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Consider our current fascination with GPS. What was once a tool of the military is now commonplace in our cars and soon will be a standard feature of cell phones. It can tell us to within a few feet exactly where we are, plot a course, and it can tell us where we are going with directions along the way.

The same is obviously true of history and that is why we all need to study it. In order to know where we are going, we first have to calculate exactly where we are, but in addition, where we have been. Without a reference to our past, a full appreciation of both the perils and accomplishments of today are impossible to fully grasp, nor can we even begin to hope to build a model for what will come.

In the Spring of 1940, on the same day Nazi Germany began its six-week campaign that would conquer France and the Low Countries, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Great Britain. To say that the task before him was daunting is an understatement. It appeared to be well-nigh impossible.

France, which had stood as a firm ally in World War One, was on the ropes within a matter of days, already making clear signals it was about to abandon the war. The new blitzkrieg war of the Nazis was pulverizing everything in its path—it seemed unstoppable, and nearly any other leader, at that moment, would have sought appeasement.

But if ever there was a modern world leader with a grasp of history it was Churchill. He came, of course, from famous stock, a descendant of the famed Duke of Marlborough. He had been a soldier, journalist, cabinet member, member of Parliament, and, in his own right, a brilliant historian.

From his reference point of that moment, of late May and early June 1940, the prospect both for the present and the future was bleak. But from history he could draw comfort, guidance, and inspiration.

England had stood alone before and had stared down other dictators. That "perfidious nation of shopkeepers" as Napoleon had once called them, had stood while all the rest of Europe had caved to the Corsican. For England, there were more than a thousand years of tradition to draw upon, from Alfred the Great, to the present. And it was that force which Churchill summoned in all its "fury and might." Appealing to their shared memory of history, he could only promise a long

twilight struggle ahead, but to the few who stood would come the greater share of honor that would be remembered for a thousand years. He and his gallant nation saved Western Civilization.

It was this grounding in history that gave strength to the present and a dream for the future. A leader who can summon that is someone who can indeed lead. Lincoln would do so when reminding all of their patriot fore-bearers, and how four score and seven years ago, a new nation had been created. FDR would repeatedly call upon our history as he struggled to strengthen our will in the face of depression and global war, reminding us of the proud heritage we had come from. Jack Kennedy would appeal to our memory of history with a remarkable vision of the future, a nation joined in racial harmony, a nation that could go to the moon, why?—because facing such challenges is what Americans did.

In our own lives, how profound history can be for us. Who is not proud of some ancestor or parent, a family history of some deed accomplished, even the most humble, of love once shown, of guidance given when needed? In a sense that is the core of what families are about—parents remembering the history of how “their parents did it.” Drawing upon that helps us to guide our own children, and in doing so hopefully points towards a better world to come.

Why study history? Because it is indeed our story. Be it the epic of a leader defiant in his stand against evil, or the memory of our own lives and that of our family. We, as a people, love stories, and that ultimately is what history is—our story, as individuals, as a nation, as an entire human race, hoping, as Churchill once said, that ahead of us there will indeed be “broad sunlit uplands.”