

## **Chance, Oversight, and Error in History**

### **LEARN THE SKILL**

History is a series of events. Sometimes those events seem to happen in a predictable and orderly way. Everything appears to be the result of careful plans and human determination. At other times, however, it is clear that historical events result from luck—good or bad—or from error or ignorance. One famous example is that of Christopher Columbus. The legend is that he *planned* to find a shorter route to the Indies. By *chance*, he ended up in what is now the Caribbean. Read carefully to determine the role played by chance, oversight, or error in deciding historical outcomes.

### **PRACTICE AND APPLY THE SKILL**

It is known that agricultural production fell substantially in the South in the years following the Civil War, contributing greatly to poverty in the region. One historian suggests disease as a factor, and argues that sanitation and wearing shoes, which many could not afford, would have reduced the risk. Many reports indicate that rural southerners were often fatigued and unable to work at normal levels:

**The specific disease, *Necator americanus* (human hookworm), was known to afflict over 40 percent of the entire southern population in later years. . . Southern mortality and morbidity [death and disease rates] increased between the two decades. . . Confederate medical personnel reported hookworm symptoms even though they were unaware of hookworm itself. Finally, statistical analysis . . . supports the assertion that hookworm disease did indeed increase during the Civil War decade.**

Write a paragraph suggesting how knowledge of hookworm as a disease and the fairly simple ways to prevent its spread might have changed the history of the South during Reconstruction and later.

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Source:  
<http://trc.ucdavis.edu/glbrinkley/Docs/Decline.pdf>