7 Reasons You Should Teach Your Children To Speak French

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The New Republic's John McWhorter recently came out with an essay on why we should stop pretending French is an important language.

The piece comes in response to a New York Times article about a new initiative from the French government to increase the amount of French instruction in American schools.

To be sure, it's a little heavy handed for a foreign government to be attempting to quasi-infiltrate another country's education system.

But here's why McWhorter's wrong, and why everyone should learn French, even if this guy's the one telling you to do it:
1) For English speakers, French is the easiest language to learn.

You may have heard it's Spanish. That cannot possibly be true though, because English is actually the mutant stepchild of German and French, and it got most of its genes from its Gallic side. In fact for several centuries French was the official language of the English court. The list of English words with French roots is basically infinite.

2) And learning French makes learning Spanish way easier.

If you're reading this, we probably don't need to spell out all the socioeconomic benefits that come with learning a second language. We again assume America's natural inclination is to learn Spanish (we'll exclude Chinese). Since French and Spanish are the mutant step children of Latin, you can practically cut out a step if you ever decide to take up Spanish. And If you already know Spanish, it requires very little effort to make the jump to French.

3) All over Europe, French is still the main second language taught in school.

Forget about the Nordic countries, who've consciously abandoned their own languages for English — their languages were never important to begin with. When I lived in France, I found it impossible to communicate with the kids from Italy, China, Japan, and Mexico in anything other than French. Nor was English an option when I traveled to Poland and the Czech Republic.

Here is how the French government defines what it calls "the sphere of French language." It's much larger than you think:
4) If you want to understand modern China and Russia, you need to know French.

For all the good stuff it led to, the French Revolution gave the world its first glimpse at totalitarianism. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was basically an attempt to reenact that part of the French Revolution. And Mao's Communist revolution in China was basically an attempt to reenact the Russian Revolution. This is why Alexis de Tocqueville's book on the tragedy recently became a best-seller. Yeah, you can get it in English. But translations suck — and who is going to do the translations in the first place if we run out of French speakers?
5) **Half of Africa speaks French.**

To continue on the China point: As you've probably heard, Chinese corporations have begun flooding into Africa, where deals are cheap and resources are abundant. French speaking countries, Algeria top among them, comprise a significant chunk of that investment. **Half of the top-10 fastest growing countries in Africa have French as an official language.** We can thus expect Africa to be an increasing focus of global trade and international relations.

6) **Americans still hear French all the time.**

![Jean Dujardin in "The Wolf Of Wall Street"](Image)

If you live in New York or Washington, you probably catch snippets of French conversation on the subway all the time. Ever wanted to be treated like an American hero? Give out directions to a lost French tourist family in their own language.

It also pops up in movies and TV shows. Knowing I spoke French, one of the first things my family asked me after seeing "Wolf of Wall Street" was what Jean DuJardin and Leo DiCaprio were saying to each other in the Geneva negotiation scene.

7) **French politics is the greatest show in news.**
Regularly reading the news can get depressing. The best cure for this, which your child will come to appreciate, is reading news out of France. Nothing too terrible ever really happens there these days. As a result, the French end up putting themselves in absurd situations to make life more interesting. You may have heard French President Francois Hollande was recently caught leaving his attractive actress mistress' house wearing a ridiculous motorcycle helmet. In the U.S., this would have resulted in scandal. In France, this resulted in a resurgence in Hollande’s popularity.

Bottom line: For relatively minimal effort, you can learn a second language that will allow you to access useful, important and entertaining stuff.

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