

The 1880s Essay Questions

Following are brief overviews of five events from the 1880s. With each event are questions to answer in essay form. The first pages give you the event and the questions. Notebooking pages you can use for your answers follow.

Krakatoa Erupts

Although there had not been any confirmed eruptions since 1680, on May 20, 1883, clouds of ash from the volcano Krakatoa were blown to a height of 6 miles (10 km) and eruptions were heard 100 miles (160 km) away when the volcano became active again. However, by the end of May, the activity had begun to subside. On June 19, it again showed signs of activity, and by August 26, 1883, the first serious explosions occurred. Within an hour, a cloud of ash blew 17 miles (27 km) into the air. On the morning of August 27, huge explosions heard 2,200 miles (3,500 km) away in Australia blew ash up to 50 miles (80 km) high. Pressure waves were recorded in the atmosphere around the Earth. Explosions died down and all was quiet by the following day. Small eruptions occurred into 1884.

Large amounts of ash fell over about 300,000 square miles (800,000 square km). Near the location of the volcano, volcanic glass (pumice) was so thick in the water that ships could not get through. The area around the volcano was in darkness for two and a half days because of ash in the air, and red and orange sunsets were seen into the next year because of the fine dust that drifted around the Earth several times.

While many people thought the rock fragments were from the volcano itself, studies showed that most of the fragments were actually from the magma that came up through the volcano. The old volcano actually caved in and sank when the magma was blown out.

Few people died from the explosions themselves, as there were few if any people living on the island. However, there were a series of tsunamis recorded as far away as South America and Hawaii. About 36,000 people died from the largest wave, which hit coastal towns in Java and Sumatra right after the volcano exploded.

There was no more activity from Krakatoa until December 1927, when new eruptions began on the floor of the sea. By 1930, there was a small island showing, which has continued to grow and is now about 1,000 feet (300 meters) above the sea, more than one-third the size of the volcano when it erupted with such force in 1883.

There has been an increase in both technology and population in the area since 1883. Do you think the greater technology will be enough to predict an eruption of Krakatoa if it occurs again as the volcano grows? Considering the increase in population in the area, are there measures that should be taken ahead of time to protect people in case of another volcanic eruption? Should hotels and businesses avoid coastal areas to try to protect people from the dangers of a tsunami? How would this impact the economy of the area? What advice would you give to a business that is considering building in this area?

Johnstown Flood

Johnstown is located at the junction of the Little Conemaugh River and the Stonycreek River in the Allegheny Mountains of Pennsylvania. In 1853, engineers finished the South Fork Dam about 12 miles (19 km) east of Johnstown. In 1862, just 9 years later, the dam broke. The lake that had been created by the dam was allowed to drain. Then, in 1879, the property was purchased by a club for a private resort. Members of the club arranged to have the dam repaired and allowed the lake to refill. It was called Lake Conemaugh. On May 31, 1889, the dam collapsed during a heavy rainstorm. About 20 million tons (18 million metric tons) of water roared down through the valley. Several small towns were destroyed before the water hit Johnstown. Many homes in Johnstown were also destroyed, and a total of more than 2,000 people were killed.

What is your opinion of trying to repair the dam that had broken years earlier for no purpose other than to build a resort? If the dam could not hold when it was originally built, why would people think it could simply be repaired after so many years of neglect and not expect it to break again? Do you think man's pride and vanity could have influenced their decision? Do you see pride and vanity influencing similar decisions today?

The Orient Express Makes Its First Run

The Orient Express, with a route that covered more than 1,700 miles (about 2,740 km), was the first European transcontinental railway. Although people had to be ferried from Varna across the Black Sea to Constantinople by steamship when the railway was opened in 1883, by 1889, the entire trip could be taken by train. The Orient Express was a luxury train. It had Oriental rugs, mahogany paneling, armchairs, and the finest food. It stopped operating during World War I and World War II but operated between the wars and again after World War II until it was discontinued in 1977.

The Orient Express resumed operations about a year after World War I ended and about two years after World War II ended. Considering the trench warfare and destruction in World War I and the major destruction that occurred with World War II, including the land mines that were used, how difficult would it have been to be certain the railway was safe to use each time it was reopened? How safe do you think people were so soon after major wars to be traveling through countries that had been at war? Considering the fact that this was a luxury train, and the people traveling on it would have been wealthy, do you think the train had an impact on the economy of the areas it went through? Explain your answers.

1884 Berlin Conference

In 1884, fourteen nations met in Berlin to discuss disputes over territories in Africa. Trade had increased between Africa and Europe, and many merchants wanted the governments of Europe to politically control the areas that their businesses were operating in. While the United States and several European countries were present, no African representatives were invited to the conference.

Many provisions were adopted by the Berlin Conference. It decided that any European nation that was claiming an area in Africa had to actually occupy it. It also said that if a nation had a

colony on the coast of Africa, that country would have the first option to claim the area that neighbored their claim going inward from the coast. Slavery and the slave trade were to end in all colonies of European nations, and the rivers in Africa were to be open to all nations, not just the nation controlling that region. When the borders of the colonies were established, there was not much consideration paid to boundaries that existed before, such as national, ethnic, and religious boundaries. By the time World War II started, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom had already divided most of Africa between themselves. Ethiopia and Liberia were the only two countries in Africa that remained independent. There were parts of Africa that accepted colonization peacefully, however, there were parts that resisted being controlled by European nations. There were violent uprisings in areas, and millions died in the wars of conquest and the demands they were forced to live under on the colonial plantations.

What is your opinion of the Berlin Conference and its goals? Did the European countries have any right to colonize Africa and try to control the lives of people there? Was it right to have the conference without having any representation from the African nations themselves? While there is debate over the role played by the United States in the Berlin Conference, some questions can be considered. For example, do you think the United States should have resisted the European desire to colonize Africa or should they have encouraged it? Since the United States had itself once been a colony of a European country and felt they should have had representation in the government, what do you think their outlook should have been on the people of Africa being controlled by European countries without having representation? Since the United States had just fought a terrible civil war that had slavery as one of its major causes, the dictates of the Berlin Conference to stop slavery in the colonies and to stop the slave trade should have sounded appealing. However, it seems that in some cases, the people of Africa were treated as slaves in their own lands by the Europeans. What do you think the response of countries should have been when they saw this happening? Should everyone have minded their own business or should something have been done to try to stop this treatment of people? Explain your answers.

The First Mechanical Dishwasher Is Invented

Born in Ohio, Josephine Garis married William Cochran when she was nineteen years old. Later, she added an "e" to her last name. Josephine Cochrane often found her expensive china was chipped and blamed servants for being careless. She began to wash the china herself, but it was time-consuming. She decided to invent something to help her get the job done faster.

After measuring the plates, she designed a rack that would hold them while they were put into a large copper boiler where soapy water sprayed each dish. With the help of a mechanic, she completed an experimental model and received her first patent in 1886. At the time, women were not easily accepted in business, and it was hard to get a business started. However, in 1893, restaurants near the Columbian Exposition in Chicago bought machines to help with the increase in business. Josephine Cochrane's dishwasher won the top prize at the Exposition's Machinery Hall. She hoped families would buy dishwashers, but they were too expensive for most common people and homes at the time often did not have enough hot water to use a dishwasher. Her machines did sell well to hotels, colleges, and restaurants.

In addition to the lack of finances and hot water to use dishwashers, do you think women in the 1880s would have felt that a mechanical appliance would get their dishes as clean as they could

get them washing them by hand? With the focus on hard work at the time, do you think women would have felt, or been made to feel, that they were somehow being “lazy” by using a machine to do the work they had always done by hand? Dishwashers did not come into common use in homes until after World War II. What changes had happened that would have made it easier to accept the help of a machine to get the work done that had always been done by hand before?











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