



## **Statement by Ambassador Charles Rivkin** **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kennedy Visit to Paris**

Fifty years ago, to the day, President John F. Kennedy, accompanied by First Lady Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, stepped off their Boeing 707 at Orly Airport for what was JFK's first overseas visit. They were greeted there by President and Mrs. de Gaulle.

The Kennedys' three-day state visit to France was a celebrated moment in the U.S.-French relationship. A young, dynamic but untested U.S. President met the legendary French leader, whose World War II role and political vision had long ago made him a global figure. They exchanged views on the full range of issues the United States and France then confronted: the status of Berlin, the war in Algeria, the situation in Indochina, the role of NATO. Among the highlights of a memorable public program were a ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe, dinners at the Elysee Palace and at the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, a reception at the Hotel de Ville, and a press luncheon at the Palais de Chaillot.

Jackie Kennedy's own program in Paris was followed just as avidly as the President's by the U.S. and French media. The extraordinarily warm welcome that greeted the French-speaking Mrs. Kennedy at every stop inspired President Kennedy's now famous remark, "I do not think it altogether inappropriate to introduce myself...I am the man who accompanied Jacqueline Kennedy to Paris, and I have enjoyed it."

I would like to invite our French friends to take a brief visit back to that era by accessing a special web page that the U.S. Embassy in Paris has developed, at <http://france.usembassy.gov/presidentkennedy.html>, with links to texts, photographs, films, audio recordings that have been made available online by the JFK Presidential Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and other sources. The materials are remarkable: they include frank assessments of de Gaulle provided to Kennedy by the distinguished U.S. historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., JFK's then secret "briefing book" for his meetings with the French President; and, motion picture images of Kennedy's motorcade circling the Place de la Concorde surrounded by mounted Republican guards.

Above all, I am most struck by the degree to which the enduring nature of the U.S.-French alliance was on display then, half a century ago, just as it was last week during President Obama's participation in the G8 Deauville summit and Secretary Clinton's visit to Paris. As President Kennedy observed in his remarks to this Embassy's staff on June 1, 1961, "I know it is customary on these visits to recall LaFayette and all the rest. But...our interest here is more substantial, and I believe it goes to the common interests of both the United States and France. We are closely associated and are allies, because it helps to protect the interest of our country and because it protects the interests of freedom around the world."