

Dates

by [Samuel Hux](#) (October 2022)



Sir Winston Churchill, Statesman, James Guthrie, 1920

No, not that kind. My love life has been settled and stabilized for a considerable time now, so I haven't dated in years. I mean the calendar kind. Like April 12, my birthday (I don't want to consider the year) and the date of other phenomena.

Death is a phenomenon isn't it? Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on 4/12/1945. I would like to claim to remember it. But what I remember are photos of bereaving people. War is certainly a phenomenon. Fort Sumter was fired upon on the 12th of April, 1861, and the Civil War began. These two dates are enough to make 4/12 infamous. The reader can go online to discover other events, and there are several significant ones, but none that make my birthday special. The Salk Vaccine was world-historical, but not the date it was declared safe and effective in 1955. And a dozen or so etceteras, including Bill Clinton in contempt of court in the Paula Jones case, 1999.

World famous dates that equal or surpass in importance and recognizability are plenteous. December 7, 1941: Pearl Harbor. June 6, 1944: D-Day. May 8, 1945: Victory in Europe Day. September 2, 1945: Victory over Japan Day. So many dates defined by World War Two, which began on September 1, 1939 of course. To which era, as Douglas MacArthur famously said, "I shall return," later revised to "We shall." The singular pledge was made on 20 March, 1942; preceded by a hell of a lot of G.I.s he returned to the Philippines on 20 October, 1944. Anyway, I shall return to the era of WW II, a pledge I make on 31 August, 2022, long before this essay sees print.

A case can be made that the most significant date for Western culture was December 25, Year Zero AD, although we would not put it that way. More adventurous: in 1654 the Anglican Archbishop of Ireland James Ussher, studying ancient history and the Biblical "begats," established the birthday of the earth as Saturday, October 23, 4004 BC, late in the day—my

favorite date of all time! It should be everyone's favorite: bless you Bishop Ussher! Who should not be considered a fool even if foolhardy. He was by the standards of the day an extraordinarily learned man.

Such dates, even if semi-fictional and imprecise, Christmas, and fictional, 4004 BC, are more significant than America's favorite date, historical, July 4, 1775. We will never find a date we all collectively agree upon as the most mostest no matter how much they mean to us "eachly." Pouring through a fat illustrated World War One history I found at home when a kid, the first book I read outside school, and the photographs more than more than, 11 AM on 11/11/ 1918, the end of the war, was a date I could never forget. But now impossible to forget—the *day* I mean—since November 11 is my beloved's birthday.

Now I must shift direction before I shall return. I want to try to imagine what it would have been like, what it would have meant, if, after the resolution of the American Revolution and the ascendancy of George Washington to the presidency, the Americans had allowed Washington one term and then did whatever was necessary to reward him for his services by getting rid of him. Of course that did not happen: he served two terms and could have served another had he so chosen, could indeed have become a kind of democratic monarch had he so wished. But try to imagine what I have just tried to imagine. Very hard to do!

Or try to imagine a case that John Wilkes Booth made impossible. Suppose Abraham Lincoln had been able to enjoy his victory in the Civil War, had realized in his lifetime the honor he has enjoyed historically speaking as the greatest American president with only one rival, Washington. Honest Abe, the man who heroically held the Union together and rid the nation of its original sin of chattel slavery, achievements unrivalled in significance and political morality, which make him indeed Number One. OK, but now

imagine that with his phenomenal term over, rivalries within an ungrateful Republican Party and a resurgence of the Democratic Party as ex-Confederates took advantage of non-lethal treatment from Washington D.C. combined somehow unexpectedly to deny Abe a following term. Hard to imagine, both because the political mechanics seem so severe and ungrateful Unionists clearly so unlikely. Nonetheless, what would you say about the American people had such a case come true? Nothing at all laudatory I am certain!

Or try to imagine a different result in the 1944 presidential election: Thomas Dewey defeats FDR. After all, it was theoretically possible given that a fourth FDR term was as offensive to some, not only Republicans, as the third term victory over Wendell Wilkie had been a break with tradition. In any case, this case was not as difficult to imagine as the Goodbye Abe was. Nonetheless, I would have found it just as deplorable.

Had Roosevelt, without full approval from an essentially isolationist American electorate—let us admit it—not responded to historical events the way he did, the vilest political leader in all human history could have become master of Europe with consequences for which the word *disastrous* is too mild an adjective, both for Europe and the world at large. Partisan politics in this essential election be damned! In my career as a voter, I have never been one whose vote could be counted on no matter how I was registered at the time; at the same time I have not thought party loyalty was criminal. But to my mind 1944 is a radically different issue. I will say, without apologizing no matter how extreme, to vote for any reason not primarily for appreciation of the services of FDR against the damnation of the human race was a *sin—and Goddamned the sinner to hell!*

Now another shift of direction since I have not fully returned to the WW II era. Before I followed my Philosophy minor into a Philosophy professorship, I was an English major and a Lit

prof. Like "all" Lit types at the time (I am recalling the 1960s) I adored William Blake and was a Socialist. Consequently, I adored Blake's "Jerusalem" poem from his *Milton*. Especially when I learned that after the Labour Party victory in Great Britain in 1945, Socialists—so the story went—marched in the streets of London singing Blake's poem, the last stanza of which went: "I will not cease from Mental Fight, / Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand: / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant Land." No longer the youthful Socialist that I was, I still admire William Blake, but can no longer read that poem without a certain revulsion that Blake does not deserve ... but that the Labourite songsters do. For the Labour Party victory in 1945 meant the Churchill defeat at the same time. I should put that a different way.

Clement Attlee did not defeat Winston Churchill the summer of 1945 to become Prime Minister. I do not presume to instruct the reader about common knowledge; I only remind. Great Britain does not have a presidential system as the U.S. does, by which for instance Tom Dewey ran directly against FDR for the presidency. It has a parliamentary system, in which one votes for his or her favored party by pulling the lever for or against the local Member of Parliament; whichever party accumulates the most votes decides who will be Prime Minister. While Churchill retained his seat as an MP, Labour got the most votes and chose its leader Attlee as PM. In other words there is nothing in the British system which says that Labour could not have kept Churchill as Prime Minister, as pragmatically unlikely that such a decision could have reached possibility.

However, nonetheless, and but ... Looking for the most significant date in British history there is a lot of competition. Consider the following, some generalized, some specific:

Willian the Conqueror takes over Great Britain in 1066. The Battle of Hastings begins 14 October.

The Magna Carta is signed in June 1215.

William Shakespeare is born 26 April, 1564.

Act of Union with Scotland, 1707.

The British are victorious at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815.

Queen Victoria ascends to the throne on June the 20th, 1837.

During May 27 to June 4, 1940, the British army is salvaged at Dunkirk.

Etcetera, Etcetera, and so forth and so on.

But I am considering 5 July 1945, when the election took place, and 26 July 1945, when the final count was made and the results were known. Focus on *July the 5th*, when the British electorate made up its mind, not July the 26th, when Churchill knew what that mind set was.

As Prime Minister, Churchill is in the league with greats like Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone. Actually, I think I should say that Disraeli and Gladstone were in Churchill's league: neither of the 19th-century giants saved Great Britain the way Winston Spencer Churchill did. Does anyone other than the occasional partisan-blind fanatic think WSC did not do that?

My respect and admiration for Churchill is almost unlimited. Call me self-promoting if you wish, but I seriously recommend my essay which can be found in the *NER* Author Archives,

September 2021 issue, with the title sounding odd to non-American ears, "The Greatest: From Babe Ruth to Winston Churchill." Not only do I find WSC a great essayist and historian, great statesman, the greatest English politician of the 20th century. All things considered I am confident that Winston Churchill was the greatest human being of the last century. . . and so far this one.

One does not have to go that far to know two things. (1) Churchill was the greatest Prime Minister of Great Britain. (2) The July 1945 election was a disgrace, unforgiveable. There is a third thing to know, and I will get to it eventually. Great Britain was phenomenally lucky that Churchill, who knew what Hitler was long before the rest of the ruling class did, although he had often been shunned was available when Neville Chamberlain gave up the premiership in May 1940. In retrospect that is perfectly clear, although not all Brits knew it at the time; yet they knew it five years later, in spite of what they did five years later. If anyone now does not know that WSC was just as essential to the Allied victory as FDR was, that "anyone" should give up any pretense to worthwhile thought. So, what I have already more than implied:

The Labour or Liberal voter in July 1945 should have thought something like the following: "I appreciate the work of my MP (or my party's candidate) but I am going to cast my preference for the Tory candidate instead, not because I actually prefer him or her, but because I prefer that Winston Spencer Churchill remain as Prime Minister *because he deserves it.*" (And that is not as unreasonable as it may sound, for the Tory Democrat Churchill was not a normal Conservative, was friendly to the working class all his career, and during his wartime Premiership was supporting the Beveridge plan which evolved into the National Health Plan.) Of course that is not what happened. Instead, before the war was declared over and victory won the man who should have enjoyed it like no one

else was removed from power. Deplorable, despicable. There is no way around that. Now allow me some connected generalizations.

No patriotic blather, but essential truths: The best thing that happened to the Western world was that 1775 birth of the United States of America. Although it severed itself from the British Empire it embodied what was and is the spirit of Britain, such that what characterized it—but for how long?—Russell Kirk called “America’s British Culture.” Great Britain has been a blessing to the Earth. I may be accused of being a retrograde, but without the British influence, parts of the non-Western world—take India for but one instance—would be politically and culturally savage.

The world was better off when Great Britain was a principal political power as well as cultural, as it was from the Renaissance on well into the 20th century. But it is no longer that. Its dominions—Canada and Australia—are probably stronger. British film is still as great as it’s always been; its literature is second to none. But is it only because of Boris Johnson’s radical ouster that the British Premier’s name comes to me no faster than Belgium’s does? I think not. It is terribly ironic that Germany strides upon the world stage as the United Kingdom once did. Let “Boris” be a clue: the Brits have a habit of ousting leaders prematurely, I think; the Iron Lady comes to mind. The decline of a great power to a subsidiary level is seldom a matter of external pressure, is more often a choice. The British public made a choice when it traded in Winston Churchill for Clement Attlee.

The United Kingdom has been in decline for 77 years now, and I don’t mean because of the loss of so much of its scattered empire, which Churchill would have clung to with his life. I am not talking about such global causes. I am speaking, I realize, in a *symbolic* fashion, but realistically nonetheless. The UK made a choice, and its citizens, now, who did not make

it, pay for it.

So, finally: (3) the most tragic date in British history was July 5, 1945.

I would not blame the reader for doubting the veracity of what I am about to say, although I share with God the knowledge that the next sentence is absolute truth. I completed the essay above on 6 September 2022, and today, 8 September 2022, Queen Elizabeth II died, and I add this postscript.

Some television commentators, during the coverage of her death, were tasteless enough to speculate on the following: given the immense popularity of the Queen and the greatly compromised popularity of Prince Charles, now King Charles III, might the British now consider dispensing with this very expensive Monarchy? (Quite unjustly compromised popularity it seems to me. He is a serious person, unlike the expensive doll William Buckley once dismissed ironically as “the people’s princess” for her closing down a popular island resort for her private vacation.)

I judge the dispensing of the Monarchy to be extremely unlikely. I cannot imagine either the Conservative or the Liberal Party rallying to such a violation of Tradition, although I would not be surprised if some Labour intellectuals played around with the idea. This says nothing however about the possibility of non-British nations within the Commonwealth, some never having been within the Empire, thinking the time for monarchy has passed; let the ungrateful depart. But should such an unlikely violation of tradition occur in Britain itself, any sentence ending with the phrase *British National Decline* would not conclude with a period (.), but with an exclamation point (!)!

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