

Jesus tops fame list, Cameron is 1,483rd

Kevin Dowling

BARACK OBAMA called him a "giant of history" and his funeral last week drew no fewer than 91 world leaders.

Yet, according to a new search program that ranks people's historical importance, South Africa's first black president, Nelson Mandela, ranks just 356th in the top 2,000 most important people in history.

At the top, according to the ranking, is Jesus, with Napoleon second. In third place is Muhammad, with Shakespeare fourth and Aristotle in eighth place.

The rest of the top 10 is dominated by political leaders, with Abraham Lincoln fifth, George Washington sixth, Adolf Hitler seventh, Alexander the Great ninth and Thomas Jefferson 10th.

The software aggregates the traces of millions of opinions expressed on the internet in the same way that Google ranks web pages. Crucially, the program, which has been created by a Google engineer and a computer scientist, includes a "reputation decay algorithm" which predicts how significant people will remain up to 200 years after they die.

It primarily uses the prevalence of people on Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, but also scours other parts of the internet, including all the books that have been published on it, to gauge people's long-term fame.

Mandela's relatively low ranking puts him just four places ahead of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, who died in 1938.

"In the long term that is probably a fair ranking," said Steven Skiena, professor of computer science at Stony Brook University in New York, who is one of the people behind the search engine.

"Both men could be viewed as founders of their respective nations and therefore of similar significance in the long term."

Skiena and his colleague Charles Ward, an engineer with Google, have published



The new program ranks people according to historical significance. Napoleon and Shakespeare score highly, Britney Spears less so

their findings in a book called *Who's Bigger*.

They have measured long-term fame by celebrity and gravitas and give equal weight to both. They say that for a person to be remembered in the long term it does not matter whether they became notable because of their fame or because of the significance of their contribution to mankind.

Britney Spears, the American singer, who would be ranked 27th most significant person based on her current

fame, plummets to 689th on the list once the reputation decay algorithm has been applied.

The authors say the algorithm can be used to measure social changes such as the relative importance of women in society.

"We can prove that women have required substantially greater achievement levels than men — equivalent to around four IQ points — to get equally noticed for posterity," Skiena said.

He also claims that the software can determine whether school history curriculums concentrate on those figures who were genuinely most important in shaping the society we live in today.

They say that about one third of those considered to be worth studying in fact do not merit it.

However, the claim has met scorn from historians. "The idea that you can create an algorithm that is somehow going to give you a scientific approach

to history is preposterous," said Antony Beevor.

"You simply cannot calibrate history and assess it in that way." He added that analysing history through a computer program was just as subjective as any other approach. "It's just a question of how they construct their algorithm and how they view their weightings," he said.

The list says Mozart is the most significant musician in history at 24th, three places ahead of Beethoven and 24

ahead of Bach. Elvis Presley is the highest-ranked pop star, at 69th, followed by Madonna, 121st, Bob Dylan, 130th, and John Lennon, 162nd.

Leonardo da Vinci is the highest-ranked artist at 29th followed by Vincent van Gogh at 73rd and Francis Bacon at 81st.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader who, prompted by Ronald Reagan, tore down the Iron Curtain, is ranked 637th on the list while the former American president is 32nd.

While there are five English

kings and queens in the top 50, the list places Winston Churchill at 37th, one place behind George W Bush and five places behind Ronald Reagan, but six above Franklin Roosevelt.

"Our time correction methods somewhat overstate the significance of recent American presidents," Skiena admitted.

The list ranks Margaret Thatcher 271st; Tony Blair is 548th, Gordon Brown 1,398th and David Cameron is 1,483rd.

History's top 50

- 1 Jesus
- 2 Napoleon
- 3 Muhammad
- 4 William Shakespeare
- 5 Abraham Lincoln
- 6 George Washington
- 7 Adolf Hitler
- 8 Aristotle
- 9 Alexander the Great
- 10 Thomas Jefferson
- 11 Henry VIII
- 12 Charles Darwin
- 13 Elizabeth I
- 14 Karl Marx
- 15 Julius Caesar
- 16 Queen Victoria
- 17 Martin Luther
- 18 Joseph Stalin
- 19 Albert Einstein
- 20 Christopher Columbus
- 21 Isaac Newton
- 22 Charlemagne
- 23 Theodore Roosevelt
- 24 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- 25 Plato
- 26 Louis XIV of France
- 27 Ludwig van Beethoven
- 28 Ulysses S Grant
- 29 Leonardo da Vinci
- 30 Augustus
- 31 Carl Linnaeus
- 32 Ronald Reagan
- 33 Charles Dickens
- 34 Paul the Apostle
- 35 Benjamin Franklin
- 36 George W Bush
- 37 Winston Churchill
- 38 Genghis Khan
- 39 Charles I
- 40 Thomas Edison
- 41 James I
- 42 Friedrich Nietzsche
- 43 Franklin D Roosevelt
- 44 Sigmund Freud
- 45 Alexander Hamilton
- 46 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
- 47 Woodrow Wilson
- 48 Johann Sebastian Bach
- 49 Galileo Galilei
- 50 Oliver Cromwell