

Title: The 1863 Draft Riots

Essential Question: Why does Black self-determination threaten American institutions? Why did white people riot against Black people in response to a government draft?

Essential Knowledge:

Common Core

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10:** By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8:** Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

New York State

- 11.3 EXPANSION, NATIONALISM, AND SECTIONALISM (1800 – 1865): As the nation expanded, growing sectional tensions, especially over slavery, resulted in political and constitutional crises that culminated in the Civil War. (Standards: 1, 3, 4, 5; Themes: TCC, GEO, GOV, ECO, TECH)
- 11.3 c Long-standing disputes over states' rights and slavery and the secession of Southern states from the Union, sparked by the election of Abraham Lincoln, led to the Civil War. After the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

National Council for the Social Studies Themes

- People, Places, and Environments
- Culture

C3

- D2.Civ.5.9-12. Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
- D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.
- D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the expansion of state sponsored violence through the institution of policing.
- Students will articulate the causes, dates, and outcomes of the 1863 Draft Riots. They'll be able to articulate the coalition that formed between the NYPD and white supremacy.
 - They'll articulate the NYPD's initial effort to help Black people and why they backed off.
- Students will explain the role Black women played during the riots while men were being attacked.

Grade Level: 9-12

Time Needed: 60-90 minutes

Relevant Topics: Make interdisciplinary connections as needed, otherwise delete

Key Vocabulary: conscription, draft, riot

Required Sources:

[Lesson Citations](#)

Materials/Additional Sources:

- [Lesson 4: Draft Riot Role Play Activity](#)
- [Lesson 4: Debrief](#)
- [Lesson 4: 1863 Draft Riots](#)
- [National Archives: Document Analysis](#)

Teacher Preparation/Background Knowledge:

The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand the 1863 New York City Draft Riots as a moment where race, class, and power intersected in violent and revealing ways, rather than as a spontaneous or isolated outbreak of violence.

While the riots were sparked by opposition to the Civil War draft, students should be pushed to analyze why violence was redirected toward Black New Yorkers and how structural violence shaped both the causes and consequences of the unrest. In thinking about the attacks on the Colored Orphan Asylum, students examine how racial hatred and economic fear led to targeted violence against one of the city's most vulnerable populations.

Students should also begin to challenge the simplified narratives of Northern freedom during the Civil War and to deepen students' understanding of how racism and inequality shaped life in all of the US.

Implementation Notes & Disclaimers:

This lesson is on racialized violence, including a burned down orphanage. This might be upsetting for some students.

Modifications**Individual Student Learning Needs:**

- For the role playing activity, some students might need extra time to learn their role.
- As an extension for kids who need more of a challenge, roles can be tailored by giving students additional details on their chosen roles.

Language Support:

- Provide definitions of vocabulary terms for students. Use images to support understanding.

Podcast Reflection: [They've Got Weapons](#)**Suggested Time:** 10 minutes

- Lead a discussion debriefing the episode. Use [Harvard Project Zero Thinking Routine: Claim, Support, Question](#) to lead discussion about the episode.
- Call on students to share observations, questions, and things that were surprising or shocking. Any curiosities they have.
- Then say that today they'll be exploring the 1863 Draft Riots in more depth.

Engage: Turn and talk.**Suggested Time:** 5-10 minutes

- Have students turn and talk to their neighbors and discuss what ideas come to mind or events come to mind when they hear the word "riot."
- Have a few from each group share out.

Explore: The 1863 Draft Riots**Suggested Time:** 45 minutes

- Go through and explain draft riots slides (briefly): [Lesson 4: 1863 Draft Riots](#)

- Have students analyze primary sources using [National Archives: Document Analysis](#).
 - [Northern Draft Riots During the Civil War](#)
- Role play of people at draft riots
- [Lesson 4: Draft Riot Role Play Activity](#)
 - Each student will read the role of someone involved in the draft riot in small groups (4-6), and then students will interview each other, learning more about different perspectives on that day.
 - Each student receives one role card. They'll then read it silently and then take turns interviewing each other. They'll record answers on the note catcher.
 - We'll debrief as a class
- Debrief the activity.
 - What feelings came up? Why did women have to take such an active role? Why didn't the police respond?

Explain: Wrap Up

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

- Go back to the podcast, and play: minute 30—31:45
 - These race riots had real impacts on Black New Yorkers. Have students write a reflection of all they've learned.
 - The Colored Orphan Asylum was targeted and burned by the mob. What does this specific act of violence reveal about the rioters and their motivations?

Homework: This will be required to begin the next class session:

- Have students use information from the lesson to complete [Lesson 4: Debrief](#).