

What does each country claim for its own?, greatest hits

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A little while back, I invited readers to describe what students are taught (or end up believing) are the greatest contributions of their country. Many people strayed from the “what students are taught” part of the exercise, but I didn’t mind too much as long as you were funny.

Here are some of my favorites:

Representing Greece is Pi, who writes,

In Greece I was also taught that Greeks invented democracy. Other than that Greeks are supposed to have laid the groundwork for the development of philosophy, mathematics, physics, biology and pretty much every other greek named thing as a science (except for economics).

Greeks claim to have organized the first olympic games some 2800 years ago. And back then there was some guy named Homer whose stories are still read today occasionally. He was also the template for the creation of a character in the Simpsons.

The sad thing is that my compatriots often think they are cool by default because of these things and they don’t have to accomplish anything by themselves.

Dan reminds us that

| Sweden is pretty proud of Dynamite (Alfred Nobel), and the safety match.

I enjoy that juxtaposition. Do you use a safety match to light your dynamite?

For France, we have bahbar (who pseudonym is a reference to another great French contribution to humanity):

| – beheadings (just kidding)

Rafael Vargas points out a Spanish invention that is very important to students:

| chupachups

Rob points out that some inventions can be used for evil:

| – the first moving picture was shot in Leeds, West Yorkshire, though by a Frenchman (so we're not responsible for Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle).

Leonardo Brondani Schenkel adds an important Brazilian contribution I had overlooked:

| Pelé

Dan summarizes how all these claims are manifested on Wikipedia:

| “John Doe was an Italian-born[1] Jew[2] of Dutch[3] and Lithuanian[4] descent who was raised in Canada[5] and lived in Argentina for several years as an adult[6]. He is perhaps best known for inventing the belly-button-lint remover[citation required].”

JS Bangs points out one of Romania's great contributions for which it doesn't get enough credit:

| [W]e defeated the Turks over and over, and thus kept the Ottomans from raping and pillaging their way all the way to France. So we like to take credit for the survival of Western Europe.

Canadian Ens happens to mention “the CanadArm” in an extensive list of Canadian inventions. From what I can tell, Canadians are taught that NASA's job is to launch the CanadArm into space so it can move stuff around.

Zheng Hua was the first of many to call out the Four Great Inventions of ancient China which students are drilled in from a young age.

Omer van Kloeten explains the Israeli approach:

| In Israel we pretty much take credit for every invention ever made by any Jewish person in the 5000 year history of the religion.

| Also, even though it's not inventions, we celebrate the fact that we survived (which for us is the same as “won”) the wars of 1947, 1956, 1967, 1969, 1973, etc. while mostly being heavily outnumbered.

I remember it being explained to me by a Jewish friend that nearly all Jewish holidays are based on a celebration of the fact that “They didn't kill all of us!”

Laurent points out a common theme: A country will claim credit for the deeds of an immigrant, and will also claim credit for the accomplishments of somebody who was born in the country but made the discovery while an expatriate. Heck, I wouldn't be surprised if there

was a case of a country who claimed credit for somebody who merely stopped in the country to have lunch.

A South African friend mentioned to me privately that South African are taught that their country invented the Kreepy Krauly pool vacuum cleaner and the dolos.

Glenn S tells us what Norway is proud of. It's too long to quote here, but it's worth reading because, unlike many other people who posted lists of accomplishments, Glenn's is written with the right sense of humor, playfully acknowledging that some of the claims may not be entirely fair.

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