

The Significance of the French and Francophone Presence in North America in French Language Learning and Advocacy in the United States

Kathleen Stein-Smith

Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, NJ, USA

Abstract—This article examines the significance of the French and Francophone presence in North America and its impact on French language learning and use, with a special focus on the linkage between Québec and French language advocacy. Within a context of heritage languages, the lack of opportunity to learn additional languages in US public schools, and declining enrollments in languages in US colleges and universities, the scope of both the historical and contemporary role of Francophones in the US is described, and a brief overview of French language advocacy is provided. Current trends, including *Francoresponsabilité* and *Franco-Activisme*, as well as the importance of advocacy partnerships and online learning, are also explored.

Index Terms—French language, Francophone, Québec, advocacy, *Francoresponsabilité*

I. INTRODUCTION

French has been an American language since the earliest years of the European era in the Americas. Cities from Boise and New Orleans to Detroit and to Montpelier, VT., demonstrate the French presence, and who knew that Los Angeles has had not one, but two French Canadian mayors? French Canadians have been described as “a people that, given its small size and the trying circumstances it has faced, has made a remarkable contribution to the building of North America” (Pratte & Kay, 2016, p. 15). At the current time, collaborations and initiatives involving Francophones in America include not only educational programs and cultural exchanges, but also French language job fairs in various locations and online, a conference in Bordeaux on France-Louisiana connections and the prominence of Louisiana authors, artists, and educators at the Salon du Livre de Montréal (Institut des Ameriques, n.d.; Radio-Canada, 2023; Leach, 2022).

French is an American language – it is essential for all who support and advocate for French language and Francophone culture in the US not only to be aware of the depth and extent of the French and Francophone presence in the Americas and in the US, but also to leverage our linkages to the French language – locally and globally – in our teaching and in our advocacy. An article title directly posed the question - “Who are the Francophones in the United States?” Twelve million Americans speak French/ But who are they? And what is their experience?” (Thiery, 2022, p. 1).

This is a two-step process beginning with the knowledge base we all need to have on the French language and Francophone culture in France, in the world, and in the US. Depending on our previous experiences with French, we may have differing levels of knowledge of Francophone culture in different parts of the world, but it is important that we all have an understanding of the French language and Francophone culture in the Americas, in Québec, in the US, and in other parts of the world that reflect the heritage and interests of our students in order to effectively develop sustainable motivation and engagement among them. The second step is to operationalize this knowledge in order to develop sustainable motivation in our students and communities and to collaborate effectively with organizations and individuals engaged in French language advocacy.

As Québec is the heart of the Francophonie in the Americas in so many ways – historically, demographically, and in the leadership the Québécois and other Francophones across Canada have shown in preserving and advocating for their language and culture, it is essential for us to remember that the vitality of French language and Francophone culture that we see today in Québec and across Canada is largely due to their stalwart advocacy and support of French.

There are two sets of questions that frame French language advocacy in the US - core questions that concern the knowledge base, our own knowledge and communication of that knowledge through our teaching and in our advocacy; and advocacy questions concerning how to ensure the present and future of French in the US.

Core questions include – *Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How?*

Who are the Americans of French ancestry and heritage, and those who speak French in the US?

What are the language and cultural stories of the Francophonie in the US?

When did our French heritage begin and how has it evolved?

Where are the Americans of French heritage and French-speakers located in the US?

Why is this important and why does this matter to all of us?

How can we work together to strengthen French language and Francophone culture in the US and beyond through a better understanding and appreciation of our French heritage and French-speaking communities?

French is an American heritage language – it has been so since the earliest years of the European era in North America and continues to be a heritage language today, spoken by 33M in the Americas, and by between 11 and 12M in the US (Nadeau, 2021; Thiery, 2022). In addition, French is spoken in the home by more than 2M in the US (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). Community-based organizations across the US are promoting the learning and use of French, and young people across the country are embracing their Francophone heritage and the French language. Canada, our neighbor to the North, is home to 8M Francophones, and Québec is key to the resurgence of French in the US (Govt of Canada, 2019). The challenge is to reach and engage the wide range of French heritage and French-speaking communities, each with a different history, and many with differing degrees of knowledge of, and engagement with, their history and heritage language.

Heritage languages play a significant role in our lives as part of our personal and cultural identity, our story in North America, and our role as global citizens in a multilingual world. Over 70M in the US speak a language other than English in the home, and our heritage languages are both a treasured piece of our heritage and history and a powerful tool for our present and for our future language capacity (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). French has been an American language since the earliest days of the European era, spoken throughout the Americas. With 33M Francophones in the Americas, it plays a significant role in communication, commerce, and culture. In the US, French is spoken by 12M, is the second most widely studied language, and is spoken by 2M in the home. Over 10M in the US are of French or Francophone ancestry (French Americans, 2023).

Although French faces the same challenges as other heritage languages, it is possible to effectively address and overcome the challenge of language loss that has been part of our history, and this is possible through education, the use of French in communication, and the use of French in creativity and the arts described in the worldwide campaign for French launched in 2017 (French Diplomacy, n.d.). Our place within the Francophone world is at the heart of French language advocacy, with our advocacy strengthened by our French and Francophone heritage and identity, and by French and Francophone community initiatives supported by the broad partnership among French language stakeholders, particularly the impact of the French presence in Québec and its influence on French language and Francophone culture in the US.

II. ANSWERING THE CORE QUESTIONS – WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, AND HOW?

There are 10M of French ancestry in the US, including over 2M of French-Canadian ancestry in New England and beyond (French-Canadian Americans, 2023). The French and Francophone space in the US includes people from French-speaking areas around the world, some who have been here for centuries and may or may not still speak French, and some who are recent arrivals who speak French in the home and want to transmit their family language and culture to their children and future generations.

While there are many stories and identities framed by French, the best-known is that of the French Canadians, living in Québec, New Brunswick, and other parts of Canada. It is interesting to note that the first experience many Americans have with French is either a visit to Québec or a chance encounter with a Québécois or other French Canadian here in the US. Even more interesting is the fact that most Americans remain unaware of the role of the French and French Canadians have played in our own history, from the earliest years of the European presence in North America and the earliest European exploration of North America through the migration of over a million French Canadians to the US during the period lasting from the mid-19th century through the mid-20th century, centered on the textile industry in New England. It is interesting to note that the term “Québécois” has existed since the mid-19th century and has come into even more general usage since the mid-20th century (Merriam-Webster, 2023b).

Throughout our history, people from around the world have come to make their home in the US, including French Canadians, immigrants from the Caribbean to many parts of the US throughout our history, as immigrants from France and from around the world. It is interesting to note that the US, a nation of immigrants throughout our history, has no official language and no language policy, while Canada and many other nations do. Knowledge of languages and cultures can only enhance understanding and communication within our society and among nations. Knowledge of our many French and Francophone cultures in the US is important in the teaching, learning, and use of French, as well as in French language advocacy.

The challenge is building a bridge between what we know and how we operationalize that knowledge in our classrooms and communities. In our classrooms, in addition to teaching about the global French-speaking world, we need to highlight French language as it is spoken in different parts of the world and in the US. We also need to focus on French learning in immersion and heritage learning programs, as well as in traditional language programs. Beyond the traditional classroom, we need to develop opportunities and materials for independent learners of all ages both in person and online. We also need to support and encourage the use of French in all aspects of life – in our communities, the media, the arts, and in the workplace. In essence, the concept of *Franco-responsabilité* using French in our daily lives, drives language advocacy and supports the resurgence of French in the US (France-Amérique, 2017).

It is essential to communicate the story of all our Francophone cultures and to reach out to those who may have partially or even completely lost their French language skills over the course of time and to provide activities, events,

and materials accessible to those who only are fluent in English. On the other hand, it is equally important to build on the interest of those participating in Francophone culture through English-language access points and to encourage all who are interested in Francophone culture to develop their language skills in French. Finding the balance of activities, materials, and media communicating the contributions of writers, artists, scholars, scientists, media, Franco-activists, and many more to both global and US Francophone culture, while never losing sight of the importance of the language itself, requires close collaboration among all French language and Francophone culture stakeholders.

III. ANSWERING THE ADVOCACY QUESTIONS – IDENTIFYING ADVOCACY MOVEMENTS, LEARNING FROM THEM, AND WORKING WITH THEM

Language advocacy means persuasion, leadership, and social purpose. Advocacy has been defined as “persuading people who matter to care about your issue” (Daly, 2011, p. 15). Language advocacy means defending and promoting language learning and use in schools, in the workplace, and in our society. Leadership has been defined as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal,” and language advocacy is also an opportunity for language educators to grow as leaders (Northouse, 2013, p. 9). Language advocacy is also a social movement, “small groups that are loosely connected by a shared purpose – and created social change” (Satell & Popovic, 2017, p. 1). Language advocacy can also be considered in terms of “everyday” and “emergency” advocacy – promoting language learning and use on an ongoing/everyday basis, as compared to defending a program at risk or in danger, often due to the retirement of a language educator or an impending budget cut (Peckham & Stein Smith, eds., p. 81).

There are many individuals and groups supporting the learning and use of French, as well as Francophone culture throughout the US. In terms of French language education, the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) is our national profession association, with state chapters and regional divisions across the country and commissions addressing a wide range of specific areas of interest (Note: this author serves as Chair of the Commission on Advocacy). Many other professional associations of language educators and professionals at the national, regional, and state level do so as well.

On the international level, the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), *Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques* (CFA), and the *Agence universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF) advocate for the learning and use of French both locally and globally. Official representatives also include the *Délegations du Québec*, the French Consulates, and the French Cultural Services of the French Embassy. At the global level, it is important to remember that the UN actively supports and implements multilingualism, with French as a working language of the Secretariat and one of only 6 official languages. The OIF maintains the presence of an Official Observer/Ambassador at the UN, and there is also an active *Groupe des Ambassadeurs Francophones* at the UN.

French language learning is also supported by the French Dual-Language Program and the French for All Program, and by organizations including the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL). In addition, organizations with a broader social and cultural mission like the Franco-American Centre offer a variety of language learning activities including in-person, online, after-school, and summer programs, etc. The French heritage program and French schools throughout the US also support French language learning.

It is essential to encourage the use of French in everyday life and in the workplace. Beyond learning, the use of French is also encouraged by initiatives including CODOFIL's *Oui!* initiative, French language job Fairs, the *Forum économique* held in New Orleans in 2022, the conference *France and Louisiana: A "Special Relationship"?* held in Bordeaux in June 2023, as well as organizations like the Laura Plantation, and many others (Cultural Services, 2022; Leach, 2022). Organizations like the Nous Foundation encourage both culture and creativity in French as well as the use of French in education and professional life, and the *Caribou à lunettes* encourages language and cultural learning through children's and young adult literature from Québec (Caribou à lunettes, 2023). French language and Francophone culture advocates also include individuals and groups who are active in a variety of ways, including music and the arts, social media, podcasts, blogs, journalism, sociocultural events, and much more, with the *French-Canadian Legacy* Podcast, the New Hampshire PoutineFest, *Moderne Francos* blog, and the *French Maine USA* and *Rêve de Gagnon* Facebook pages just a few examples.

While identifying relevant advocacy groups may seem like the difficult part, it may actually be much more challenging for an already-busy professional to devote the time and effort needed to truly learn from them in terms of their mission, the actual content they generate, and their effectiveness, success, and impact. However, if the effort is made, these successes can be adapted to local conditions and implemented wherever needed. The important thing to remember is that advocacy is a broad umbrella, with many voices needed, and that each of us should contribute as best we can. Some may choose to follow events, while others may seek a more active role.

The most important advocacy question to answer is how to support existing programs, organizations, and initiatives, and potentially to collaborate and to form partnerships. This answer is unique for each individual and group, but possibilities for collaboration include research and writing, joint events and initiatives, and many more.

IV. THE STATUS OF FRENCH LANGUAGE AND FRANCOPHONE CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

Any discussion of French language in the US needs to be considered within the context of heritage languages in the US and of the French language in the world (Kelleher, 2010; Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022; Nadeau, 2021; OIF, 2022). French is spoken by 33M in the Americas, including 12M in the US, and is the 4th most spoken language in New York City (CUNY Lehman, n.d.). Over 10M claim French or Francophone ancestry in the US, and over 2M speak French in the home. French is also the second most studied language in the US (American Councils, 2017; MLA, 2019, 2023).

It is important to consider the current status of French within the framework of language and languages within the US. While 70M Americans speak a language other than English in the home, only 20% of US K-12 students learn an additional language in school, and only 7.5% are enrolled in a class in a language other than English at the postsecondary level (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022; AMACAD, 2017; MLA, 2019, 2023). At the college and university level, French programs have declined in enrollment in recent years, even as the number of Francophones in the US has increased (MLA, 2019, 2023; Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022; Johnson, 2019).

A Franco-American has been defined as “an American of French or especially French-Canadian descent” (Merriam-Webster, 2023, p. 1), and those who speak French and/or who claim French or Francophone ancestry include not only the descendants of early French explorers or *voyageurs*, but also the million French Canadians who migrated to the US during the period from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century as well as those who have come to the US from around the world (Choquette, 2018; Merriam, 2023b).

V. THE QUÉBEC – US CONNECTION

Beyond the shared history of the United States and Québec, a broad range of contemporary initiatives connect the US and Québec. Both Québec and Louisiana are members of the OIF, facilitating economic and other interactions. Among nine *Délégations générales* du Québec in the world, two are located in the US, in New York and in Los Angeles respectively. In addition, Québec has delegations in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, and Houston, a bureau in Washington, DC, and a trade office in Philadelphia (Gouv, 2023). It is interesting to note that French is one of the most sought-after languages in the workplace (ACTFL, 2019). International education – Americans studying in Quebec – and the presence of French Canadians and Franco-Americans in the US are two major aspects of this profound connection.

Le Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques, established in 2008, has as its mission to «contribuer à la promotion et à la mise en valeur d’une francophonie porteuse d’avenir pour la langue française dans le contexte de la diversité culturelle.» It accomplishes this through “strengthening and enriching relations among them and by leveraging the contributions of the hemisphere’s numerous francophiles” (CFA, 2022, p. 1).

In terms of trade and economics, “Canada and the U.S. share one of the largest trading relationships in the world, with nearly \$1.3 trillion in bilateral trade in goods and services in 2022. That year, Canada was the largest U.S. trading partner in goods and services” (Govt of Canada, 2022, p. 1). “Top commodities traded between Québec and the U.S. are mineral fuels, aircraft, & computers” (EBTC, 2023, p. 1). Québec currently has a United States strategy, aimed at establishing even closer ties with the US (Gouv du Québec, 2023b).

International education and study abroad play a significant role in relations among societies, and Canada is a popular study abroad destination for US students, and the US a popular destination for Canadian students. Canadian students are the 4th largest group of international students in the US, while over 10K US students study in Canada (OpenDoors, 2022; Wilson, 2018; Erudera, 2022).

The power of international students is not to be underestimated as many international may stay in the country of their study, while many others return home with memories and connections there. Université Laval and the Université de Montréal are among the most popular choices in Québec (CanadaVisa, 2023) (Note: the author earned a *Baccalauréat spécialisé* and a *Maîtrise* at Université Laval).

Over 2M in the US are of French-Canadian ancestry, with some having arrived early in the European area, and most during the mid-19th through mid-20th century, and are located primarily in New England, Louisiana, and the Midwest. The states with the highest percentage of inhabitants of French-Canadian ancestry are Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont (Wikipedia, 2023b). The presence of such significant populations in the most densely populated region of the United States is significant for a variety of reasons, including the intense contact over a relatively long period of time between French Canadians and other Americans from a wide range of backgrounds. Famous Americans of French ancestry can be traced back to the earliest years of European exploration to the current day – from the European explorers like those who were the earliest to visit the Mississippi Valley and beyond to those in all walks of life today – to Jack Kerouac, and to many more. Their stories can be inspirational to all learners and French language enthusiasts.

The discussion of the contribution of Americans of French and Francophone ancestry is not limited to the transmission of information, but also involves helping learners and heritage language speakers to draw inspiration from the contributions made in the past and present and to learn how those of all cultures can continue to make contributions to US society moving forward. It is important to remember that “when facing uncertainty, the most useful stories encourage imagination, hope, curiosity, and purpose” (Furr & Harmon Furr, 2022, p. 1). The story and the power of story to inspire and motivate can lead to social action and social movements (Boris, 2017; Renken, 2020).

Beyond historical personages, writers and artists, and contemporary celebrities, local figures and family members can also inspire, and their stories should be shared. Many are not aware of the extent and depth of the French experience in the Americas and in the US, and telling the story of the scope of *la Nouvelle France*, of the challenges faced by the French in America, of the story of the French Canadians and the migration of French Canadians from Québec and Acadia to the US should be told. Beyond French Canada, the stories of those who came to America from the Caribbean and beyond, and from France can be part of this inspirational story. It is not only students in classrooms who may not be aware, but also adults, either independent learners or driven by personal interest to learn more.

VI. THE ROLE OF QUÉBEC AND THE FRENCH PRESENCE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE USE AND ADVOCACY IN THE US

French language and Francophone culture have been present in what is now the United States since the earliest years of the European exploration of the Americas, with French *voyageurs*/explorers among the first Europeans to visit many areas in the US and Canada. France has been the oldest ally of the United States, it is generally believed that, without the aid of France, the American Revolution would have had an entirely different outcome (Schachtman, 2017). It is noteworthy that not only can French Merci Trains/*Trains de la reconnaissance française*, a gift from France to the US after WWII, be seen in several American cities, including Manchester, NH, but also that French artifacts play a prominent role in exhibits at the National Museum of the United States Army (Merci Train, 2023; Thiery, 2023). It is within the context of this profound connection between France and America that it is necessary to consider the role of our shared experience and ongoing relationship in the story of French in the US, how this story is shared with family and friends, and how it is communicated to students and to our society.

While Francophones in the US come from around the world, more than 2M French Canadians came to the US, primarily to New England and surrounding regions. It is interesting to note that, among the states, Maine has the largest percentage of people of French ancestry, with Madawaska. Maine, home to the largest concentration of people of French ancestry. On the other hand, the county with the largest percentage of French language speakers is St. Martin's Parish in Louisiana. The states with the highest percentage of Francos are Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Louisiana, and the states with the largest number of Franco Americans are California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York. A regional distribution has the Midwest, New England, California, Louisiana, and New York (French- Canadian Americans, 2023). New York City alone is home to more than 80,000 Francophones (Sicot, 2019; France-Amerique, 2021).

The significance of Québec in French language and French Language Advocacy in the US lies largely in its proximity to the United States and in the large heritage population in the US. For students of French in the US and for Americans generally, French Canadians and Québec may be the initial points of contact with French language and Francophone culture. "Franco-Americans can take heart in the remarkable success Québécois have achieved in modernizing and reinvigorating their own culture" (Brault, p. 184).

It is important for French language educators, advocates, and stakeholders to build on this proximity and shared experience in teaching and advocating for French language and Francophone culture through spending time on teaching the history and culture of French Canada and of French Canadians in the US and by encouraging study abroad in Québec. Within the global context of the Francophone world, a better knowledge and appreciation of Québec and the role that Québec has played in Francophone culture throughout the Americas could support and strengthen French language learning and use in the US.

The good news is that many scholarly and community-based organizations are working to bring French language learning and use, as well as an appreciation of the French language and Francophone culture in Québec, to Americans. Interesting, many in the US are not aware of the proximity of Québec to the US, of the large number of Americans of French-Canadian origin, or of the importance of French Canada and of Québec in Francophone culture in the US. A challenge is to increase awareness, and across the US, organizations are offering opportunities for French language learning and use.

Fortunately, there are resources readily available for anyone wishing to learn more about the Francophone and the French-Canadian presence in the US, the experience of French-Canadian immigrants in New England, the period known as *survivance*, the challenges faced by French-Canadians in the US, the ongoing linkages between Americans and Québec, the contributions of French-Canadians throughout the history of North America, local Franco-American communities, and much more (Brault, 1986; Perreault, 2010; Pratte & Kay, 2016; Quintal, 1996; Roby, 2004; Vermette, 2018).

VII. FRANCOPHONE ORGANIZATIONS AND INITIATIVES IN THE US

There are many initiatives in the US to promote French language and Francophone culture, including many Franco-American organizations and initiatives along with many others. Organizations and initiatives include educational programs in our schools and educational institutions, both traditional and immersion programs, as well as study abroad. Beyond the classroom, summer camps and community-based French groups empower both heritage language speakers and French language learners. Organizations exist at the international, national, and regional level, and can also have a subject-area focus such as history, literature, etc.

Within this framework, advocacy is a broad umbrella, including many voices, and a partnership among educators, parents and communities, and other language stakeholders is essential. Driven by a firm belief in the significance of French language and Francophone culture within the context of a multilingual world and an increasingly multilingual United States, French language advocacy includes initiatives and activities by organizations including the OIF and the CFA – not to mention the worldwide campaign for French launched by the French government in 2017 (French Diplomacy, n.d.). In the US, the AATF (American Association of Teachers of French) has a mission to “promote throughout North America the teaching and learning of the French language and French-speaking cultures and civilizations,” and has chapters throughout the US. In addition, initiatives such as the *Révolution bilingue*, the French Heritage language program, and the FACE Foundation, along with institutions like the Alliance Française, promote French language and Francophone culture throughout the US (AATF, 2019, p. 1; Jaumont, 2017).

Other organizations working to promote French language and Francophone include CODOFIL (*Conseil pour le développement du français en Louisiane*), the *Centre Franco-Américain* of New Hampshire, and the Nous Foundation working to promote French language and Francophone culture locally and beyond, through education, programming and events, activities for all, and through social media and the creative and performing arts. While perhaps best known for over 50 years on French language immersion, CODOFIL also advocates for the use of French beyond the classroom through initiatives like the *Oui!* Initiative and through its lead role in the 2023 *Université d’été* held outside Québec for the first time, in Lafayette, LA (CODOFIL, 2023). The *Centre Franco-Américain*, headquartered in Manchester, NH, serves its region and beyond through both onsite and online programs, events, and initiatives, including events like the *cabane à sucre*, *Beaufolais nouveau* festival, and a baking contest with a French fairytale theme, as well as French conversation groups and more (FAC, 2023).

The Nous Foundation is “a cultural institute promoting French and Creole across Louisiana and the United States,” through programming, its cultural institute, and scholarships (Nous, 2022, p. 1). *Le Caribou à lunettes* works to bring an appreciation of French language and Francophone culture to children and young people through literature, offering both a collection and workshops for children and teens, for teachers, and for librarians. The French Heritage Foundation of Minnesota offers events and programming, scholarships, publications and more (Fahfminn, n.d.). The Laura Plantation: Louisiana’s Creole Heritage Site offers resources, tours in both English and French, a podcast, and more (Laura, 2023). In Missouri, the St. Genevieve National Historical Park demonstrates the history of the French presence in the Mississippi Valley. In social media, the *French Canadian Legacy* Podcast celebrates the ties that have always existed – and continue to exist - between French Canadians and Americans (FCL, n.d.). The *Moderne Francos* blog, with a subtitle, “where new Franco-American traditions are born!”, provides a fresh perspective on the traditions and history that link us (Moderne, n.d., p. 1). In celebrating poutine, the New Hampshire PoutineFest celebrates not only poutine, but also Québec and the linkages between Québec and Americans (NHPoutine, n.d.).

All of these wonderful organizations and initiatives are just a small fraction of the intense activity and vibrant culture framing French in America, but it is essential to remember that behind each of these, there is a leader and leadership team who do all the work to make these great things happen.

VIII. THE QUÉBEC PRESENCE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN FRENCH LANGUAGE ADVOCACY IN THE US

While Francophones in the US reflect the global nature of French language and represent a wide range of histories and cultures, it is nonetheless important to remember that not only is Québec so close to many of our US states, but that also many Americans of Francophone heritage are descendants of those who came to the US from Québec and French Canada. However, it is equally important to remember that the French Canada and Québec of the past is like any other heritage nation – it has continued to evolve in the years that have passed since our ancestors and those of our friends and neighbors came to the US, and that contemporary Québec and Canada are global and cosmopolitan. It is important to honor, respect, and remember the past, but it is perhaps even more important to recognize that a culture continues to evolve, and that an accurate reflection of it includes contemporary people and events, and current authors, artists, and thinkers. This is even more necessary when we are trying to transmit a language and culture to future generations.

The first step in leveraging all the connections between French language and Francophone culture and the US is to introduce a discussion of the global – and local – role of French in the US – in our past, present, and future, and within our families, our communities, and our society, as well as in our role as global citizens. It is necessary to talk about the importance of French in our lives and to develop an action plan to develop language knowledge and cultural skills, and to ensure that this sense of purpose remains central to the conversation. However, this can be more difficult that it may seem at first, and it is perhaps even more important to re-visit the French connection – in different ways for different audiences – in order to develop sustainable motivation.

At this point, it is interesting to consider the power of “story” and the importance of the “storyteller.” “Telling stories is one of the most powerful means that leaders have to influence, teach, and inspire.” This is especially important in the context of language and culture, as “storytelling forges connections among people, and between people and ideas. Stories convey the culture, history, and values that unite people. When it comes to our countries, our communities, and our families, we understand intuitively that the stories we hold in common are an important part of the ties that bind” (Boris, 2017, p. 1). An example of effective and compelling storytelling would be the programs offered through the Athenaeum of Philadelphia and the AF of Philadelphia- the *Cercle Francophone de l’Histoire* and *Femmes Peintres*

respectively. It is essential for us not only to know the story of French in America, but also to communicate it effectively to future generations – young people and students.

It is also important to consider the psychology of influence and persuasion, and blue ocean thinking – building on community and cross-cultural communication, and on the strategic development of new models for language learning and use respectively.

IX. BRINGING QUÉBEC INTO OUR COMMUNITIES AND CLASSROOMS – THE IMPORTANCE OF TELLING THE STORY

Telling the story of Québec and of French in North America is an inspirational first step, and – beyond the storyteller – Québec-oriented materials, media, and spaces are needed. Materials include curriculum for a wide range of ages/grades and of language proficiency, as well as materials focused on the needs of the French heritage speaker and of the independent learners. It is essential that materials in French be readily available and, of course, affordable. Media – both creative and educational – is needed, and again, must be easily accessible and affordable. Spaces are perhaps the most challenging aspect of setting the stage for French, with cost and administrative responsibilities to be met. However, language learning must be accompanied by language use in a wide variety of settings. Exchange programs, internships, and study abroad are all ways to develop both linguistic skills and cultural knowledge, while also fostering and encouraging a global mindset among French language learners and speakers.

This is a multifaceted long-term campaign, and requires a partnership of educators, native speakers of French, heritage language speakers and learners, businesses and other organizations in need of French language skills, along with external partners. The Québec Delegations and French consulates are an excellent starting point, as are Francophone organizations and businesses. There have been several French Language Job Fairs in Louisiana, offering opportunities to French language speakers and those who have become proficient or even fluent French learners to use their French language skills in their professional lives.

Even beyond the classroom and the workplace, it is necessary to focus on the role of language in our personal, social, cultural, and creative lives and to ensure that opportunities exist for French and Francophone speakers, learners, and enthusiasts to enjoy the experience of living their lives and creating in French.

X. CURRENT TRENDS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS – FRANCORESPONSABILITE AND FRANCO-ACTIVISME

Social movements have been defined as “small groups that are loosely connected but united by a shared purpose,” have played an important role, and can do so in language advocacy (Satell & Popovic, 2017, p. 1). In order to bring about the resurgence of French in the US, a partnership between language educators and language stakeholders, including heritage language speakers is needed, and our connection to the French-speaking world, and specifically to Québec, is key. In the case of French language advocacy, this means *Francoresponsabilité* and *Franco-Activisme*. *Francoresponsabilité* – a term first used in Québec - has been defined as “développer l’usage de la langue française au quotidien, » or developing the use of French in our daily lives (France-Américaine, 2019, p. 1).

Language is intrinsically interdisciplinary, spanning all areas of our lives, and so is French language advocacy. French language and Francophone culture have played a significant role in America for centuries, and the Francophone presence in the US continues to grow, as Franco-Americans revisit their history, and as new Francophone immigrants from around the world continue to come to the US. Québec, our friend, neighbor, and home to so many of our forebears, continues to be an inspiration to French language and Francophone culture in the US.

The future of French around the world and in the US is bright. More people speak French in the world than ever before. In the US, new arrivals from all around the Francophone world bring their language and culture to an already-vibrant community of Americans of French ancestry and French speakers here in the US. The future of French begins with the storyteller, the family member, teacher, or community leader who brings history – long ago or relatively recent – to life, or back to life. However, it doesn’t end there. Once interest, recognition, and motivation to find out more have been awakened, it is up to all French language and Francophone stakeholders to work together to develop the opportunities and pathways for meaningful and authentic learning and use for all, in all aspects of our lives. The French and Francophone advocacy campaign is the work of all of us – with many voices – bringing our insights, knowledge, and skills to bring about a resurgence of French and to make French language and Francophone culture part of American life. This means that families, educators, community leaders, French language enthusiasts and Francophiles, and external partners all can have a voice and play a role.

XI. CONCLUSIONS

French is a global language and a heritage language in the US. The contributions of French language and Francophone culture – past and present - are noteworthy around the world, in the Americas, and here in the US, and it is necessary for all of us to work together to make the contributions, the organizers, the writers and artists, the *Franco-activistes*, and many more known to our communities and to our students. In this way, we can ensure that the future will remain bright for the language and culture.

As the *Francophonie* in the US is geographically dispersed, online learning, communication, and programming are essential to ensure a sustainable Francophone presence in the US. In addition, any local variety of French needs to be

honored and highlighted, as they have been in the free online *Dictionnaire de la Francophonie*, part of the worldwide campaign for French. Learning, communication, and creativity – as stated in the international strategy for French, are priorities (French Diplomacy, n.d.).

Interest in both the language and the culture needs to be fostered and encouraged among all who are interested regardless of their level of language skills. In addition, learning materials featuring the stories of Francophone culture around the world and in the region and local community, along with local language usage, are essential, as are flexible opportunities to learn French online. External credentials, validating French language knowledge and shareable on social media, can help French language speakers to use their French language skills and cultural knowledge in their professional lives, and in this way, encouraging French language learners to learn an additional language, to enhance their heritage language skills, or to re-embrace a forgotten or partially forgotten family language (Global Seal, n.d.).

Canada, our neighbor to the north, is an example among many others, of a national language policy. A language policy, reflecting our history as a nation of immigrants, our global present and future, as well as our values and identity, is sorely needed. Our core values can and should drive our actions in terms of language and languages. A closer examination of the language policy of Canada and other nations could serve as an example for the US. Closest to home, our own state of Louisiana has been a member of the OIF since 2017, setting an example for other states and the US itself. The proximity of Québec, the close relationship of Canada and the US, and the growing number of French speakers around the world and in the US, are important factors in the renaissance of French in the US.

French is a language of our past, our present, and our future. Most importantly, we can all work together - educators, employers, external partners, and most importantly, parents and communities - to encourage and support the learning and use of French. *L'union fait la force.*

REFERENCES

- [1] American Academy of Arts & Sciences. (AMACAD). (2017). *America's Languages: Investing in America's Languages*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.amacad.org/publication/americas-languages>
- [2] American Association of Teachers of French. (AATF). (2019). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://frenchteachers.org/>
- [3] American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (ACTFL). (2019). *Making Languages Our Business*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/MakingLanguagesOurBusiness_FullReport.pdf
- [4] American Councils for International Education. (American Councils). (2017). *The National K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.americancouncils.org/news/announcements/new-report-world-language-study-us-k-12-schools>
- [5] Boris, V. (2017). *What Makes Storytelling So Effective for Learning?* Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/what-makes-storytelling-so-effective-for-learning/>
- [6] Brault, G.J. (1986). *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England*. Lebanon, NH: The University Press of New England.
- [7] Canada Visa. (2023). *Study in Québec*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.canadavisa.com/study-in-Québec.html>
- [8] Caribou à lunettes. (2023). *Caribou à lunettes*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://cariboulunettes.com/en>
- [9] Centre de la Francophonie des Amériques. (CFA). (2022). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://francophoniedesAmériques.com/>
- [10] Choquette, L. (2018). *French Canadian Immigration to Vermont and New England (1840-1930)*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://vermonthistory.org/journal/86/VH8601FrenchCanadianImmigration.pdf>
- [11] *Conseil pour le développement du Français en Louisiane. (CODOFIL)*. (2023). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/>
- [12] Cultural Services French Embassy in the United States. (Cultural Services). (2022). *French Language Job Fairs*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://frenchhighereducation.org/13977-french-language-job-fairs>
- [13] Dietrich, S. & Hernandez, E. (2022). *Language Use in the United States: 2019*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.html>
- [14] Eastern Border Transportation Coalition. (EBTC). (2023). *QUÉBEC: CANADA – U.S. TRADE (US\$)*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://ebtc.info/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Québec.pdf>
- [15] Erudera. (2023). *Canada International Student Statistics*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://erudera.com/statistics/canada/canada-international-student-statistics/>
- [16] France-Amérique. (2019). *Franco-Responsibility: Louisiana Rises to the Challenge*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://france-Amérique.com/franco-responsibility-louisiana-rises-to-the-challenge/>
- [17] France-Amérique. (2021). *The French Cousins behind New York's Little Paris*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://france-Amérique.com/the-french-cousins-behind-new-york-little-paris/>
- [18] Franco-American Centre. (FAC). (2023). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://facnh.com/>
- [19] French-American Heritage Foundation of Minnesota. (Fahfminn, n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://fahfminn.org/>
- [20] *French Americans*. (2023). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Americans
- [21] *French-Canadian Americans*. (2023). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French-Canadian_Americans
- [22] *French-Canadian Legacy Podcast. (FCL)*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://fclpodcast.com/>
- [23] France Diplomacy. (n.d.). *International Strategy for the French Language and Multilingualism*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/francophony-and-the-french-language/france-s-commitment-to-the-french-language/international-strategy-for-the-french-language-and-multilingualism/>
- [24] *The French Program at Lehman College, CUNY. (CUNY Lehman)*. (n.d.) Retrieved December 12, 2023 from

- <https://www.lehman.edu/deanhum/langlit/french/frenchprogram.html>
- [25] Furr & Harmon Furr. (2022). *How to Tell a Compelling Story to Motivate Others*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.fastcompany.com/90780223/how-to-tell-a-compelling-story-to-motivate-others>
- [26] *The Global Seal of Bilingualism*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://theglobalseal.com/>
- [27] Government of Canada. (2022). *Canada-United States Relations*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.international.gc.ca/country-pays/us-eu/relations.aspx?lang=eng>
- [28] Government of Canada. (2019). *Some Facts on the Canadian Francophonie*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/publications/facts-canadian-francophonie.html>
- [29] Gouvernement du Québec. (2023). *Québec Government Offices Abroad*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.quebec.ca/en/gouvernement/ministere/relations-internationales/representations-etranger>
- [30] Gouvernement du Québec. (2023b). *United States Strategy*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.quebec.ca/en/government/policies-orientations/Quebec-international-vision/united-states-strategy>
- [31] Institut des Amériques. (n.d.). "France and Louisiana: A "Special Relationship"?" Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.institutdesameriques.fr/en/calendar/france-and-louisiana-special-relationship>
- [32] Jaumont, F. (2017). *The Bilingual Revolution: The Future of Education Is in Two Languages*. NY: TBR Books.
- [33] Johnson, S. (2019). *Colleges lose a stunning 651 foreign language programs*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-lose-a-stunning-651-foreign-language-programs-in-3-years/>
- [34] Kelleher, A. (2010). *What is a Heritage Language?* Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/What-is-a-Heritage-Language.pdf>
- [35] *Laura Plantation: Louisiana's Creole Heritage Site*. (Laura). (2023). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.lauraplantation.com/>
- [36] Leach, C. (2022). *Jobs for French Language Speakers: Le Forum Économique*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://wgno.com/news/jobs-for-french-speakers/>
- [37] *Merci Train*. (2023). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merci_Train
- [38] Merriam-Webster. (2023). *Franco-American*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Franco-American>
- [39] Merriam-Webster. (2023b). *Québécois*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Québécois>
- [40] Modern Language Association. (MLA). (2019). *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Guidelines-and-Data/Reports-and-Professional-Guidelines/Teaching-Enrollments-and-Programs/Enrollments-in-Languages-Other-Than-English-in-United-States-Institutions-of-Higher-Education>
- [41] Modern Language Association. (MLA). (2023). *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Guidelines-and-Data/Reports-and-Professional-Guidelines/Enrollments-in-Languages-Other-Than-English-in-United-States-Institutions-of-Higher-Education>
- [42] *Moderne Francos*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://modernefrancos.com/>
- [43] Nadeau, J-B. (2021). *33 Millions de francophones dans les Amériques*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.ledevoir.com/societe/597077/de-la-terre-de-feu-a-la-terre-de-rupert-33-millions-de-francophones>
- [44] *NHPoutineFest*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.nhpoutinefest.com/>
- [45] *Nous Foundation*. (2022). Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.nous-foundation.org/>
- [46] Opendoors. (2022). *Fast Facts 2022*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://opendoorsdata.org/fast_facts/fast-facts-2022/
- [47] Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. (OIF). (2022). *La Langue française dans le monde*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=la+langue+française+dans+le+monde+2022
- [48] Peckham, R. & Stein-Smith, K. eds. (2021). *Strategic Advocacy for the French Language in the US*. Marion, IL: AATF.
- [49] Perreault, Robert B. (2010). *Franco-American Life & Culture in Manchester, Vivre La Difference*. Dover, NH: History Press Library Editions.
- [50] Pratte, A. & Kay, J. (2016). *Legacy: How French Canadians Shaped North America*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- [51] Quintal, C. (1996). Steeples and Smokestacks. *A Collection of essays on The Franco-American Experience in New England*. Worcester, MA: Institut Français, Assumption.
- [52] Radio-Canada. (2023). *Le Salon du Livre de Montreal*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.salondulivredeumontreal.com/>
- [53] Renken, E. (2020). *How Stories Connect and Persuade Us: Unleashing the Brain Power of Narrative*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/04/11/815573198/how-stories-connect-and-persuade-us-unleashing-the-brain-power-of-narrative>
- [54] Roby, Yves. (2004). *Franco-Americans of New England: Dreams and Realities*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP.
- [55] Satell, G. & Popovic, S. (2017). *How Protests Become Social Movements*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://hbr.org/2017/01/how-protests-become-successful-social-movements>
- [56] Schachtman, T. (2017). *How France Saved America: Soldiers, Sailors, Diplomats, Louis XVI, and the Success of a Revolution*. NY: St. Martin's.
- [57] Sicot, J. (2019). *New York, la capitale méconnue de la francophonie*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://lepetitjournal.com/new-york/new-york-la-capitale-meconnue-de-la-francophonie-262838>
- [58] Thiery, C. (2023). *The U.S. Army's French Treasures on Display in Virginia*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://france-amérique.com/the-us-army-french-treasures-on-display-in-virginia/>
- [59] Thiery, C. (2022). *Who Are the Francophones in the United States?* Retrieved December 12, 2023 from <https://france-amérique.com/who-are-the-francophones-in-the-united-states/>
- [60] Vermette, D. (2018). A Distinct Alien Race. *The Untold Story of Franco-Americans: Industrialization, Immigration, Religious*

Strife. Montreal: Baraka Press.

- [61] Wilson, E. (2018). *Why American Students Should Study in Canada*. Retrieved December 12, 2023 from https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/american-students-study-canada_ca_5cd54ecce4b07bc72976cf4b

Kathleen Stein-Smith, PhD, *Officier dans l'Ordre des Palmes académiques*, is a dedicated foreign language educator and advocate. She serves as Chair of the AATF (American Association of Teachers of French) Commission on Advocacy, an America's Languages Fellow, and as a member of the ATA Education and Pedagogy Committee and the MLA Delegate Assembly. She is also active in foreign language education associations, including the NECTFL Advisory Council, CSCTFL Advisory Council, and as a SCOLT sponsor. She has presented at numerous professional conferences at the state, regional, and national level, is the author of nine books and numerous articles about the foreign language deficit and the importance of multilingualism, has given a TEDx talk on the U.S. foreign language deficit, has been interviewed by press and radio, and maintains a blog, "Language Matters" <https://kathleensteinsmith.wordpress.com/> She earned a Baccalaur éat sp écialis é and Ma ñrise in Qu ébec, where her master's thesis on the comparative stylistics of French and English was written under the direction of Jean-Louis Darbelnet. Email kathysteinsmith@gmail.com