universities in the United States, and Americans have
gone to study in Mali; these students have maintained
bonds with people and institutions in both countries
after returning home. Some Malians have immigrated
to the United States and have established their families
in cities throughout the country, where they also
contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the
United States. Like Malians everywhere, Malian
Americans retain the memory of Malian history, and
they preserve vital ties to families and communities in
Mali by sending money home and receiving visitors
here, celebrating weddings and births, and mourning
the passing of relatives and friends in both countries.
In this way, connections between Mali and the United
States continue to grow.

Today, more and more American schoolchildren
are learning about Malian culture and Mali’s
important place in world history. Malian music, which
has gained an enthusiastic following worldwide, is
being played on American airwaves, and more and
more concert tours are coming to the United States.
The Internet connects Malians and Americans to one
another in new and productive ways, and increasing
numbers of Americans are traveling to Mali to learn
about Malian history and culture firsthand. Mali
welcomes all of these global educational, cultural, and
economic exchanges, just as she has in the past.

From Timbuktu to Washington has evolved over five
years from a wish and an idea to a fully developed and
exciting program of musical performances and cultural
activities. Planning was enhanced by the previous
relationships, both personal and institutional, between
the Smithsonian and Malian cultural institutions and
was supported by the Malian government and U.S.
agencies in Mali. Malian organizers thoughtfully
deliberated about what to share with American
visitors and determined how Malian culture in all its
diversity should be represented. We would like to
recognize the dedication of all of the many Malians
who have been involved in bringing their culture to the
Smithsonian Folklife Festival. When you have the
opportunity to work with colleagues over the years it
takes to plan such an event, you share their joys and
sorrows, and you are nourished by their energy and
commitment. You learn about each other as people.
Despite many challenges and distractions, our
colleagues remained wholeheartedly engaged in the
planning for the Festival, and they always made us feel
welcome in Mali.

Michael Twitty is an Afro-American Studies
major at Howard University.