

**David A. Gerstner – Arts et Lettres – 26 juin 2024**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,  
I am Mohamed Bouabdallah, Cultural Counselor of France in the United States and the Director of Villa Albertine. I am delighted to welcome you tonight as we honor one of the greatest supporters and “passeur” of French cinema in the United States, Dr. David A. Gerstner.

David, it is my privilege and pleasure to honor you tonight. Please allow me to extend a warm welcome to your family, including your husband Michael and your father David Gerstner. David *E* Gerstner, you are A, he is E.

I would also like to welcome your friends who have come to show their admiration and support.

Dear David, throughout your career, you have been a champion for French cinema, starting in

your university days. After completing a bachelor's degree at SUNY Buffalo in Arts and Media Studies, obtained with the highest distinctions, you pursued Film studies at the prestigious NYU Tisch School. It was there that you discovered Truffaut and Godard. Just like in a Christophe Honoré movie, this was the start of your “Chanson d’amour”, love song, with France and with French cinema.

From there, you became immersed in French culture and became a true Francophile and Francophone. You even began spending most of your vacation time in France, to the *désespoir* of your husband, who would have liked to spend some time in Italy

From your time at the University of Tours, you are a specialist in wine from the Loire Valley, which is one of the things we agree on, but we can come

back to that later. But if we can agree on wine, then we have a friendship.

After completing a PhD in Philosophy at UCLA, you came back to the East Coast to teach cinema at the College of Staten Island.

And when it comes to the impact you've had on your students, I'll say it very simply: you've changed their lives.

You are an immensely dedicated professor. You are meticulous, detailed and intentional. You have introduced many college students to both the masters of the French Nouvelle Vague and contemporary directors.

But, I think, what is really distinctive of you, is that you care deeply for your students, and you want to open a world of possibilities for them. You support them beyond the classroom, and I don't want to share too many stories about what you have done in your life for your students, which was beyond your duties as a professor, but

I'm very impressed by that. And what you want to do is make sure that they are prepared for their future careers. With a teacher like you, it is no wonder that several of your students have gone on to become filmmakers themselves.

In your dedication to the French-American friendship, you became a close collaborator of Villa Albertine. In 2016, you initiated exchange programs for your students with French Universities, with the support of the French Embassy. The first program was with the Université de Tours, followed by the second in 2023 with the Parisian film school EICAR. This year, you welcomed French students to the College of Staten Island for two weeks of filmmaking and artistic exchange, and very exciting, interesting discussions about cinema.

You also nurtured this friendship between France and the US, by organizing events at the College of

Staten Island with French filmmakers. Thanks to you, your students have met with many high-profile filmmakers and film critics, including: Bertrand Bonello, Claire Simon, Emilie Deleuze, Patricia Mazuy, Christophe Honoré of course, Serge Toubiana, Sylvie Pialat, etc. ... to name a few.

It is no surprise that you are a wonderful host and have kept in touch with many of the filmmakers who have visited your classroom. Christophe Honoré became a very good friend of yours. In fact, in 2015, you published a book about his work: *Christophe Honoré: A Critical introduction*. Your second book, *Queer Imaginings: on Writing and Cinematic Friendship*, published in 2023, touches on an interest that you share with Christophe: queer desire in cinema.

And desire I think, is the key word when it comes to David, and we had a wonderful dinner two weeks ago, and we had a long discussion about desire and about “seduction by intellectuality” that really is the definition of French cinema.

My mission as cultural counsellor in the US, by the end of my mandate, I will have convinced you that Claude Sautet is not ‘too perfect’.

Your fascination with François Truffaut, led you to develop a beautiful friendship with his daughter, Laura, who shared her memories of her father with you. You wrote and directed a short film on Truffaut’s extraordinary correspondence with Jean Genet, *Between Men: A Historical Fantasy*. I must add, every year you go to Paris to see *Les 400 Coups*. This movie. *Between Men: A Historical Fantasy* illustrates an idea that you have often presented to your students: that cinema is not only about film, but a rendition of the history of art in all disciplines. We are very happy that you have made this movie, it is a fantastic debut, and we hope we will have the pleasure to watch more films directed by you, directed by Mr. David Gerstner in the future.

I'm not done.

In addition to all of these incredible contributions as an educator and a scholar, you and your husband Michael have gone above and beyond for our residents of Villa Albertine. You have organized a *salon* for Alice Diop, you have consulted with Palme d'Or winner Julia Ducourneau on the screenplay she wrote while in residency and got to see the result of that.

Finally, in 2022, you joined the Albertine Cinematheque committee. You have become an invaluable partner of our University program, along with your fellow jury members Anne Kern and Sam Di Lorio. Thanks in large part to you, this program, Albertine Cinematheque, brings French cinema to tens of thousands of students on campuses all over the United States, from Virginia to Hawaii. And I've been speaking to

Vincent, we need to organize an assessment mission to Hawaii about Albertine Cinematheque.

We are really deeply grateful for your immense dedication to our program, and to friendship between France and the United States, and tonight *cher* David, we celebrate your unconditional love of France and French cinema; we celebrate the friendship you've extended to all our residents and to all the team of Villa Albertine; and you were not my first date but my first dinner in New York when I arrived four months ago, and for me it was a really enjoyable dinner, but more than anything, we celebrate tonight your generosity, and the lifelong dedication to a love for French cinema and instilling this love to generations of American students.

*David A. Gerstner, au nom de la ministre de la Culture, nous vous faisons Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.*