

# What does each country claim for its own?

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One of the things that fascinates me is how each country's view of history is clouded by its own chauvinism. I was reminded of this when researchers were able to reconstruct the original recording from a phonautograph which predated Edison's phonograph, thereby adding another claim to the mix of who invented sound recording.

I think the most contentious invention belongs to human flight. It seems that every country on the planet has a claim to being the pioneer in this field. I'm particularly amused that both France and Brazil claim Alberto Santos-Dumont as their own. Failure is an orphan.

When I visited Portugal, I asked one of the professors, "What is it that students in Portugal are taught is Portugal's greatest contribution to humanity?"

The professor had to stop and think for a while before formulating an answer.

"Portugal has not fared very well of late economically. Our best years were long ago. I would say that our greatest contribution was our accomplishments during the Age of Discoveries."

My question to you, dear reader, is to tell us what students in your country are taught are your country's greatest achievements, or alternatively, what students believe them to be. These beliefs need not be based in fact. I'm more interested in what it is that people *want you to believe* whether or not it's actually true.

For starters, here's my list of what students are taught (or end up believing) are the great accomplishments of the United States:

- Democracy (even though it existed for millennia prior, and some might argue whether what we have today still counts as one)
- Powered flight (The Wright Brothers)
- The telephone (Alexander Graham Bell)
- The light bulb, phonograph, and motion pictures (Thomas Edison)
- The camera (George Eastmann)
- The elevator (Elisha Otis)
- The automobile (Henry Ford)

Many of these are contested, and two of them are flat-out wrong: Elisha Otis did not invent the elevator, but he made them popular in the United States thanks to safety improvements. Similarly, Henry Ford did not invent the automobile but he made them popular and affordable in the United States by using an assembly line.

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