

# Strange dark days in history you may not know about.

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Thanks to modern technology, we can now often identify the cause of a dark day—perhaps a solar eclipse , smoke from a wildfire, or ash from a volcanic eruption—and even predict many of these phenomena. But in the past, people sometimes didn't understand why the sky would suddenly and strangely lose its light in the middle of the day.

## **Black Rain in Detroit (1762)**



On October 19, 1762, a strange night enveloped Detroit, Michigan. In a letter detailing the day, businessman James Stirling described the sun as appearing " *blood red, and three times larger than usual* ." The sky was so dark that candles had to be lit, and the air was " *a dull, yellowish-green* ." Strangest of all, a black rain fell, filling the air with a sulfurous smell and blackening a piece of paper when Stirling held it up.

Businessman John Porteous recounted that the night was so thick that " *it was often impossible to distinguish men from women at a distance of just 10 yards (about 9 meters) on the street* ." He said the black rain " *appeared on white paper like fresh ink* ." There were also reports of similar strange weather phenomena just across the Canadian border, with the phenomenon known as "pluie de suie" in French (meaning "soot rain").

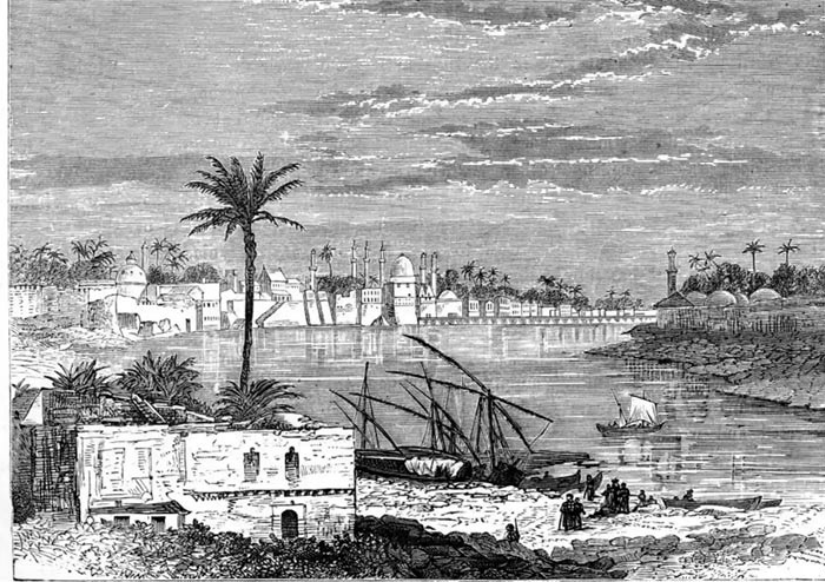
To this day, there is no definitive explanation for the darkness and the black rain. The superstitious explorer Jonathan Carver believed the rain foreshadowed the Pontiac rebellion, which began the following spring. Stirling recorded various theories in his letters—including a plague caused by the English, a forest fire, or (in his view) " *the eruption of some volcano, or an underground fire* ," sulfur " *meeting water clouds, falling with the rain* ."

## **The Dark Days in New England (1780)**

One of the most famously mysterious dark days in history occurred across New England on May 19, 1780. The sun rose as usual, but soon after, dark clouds rolled in and obscured the light. In his diary, George Washington—then fighting in the Revolutionary War in New Jersey—described the clouds: " *dark, but with a kind of bright, reddish light interspersed with them—bright and dark alternating* ." Dr. Cotton Tufts of Massachusetts also described the clouds as having a " *brass-like appearance* " and noted a foul odor in the air, " *some like the smell of a burning chimney, others like the smell of a burning swamp* ."

The cause of the darkness remained unknown for many years. But about 20 years ago, scientists put forward a promising hypothesis: the existence of burn marks on tree rings dating back to 1780 in the Lake States and Canada indicated that the "culprit" might have been a forest fire.

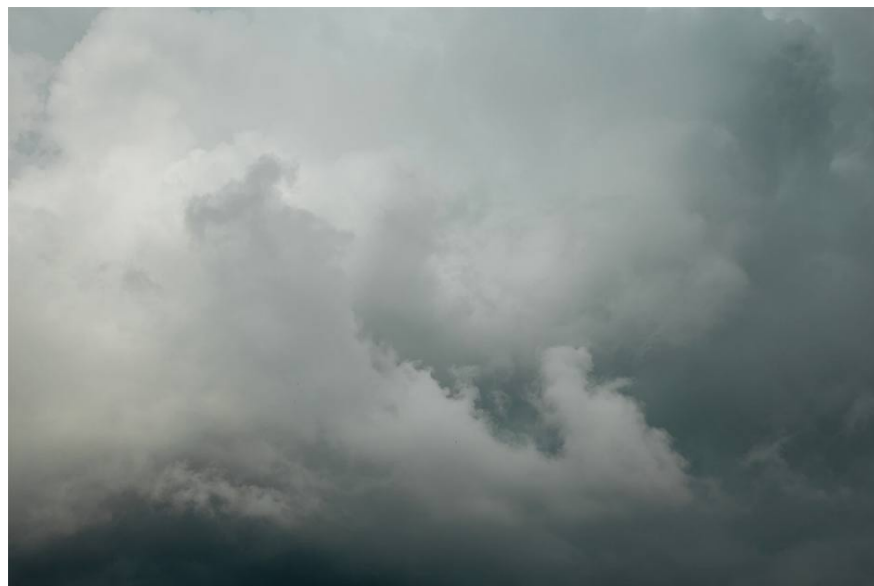
## The Dark Events in Baghdad (1857)



British envoy Charles A. Murray was working as a diplomat in Baghdad, Iraq, when the sun mysteriously turned black on May 20, 1857. Quoted in Charles Fort's *\*The Book of the Damned\** (1919), Murray described the event as " *a night darker than usual midnight, when neither stars nor moon were visible .*" This pitch-black night lasted only a short time and was then " *replaced by a terrifying, glowing red darkness, which I had never seen anywhere in the world .*"

Even stranger, a large amount of red sand fell from the sky. Fort hypothesized that it was a simoon – a dust storm – that had carried an unusually large amount of sand, but Murray had witnessed simoons before and dismissed this explanation.

## The Dark Day of Oshkosh (1886)



Around 3 p.m. on March 19, 1886, the city of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, was suddenly plunged into darkness. The Oshkosh Daily Northwestern reported that "*in less than five minutes, the sun had been obscured to the point that it was almost nighttime inside the houses.*" According to the newspaper, the nearby towns of Eureka and Berlin also experienced a similar strange phenomenon of darkness.

Residents of Oshkosh said the loss of light was due to a "*dark cloud or thick fog*" coming from the west. Some believe the dark clouds are caused by swirling winds at such a high altitude that they are imperceptible on the ground, but a definitive explanation remains unconfirmed.

## **Black Sunday (1935)**

People living on the Great Plains in the 1930s were accustomed to dust bowl storms—caused by inefficient agriculture damaging the land and a series of severe droughts—but the storm that struck on April 14, 1935, was unusually intense. Later known as Black Sunday, that storm contained 300,000 tons of black dust, rose more than 3,000 meters, and moved at speeds up to 160 km/h.

People ran home, sealing every gap with rags to keep the dust out. Folk singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie, who was in Texas, recounted when the black blizzard struck: "*It was so dark you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, you couldn't see anyone in the room.*" He even wrote a song about the terrifying storm, with lyrics like, "*It came down on our city like a black curtain falling / We thought it was judgment, we thought it was the end of the world.*" Apparently, one woman was so convinced it was the beginning of the Apocalypse that she considered killing her child to spare them from the coming horror.

In Kansas, 17 people were reported to have died from dust pneumonia, and three others died from suffocation. The storm also killed countless animals, including cows, birds, rats, and rabbits, who died from black dust. Shortly afterward, Congress passed the Land Preservation Act, aimed at mitigating land damage caused by inefficient farming practices.

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