



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

SPEECH BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF THE FRANCO-AMERICAN OFFICIAL CEREMONY

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE D-DAY LANDING

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER

SUNDAY JUNE 6, 2004

D-Day veterans, Mr. President of the United States, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We stand here in hallowed ground, in a place that will live for ever in our memory for the role it has played in our history.

Against the dark night of oblivion, we are gathered here today to pay homage to the Soldiers of Freedom, to the legendary heroes of Operation Overlord.

Against the swift passage of time, our presence together today is a reminder to younger generations of the true significance of a war that continues to shape our understanding of the world.

France will never forget.

It will never forget that 6th of June 1944, the day hope was reborn. It will never forget those men who made the supreme sacrifice to liberate our soil, our native land, our continent, from the yoke of Nazi barbarity and its murderous folly. Nor will it ever forget its debt to America, its everlasting friend, and to its Allies, all of them, thanks to whom Europe, reunited at last, now lives in peace, freedom, and democracy. * Sixty years ago, the fate of France, of Europe, and the world, was decided on these Normandy beaches, here on Omaha Beach, on Bloody Omaha.

Today, as we stand in respectful silence, our emotion is undimmed at the spectacle of these rows of crosses, where your companions, your brothers in arms fallen on the field of honor now rest for all eternity. Our hearts are heavy as we contemplate their courage, their abnegation and their generosity. Our spirit is uplifted by the supreme abnegation of these young men who offered up their lives to save the world.

In the name of every French man and woman, I want to express my nation's eternal gratitude and the unparalleled debt our democracies owe them.



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I salute their courage, that flight of the human soul which, by their refusal to acknowledge the inevitability of enslavement, altered the course of History and so conferred a new stature on mankind, nations, and peoples.

I salute the memory and the sacrifice of all these fighters.

Overcoming fear, their fears, by the rightness of their struggle and the strength of their ideal, they raised the human conscience to a higher plane. *
Mr. President of the United States,

This day of remembrance begins here, at Colleville-sur-Mer, in this cemetery where for all time America honors its sons who died so young in the name of freedom. They are now our sons also.

To the entire American nation sharing this solemn moment with us, to all those men and women who paid the ultimate tribute of those heroic days, the message of France is a message of friendship and brotherhood; a message of appreciation and gratitude.

For more than 200 years, the same humanist values have shaped the destinies of France and America. Our two nations have never ceased to share a common love of liberty and law, of justice and democracy. These values are rooted in the very depths of our cultures and civilization. They form the genius of our peoples, the heart and soul of our nations.

From the plains of Yorktown to the beaches of Normandy, in the suffering of those global conflicts that have rent the past century, our two countries, our two peoples, have stood shoulder to shoulder in the brotherhood of spilled blood, in defense of a certain conception of mankind, a certain vision of the world: the vision that lies at the heart of the United Nations Charter.

Having experienced the long ordeal of war and occupation, France knows full well how much it owes to the United States of America, to the commitment of President Roosevelt and to the leadership of General Eisenhower. Each of us, every French family, cherishes the memory of those moments of joy that followed the D-Day Landings.

This friendship remains intact to this day: confident, exigent, founded in mutual respect. America is our eternal ally, and that alliance and solidarity are all the stronger for having been forged in those terrible hours. And in America's time of trial, when barbarity wreaks death and destruction in America and elsewhere in the world, France stands foursquare alongside every man and woman in America, as in the tragedy of September 11, 2001, a date engraved for ever in our memories and hearts. Their grief is our grief.

In conferring the Cross of Chevalier in the Order of the Legion of Honor this morning on one hundred American veterans here today, I wanted, in the name of every French man and woman, to bear witness once more to this ancient friendship and to our gratitude. * Ladies and Gentlemen,



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This moment of remembrance is also a moment for words of peace. For the glorious combat of these men to whom we are paying homage places us under an obligation for the future, and imposes a duty on us for the present.

Sixty years ago, these Soldiers of Freedom took up arms to ensure the triumph of the values to which men and women everywhere aspire: a vision of humanity and human dignity, of peace, freedom, and democracy.

But there is no end to this struggle of man against himself.

In a dangerous world, where violence and hatred too often stir up men, peoples even, the message of these heroes of The Longest Day, the flame our fathers bore so proudly and have now bequeathed to us, are our common heritage which implies a corresponding duty for us.

It implies a duty of remembrance, a duty to recall this still recent past when fanaticism, the rejection of those who are different from us, the rejection of others, cast men, women and children into the night and fog of the death camps. We must never forget that without a compass, without fidelity to the lessons of History, there can be no future.

We have a duty of vigilance also, a duty to fight ruthlessly all these upsurges and seedbeds of hatred that feed on ignorance, obscurantism, and intolerance.

And we have a duty of fidelity to our values, so that our generation may build and pass on to our children a world of progress and freedom, as is their birthright. To build that society of respect and dialogue, of tolerance, and solidarity that was the very essence of the struggle we are commemorating today. To keep alive for all time the spirit of hope. |