



Stupid History: Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions Throughout the Ages

Leland Gregory

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Why exactly is Paul Revere revered? Was the lightbulb really Thomas Edison's bright idea?

* Best-selling author Leland Gregory employs his masterful wit to expose historical myths, faux "facts," strange events, and tales of human stupidity throughout history.

If it would shock you to learn that Benjamin Franklin didn't discover electricity, you'll appreciate this take on hundreds of historical legends and debacles. Historians and humorists alike may be surprised to learn that:

* Samuel Prescott made the famous horseback ride into Concord, not Paul Revere.

* As a member of Parliament, Isaac Newton spoke only once. He asked for an open window.

* On April 24, 1898, Spain declared war on the U.S., thus starting the Spanish-American War. The U.S. declared war the very next day, but not wanting to be outdone, had the date on the declaration changed from April 25 to April 21.

With these and many other stories, leading humorist Leland Gregory once again highlights both the strange and the funny side of humankind.

Stupid History: Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions Throughout the Ages Details

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

Bettie? says

1* from Stephanie

SheLove2Read says

This is basically a book of little known historical facts and anecdotes. While some of the entries are interesting and even enlightening, the majority of the book is written in a "humorous" way that detracts from the enjoyment of the book, for me at least.

Dusty Craine says

I liked this book. I'm a big fan of stupid random trivia. Some of the facts in this book are things I had read before but it was a very interesting, quick compilation of those strange facts.

I'm reviewing the ebook version here too, and I have to say that this edition of the book is horribly converted. There are typos all over the place, bad OCR recognition in other places and at one place or another the conversion is so bad that I couldn't even figure out what was trying to be said.

It was definitely worth it's Free Friday price tag but I may have bristled had I paid anymore than .99 cents for this book. Do yourself a favor and borrow it from the library or a friend via LendMe, if that's possible.

Monique says

so far i'm not impressed - incomplete research, pointless opinions and don't get me started on the typo's.

George says

AMUSING TO SILLY.

‘Stupid History: Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions Throughout the Ages,’ by Leland Gregory was a “Free Fridays” free NOOKbook from B&N.com, and worth every penny I paid for it. It is a collection of ‘historical’ trivia tidbits—more than a hundred of them—ideally sized and suited for reading on the ‘john’. [Although, I do admit to some trepidation in submitting my eReader to such a humid environment.]

It's hard to complain about the 'quality' of a 'free' book, but I will mention, by way of warning, that this one is rife with annoying typos—e.g. every time the number two is indicated it is spelled 'too'.

Recommendation: An absolute "must read" for all historical trivia nerds who would delight in knowing that "The Battle of Bunker Hill was actually fought on Breed's Hill.."—(page 48). For all others, there's not much to be missed here.

B&N NOOKbook, 368 pages

Stephanie (Reading is Better With Cupcakes) says

Yes, I did read the whole thing. I found it rather, well, stupid.

The tidbits of history were ok, I learned a couple of neat things.

However, the humor the author attempted was over done and rather lame. Top that with the HORRIBLE editing of the book, and you have a rather lame read.

Someone should have taught his editor that when you mean 2 things, you spell it as 'two' not as too. Also, a 'v' should not be replaced with 'u'. So many errors, it was hard to read.

I don't know if these errors are a part of the paperback edition as I read the ebook one.

I would not waste your money on the ebook edition (I thankfully got it for free). It isn't worth it.

Sarah Sherrin says

All in all, it was a fun and quick read. Some of his facts were spot on and other were left to interpretation of what actually happened. I'm glad I was able to read it, but might not be picking it up again for a while.

Nate says

Pretty entertaining, and I'm a sucker for tales of historical misconceptions, but there are a few glaring problems with this book.

First, a couple of tales that he presents as "fact" are misleading. For example, an early tale in the book states that Lizzie Borden, famous axe murderer, was actually unanimously found innocent by the jury, implying that the famous rhyme about her is just a historical misconception. However, there is a big difference between a "not guilty" verdict and actual innocence. It is widely believed that her defense attorney was able to manipulate the sexist views held by jurors of the time (1893) to play into their view that there was no possible way this sweet young woman could have committed the crime. The judge also excluded her unsuccessful attempt to purchase cyanide shortly before the murders, and her entire original inquest testimony. At the time of her arrest, police noted that she was eerily calm and did not seem to exhibit any

shock or sadness at the brutally axe-murdered bodies of her parents. In short, at best her guilt is questionable, and it's certainly interesting that a jury found her innocent, but to present that verdict as a "look, she was actually innocent" tale is such an incomplete picture that it's dishonest.

Second, another of his supposed "facts" is in reality just a conservative rant about the Constitution disguised as fact. He states that there is no separation of church and state because that specific phrase does not appear anywhere in the Constitution, gives his own opinion on the policy justification for the establishment clause, then states that "no one, not even the courts, takes the time to read it." Yeah, okay. Clearly the members of the Supreme Court analyze and interpret the Constitution without even bothering to read what it is they are interpreting and Leland, a comedy writer, understands the Constitution better than they do. He's not a lawyer, he doesn't understand constitutional law, and he needs to knock it off with the backseat lawyering. The question of how far the language "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" should go is a thorny and controversial one, but no matter what your view, you can't just take your viewpoint (in his case, a strict constructionist one) and state it as fact. Aside from that, through the interpretation of the Supreme Court, the Constitution gives a whole lot of rights that are not explicitly stated, and in all likelihood were not contemplated by the founders. That whole "implied rights" thing, like the right to privacy, which came out of *Griswold v. Connecticut* and served as the basis for *Lawrence v. Texas* and *Roe v. Wade*. Whether you agree with them or not, under current US law, the Constitution does in fact provide us with these implied rights, even though the Constitution doesn't explicitly set them out.

Third, he doesn't cite authority. For anything. Considering his track record with the above tales, and the fact that he retold well-known urban legend 911 calls as actual 911 calls in some of his other books, I don't really trust all of his unsourced and unlikely stories as fact.

Despite all this, it's an entertaining book, and the majority of it is probably true, hence the 2 stars rather than 1. I would just recommend taking the tales with a grain of salt unless you have the time to think about and verify them with your own research.

Stephanie says

Lots of stupid history told in a snarky and unlikeable tone. No thank you....

Benjamin Sobieck says

How much does a typo matter to you?

If it's in fiction - and the writing is otherwise top notch - my response is, "Who cares?"

But what if it's non-fiction? Does it change how you view the information?

That was the boondoggle "Stupid History," by Leeland Gregory, presented. I downloaded it to my Nook as part of a Free Friday promotion from Barnes & Noble.

I don't want to be a jerk and say something like, "I'm glad it was free." But I definitely don't want to pay for

editing this bad. For all I know, it wasn't the author's fault. He probably burned himself out on research and passed the editing to a third party, who did a shoddy job.

I don't know that's the case. I do know one thing: The historical trivia was entertaining to read. The quick entries about, well, stupid history trivia make essential reading for a Walking Encyclopedia of Worthless Information like me. Or if you hang your e-reader next to your toilet paper - unlike me.

However, the information may be rendered extra worthless if it's not accurate. The numerous typos throughout "Stupid History" force me to consider this. Much of the trivia I'd heard before, and I knew was accurate. As for the rest, that's up to you, dear reader.

Be careful. You might end up learning some "stupid history" yourself.

Brandon_C1 says

Extremely funny and completely butchered my knowledge in history

Michelle (In Libris Veritas) says

The title is a fair warning to all, this is in fact stupid. I'll accept that this is a bias opinion because I knew most of these "tales" already but it has its problems. Some of the entries in this book aren't even tales, they are just random facts that have nothing to do with history. Another weak point is the fact that there are no sources listed anywhere in this book, I understand that people can have a plethora of information on their own but it would have helped the creditability of this a lot more. Also there were quite a few spelling errors that were repetitive and drove me crazy and the longer you read the more the author begins to insult everything. The positive is that each entry is short and to the point, so it catches your attention and doesn't bog you down with tons of information. It's also a fairly quick read if you like history.

Shannon Renee says

This was a free ebook for my nook. It really lived up to the name stupid. It was just filled with non-sense information. Some were funny, some made you think, and some made you want to roll your eyes and slap the author. This will not be a re-read but is ok if you're bored out of your mind.

Sean O'Hara says

The title doesn't lie. This is a book of stupid, easily disproven trivia, often with an absurd Amerocentric or Eurocentric slant. Among the highlights:

* It's impossible to fight in chariots since the reins require two hands. Luckily ancient cultures were smart enough to design -- get this -- chariots with room for passengers. Gregory claims Hollywood invented this "myth" -- apparently in his world, Homer was a script writer, considering the numerous examples of chariot

battles in the Iliad.

* Lizzie Borden didn't kill her parents. The evidence for this claim -- why she was acquitted. Just like Klaus von Bulow and OJ Simpson.

* Horseshoe crabs "are survivors of a species that became extinct 175 million years ago." Leaving aside the question of how this is "history," how exactly can an extinct species have survivors? Maybe he means that they're descended from a species that is now extinct, but then so are humans.

* He gives a really garbled interpretation of what the Emancipation Proclamation accomplished, followed by that Lincoln quote that neo-Confederates like to throw around because, removed from context, it makes Lincoln sound like a political opportunist who didn't care about slavery.

* "On November 8, 1918, the United Press Association reported that Germany had signed a peace agreement, thereby bringing World War I to an end.... But the story was wrong. It all started when someone, now believed to be a German secret agent, called the French and American intelligence offices to report that Germany had signed an armistice.... The war didn't officially end until June 28, 1919, with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles[sic]." Technically correct, but otherwise wrong. Fighting on the Western Front ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, 1918 -- this is the event commemorated in America as Veterans Day, and known in the rest of the world as, yes, Armistice Day. The news report was three days premature, not seven months. And the treaty of Versailles didn't end the war -- it set the terms of peace between Germany and the Anglo-French alliance. There were many more powers involved with the war, and as many treaties ending the conflicts between each country.

* An account of the 1657 fire in Edo (which Gregory anachronistically calls Tokyo) based upon legend instead of fact.

* "August 8, 1945, two days after the US Army Air Force dropped the nuclear bomb Little Boy on Hiroshima and one day after Fat Boy [sic] devastated Nagasaki, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. By doing so, the Soviets were able to partake of the spoils of the Pacific war without actually having to fight in it." The second bomb was Fat *Man*, and it was dropped on August 9, the day *after* the Soviets declared war. But far more importantly, the Soviets *did* fight against Japan in the week between their declaration of war and Japan's surrender -- and in fact, many historians argue that their entry into the conflict was as important to Japan's capitulation as the nuclear strikes.

* He gives a silly explanation of the phrase "sow wild oats," placing its origins in the Middle Ages, when in fact it dates back to antiquity.

* A story about a newspaper that accidentally included a picture of John Wayne Gacy in an article about National Clown Week. A quick google turns up lots of references to the story but no original source -- a classic hallmark of an urban legend.

* He gives a ludicrous account of the Emperor Claudius' death. Too bad no one knows what happened to Claudius -- most historians agree he was murdered, but how, or even where, is a matter of conjecture. Gregory's account is based upon just one of the contradictory versions found among ancient sources.

* "On April 24, 1898, Spain declared war on the United States.... The United States declared war the very next day but, not wanting to be outdone, had the date of the declaration of war read April 21 instead of April 25." April 21 was the day the US declared a blockade against Cuba; Congress backdated the declaration to

give post hoc legitimacy to what had been an act of war.

* He repeats the story of Davd Rice Atchison who was allegedly President for one day. The tale is based upon the fact that in 1849 inauguration day fell on Sunday and Zachary Taylor decided to delay his oath for one day. Okay, if Taylor didn't become President on March 4, 1849 because he didn't take the oath, how did Atchison become President if he didn't take the oath either? A careful reading of the Constitution will show that Taylor did in become President on March 4, but couldn't exercise his powers until he took the oath the next day.

* Several examples of battles that didn't take place at the site they're named after. Okay, so what? Land battles are usually named for the strategic objective or a notable landmark in the vicinity.

* Several stories of nuclear bombs being involved in crashes and miraculously not detonating. Nukes are finicky devices -- if they don't go off in a very particular way, there will be no nuclear reaction.

* He claims the term "flea market" comes from the Dutch term for valley market and has nothing to do with fleas. No, it's a direct translation of a French term meaning, "flea market."

* He says sauerkraut was renamed "liberty cabbage" in World War II. Close -- that happened in WWI.

* A downright racist story about the Emperor Menelik II ordering electric chairs be installed in Ethiopia without realizing they needed electricity. Ho, ho, ho, those stupid darkies and their savage ignorance. Gregory must imagine Menelik as something out of a Tarzan movie -- a guy in a loincloth and necklace of bones presiding over primitives from his grass hut. A little googling shows how stupidly offensive this story is.

* He repeats the legend of the Great Military Leader who grew tired of his soldiers wiping snot on their coat sleeves and ordered buttons sewn on to stop them. The story is normally attributed (without source) to Frederick the Great, but Gregory pins it to Napoleon -- *during his campaign against Russia*. Because it's not like the quartermasters had anything better to do than sew superfluous buttons on hundreds of thousands of uniforms.

* "The confusion about Napoleon's size arose because after his autopsy, it was reported that he measured five feet two. The problem is, he was measured based on the old French system of pied de roi ... which was shorter than the modern foot." Do the math. If Gregory's facts are correct (hah!), Napoleon would be *shorter than 5'2* in modern units.

Jon says

2.5 stars

I didn't laugh and I barely smiled. Most of the trivial historic oddities I already knew. A handful were uncommon but in poor taste (I put it down to 'guy humor' and moved on). Very light quick read, perfect for wasting time on a muggy summer evening.

Ebook Formatting Critique: I downloaded this book as one of Barnes & Noble's Free Friday offerings for the Nook Color in June 2011. I thought a book published just four years ago, in the 21st century, would have

been transferred to electronic format with fewer errors. The errors I cringed upon while reading looked like typical OCR (optical character recognition) errors missed by the software (requiring human intervention) from scanned hard copy. I find that inexcusable since the book most likely existed as an electronic document before printing to paper. Even more inexcusable if these same errors occur in the print book.
