

## HISTORICAL BITS

### DID YOU KNOW...?

#### AMERICAN HISTORY

SOURCE: Prof. Richard Shenkman, Historian, George Mason University.  
*Legends, Lies and Cherished Myths of American History*  
*I Love Paul Revere whether he rode or not.*

- Until the 1830's, Americans did not eat tomatoes. Incredibly, they thought this Native American vegetable to be poisonous. They used them only for decorations, known as "love apples".
- During the first five years of the XX century, a Negro was lynched almost every day; Mexicans in the Southwest suffered a similar fate.
- By 1900 the problem in the cities was pollution with some 3 million horses dumping 25 lbs of manure in the streets daily. The stench, swarm of flies and pungent urine odors permeated throughout. When it rained it became a muddy manure mush. People rejoiced with the advent of the horseless carriage which ironically was to pollute the atmosphere for future centuries.
- Mark Twain said "Man is the only animal that blushes, or needs to."
- The steamboat is generally thought to have been invented by Robert Fulton. It was James Rumsey of Virginia that invented the first steamboat in 1784. It was John Fitcher that improved the previous lower speed versions. Robert Fulton built one that was commercially successful in 1807. The name of Clermont given is his biographer's error. Fulton called it the "North River Steamboat."
- By 1842 immigration increased to over 100,000; by 1854 it had increased to over 400,000. By 1850 political parties began to manipulate immigrants via vote fraud. Democrats controlled the Naturalization bureaucracy and with this they were able to control thousands of votes using bribes and phony naturalization forms. The money came from Wall Street, federal

officeholders (who had to kick back 3% of their salaries to the Party) and finally from military suppliers of the Navy. During this time James Buchanan became President by nearly a half million votes.

- Lincoln is generally seen above reproach, honest, humble, unambitious and one born in a log cabin. As a boy they did live in a cabin with a dirt floor but according to historian and Prof. Shenkman, he lived much better than his neighbors. His family past was a source of shame to him. His mother was illiterate. His mother's sister had an illegitimate child and his own mother, Nancy Hanks had an illegitimate child. Although good at it, Lincoln hated farm work. Although he had little as a young man, he was very ambitious. At age 23, he ran for the State legislature and lost. He gains exposure and contacts as a Postmaster where he illegally used the frank to cancel postage fees for his future constituents. While there was a \$10.00 fine for each infraction, he was never caught. As a legislator he became an influential speaker and became what we would call today "a politician's politician". He knew when to keep quiet on controversial issues. He once held along with many white Americans the hope that freed slaves could be shipped back to Africa. While opposed to slavery later, there was some political posturing on the issue. On occasion he was to have been for slavery in one part of the state of Illinois and against it in another. He defended the railroads in what now could be labeled as a corporate lawyer today. Although superstitious, he had a brilliant mind, excellent sense of humor and had the innate talent for public speaking.
- In 1861, the first Negroes were appointed commissioned officers in the Civil War by the Confederacy in Louisiana. By the end of the war, 93,000 had served the Confederate South; 100,000 in the Union Army and about 30,000 in the Union Navy. More than 65,000 were killed.
- Benjamin Franklin was opposed to the bald eagle as a national symbol. He referred to the bird as one with bad moral character. His choice was the turkey.
- It is generally held that George Washington was an honest man with an equally honest cabinet but the facts show a different side of him. Land during his time was a symbol of wealth and prestige. Through inheritance he received Mount Vernon and about 2,000 acres. Dissatisfied, he courted Martha, one of the richest widows even though he did not love her. (When he was engaged he revealed via letter that he loved Sally Fairfax). Through Martha he received 100 slaves, 6,000 acres and enough money to buy thousands more. Eight years after his marriage (1767) he illegally stole land specifically set aside for Indians by the Crown. He hired a

surveyor and told him “to keep the whole matter a profound secret” and told him to lie if he had to. In the next few years, he decided to keep land from the government that was supposed to go to his soldiers. But instead he arranged that he and his officers would get 200,000 acres seeing fit to receive the best himself, “the cream of the Country” as he subsequently boasted. As for his cabinet, Hamilton’s number two man was caught using inside information for the purpose of making a killing in the bond market. Hamilton himself was accused of corruption. To clear himself of the charge of consorting with a known speculator, he admitted consorting with the man’s wife, a Mrs. Reynolds.

- It is generally held that political leaders like Jefferson or James K. Polk, in acquiring more land for the Country, did not have to lie to Congress or the American people. The opposite is true. Jefferson lied to Congress in his bid to acquire Spanish Florida. He told Congress and the public that he was going to have to use military force. Instead he resorted to bribes with the French government who had some control over the Spanish. Polk’s lies are even larger and numerous. Following the sickly greed for land that started with Washington 150 years earlier, Polk is driven with this insatiable need for more land grabs, a fever that is sweeping the rest of the country. The first lie concerns Oregon. He stated that the U.S. was legally entitled to all of Oregon. In fact, Britain had equal claim. Polk felt compelled to demand it all, even if he had to lie to the American public about his true aims and the justice of the American demand. His second lie follows the intent of involving the U.S. in a war with Mexico and gaining new territory. He sends Zachary Taylor into disputed territory and also into Mexico, the city of Matamoros with the intent of provoking a war, baiting the Mexican army and to make them look as the aggressor. The problem is that Zachary Taylor is in Mexico when he does this. Taylor will sack the city of Matamoros stealing, killing and even violating Catholic Churches. Polk’s lie to Congress is that it took place in American soil. The American border was more than a hundred miles north at the Nueces river. The next lie was that he did not want to go to war. War had come, he said, “notwithstanding all the efforts to avoid it.” He follows this up with another lie. He said he wanted justice. What he wanted, as Prof. Shenkman asserts, was their land, the Southwest and California, about half of the territory of Mexico. He did not allude to this until he was into the war, a year later.
- In 1948, during the crisis of the Middle East, U.S. ambassador Warren Austin said that he hoped the Arabs and Jews would settle their differences “like good Christians.”

- Magellan never circumnavigated the globe as the textbooks declare. Partway through the trip he got in a beach fight with Filipino natives and was killed; the expedition was completed by Juan Sebastián del Cano.
- Henry Hudson is remembered for exploring the Hudson River but it was not he who discovered neither the river nor the strait or the bay that bears his name; It was Giovanni da Verrazano.
- Sir Walter Raleigh did not introduce tobacco to either England or Europe. It was introduced by sea captains and sailors. In France it was Thevat in 1556. Before, it was sailors returning from Cuba in one of Columbus' expeditions.
- Eli Whitney did not devise the principle of interchangeable parts. He was not even the first person to use it in the manufacture of weapons. A decade earlier it was French Honoré Blanc who made firing mechanisms for muskets out of interchangeable parts.
- It is generally believed that Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. In fact, the cotton gin was invented in Asia and perfected in Santo Domingo in the 1740's a half century before Whitney's cotton gin. Even then, Whitney's gin was not very efficient. It was Hodgen Holmes that invented the saw tooth that made it efficient in his invention.
- Thomas Edison's erroneous history concerns not his inventions but his personal life. Contrary to established myths, he did not grow up poor. He did not do badly in school and he did not forget his wedding day.
- George Pullman is said to have invented the sleeping car in 1864. The problem is that they were already in existence 21 years earlier. The first one was built by John Stephanson in 1843 for the Erie Railroad Company. Five years prior to Pullman's sleeping car, Eli Wheeler had patented the sleeping car.
- Henry Ford is credited to single handedly invent the moving assembly line. The idea was conceived in a joint effort of several of his top engineers. Henry Ford took the credit.
- Henry Ford is seen as a progressive for instituting the five dollar a day but he did it only to keep a stable work force going. The assembly line was a worker's nightmare and the only way to keep them from walking away was to pay more than the usual wage.

- Charles Lindberg is reputed to have been the first man to fly non-stop across the Atlantic. Lindberg was actually the sixty-seventh person to make the trip. His accomplishment is that he did it solo. The first non-stop flight was made by two British pilots, Sir John Alcock and Sir A.W. Brown in 1919.
- Puritans are believed to have been hostile to sex and other worldly pleasures as well. In reality they were no less promiscuous than their descendants and happily welcomed the practice of sex. They talked about it in public meetings. Teenage daughters were allowed to sleep with potential suitors as long as everyone remained clothed. This practice known as *bundling* sometimes led to sexual experimentation and unwanted babies. Rape, adultery and fornication were regarded as pardonable human weaknesses. In old New England, there were cases of couples getting married in the nude or in their underwear, usually at night. However, some were performed in the daytime.
- During the Victorian Age, prostitution seemed to go from bad to worse. After the Civil War officials in several cities considered giving it legal status. In 1867 the N.Y. City Police Department endorsed a plan to regulate the trade. In the East, prostitution was so open there were thick guidebooks to direct customers to the best whorehouses. It is estimated that in N.Y. in 1870 there were about 10,000 whorehouses; twenty years later the figure rose to 40,000.
- Most people think that prior to 1973, abortions had always been illegal. In fact, there were no laws in the U.S. against abortions until the 1820's and for many years after that most states approved abortion in the first four months of pregnancy. By the mid nineteenth century it began to be outlawed not by the clergy but by the medical profession. Before then, no one knew that life began when an egg and the sperm united. It was thought that life began at about four months, the time of "quickening", when the baby was felt by the mother. Yet abortions continued in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was estimated there was one abortion for every six births. In the 1920's, one out of four pregnancies ended in abortion.
- It has always been assumed that during American colonial times, women had the role of child rearing. To the contrary, child rearing was the job of fathers. Children were regarded as little adults and were given heavy responsibilities. They dressed like their parents and were forbidden toys. Parents in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were told by the clergy to not become too close to their children. When they became teenagers they were sent away to live with other families. Before the XIX century children's birthdays were not observed.

- Regarding the elderly, early colonial families' reverence for the old began to decline after 1750. After the Revolution, they became the target for abuse and as a consequence created a whole new vocabulary of scorn e.g. "old goat", "geezer", "old cornstalk", "baldy". The positive words that had been used before ("progenitor", "eldern", "grandame", "forefather", "granfer") began to disappear.
- While divorce appears to be a modern phenomenon usually linked to morality or the complications of modern life, it has been no less a problem in the past. In the late XIX century there were so many divorces that the federal government undertook a study. In the 1850's there were 25,000 divorces a year, more than any other industrialized nation in the world. In the 1920's, Americans were divorcing almost as often as the early 1960's. For the children of late seventeenth century Virginia there were difficult times as parents often died young. There were many one parent homes. In the XIX century death came so early that the number of families headed by single parents was about the same as today.
- People are taught that the Revolutionary War pitted Americans against foreigners in a classic battle for self determination. Americans known as loyalists are rarely mentioned. Only a small minority supported the Revolution. John Adams estimated that about a third of the population was hostile to the idea; another third was in the middle or indifferent.
- While the minutemen are believed to have come to the defense of their country in the greatest hour of need and from the ranks of the middle class, scholars have found that the average minuteman was economically below average. In 1778, they were poor, landless, out of work and out of hope. Their decision to volunteer was not at the expense of a middle class career but of the opportunity that the military offered for social advancement. Many did not volunteer. Some were paid to fight. (A yeoman farmer who refused to fight could hire a substitute to do the fighting for him) Most minutemen were unreliable and without proper training and could not hit much with the "old squirrel rifle". Evidence shows that not one in ten could hit a redcoat in Lexington or Concord. If they were successful it was because they outnumbered the British two to one. Any idea of "standing their ground" are put to rest by their own leader, Captain John Parker who ordered not to fire and to disperse.
- The American Revolution was fought not by skillful tactics of guerilla warfare by one side but rather in the classic European style of regular armies fighting regular armies. Fighting and winning via guerilla tactics would have been a hollow victory, one of winning a war but losing the peace.

- Paul Revere did not ride alone through the woods when the British started in on Lexington and Concord. William Dawes and Samuel Prescott also made the trip. Revere did not even make it to Concord; After Lexington he was captured by a British patrol.
- Before he was to die, Benedict Arnold did not heroically request to die in his American uniform in which he fought his battles. According to his wife, he was delirious his last three days and was unable to swallow or speak.
- The Rough Riders and Teddy Roosevelt never charged on horseback up San Juan Hill. Actually their horses were mistakenly left in Florida so any fighting was done on foot. The fact is that out of any army of 16,000, the Rough Riders numbered just a few hundred and most likely went up Kettle Hill as Roosevelt alluded to soon after. It was Roosevelt that years later talked about San Juan Hill which led to the confusion.
- A commonly held belief about World War I is that the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915 touched off American intervention. The Lusitania was not even an American ship; it was British. There was no intervention until two years later. The ship was not struck without warning and it was not an unarmed ship. Fair warnings were issued by the Germans and the British ship was carrying arms and ammunition.
- Hitler did not single handedly snub Jesse Owens. The newspapers made up the story. Owens himself insisted that the newspaper's story was untrue. The facts are clear. Hitler did not congratulate anyone else that day, not even German winners largely because the Olympic Committee had told him to remain neutral. Prior to this (in the first day) Hitler did snub Cornelius Johnson by walking out of the Stadium. Another misconception that the German audience shunned Owens. The opposite is true; he received ear shattering ovations from the German audience and according to Owens, the greatest of his career.
- News of the slaughter of millions of Jews did not make big news during the war. News of the extermination of 400,000 Hungarian Jews in 1944 made only page 12 of the New York Times in four short column inches. It appears, according to Prof. Shenkman, that U.S. government leaders knew about these atrocities and did nothing. When Franklin D. Roosevelt was asked to bomb the death camp at Auschwitz, the military said it could not spare the planes to do the job, even though bombers were hitting targets only fifty miles away.

- There is the belief that immigrants who came to America were tired and come with a “yearning to breathe free.” According to Senator Patrick Moynihan, his Irish immigrant grandfather “never once mentioned being tired” and the world to which they arrived was a cesspool of intrigue, poverty and corruption. According to Moynihan, they came from societies that were more civilized than ours. In the U.S. at the turn of the century, there was on the average one lynching for every day of the year.
- While it is believed that America loves immigrants, the fact is that it is directed to a special class: those that have been here first. When Irish Catholics later came in the nineteenth century Protestants rioted in protest burning over 30 homes and killing some fourteenth Irish Catholics. The same racist attitudes were directed to other groups arriving from Eastern Europe.
- Most of the lore of Western towns, shootings at high noon and notorious killers are the fabrication of Hollywood screenplay writers, who in turn were influenced by the outrageous fiction of the nineteenth century dime novels. There is no evidence that anyone was ever killed at high noon. Those celebrated as heroic shooters have been blown out of proportion: Billy the Kind is reputed to have killed 21 by time he was 21. Historian Eugene Hollow can only account for three; Bat Masterson is credited with 20 or 30 men killed. The actual number is three. Wild Bill Hickock was to have killed 6 Kansas outlaws. He lied; he only killed three, all unarmed. Cody himself stated in a letter to his publisher that he did not much care for the truth.
- Davy Crockett was unlike anything that was said by his party, the Whigs. Nor is he the Hollywood portrayal of a clean shaven, soft spoken hero of the movies. In his time, he was not universally popular or respected and was seen an uneducated sort that thrived on his jokes. He was seen as an ignoramus, defeated in Congress, became disenchanted and deserted his wife and children. When he boasted having killed more than 100 bears, his friends reportedly joked that could not be; Davy could not count that high.
- Slavery is normally seen as favorable to whites in Colonial America but in Georgia (1735) introduction of blacks was forbidden for the express purpose of forestalling the development of slavery. It was done with the idea of not helping blacks but whites. They felt that it would be incompatible as a refuge for debtors who wanted a new start for life. Most of the new settlers would not afford to buy slaves of their own.
- Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was not the first issued. Lord Dunmore, the British Governor of Virginia promised to free all the slaves



that would take arms for the British government. While it did free 800 slaves, the motives of Lord Dunmore were not based on compassion or ethics but rather with agitating the Virginia patriots who were slaveholders. Even George Washington was incensed as he asserted that Lord Dunmore would “become the most formidable enemy America has.” While the rebels saw the plan as diabolical, ironically they were to do the same later when it was possible. The myth of the slave’s contentment is the direct result of the Master’s need to justify the system to him and others. It was designed for northern consumption, most useful in reassuring Southerners of the justice of their cause.

- Thanksgiving is generally seen as a day of giving thanks in the fall. It is inferred that religion, compassion and family play a role in this joyous occasion. The first occurred in the autumn of 1621. In 1623 it was celebrated in July. It was not a family celebration nor was it connected to religion. It was a community festivity and recreation that lasted for a week. As Prof. Shenkman asserts, the Pilgrims would not have tolerated festivities at a truly religious time. There is no consensus on whether turkey was eaten. The only food for certain that was present was “fowl” and “deer”.
- The stories of the Liberty Bell and of a “gray headed patriot” ringing the bell to a cheering crowd who “anxiously awaited” the signing of the Declaration of Independence is a fraud invented by the XIX century Philadelphian George Lippard. If this were to be true it would have been rung on July 2 when it was actually declared or July 8 when Congress celebrated Independence for the first time. But there is no evidence. The inscription in 1753 proclaiming liberty had nothing to do with the Revolution. It was not named Liberty Bell until long after the Revolution. The liberty referred to in the title was intended to mean liberty of blacks and not whites. The name was coined in 1839 by antislavery activists. Eleven years earlier the City of Philadelphia had tried to sell the bell for scrap; there were no takers.
- The idea that Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock is credited to the dubious testimony of a 95 year old man more than a century after the Mayflower arrived. In actuality, the Pilgrims first landed in Provincetown. Plymouth was neither the first European settlement nor the first permanent settlement. The first settlement was Jamestown in 1607. According to Prof. Shenkman, the explanation for the historical manipulation is due to “New England historians, who until the XIX century dominated in the writings of, by and for New Englanders.”
- Art has also played a role in supporting American mythology. General Custer is generally seen clean shaven with a neatly trimmed mustache and

decidedly debonair. Custer scholar W. A. Graham states that Custer “was a weary, dirty, unkempt man who was fighting desperately for his life...whose haggard features made him appear older than his age by many years.” Washington has also been made to appear like a god. As President his hair was usually powdered. He did not often wear a wig. His complexion was sallow, his face pockmarked by smallpox scars, his shoulder narrow while his arms and legs looked like that of an old retired athlete. He was six feet three, like Lincoln and had ill fitting dentures. Prints likewise have political agendas and contribute to erroneous content: a case in point is Paul Revere’s print of the Boston Massacre, the Battle of Lexington, Washington crossing the Delaware. The latter deserves comment. While Washington did cross the Delaware, he was not standing, nor was he impassive and there was no flag waving in the boat. The flag of the United States was still to be approved by Congress. According to historian Ann Hutton, the painting was done in the 1850’s by a German named Leutze to stir up feeling of Revolution in his country.

- Americans firmly believe that Pilgrims lived in log cabins. Pilgrims had no idea what a log cabin looked like. They were virtually unknown in England and were not built in America until the late seventeenth century by the Germans and the Swedes. The term log cabin cannot be found in print before the 1770’s.
- Even though the Mayflower Compact continues to be thought of as the cornerstone of democracy and self government in America, the Compact was specifically designed to curb freedom, not promote it. The Pilgrim Governor wrote that its purpose was to control renegades aboard the Mayflower who threatened to go their own independent way once on land. The Compact forbade such action and required “all due submission and obedience.” While there is mention of majority rule, they had no intention of turning it over to the people; it was to be ruled by the elite. Another association by Americans is freedom of religion but this was restricted to only their brand of religion. Religious persecution against Catholics, Jews and other sects is well documented in Colonial America.
- The town meeting is also seen as a brand of early democracy in Colonial America. The town meeting was for the few selectmen, not for women, blacks, Indians or even white men without sufficient property and certainly not for members of other religions. These were called by and for the powerful property owners who represented the elite. These were not monthly meetings; the most they met were twice a year to set taxes etc. Elections were held annually and selectmen often remained in office as much as 30 years. By the 1660’s a man needed to have 80 lbs of taxable estate; only 25% of the adult males could meet this standard. Thus, there was no representative government, universal suffrage or tolerance. Later

the descendents of the Pilgrims changed the “dictatorship of the holy and regenerate” only to become beset with bickering fights between breakaway precincts, factions leading ultimately to debating attorneys that took over meetings discouraging others to participate.

- Freedom of the Press did not exist in Colonial America. Under John Adams the Sedition Act was passed and Americans were thrown in jail just for insulting the President. The New York Press was not even permitted to report the votes of legislators without the express permission of the Speaker of the House.
- The Boston Massacre is steeped in myth. It does not represent a skirmish between redcoats and patriots. This had happened many times. The facts reveal that five Americans died and six other were wounded. But the fight was intentionally started by the Americans who roamed the city at night armed with clubs and rocks looking for a confrontation. The myth of the British mowing down a group of peaceful civilians was nothing but propaganda. But what is remarkable to Prof. Shenkman, is that we celebrate the event with pride.
- The Boston Tea Party incident has been taught since grade school, one in which Americans were forced a tax on tea and thus they rebelled dumping British Tea overboard. Their freedoms, it is said, were being infringed upon. The story is filled with stirring details; colonist dressed as Indians calling themselves Mohawks with a mysterious code of silence by its participants. It is very misleading. What is generally held is that colonists feared the effect of British taxes but in reality the Tea Act reduced the duty of British tea imported to America. What is not brought up is that other teas were being smuggled in from Holland by American merchants like John Hancock. Three fourths of the tea sold in Colonial America was being smuggled. The Boston Tea Party was organized to save America’s smugglers from economic competition. It was the rich that opposed Parliament; the small tax increases had little impact on the average American.
- Usually associated with the Revolution is the slogan “Taxation without representation is tyranny”. The facts reveal that Americans were unrepresented in the legislatures at home and in Parliament. In Virginia only 6 percent owned enough land to be entitled to vote. In Massachusetts it was 16 percent and only 4 percent exercised the right. In Philadelphia only 2 percent could vote.
- The George Washington/Valley Forge story is riddled with myth. The story repeated is that the soldiers there nearly froze and starved to death and the men were so naked they left their bloody footprints in the white

snow. Washington warns Congress of this awful deprivation and the dangers of the army “dissolving” or “dispersing”. The myth is that the winter was less severe than other winters and that there was considerable food in December, January and February. The army was supplied each month with a million pounds of flour and a million pounds of meat and fish; thus, each soldier was allotted 3 pounds of flour and 3 pounds of meat or fish per day. The idea that they went “naked” stems from a misunderstanding of the eighteenth century use of the term. Then it meant not going without proper clothing. Washington clearly orchestrated this fabricated propaganda to get more money for Congress.

- While Americans believe that elections in the past have always been conducted fairly and honestly with little manipulation, many have been won by cunning and fraudulent means. Such are the cases of William Henry Harrison in 1840 and John Kennedy in 1960. More interesting are elections involving lesser offices; these were won by candidates who dispensed the most alcohol including George Washington’s run for a seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1778. Historians note that the successful outcome was determined by 144 gallons of rum, beer, wine and punch. He obtained 307 votes or 2 gallons of alcohol for every vote gotten.
- Pirates are usually portrayed as fiends or terrorists of the seas by the print and visual media. The truth is that pirates did not terrorize innocents, they robbed them. They actually had a democratic and representative system among themselves. When a ship was captured, the captain was judged according to how he treated his men. Their victims did not walk the plank. They merely threw them overboard. Nor were they uncivilized; they provided for the lame and the poor; they compensated sailors who were injured and limited the powers of the captain with a majority role on all major decisions. Everyone’s pay was the same as everybody else.
- Americans believe that Tokyo Rose to be one of the worst villains if not criminals of World War II. The U. S. tried and convicted her of treason in 1949. The facts reveal another picture. She was “a helpless and hapless young Japanese American girl, Iva Toguri, who has been stranded by the war in Japan.” She did broadcast on Radio Tokyo but she was made to by the Japanese because she spoke good English. She never denounced her U. S. citizenship. She did not have a sweet, seductive voice but rather sounded more like Gracie Allen of old. The content of her broadcasts did not demoralize the troops. In fact they were slyly orchestrated by an Australian POW to comfort the troops. The Japanese never caught on according to Prof. Shenkman. It was discovered much later that witnesses

against her were told to lie by the U. S. Occupation Police. When flown to San Francisco for trial, “they were told what to say and what not to say for two hours every morning for a month before the trial started.” Even the judge ordered the jury to leave out virtually all of the arguments of Toguri’s lawyer. The jury foreman later admitted that they would have acquitted her had it not been for judge’s instructions. The same occurs for the Germans with Axis Sally or Mildred Gillars of Maine who clearly did commit treason. . In one of her broadcasts she blurts: “Damn Roosevelt! Damn Churchill! Damn all the Jews who have made this war possible.” Although she was convicted after the war, no one wants to remember her. As one historian stated: “Axis Sally was White and Tokyo Rose was Asian. That surely had something to do with it.” Another manipulation based on Nationalism and Politics, the two greatest barriers of a pluralistic democracy.

## **Top 10 Myths About Thanksgiving**

**By Rick Shenkman**

Mr. Shenkman is the editor of History News Network.

### **MYTH # 1**

#### **The Pilgrims Held the First Thanksgiving**

To see what the first Thanksgiving was like you have to go to: Texas. Texans claim the first Thanksgiving in America actually took place in little San Elizario, a community near El Paso, in 1598 -- twenty-three years before the Pilgrims' festival. For several years they have staged a reenactment of the event that culminated in the Thanksgiving celebration: the arrival of Spanish explorer Juan de Onate on the banks of the Rio Grande. De Onate is said to have held a big Thanksgiving festival after leading hundreds of settlers on a grueling 350-mile long trek across the Mexican desert.

Then again, you may want to go to Virginia.. At the Berkeley Plantation on the James River they claim the first Thanksgiving in America was held there on December 4th, 1619....two years before the Pilgrims' festival....and every year since 1958 they have reenacted the event. In their view it's not the *Mayflower* we should remember, it's the *Margaret*, the little ship which brought 38 English settlers to the plantation in 1619. The story is that the settlers had been ordered by the London company that sponsored them to commemorate the ship's arrival with an annual day of Thanksgiving. Hardly anybody outside Virginia has ever heard

of this Thanksgiving, but in 1963 President Kennedy officially recognized the plantation's claim.

## **MYTH # 2**

### **Thanksgiving Was About Family**

If by Thanksgiving, you have in mind the Pilgrim festival, forget about it being a family holiday. Put away your Norman Rockwell paintings. Turn off Bing Crosby. Thanksgiving was a multicultural community event. If it had been about family, the Pilgrims never would have invited the Indians to join them.

## **MYTH # 3**

### **Thanksgiving Was About Religion**

No it wasn't. Paraphrasing the answer provided above, if Thanksgiving had been about religion, the Pilgrims never would have invited the Indians to join them. Besides, the Pilgrims would never have tolerated festivities at a true religious event. Indeed, what we think of as Thanksgiving was really a harvest festival. Actual "Thanksgivings" were religious affairs; everybody spent the day praying. Incidentally, these Pilgrim Thanksgivings occurred at different times of the year, not just in November.

## **MYTH # 4**

### **The Pilgrims Ate Turkey**

What did the Pilgrims eat at their Thanksgiving festival? They didn't have corn on the cob, apples, pears, potatoes or even cranberries. No one knows if they had turkey, although they were used to eating turkey. The only food we know they had for sure was deer. 11(And they didn't eat with a fork; they didn't have forks back then.)

So how did we get the idea that you have turkey and cranberry and such on Thanksgiving? It was because the Victorians prepared Thanksgiving that way. And they're the ones who made Thanksgiving a national holiday, beginning in 1863, when Abe Lincoln issued his presidential Thanksgiving proclamations...two of them: one to celebrate Thanksgiving in August, a second one in November. Before Lincoln Americans outside New England did not usually celebrate the holiday. (The Pilgrims, incidentally, didn't become part of the holiday until late in the nineteenth century. Until then, Thanksgiving was simply a day of thanks, not a day to remember the Pilgrims.)

## **MYTH # 5**

## **The Pilgrims Landed on Plymouth Rock**

According to historian George Willison, who devoted his life to the subject, the story about the rock is all malarkey, a public relations stunt pulled off by townsmen to attract attention. What Willison found out is that the Plymouth Rock legend rests entirely on the dubious testimony of Thomas Faunce, a ninety-five year old man, who told the story more than a century after the *Mayflower* landed. Unfortunately, not too many people ever heard how we came by the story of Plymouth Rock. Willison's book came out at the end of World War II and Americans had more on their minds than Pilgrims then. So we've all just gone merrily along repeating the same old story as if it's true when it's not. And anyway, the Pilgrims didn't land in Plymouth first. They first made landfall at Provincetown. Of course, the people of Plymouth stick by hoary tradition. Tour guides insist that Plymouth Rock is THE rock.

### **MYTH # 6**

#### **Pilgrims Lived in Log Cabins**

No Pilgrim ever lived in a log cabin. The log cabin did not appear in America until late in the seventeenth century, when it was introduced by Germans and Swedes. The very term "log cabin" cannot be found in print until the 1770s. Log cabins were virtually unknown in England at the time the Pilgrims arrived in America. So what kind of dwellings did the Pilgrims inhabit? As you can see if you visit Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts, the Pilgrims lived in wood clapboard houses made from sawed lumber.

### **MYTH # 7**

#### **Pilgrims Dressed in Black**

Not only did they not dress in black, they did not wear those funny buckles, weird shoes, or black steeple hats. So how did we get the idea of the buckles? Plimoth Plantation historian James W. Baker explains that in the nineteenth century, when the popular image of the Pilgrims was formed, buckles served as a kind of emblem of quaintness. That's the reason illustrators gave Santa buckles. Even the blunderbuss, with which Pilgrims are identified, was a symbol of quaintness. The blunderbuss was mainly used to control crowds. It wasn't a hunting rifle. But it looks out of date and fits the Pilgrim stereotype.

### **MYTH # 8**

#### **Pilgrims, Puritans -- Same Thing**

Though even presidents get this wrong -- Ronald Reagan once referred to Puritan John Winthrop as a Pilgrim -- Pilgrims and Puritans were two different groups. The Pilgrims came over on the *Mayflower* and lived in Plymouth. The Puritans, arriving a decade later, settled in Boston. The Pilgrims welcomed heterogeneousness. Some (so-called "strangers") came to America in search of riches, others (so-called "saints") came for religious reasons. The Puritans, in contrast, came over to America strictly in search of religious freedom. Or, to be technically correct, they came over in order to be able to practice *their* religion freely. They did not welcome dissent. That we confuse Pilgrims and Puritans would have horrified both. Puritans considered the Pilgrims incurable utopians. While both shared the belief that the Church of England had become corrupt, only the Pilgrims believed it was beyond redemption. They therefore chose the path of Separatism. Puritans held out the hope the church would reform.

### **MYTH # 9**

#### **Puritans Hated Sex**

Actually, they welcomed sex as a God-given responsibility. When one member of the First Church of Boston refused to have conjugal relations with his wife two years running, he was expelled. Cotton Mather, the celebrated Puritan minister, condemned a married couple who had abstained from sex in order to achieve a higher spirituality. They were the victims, he wrote, of a "blind zeal."

### **MYTH # 10**

#### **Puritans Hated Fun**

H.L. Mencken defined Puritanism as "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy!" Actually, the Puritans welcomed laughter and dressed in bright colors (or, to be precise, the middle and upper classes dressed in bright colors; members of the lower classes were not permitted to indulge themselves -- they dressed in dark clothes). As Carl Degler long ago observed, "The Sabbatarian, antiliquor, and antisex attitudes usually attributed to the Puritans are a nineteenth-century addition to the much more moderate and wholesome view of life's evils held by the early settlers of New England



# Top 10 Immigration Myths and Facts

## Myth Fact Source

### 1. *Immigrants don't pay taxes*

All immigrants pay taxes, whether income, property, sales, or other. As far as income tax payments go, sources vary in their accounts, but a range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes. Even undocumented immigrants pay income taxes, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers), which grew \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998.

National Academy of Sciences,  
Cato Institute,  
Urban Institute,  
Social Security Administration

### 2. *Immigrants come here to take welfare*

Immigrants come to work and reunite with family members. Immigrant labor force participation is consistently higher than native-born, and immigrant workers make up a larger share of the U.S. labor force (12.4%) than they do the U.S. population (11.5%). Moreover, the ratio between immigrant use of public benefits and the amount of taxes they pay is consistently favorable to the U.S., unless the "study" was undertaken by an anti-immigrant group. In one estimate, immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in taxes, and use about \$5 billion in public benefits. In another cut of the data, immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the amount of government services they use.

American Immigration Lawyers Association,  
Urban Institute

### 3. *Immigrants send all their money back to their home countries*

In addition to the consumer spending of immigrant households, immigrants and their businesses contribute \$162 billion in tax revenue to U.S. federal, state, and local governments. While it is true that immigrants remit billions of dollars a year to their home countries, this is one of the most targeted and effective

forms of direct foreign investment.

Cato Institute,  
Inter-American Development Bank

*4. Immigrants take jobs and opportunity away from Americans.*

The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900s coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth. Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers, and foreign-born students allow many U.S. graduate programs to keep their doors open. While there has been no comprehensive study done of immigrant-owned businesses, we have countless examples: in Silicon Valley, companies begun by Chinese and Indian immigrants generated more than \$19.5 billion in sales and nearly 73,000 jobs in 2000.

Brookings Institution

*5. Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy*

During the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, filling gaps left by native-born workers in both the high- and low-skill ends of the spectrum. Immigrants fill jobs in key sectors, start their own businesses, and contribute to a thriving economy. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually. As Alan Greenspan points out, 70% of immigrants arrive in prime working age. That means we haven't spent a penny on their education, yet they are National

Academy of Sciences, Center for Labor Market  
Studies at Northeastern University,  
Federal Reserve

1 Due to welfare reform, legal immigrants are severely restricted from accessing public benefits, and undocumented immigrants are even further precluded from anything other than emergency services. Anti-immigrant groups skew these figures by including programs used by U.S. citizen children of immigrants in their definition of immigrant welfare use, among other tactics. transplanted into our workforce and will contribute \$500 billion toward our social security system over the next 20 years.

*6. Immigrants don't want to learn English or Become Americans.*

Within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. Greater than 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens; given increased immigration in the 1990s, this figure will rise as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization in the coming years. The number of immigrants naturalizing spiked sharply after two events: enactment of immigration and welfare reform laws in 1996, and the terrorist attacks in 2001.

U.S. Census Bureau,  
U.S. Department of Homeland  
Security (Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services)

*7. Today's immigrants are different than those of 100 years ago.*

The percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born now stands at 11.5%; in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was approximately 15%. Similar to accusations about today's immigrants, those of 100 years ago initially often settled in mono-ethnic neighborhoods, spoke their native languages, and built up newspapers and businesses that catered to their fellow émigrés. They also experienced the same types of discrimination that today's immigrants face, and integrated within American culture at a similar rate. If we view history objectively, we remember that every new wave of immigrants has been met with suspicion and doubt and yet, ultimately, every past wave of immigrants has been vindicated and saluted.

U.S. Census Bureau

*8. Most immigrants cross the border illegally*

Around 75% have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25% that are undocumented, 40% overstayed temporary (nonimmigrant) visas.

INS Statistical Yearbook

*9. Weak U.S. border enforcement has led to high undocumented immigration.*

From 1986 to 1998, the Border Patrol's budget increased six fold and the number of agents stationed on our southwest border doubled to 8,500. The Border Patrol also toughened its enforcement strategy, heavily fortifying typical urban entry points and pushing migrants into dangerous desert areas, in

hopes of deterring crossings. Instead, the undocumented immigrant population doubled in that timeframe, to 8 million—despite the legalization of nearly 3 million immigrants after the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986. Insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the U.S., compared with the number of jobs available to them, have created this current conundrum.

Cato Institute

10. *The war on terrorism can be won through immigration restrictions.*

No security expert since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 has said that restrictive immigration measures would have prevented the terrorist attacks—instead, the key is good use of good intelligence. Most of the 9/11 hijackers were here on legal visas. Since 9/11, the myriad of measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have netted no terrorism prosecutions. In fact, several of these measures could have the opposite effect and actually make us less safe, as targeted communities of immigrants are afraid to come forward with information. Newspaper articles, various security experts, and think tanks

Prepared by the National Immigration Forum, June 2003

## **TERROR MYTHS**

The worldwide spread of terrorism -- and the media coverage of it -- leads to some fantastical thinking these days. Myth often replaces reality when it comes to such a scary subject, and the fact that we are in a presidential season only adds to the noise machine.

Here are three of the major myths about terrorism, often repeated in the media.

1. The Wall. We need a 600-mile wall between us and Mexico to protect us from Al Qaeda. Republican candidate Tom Tancredo is running an ad in which a terrorist slips across the border to do us lethal harm.

Is this possible? Sure. Likely? No. Imagine you are Ahmed the terrorist. You have an engineering degree, like Mohammed Atta, and you live in Frankfurt Germany. Are you going to schlep to Tijuana and try to swim the Rio Grande or starve in the desert for days with a pack of other sweaty illegals?

Of course not. You will get a student visa to Canada, where you will rent a car, drive to some spot in the 450 miles of wilderness patrolled by four Mounties, and simply walk or drive across the border. Or maybe you'll just buy a boat with an outboard motor and cross the river above Niagara Falls, where you are not likely to be spotted, because nobody is keeping an eye on the river.

Or maybe you'll just sign up with a German travel agency for a charter flight to Vegas with senior citizens from Dusseldorf. You have a legal passport and no criminal record, so no problem. You'll play the slots, cruise the buffet at the Luxor, go to a drag show, and take in the late show by Wayne Newton. Then you will simply get on a bus and vanish into some major city somewhere.

2. The Jack Bauer scenario. Reality will resemble the TV show 24, where every few episodes Kiefer Sutherland captures a terrorist at the last minute as he is about to blow up a shopping mall, detonate a bomb etc, etc. It's the scenario mentioned most by those who defend torture. There's a nuke in NYC set to go off in an hour and you've got to get the truth out of the one bad guy you've captured.

Possible, of course, but again, not very plausible. In fact, most foiled plots are disrupted fairly early on, through good police work, solid intelligence, international cooperation, alert citizens and really dumb plotters. The guys who planned a shooting rampage at Fort Dix sent videos of their training exercises to a local video store to get them put on DVDs. An alert clerk saw the pictures of these guys running through the Poconos woods screaming "Jihad!" and alerted the police. Since the Poconos are littered with resorts that advertise heart-shaped Jacuzzis, these videos really did stand

out from the rest of the pack.

The Canadian jihadis who planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament trained in the woods, and afterwards cleaned up in the bathroom of a popular doughnut chain, where they attracted the attention of authorities. Who knew jihad and jelly doughnuts went together? (A young Canadian Muslim engineer then went undercover with the group and was key to foiling the plot. )

In fact, the one Hollywood scenario that is the most probable comes from Tom Clancy and *The Sum of All Fears*. Terrorists simply load a nuclear device onto a ship inside a container, and send it off to Baltimore, where it blows up sitting on the dock.

OK, they probably wouldn't really pick Baltimore. Can you imagine Osama in his cave saying to Al Zahawari, "We will cripple the American devils by wiping out The Baltimore Orioles and the Edgar Allen Poe museum in one mighty blow. (Kudos to Ted Turner, for putting millions into the Nuclear Threat Initiative when he realized that after the end of the Cold War, the United States and Russia still had thousands of nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert, and that governments were not moving to address the danger. )

3. Hi Tech Masterminds: Terror attacks are complicated high-tech schemes directed by a brilliant criminal mastermind. Or so Hollywood would have you believe. (Think Alan Richman in *Die Hard*, Gary Oldman in *Air Force One*. The latter is great Hollywood high-concept stuff. But who would try to hi-jack *Air Force One* when you could easily grab a nuclear plant where the Wackenhut guards would sleep through the whole attack (as recent news headlines attest.)

In fact, low tech has been the hallmark of the most successful terror attacks. A bunch of guys with box cutters pulled off 9/11. A major American city, Washington, D.C., was utterly paralyzed for days by one psychotic adult and a teenaged boy in a Chevy

with a high-powered rifle. One unknown terrorist (or nut) used a few envelopes and a bunch of stamps to send deadly anthrax through the mails. The delivery methods for this attack probably cost less than 50 bucks and were purchased right under the smiley face of Mr. Zip.

A couple of British doctors tried to bomb a London night club and crashed into an airport in Scotland, failing to harm anybody seriously except themselves. This gives one pause about the British Health Service. Would you want these guys taking out your appendix?

*Boston University Journalism professor Caryl Rivers is the author of "Selling Anxiety: How the News Media Scare Women."*

## **Rick Shenkman: How Are Lawyers Like Politicians?**

Lawyers have to appeal to juries the way pols have to appeal to voters. And often they follow a similar approach. Ask a good lawyer how they win over a jury and they'll say you have to create a narrative the jurors can easily follow. That's just what pols have to do too. I can remember when I was an investigative reporter in Salt Lake City the lead prosecutor in a complicated bribery case told me her greatest challenge was making the convoluted connections between the defendants understandable. It wasn't easy. I doubt whether many jurors at the end of the case had a clear grasp of the case she was making. It involved a security company hired by a utility that contracted with an independent coal operator. So right off the bat jurors had to keep straight who the players were, how these companies interacted, and who was bribing whom to get what. I had reported on the case for a couple of years at my TV station. Some anchors and producers never figured out the relationships even though I did story after story. I am sure many viewers were confused as well.

Like I said politicians face the same challenge as that prosecutor. But with one difference that's paramount. You can't squeeze all of America's voters into a jury box to hear your opening and closing statements and to watch a parade of witnesses. So when you create a narrative it's got to be more than simple and easy to understand. It's got to be so compelling that even people who catch just a smattering of your opening get what you are saying and sympathize with your point of view. So how do you do that? Pols do it by playing off of American myths. Myths aren't lies, though often they include false assumptions and misinformation. Myths are actually pictures of the world in which we live and our place in it. They tell us who we are and what values we cherish. In a contest between the truth and the myth the myth always wins because facts are next to nothing compared with a myth, which lies deeply buried in our unconscious.

Here's where my book comes in. Because voters are beholden to myths they are susceptible to manipulation. The more ignorant voters are about the facts the more easily they can be misled. Ignorant voters are therefore sitting ducks for wily pols who play on myths. This is what happened during the past few years. The Bush administration used myths to appeal to voters. The facts didn't matter until the failures became so overwhelmingly inescapable that finally people had to face them.

What myths did the administration employ? They used the Hitler myth. Hitler of course was real. But the comparison of Saddam and Hitler was not real. But once people came to see Saddam as Hitler all kinds of synapses went off in their heads that made them susceptible to the administration's fear-mongering. By tying Saddam with 9-11 the administration was able to make a convincing case for war.

The consequence was that voters paid little heed to facts. One study by the University of Maryland found that nearly 60 percent of Americans were convinced that Saddam Hussein was helping Al Qaeda when we undertook our invasion. A majority based their support for the war on this flagrant misunderstanding. Fifty percent of Americans continued to believe Saddam was behind 9-11 even after the 9-11 Commission set the record straight.

Lawyers sometimes have bad juries who don't pay attention to facts even after they have taken pains to lay them all out one after another. Imagine how much greater the challenge is to get voters to follow the facts then!

Were politicians angels we wouldn't have to worry. But they're not. So we need smart voters. Alas, they don't make up a majority.



## The Religious Affiliation of First U.S. President George Washington

President George Washington was an Episcopalian. He was a member of the Episcopal Church, the American province of the Anglican Communion, which is a branch of Christianity, and which is usually classified as Protestant.



Washington and the family he was raised in were originally Anglicans. The Episcopal Church was not officially founded as a separate province within Anglicanism until 1789, *after* the American colonies proclaimed independence from Great Britain. Prior to the American Revolutionary War, the Episcopal Church was part of the Church of England, so Washington was originally a member of the Church of England.

While he was President, Washington attended Christ Church (an Anglican/Episcopalian congregation) in Philadelphia.

George Washington has frequently been described as a "Deist." Washington is not known to have described himself using this word, nor is he known to have been a member of any Deist organizations. Some writings by George Washington indicate Deist beliefs; other writings indicate non-Deist beliefs.

Although he was an Anglican and an Episcopalian, Washington reportedly did not take communion and was not considered an official "communicant" (full-fledged adult church member).

It is generally agreed upon that Washington's beliefs could be described as "deist" during at least part of his life. Deism for Washington, as with most historical figures classified as deists, was never an actual religious *affiliation*, but was a classification of theological belief. As nearly all major political figures from Washington's era can be described as "deists" if a sufficiently broad definition is used and if the correct quotations are selected, classifying Washington as a Deist may not be particularly useful or distinctive.

Although the Episcopal Church is the only denomination Washington ever attended with any regularity, he was not particularly dedicated to the denomination nor did he have a strong Anglican or Episcopalian self-identity. During Washington's era there was no real notion that he was a "non-Christian," and his denominational affiliation certainly placed him well within "mainstream"

Christianity at the time. But Washington's religious beliefs could be classified as relatively broad and non-specific. His disinterest or disbelief in some mainstream Protestant Christian beliefs have led later (usually partisan) commentators to label Washington as "non-Christian."

George Washington was identified as an Episcopalian by the *1995 Information Please Almanac*; the Library of Congress; and *A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the United States Constitution* by M. E. Bradford. *Memoirs & Correspondence of Thomas Jefferson, IV*, page 512 was cited as the source stating that Washington was a "theist." (Source: Ian Dorion, "Table of the Religious Affiliations of American Founders", 1997).

From: Robert G. Ferris (editor), *Signers of the Constitution: Historic Places Commemorating the Signing of the Constitution*, published by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service: Washington, D.C. (revised edition 1976), pages 214-218:

Peerless military leader of the War for Independence, able chairman of the Constitutional Convention, brilliant first President, and wise statesman, Washington more than any other man launched our Republic on its course to greatness. For these reasons, he clearly deserves the epithet "Father of His Country."

Washington enjoyed only a few years of retirement at Mount Vernon... He died at the age of 67 in 1799. In his will, he emancipatd his slaves.

From: Rick Shenkman, "An Interview with Jon Butler ... Was America Founded as a Christian Nation?", posted 20 December 2004 on History News Network website (<http://hnn.us/articles/9144.html>; viewed 30 November 2005):  
*Mr. Butler, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences at Yale University, is the author of Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People (Harvard University Press, 1990). This interview was conducted by HNN editor Rick Shenkman for The Learning Channel series, "Myth America," which aired several years ago...*

[Interviewer:] *Let's go through some of [the Founding Fathers]. George Washington?*

[Jon Butler:] George Washington was a man for whom if you were to look at his writings, you would be very hard pressed to find any deep, personal involvement with religion. Washington thought religion was important for the culture and he thought religion was important for soldiers largely because he hoped it would instill good discipline, though he was often bitterly disappointed by the discipline that it did or didn't instill.

And he thought that society needed religion. But he was not a pious man himself. That is, he wasn't someone who was given to daily Bible reading. He wasn't someone who was evangelical. He simply was a believer. It's fair, perfectly fair, to describe Washington as a believer but not as someone whose daily behavior, whose political life, whose principals are so deeply infected by religion that you would have felt it if you were talking to him.

...The principal Founding Fathers--Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin--were in fact deeply suspicious of a European pattern of governmental involvement in religion. They were deeply concerned about an involvement in religion because they saw government as corrupting religion. Ministers who were paid by the state and paid by the government didn't pay any attention to their parishes. They didn't care about their parishioners. They could have, they sold their parishes. They sold their jobs and brought in a hireling to do it and they wandered off to live somewhere else and they didn't need to pay attention to their parishioners because the parishioners weren't paying them. The state was paying them.

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Originally Posted: Mon, 22 May 09:25 PDT

# Top 5 Myths About America

RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION  
LIBERALS VS CONSERVATIVES  
THE MEDIA: LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE  
U.S. RANKING WORLDWIDE  
HUMANITARIAN RANKING

SOURCE: CRAIGS LIST

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- Date: 2006-05-22, 9:25AM PDT

MYTH 1: The US was founded on Christian principles.

TRUTH:

This is incorrect.

The Constitution never once mentions a deity, because the Founding Fathers wanted to keep their new country "religion-neutral." Our Founding Fathers were an eclectic collection of Atheists, Deists, Christians, Freemasons and Agnostics.

George Washington, the Father of our country, and John Adams (Second President of the USA) CLEARLY stated in the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli: "The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian Religion."

G.W. rarely attended church and instead followed a popular 18th century philosophy called Deism—a philosophy that believed in a cosmic energy or universal "Force." The dictionary says that Deism is "a system of thought advocating natural religion based on human reason rather than revelation," that had nothing to do with Christian principles.

James Madison, original mastermind of our Constitution, was an Atheist to the core who loved skewering Christianity. In 1785 he wrote, "What have been [Christianity's] fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution."

Thomas Jefferson, who sat down and authored The Declaration of Independence, rarely missed an opportunity to laugh at Christianity. In a letter to John Adams in 1823, he wrote: "The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus...will

be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

In 1814, Tommy J. wrote about the Bible's Old and New Testaments, "The whole history of these books is so defective and doubtful -- evidence that parts have proceeded from an extraordinary man; and that other parts are of the fabric of very inferior minds."

In fact, it was President Jefferson himself who first wrote (to a Baptist church group in 1802), "The First Amendment has erected a wall of separation between Church and State." Therefore, when Jefferson talked about "Nature's God," the "Creator" and "divine Providence" in the Declaration that he wrote, and referring to a general cosmic energy-- not the Christian God.

America is not a Christian nation. Our Constitution derived from the post-Christian Enlightenment values of reason and truth

MYTH 2: US Conservatives tend to be patriotic, ethical Americans; liberals tend to hate America and are immoral.

TRUTH:

Liberals aren't the traitors to America. In fact, it is conservatives who insist on sending American troops into the Iraqi slaughterhouse. Most of them could care less about our troops, no more than Mao or Stalin cared about the safety of their own soldiers. In the neocons' view, these young boys and girls are expendable test dummies. They're dying for virtually nothing, so that the Bush Admin can make good on their campaign promises to their special interests from the petroleum and infrastructure-rebuilding industries. By revving up the Arab threat, these MFs can scream "national security" and "freedom" as smokescreens, while getting their hands on a diminishing resource: Middle Eastern fossil fuels, which power everything from your lightbulbs and computer that you leave on all night, to your needless gas-guzzler pickup truck.

Pro-war conservatives are the traitors to America. With only 29% of the public approving of Bush's policies now, it took a full 5 years for America to finally wake up in bed next to this disgusting fact.

Do liberals hate America? No, in fact they care so much about the USA that they fight so aggressively to make it better. They're not anti-American; Do liberals hate American policies? Sometimes, but only the self-destructive ones that threaten human rights, liberty, democracy, justice, inquiry, excellence and reason-- the values that our country was founded upon.

As for conservative moral superiority? Think of the child-molesting priests,

money-scamming televangelist preachers, Jack Abramoff's friends in the Bush Admin, gay-hating Jesus lovers, the Christians who beat up the professor who opposed intelligent design, human rights violators like Lynndie England and her Abu Ghraib officer pals, Tommy "Scandal-icious" Delay, Scooter "Leaky" Libby, the entire K Street Project meant to hire only Republicans, FEMA's Michael "Yer doin' a heckuva job" Brownie, and so on.

A propos, conservative Red states have a divorce rate 27% higher than the liberal Blue states, the per capita rate of violent crime in Red states is 49 per 100,000 higher than in Blue states, the top 5 states with the highest rates of alcohol abuse are Red states, and the per capita rate of gonorrhea in Red states was 41 per 100,000 higher than in the Blue states who stand for "ethical," "God-fearing" conservative with "traditional family values."

MYTH 3. The US has a liberal media.

TRUTH:

The US media is a mix of liberal, centrist and conservative voices. Also, the US media is largely owned by 10 corporations who frequently push pro-conservative agendas to the American public. Evidence:

1. Even Republican Pat Buchanan confessed, "For heaven sakes, we kid about the liberal media, but every Republican on earth does that." Neo-conservative pundit Bill Kristol also said, "I admit it: the liberal media were never that powerful, and the whole thing was often used as an excuse by conservatives for conservative failures."
2. A 2005 study in the Quarterly Journal of Economics found that "coverage by public television and radio is conservative compared to the rest of the mainstream media." Why? Partly because only four major corporate networks control American TV news-- up to 75% of the audience share. The "Big 10" media conglomerates who control the bulk of the entire US media are: AOL Time Warner, Disney, General Electric, News Corporation, Viacom, Vivendi, Sony, Bertelsmann, AT&T and Liberty Media. Yes, we have National Public Radio, but compare its public reach to that of Canada's CBC and the United Kingdom's BBC.
3. Eighty percent of all US newspapers are owned by corporate chains.
4. Liberals are virtually non-existent on talk radio stations nationwide
5. Conservatives are very well accomodated for across FOX News, the Wall

Street Journal, the Washington Times, the New York Post, the American Spectator, the Weekly Standard, the Drudge Report, the National Review, etc. Even so-called "bastions of liberalism," e.g. the NY Times, MSNBC, WashPost and NPR make a concerted effort to be "fair and balanced" by bringing in right-wing views like those of David Brooks, Joe Scarborough, Tucker Carlson, Charles Krauthammer and Cokie Roberts to have their say in these forums, respectively. This is in stark contrast to FOX News' claims to unbiased objectivity, which were easily demolished by Robert Greenwald in 2004.

6. Contrary to what some paranoid Republicans claim, most journalists are centrists, not liberals. A representative sample of 141 US journalists and bureau chiefs were asked in 1998, "On social issues, how would you characterize your political orientation?" Answers: Left 30%, Center 57%, Right 9%, Other 5% . Next question, same sample: "On economic issues, how would you characterize your political orientation? " Answers: Left 11%, Center 64%, Right 19%, Other 5%. Also, look at the total number of think tank citations in major newspapers, radio and TV transcripts: Conservative TTs: 7792, Centrist TTs: 6361, Liberal TTs: 1152.

7. Eric Alterman summarizes a 1999 research study from the academic journal Communications Research: "Four scholars examined the use of the 'liberal media' argument and discovered a fourfold increase in the number of Americans telling pollsters that they discerned a liberal bias in their news. But a review of the media's actual ideological content, collected and coded over a twelve-year period, offered no corroboration whatever for this view."

MYTH 4. The US doesn't need improvement compared to other countries; it is the greatest country in the world.

TRUTH:

Wrong again. I'll only cite the statistics here.

USA Ranking on Adult Literacy Scale: #9  
(#1 Sweden and #2 Norway)- OECD

USA Ranking on Healthcare Quality Index: #37  
(#1 France and #2 Italy)- World Health Organization 2003

USA Ranking of Student Reading Ability: #12  
(#1 Finland and #2 South Korea)- OECD PISA 2003

USA Ranking of Student Problem Solving Ability: #26  
(#1 South Korea and #2 Finland)- OECD PISA 2003

USA Ranking on Student Mathematics Ability: # 24  
(#1 Hong Kong and #2 Finland)- OECD PISA 2003

USA Ranking of Student Science Ability: #19  
(#1 Finland and #2 Japan)- OECD PISA 2003

USA Ranking on Women's Rights Scale: #17  
(#1 Sweden and #2 Norway)- World Economic Forum Report

USA Position on Timeline of Gay Rights Progress: # 6 (1997)  
(#1 Sweden 1987 and #2 Norway 1993)- Vexen

USA Ranking on Life Expectancy: #29  
(#1 Japan and #2 Hong Kong)- UN Human Development Report 2005

USA Ranking on Journalistic Press Freedom Index: #32  
(#1 Finland, Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands tied)- Reporters Without Borders 2005

USA Ranking on Political Corruption Index: #17  
(#1 Iceland and #2 Finland)- Transparency International 2005

USA Ranking on Quality of Life Survey: #13  
(#1 Ireland and #2 Switzerland)- The Economist Magazine ...Wikipedia "Celtic Tiger" if you still have your doubts.

USA Ranking on Environmental Sustainability Index: #45  
(#1 Finland and #2 Norway)- Yale University ESI 2005

USA Ranking on Overall Currency Strength: #3 (US Dollar)  
(#1 UK pound sterling and #2 European Union euro)- FTSE 2006....the dollar is now a liability, so many banks worldwide have planned to switch to euro

USA Ranking on Infant Mortality Rate: #32  
(#1 Sweden and #2 Finland)- Save the Children Report 2006

USA Ranking on Human Development Index (GDP, education, etc.): #10  
(#1 Norway and #2 Iceland)- UN Human Development Report 2005

So much for those "socialist" Europeans and those "backward" Asians, hm?  
We can do better than this.

Miscellany:

\*Only 18% of Americans own passports and bother to travel outside of the US.



- \* 85% of US soldiers in Iraq believe that they are there to get revenge for 9/11.
- \* New international student enrollment in US grad schools has decreased by 6%, because of xenophobic post-9/11 US visa restrictions, jacked-up tuition fees and better educational opportunities in the EU and Asia. So no, not everyone wants to come here anymore, because it's become a land of incredibly limited opportunity, and we've lowered our educational standards.

MYTH 5: The US government loves to help other countries.

TRUTH:

This is a myth. The US government tends to be motivated by interests, not humanitarian principles.

Denmark gives the most amount of its GDP (1.01%) to developing countries; Norway gives 0.91%; the Netherlands give 0.79% and so on until the end of list, where the USA sits. Yes, America ranks DEAD LAST in foreign aid at a pathetic 0.1% of its GDP, compared to the other 21 nations listed as developed nations. The idea that the US government is a heroic bunch that runs around the world helping the poor and the disempowered is not backed up by the evidence. We have one of the stingiest governments on earth.

Most Americans believe the US spends 24% of its budget on aid to poor countries; the actual amount is well under a quarter of 1%. Our country also ranks #5 on asylum-seeker acceptance rates (#1 is Denmark and #2 is Canada).

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

**SOURCE:** *Mestizo: The History, Culture and Politics of the Mexican and Chicano*

**DISCUSSION:** Liberals and Conservatives, Dawn of XX Century Mexico

“The history of Mexico, (as Pedro Henríquez Ureña has noted,) is divided into two classes: (1) honest rogues and (2) decent thieves. The liberals belong to the honest rogues, the conservatives or imperialists belong to the decent thieves. One major danger always present is with those that mask themselves as progressives and revolutionaries, when in reality, they are conservatives, lacking in the spirit of change. The latter want to maintain the status quo, the plutocracy and desire to leave the oppressive structures intact.” All of the great philosophers and thinkers have recognized that the only inevitable certainty on this earth is change, thus, one need to recognize this universal reality. To think that Mexico, the United States or the Soviet satellites would have the same political or philosophical form in the future is to be closed, conservative and myopic; As Jesús Silva-Herzog has stated: “Living...is action in motion, a happening and there cannot be an event or an activity without change, because change is the essence of the activity or event.”