Let me begin with a question. I’m going to read five fictitious headlines. Then in your mind I want you to ask, about whom do they refer? King Henry V of England or President George Walker Bush:

#1 Son follows the footsteps of powerful father.
#2 Leader seeks throne justification.
#3 War is declared on “evildoers.”
#4 Feckless frat-boy turns king.
#5 Debate Rages: A war of choice or a war of necessity?

I’ll cut to the chase. These chapter headlines could describe the life and times of Henry V…or George W. Bush. The parallels are uncanny. Henry V fought the same conflicts as George W. Bush …and their battlegrounds were not confined to the green earth. Their struggles included internal strife, personal demons, political dilemmas and global challenges. George Santayana’s famous observation, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" has never had such profundity. In fact, it’s not simply an occasional historical re-run we’re witnessing today but a cul-de-sac of events that is revolving before our eyes. Today we will compare and contrast William’s Shakespeare’s Henry V and our own President, George W. Bush.
This analysis will neither be an exercise in Bush-touting …nor bashing, just as it won’t be either a drum beating rah-rah speech of England’s popular dead king or a character slaying thereof. We will instead consider their leadership styles, rhetoric, character and motivation. This analysis would be anemic, however, if the two leader’s accomplishments and missteps were ignored. And I have no intention of leaving those rocks unearthed.

Comparing the leadership style of King Henry V and George W. Bush was a source of levity at the mock debate at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington D.C. in 2005. Eight panelists enjoyed the wit of fellow Washington pundits as they compared the two leaders. Some highlighted the positive connections and others leveled comparisons with tongues like swords. One of the panelists, David Brooks of the New York Times, said he’d compare the neoconservative advocates of George Bush's war to the English churchmen who gave their blessing to Henry's war. Brooks used the term "theocons" and the audience roared with laughter.

Is it possible that Shakespeare's *Henry V* and United States President George W. Bush can be compared with such veridical ironies? The similarities are both surprising and alarming.

Both “Hal,” as Henry V was commonly referred to, and W. appeared destined for mediocrity in their early stages of life. Henry’s father, King Henry IV, was continually disappointed with Hal’s social connection with Falstaff and the motley crew. It took Hal’s formal announcement of dissociation with Falstaff to be reckoned as one who turned the corner. Although Falstaff plays a significant role in the *Henry IV* plays, he never appears in *Henry V*. The last act of *Henry IV* contains what is often referred to as "the rejection scene." The scene takes place during a royal procession in which Hal, who
has recently been crowned king, is approached by Falstaff. When Falstaff calls out to his friend, Hal replies, "I know thee not, old man." Although critics debate the implications of this scene, many feel that Hal's rejection of Falstaff is motivated by his understanding of his responsibilities as king, and the knowledge that in order to fulfill his duties, he must leave behind the friends and activities of his youth.

Enter George W. Bush. Similar to Prince Hal, George Bush II minimized his previous chemical weaknesses and party chums as nothing more than bad elements attempting to hijack his political destiny. Despite a 1976 DUI arrest, Bush distinguished this weakness as more of a distraction than an illness. Similar to Hal, young W. brushed aside any deeper implications of his new dissociation and accepts it as a maturing revelation of his destiny.

President Bush wrote in his autobiography: "I am a person who enjoys life, and for years, I enjoyed having a few drinks. But gradually, drinking began to compete with my energy. I'd be a step slower getting up. My daily runs seemed harder after a few too many drinks the night before." Bush’s decision to turn away from drinking is admirable, of course. One cannot help but sense the motivation parallels that of Henry V. As his world vision and ambition became more in focus, any ill habits were forgotten, or, Shakespeare would write, “know thee not.”

Henry V’s break-neck maturation from a meandering plebian to a world leader surprised many. He declared, "Presume not that I am the thing I was, for God doth know so shall the world perceive, that I have turned away from my former self." In a blandishing dialogue with Ely, Canterbury describes their new leader:

The courses of his youth promised it not.
The breath no sooner left his father's body
But that his wildness, mortified in him,
Seemed to die too. Yea, at that very moment
Consideration like an angel came
And whipped the offending Adam out of him
Leaving his body as a paradise
To develop and contain celestial spirits.
Never was such a scholar made;
Never came a reformation in a flood/
With such a heady currance scouring faults;
Nor never a Hydra-headed willfulness
So soon did lose his seat – and all at once-
As in this King.

Some would argue the events leading up to President Bush's war on terror chiseled the
younger Bush into a strong political figure. Others suggest Bush had a natural proclivity towards
leadership and the bud just needed a reason to flower. Longtime admirer of George Bush,
Professor John Lewis Gaddis remarked that the events of September 11 saw Bush undergo"one
of the most surprising transformations of an underrated national leader since Prince Hal became
Henry V."

But the question is begged: Would President Bush be flattered by a comparison to
Henry V? And the flip side, would Henry V appreciate this connection? Interestingly, the
Branagh version of Henry V was one of the Bush household's favorite films. Lines from
Henry V were quoted by Commodore Ian Macfadyen before initial air strikes against Iraq.
Political commentator Rich Lowry said of Bush following the September 11 attacks, "I
thought as Bush stood atop part of the rubble of the World Trade Center, he came as close
as he ever will to delivering a St. Crispin's Day speech. That spirit and resolve carried over
in the House chamber last night and it was something to behold."

Interestingly, the dying Henry IV told his son to engage in foreign wars to distract
the people from domestic issues. “Be it thy course to busy giddy minds/With foreign
quarrels, that action, hence borne out/May waste the memory of the former days.” This
was Hal's father's deathbed advice. The invasion of France turned an immature Hal into the perception of a strong leader. His youthful indiscretions become nothing but a memory.

Henry V’s war with France, as Bush’s war on terrorism, was heralded as a war of necessity and not choice. Shakespeare had a commoner tell a disguised Henry V on the night prior to the decisive battle of Agincourt: “If the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs, and arms, and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all, ‘we died at such a place.” With the blessings of the clergy, King Henry V was able to invade France with a “conscience washed as pure as sin with baptism.”

President Bush told a tense nation on the night he took the country to war, March 17th, 2003, "Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised." Bush further justified his actions by citing U.N. Security Council Resolution 1441, which warned Saddam Hussein to show the world Iraq’s arms and its weapons programs and destroy them. The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously in favor of Resolution 1441. When Iraq failed to abide by the resolution, Bush felt fully justified in going to war.

How different is the introspective struggle Henry V seemed to endure? Henry V seemed to require more than permission to begin the war with France. He appears to have needed assurance that he was making a wise choice. Henry V struggled with the assumed death toll that his war would bring and attempted to justify and buoy his decision. "For God doth know how many now in health shall drop their blood in approbation" (1.2.20).
A strong leader will exude steadfast resolve in public, but introspective reflection in private. Henry V reflected on the enormity of his endeavor:

Upon the king! Let us our lives, our souls,
Our debts, our careful wives
Our children, and our sins lay on the king!
We must bear all. O hard condition!
Win-born with greatness, subject to the breath
Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel
But his own wringing.
What infinite hearts ease
Must kings neglect that private men enjoy!
And what have kings that privates have not too.
Save ceremony, save general ceremony!

Now, compare the words of King Henry V to the report from the Knight Ridder Washington Post story regarding President George W. Bush’s television speech to the nation on March 20, 2003:

President Bush announced the attack in a four-minute television speech to the nation. "On my order, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war," he said. "These are the opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign."

Minutes before the speech, an internal television monitor showed the president pumping his fist. "Feels good," he said.

England enjoyed a spirit of unanimity in her loyalty to the King. Legitimacy is a key component of loyalty. Legitimacy is also a key point of difference between Shakespeare’s Henry V and George W. Bush. Bush won the 2000 election by obtaining 271 electoral votes to Al Gore’s 266 electoral votes. However, Bush won fewer popular votes. Gore won the popular vote nationally but lost the weighted Electoral College vote to President Bush, losing Florida by 537 contested votes. George W. Bush won the election but not the heart of the nation.
King Henry V made the case for war with France almost immediately following his ordination. Henry claimed France on two grounds, by treaty and by inheritance (Saccio 75). By invading France, he renewed the "Hundred Years War" which was initiated by his great-grandfather Edward II in 1337.

President Bush justified his intentions by citing the dreadful attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. A war on terror was declared and on September 27, 2001 more than 1000 US troops were ordered to the Afghanistan border. The bombing campaign begins on October 7, with Allied ships, aircraft and submarines firing 50 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Taliban targets. Bush begins the war on terror with a speech to a dazed nation following the Trade Tower attacks. He asked not if the country was ready. Nor did he argue in “conscience make this claim.” In his words, he declared confidently that “America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining.”

King Henry V’s justifications might have been murky to many, but he begins his quest with a question. He asks the Canterbury, Ely, Westmoreland, Exeter and others, "May I with right and conscience make this claim?" (1.2.97). David Perry, a professor of ethics at the U.S. Army War College who references Henry V often in his lectures, observed that Shakespeare's Henry V surrounded himself with advisers who were all biased in favor of war. Consequently, Henry V's invasion permission was a mere formality, with battle plans and geo-political expansion already drawn in the hearts of his advisors. Likewise, one week after the bombing began Afghanistan, the Taliban promised to hand over Osama bin Laden if the bombing stopped, but Bush rejected the
offer as "non-negotiable". The justification for the war might here have been muted but a larger battle plan by President Bush and his advisors was apparently being drawn.

Pride in the rank and file is intrinsically important to the morale of the troops as both Henry V and George W. Bush knew instinctionally. The most famous and often quoted speech in *Henry V* is the “St. Crispian Day” speech addressed to his troops. Henry V declares:

> If we are marked to die, we are enough to do our country loss;  
> And if we to live …The fewer men, the greater share of honour  
> God’s will, I pray thee wish not one man more.  
> By jove, I am not covetous for gold  
> Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost  
> It eanes me not if men my garments wear  
> Such outward things dwell not in my desires  
> But if it be a sin to covet honour  
> I am the most offending soul alive.

Similar in tone and content is the rhetoric in a *Christmas Day* speech to the troops stationed in Iraq. Note the obvious parallels between *Henry V’s* "St. Chripian Day" speech and President Bush's "Christmas Day" speech as the President addresses the troops before him:

> As your Commander in Chief, I am proud of every one of you. Some of your comrades have been wounded, and we pray for their recovery. Some have given their lives. This nation will never forget their service and sacrifice, and in this holiday season we pray that God will comfort the families they left behind. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity. Americans are blessed to have men and women like you protecting us, and defending the cause of freedom across the world.
Both speeches reference "God" in similar ways to similar ends. *Henry V* speaks of "God's will" in protection of the soldiers as the English army. The King's troops are simply following through with what God's wishes, and thus, casualties will be minimal if their cause is just. His suggestion that right makes might and that God is on England's side in this battle are frightening because its commonality with the political rhetoric we hear today. President Bush invokes God's name as he declares that the "liberty Americans enjoy is God's gift and therefore our responsibility to defend the cause of freedom across the world."

In the lives of both Henry V and President George W. Bush, God played the leading role. God is mentioned in every Henry V speech. To his men, King Henry V declares:

> We are in God's hands, brother, not in theirs.  
> March to the bridge. It now draws toward night.  
> Beyond the river we'll encamp ourselves,  
> And on tomorrow bid them march away.

What’s more, in the victory scene when King Henry V is in awe of the disparity between his losses and France's, he shouts, "Was ever known so great and little loss/On one part and on th' other? Take it God/For it is none but thine."

King Henry V was a deeply devout Christian and took his faith quite seriously. Similarly, President George W. Bush's faith in God helps guide him through difficult times and assists him in making tactical decisions.
Bush told the former president of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas:

God told me to strike at al Qaida and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East. If you help me I will act, and if not, the elections will come and I will have to focus on them." (Haaretz)

Motivations are always difficult to ascertain. Both Henry V and George W. Bush had the opportunity to relish personal revenge on their foes. How they acted upon the contentious acts and insults is a matter of debate. The patronizing gift of tennis balls which oozed with sarcasm enraged King Henry V. The King informs the French Ambassador, to “Tell the Dauphin I will keep my state, be like a king, and show my sail of greatness..." and adds later, "this mock of his hath turn'd his balls to gun-stones, and his soul shall stand sore charged for the wasteful vengeance…"

President George W. Bush had his opportunity to settle an old score with his foe, Saddam Hussein. An assassination attempt against President Bush senior by a booby trapped car was disclosed in 1993 during a visit he had made to Kuwait. The United States government claimed that investigations showed that the Iraqi president was behind that attempt. In his speech before the UN General Assembly, George W. Bush said that Saddam Hussein had organized an "assassination attempt against the ruler of Kuwait and a former United States President." A far cry from the insult of tennis balls but certainly stirs the pot of motive.

Myth and embellishment are always a part of war and politics. When one reads Henry V, one is in awe of the inspiring rhetoric. The battle of Agincourt was not solely won by inspired words, however, but for a number of tactical and technical reasons as well. The English expected to be wiped out in the battle, although Henry V continued to affirm his faith
that God could give them victory. Whether or not God intervened, the English deployed a number of wise military tactics and innovations. First, the long bow was a remarkable contribution to King Henry V's victory, and conspicuously absent from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The omission was to play up the valor of the English soldiers and the glory of God. The French, who greatly outnumbered the English, were terribly weighted down in the marshland by extremely heavy armor. The casualty ratio was astounding. Historians believe the actual number of perished Frenchmen was around 7000 and the English at the most lost 500 men. (Saccio 84). The English deployed felicitous weaponry and engaged a superior military strategy.

The United States military enjoy early success in "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Few questioned the technological edge the United States had over Iraq as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld aptly named the strategy "shock and awe." With a quick military victory, President George W. Bush promised the Iraqi people would open their arms and hearts to the liberating American troops.

The outcome of George W. Bush's war on terrorism is yet to be determined. Bush himself promised "a long fight." King Henry V's victory over France turned out to be short-lived and in the long-term perspective, futile. The parallels and the differences between William Shakespeare's *Henry V* and George W. Bush are worth noting, regardless of your political persuasion. The one concept we all can agree on, however, is a hope that George Santayana's famous observation regarding unlearned history will be heeded.

Thank you.