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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE AFRICAN
HERITAGE RECEPTION AT GRACIE MANSION**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Welcome to Gracie Mansion, everyone.

[Cheers]

For the first ever in the history of New York City, the first ever Gracie Mansion celebration of the African communities of New York City –

[Cheers]

There are two kinds of people, there are two kinds of people – the people who are at this party and everybody else.

[Cheers]

Now I have to say I have been at many wonderful events. But rarely have I seen an event where our wonderful MC, let's thank Famod by the way for the great work he does for this city.

[Applause]

He represents me so well in the Bronx but he is also someone that African communities are so proud of and so connected to.

[Applause]

But I rarely have been at an event where the host greets people in a variety of languages and everyone seems to speak all of the languages, very impressive, very impressive. I want to tell you that I have had the joyous experience of going through the great communities of this city and seeing the vibrancy of the African communities and neighborhoods. And seeing how many wonderful people are now a part of the fabric of this city. I also want you to know that I have had an experience that all Americans really should have if they want to understand America, they have to visit Africa.

[Cheers]

And when Chirlane and I became parents we made a vow to each other that we would take our children to each of their homelands, so they could understand not just from books or movies, but they could understand by being there. And about six, seven years ago we took our children to Ghana and had an extraordinary experience.

[Applause]

And they understood through one nation only and there are so many wonderful nations but they understood just the beginning, just the beginning of the greatness of the African continent and the people who make it great. I also have to say to you that wherever I go around New York City, I have a very humbling experience. Many times I am standing there with our First Lady and people walk by me because they want to meet her.

[Laughter]

And then eventually they come back to me and say hello.

[Laughter]

So I don't mind being with someone more popular. She's always been the most popular person to me so I understand it.

[Applause]

But I want you to know that our First Lady salutes everyone here. She is on her way back from Washington DC and she wanted to be a part of this event and she will be going forward because this is the first annual event. We are going to work together to make it an annual event.

[Applause]

But she has been today in Washington fighting for the mental health needs of all New Yorkers and all Americans. So I bring you her greetings and I am her inadequate surrogate.

[Laughter]

But I will do the best I can. I have a few things to say very quickly. But – thank you so much. The love is returned. But I want to tell you, that so many members of my administration, the people who serve this city and serve all of the communities present here, they wanted to be a part of this and I am going to shout out their names and I want you, you'll hear them all and applaud them all because they do such good work for our city. Starting with, thank you, starting with the top lawyer for the City of New York, my corporation counsel, Zachary Carter.

[Applause]

Our Commissioner, something near and dear to many people here – our Commissioner for Small Business Services Gregg Bishop;

[Applause]

Our Community Affairs Commissioner Marco Carrion;

[Applause]

International Affairs Commissioner Penny Abeywardena;

[Applause]

A man you are glad is there when there's an emergency – our Emergency Management Commissioner Joe Esposito;

[Applause]

Our Oath Commissioner Fidel Del Valle;

[Applause]

Commissioner of an office that does such important work and it's just been renamed, the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, Commissioner;

[Applause]

Commissioner Cecile Noel. Director of the – and Chair of the City Planning Commission, Marisa Lago;

[Applause]

My senior advisor and the Director of our Office for Minority and Women Owned Businesses, Jonnel Doris;

[Applause]

Who is making sure that millions, and millions, and millions of dollars go to businesses in all of the communities of this city.

[Applause]

Elected officials and soon to be elected officials, first State Senator Kevin Parker of Brooklyn.

[Applause]

And next a dear friend of mine who we served in the City Council together and now he is on his way to the New York State Senate, in the City Council he was the first Muslim member of the City Council in the history of New York City.

[Cheers]

And one of the greatest advocates for our public school students in all of New York State, soon to be State Senator Robert Jackson.

[Applause]

And another soon to be elected official – he is the Democratic nominee for Assembly from Staten Island.

[Applause]

When he is elected he will be the first African –

[Cheers]

Wow, you're popular, come on, come on.

[Applause]

You know for a lot of communities it takes generations and generations to get to high office but the African communities are speeding up the clock.

[Applause]

Soon to be Assemblymember, Charles Fall –

[Applause]

We have got a lively crowd tonight. Everybody, we've got a lot to celebrate but I need to say something. While we are celebrating, while we are feeling such joy about the greatness of these communities and the recognition that these communities are finally getting – we have some sorrow that we have to address tonight as well. And I want to give my heart out particularly to members of the Nigerian community here.

[Applause]

On Friday, thank you, on Friday, this last Friday we had something happen that we never ever want to see in any neighborhood in any city anywhere when we lost a good young man. Oluwadurotimi Oyebola, a young man, 16-years-old who loved to learn, he loved math, he loved science he wanted to be a doctor. He was just a young man playing basketball and he was shot

and killed for no reason whatsoever. And I know his family is in pain, I know the Nigerian community is in pain and all New Yorkers so on behalf of all 8.6 million New Yorkers my condolences to the Oyebola family and to the community and I ask you all for one moment, amidst our celebration, just one moment, a moment of silence for this good young man we lost.

[Moment of silence observed]

Thank you. Thank you, God bless you, God bless you. Now the good news is there is always good news in the world too. And a very good thing for New York City and a very good thing for America is that here before me are representatives of one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in this city and we are so proud of that fact. Over 50 nations of Africa are now represented in New York City, with all the joy, the energy, the prosperity, the entrepreneurship, the creativity, all making this city better. And it's not just one part of the city or another part of the city, if you go to Central Harlem you are in an African community.

[Cheers]

If you go to Clifton in Staten Island you're also in an African community. If you go to Concourse Village in the Bronx, you are definitely in an African community. In fact, to all the Bronxites, you constitute one of the largest African communities in all of America.

[Applause]

Now, look around you, look around you, you see people of great ability, people of great intelligence, people who make us stronger. Don't you think that's what leaders should be saying about people who contribute to all of us?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: But brothers and sisters, is that what we are hearing from Washington DC right now?

Audience: No!

Mayor: And I think it's not only wrong, it's not only sad, it's destructive to hear leaders of a nation denigrate our own people, our own people. And I will tell you as the grandson of immigrants, maybe it's some solace, maybe somehow it might make you feel a little better to know, somehow in the American experience, every new wave of immigrants gets singled out for this same unfortunate treatment. I could dare say that people of African descent have borne some of the worst. But I can tell you that somehow in this country we still haven't figured out that all of the negativity that were heaped upon Chinese Americans, or Irish Americans, or Italian Americans, or Jewish Americans, or Latino Americans, now heaped upon people who have come from Africa, it's all got the same root. Something in America that we have to extract and remove and end once and for all to finally live up to our ideals as a country. Because we can't hate our brother and sister and be whole nation can we? So tonight we get the situation right. Tonight we turn the tables, we right the ship. And I say as Mayor of the greatest city in the United States of America, thank you – thank you for joining us.

[Cheers]

You know a lot of people – a lot of people find it fashionable politically to blame our ills as a country on immigrants. Here's what I say to them because, I have a city that is the proof positive that immigrants can make us stronger and that we can all actually get along.

[Cheers]

Right here and we prove it every day.

[Cheers]

So this city has the most immigrants it has had in 100 years, right here in New York City today.

[Cheers]

We are the safest big city in America.

[Cheers]

We have the strongest economy we have ever had.

[Cheers]

We have the most jobs we have ever had.

[Cheers]

We are strong not despite immigrants but because of immigrants.

[Applause]

So next time you hear a hater – next time you hear a divider.

[Cheers]

Next time you hear someone who is confused, tell them come to New York City – we will set you straight!

[Applause]

Now everybody, this is the first annual gathering, as I said, and what we do at all these gatherings for each community is we have an honoree. Well this is the inaugural honoree, and she is someone very, very special. When you think of what people who have come from Africa and brought – and have brought their great skills and talents here, I'm going to tell you her story because it's so powerful. She was born and raised in Lesotho, and she came here and she brought

her gifts and has become a Tony-nominated singer, an actress, a composer. If you love Broadway, you might know her as the originator of the role of Rafiki in the Lion King.

[Cheers]

If you believe in good causes and humanitarian works you would know that she created and ran her own foundation to fight AIDS in South Africa.

[Cheers]

And if you're a student of history you will know that she was invited by Nelson Mandela to be the sole performer at his first press conference after he was released from prison.

[Cheers]

Someone who has earned a claim all around the world for her talents, it's my honor to bring forward Tsidii Le Loka!

[Applause]

And she's wearing a very elaborate dress so it takes time to come here.

[Applause]

Tsidii, when we honor someone, we don't just invite them to a party, we don't just invite them to speak – we give them a true New York honor. So I have here a proclamation for you—

[Cheers]

—and this proclamation proclaims and explains the amazing works of this artist and this humanitarian. But the best part is the final lines, which I get to say because of this office that I've been bestowed with and it says: "Now, I, Bill de Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York, proclaim Wednesday, September 26th, 2018, in the City of New York as Tsidii Le Loka Day.

Ladies and gentleman, give your warm, warm welcome for Tsidii Le Loka.

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