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About a half-century ago, I can still remember, as if it were yesterday, the course and the teacher who launched me on my lifetime love of history. The course: The History of the Development of the West; we called it “Cowboys and Indians”. The teacher: Howard Roberts Lamar; he later served as President of Yale. Professor Lamar introduced me to the heroes and the dynamic story of westward expansion, the Indian tribes and Indian wars, and the diplomatic dealings with the British and the French. He introduced me to the complexities and the continuities of history. He showed us the intertwining relationships of long-term movements and of new ideas; of geographical realities, and personal leadership and sheer chance in determining particular outcomes.

I have been a lover of history ever since. Why?

There is the sheer drama of it all: the understanding of how the lives of famous people came to be and how events like World War I or the evolution of the modern Russian state developed as they did. There are the sobering and often inspirational lessons history teaches, particularly through the lives of individuals, the choices they made, the values they embodied, the risks they took, the challenges they overcame, and those they didn’t—all of this making it clear that progress is possible but not inevitable. That there are some causes and effects that can be influenced by man, and some that can’t. That life is not straightforward nor foreordained, but nor is it beyond our control.

My love of history has influenced my life in many ways. It has instructed me in how I’ve tried to lead Procter & Gamble, which I was part of for 40 years. For example, it has influenced me as I have contemplated how long and how much to invest to create entirely new businesses and establish strong organizations in a country like Russia. I have done this recognizing that major victories are never easily won. I’ve seen that courage and persistence count for everything as I’ve learned about the lives of Lincoln, Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel and many others.

My awareness of China’s history, for example, led me to appreciate the remarkable culture and history of this country. Because of that awareness, I was able to relate to the government leaders in China with a knowledge and a respect otherwise not possible.

My love of history has been a driving force in my commitment to help create the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. The Freedom Center reveals the stories of heroes who fought for their own freedom and others who helped them along the way. While anchored in the history of the Underground Railroad, it brings the story to contemporary times, with the purpose of inspiring and challenging us to take steps for freedom in our own lives today.

My commitment to this institution was inspired by people who I had read about who fought for their freedom; people like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass; and others, like Thomas Garrett, who in the courtroom where he was being fined for having helped a slave escape said, “Let this fine serve as a license for me to help every other slave that comes to me.” These are all examples of the courage, cooperation and persistence we seek in our own lives.

My reading of history and my writing about it have led me to recognize the importance of meticulous research and the pursuit of truth, even as I recognize that learning must be a way of life.

Paraphrasing a former Yale President and classmate of mine, Bart Giamatti, I love history because I have come to see that without a knowledge of the past—its realities and its causative relationships—we cannot hope to construct an action agenda able to lead us to a better future.

As I write this, I think of some of the recent books that I've read, the values they reinforce and the lessons they teach, and their relevance to our everyday life. I think of Walter Russell Mead's *God and Gold*, with its perceptive exposition of how the co-existence of rapid changes and unchanging traditions benefited the development of the Anglo-American world. I think of the memoirs of Vaclav Havel, relating his brave resistance to communist rule in Czechoslovakia, his unexpected ascendancy to the Presidency, the challenges he encountered in that office, and the honesty of his examination of his strengths and frailties. I think of Bart Giamatti's treatise on the value of a liberal arts education in his book *A Free and Ordered Space*. I think of Professor Saidiya Hartman's poetic recollection of her trip to her home country of Ghana to trace the roots of the Middle Passage and the institution of slavery. Her reflections on that trip cast a shining light on the pursuit of freedom today.

In the end, I guess I love history because of the joy the acquisition of knowledge brings and because of what it teaches. There is joy in understanding the drama of lives and events unfolding; in seeing the connectedness of things; in the role of the individual choice and the contingency of events; in the interface between long-term trends and human intervention and chance as well. There is the learning that comes from both understanding the worst that man has done (e.g., slavery, genocide), hoping it will steel us to not repeat it, and appreciating the best that man has done (e.g., the pursuit of freedom, courage in the face of insuperable odds), with the hope it will provide knowledge and inspiration to help us create a better future for ourselves and those whose lives we touch.