

THE CHANGED HISTORY SERIES

FAMOUS PHONIES



LEGENDS, FAKES, AND FRAUDS WHO
CHANGED HISTORY

BRIANNA DUMONT

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Author's Note

This book isn't about rewriting history. I don't want to obliterate anybody's beloved Bard. But this book is about *expanding* history. Let's leave it to the scholars in their ivory towers to debate the finer points of oral transmission in Ancient Greece, or how many ruffled Elizabethan actors it took to write a bawdy joke. Their job is to argue all day. My job is to bring those arguments down from the tower and give a new side to an old face. Taking the stuffiness out of those debates is just a bonus, because I truly believe history is the greatest subject out there, and it deserves some loosening of the collars. All of the research is their work; I just read all their books and tried to stay as accurate as possible in a world built around contradictions. Apologies to all my historian friends if I glossed over one too many of their finer points in my quest to write a really great children's book!

“History would be a wonderful thing, if only it were true.” — Tolstoy



enter at your own risk

Introduction

Caution: Extremely Controversial

If you're looking for witty sayings by Confucius or electrifying tales of George Washington's brilliance you've got the wrong book. Sure, those famous guys are in here, but it'd be dull as rocks to rehash stuff you've already learned. Besides, there's something those other books didn't tell you about these fabulously famous figures. They never existed.

Ah, got your attention, did I?

It's not as easy as all that, of course. Your teachers aren't out to scam you so don't throw out your history books just yet. As usual, the truth isn't black and white. Many of the figures in this book were real people. They lived and breathed, just like you and me. Only, they weren't exactly the brilliant figures we learn about in school. Some were fake; some were phony; and some were just plain made up. The people who were once real have been crushed by their own legends long ago. Today, we actually think the legends are the real deal.

They aren't.

This book isn't trying to get rid of anybody's beloved Bard or peace-loving cannibal, but it is trying to expand your knowledge about history. So if controversy makes your skin tingle and mysteries make your head ache, this may not be the book for you. It's chock full of both. But if you want to know who really wrote Homer's epics, or how Shakespeare could possibly be a big, fat phony, then dive in and enjoy another side of history's movers and shakers.

Chapter

1

Confucius

Man of Many Sayings

Lived: Sixth century BCE, China

Occupation: The Great Teacher

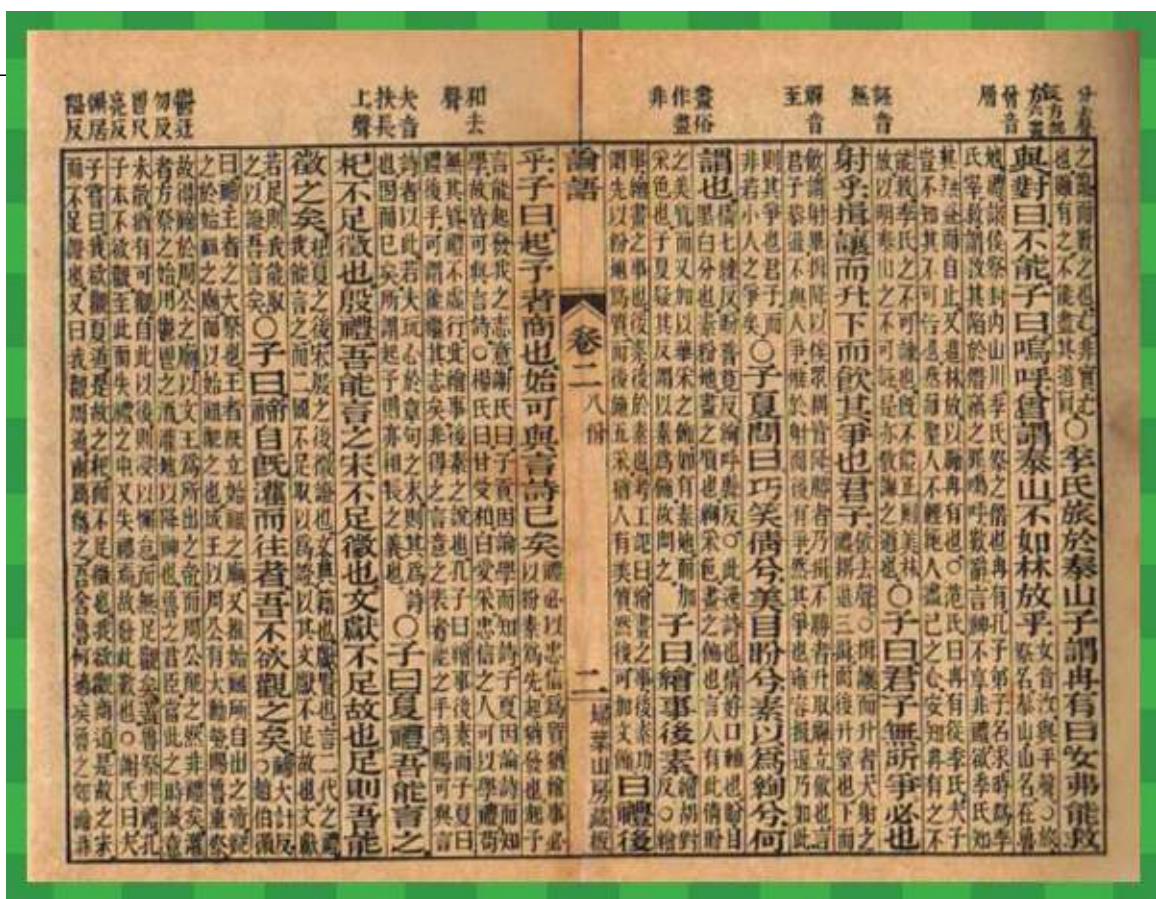
Way More Popular than Bieber

Today, Confucius would rule the Twitter-sphere with all his pithy sayings, just as he ruled ancient China's word game. Instead of "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself," today Confucius's quips would be more like: ***B4 U EMBARK ON A JOURNEY OF REVNGE, DIG 2 GRAV***. But hey, the message is still there.

Confucius lived at the same time as other great thinkers, such as Thales in Miletus and Buddha in India. Maybe it was something in the water. In any case, the sixth century BCE churned out more great thinkers than Harvard has churned out presidents.

After people in China realized the potential of the great stuff coming out of Confucius's mouth, they started flocking to him. Some say that over three thousand disciples followed him around the country. Many scholars believe it was probably closer to seventy-two (although that's even suspicious). Still, that's an impressive number before things like Twitter and Facebook could help get the word out about the new guy in town.

Confucius's sayings were gathered together in a book called the *Analects*.



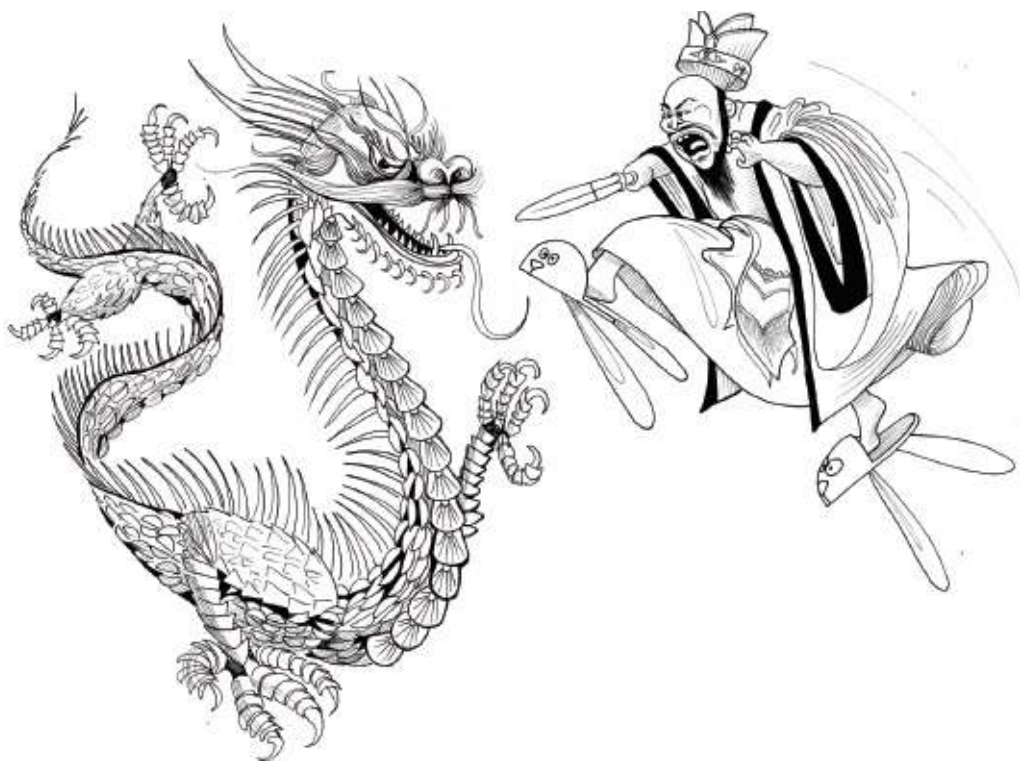
The Analects: just don't call them an autobiography.

The *Analects* brims with useful aphorisms—short blurbs about the best ways to live, work, and learn. At least, that's what the history books tell us. But in reality, most of these sayings weren't written down until a century after Confucius lived. Not only that, but much of what we know about Confucius's life was compiled decades, and even centuries, after his death.

Who's to say this guy wasn't some old fraud?

Well, if he was, it wasn't his fault. After Confucius died in 479 BCE, his followers started "remembering" all the great things he did: Thought up hundreds of brilliant sayings; invented a new philosophy; stood over nine feet tall; slayed a fire-breathing dragon while wearing fuzzy, pink bunny slippers. Done, done, and done.

Okay, maybe not that last one, but you can see how easily his reputation snowballed. Everyone wanted to turn this man into a legend. Maybe they just felt bad for ignoring him during his lifetime.



It isn't easy being awesome.

Confucius Who?

So, what's the story behind the most influential man in Chinese history? With thousands of followers or at least a few dozen, he was probably handsome and well-spoken, right? Not really. History tells us that he was ugly and grotesquely tall, which sounds like a troll. Even his future biographers didn't try to sugarcoat the truth about his appearance—but they also had no problem bending the facts to make Confucius seem better than he probably was.

Take his birth, for instance. Legend says his birth was divine, an answer to a prayer his mother made every night before bed. If she had a son, Confucius's father promised to marry her. Hence his name **Kong**, which means “an utterance of thankfulness when prayers have been answered.”

Kong:

Confucius is the Westernized version of Kong Fuzi, which means Master Kong, and is only one of the many ways to say his name in Chinese.

Lengthy in English, but it works in Chinese. Legend also says he was over nine feet tall. Sure, he was probably a giant for his time—around six feet—but that's likely it. As for being ugly? His biographers say his head was so disfigured it could make kids cry. Okay, there's no documentation of any kids actually crying when they saw him, but they might have.

We do know that Confucius's dad had at least two wives, which would be frowned upon today but was all good back then. However, neither one of those women was Confucius's mother. Even though his prayers had been answered, Confucius's dad still hadn't married his mom, who was, in fact, a fifteen-year-old girl. It gets worse. A few years after Confucius's birth, his dad died, and his wives kicked the girl and baby Confucius to the street without much more than a “don't let the door smack you on your way out.”

As a result, Confucius grew up poor and illegitimate. To get by, he did menial jobs like watching livestock. But he was smart—too smart for the other kids in his town. Even worse, they all knew it, too. While the other children played war games, Confucius hung out by himself or with other old souls. A.K.A. old men.

Finally, a local duke noticed him. How could he not notice a six-foot-tall kid with a weird head? After he got over Confucius's odd looks, the duke noticed something else—Confucius was sort of smart, unlike his peers. The duke put him in charge of some granaries, which was actually a pretty impressive gig since grain was used as money in sixth-century BCE China. What wasn't so impressive was having to count out tiny beads of grain all day. What Confucius really wanted—and what he spent his whole life trying to get—was a government position.

Confucius eventually settled down, married, and had some kids, all while wishing he could get into politics. He had this grand idea for China that he wanted to see come to life. Confucius lived during the Spring and Autumn Period—a precursor to the Warring States Period, whose name pretty much sums up the time—and for most of his life, the country was embroiled in chaos between the various warring lords.

Confucius wanted a peaceful, stable, and fair China. So he did the noble thing. He abandoned his wife and children and set out to teach people to honor their ancestors and to live humbly and righteously.



Confucius and his followers—all four of them (Japan).

World Peace through World Domination

For the rest of his life, Confucius traveled the country looking for rulers to promote him to a government position. Unfortunately, very few of them listened to him, probably because Confucius always shot himself in the foot by saying stupid things. Instead of the benign, jolly sage that legends teach us about, the actual Confucius didn't seem to understand people at all. When he met a ne

ruler, his first question would be: “Can I be your master?” Most princes and dukes threw him out right then and there.

But that didn't discourage Confucius from asking more leaders to follow him. He even found a few who would listen and let him teach them, but then he messed up those opportunities, too. As soon as he got a prince's or duke's ear, he had a bad tendency to say things like, “An oppressive government is worse than a man-eating tiger.” And man-eating tigers were no joke in his day. His new students usually exiled him after that.

So Confucius roamed all over China, collecting followers but no royal students. He didn't take rejection well, either. When asked to comment on men higher up in the government food chain, he replied, “Pah! These puny creatures aren't even worth mentioning.”

It takes one to know one.

Luckily for Confucius, the lords refrained from removing his head, but they also didn't give his misshapen head a job. So when he wasn't insulting dukes, he enjoyed hitting poor people with his cane and telling them to just die already. Maybe it made him feel better. His disciples, who were supposed to convert others to Confucius's way of thinking, weren't exempt from his anger, either. After his disciple Ran Qiu failed to convince his own ruler to act more ethically, Confucius got harsh with Ran Qiu. “He is no longer my disciple,” he supposedly said. “Beat the drum, my little ones, and attack him: you have my permission.” Which almost sounds like the Wicked Witch of the West ordering her flying monkeys to attack the unsuspecting Dorothy and her friends.

governor:

Much debated. Maybe he did hold public office as the Minister of Crime, saw how ineffective it was, and developed the idea of ruling with virtue to set an example for everyone to follow.

As a result of his nasty personality, the actual Confucius had very little influence over others during his lifetime. But that just wouldn't do for his followers, so they decided to jazz things up after Confucius's death. His followers claimed that he was a **governor** and that crime virtually disappeared during his tenure. Being a governor would've been the perfect gig for Confucius to prove the truth of his ideas. Although, it probably never happened.

Sure, he was bitter. It'd be hard not to be after spending your whole life trying to teach people the best way to live while they refused to be taught. But he tried to make the best of a bad situation. He insisted to others “not to be upset when one's merits are ignored: is this not the mark of a wise man?”

Confucius died at the age of seventy-two (there's that suspicious number again), and even on his death bed, he was still asking people if they would let him rule over them. He knew China would never be peaceful and stable with blockheads in charge, and in his opinion, they were all blockheads. He considered his life a total failure. It'd just be one more kick in the pants if he'd known that by the fourth century BCE people thought he should have been king.

His followers knew it, though, and they kept traveling and writing, trying to spread the word about Confucius. That's when the embellishments to his life story started. It was as if they were trying to use Bedazzler on Confucius to make him way cooler (and sparklier) than he was. They also glossed over the nasty bits about him, which helped him rise in esteem throughout the country. There are three different versions of Confucius, and you can take your pick: the humble sage, the politically motivated sage, or the warrior sage, but each one was constructed centuries after his death.

But just when Confucianism began to take root, the Qin dynasty took control of China. The leader ordered all books on Confucius burned. He also ordered that Confucius's followers be burned, too.

It turned out okay, though. The Qin's were soon overthrown, since, well, they were kind of brutal and the Han dynasty took their place. The Hans happened to be big fans of Confucius and put all of his principles into the government. They even made Confucianism the main philosophy of China.

The Han set the stage for how all subsequent dynasties would rule. Turns out, Confucius had the last laugh after all.

junzi:

A superior person; an individual who is morally noble and an example to others, typically a male. Sorry, ladies. Women usually got the short stick when it came to equality in the sixth century BCE.

Study Confucius, Live Long Life

So what were Confucius's principles? Mostly, he taught how to live as a *junzi* in order to create a good and peaceful China. If people (including rulers) lived virtuously, then their subjects would follow the example—so the thinking goes.



If Confucius saw all the temples and statues to him today, he'd probably faint. Or whack people with his cane. Either way, he'd be excited.

And no, the principles are not just punch lines used in bad Chinese parodies starting with “Confucius says . . .”.

In order to rule, emperors had to have the Mandate of Heaven. **Tian** gave emperors their authority

rule, meaning their power and legitimacy came directly from above—unless they didn't follow Confucius's principles or behave like the early sage emperors (like Huangdi!—see chapter 11).

Then, *Tian* took the Mandate away, and the emperor could then be justifiably overthrown. It was exactly what Confucius always wanted in life: emperors following everything he said, exactly as he said it. He would've been so excited.

Tian:

Heaven.

Some of the ideas of Confucianism were rather progressive, like how positions should be given based on merit and not birth. Others weren't as forward thinking. For example, women didn't really matter until they became someone's wife, and then, Confucius tells them to obey their husbands and to walk on the opposite side of the street from men. Unfortunately for many Chinese women, this type of thinking defined their role in the world for hundreds of years to come.

At the heart of Confucianism are five core values—*Rén, Li, Yi, Zhi, and Xin*—and these dictated the way the Chinese ruled for *centuries*. They're that important. Confucianism is a very complicated system involving loyalty, kindness, and respect. But at the core of Confucianism lie *Rén* and *Li*.

Like a nineteenth-century Victorian gentleman, *Rén* is about propriety—always the right behavior for the right situation, especially when it comes to interacting with other people. *Rén* is sometimes translated as “benevolence,” because it requires trying to see things from another person's point-of-view and then doing what's best for them. Picture Confucius beating poor people who never contributed to society—they needed to know their place; that's what was best for them. In all seriousness, though, *Rén* is the recognition that we need to be kind to others because we all live in a community and are connected to those around us by important relationships.

The Five Basic Relationships of Confucianism

Confucianism is big on our relationships to others. Here are his top five relationships, with the most important person mentioned first, of course:

1. Ruler to Ruled
2. Father to Son
3. Husband to Wife
4. Elder Brother to Younger Brother
5. Friend to Friend

The trick was to know your place in this ruling system. A son always respects the father, and hopefully, the father will be deserving of that respect. But in Confucianism, the father doesn't have to be nice or kind to his son. He can even abandon his son, like Confucius did, and that son must still respect him. As you can see, it's good to be an old man in this scheme. Kind of like Confucius.

Li is about rituals—and boy was Confucius big on rituals. If you want to be a *junzi*, you have

respect social rituals in the proper way. These customs determine how one should drink tea, honor one's ancestors, and even govern a country. By practicing rituals down to the tiniest detail, you discipline your mind and your body to think and act in the right way. Pretty deep, huh?

Top Five Confucius Sayings (That Would Totally Rule Twitter)

Confucius has so many great sayings it's hard to choose the best ones, but here are a few:

1. Man with one chopstick always goes hungry.
2. He who laughs last thinks slowest.
3. He who lives in glass house, dress in basement.
4. Man who farts in church sits in his own pew.

Just kidding. Those are bad “Confucius says” jokes. Here are some real Confucian sayings directly from the *Analects*:

1. To see the right and not do it is to lack courage.
2. When anger rises, think of the consequences.
3. When one rules by means of virtue it is like the North Star—it dwells in its place and all others turn towards it.
4. Do not be concerned that no one may recognize your merits. Be concerned that you may not recognize others’.
5. If you study but don't think, you'll be lost. If you think but don't study, you'll get into trouble.

Making a Legend

Yes, a man named Confucius lived and breathed fresh Chinese air in the sixth century BCE. But he certainly wasn't the sweet, wise teacher who had a pithy saying in his back pocket for every situation. That phony version of Confucius can only be attributed to his followers. After Confucius died, they raced for their pens and wrote down as many of his sayings as they could remember. They probably also invented a lot of new ones along the way. Then, they got walking. They traveled across China, spreading their form of Confucianism until it started trending.

As a result of his followers' efforts, Confucius's legacy is as important as any of the other great world teachers. You can't discuss what it means to be Chinese without discussing Confucianism. For over two thousand years, Confucianism was the official philosophy of China, meaning millions and millions followed his teaching. Until the twentieth century, any student who wanted even a basic government position had to pass an exam on Confucian principles—to make sure they knew how to govern properly.

It took a while, but a wise man once (supposedly) said, “It does not matter how slowly you go, so long as you do not stop.” Fortunately for Confucius, his followers listened carefully to his words—even if they made some of them up in the first place.

Chapter

2

George Washington

His High Mightiness

Lived: Eighteenth century CE, America

Occupation: Commander-in-Chief, first President of the United States

How to Look Like a Hero

It's time to take everything you think you know about George Washington and throw out at least half of it. You can start with his appearance. He was freakishly tall at six-foot, three-inches, had a pockmarked nose from smallpox, auburn (red) hair, and was built like a quarterback. The white-haired elderly gentleman we know from the dollar bill didn't come until much later.

Washington was no dummy, though, so don't worry about that. He knew his role in the United States of America would be too great for people not to be interested in his life. So he made sure to dot his i's and cross his t's. He even admitted as much when he said, "I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent."

In other words, he knew he had better at least have the shiny veneer of a hero, unlike his actual veneers, which weren't shiny at all.



Scary enough for Halloween.

Before he was unanimously elected as general of the Continental Army (sort of), before he led the Americans to victory at Yorktown (kind of), before he graciously came out of retirement to become the first president and set the course for the new country (somewhat), George Washington was just a small-time farm boy with no professional education and a chip on his shoulder the size of Virginia.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

We won't even talk about the obvious fake myths surrounding George Washington, like his wooden teeth or the infamous cherry tree incident. Sure, Washington's terrible teeth could scare a zombie, but they weren't wooden. They were made from the pearly whites of humans and hippos. And he certainly could tell a lie. That sly old fox constantly covered up his secrets and misdeeds. His life depended on lying his red head off to Congress and to the British. Mostly because the entire British Empire wanted to kill him, and if they ever captured him or if the war was lost, Washington would have gotten a traitor's death—hanged, drawn and quartered.

Bagging Bald Eagles

George considered it a good day when he was able to hunt. In true aristocratic fashion, foxes were his favorite prey, but he also got pretty excited when he shot five bald eagles and five mallard ducks in one day in 1768. For a man always worried about his historical reputation, bagging bald eagles didn't faze him. Then again, they weren't endangered yet like they are today, and the United States of America wasn't even a twinkling in his eye.



This will never go out of style!

He also wasn't the down-to-earth, calm hero everyone thinks he was. Washington tended more towards the pretentious side of Virginia aristocracy. Instead of shaking hands, he preferred to bow and would stare you down until you retracted your hand from his presence. Don't even dream of actually patting him on the back, either.

And his temper was explosive when he couldn't contain himself, although he usually could. Thomas Jefferson remembered one time in particular when George went crazy. He threw off his hat and stomped on it in a temper-tantrum most three-year-olds would envy.

George had good reasons to put on airs and fight for what he wanted. He had a lot to prove. No less than five deaths made it possible for him to become the legend we know and love. As the first son of his second wife, Washington was entitled to little of his father's wealth. But with the deaths of his father, his older brother, his older brother's wife, his future wife's first husband, and his stepdaughter, Washington suddenly found himself rolling in the **dough**.

dough:

Money. Although his face wasn't on those bills yet.

Without money, Washington wouldn't have been Washington.

Hey, it takes a lot of gold to properly clothe His High Mightiness—as he once suggested a president should be called, before deciding on the more democratic, Mr. President.

Although he came from humble beginnings, George had more refinement and class in his little pinkie than the king of England had in his whole palace. At least that's what George thought. As soon as he came into some money, George made sure everyone else thought that, too.

When calling upon the Continental Congress to boycott all imported goods from Britain prior to the Revolutionary War, he was secretly ordering carriages, fancy clothing, guns, and Wedgwood pottery from London for his own personal use. At another meeting of Congress, he called for the end of slavery, then went home and bought himself some more slaves. (He preferred buying girls, so they could have kids and give him even more slaves. A sort of two-for-one deal.)

Yes, Washington was a ball of contradictions. Even in politics he wasn't always a smooth operator. He went behind people's backs, argued, and sulked. It wasn't until later in life that he learned how to hide his temper under a cool exterior. Sometimes.

Puppet Master

Washington was a master when it came to fooling people. His early career is loaded with a long list of misdeeds, including:

1. Letting his men fire the shot that started the French and Indian War.
2. (Accidentally) admitting to assassinating a French diplomat.
3. Setting up a fort in a terrible location leading to its defeat.
4. And marching against a superior force, losing, and blaming it on others.

Second Continental Congress:

Representatives from the twelve colonies who gathered to complain about Britain. The Declaration of Independence was signed at this gathering too, on July 4, 1776—exactly twenty-one years to the day a young George Washington lost his first fort.

So his first command was a dismal failure. To top it off, he quit his position because he kept getting passed over for promotion. Weird. Somehow, he still came out smelling sweeter than a rose by the time the **Second Continental Congress** needed a military leader for their army. (To be fair, there weren't a lot of military men to choose from. Most of the representatives from the colonies were politicians, not fighting men.)

When the French and Indian War ended, Washington was still a young guy trying to move up in a hierarchical society. After trying his hand at the military and finding "something charming in the sound of bullets" whizzing past his ears, Washington went to the dark side—politics. His first political campaign was for a seat in the **Virginia House of Burgesses**.

Virginia House of Burgesses:

As a burgess, Washington represented a county in Virginia. He had some power but was content to sit back and let the more outspoken (read: loud) burgesses like Patrick Henry ("Give me liberty or give me death!") do the talking.

Mere technicalities didn't stop George from using his imagination to gain voters. He really wanted the seat and the word "illegal" didn't faze him. Washington didn't like to lose, and after an embarrassing defeat in 1775, he stepped up his game in a big way. He had his supporters buy vats of wine, barrels of beer, and gallons of rum punch to help sway voters' opinion of him. Washington wasn't afraid to get caught buying votes. He was only afraid of not buying enough to claim victory.

He won, of course. You don't mess with colonists and their alcohol.

To make his next move up the social ladder, he had to marry, and marry well. Luckily for him, the widow Martha Dandridge Custis was better than beautiful: she was rich and she had a thing for really tall guys.

Even though his own mother boycotted his wedding, and even though George was in love with another (already married) older woman, George and Martha ended up being a match made in a miserably heaven. With their marriage, he came to own eight thousand acres at Mount Vernon and over three

hundred slaves, but George didn't stop there.

~~He was hungrier for land than a lion for a juicy zebra rump roast, and like the previous election employing shady dealings didn't deter him. He secretly sent men over the invisible line dividing Indian and colonial lands to scout out prime real estate. When the British renegotiated a treaty allowing colonial expansion in 1768, Washington was ready to pounce.~~

It wasn't like he was the only one grabbing the best for himself. Most colonists were land-mad. George was just better than most at underhanded dealings and secrecy, and he also had greater motivation for it. He knew that he would need to be pretty wealthy to get noticed by Congress. And he intended to get noticed.

Good Enough for Broadway

You might be thinking, *Sure, George wasn't the nicest guy when it came to getting what he wanted, but he had the undivided support from Congress and his fellow revolutionaries because his leadership and genius won the Revolutionary War. Men were practically flocking to his side!*

Wrong.

The day the Second Continental Congress decided to name the head of the Continental Army, George came dressed to impress. He rolled up in his chariot and emerged in full militia uniform, despite not having been in uniform for seventeen years. Thankfully, he had a few slaves at home who were handy with a sewing needle. His strategy worked. Everyone agreed—he looked the part. Washington was not the first Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army almost by default. But A-lister looks aren't exactly a substitute for a tactical brain.



Stud muffin in a saddle.

John Adams, eventually the second president of the United States, later wrote a letter stating that the

“talents” that got George the general job were his “handsome face” and “tall stature.” Adams forgot to mention his own part in George’s success. See, John Adams really didn’t like John Hancock, George’s chief rival for the command of the Continental Army. Maybe it was Hancock’s obnoxiously large signature that Adams didn’t like. Everyone knew it wasn’t to make King George III take notice; it was to make Hancock popular. In order to make sure Hancock didn’t become general, Adams nominated George Washington instead.



Loud and proud.

Petty differences weren’t all that swayed the voters. Washington was from the South, and the delegates understood they needed to unite the colonies in order to beat the British. Washington would help bridge the gap and tie the North and South together in one cause for freedom.

As he accepted the nomination, Washington said, “I do not think myself equal to the Command I am honored with.” In this case, he wasn’t being humble—he really was a terrible tactician with more “strategic retreats” than wins to date. That didn’t change in the next war. But who’s counting?

To solidify his reputation, he declined any payment. Instead, he magnanimously agreed to be reimbursed by Congress for his expenses. Everything from liquor to spies’ salaries to a broom was carefully recorded. At the end of the war, Washington charged \$160,074 to the new government. That’s somewhere in the millions of dollars today.

Despite being a meticulous record keeper via his thirty-two secretaries, George often found himself in debt. It might have been all those shopping sprees he enjoyed so much, but a lot of his money was also tied up in land. (He didn’t get better with age when it came to money. He even had to borrow a few thousand to go to his own inauguration in New York on April 30, 1789.)

So, he wasn’t good with gold, but what about his leadership qualities? Everyone must have liked him during the war once they realized what a good general he was. Right?

Wrong.

“Outgeneralled”

Washington had his army, his reputation, and his prestige. Nothing could stop him, except for the British. During 1775, Washington and the colonial army got really good at retreating. In 1776, things were going about the same way until Washington crossed the Delaware River at the end of the year and won the Battle of Trenton.

The next year, 1777, started off well for Washington and his army, with a second win at Princeton a few days into January, but then things started going downhill again with Washington racking up defeats like he was racking up a pool table. The next horrendous winter spent at Valley Forge (1777–1778) where Washington’s men starved and froze to death, was merely one low point in a year of low points.

It wasn’t just the British that wanted him dead. Even men in Congress were calling for his head. People had always groused about George’s lack of wins, his tactical faults, and his inability to see the big picture.

picture like keeping southern cities safe. George probably wondered if it was him when his aides tried jump ship.

Truly Alarming

Despite being the poster boy for a new republic, George still had a bit of the pretentious in him. He really wanted to look elite and that meant surrounding himself with people that also looked elite. Obviously, he needed an entourage. So he formed his own personal Life Guard to follow him everywhere. They made sure he wasn't kidnapped or assassinated, and they carried his personal papers.

It wasn't enough that the men in his Life Guard were muscular and good at playing post-master. George had high standards down to every last plumed feather in their hats (because without a hat, a man's appearance was just ruined according to Washington). They had to be at least five feet, eight inches tall, wear what he told them to wear, and own property. Washington spared no expense on them, but kept the group very hush-hush. It wouldn't do for Congress to find out how expensive his kept men were. But Washington was a master of secret-keeping. He also kept an entire spy ring secret from Congress while he was general!

One aide secretly asked another general to take over the army, and Washington faced down mutiny on three separate occasions. Alexander Hamilton, future Secretary of the Treasury, pointed out that Washington was moody, difficult to work with, and had mild abilities as a leader—but they had beef, so that might all just be bluster. Hamilton also thought Washington was indispensable to the cause, if only outwardly. The man looked really good on a white horse, and looks were important.

Despite not knowing the terrain during important battles, despite being indecisive, and despite not having that spark of genius that marks most great generals, Washington was exactly what the American cause needed: a tough-as-tacks poster boy for freedom. His superhuman ability to dodge bullets didn't hurt his image, either. Washington could come off the battlefield, his coat riddled with bullet holes, and not a scratch on him.

Somehow, even when he lost a battle, Washington still won. After the bloody Battle of Germantown (October 4, 1777), Washington lost his position and twice as many men as the British, but the French decided he was pretty brave and threw their weight behind his flailing army. (It helped that his generals were winning important battles at places like Saratoga.)

Mercifully, too, since the French were better at the whole “strategy” thing than the Americans. They had been using it against the British for a lot longer. It was thanks to French advice that the colonists won at Yorktown (1781), which was the beginning of the end for the British dream of one big Canada. It was also the beginning of Washington's celebrity status and the end of Washington's human status.

Casanova?

Washington had a habit of capitalizing on his good looks, like winning command of the army and charming French generals into helping the American cause. That's because he knew the importance of looking the part. And while his marriage was a good one, he didn't mind flirting and dancing with pretty, young girls after a few sips of champagne.

In fact, Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, was so infatuated with him that in her letters to her husband she gushed about Washington's goodness—and his good looks. Furthermore, Lady Kitty, the daughter of one of Washington's generals, requested a lock of George's hair, and Caty Greene, wife of General Nathaniel Greene, danced for three straight hours at a ball with Washington. Afterwards, she named her son after him. That must have been some two-step!

Getting Better with Age

Okay, so George wasn't great at the whole "tactics" thing while leading the army, but he *was* real good at being strict with his troops. He was forever trying to make his soldiers look like soldiers—his own personal mini-me's. He wanted them to stop gambling, drinking, and cursing. A man could get twenty-five lashes for uttering a curse word, fifty lashes for drinking, and fifteen hundred lashes for desertion. That is, until Washington had a gallows built and hanged a couple of repeat deserters as a warning to the rest of the soldiers.

Washington was constantly annoyed with his men unless they pulled off a miraculous feat, like trudging miles through snow with bleeding feet or winning against terrible odds. Then he liked them. After their shared suffering during the winter at Valley Forge—where up to ten men died a day from the cold, disease, and starvation—Washington became his soldiers' biggest supporter. He stopped complaining about how worthless his volunteers and officers were and started defending them. He may have stayed in plusher quarters and ate dinner each night, but he knew they were miserable, and he felt bad enough about it to beg, borrow, and steal things they needed.

In time, Washington grew into his position. He gave better treatment to prisoners of war, inoculated his army against smallpox, operated a spy ring, mixed **freed slaves** into his army, developed a navy for the colonies, and finagled much-needed funds and arms from Congress. But it seems that the reality of the job finally hit home, and he once mentioned how he would have never taken the gig if he'd known how hard it would be.

freed slaves:

Even though Washington allowed freed slaves to fight with the army, it's not as magnanimous a gesture as it first appears. If it had been up to him, he would never have allowed them to serve. But he desperately needed men, and the British were only too happy to arm black men for their cause. So Washington reversed his decision a year into the war, and the Continental Army was the most integrated army in America until the 1960s.

Washington may have lost more battles than he won and he was usually outmaneuvered by the superior British forces, but he held the army together, inspired loyalty in his men by his bravery, and persuaded men to reenlist. That's no small accomplishment, no matter what kind of general you are.

First President—Kind Of

After the British surrendered and the Treaty of Paris was signed, Washington didn't get unanimously voted in as first president, nor did he prance into the Oval Office as a thank-you for winning the war. For one, the first president to stay in the White House was John Adams (president number two), and the

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