

CATEGORIES USED BY HISTORIANS TO ORGANIZE INFORMATION

SOCIAL

This primarily refers to relations between groups within some sort of community (a community can be as small as a neighborhood or as large as a country). This includes the classes or castes to which people belong (the working class, the aristocracy), the ethnicity or racial groups to which people associate themselves or others, and the attitudes people share towards other groups and institutions.

POLITICAL

Questions of how humans are governed, including such matters as the exercise of power in peace and war, the use of law, the formation of governments, the collection of taxes, and the establishment of public services.

INTELLECTUAL

This refers to the ideas, theories, and beliefs (non-religious) expressed by people in some organized way about topics thought to be important. This includes such matters as political theories, scientific ideas, social theories, and philosophies of life.

CULTURAL

This is perhaps the broadest category. This refers to what groups do and to all those things which surround us, both tangible and intangible (e.g., ideas and values). For those tangible things that surround you, think about your senses. It is what you see (architecture, paintings, movies, clothes), taste (food), hear (dialect and music), and smell (food and other aromas). It also encompasses what a society does with its time (e.g., taverns, gambling, sporting events, museums, etc.). Further, it refers to the ideas, values, and expressions human beings hold, the customs people follow (marriage, eating), and the activities people engage in together (clubs, drinking).

ECONOMIC

This refers to the production and distribution of goods and services and the developments of new technology which aid the production of goods and services. On the production side, historians usually focus on agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, and finance. On the distribution side, they deal with who gets what and how much of what is produced (i.e., the distribution of wealth in a society). For example, how much and what kind of food is on the shelves at the grocery store and how much it costs for the consumer. This also includes what people do to earn a living and how much they make. In terms of technology it includes things like innovations and inventions in transportation (the car), farming equipment (the tractor), consumer goods (washing machine), public utilities (dams and nuclear energy)... just to name a few.

RELIGION

This refers to theories, beliefs and practices related to the supernatural or the unknown. This includes such matters as the growth of religious institutions, the formation of beliefs about the relation between human beings and God, and the practice of rituals and festivals.