

**Ambassador's Op-Ed
for the 10th Anniversary of the September 11, 2001, Attacks**

No words can truly describe the heartbreak of September 11, 2001. Too many lives were lost that morning; the sadness remains, even 10 years later, and even with the inspiring memories of courage and service from that day. But for Americans who know the strong bonds we share with France, it was no surprise that one of the most moving commentaries about that tragic day came from the columns of this very newspaper, in Jean-Marie Colombani's declaration on September 12 that "nous sommes tous Américains."

Much shared history went into that statement. We all revere the memories of Lafayette, the doughboys, Normandy. Since that fateful morning in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, our friendship was on occasion tested, especially over the war in Iraq. Yet we weathered the discord, and our relationship today is as strong as ever. The words of unity from the September 12 *Le Monde* resonate even now because they speak to what has always connected Americans and French – and to what makes our relationship, and our countries, so resilient. Voltaire once reputedly exclaimed, "I may disagree with what you have to say, but I shall defend to the death your right to say it." This enlightened view of civil liberties, which inspired America's founders, girds our ties and constitutes the complete opposite worldview of the 9/11 terrorists. It embodies our dedication to political openness and to public service; it recognizes that only countries with an unfettered flow of ideas can innovate and be truly modern.

Our partnership comes naturally. Americans and French people share special qualities in our dedication to public service and commitment to make our societies better and fairer. The first responders at the World Trade Center were New York firefighters and police officers, people who embody this ideal. With images of their selflessness fresh in our minds in the aftermath of 9/11, so many of us asked ourselves how we could serve our fellow citizens; thousands of Americans joined the military, the Peace Corps, and the diplomatic corps. France clearly shares this spirit of solidarity; a French doctor, after all, founded Medecins Sans Frontières, one of the world's most important and successful NGOs. It was appropriate that on July 14, 2002, France invited four New York firefighters who had been at the World Trade Center site to drive their truck down the Champs Elysées to lead the annual Bastille Day parade. So many French people I meet serve on municipal councils and about a third of all people over the age of sixteen – that's about 15 million people – have joined civic and nonprofit groups. Thousands more will volunteer in both our countries as our presidential elections unfold next year.

Often enough, we display that dedication together in tough, challenging environments. When I visited camps in eastern Afghanistan, American and French soldiers told me how much they appreciate each other's resolve and professionalism.

As much as the commitment to service connects Americans and French people, another common denominator is that we prize innovation and draw inspiration from each other's inventiveness. American tourists who marvel at the TGV and French technophiles addicted to iPads are only part of the picture. There are currently dozens of American researchers in the labs at the Pasteur Institute in Paris. With teams of scientists from France and dozens of other countries, they strive every day to make discoveries that will improve public health – from combating AIDS to exploring neuroscience. At the same time, many French innovators populate global technology firms in the United States; French is common in Silicon Valley. In our economically unpredictable times, such scientific, commercial and cultural exchanges reinforce our shared commitment to intellectual curiosity and leading global innovation. It's part of what makes me optimistic about our future.

My job as Ambassador means I spend a lot of time focusing on what keeps us close, but, of course, the United States and France are different in many ways. Like the best of friends, we do not always agree. This summer I read the American historian David McCullough's newly published book about Americans in France in the 19th century. McCullough writes "the rewards of our ties with France have far exceeded any difficulties there have been." What was true then remains true today. When you hear all the American students chatting by the hallway coffee machines at Sciences-Po or the melodic French voices on campus quads from New Haven to Palo Alto, it is clear Americans and French people are as curious about each other's countries and our common heritage as ever.

As we face the uncertainty of the next post-9/11 decade, President Obama's observation that the United States has no stronger friend than France rings especially true. For proof, you need look no further than American schools, where the French enlightenment is in every history book and so many students of all ages, from Florida to Alaska, study French. They have taken the torch of French-American friendship, which burns as bright as the Statue of Liberty's flame in New York Harbor. They constitute an essential reason why our friendship will remain strong, and thrive, for decades to come.

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