

## Fulbright Hays GPA Senegal Week One

**Dakar-June 28, 2017**

The omnipresence of the Atlantic Ocean is striking as we travel along the Corniche, a main city thoroughfare that runs along the coast. It quickly becomes a point for navigating the city or at least orienting oneself as taxis weave in and out of traffic. My gaze upon the ocean from this side of the Atlantic is always one tinged with a bit of melancholy as I imagine how my ancestors might have taken in their last breath of fresh ocean air or glimpsed longingly at the landscape before departing a homeland that they could no longer freely claim.

The capital of Senegal and the most western point on the African continent, the city of Dakar is home to about 3 million of Senegal's 14 million people. Senegal has a youthful population, with 62% of its citizens under the age of 25.<sup>1</sup> Meeting the challenge of educating and employing its youth is critical.



While in Senegal our group will be

residing at Hotel Djoloff, located in the Fann Hock neighborhood of Dakar. The proximity to the ocean is truly appreciated. From the rooftop at breakfast we watch fishing boats coming and going—the colorfully and artistically painted pirogues, the type of boats that not only traditionally trawled the waters for fish but also ferreted Senegalese captives to slave ships headed to the Americas. Though surrounded by modern beach side resort hotels such as the Radisson and other commercial development such as Sea Plaza Mall, the fishing boats lining areas of the

coast are an icon of a traditional way of life that has stood its ground in the midst of urbanization and globalization.

Like most African capital cities that I have visited, Dakar is—to use a well-worn cliché—a city of contrasts. However, what is most fascinating in this capital city is the ease with which urban space is shared among man, machine, and animal. The goats perched comfortably on the sidewalk seem no more out of place to passersby than the horse drawn carts that sleek SUVs and old beat up taxis yield to as they navigate city streets. On any given evening, pedestrians and vehicles alike may encounter a street closed off as mourners gather under a big tent to participate in a memorial service for a lost loved one. Space and respect for those who occupy it appear to be an understood aspect of the tolerance and acceptance that I detect among the Senegalese people.



Hotel Djoloff in Dakar, Senegal

<sup>1</sup> Index Mundi: Senegal Demographics Profile 2017. *CIA World Factbook*. [http://www.indexmundi.com/senegal/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/senegal/demographics_profile.html)