

Chevalière dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres

December 4th, 2025; NYC

Monsieur le Directeur, Mesdames et Messieurs, Merci.

It is a great honor to be presented today with the title of *Chevalière dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. I am grateful, touched, and inspired by this award.

In Britain and Ireland, it is not possible for women to be chevaliers: men, if they are lucky enough to be ennobled, are dubbed knights, and women are dames. In France, which since the time of Jeanne d'Arc has taken a progressive view of female leadership, women are encouraged to fight for themselves. I hope that — as a chevalier — I won't be called upon in future to ride into battle for the arts, sword in hand. But I shall try to prove worthy of your confidence, by being part of a Round Table where we robustly defend the value of the arts, of education, and of peaceful and constructive international relations between France and her Western allies.

My great mentor, teacher, colleague, and friend, Stanley Hoffman, was a proud Frenchman. Though born to an Austrian mother and an American father he never knew, he grew up in France. He was part of the great exodus from Paris in June 1940 and spent his childhood as a foreign-born Jew in hiding in Vichy France, educated and protected by his mother and schoolteachers. Later he wrote extensively and brilliantly on France, its leaders, culture, and foreign relations. He was a major influence on me and became godfather to my son Rory. Stanley was a passionate exponent of the importance of maintaining a strong ethical framework in international relations, despite the day-to-day pressures of realpolitik. His academic work was driven by a desire to understand the catastrophe of the Second World War and to ensure that there would never be a recurrence. I know that he would be especially pleased that I am receiving this award from the country he loved.

Like many Irishwomen, I grew up with a sense of France as the epitome of culture, style, and sophistication. On early visits I was not disappointed,

and learned to sail at *the École de Voile* in Cherbourg. My countryman, Oscar Wilde, joked that “when good Americans die, they go to Paris.” It certainly struck me, when I first spent time in Paris as a graduate student, that the food was heavenly. I loved then — and still love — the small elegances that are so big a part of French life: the markets full of exquisite handmade cheeses, *pâtisserie* so perfect that it resembles jewelry spun out of sugar. It is no wonder that France invented the word for window-shopper: it makes a joyful *flâneuse* out of every jaded pedestrian, a *bon viveur* out of even the most hardened Philistine.

Nobody can fail to enjoy the flair and panache of French galleries and museums, the *joie de vivre* of a French street, where traditional boulangeries, *fleuristes*, cafes, and bookshops express the community of local life, and the diversity of local produce. In France, *intellectuel* will never be anything other than a term of commendation. The creative arts will always be cherished as a source of national pride: not peripheral but essential to *bien-être*. France nourishes its cultural life, language, and literature as a form of shared capital and creative expression: something that is not exclusive but expansive. This, in itself, is a wonderful gift and an example to other nations.

Here in New York, we sometimes forget another gift from France to America that symbolizes our shared history and values. I’m referring to the Statue of Liberty. It has become customary to see Lady Liberty as a wholly American icon. A symbol of the value America places on individual freedom: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Yet the fact remains that the Statue of Liberty was conceived, designed and engineered in France. It was a gift from France to America. While it was partly inspired by the shared history of revolution and independence between France and the United States, it specifically commemorates the abolition of slavery in 1865. The French abolitionist Édouard de Laboulaye proposed the statue that year, and the sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi created it, assisted by Gustave Eiffel, who built the metal framework.

People, looking only upward at the Statue of Liberty’s crown and torch, often forget the broken shackle and chains at her feet. France wanted to remind America that her dream of liberty was not complete with the

revolution of 1776 but could only be achieved when all her citizens, of every race and color, were free. *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Freedom is a part of an essential triad, where the fundamental equality and brotherhood of citizens — their mutual responsibility for one another’s well-being — are part of the social compact of democracy.

Significantly, the Statue of Liberty looks outward, not inward. It welcomes immigrants. Traditionally it was the first thing that weary, apprehensive, arrivals saw when they sailed into New York Harbor, often (especially in the case of Irish immigrants) leaving behind famine, desperate poverty, and loss. But the statue, *La Liberté éclairant le monde*, which is your gift to us, also looks steadfastly east to Europe. Despite the biting physical and political winds that often blow into Manhattan Island, it raises its hand in greeting, bearing aloft an eternal flame — like the Olympic torch — that is passed on in hope from one generation to another. It is a symbol of friendship between America and France — the way we look to — and look out for — each other, recognizing what we hold in common.

In accepting this wonderful honor from France, I would like to stress the importance of continuing to look outward, continuing to nurture the cultural relationship between America and France, building on those projects and values that we share. Victor Hugo in 1849, at the International Peace Congress held in Paris, predicted that “A day will come when we shall see ... the United States of America and the United States of Europe face-to-face, reaching out for each other across the seas.” The European Union is not quite the federation Hugo foresaw. Nonetheless, his visionary perspicacity and optimism remain relevant.

Carnegie Corporation of New York supports organizations that are working toward an improved immigration system built on evidence-based immigration and immigrant integration policies. Annually, we celebrate Great Immigrants, Great Americans, including 15 from France. We carry stories on our website celebrating immigrants — from my countryman, the poet Paul Muldoon, to the musician David Byrne, and the world-leading mathematician Terence Tao. Andrew Carnegie himself was, of course, an immigrant. His vision of America was inclusive: one where every new arrival would have the opportunity for self-improvement, and the support

of free public libraries in that endeavor. His libraries remain places where all are welcome, where literature provides our common home.

Here at Carnegie, we are committed to resisting the polarization which currently besets national unity and international amity both in the United States and in Europe. We support academic research, community service programs, and projects that bring people together across political divides. Examples include Narrative 4 and the American Exchange Project which bring together school students from across the country, from Appalachia to Manhattan, to learn each other's stories and live in each other's homes.

As part of our investment in peace and democracy, we also support the Lafayette Fellowships for French and American students. These fellowships, created by the French government to honor the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, will nurture a highly trained cohort of future leaders who are familiar with both France and America and have close ties to both nations. This joint enterprise speaks to our wider shared project of fostering tolerance, understanding, and cooperation. We are also proud supporters of the Paris Peace Forum.

I am extremely proud to receive this award and, with it, to reaffirm my personal commitment to fostering good relations between France and America. As an Irishwoman married to an American, who has divided her working life between the U.S. and Britain, I appreciate the complexities of maintaining diplomatic ties at a time of global uncertainty and saber-rattling, when many nations are embroiled in internal political conflict and factionalism is rife. In my opinion, it has never been more important to continue our friendships, to keep leaning over the walls that rise to divide us, and to keep our eyes fixed on the goals we share.

Please accept my heartfelt thanks and warmest appreciation. *Merci du fond du cœur.*