Dear Friends,

In the ensuing weeks of the devastating attacks in Paris, just days after another series of violence in Copenhagen, France and America have not ceased their bilateral efforts to combat terrorism. In that context, we have received a number of French officials in Washington to discuss the best actions that our two countries may take to protect our citizens.

On February 9 and 10, Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira visited Washington, D.C. and New York, where she met with her counterpart, Attorney General Eric Holder, as well as José Luis Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States and NGOs. Just one week later, Minister of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve travelled to Washington to attend the governmental meetings of the White House Summit to Combat Violent Extremism. Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo was also in the U.S. capital on the occasion of this conference. For more on the Summit, see page 2.

French Minister of Interior Bernard Cazeneuve speaks with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism, held on February 18 and 19 in Washington, D.C. Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo was also in the U.S. capital on the occasion of this conference. For more on the Summit, see page 2.

From the Ambassador’s Desk: A message from Gérard Araud

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While preserving the security of our citizens remains a top priority for both France and America, the two countries have not ceased cooperation in a number of other important sectors, particularly business, economy, science and technology. Business France, a new government agency launched at the beginning of this year, was created expressly to foster foreign growth and investment in France. Whether we look at Alexion Pharmaceuticals, which recently decided to open its first center for Research and Development located outside the U.S. in Paris, or Cartier, a French brand established for well over 100 years in the U.S. which just hosted an event at the embassy this past month, it is clear that France and America's economies continue to benefit from partnerships between companies from our two countries.

Throughout the U.S., there is much more that our two countries have to be excited about. This past month, I visited Boston, where I spoke to the board of MIT-France, an exciting program that sends students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to conduct research with top companies and labs in France. 13 French films and co-productions were nominated for the 87th Academy Awards on February 22, of which two received Oscars. No matter the accomplishment, I am consistently proud of the strong bonds that exist between France and America, throughout both difficult and celebratory times.
Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira visits the U.S.

On February 9 and 10, French Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira paid a visit to Washington, D.C. and New York, where she addressed mutual efforts made by France and the United States to combat terrorism and discrimination, and to ensure the rule of law.

On February 9, Minister Taubira met with her American counterpart Attorney General Eric Holder at the Justice Department to discuss joint efforts of France and the United States to protect citizens following the recent attacks in Paris. "Both of our countries have been stricken by terrorism. But we are also very willing to fight together, so we are increasing cooperation between our countries," said Minister Taubira following their meeting. In that regard, the two officials spoke about the Global Summit to Counter Violent Extremism in Washington, D.C. which took place on February 18. Minister Taubira also met with José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General of the Organization of American States, to speak about criminal cooperation with Latin American countries. Additionally, they examined how antiterrorism penal policies of France compare with the American efforts to combat terrorism.

In an appearance on Andrea Mitchell Reports, Minister Taubira emphasized the importance of respecting human rights while fighting against terrorism, stating, "Our challenge is first to preserve our citizens' security, and at the same time, not to sacrifice democracy."

On February 10, Minister Taubira gave a speech to the Counter-Terrorism Committee at the United Nations Security Council in New York and met with permanent representatives of the Sahel countries to speak with them about France's actions in the region. Prior to her departure for France, the Minister of Justice took the opportunity to visit Ground Zero and the National September 11 Memorial to pay tribute to the victims of 9/11.

French officials at Global Summit to Counter Violent Extremism

Following recent attacks around the world—notably in Paris, but also Ottawa, Sydney, and Copenhagen—the White House organized a Summit for Countering Violent Extremism, which was held on February 18 and 19 in Washington, D.C. Gathering leaders from around the world, this conference highlighted efforts being made both domestically and internationally to prevent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States and abroad to commit acts of violence.

A strong cohort of French support was present at the Summit. French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve and Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo both travelled to Washington on the occasion of this conference.

Minister Cazeneuve attended the Summit on February 19, which was held at the State Department. Minister Cazeneuve met with Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson, as well as Lisa Monaco, President Barack Obama's Advisor on Homeland Security and Counter Terrorism.

At the Summit, the Minister gave a speech entitled “Understanding Violent Extremism Today,” where he spoke about the steps that France is taking to prevent further attacks, including increasing domestic security and intelligence and mobilizing government agencies to prevent radicalization of individuals. Minister Cazeneuve expressed his gratitude to all those who have supported the French community, saying, "I would like... to thank you warmly on behalf of France and the French people for your gestures of solidarity during that ordeal. I salute our American hosts, and particularly John Kerry, for their unwavering support."

During her time in Washington, Mayor Hidalgo met with various public officials, including her U.S. counterpart Muriel Bowser, Mayor of Washington, D.C., and Charles Rivkin, Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs and former U.S. Ambassador to France. When speaking to attendees of the Summit at the White House, Mayor Hidalgo stressed that "without values of tolerance a city like Paris would not exist," and addressed measures that France has taken to express an inclusive city in the wake of the attacks.

Representatives from a number of U.S. partner nations around the globe attended the Summit, where they focused on the efforts of communities, religious leaders, the private sector and the technology community to contribute to the fight against violent extremism and the recruitment and radicalization of foreign terrorist fighters.
Mercedes Abramo, CEO of Cartier North America

Since 2006, the Cartier Women's Initiative Awards have awarded talented female entrepreneurs from around the world for work that is creative, financially sustainable and responsible. Laureates selected for the award receive not only funding for their business, but also coaching, networking opportunities and media exposure. A partnership between Cartier and McKinsey & Company, INSEAD business school and the Women's Forum, the Women's Initiative Awards are now reviewing applicants for the 2015 Laureate selection. On February 12, Cartier hosted a call for applications at the Embassy of France, featuring remarks by Olivier Sérot-Almeras, French Consul General in Washington, as well as Mercedes Abramo, President & CEO Cartier North America. Ms. Abramo spoke with News From France about the awards and Cartier’s connection with France.

You're here tonight to present a call for applications for the Cartier Women's Initiative Awards, which will award exceptional women-led companies around the world with funding. How did this project come to be?

Nine years ago the Women's Forum in Deauville, France, approached Cartier about being involved in a Women's Initiative Awards, and we asked ourselves, “how can we make a meaningful contribution to help women in economics and society?” For us, this particular partnership has really helped us find a way for Cartier to contribute significantly to women’s empowerment.

Why did you choose the Embassy of France to announce your call for applications tonight?

We actually are announcing a reminder of the application deadline, which is February 27. It’s wonderful because there’s an obvious connection to France—we are a French company, based in Paris and founded over 165 years ago and we’ve always maintained a great relationship between our U.S. subsidiary and French Embassies around the world.

The Cartier Women’s Initiative Awards have been established since 2006. What particular benefits do the selected women-led companies receive?

More than half of Cartier’s staff, including managers, are women, so we felt that this was particularly an area where we could make an impact. Women account for only about 30% of entrepreneurs, so for us something that was extremely important was to allow women an opportunity to receive funding. What’s particularly interesting about our initiative is that you have access to coaching from some well-known business experts as well, so it’s not just the funding but it’s also that ability to offer something to women that they don’t normally receive in other ways.

President and CEO of Cartier North America, you know first-hand the role that female leadership plays in the growth of businesses. Are there certain challenges that female entrepreneurs and business leaders face today?

We do typically see that female entrepreneurs have more difficulty getting access to funding, but very specifically also to coaching and to networking opportunities. That’s also again what’s so wonderful about this award, is that you do receive access to a whole network of women, both the current laureates and all of the past laureates, as well as coaching from McKinsey and INSEAD. For us that’s a unique feature of this program with which we’re particularly proud to be associated.

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Kalorama Residence re-opens after years of renovation

This month, the French Ambassador’s Residence on Kalorama Avenue in Washington, D.C. officially re-opened. Over the past several years, the Kalorama Residence has been under renovation and has finally been completed, boasting a new collection of artwork and decor.

Designed by American architect Jules Henri de Sibour, the house was completed in 1911 and purchased by the French government in 1936. The building of the house was originally commissioned by William Watson Lawrence, founder of W.W. Lawrence & Company. Possessing both French and Elizabethan elements of design (Mr. de Sibour was born in Paris and studied at the Atelier Daumet-Esquieu), the French government saw this as a perfect location for the Ambassador’s residence at the time it was purchased.

Since being purchased by France, Kalorama has been at the center of Washington society, hosting hundreds of receptions and lectures which have drawn people from all over the world, including several U.S. Presidents. The coming years will be no different for the residence, as a number of events have already been slated to take place at Kalorama.

Goût de/Good France will celebrate French cuisine on March 19

On March 19, over 1,000 chefs on five continents will take part in the Goût de France/Good France project, an international event to celebrate French cuisine. Through the work of dynamic and creative chefs, the project will provide a worldwide demonstration of the excellence of French cuisine, which earned it a recent listing in the “Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” category by UNESCO.

Beginning last year, chefs from around the world were invited to submit menu proposals representative of French gastronomy. Over 1,300 chefs have been selected to participate. Restaurants across the United States are preparing for this exciting event, from New York to Chicago to San Francisco.

Ici Urban Bistro in Washington, D.C., one of the American restaurants selected, will prepare a healthy and innovative French meal under the direction of Executive Chef Franck Loquet, featuring dishes such as branzino tartare, Atlantic salmon and herb-crusted lamb loin.

Be sure not to miss this spectacular celebration of French cuisine. Visit http://restaurateurs.goodfrance.com/en/ to find a participating restaurant near you.
in depth: Foreign Investment

With launch of Business France, the country seeks to expand foreign investment

The French economy exhibits attractive qualities that entice foreign investors. France plays host to world-class industrial centers, large and powerful international companies, a dynamic network of innovative Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), globally renowned scientific research, top-quality higher education and technical training, high levels of hourly labor productivity, and high-quality infrastructures. Moving forward, the government has made investment promotion and business development top priorities.

Creation of Business France

The year 2015 ushered in the kick-start of Business France, a new initiative designed to foster growth and foreign investment in the French economy. This new government agency was created on January 1 through the merger of two state-owned organizations: Ubifrance and the Invest in France Agency. Ubifrance is a French agency for international business development focusing on export promotion, while the Invest in France Agency is responsible for advancing international investment in France and promoting its economic attractiveness. Business France seeks to increase the number of foreign investments in France, support the development of French companies overseas, and better promote France’s business image through one unified platform.

As summarized by Muriel Pénicaud, CEO of Business France and Ambassador for International Investment, Business France serves as “a key player in fostering competitiveness, growth, and employment in France.” The government agency supports French and multinational companies, both in France and in 70 countries throughout the world.

France’s attractive economy

In order to foster successful economic growth, France has been working toward increasing its global competitiveness. One agreement evidenced by these efforts is the recent National Pact for Growth, Competitiveness and Employment. This legislation is designed to provide businesses operating in France with the resources to establish themselves with sustainable and offensive practices to better succeed in international markets. These actions not only augment profit margins for businesses affected by the program, but also contribute to a boost in competitiveness of the French economy.

The Pact seeks to increase France’s investment attractiveness through lower taxes and business costs, greater access to effective and tailored funding, greater incentives and support for innovation, and a simpler and more stable regulatory, administrative, and tax environment. This legislation was a precursor to the Business France initiative to spur growth in the French economy.

Business France promotes the principal advantages for investing in France. With the second largest economy in the European Union, France offers a distinct opportunity for global enterprises to benefit from its strategic central location and renowned networks of roads, high-speed rails, and airports. France also boasts the second largest market in Europe and provides competitive labor costs. Compared with competing markets in Japan, the United States, Germany, and Italy, France has low costs per employee, fewer business setup expenses and lower operating costs. In fact, the competitiveness and employment tax credit (CICE) is reducing labor costs by 6 percent.
in 2015, amounting to €20 billion in annual savings for companies.

France is also praised among experts for its openness to inward investment and is a leader in Europe as the top recipient of foreign investment in industry. For all of these reasons, new companies decide to invest in France every day.

Innovative tax measures play a key role in fostering competitiveness in France, particularly in the Research and Development (R&D) field. Offering the most attractive research tax credit in Europe, France’s tax incentive program provides a 30 percent tax break on annual R&D expenses up to €100 million and a 5 percent tax break above this threshold. In addition to its generous rates, France’s research tax credit is also backed by a large tax credit base, which covers not only all R&D spending such as salaries, social security contributions, and operating costs, but also innovation expenses incurred by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) at a rate of 20 percent, up to €400,000 a year. These tax incentives reflect France’s dedication to innovation.

The U.S. invests in France

American companies are taking advantage of the economic opportunities supported by Business France. Alexion Pharmaceuticals Inc., for example, recently announced that it will establish its first center for research and development in Paris, France. Alexion is a global biopharmaceutical company focused on developing and delivering life-transforming therapies to patients with severe and life-threatening rare disorders. Opening operations in France will allow Alexion to serve patients locally and foster an innovative community beyond the United States.

Another American firm, Hexcel Corporation, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of advanced composites for use in aerospace, wind energy and industrial applications, plans to open a new carbon fibre production plant in Roussillon in southern France. The company will invest a total of $200 million in 2015, bringing 120 jobs at the completion of its construction in early 2018.

France’s efforts to expand its economy are evident not only in France itself, but also abroad. The initiative “La French Tech” strives to boost innovation in France and includes a pioneering group of entrepreneurs, investors, big companies, and government agencies who are committed to working with French startups, both in France or abroad.

Many “French Tech” companies now do business in the United States, as was evidenced by the strong representation of a French delegation at January’s Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. The delegation comprised 120 companies, including 66 startups, a 73 percent increase from last year’s French attendance. Emmanuel Macron, France’s Minister for the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs, attended the conference along with Axelle Lemaire, Minister of State for Digital Affairs.

Through initiatives such as Business France, both French and American companies will continue to benefit from international expansion. The attractiveness of France’s economy is clear, and in the coming years the two countries are likely to see expats arriving on both sides of the Atlantic.
15 startups will represent French Tech at SXSW 2015

The South by Southwest festival—commonly referred to as SXSW—is well-known for welcoming up-and-coming musicians to Austin, TX for a week every year. Since its inception in 1987, the festival has become an important showcase not only of promising musicians, but also of filmmakers and entrepreneurs.

This year, 15 French startups will represent a French Tech delegation at the SXSW festival in Austin, where they will exhibit their work at a French Pavilion from March 15 to 18. These innovative startups were selected to attend SXSW by Business France, a government agency which seeks to expand foreign investment in France. The work of all of these startups is related to music in some way. French companies that will be attending include 3D Sound Labs, which have produced the first set of smart 3D audio headphones, Edjing, a mobile music application designed specifically for DJs, and Weezic, an interactive music practice platform.

Following the SXSW festival, these impressive French startup companies may have the opportunity to work with interested partners from the U.S. music industry.

68th Café des Sciences invites Thomas Ketchell, founder of Hstry

On February 10, the Consulate of France in Boston hosted the 68th lecture of the “Café des Sciences” series, which engages the American public in the promotion of scientific innovation and cooperation between the United States and France. This month, the series featured Thomas Ketchell, the founder of Hstry, a free digital learning tool created to encourage classroom collaboration and engagement. Ketchell’s discussion, “History in the heart of digital learning,” highlighted his use of technology to engage elementary and secondary school students in their curriculum. His online platform allows students to relive historical events through a first-person perspective, bringing history to life. Hstry strives to communicate history lessons interactively to the public, especially to children and teenagers. This particular “Café des Sciences” discussion featured a product unique among its competitors, serving as a digital learning tool where both teachers and students can make their own mark on history while observing historical figures, landmarks and movements.

Ambassador Araud visits Boston; speaks at MIT and Harvard

On February 5, Ambassador Araud gave a lecture about the recent attacks in Paris at Harvard’s Center for European Studies in Cambridge. The ambassador also visited LabCentral, a shared laboratory space designed to support life-science and biotech startups. There, he presented the Hello Tomorrow Challenge, a French competition which awards grants to promising science and technology startups all over the world.

On February 6, Ambassador Araud met with Charlie Baker, the Governor of Massachusetts, and attended a board meeting of the MIT-France Endowment Program. Through this program, qualified students from MIT receive grants to conduct research at top institutions and labs in France. The program is the first of its kind at MIT, and has extended bilateral programs to 17 countries worldwide since its inception. Ambassador Araud spoke about the progress that MIT-France has seen over the last year, noting that the program has doubled the number of funded projects from 2013.

Ambassador Araud’s trip to a city rich in American history and a long tradition of academia and research was fruitful for all involved, creating opportunities to discuss not only pressing current events but also Franco-American partnerships in science, innovation, technology and research.

Two American universities qualify for wine competition

On January 27, nine wine-appreciation clubs from prestigious American universities gathered at the Consulate of France in New York to compete in the Left Bank Bordeaux Cup. Each year, the Commanderie du Bontemps for Medoc, Graves, Sauternes, and Barsac—an organization representing winegrowers along the left bank of the Garonne River and Gironde Estuary—host the Left Bank Bordeaux Cup, where prestigious universities all over the world compete for the top prize. Hosted by French Consul General in New York Bertrand Lortholary, Grand Maître Emmanuel Cruse and a team of jury members judged the competing universities based on an extensive theory test and three blind tastings.

This year, the two winners of the New York preliminary round were the UCLA Anderson School of Management and the MIT Sloan School of Management, who will both continue to the final competition at Château Lafitte-Rothschild in the Medoc region of France this June.

The Left Bank Bordeaux Cup was created in 2002 for oenology clubs of French universities. Teams are asked to answer various questions to demonstrate their knowledge of the regional wines. In 2012, La Commanderie du Bontemps opened up the competition to an international audience—now, there are a series of qualifying rounds in New York, Hong Kong, London, Paris, and Shanghai, where winners of each respective preliminary have the chance to compete in the final competition at Château Lafitte-Rothschild in June.

This competition provides the opportunity for students around the world to share their passion for oenology while supporting and expanding the notoriety of wines from the Bordeaux Left Bank.

On February 5 and 6 marked Ambassador Gérard Araud’s first trip to Boston since he arrived at the French Embassy in September. In addition to meeting with Governor of Massachusetts Charlie Baker, Ambassador Araud visited both Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) alongside French Consul General in Boston Fabien Fieschi to speak about the recent terror attacks in France and the MIT-France Endowment Program.

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Marion Cotillard attends screening of two new films in L.A.

Marion Cotillard, famed French actress and recent Academy Award nominee, attended a double header screening of her films Two Days, One Night and Rust and Bone on February 2 in Santa Monica, CA, at the Aero Theater. Cotillard held a question and answer session alongside French Consul General in L.A. Axel Cruau.

Two Days, One Night follows Sandra, a factory worker who has just lost her job following a hospital stay. Over the course of one weekend, she must convince her co-workers to give up their annual bonuses so that she can get her job back. In Two Days, One Night, directors Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne have crafted a gripping tale of family, work, and the value of money. The Dardenne brothers, a Belgian directing duo, are well-known for films such as Rosetta and L’Enfant, which both won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

Cotillard was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Actress category for her performance in Two Days, One Night. This was the second time that Cotillard was nominated for an Academy Award, as she won in the same category for her performance in La Vie en Rose.

Rust and Bone, a 2012 film directed by Jacques Audiard, was also shown at the screening attended by Cotillard. The film is about Ali, a single father, and his love affair with marine park trainer Stephanie, played by Cotillard, who is forced to amputate both of her legs after an accident. Nominated for both Screen Actors’ Guild (SAG) and Golden Globe awards, this tale chronicles a passionate, emotional and moving story of love and loss.

Having been nominated and awarded with numerous awards at American festivals for her performances in both French and English, Cotillard has a well-established presence in the United States. With her latest films, she continues to prove that not only does she possess a wide range of emotional depth, but also that her work is accessible and appealing to the American public.

“My French Film Festival” provides unique viewing experience

From January 16 to February 16, UniFrance Films hosted an online film festival for French cinema lovers all around the world. Officially titled My French Film Festival, the fifth annual edition showcased ten French feature films and ten French short films, which were available to both French and international viewers on a number of different online platforms, with subtitles in 13 different languages.

Unlike other film festivals, My French Film Festival is unique in part due to the platforms on which it is offered. Not only are viewers able to watch all films on MyFrenchFilmFestival.com, but the films are also available on iTunes, in-flight airplane entertainment systems, and on various international cinema websites. Moviegoers may enjoy the festival in theaters across the globe, with screenings that take place throughout the duration of the competition.

Three top prizes were awarded to the best feature and short films in the competition. The Prix Chopard filmmakers’ prize was awarded to Hippocrate, a film by Thomas Litté about a young man’s first experience as a junior doctor, which happens to be in the same hospital in which his father works.

The Lacoste Audience Award allowed voters to vote on their favorite films, creating a truly interactive festival experience. With over 15,000 votes counted, A Place on Earth by Fabienne Godet and A Town called Panic: The Christmas Log, a Belgian short film by Stéphane Aubier and Vincent Patar, both received this honor. An additional International Press Award was given to Breathe by Melanie Laurent and Extrastyle by Alice Douard, under the supervision of a jury of six foreign film journalists.

Since My French Film Festival first began five years ago, it has continued to grow, and this year was no exception. The website reported registrations which reached 137,000, with a combined 250,000 screenings, a 20 percent increase from 2014. In gaining viewers throughout the world, the festival has helped to boost the careers of young French filmmakers, as well as the international credibility of French cinema.

Philharmonie de Paris concert hall opens after 20 years of construction

After nearly twenty years of postponed construction, the Philharmonie de Paris opened to the public on January 14. In celebration of the grand opening, the Orchestre de Paris performed Gabriel Fauré’s symphony Requiem. The structure of the renovated building was designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, who constructs his projects around a single, powerful concept in order to create an authentic sensation for visitors of his buildings.

The innovative architectural design of the symphonic concert hall is situated in the Parc de la Villette in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. In addition to its 2,400-seat Grande Salle, the Philharmonie houses rehearsal rooms, an educational center, exhibition space, and restaurants, creating a “living space for music.”

Beginning on March 3, the Philharmonie de Paris will dedicate its first exhibition to the British musician David Bowie. Originally presented at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 2013, and most recently exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the exhibit will take on a new persona during its three months in Paris.

Virtuosi of Houston will travel to Paris through a partnership with Texan-French Alliance

Virtuosi of Houston, the city’s premier youth chamber orchestra, will travel to Paris for a week in March of 2015 through funds raised by Kickstarter, an online platform which allows organizations and individuals to raise money for independently created projects.

Established in 1996, Virtuosi of Houston is a premier young artist chamber orchestra that focuses on education of exceptionally gifted musicians.

The students will receive the unique opportunity to study and perform at the Conservatoire de Paris, an educational center for young French musicians whose history dates back to the 18th century. They will have the opportunity not only to take master classes with their French counterparts, but also to explore one of the world’s most renowned cities.

In order to raise funds for their trip to France, Virtuosi of Houston partnered with the Texan-French Alliance for the Arts, a non-profit organization which seeks to increase artistic, cultural and educational connections between France and Texas. As a result of the successful project funding, this invaluable journey to Paris may have a defining impact on the career path of these young musicians.

For five years, My French Film Festival has exposed up-and-coming French filmmakers to the international community.
French participation in Louisiana’s Mardi Gras celebrations

On February 14, Consul General of France in Louisiana Gregor Trumel appeared as the Special International Guest of Honor at the Alexandria Mardi Gras Association’s 19th Annual Children’s Parade in Alexandria, Louisiana. As the Special International Guest of Honor, Mr. Trumel was accompanied by Mayor of Alexandria Jacques Roy.

Mr. Trumel was the first Consul General to participate in a Mardi Gras parade since the founding of the Consulate of France in New Orleans in 1803, as well as in the history of Mardi Gras celebrations in Louisiana.

On February 17, otherwise known as “Fat Tuesday,” Mr. Trumel rode with the Krewe of Rex, one of the oldest Mardi Gras organizations, as part of their parade in New Orleans. The theme of the parade this year was “Wars that Shaped Early America,” with floats dedicated to the War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the Battle of New Orleans.

The origins of Mardi Gras can be traced back to medieval Europe, originating in Venice and Rome in 17th and 18th century, where the celebration is also known as “Carnaval.” Mardi Gras celebrations later spread to the French House of the Bourbons, and further extended to French colonies and territories—including Louisiana.

Mardi Gras was originally an extravagant celebration meant to indulge in great feasts before the Catholic practice of Lent, a 40-day period of fasting and inner reflection. Mardi Gras in France today is celebrated not only by those who observe Lent, but also by the general public. The biggest Mardi Gras celebrations in France are in Nice and Paris.

In Louisiana, Mardi Gras has been celebrated since the early 18th century. While the holiday was originally celebrated with society balls, festive parades were an integral part of Mardi Gras traditions in Louisiana by the 1830s.

Today, people the world over travel to watch the festive parades put on by various “Krewes” for Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Carnival participants wear costumes or dresses in purple, green and gold embellished with long beads collected from the previous parades.

The Mardi Gras parades in Louisiana are a joyful celebration. From elegant balls to parades gathering thousands of attendees masked in purple and green, these events attract people from all over the world. The Consulate of France in Louisiana was proud to be part of this year’s celebrations, promoting Franco-American friendship through one of the premier cultural traditions in the Southeast region of the United States.