Cities at war

In 600 BC, Celtic tribes settled a rocky dome in south-western France that later was named Carcassonne. The town was fortuitously located at the crossroads of paths to the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea and the Spanish peninsula. Such an excellent location made the town a vibrant artisans’ colony, way station and trade centre, but most importantly, it also made Carcassonne strategically vital to conquering armies. Just as other major urban areas evolved in the ancient world – Troy, Constantinople, Alexandria and others – Carcassonne became an immense, fortified city and a once-prized possession of army generals and feudal barons only attracts curious visitors now, who gawk at its stony architecture and photograph its gargoyles and passageways. Even the Inquisition Tower, the torture chamber inside the battlefields where the Crusaders restored the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, has been reincarnated as an elegant hotel.

Today, Carcassonne is a crown jewel of France’s romantic past. Its dream-like castle and grandiose walled city intact and preserved, and the surrounding countryside a lush carpet of vineyards. Inside, tourists flash back in time to 1000 years ago, when Carcassonne’s minstrels strolled among poets and writers, valiant knights protected the virtue of damsels, and merchants hawked their finest silks and tapestries to travellers from distant Asia.

Stuck in the past

Yet, for all its magnificent splendour, Carcassonne can seem forlorn: a solitary, curious visitor now, who gawk at its stony architecture and photograph its gargoyles and passageways. Even the Inquisition Tower, the torture chamber inside the battlefields where the Crusaders restored the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, has been reincarnated as an elegant hotel.

Today, Carcassonne is a crown jewel of France’s romantic past. Its dream-like castle and grandiose walled city intact and preserved, and the surrounding countryside a lush carpet of vineyards. Inside, tourists flash back in time to 1000 years ago, when Carcassonne’s minstrels strolled among poets and writers, valiant knights protected the virtue of damsels, and merchants hawked their finest silks and tapestries to travellers from distant Asia.

Stuck in the past

Yet, for all its magnificent splendour, Carcassonne can seem forlorn: a solitary, curious visitor now, who gawk at its stony architecture and photograph its gargoyles and passageways. Even the Inquisition Tower, the torture chamber inside the battlefields where the Crusaders restored the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, has been reincarnated as an elegant hotel.

Today, Carcassonne is a crown jewel of France’s romantic past. Its dream-like castle and grandiose walled city intact and preserved, and the surrounding countryside a lush carpet of vineyards. Inside, tourists flash back in time to 1000 years ago, when Carcassonne’s minstrels strolled among poets and writers, valiant knights protected the virtue of damsels, and merchants hawked their finest silks and tapestries to travellers from distant Asia.

Stuck in the past

Yet, for all its magnificent splendour, Carcassonne can seem forlorn: a solitary, curious visitor now, who gawk at its stony architecture and photograph its gargoyles and passageways. Even the Inquisition Tower, the torture chamber inside the battlefields where the Crusaders restored the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, has been reincarnated as an elegant hotel.

Today, Carcassonne is a crown jewel of France’s romantic past. Its dream-like castle and grandiose walled city intact and preserved, and the surrounding countryside a lush carpet of vineyards. Inside, tourists flash back in time to 1000 years ago, when Carcassonne’s minstrels strolled among poets and writers, valiant knights protected the virtue of damsels, and merchants hawked their finest silks and tapestries to travellers from distant Asia.
globalisation wars and have learned many important lessons that can affect its eventual outcome. We believe the US can prevail in the battles of the coming years but only if the nation accepts two facts: first, that it is falling behind in the new economy; and second, that it will be victorious after it stops thinking about the 21st century as if it were still the 20th.

Economic developers can relate to Carcassonne’s unkind fate. Like modern-day Knights Templar, who flew their red and white battle flag (the Beausant) and shouted “Veritas vos liberabit!” (“The truth shall set you free”), we also clash with our opponents on the battlefield. Our singular mission is to bring home to our leaders and our constituents the spoils of victory: investments, jobs, growth and security.

Yet too many of our battles are being lost to predatory competitors. We often find ourselves out-duelled by better financed, better supported economic warriors from other lands. Strapped with yesterday’s outmoded weapons and backed by weak, timid decision makers, our quests can only fail against such opponents. We then must face incredulous politicians and a sceptical populace as the victors return home as heroes.

Change is needed

Without question, the US’s long-term prosperity is in jeopardy. To overcome this danger, set the ship right again and pioneer the world’s next quest – the development of abundant alternative energy – the country must embark on a new New Deal. This undertaking would result in a restructuring of the country’s social and economic systems. It would liberate and refocus the power of US capitalism on the many tasks at hand. This would result in fundamental changes to the tax code, social support network and wealth-creation systems. At the same time, lawmakers must craft better ways for capital to reach its targets, especially entrepreneurs, researchers and those formulating intellectual properties. Infrastructure must be state of the art, especially information networks, beginning with fibre-optic broadband from coast to coast.

No sidetracking

And US politicians and media outlets must be prevented from sidetracking the debate on the country’s future. Rather than making globalisation an irredeemable villain, the media should showcase its tremendous potential. Stories and editorials should urge local leaders to speed ahead with transitioning US workers, towns and businesses. Likewise, politicians should end their incessant immigrant bashings, stop accusing India of stealing jobs and quit excoriating China because its goods cost less to produce.

For these and so many other vexing issues, economic developers have answers or at least some logical places to start a sorely needed discussion about the future. But the time to act has grown short and the US’s needs continue to mount up. As a nation, it must meet these challenges and reaffirm its place, not only in today’s world, but in tomorrow’s as well.

Don Holbrook examines these points in further detail in his forthcoming book, Who Moved My Smokestack? Why Americans Are Losing Their Jobs – And What We Can Do About It, published by Random House this summer.