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PARIS – French President Emmanuel Macron took first place, ahead of far-right leader Marine Le Pen, in the first round of France's presidential election on Sunday, but he is on course for a far closer second-round clash than five years ago.

While polling suggests Macron should retain the presidency in two weeks, first round results show the incumbent can't rest on his laurels.

Le Pen will be able to count on voters from far-right TV-pundit-turned-politician Eric Zemmour, who called on his supporters to back her on April 24. Meanwhile, leftist firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon fared better than expected and brings a heavy dose of uncertainty to the mix as his voters are a diverse bunch. Many are likely to abstain in the second round, while others will divide up between the French president and Le Pen.

“Politics is war without bloodshed
while war is politics with bloodshed.”

France’s repeat of the 2017 runoff confirms Macron’s and Le Pen’s own political analysis: That the divide between the left and the right is no longer relevant in France and has been replaced by an opposition between a mainstream bloc that is pro-European and open to the outside world on one side, and nationalists on the other. Both candidates scored higher than five years ago, leaving the traditional right and left in an even more shambolic state than before. Macron went from 24 percent in 2017 in the first round to 27.6 percent Sunday and Le Pen went from 21.3 percent to 23.4 percent.

The gap between them is higher than last time around, showing that Macron has managed to drum up the most votes despite controversies in the campaign’s last mile, including over the state’s overuse of consulting firms. But the far-right bloc – Marine Le Pen, Eric Zemmour and nationalist Nicolas Dupont-Aignan combined – garnered than 30 percent of the total vote.





I describe the “fun” parts of *Only Yesterday* because they’re wonderful, but also to make a point about the origin story we’ve learned about the mood of the ’20s. Looking back at Allen’s work from the vantage point of 1986, historian David M. Kennedy argued that the biggest failing of the book was its lack of historical depth: “Rarely did Allen forge an explanatory chain whose links ran back more deeply into the past than 1917.” And indeed, Allen seemed to blame World War I for every ash-covered carpet and scarred dining table.

Allen is also really good at describing parties—or, at least, the ones the middle class and upper class attended. The historian wrote about how women taking up smoking had “strewed the dinner table with their ashes, snatched a puff between the acts, invaded the masculine sanctity of the club car, and forced department stores to place ornamental ash-trays between the chairs in their women’s shoe departments.” In what I think may be the best passage in the book, Allen described the way 1920s partygoers stepped all over every previous genteel convention:



Anyway, let’s get to that fun. A very joyful book to read about the decade is Frederick Lewis Allen’s *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*, which Allen—a blueblood journalist and editor at Harper’s—published in 1931. The book chronicles all of the movement and motion that makes the decade sexy, and doesn’t seem to miss a fad.

The property, complete with a 30-seat screening room, a 100-seat amphitheater and a swimming pond with sandy beach and outdoor shower, was asking about \$40 million, but J. Lo managed to make it hers for \$28 million. As the Bronx native acquires a new home in California, she is trying to sell a gated compound.

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Perhaps by remembering the twenties merely as an enchanting series of novelties or the crude afterthought of a simpler past, we preserve the illusion of our own simple innocence," mused historian Paula Fass in the introduction to her book *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*.

Whether that means there will be a longer-term far-right alliance is an open question. Nicolas Bay and Gilbert Collard – two MEPs who left Le Pen's party to join Zemmour – didn't endorse a possible alliance with Le Pen, in case she wins the second round.



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Zemmour, a 63-year-old TV pundit-turned-politician, was once tipped to come second behind Macron, back in October. But he plummeted spectacularly in the polls after suffering from a perceived lack of credibility as the Ukraine war started and former comments praising Russian President Vladimir Putin resurfaced. He scored a measly 7 percent. Despite their bitter and unrelenting fighting throughout the campaign, he swiftly endorsed Marine Le Pen.

"I have disagreements with Marine Le Pen," Zemmour said at his concession speech Sunday, "but there is a man facing Marine Le Pen who has let in 2 million immigrants ... who would therefore do worse if he were reelected – it is for this reason that I call on my voters to vote for Marine Le Pen."