

CAUSE AND EFFECT ESSAY

It is tempting, and often comforting, to think that humans control their fates. The decisions that people make in their daily lives can affect many things, and the course of their lives cumulatively reflects these many small decisions. On the other hand, people cannot control every aspect of their environments, and forces beyond human control frequently intervene in human affairs. Notwithstanding many people's opinion that the weather has little influence in their lives besides determining what clothes they wear on a particular day, the weather has in fact caused world history to radically shift in important ways that are still felt today. Numerous examples from world history document the long-term effects of weather in the formation of cultures and nations. In the thirteenth century, Khubilai Khan ruled over the vast Mongol empire, which spanned from the Pacific Ocean in the east to the Black Sea in the west, from present-day Siberia in the north to Afghanistan in the south. To expand his reign further, Khubilai Khan mounted two invasions of Japan. Two monsoons, however, caused him to end his attacks. Delgado (2008) describes legendary accounts of this event: "The legend, oft repeated in countless history books, speaks of gigantic ships, numbering into the thousands, crewed by indomitable Mongol warriors, and of casualties on a massive scale, with more than 100,000 lives lost in the final invasion attempt of 1281" (p. 4). Because of this unexpected defeat, Khubilai Khan decided to stage a third invasion of Japan, but he died before he could fulfill this ambition. Without these monsoons, Japan might have been defeated by the Mongols and thus lost its identity as a unique culture, with far-reaching consequences for Asian and world history.

In the early years of America's Revolutionary War, which began in 1775, it appeared likely that the British would crush the armies of her colonial territory and incorporate it back into the empire. The British troops were a well-trained and disciplined army that was feared worldwide. In contrast, the American troops were newly trained, sometimes poorly organized, and lacked sufficient resources to fight effectively. General George Washington could have easily been defeated in the Battle of Long Island on August 22, 1776. Historical records show that Sir William Howe, the British commander, was clearly defeating Washington on Long Island and was actually winning handily (Seymour, 1995). Nonetheless, the weather intervened when a heavy fog rolled in, so the American forces were able to retreat, regroup, and survive to fight another day. Because of this fog, the United States was not defeated in its struggle for freedom. Consequently, today's United Kingdom of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland does not include the United States. The United States is not a commonwealth of a mother country, as Canada and Australia are, though the United States still has strong ties to its colonial past.

When Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Russia in the early nineteenth century, he met with early successes that appeared to guarantee that he might eventually rule the world as his personal domain. His soldiers captured Moscow and destroyed the city, which encouraged him to push farther in his military campaigns. However, because of his dreams of glory, Napoleon overlooked the simple fact that Russian winters are extremely cold. When the temperatures fell below freezing, many of his soldiers and their horses died in the brutal weather. As Belloc (1926) writes in his classic study of the Napoleonic wars, "The cold was the abominable thing: The dreadful enemy against which men could not fight and which destroyed them" (p. 217). As a result of the failure of Napoleon's Russian campaigns, his own rule ended relatively soon after. His defeat led to a reorganization of power throughout the European nations, as well as to the rise of Russia as a major world power. As these three examples unambiguously

demonstrate, the weather has caused numerous huge shifts in world history as well as in power balances among cultures and nations. Without the rainy storms of the monsoon season, Japan might be the eastern outpost of Mongolia; without the appearance of dense fog, the United States might still be a territory of the United Kingdom; and without winter snow, Muscovites might speak French. Today weather forecasters can usually predict with a high degree of accuracy when thunderstorms, hurricanes, tsunamis, and tornadoes will strike, but the course of history cannot be fully isolated from the effects of the weather.