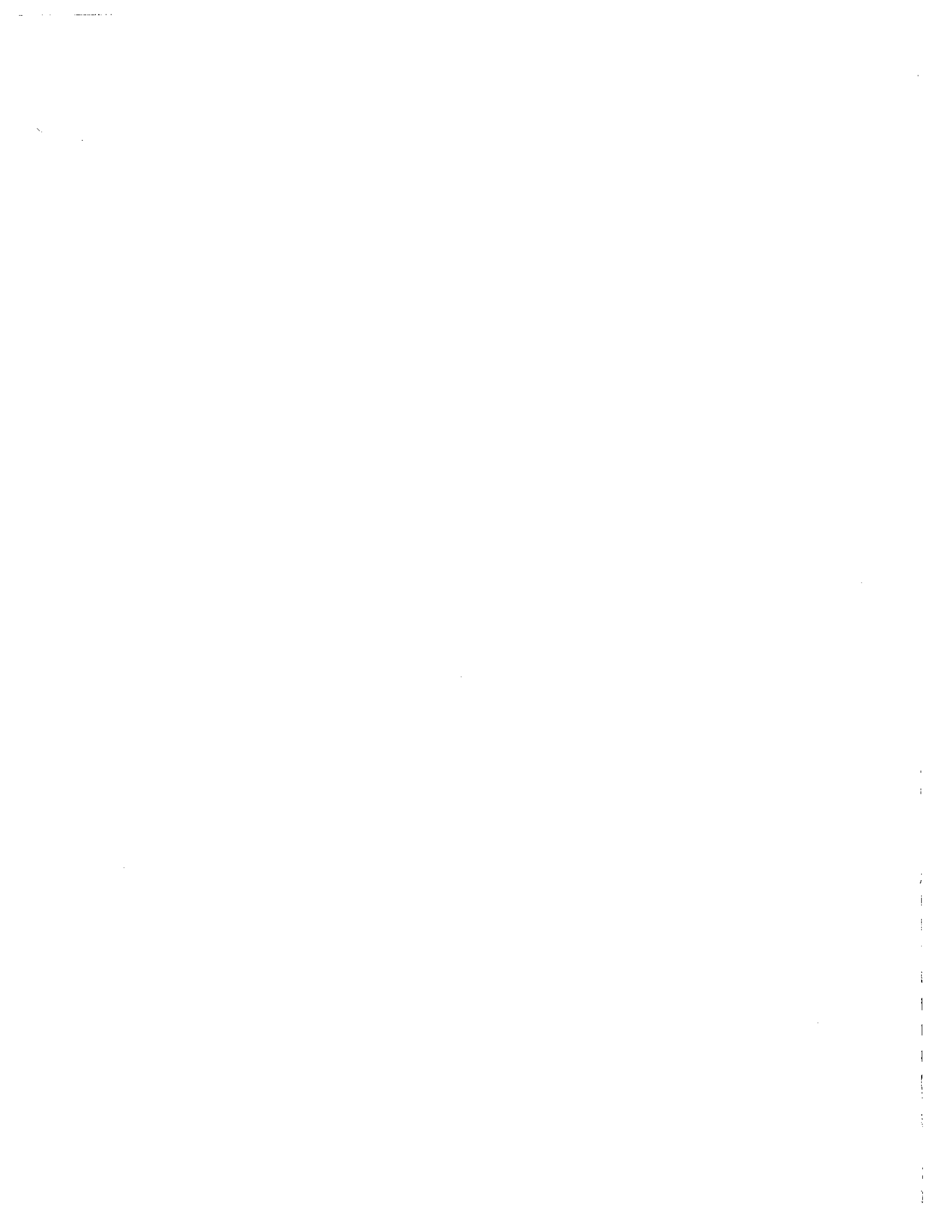


## PROJECT 3

### Historical or Unhistorical?

Next to each short event or account, write either *historical* or *unhistorical*.  
There is a correct answer to each one.

1. George Washington never told a lie.
2. Hildegard of Bingen had visions from God.
3. Hildegard of Bingen wrote about visions from God.
4. Native African people are not capable of constructing with stone.
5. Romans built roads.
6. Romans loved the true God.
7. Romans built temples to their gods.
8. John Kennedy was the best president.
9. Bill Clinton ran as the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party.



Secondary sources are arguments (interpretations) of history, usually based on primary sources. While all historians should be accountable to sources, some historians also find patterns of causality in history. **Causality** means the relationship between cause and effect, or what caused an event, a transition, or a development to occur. For example, what caused people to settle into farming communities in one area but not in another? Why did one society explore the oceans and the other society not? How did religions develop, and why, in the patterns they did? When historians study such questions, they sometimes look for patterns to causes, and not only to causes, for individual events. Patterns of causality regular enough to be predictable are known as **determinism**. Determinism suggests an inevitability of events; that is, things had to happen the way they did. In other words, given the determining factors in place at a particular time, the outcome that did occur must have occurred. For example, given the historical conditions (determinants) in place prior to the First World War (nationalism, industrialism, capitalism, and so on), the First World War was unavoidable. Not all historians use determinism; some find determinism restricting, but all historians examine cause and effect.

Probably the most familiar form of determinism is known as **economic determinism**. Economic determinism is an interpretation that looks for economic conditions to trigger behavior or change in history. The argument that a presidential election will be determined by the state of the economy is an argument an economic determinist might make. There are some well-known examples of arguments based on economic determinism. Two examples are that society is usually formed into economic classes and that revolutions are motivated by economic circumstances. These two arguments come from **Karl Marx**, the founder of economic determinism. Marx described the whole scope of history in terms of the economy, with ruling classes controlling wealth and property and working classes producing wealth for the ruling classes. Marx wrote his famous works on **capital and labor** (ruling classes and producing classes, respectively) during the industrial revolutions of the mid- and late eighteenth hundreds, a time when tensions between workers and industry was great and greed and violence seemed unchecked. Some of Marx's views have become outdated in the twenty-first century, but Marx's determinism survives as an influential interpretation of history.

A second determinism has survived almost exclusively in the sphere of popular history; that is, in places like history on television, or so-called *historical fiction*. This second determinism is called **Great Men and Battles**. Like Karl Marx's economic determinism, this method was developed during the nineteenth century; only in this case, by nationalist writers from Europe to create grand myths about the heritage of a country. No serious scholar today uses this outdated determinism. One reason it continues to capture the imagination

of the popular audience is its compelling use of glory and drama. Consider the inspiring opening passage from an essay by the nineteenth-century historian **Sir Edward Creasy**. Creasy included his account of the **Battle of Marathon** in his famous 1857 work titled *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*. Marathon was one of the most complete victories of the ancient Greeks over the Persians.

Two thousand three hundred and forty years ago a council of Athenian officers was summoned on the slope of one of the mountains that look over the plain of Marathon, on the eastern coast of Attica. The immediate subject of their meeting was to consider whether they should give battle to an enemy that lay encamped on the shore beneath them; but on the result of their deliberations depended, not merely the fate of two armies, but the whole future progress of human civilization.

Creasy further explains,

The day of Marathon . . . broke forever the spell of Persian invincibility, which had paralyzed men's minds. . . . It secured for mankind the intellectual treasures of Athens, the growth of free institutions, the liberal enlightenment of the western world and the gradual ascendancy for many ages of the great principles of European civilization.<sup>2</sup>

Creasy was a wonderful writer, but his historical interpretations are no longer taken seriously. Historians today look at many more factors to describe the rise and fall of empires or the establishment of democratic institutions in England. Creasy's argument suggests that the victory of the Greeks over the Persians at Marathon caused the survival of democratic traditions in ancient Athens, which in turn led to a European "Western tradition," which in turn led to the rise of Great Britain as a world power fifteen centuries later. If Creasy's analysis is correct, however, every contingency that led to the Battle of Marathon must also have led to the rise of democratic institutions in Great Britain. Every other detail that provided for an Athenian victory must also have led to English greatness: the use of hoplites, the institution of slavery in Greece, the diet and culture of the Greeks that produced such excellent soldiers, including the prevalent homosexual lifestyle of the ancient soldiers. Obviously such obscure connections are tenuous, and the argument breaks down when it is examined more closely. But Creasy's point was really to glorify his nation's own history by associating it with a romantic past.

Perhaps more recent historical methods are somewhat more boring than Great Men and Battles, but recent methods are more honest, inclusive, and

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2. Sir Edward Creasy, *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* (Harrisburg: Military Service Publications, 1943), 1.

accurate. Until the middle of the twentieth century, modern historical research was dominated by national or topical history. In the past fifty years or so, however, historians have begun to broaden the narrative to include groups, people, and institutions that had been previously marginalized. Historians of the 1950s and 1960s began to recognize the importance to history of everyday life and people, including those who do not command positions of power and public authority. Historians began to write history to reflect the social reality that all elements of society contribute to the makeup and development of human civilization. It has now become conventional to integrate into the historical analysis families, minor institutions, popular mentalities, and statistics, as well as people of power. This way of describing the past is more democratic and more realistic than previous, elitist methods. The new inclusive histories are called *social history*.

Thus we see that history changes with society; as the world democratized, so did history become more **inclusive** (democratic). As the world globalized, so did the study of history. Many historians felt that to be intellectually honest and to keep pace with current developments in historical research, university curricula must integrate into General Education programs at universities in the United States more of the world than had been previously considered. During the 1990s, many history departments changed Western Civilization or “Great Texts” to World History requirements. This trend followed a twentieth-century pattern of globalization, accelerated by innovations in computers, space exploration, and the Internet. This text and this approach to world history are reflections of the changing world. By participating in this course, you are involved in both the changing world and the changing ways history is evaluated and written.



## PROJECT 4

### Methods Historians Use

Identify each statement below with one of three methods: economic determinism, Great Men and Battles, or social history. Write in the space below each statement the historical method that might be associated with the argument.

1. The Soviet Union succumbed to the rule of Stalin because of the ruler's charismatic appeal. Stalin single-handedly turned the country into a first-rate power.
2. The whole history of European dominance over Africa can be explained by the rise of industry and capitalism.
3. The overthrow of the old regime in 1789 came about through an intersection of intellectual, economic, and social developments. The relations between the crown and the peasantry was complex, with some peasants supporting the king but more urban peasants, influenced by the middle classes, tending to support the revolution.
4. Provide a historical argument that might be based on economic determinants. (For example, provide an economic determinant for the election of a particular U.S. president, or to explain patterns of migration.) Were there other types of determinants as well?





## GENRE

Historians study within particular **genres** or areas. Areas of study are sometimes national, such as American history or Russian history. National studies can help define a nation or people, correct misconceptions, or generate discussion about national experience. But historians are not mythmakers; they are interpreters of the past and formulate arguments on the basis of sound reasoning. It is not the work of scholars to praise a national history simply out of a sense of nationalism. Historians do not best engage in preaching, whitewashing, or sugarcoating. If a state or people have positive and negative aspects in their past, historians should be free to address both rationally and in proper context. Japanese historians have recently come under strong criticism, for example, for ignoring in school textbooks the violent behavior of the Japanese occupation of China in the middle of the last century. The Chinese government wants Japanese students to be honest about the Japanese past, perhaps in order to prevent future atrocities. It is partly the work of historians to be sure accurate accounts are available.

Larger geographic regions than “country” might also define historical category. A geography in all its aspects—climate, wildlife, landscape, natural resources—influences the way people eat, travel, and communicate; the materials they use; the art they make; and the size of families they raise. Some historians therefore study history within this important framework. One such focus of study and teaching is the **Atlantic World**. This huge area supersedes national boundaries and includes the eastern regions of the Americas and the western regions of Africa and Europe. The Atlantic World saw enormous population shifts during the centuries following 1492. Through the massive importation of slaves from Africa, settlers’ arrival from Europe, and the violent reduction of native populations, the ethnic and cultural makeup of both the northern and the southern Americas changed forever. Patterns of change in North America differed in some respects from those in Central and South America, but overall patterns of slavery, settlement, and nation building spanned the western side of the Atlantic. The history of every nation of Latin America rests on the experiences of those first centuries of contact. Arguments historians might make regarding the Atlantic World address the degree and type of African influence on the culture of Brazil, for example, or might ask to what degree South American native cultures influenced West Africa. Certainly massive economic changes resulted from the slave trade, not to mention the violent loss of populations to Atlantic slavery. The Atlantic World is only one of several such supranational geographic regions historians recognize as fields of study. Others include the *Mediterranean* and the Silk Road.

Other genres of history help define interaction between historical groups. *Women's history* examines how societies have defined women and family, citizenship, and culture in the context of gender. **Big history** studies the whole of human history in the context of the universe, the natural world, the ecology of the planet, and the impact humans have had on the environment. There are also specialized fields of history such as economic history or the history of slavery, technology, science, and so on. In short, historians research and teach almost any aspect of the human experience.