

Laura Haim, The Warrior Journalist & Spokesperson, Emmanuel Macron Presidential Campaign

Having reported on some of the most consequential moments in political history over the last three decades, Laura Haim earned the Legion of Honor, the highest French order of merit, in 2015. Whether reporting from the battlefields of war or the trenches of the presidential political battle, her thirst for the truth and facts remains insatiable, while her faith in young people and the “real people of journalism” remains undaunted. If you speak to her, you’ll realize that she’s still one of them. A French woman who adopted America after falling in love with its patriotism and its “no-matter-what spirit,” she has a knack for predicting the next president, from Barack Obama, to Trump

and Macron. Want to know who’s next?

Michka Bengio: What do you think is the state of the press today in America?

Laura Haim: I’m deeply inspired by those types of people who are in what I’m calling “the shadows,” which is the producer, researchers, fact-checkers, reporters all over the world. You have a lot of unknown people who are doing extraordinary journalism and real news, and there’s a tendency at this moment from the public to basically confirm everything. I believe there’s a need now for a certain form of journalism among the reporters, and I strongly believe that people want that.

MB: You believe heavily in the power of the print press and the innovation of the digital press. You’ve talked about how each form of media has its own “responsibility to democracy.” What do you mean by that?

LH: When you’re doing a TV show in the morning and reaching millions of people, you have a certain responsibility to show them what is important in the world. I’m quite interested by the phenomena in the American press, which I’m calling the Trump obsession. I really think it is important to cover Trump and to report in a historical way about what’s happening with this White House. But on the other side, I really would like to see much more foreign news in the daily coverage of the American press, and I don’t see that on TV. I spoke with a lot of people about that and they said, “Oh, the American public doesn’t care about foreign news.” And I strongly disagree with that. When I was following campaigns, I could see that in the middle of America, people were really interested by what’s happening in the world and they have tough questions for the politicians. I mean, they were quite affected by the war in Iraq, in Afghanistan—they lost sons, they lost daughters, they lost nephews—and they did not understand certain parts of the war. We as journalists have a mission to explain the world to the people.

MB: You’ve covered both Barack Obama and Donald Trump and traveled the country to meet people from all backgrounds. Did you find a similar fervor for Trump as for Obama?

LH: You know, when I went out to Iowa, everybody in Washington and New York was telling me, “Oh my God, Iowa? How can you go to Iowa? You’re going to spend two weeks there? This is going to be horrible.” It was not horrible, it was wonderful, because the people in Iowa are not stupid, they are extremely educated. You have a university in Iowa City where you can see a lot of interesting debates. When you have primaries in Iowa, when you go to the small towns and you listen to the people in town hall meetings, you are far away from stupidity and you’re far away from superficiality. You are on the ground with real people who have real issues and who are suffering. I really think that Donald Trump was able at one point to capture that. He was able to understand what people wanted to hear. And I think that Obama was also respectful and engaging and trying to give them a feeling of hope and change. You have to respect the people. And when you respect the people and don’t feel that they are stupid, you are doing good politics.

MB: You said you were working on a project abroad and flew back to New York right when 9/11 happened, and this was the day when you saw the best in American values. Can you expand on that?

LH: Of course! And I always say that. When something extremely serious happens, it’s the strength of the American people coming together, no matter what. There is a unity. I strongly believe in the patriotism of America. Now, people can say it’s wrong and it’s really terrible, but no, it’s the beauty of this country. I think you have the right at this moment to be really worried about what’s happening in America, because in my opinion, this country is extremely divided. I really see two countries in one. But you also have to say, “Let’s stay optimistic,” because this is the soul of America, and let’s make sure that this country is going to survive



no matter what. When there's a crisis, you see the spirit no matter what. I'm calling that the "no-matter-what spirit." It's quite admirable.

MB: You talked to young people across the nation. Do you see a different America in them—less divided, more open, more globalist—than the older generations, or are they the same?

LH: When I speak to younger generations, they really understand that they have to think in a different way. They're very optimistic about what they can do, what they want to do. They want to understand. And they're quite worried about what's happening. Some know it's not going to be easy. They are in debt. They're worried about the cost of education. They're worried about what's going to happen to the future. They understand that they're not going to have the same job from 23 years old until 75 years old—that they're going to have to switch, that they're going to have ups and downs. They understand that and they want to do something. What they're looking for—it's quite interesting—they're always talking about democracy, the rise of populism. They're talking about global warming, the #MeToo movement, especially young girls. They're talking about women's place in society. They're talking a lot about human rights and they have a huge conscience and I really, really think they're more clever than we were. They better understand the world's globality, and it's very inspiring. My time at the University of Chicago was particularly inspiring for me in this aspect. To speak with those people and to listen to them—it's quite powerful. It gives you hope that one day they're going to have responsibility and they're going to care about important issues.

MB: You touched on the #MeToo movement—I've been here for 12 years now and my experience has been Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and then #MeToo.

LH: Yes, and they have all come from civil society, which is interesting. I was too young to experience the Vietnam War,

but I saw pictures of people taking over the streets. Now people are taking the streets for issues happening here that they deeply care about. What's interesting in my opinion is there's no single face. It's the face of the people. I'm totally unable to tell you what is the face of the Occupy Wall Street movement. What do you think of that? There's no political representation of those three movements coming from the civil society. You have different faces, and then you have some politicians who are trying to get into it, but there's not a leader. This is the people, and this is power to the people.

MB: You followed some of the most important campaigns of our times, from Obama to Trump and Macron. What are some of the key differences between a French campaign and a U.S. campaign?

LH: In France, we do not hold political ads, it's forbidden. The campaigns are much more traditional. You have to go to the market. You have to speak to the people. And in America, I rarely saw a candidate give a two-and-a-half-hour speech, but we have a strict law in France that requires the same amount of time for candidates on the air for TV and radio. There's an equality of time that is very interesting, and everybody has to respect that. Then the third difference is at one point, before the day of the vote, you have to stop campaigning for 24 hours. In America, you can keep campaigning on TV and even when people are voting on election day. In France, the vote is on Sunday, and on Friday at midnight, everybody has to stop campaigning. We call it the pause, 24 hours of silence. Nobody can speak about politics. Nobody can have any political speech. We are giving people time to think about the importance of the process. I think it's really, really good and important for democracy.

MB: You moved from journalism to politics for a short period of time. I've heard you have an uncanny ability to predict the next president.

LH: After Trump's election, I came to France to take a small pause, and when I saw Macron on TV, I said that he was going to be the next president. Everybody was telling me,

"Are you crazy?" I called him in December, and I had a meeting with him and his wife. We spoke for 45 minutes, and I told him, "You're going to be the next president in France, and I'm willing to do a pause in my journalistic career to see what's happening. I'm quite interested to help you with my American experience, to do something for the country and to do something for democracy." He offered me [a position as] his spokesperson. I love politics. I always want to be with someone who is going to win. So that's probably my American side. People tell me, "You have a sixth sense," and asking me, "Who are you going to follow in 2020?" I have two names in my mind—that I'm not going to tell you.



Photography by Nadine Fraczkowski