The Ned Kelly Outbreak

# Instructions - Please Read!

This reading is meant to be difficult.

Please follow the instructions below.

1. Read the essay, but ***DO NOT use a dictionary*** to find the meaning of words.
2. Note words you don’t know after the essay.
3. For each unknown word, try to guess the meaning from the context. ***DO NOT use a dictionary!***

## Necessary Vocabulary

**Squatter (n)** - a person who illegally settles on land or occupies property

**Settler (n)** - a person who settles in a new country or area, usually with permission

**Rural (adj)** - of or relating to agriculture

**Ethnic (adj)** - pertaining to or characteristic of a people, especially a group sharing a common culture, religion, language, etc

**Sympathiser (n)** - a person who agrees with a person or cause

**Credence (n)** - belief as to the truth of something

**Abet (v)** - to encourage, support

**Delusion (n)** - a false belief or opinion

**Grandeur (n)** - the quality or state of being impressive or awesome

**Lampoon (v)** - to mock or ridicule

**Impetus (n)** - a moving force; impulse; stimulus

**Monopoly (n)** - the exclusive possession or control of something

**Turbulence (n)** - violent disorder or commotion

**Magistrate (n)** - a public official charged with the administration of the law

**Antagonism (n)** - active hostility or opposition

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# Essay

The Kelly outbreak is a famous phenomenon in Australia's history. Some historians see it as a simple criminal incident between an outlaw and the police. Others see it as a broader social conflict between a rural community and the authorities.

An important issue for historians is to understand the underlying causes of this criminal outbreak. Was it mainly due to personal, ethnic, or socio-economic factors?

This essay will examine each of these explanations. It will argue that the actions of the Kellys and their supporters are a result of social and economic developments at the time.

Doug Morrissey suggests that Kelly's Irish heritage was mostly responsible for the Kelly outbreak. He points to the high percentage of Irish sympathisers among Ned's supporters.

However, the evidence does not suggest that this was a major factor. Public sympathy crossed social and ethnic barriers. Furthermore, Ned once stated that he considered himself an Australian rather than an Irishman. His lifestyle, and his concern with local issues shown in his letters, give credence to this.

Angus McIntyre suggests two causes for the outbreak. The first is revenge for the harsh sentence given to Ned's mother. She was charged with aiding and abetting an attempted murder. The second is Ned's self-centredness. According to McIntyre, Ned had delusions of grandeur and considered himself capable of any feat.

There appears to be some merit in this interpretation. After his father's death in 1866, Ned Kelly became the male head of the family at the age of twelve. He would have had a great understanding of his mother's problems coping with a large poor family. This may explain his reverence for her.

Kelly was also a member of the Greta Mob. The mobs were gangs of youths who moved around the region. They earned money from seasonal sheep shearing. They were, according to contemporary reports, 'flash', 'larrikin' and 'displayed a disregard for authority'.

Ned Kelly was held in high esteem by the mob. He excelled at marksmanship, bushcraft, fighting, and most importantly, lampooning authority. This may have been the basis for Ned's 'elevated conception of his powers'.

But, Ned also showed concern for the wider social and economic problems of the north-east region. I am not sure that the man Dr. McIntyre describes would have shown such concern. Mrs. Kelly's sentence may have provided the impetus for the outbreak, but there appear to be stronger reasons why a significant part of the community supported Kelly. McIntyre's analysis may explain why Ned led the uprising, but fails to explain why it was such a widespread social phenomenon.

John McQuilton argues that the outbreak was the inevitable result of economic and social ills in the region. He focuses on the dramatic changes in technology, land use, and social systems that occurred during this period. These changes could not fail to produce 'profound results', one of which was an outbreak of banditry.

McQuilton argues that the outbreak was a result of conflict based on unequal distribution of rural resources. Evidence from the period supports such a view.

The region was first occupied by squatters during the late 1830s and 1840s. By 1850, several villages were established.

Between 1860 and 1880 several land reform laws were introduced. They were intended to halt the monopoly of the squatters by creating a new rural class. These laws made small freeholds available for settling.

This effort to make land available to the new rural classes proved a failure. The government's and the settlers' knowledge of European agriculture was inapplicable to Australia. In addition, the squatters opposed and obstructed the settlers. They used their superior local knowledge, finances, and political influence to avoid regulations. They amassed large holdings of premium land, leaving poorer land to settlers.

This situation caused hardship and poverty among settlers. They stole stock from the squatters to supplement meagre food supplies and income. The police were inefficient and corrupt, and harassed the settlers. The magistrates, who were often squatters, treated the settlers harshly.

The social atmosphere in the district at the time of the Kelly outbreak was one of bitterness and turbulence.

To understand the Kelly outbreak, we must examine the social and political events which preceded it. The land acts of the 1860s, the reaction of the squatters, and ignorance of the regional landscape caused widespread poverty among the settlers. The treatment by the police and magistrates heightened antagonism.

This produced a social structure in which the squatters and settlers were directly opposed. These events can be seen as the underlying cause of the Kelly outbreak.

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# Unknown Words

Write unknown words here. Write what you think they mean from the context of the essay. ***DO NOT use a dictionary!***