



Stupid American History: Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions

Leland Gregory

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America is the home of the brave and, apparently, the stupid and gullible. Satirist Leland Gregory teaches us a lesson in historical hilarity with *Stupid American History*.

From Columbus to George W. Bush (that's a lot of material, people), Leland leads us through American history's mythconceptions, exposing idiocy and inanity along the time line. He reeducates by informing us about myths. For example, Samuel Prescott actually was the guy to alert us that the British were coming and not that Paul Revere dude.

Move over Colbert and Stewart; satire has finally found its rightful place in American history.

Excerpt from the book:

"John Tyler was on his knees playing marbles when he was informed that Benjamin Harrison had died and he was now president of the United States. At that time marbles was a very popular game for both children and grown-ups."

For reasons still unknown, Texas congressman Thomas Lindsay Blanton, a Presbyterian Sunday school teacher and prohibitionist, inserted dirty words into the Congressional Record in 1921. His colleagues overwhelmingly censured him on October 24, 1921, by a vote of 293-0."

Stupid American History: Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions Details

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From Reader Review Stupid American History: Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions for online ebook

Kelly says

"Move over Colbert and Stewart" – are they serious!?

(Full disclosure: I received a free copy of this book for review through Library Thing's Early Reviewer program.)

I requested a copy of STUPID AMERICAN HISTORY through Library Thing's Early Reviewer program. Based on the book's description, I was hoping that it might be a hybrid of James Loewen's classic, LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME, and The Daily Show's satirical American history "textbook," AMERICA: THE BOOK. Unfortunately, STUPID AMERICAN HISTORY lacks both the wisdom (not to mention, attention to detail and sources) of LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME and the snarky humor of AMERICA: THE BOOK.

STUPID AMERICAN HISTORY is really more a collection of anecdotes and (unreferenced) factoids than a comprehensive book. As such, it lends itself better to bathroom reading as opposed to a thorough, cover-to-cover reading. It might make for a cute gift or stocking stuffer – the pages are made to resemble faux parchment paper, and there's lots of ornamentation around the text – but it's not really suitable for a history buff. Each "mythconception," for example, is presented on a single page – and most don't even take up the whole page!

STUPID AMERICAN HISTORY reminds me of those little paperback books of "odd facts" I used to enjoy...in junior high school. Which is fine, if that's what you're after. But if you're looking for a debunking or reimagining of American history, check out James Loewen's LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME – or any of his books, for that matter.

<http://www.easyvegan.info/2009/04/03/...>

Don says

I received a Kindle for Christmas, and I picked this book to be the first to read on it because it was a free e-book and it was fairly short - the decision had more to do with testing out the Kindle than actually choosing this book to read. It was a quick read, as the book consists of a myriad of weird, trivia like facts regarding American history. The frustrating part about the book is that for some of its information, there are no footnotes, no citation to any sources, which I think is unfortunate for a book about history. There were a couple of the supposed weird facts that the book was wrong about, mixing dates of important founding documents, and taking small incidents out of context to draw conclusions about a much bigger picture and certain relationships. Also, the author had a little too much editorializing for me about the effectiveness and role of government - harmless stuff, but I prefer history books that don't get into that. It was enjoyable to read because the Kindle truly is an amazing device, one I think I will greatly enjoy; but its content and writing style was not remarkable in any way.

Eric Bauman says

I read this on the Kindle. I think I got it for free or nearly free. While my Nook was down (long story), I needed something to read since all of my physical books were packed in boxes for the move.

The book is a series of one- and two-page stories about figures and incidents in American history. I found that a lot of stories tended to be about the same figures (Benedict Arnold gets mentioned quite a few times). Also, quite a few of them were not all that interesting—some even seemed to be merely nit-picking by the author (perhaps he was trying to fill pages, I don't know).

The repetition that I mentioned leads me to believe this is not a book meant to be read straight through, as I did, that maybe you should just read one or two (while perched upon the throne, perhaps) stories and then put it away for a while. If you read it straight through, though, it gets frustrating and what might have been light-hearted gets cloying.

Michael says

This seems like a compilation of historical factoids previously printed on the back of Leinenkugel beer coasters. Not that there's necessarily anything wrong with that – I loves me some beer after all – and it's a somewhat enjoyable read on my phone within the context of a crowded bus. It's chock-full of interesting counter-logical stories, swipes at politicians old and more recently old, and goofy, cartoon figures of satirical genre that punctuate the book in apparently nonsensical order.

It's certainly nothing approaching scholarly as the constantly shifting content implies that it was written for those with the attention span of a coked-up lab rat. My biggest problem with this is the occasional (or, according to some other reviews, very frequent) fact-bending. As an example, the author laments the fact that Alexander Cartwright – the founder of the Knickerbockers and, therefore, organized baseball – “*was finally inducted into*” the Cooperstown Shrine in 1938. This is certainly true, though he conveniently doesn't mention that the first class of inductees were selected only two years before and the physical Hall itself wasn't even completed until 1939. There's no lie here of course, just a questionable statement geared to support whatever he may have been getting at with the story. Then I read the rather surprising statement that, of US Civil War Generals R. L. Lee and U. S. Grant, only Grant owned slaves! Fascinating but perhaps less fascinating than that PBS documentary about Lee I watched a couple weeks later that mentioned in certain detail his *two hundred* slaves! My oh my, whose scholarship do I believe in this case?

There are lengthier lists elsewhere about questionable “truths” even after this book was revised more recently. Nonetheless I have to believe that much of this is, at base, factual. I think the main problem revolves around the attempt to be clever and punchy through brevity with content that needs more explanation than can fit on one side of a small bookmark or complimentary key chain. Depending on my mood I might usually throw a single star at something like this, but it only took about 2.7 hours to read and, in recent months, that's very much appreciated – Three Stars!

Leslie says

This is one of the first Kindle books I acquired and I didn't even own a Kindle when I bought it. 7 years ago - really.

Anyway this is a collect of tales that debunk the 'fake news' you learned in school. at least if you are an American if you aren't you probably didn't learn any of this.

"a Chicago Tribune reporter, admitted several years after the fire that he had made up the story of the cow kicking over the lantern because it was more interesting copy. " Journalism

Betsy Ross didn't make the first flag

Francis Scott Key wrote a poem not an anthem

The real story behind the Boston Tea Party... the taxes were lowered and the smugglers were furious.

I only found one glaring error placing Jimmy Carter's election in 1978 rather than 1976. This version doesn't exist on Amazon any longer and I hope the new version corrects that error.

Sean O'Hara says

Gregory's previous book, Stupid History ws so much fun to nitpick that when I saw this one listed as free on KindleIQ I decided to pick it up. To his credit, Gregory's research has improved so there are far fewer falsehoods, and he even cites sources occasionally. However, the number of errors in the book remains atrocious.

* He claims the phrase "a more perfect union" is bad grammar since nothing can be better than perfect, ignoring the obvious interpretation of the phrase as "closer to perfect," which has been obvious to people for about 225 years now.

* He claims the Battle of New Orleans was pointless since it took place after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, and Andrew Jackson's subsequent use of the battle to bolster his reputation was thus dishonest. Never mind that Jackson had no way of knowing what was happening at Ghent, as Daniel Walker Howe points out in What Hath God Wrought, if the Brits had secured New Orleans, giving them effective control of all trade flowing out of the Mississippi basin, the treaty wouldn't've mattered.

* He claims that Dr. Spock was never jailed for his anti-Vietnam views, then says that Spock was arrested and convicted of telling young men how to avoid the draft, though the conviction was thrown out on appeal. So in that process, he never set foot in a jail cell?

* "We are led to believe, in our abbreviaed versions of history, that all slave-holding state seceded from the Union during the Civil War, or else they gave up the practice of slavery. But that's just not true. Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware remained in th Union but continued to allow citizens to own slaves.... [They] were joined by West Virginia when it was admitted to the Union in 1863." Several problems here. While it's true Kentucky and Missouri remained in the Union, they also seceded -- both states had rival governments throughout the war, with delegations to the congresses in both Washington and Richmond.

Maryland and West Virginia both abolished slavery on their own before the ratification of the 13th Amendment. The only slave state that didn't secede and didn't give up slavery on its own was Delaware, which had only a few hundred slaves in its territory. Gregory goes on to say that "this demonstrates that the Civil War was anything but black and white," showing sympathy, as he did in Stupid History, with the Lost Causers who seek to portray the Civil War as about issues besides slavery.

* He repeats the erroneous etymology of "red light district," stemming from railway workers who would hand red lanterns in front of whorehousss so they could be found in case of emergency.

* Claims that Francis Scott Key didn't write the Star Spangled Banner -- he wrote The Defense of Fort McHenry, which was excerpted for the Star Spangled Banner. The difference is?

* Claims that America didn't have taxes until the Civil War. No, we didn't have a Federal income tax. There are of course many other types of taxes. What does he think the Whiskey Rebellion was about?

* Claims that Jimmy Carter was "the first Southerner elected to the presidency following the Civil War." No, that would be Woodrow Wilson who actually grew up in the Confederacy in a slave-owning family. Wilson was followed by Truman from Missouri and LBJ from Texas.

* Defines "revisionists" as "people who want to rewrite history to make it more politically correct." No, revisionism is the process of reevaluating history as more information become available. For example, the history of the Cuban Missile Crisis has been significantly revised in the last twenty years thanks to newly declassified documents from both the US and Soviet Union. We've discovered that, far from the original narrative of Kennedy staring down Krushchev, they reached an accomodation, whereby the US agreed to remove IRBMs from Turkey and to never attempt another invasion of Cuba. This is factual correctness, not political. It is true "revisionism" is sometimes used pejoratively to describe politically motivated reconsiderations, but such are as likely to be used for non-PC purposes, such as claiming the Civil War wasn't about slavery.

* "Julia Ward Howe sold her poem, Battle Hymn of the Republic, which was later set to music, to the Atlantic Monthly in 1862 for \$5." No, she wrote the lyrics specifically for the music. The tune was a popular spiritual in the years leading up to the Civil War. At the start of the conflict, soldiers set new lyrics, known as John Brown's Body, to the tune. These lyrics were extremely coarse ("John Brown's body is mouldering in the grave"), and Howe disliked them, so she penned new religiously-themed words for the song. Why Gregory would go for a mundane piece of trivia when the full story is more interesting, I can't imagine.

* While claiming Henry Ford didn't invent the automobile, he points to various attempts at creating steampowered cars, which he notes didn't work. He never mentions the people who actually did invent the internal combustion engine.

* He makes the horrors of Andersonville sound like mere mismanagement.

* Discusses the fact that Alvin York tried to get out of the army as a conscientious objector. But the only reason anyone remembers York these days is because of the Howard Hawks film, which uses that as a primary element of the story. Why is Gregory mentioning this in a compendium of supposedly little-known facts?

* Claims that a Samuel Slater was, in addition to the founder of the American industrial revolution, created child labor. But child labor has been around since time immemorial. The reason people used to have so many

children wasn't just the lack of condoms -- kids could be used to lessen the workload of the parents.

* He mentions Victor Berger's attempt to abolish the Senate but fails to note any of the more interesting facts of his life.

* Claims that no sitting President has lost a reelection campaign in time of war. Only true if you don't count LBJ dropping out of the primary once he realized he couldn't win.

* The crown jewel of Gregory's shoddy research -- he claims that when the Titanic struck the iceberg, passengers were watching a D.W. Griffith film called The Poseidon Adventure. No such film exists. The Poseidon Adventure was a 1969 novel first filmed in 1972, 60 years after the Titanic sank. He appears to have gotten his facts from this Snopes page, but failed to check the references, which leads to this page which explains the story was made up by Snopes to demonstrate the importance of checking sources instead of reflexively believing everything you read. Heh.

Sarah Crawford says

This is a book about aspects of American History which are little known, or which are well known but totally false. There's loads of fascinating facts in the book. A few things I found really interesting:

1. Where the term record 'album' actually comes from.
2. The Mickey Mouse cartoon that was banned in 1932 in Ohio.
3. When it was actually illegal to hold a religious marriage.
4. The major communist who worked first for the New York Tribune.
5. Hitler was named man of the year for 1938 by Time magazine.
6. The origin of the term 'lynch'.
7. General Order 11 which allowed the expulsion of all Jews from military controlled areas. This was given out by Ulysses S. Grant in 1862. (In 1942, all persons of Japanese origin, even if they were American citizens, were removed from 'military areas' on the West Coast under Executive Order 9066.)
8. The relationship between Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh and Adolph Hitler.

There are loads and loads of other interesting things in this book.

Aimeslee says

Unless you just have to read words to stay sane (like on a trip or if the electricity goes off), I would not recommend this to anyone. It left me saying "meh!". It was mildly entertaining at first, but that did not last long. Then, when he wrote that Jimmy Carter was the first Southern president since Reconstruction, I was like, who was LBJ, chopped liver? Sorry, just could not trust another word after that. Plus, I'm no fan of Dubya, but this author lets his dislike/ridicule show slightly and that isn't necessary. Mr. Gregory, I'm sure you are very witty at cocktail parties, but you should not have tried to be here. A simple presentation of verified facts would have been nice.

MEH!

Cookav says

Did you know that Martin Van Buren's first language was not English, but Dutch?

Or that The Poseidon Adventure, a movie about passengers trying to stay alive after their ocean liner capsized, was being played on the Titanic 40 minutes before it sunk?

Or how about the fact that Heinz ketchup actually has over 60 varieties, but H J Heinz thought the number 7 was lucky, so he changed the label to 57 varieties?

Other random facts and funny bits of history that are rarely mentioned are found in Stupid American History.

I found this book amusing, but I only gave it 3 stars because of some crude humor (because of this, I would only recommend this book for ages 11+). Also, Leland Gregory didn't sight his sources in the book, which made it feel unreliable. Altogether though, the facts were amusing and I found them funny.

Ayse says

amusing historical anecdotes -- no sources cited

Paul Pessolano says

This is a fast, easy, entertaining, informative, and fun read. It is well suited to education and those who really want to know the truth about history. Gregory gives the reader a different slant on our history and will dispel the history that was taught to us.

The best way for me to give you a feeling for the book is to show you a few of the items from the book.

"The first motto that appeared on U.S. coins was not "In God We Trust", it was "Mind Your Own Business".

"President Lincoln had four brothers-in-law who fought for the Confederacy".

I love this one, "In 1872, Congress passed a law requiring members of both houses to be docked a day's pay for every day's absence, except in cases of illness. More than 135 years later, the law has been enforced only twice".

"President Andrew Jackson, in 1815, at the battle of Mobile, Alabama, "Elevate Them Guns A Little Lower".

"In 1875, James Stephen Hogg, the first native born Texan to become the State's Governor, named his daughter, Ima". What was he thining????

"Herbert Hoover was the only President to turn his entire salary over to charity".

When Billy Carter was asked why his brother Jimmy didn't try to control his behavior, Billy said, "I'd tell him to kiss my ass".

These and many more oddities of American History are waiting for you in this book, and maybe best of all the cost is only \$9.99.

Trisha says

An easy read, but very repetitive and contradictory. As a History major, I thought I would enjoy this book, but I found Gregory's attempts at cheekiness annoying. I would only suggest this book if you need something to read, but don't have the time or are in the right surroundings to devote your brain to a real book.

Amy says

There are lots of fascinating tidbits in this book. Some of these include:

On September 11, 2002, the first anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the numbers that popped up for the New York Lottery were 9-1-1. What were the chances of those three numbers coming up on the anniversary of the attacks in the same city in which the attacks took place? Read the book to find out!

The First Real President: The first president to be born a citizen of the U.S. was number 8, Martin Van Buren. He was born on Dec. 5, 1782, six years after the signing of the Constitution. Because all previous presidents had been born before the American Revolution, they were actually British subjects.

Herbert Hoover was the only president to turn his entire salary over to charity.

In 1938, Time Magazine named as its Man of the Year -- Adolf Hitler.

Not in a Box, Not with a Fox: Twenty-three (23) New York publishers rejected Theodore Geisel's first book before one decided it was worth printing. "And to Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street" went on to sell millions of copies and started the career of the beloved children's author, Dr. Seuss.

John Tyler wasn't honored after his death on January 18, 1862, and no official word of his death was ever issued. Why? Check out page 153 to discover the answer.

This is one of my faves! In 1872, Congress passed a law requiring members of both houses to be docked a day's pay for every day's absence, except in case of illness. More than 135 years later, the law has been enforced only twice! Why am I not surprised?!

Infamous American dictionary maker Noah Webster adamantly hated the British and was simultaneously filled with American pride. He thought total separation from the English and their language was in order so in 1806, he Americanized many words, including: centre to center; honour to honor; programme to program; colour to color and more!

One of the original four parts of the Alien and Sedition Acts enacted on July 6, 1798 stated that: The Alien Enemies Act, authorized the president to apprehend and deport resident aliens if their home countries were at war with the United States. That act was signed into law with no expiration date and it remains in effect today as 50 U.S.C. 21-24.

Civil War General Lew Wallace gained his greatest fame not from activities on the battlefield but as the author of the novel Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ.

Dani Shuping says

This review was written for LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

I received this book through Library Thing's book reviews. Unlike some of the other reviewers, I approached this book as what it appeared to be: a book of assorted trivia that wasn't taking itself too seriously. This book is by no means a history book and is probably best used for trivial pursuit or just for tossing random facts into conversations, but that's ok. It succeeds at what it's supposed to be, a light entertaining read.

The book presents many entertaining factoids, many of which that I had never heard or seen before. The research appears fairly thorough (although there are no citations) and presents those factoids that people love to toss out at random. My two main complaints about the book are that it's not in any type of order (makes it difficult to find things later) and that the images often have nothing to do with the factoid. Other than that, it's a handy little book to have around for a light read.

Ava C says

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was lucky, so he changed the label to 57 varieties?

Other random facts and funny bits of history that are rarely mentioned are found in Stupid American History.

I had originally given this book 3 stars, but after looking back through it, I moved it down to 1 star. Although the book is advertised as a children's book, there are references that should not be included in a children's history book, along with swear words sprinkled in between. Gregory fails to site his sources, making the book only slightly more reliable than Wikipedia. If you are looking for a comical history book for younger readers, I would instead suggest books such as 1314 And All That by Scoular Anderson (A book about Scotland's history) or the Horrible Histories books (which are mainly about British history, but also include books on American history.)
