

## 5 World Leaders Who Did The Opposite Of What You'd Expect

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8-11 minutes

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Some leaders are visionaries, lighting the way for future generations and forging easy Oscar wins for future actors portraying them. Others sink to such impressive lows that the highest honor they should expect is a law named after their terrible deeds. However we remember them, it's most important to remember that no human is pure good or evil. Sometimes we get the story wrong entirely, and it's not like the biopic is going to correct us. Stories like ...

### 5

## Richard Nixon May Have Saved The Environment

Richard Nixon was the ruthless, business-minded regulation slasher who infamously mandated that gas have low lead, not no lead. But through his goal of presenting Congress with the most ["comprehensive and costly program of pollution control in America's history,"](#) he signed not one, not two, but six landmark environmental regulations, which probably actually did save at least one landmark. The first was the National Environmental Protection Act (1970), creating the Environmental Protection Agency. The second was the Clean Air Act (1972), the third was the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972), and the fourth was the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act (1972). Fifth was the

Endangered Species Act (1973), and the sixth was the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974).



[U.S. National Archives](#) Have fun

mentally squaring that one, farmers' market hippies.

These acts improved the environment a lot more than they improved Nixon's image. Eighteen years after the passage of the Clean Air Act, it was estimated that with that one bill, Nixon had saved [205,000](#) people from premature death, granting them long lives of paying billionaires' taxes for them.

4

## George W. Bush Saved Millions Of Africans

George W. Bush is primarily known for destroying the Middle East with his failed [\\$4 trillion and counting](#) wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, vetoing healthcare for poor children, and having a shoe thrown at him. Opinion has softened lately, considering what we now have to compare him to, but at the time, he seemed like the most dangerous combination of evil and dumb. And yet he saved so many lives in AIDS-ravaged Africa that [even Bono had to praise him](#). Do you know what it takes

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to get Bono to praise a Republican? About \$50 billion, it turns out.

"I invaded Iraq, you invaded iTunes, we're pretty much the same."

Bush's efforts to fight AIDS in the developing world included the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which gave over [\\$48 billion](#) to provide healthcare to the poorest countries in Africa. While a major goal of the plan was to treat HIV and AIDS patients, the money also went to treating and preventing malaria, tuberculosis, and infant deaths. By the time Bush left office, the number of HIV-positive Africans receiving treatment had jumped from 50,000 to [over two million](#), and malaria deaths had [fallen by half](#). Incidentally, this is just under how many Americans were disappointed when he was elected.

### 3

## Margaret Thatcher Created One Of The World's First Needle Exchanges

Margaret Thatcher is a polarizing figure in the United Kingdom, but ask any Brit about her legacy, and you'll hear more or less the same thing, give or take some cursing. She tends to be remembered for her attacks on unions, healthcare, and free milk, but her most extreme policy was the Umbridge-esque Section 28, which banned the "practice and promotion" of homosexuality. That's right, all promotion of homosexuality in the UK -- billboards, commercials, skywriting -- ground to a halt. They were dark times.

Which is weird, because Thatcher's response to the AIDS epidemic would be considered progressive even today. The way -- through the use of intravenous drugs. Despite

objections that it would promote debauchery and drug use, Thatcher implemented the UK's needle exchange program in 1986. Keep in mind, it was only the [second program of its kind in the entire world](#). (After the Netherlands, which is where they keep the lab for growing experimental policy.) Reagan couldn't even say the word "AIDS," while Thatcher was punching it right in the nucleoid.



[Michael Evans/The White](#)

[House](#) Admittedly, doing more than Reagan on AIDS [wasn't a high bar to clear](#).

And it worked. Today, the prevalence of AIDS among adults in the UK is [0.16 percent](#), or 1.6 people per 1,000 citizens. By comparison, [the U.S. rate is between 0.4 percent and 0.9 percent](#). Thatcher's program was so successful that it inspired several countries to implement their own programs -- except the U.S., of course.

2

## Herbert Hoover Was A Prolific Humanitarian

Herbert Hoover didn't cause the Great Depression, but he didn't exactly live up to the challenge it posed. His ineffectual and sometimes counterintuitive approaches led to a disastrous and failed reelection campaign, and his greatest legacy today is the "Hoovervilles" -- the nickname given to camps set up for thousands of people left homeless during the Depression. U

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you're a punk band, there are few indictments so severe as having a squat named after you.



[Berenice Abbott](#) It's nice by the standards of a rough-hewn shanty town, but not exactly the kind of thing you want your name attached to.

But before, after, and during his presidency, Hoover was a humanitarian extraordinaire. His laundry list of achievements includes rescuing [120,000](#) stranded American tourists in the early days of WWI, and saving over [ten million](#) French and Belgian lives after the war. But Hoover wasn't done. He founded the Commission for Relief Belgium, then the American Relief Administration, and then, not satisfied with starting a mere two life-saving organizations, he [went and founded a third](#): UNICEF.

And then there were Hooverlunches. That's what they called the 15 million lunches he fed to Europe, including the Soviets, every single day. When criticized for saving Soviets instead of, like, rolling over them with a tank, Herbert hollered, ["Whatever their politics, they shall be fed!"](#) All this led to him being ranked as [one of the ten greatest living Americans](#) in a 1922 *New York Times* poll. He was so popular that both parties tried to recruit him, and [even FDR wrote in 1920](#), "He is certainly a wonder and I wish we could make him President of the United States. There could not be a better one."

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**Bill Clinton Supported The Mass**

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# Incarceration Of Black Men

Whether he's remembered as a smooth-talking ladies man or a saxophone-playing joke, most liberals agree that Bill Clinton was a good president. That's thanks in no small part to the booming economy he left us, which included record lows in the black unemployment rate. That's one of the reasons Toni Morrison dubbed him America's "first black president." After all, anyone who loves jazz that much must be a friend to the black community. Right? ... Right?



[Gage Skidmore](#) This entry's about to trade the saxophone for a sad trombone.

In truth, Clinton did more to harm the black community than [the Nixon administration could have ever hoped to](#). In a bid to secure the "tough on crime" vote, he supported three-strikes laws, which mandated automatic life sentences for anyone with three convictions of certain crimes. To some people, that seems like there's no downside. Why *not* keep repeat offenders off the streets for good? But that requires ignoring the criminal justice climate, which is a mess of racist policies that overwhelmingly target black people (look at the [100-1 sentencing disparity](#) between crack and powder cocaine ... which Clinton also supported). Between 80 and 90 percent of drugs charges were leveled against black people, despite no significant racial differences in drug use. Throwing mandatory minimums into the mix is kind of like expelling the kid who keeps getting shaken down for his lunch money.

The result was an unprecedented increase in the incarceration rate, especially among young black men -- and we're still

dealing with it 20 years later. Oh, and that record low black unemployment rate? It didn't include prisoners. Taking them into account, the unemployment rate for young black males without a college degree was 42 percent. We're not saying Clinton intentionally imprisoned young black men to make his unemployment numbers look good; we're just saying that *would* be a good plan for an extremely boring supervillain.

*AdamBot adores alliteration. You can find him on Twitter [@Adam Writings](#).*

*Hoover was also a [great vacuum brand](#), but the man in this article had nothing to do with them.*

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