

# Launch of the Lafayette Scholarship Program from New York

Emmanuel MACRON

Thank you so much. Mr. Ambassador, presidents of universities, students. Thank you very much for welcoming us in your place. I have to say, I envy you a little bit. And this is a pleasure indeed to be with you at Villa Albertine, this Gilded Age landmark, as we described together.

And this is very special for us to welcome all of you. And this is largely to launch this common program and to thank those who make it possible. And after that, we will have an exchange. But clearly, for me, this is a ceremony to thank all of you. First, it makes a lot of sense to do it in Villa Albertine. And I want to thank your teams and all the teams of the French Embassy and all those who work very hard with all of you to try to strengthen the links between your country and France and I see great people here. And I will revert to you, don't worry.

But Villa Albertine, this is a bookstore, 30,000 readers a year. I discovered that. It's Residences that we launched a few years ago. This is the fifth anniversary of the Residences. And we have now 360 creators hosted across 60 locations from Alaska. We have other meetings sometimes in Alaska, but we can have these Residences to Miami, Mississippi, to Nevada. And the French for All initiatives that we launched in 2022 during my state visit in New Orleans. And the French for all initiative already supported 250 US public schools and universities in order to keep French alive and strengthen some common programs.

So I wanted to insist on that, the bookstore, the Residences, the French for all program, because this is the basis on which we want to elaborate. And during the state visit of President Biden, we had this idea of launching a new fellowship, a new program to allow students to come to France and share this experience and strengthen the relationship between our two countries because we are totally sure that it can change the life, and it can change the history as well, because these few months that you spend in another country, knowing it better could totally change, obviously, the relationship, and sometimes the key decisions. But in parallel, this country took some decisions about universities and sciences, and this is why we decided to launch as well at La Sorbonne University, choose Europe and choose France for Science in order to be a sort of good partner for those who want to follow up their research.

And we pre-selected a lot of applications. We had 30,000 visits to the platform, and we committed as well several millions of euros with the European Commission, but the French government as well to strengthen this partnership. And we committed as well several million euros with the European Commission, and we committed to the European Commission, to be able to support the European Commission, and to be able to support the European Commission and the European Commission. And we were able to support all these different initiatives, Choose Europe and Choose France for Science in order to be a sort of good partner for those who want to follow the research and we preselected a lot of applications we had 400 000 visits to the platform and we committed as well several millions euros with the European commission that French government as well to strength this partnership and all these different initiatives Choose Europe and Choose France for Science what we did with Villa Albertine and the different programs are based on the fact and we are totally sure that cultural education are bases very special relation we have between our two countries and can change a lot of things and I want to salute those with us today from the Academic World Embodies of spirit of reason progress and exchange so president from Fordham university, Baruch college, universities Rockefeller and Stevens Institute of technology and representatives of many other universities who honor us with their presence today thank you very much and we are very attached to the relationship with you and the friendship with your colleagues in France and in Europe.

So today we are here together to launch the Lafayette fellowship placing young people the next generation I understand it's you much more than me crossing the Atlantic to fight for American freedom as well as Lafayette did 250 years ago, and this is why we wanted to refer to this common history. This fellowship is based on trust on youth, as you mentioned. Lafayette was super young when he made this trip, and he decided to take all the risks for freedom and for a country which was creating itself and for this democracy. A new generation of Americans crossing the ocean not to wage war but to invent the future of science and culture together with this common ideal the legacy of the marquis de Lafayette which is a legacy of enlightenment and belief in precisely in reason, in culture and in education. So, thanks to the Lafayette Fellowship. Each year at least 30 Americans master students from across the US will study at 15 France's finest universities and Grand École. And I want to mention them : Aix-Marseille Université, Université Côte d'azur, Paris Cité université, l'Université Paris Saclay, l'Université Paris sciences et Lettres, Sorbonne University, University of Bordeaux, Grenoble Alpes, Strasbourg, as well as l'École Normale Supérieure Lyon and Paris, L'École Polytechnique, HEC, ISAE-SUPAERO, Sciences Po Paris and Toulouse School of Economics. And because I just mentioned here the best of the best, la crème de la crème of the French ecosystem.

And these students will be able to study in English in France, across disciplines, from science to humanities. And on top of, obviously, the stay and the experience at the university, they will have an extraordinary leadership program. So they will meet with leading figures in culture, science, business. They will visit a lot of places all across the country and try to share our culture, but as well the best leaders. And our ambition is not just to train excellent scholars, but to shape leaders and bridge builders. And this is why this program was totally tailored with this objective. And, back in the U.S., they will form a remarkable community, the Lafayette Fellows, which is clearly a sort of unique group with the future ambassadors of the French-American friendship. And, we pre-selected, we open now, two weeks ago, you have already more than 500 applications, and we will select the 30 students by November.

Animatrice

Yeah, it will finish by the end of November. And the applications will be selected in February.

Emmanuel MACRON

On February they will have the answer, and they will come to France in July 26th for the first promotion. They will arrive in Paris to mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th. But the 30 students will be clearly the pioneers of this relation.

I want here to extend my warm thanks to the founding benefactors who made this initiative possible. The Carnegie Corporation of New York, Eric and Wendy Schmidt, the Richard Lounsbery Foundation, Hubert Jolie and Hortense Le Gentil, Stéphane and Veronica Bulgaria, Hubert and Mirielle Goldschmidt, Rudolf Mann, David Sarnoff, Fidji Simo, La Fondation Chambre Lafayette, Veronique and Jean-Hugues Monier, France and Christofer Descours and Gildo Pastor. I hope I mentioned everybody, but I want to thank all of you because it is thanks to your contribution and your commitment that we made this fellowship possible and feasible, and it means a lot to us. You stand in a great tradition, and I really believe it can change a lot of things. So I don't want to be longer, but I want to clearly wish the best to these first students. I want to thank you for this contribution.

I want to tell you that at the highest level of the French government, we will accompany these first students, and we will do our best for them to have a unique experience, but clearly to make something new with this new generation. You are invested in so many areas, in innovation, in academics, universities, as I mentioned, research. But this new generation, through this program, has a huge responsibility, which will be to reinvent the common future and the future of the transatlantic coalition. I strongly believe we have still a lot of things to do together, whatever we can read and whatever could happen in the short run. So this is a very important program, and I really want to thank all of you to be here today. I want to thank those who made it possible, the teams of the embassy, and obviously, all the students who will participate to this Lafayette Fellowship. Long live Lafayette Fellowship. And thank you very much. Long live the friendship between our two countries.

Mohamed BOUABDALLAH

Merci, Monsieur le Président. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Now we'll have an exchange between you and students who are with us today, and it will be moderated by Florence Botello, the higher education attachee in Boston and the executive director of the Lafayette Fellowship. Thank you.

Animatrice

Thank you, Mr. President. The students were truly honored and delighted to have this opportunity. We will start with a question from a graduate from Fordham University, majoring in English and in French and Francophone studies. She will ask you about democracy and academic cooperation between France and the United States.

Intervenant

Yes. Thank you for the introduction and good morning, Mr President. My question is, in your view, how can Franco American collaboration and education and research contribute to strengthening democratic values for future generations ? And how do you envision students playing a role and serving as ambassadors in addressing this pressing global issue ? Thank you.

Emmanuel MACRON

Thank you. Thank you very much. I have to say that sometimes we can have the feeling that the democratic values could be at risk. I'm not sure this is a pessimism, but much more lucidity and happily for us. And I think first, universities are the very place, first, where you learn and you debate. It's very important to me because this is clearly the foundations of our democracy and our democratic dialogue.

In democracy, you can agree and you can disagree. This is why this is the end of violence. This is why democracy is a treasure. And sometimes when a lot of people challenge democracy, saying we can have a much more efficient system by taking decisions without any rule of law or challenging these democratic values and the checks and balances and all the sophistication which goes with the democracy. I think this is a terrible mistake because this is just the fact that you forget this process of civilization through which, through the debate. Because you can choose by your vote, your leader, you debate with respect, but you don't use violence. The university is a very place where this debate takes place.

The second point is that the debate unlighted democracy is based on facts and truth. You can debate about a lot of things. We can agree, we can disagree, but you have a scientific truth. You have a sedimentation of knowledge and you have a relationship with authority. But this authority is not based on violence.

One of my own professors told me, when I was raised, where is based your authority ? He told me just, I read more books than you read. And this is true. And this is a place where you can debate openly, but you have this authority based on knowledge. And this is exactly what we need for democracy. Democracy is just a way to organize a society where everybody has a voice, but you need some rules and liberties, some checks and balances. This is why I really believe that the universities are a very special place to do so.

So for me, universities in your country and universities in my country have a very important role to teach, to consolidate our democracies. The exchange between our students, our academics, our researchers is extremely important for our democracies, because this is a way to consolidate the relationship with truth, science, and as well open and respectful debates. This is my answer.

Animatrice

Thank you. Thank you. The second question comes from a senior undergrad student at Columbia University. Kita is pursuing a dual degree in economics between Columbia University and Sciences Po Paris. Her research focuses on migration studies. And today she would like to ask you about anti-intellectual sentiment and the current climate within U.S. universities.

Intervenant

Thank you, Mr. President, for your time. My question is as follows. Given the current climate of rising anti-intellectual sentiment in both the U.S. and France, how do you envision this fellowship shaping public attitude towards knowledge, expertise, and education ?

Emmanuel MACRON

I think it's closely linked with the first question and what I try to explain. I'm quite worried by what you describe as an anti-intellectual atmosphere, I would say. Because sometimes it seems that people are more and more attracted by a sort of holistic approach of the world. When I say holistic approach of the world, there is a sort of new attraction of ideologies or religion in the way to address the world. I think our history on both sides of the ocean is based, and this is a history of enlightenment precisely I mentioned several times, that is based on respect of this possible ideologies or your religions, but as the emancipation of the individuals based on reason, knowledge, which is exactly what makes you free.

We have to be extremely careful vis-à-vis our people everywhere, perhaps to re-explain or make perhaps more perceivable the fact that knowledge is exactly what makes you more free. This pre-critique, as we say in the French Enlightenment, meaning a method, the way not just to accumulate knowledge, but the way you challenge the knowledge which it's transmitted to you is the best way to build your own life, to be part of a nation, to be part of clearly the people of your nation, but to try to challenge a little bit and make you a free individual.

So for me, one of the main risk is a sort of separation between those who are well-educated and the rest of the people and the way some politicians can play on that. Saying, there is a common sense, and the common sense is automatically dead against the knowledge in the university because it's too sophisticated. We probably have our part of responsibility because the intellectuals have to be part of the common debate in the society, make it through, I would say, simple language. But you have to bring people and make it perceivable that through the knowledge, through education, through the universities, at your young age or later, because this is a permanent process, precisely this ability to be educated makes you more free, give you some capacity to build your own life. My view regarding this phenomenon is due to the fact that our societies are overwhelmed by a theory of very anxious phenomena.

Our people are progressively trying to contain this anxiety through a sort of attraction for simple ideas. And this is where religions or ideologies could find a new attractiveness. And this is the other point we should do in order to address what you describe. We have to restore the capacity to deal in the current environment and preserve, I would say, the capacity to remain a free and reasonable individual. Let's be clear. Social networks are killing our capacity to work in a normal life. This is why people are so anxious and goes to simple ideas. Because from the morning to the bed, they absorb a quantity of very anxious ideas. And all these ideas are about a world which is absolutely impossible to address to handle and push you towards the extreme and is the best enemy of what is clearly taught at the university, the complexity of the world and complex ideas. Social media are structured, first to have emotion stronger than argumentations, and to trap you in cognitive bubbles and to push you towards the extreme with a clear confirmation bias.

So we have to clearly re-engage, as well to make this social media which is just the way we approach a lot of information, a lot of intellectual content, totally differently and make them compatible with the enlightenment. And this is a challenge of our generation because today this is not the case. And today, we are in a certain way just under this constant pressure, and we clearly underestimated the consequence of this transformation of our cognitive environment on the way to live in society and in open societies. And this is exactly what's happening for me in both the US and Europe.

We have to better protect our children and teenagers about social media. But we have as well to, as some of the people said in another context, we should take back control of the social media. Just to say, I don't want to live in this world of craziness and permanent violence, being overwhelmed by permanent contents, decided by algorithms of the others. I want to understand this world through some checked and verified information. I want to understand transparently who is pushing this information to me. And I want to build the structure of a common world. And this is, for me, the way to address the phenomenon you are describing, which is just a symptom of a world where a lot of people are just going to the extremes, more and more in the middle of plotism and skepticism and this is where we have to restore this capacity to live in a common world being enlightened by knowledge and reason. Sorry it was too long, but this is a very complicated phenomenon.

Intervenant

Thank you. We will hear from a senior at New York University, double majoring in international relations and French, and she interned at the United Nations Department of Peace Operations. She has a question concerning today's global challenges.

Intervenant

Thank you. Good morning, Mister President. My question today for you is, how do you envision the Lafayette Fellowship and transatlantic academic exchanges helping this next generation of researchers address today's global challenges of sustainability, health, and democracy ? Thank you.

Emmanuel MACRON

Thank you. You mentioned three key topics. I would add probably technology as well as one of them and defense and security. But for me, the fellowship has a very important role because this is a selection of top students. And this is, as I mentioned, the opportunity for the students to share an experience on the other side of the ocean and just pursue their capacity to learn, to research and so on. But you have this leadership program as well. And one of my messages to you is your generation, I hope, will be happy at the universities, in labs, but as well in companies or in administrations. But it's very important to have in mind that you have a part of our common destiny. And when we speak about leadership, it's just, you can be super good in your discipline, but you have something to tell to the others for the organization of the nation and the organization of the global order. And we need more and more young people from your generation to be engaged positively, not just to say : I'm super concerned, I'm upset by climate, I'm upset by this topic, I'm upset by all of them are very important topics. But I want to change the world for climate change, I want to change the world for technology and so on. And being a leader means you have an expertise, you are good in your discipline, but you have something special to tell to the other, to inspire to the other in order to participate, to reshape this world. Because there is no faith just to be sit on a chair and looking at what's happening.

So, for me, the responsibility of this fellowship is clearly as well, part of the leadership is this student. This is my hope and this is why we do so. And I know that all those who contributed to this program and decided to put their money in this program, and I want to thank them again, have the same hope. It's to say, okay, they will take clear decisions for the future. They will be part of the solution. And I think your generation is part of the solution to fix that. We are working super hard to try to resist some negative trends. Sometimes I have the feeling in this current moment that we spend a lot of energy to resist to the bad instead of building the good. I mean, it's part of the game probably, but I mean, we should. The more we convince people to work together and we recreate cooperation and a cooperation spirit, and the more we offer the opportunities to the students through this fellowship to address sustainability, health, technology, democracy in this common program, the more the participants of this program will build, I mean, will build bridges in a world of fragmentation. But for me, one of the main hopes is to be sure that the students will become leaders in a certain way. There are several ways to be leaders. You can decide, you can inspire, you can gather people, but to be leaders of this world.

Intervenant

Thank you very much. Next a senior at Baruch College, majoring in political science with a minor in sociology. She also serves as the executive vice president of Baruch's undergraduate student government. And she would like to ask you a question on artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

Intervenant

Thank you, and good morning, Mr. President. My question is, as both France and the United States grapple with the governance of emerging technologies, how can this academic partnership help develop shared ethical frameworks and regulatory approaches, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence and biotech, where our society's values must guide scientific progress ? How do we envision France and the United States working together to shape a more responsible future ?

Emmanuel MACRON

Thank you. It's a very important question, but I have people around me who are much more expert than I am, and they were used to teach me about that, so I will be super cautious on this issue. The challenge you mentioned is one of the most complicated ones for our generation, because we have a big dilemma, especially when you are in Europe, because we are lagging behind the U.S. in terms of AI and capacities, and we are probably more willing to regulate. The question is how to regulate in the very place where you are front owners in AI, and this is where the partnership can function. But today, the big issue on AI, if we are totally honest, is that the key players are not, let's say, don't have a huge appetite to think about regulation. So, this is why I am very grateful for a bunch of people super successful in AI and tech, and with the feeling that they are part of precisely a democratic world, and they want to inject these democratic values in the way to deploy AI, and this is a group of people I am working with.

So, my view on that is to reengage with people, and especially in the different fields, meaning corporate people and innovators, academic researchers, and governments, plus NGOs and free researchers, to have the same discussion and work on a common setup. This is what we did a few months ago in the Summit for AI we organized. And the question is how to deal with, I would say, the transformation and the development of AI with some key sectors. You mentioned health care, but I could mention defense and security. And the question is how to be sure that these AI deployments and developments will be by design ethical. And I insist on by design, because this is not something given the structure and the dynamic of the AI that you can regulate the day after, it's already too late.

The question is how to be sure that AI will be compliant with our common values and our democratic values. And how to be sure that in some key decisions, people based on a democratic, open and transparent debate will be in a situation to decide, we go or we don't go. Today, let's be honest with it, there is no guarantee. And this is why such a partnership is so important because I think in the Franco-American convergence, you can find probably one of the bases of this common spirit. And I think France has a lot of things to learn from the US : this taste for freedom and liberty and this capacity to accelerate to this trust in the future. But I'm sure that the US has perhaps something to learn from France. This appetite for fairness and a more ethical approach in this obsession that we will live in this *res publica* I mean a common world being shared where everybody has a voice to be respected. And this is why I think the bridge between France and the US is very powerful, and the bridge between US and Europe is very powerful because this is a perfect complementarity. But for me one of the main risks of the AI, is that it will, clearly, is transforming the world provide a lot of opportunities. And is a source of a lot of phantasma as well, but a lot of breakthroughs. The big risk is not to have a political, open and transparent debate on AI. And whatever the breakthrough could be, it would be detrimental for the society if we don't have this right approach. And for me, this is in this dialogue. But this is a multi-stakeholder, permanent dialogue. and largely a transatlantic dialogue because we do have the same values and the same story.

Intervenant

Thank you. Let me introduce a student from Princeton. So, she is a PhD candidate in French literature at Princeton University. He also found in Princeton's very first French film festival, and he would like to ask you a question on the French language.

Intervenant

Thank you very much, and thank you very much, Mr. President. I have a question on French language. During your two terms as President, you committed yourself to promoting the French language in the U.S. and beyond. You launched the French For All initiative that you mentioned three years ago, and today you were launching the Lafayette Fellowship. You are probably aware that these decrees in humanities departments and many language departments are closing down in the US, including French departments, unfortunately. I was wondering, some people are even talking about the crisis of humanities. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your vision for the French language in the US and beyond, and also how France positions itself in this landscape.

Emmanuel MACRON

No, thank you. You're right, and your assessment is, I think it's perfectly clear. It's true in the US, it's true in Europe and in a lot of places and the dynamics of Francophonie is much more in emerging world and much more on the African continent and Pacific than in Europe or in the U.S. But Francophonie is expanding so my first argument when I have to face this very lucid and negative assessment is to say : okay, it's true in our countries, but look at the dynamic and the opportunities French language could create, because today the epicenter of Francophonie is not France, it's Congo River. And this is the first language in the African continent, and the African continent is number one in terms of demography and potential trends.

So, it will offer a lot of opportunities for this continent as well to expand. Second, I think you mentioned it, but the crisis is much broader than the French language. There is a crisis in humanities in universities, not just in the U.S., but U.S. and Europe. And I think this is very important for all of us to go through this crisis. There is total independence on academics, so I don't want to interfere or give the feeling it could be a sort of national politics. But I think we will go through this crisis by the demonstration of the fact that the humanities are a necessity as well to address a lot of the transformation of our current environment. No chance to deliver climate change policies without humanities. Because if there is no guidance to transform the behavior of people to understand how they behave through humanities, you will never guide them. It's not just through innovation. You need humanities. No chance to have a sustainable world with AI without humanities. Because if you want an ethical AI, you need philosophers and so on.

I think it's just the way I think we will address, through the big transition of our current world, the humanities, and make them stronger. But it would probably take time. Now, as for the French language, I think the multiplication of this partnership and making France a more vibrant place for science, for education, for research, is the best way to have as well alumni going here and deploying French departments and making French as an attractive language. I think young people are always attracted by language when they provide opportunities for them in terms of research, in terms of education, in terms of economic opportunities. So, this is what we are doing as well in France and in Europe, which will provide the best answer to your question. So, we have a lot of opportunities with the French language in all the places which have to be highlighted to make French more attractive. Second, the crisis of humanities, we will go through it to take time, but I'm more optimistic. And third, we will multiply as well the program like French for all and the attractiveness of the French ecosystem to have as well ambassadors like you are and the future students, precisely to help the French language to be more present in the universities.

Journalist

We are deeply grateful, Mr. President. So, thank you so much for engaging with the students, responding their questions, and also inspiring them and us with your vision. And I think we can definitely close the Q&A session.

Emmanuel MACRON

Thank you very much. I want to -- first, I want to thank you not just for your questions, but it's very impressive to see what you are doing and how impressive people you are. But I really want to thank all of you for being committed to the relation between the U.S. and France and your decision to clearly invest in this young generation. For me, it's very important. We try to do our best on a daily basis to avoid the worst and try sometimes to do good things, but my obsession is to give this generation the opportunity to choose.