

SPEECH OF HIS EXCELLENCY ROBERT WHITEHEAD,  
AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO TOGO  
AT THE OPENING COCKTAIL PARTY FOR  
THE FILBLEU BOOK FESTIVAL  
CHIEF OF MISSION RESIDENCE  
TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2015 AT 06:30 P.M.

/Salutations/

Good evening. It is a great honor for Agathe and me to welcome you to our home for this celebration of the 2015 Filbleu book festival, which opens tomorrow. As a former university professor, I doubly appreciate your invitation to be festival patron.

The United States has a long and rich literary history, and I can recall some of the classics that shaped my own outlook on life. For example, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Ernest Hemmingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and Thomas Pinchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Think of some of the great American authors whose works have achieved worldwide fame and are translated into many languages. Eugene O'Neill, Pearl S. Buck, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Toni Morrison – the list goes on and on.

So, as a nation of authors and readers, I am thrilled that for this year's Filbleu festival, you have chosen three books by prominent American authors for reading and discussion. Each deals with a theme that represents what the United States considers important subjects for Togo to move forward: increased economic growth and job creation, strong democratic institutions, and the empowerment and inclusion of women in all aspects of society.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know that reading is of fundamental importance in so many ways. Yet, in this digital age, should we worry that books are in danger of disappearing and will our children or grandchildren forego books for computer games? Fortunately, evidence points to the contrary.

A 2013 study done in the United States by *Scholastic*, a global children's publishing, education, and media company, revealed the percentage of children who have read an e-book has gone from 25% to 46% since 2010. Eighty percent of children who read e-books still read books for fun, primarily in print. And half of children age 9-17 say they would read more books for fun if they had greater access to e-books – a 50% increase since 2010.

So, it would appear that we should not yet ring the death knoll for books – even though printed ones might become less widespread as e-books become more popular. And, I might add, in this age of Twitter and Facebook, old-fashioned book festivals are booming in the United States, drawing readers and writers from all over. I am glad to see the same applies to Togo.

In conclusion, I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Kangni Alemjrodo and the festival organizers for selecting me as patron for this year's festival. If I may refer for a moment to a great book named the dictionary, "arts patronage" refers to the support that kings, popes and the wealthy have provided to artists such as musicians, painters, sculptors – and authors. Tonight, let's add to the list the slightly more humble role of ambassador.

Thank you.

SPEECH OF HIS EXCELLENCY ROBERT WHITEHEAD,  
AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO TOGO  
AT THE OPENING WORKSHOP FOR  
THE FILBLEU BOOK FESTIVAL  
MULTIPURPOSE ROOM  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2015 AT 09:30 A.M.

/Salutations/

Good morning. It is a great honor for me to welcome you to the United States Embassy for this opening workshop of the 2015 Filbleu book festival. As a former university professor, I doubly appreciate your invitation to be festival patron.

The United States has a long and rich literary history, and I can recall some of the classics that shaped my own outlook on life. For example, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Ernest Hemmingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and Thomas Pinchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Think of some of the great American authors whose works have achieved worldwide fame and are translated into many languages. Eugene O'Neill, Pearl S. Buck, John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Toni Morrison – the list goes on and on.

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Thank you.