

**Title:** The Rotten Orchard: Corruption and Capitalism

**Essential Question:** How is what we understand as “corruption” just a part of capitalist institutions?

**Essential Knowledge:**

**Common Core**

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6:** Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

**New York State**

- Students will examine the market revolution, including technological developments, the development of transportation networks, the growth of domestic industries, the increased demands for free and enslaved labor, the changing role of women, and the rise of political democracy.

**National Council for the Social Studies Themes**

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Power, Authority, and Governance

**C3**

- D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- D2.Eco.1.9–12: Analyze how incentives influence choices that may result in policies with long-term consequences.
- D2.Eco.2.9–12: Use marginal benefits and marginal costs to analyze decision-making.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will analyze the difference between looking at police misconduct as corruption vs. what the system of capitalism incentivizes.
- Students will explore Parkhurst’s crusade and call out corruption, as well as the limits of his call for reform.
- Students will understand that the police, as an institution, protect property and capital by design.

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Time Needed:** 60-90 minutes

**Relevant Topics:** Capitalism, economic structures, Tammany Hall, government corruption, NYC vice

**Key Vocabulary:**

**Required Sources:**

[Lesson Citations](#)

**Materials/Additional Sources:**

[Lesson 6: New Yorker Article Excerpt](#)  
[Lesson 6: Full New Yorker Article](#) (optional)  
[Nov 19, 1955.pdf](#) (optional)  
[Lesson 6: Capitalism + Essential Question packet](#)  
[Lesson 6: Capitalism & Parkhurst](#)

### **Teacher Preparation/Background Knowledge:**

This lesson uses Reverend Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst's critique of political and police corruption in 1890s New York City as a case study to help students analyze how economic incentives within a capitalist system shaped institutional behavior. Rather than framing corruption as individual moral failure, students examine how profit, risk, and power created systemic conditions that rewarded illegal behavior and discouraged reform.

The lesson is designed to deepen students' understanding of capitalism as a system of incentives (although it is also a political system, this lesson barely touches on that) and to strengthen their ability to apply economic reasoning to historical events. Students practice disciplinary thinking by identifying how incentives influenced decision-making by police, politicians, and reformers and by evaluating why corruption persisted despite public awareness and legal prohibitions.

### **Implementation Notes & Disclaimers:**

This lesson examines capitalism as an economic system of incentives, not as a political ideology. While it is a political ideology, this could be harder to teach in this political climate. This instruction is grounded in historical evidence and economic reasoning. Students are not asked to endorse or reject capitalism, but to analyze how incentives function in a specific historical context.

The closing activity more actively questions capitalism as a political ideology, and it can be omitted if need be.

### **Modifications**

#### **Individual Student Learning Needs:**

- Allow extended time for reading and written responses.
- Offer multiple response formats (bullet points, diagrams, oral explanation).
- Provide sentence frames for written and oral responses (e.g., "An incentive that influenced police behavior was \_\_\_ because \_\_\_").
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#### **Language Support:**

- Provide a vocabulary preview with student-friendly definitions for key terms (e.g., *capitalism*, *incentive*, *corruption*, *profit*, *risk*).
- Offer a glossary with visuals or real-world examples to support concept development.
- Allow students to annotate the text in their home language or use bilingual dictionaries.

#### **Safety Concerns:**

Avoid asking students to make personal disclosures related to policing or crime.

**Podcast Reflection:** [The Rotten Orchard](#). Use [Harvard Project Zero Thinking Routine: Claim, Support, Question](#) to lead discussion about the episode.

**Suggested Time:** 5 minutes

- Do now: Students will journal and answer the prompt: What are your takeaways from last night's episode? Why do you think the episode is called "The Rotten Orchard?"

**Engage:** Reverend Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst

**Suggested Time:** 25 minutes

- In 1955, The New Yorker did a thorough profile on Reverend Parkhurst and his 1892 sermon and crusade against the police force and their corruption, involvement in vice economy
- Say: Today we'll be close reading a portion of the article, which was part of a two part series on Parkhurst and his foray into NYC vice economy and police corruption
- Distribute the piece (there are two versions linked. A PDF of original print copy, which includes 1950s ads and original New Yorker format. In history class, this could be interesting for students. Another is a digital copy.
- Students can read in pairs or independently, but because of Parkhurst's powerful language, it might be nice to read as a class out loud. Students will then answer and discuss questions
  - [Lesson 6: New Yorker Article Excerpt](#) (questions are here)
  - [Original New Yorker Print PDF](#) (optional)
  - [Lesson 6: Full New Yorker Article](#) (optional)

**Explain Capitalism**

**Suggested Time:** 30 minutes

- Have students read the first page of the handout, [Lesson 6: Capitalism + Essential Question packet](#), briefly defining capitalism. Then go through the slides, stopping at each turn and talk. [Lesson 6: Capitalism & Parkhurst](#)
- Explain that capitalism is a system that shapes incentives. What Parkhurst is describing is not just "bad morals," but a political-economic system where corruption is rational behavior.
- As you present slides, students will fill out a graphic organizer, and then answer essential questions, extended response (see C3 resources for what to look for in essential questions)

**Close:** Can capitalism be equitable? Can police be devoid of corruption in a capitalist country?

**Suggested Time:** 5 minutes

- Close on Stokely Carmichael video and allow students to end on that note.
  - Please note the difference in time periods, as students might misunderstand Stokely Carmichael as a contemporary of Parkhurst, as they both probably feel ancient to them
  - Have students complete [Harvard Project Zero Thinking Routine: Connect-Extend-Challenge](#)
- [Kwame Ture on Capitalism](#)