

Title: Does Diversity Change Police Forces?: The Limits of Representation in American Institutions

Essential Question: Are institutions violent because they lack diversity? Do they change when they diversify?

Essential Knowledge:

Common Core

- 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

- 12.E3 THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY: There are various economic systems in the world. The United States operates within a mixed, free market economy that is characterized by competition and a limited role of government in economic affairs. Economic policymakers face considerable challenges within a capitalist system, including unemployment, inflation, poverty, and environmental consequences. Globalization increases the complexity of these challenges significantly and has exerted strong and transformative effects on workers and entrepreneurs in the United States economy.
- 12.G2d The definition of civil rights has broadened over the course of United States history, and the number of people and groups legally ensured of these rights has also expanded. However, the degree to which rights extend equally and fairly to all.

National Council for the Social Studies Themes

- Culture
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

C3

- D4.6.9-12. Use disciplinary and interdisciplinary lenses to understand the characteristics and causes of local, regional, and global problems; instances of such problems in multiple contexts; and challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address these problems over time and place.
- D4.7.9-12. Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will analyze the claim and provide evidence to support or challenge, "Does diversity change institutions?"
- Students will understand why the NYPD added Black people to the force in the 19th century.
- Students will look at the difference between labor unions and the police union.

Grade Level: 9-12

Time Needed: 60-90 minutes

Relevant Topics: DEI, power mapping, Tenderloin Riots

Key Vocabulary: diversity, union, representation, power structures

Required Sources:

[Lesson Citations](#)

Materials/Additional Sources:

[Lesson 8: Creative Task](#)

[Lesson 8: Evidence Stations](#)

Teacher Preparation/Background Knowledge:

This lesson uses Episode 8 of *Empire City* to examine how racial diversity intersected with institutional power in the New York City Police Department (NYPD) during the 19th century. Teachers should be

prepared to frame diversity not as an automatic agent of change, but as one factor operating within broader political and structural systems.

In the late 1800s, New York City hired Black police officers largely in response to public criticism rather than from a commitment to racial equality. City leaders believed that Black officers could—

Help manage Black neighborhoods, reduce accusations of police brutality, and improve the department's public image

However, these officers were often restricted in authority and rank, limiting their ability to influence policy or institutional culture. Representation increased, but power largely remained unchanged.

A key historical insight for this lesson is the distinction between representation and structural power.

The episode also introduces an important comparison between labor unions and police unions:

- **Labor unions** in the 19th century organized to challenge employers and government power, advocating for wages, hours, and safety. They were often politically left and home to communists, socialists, and anarchists. They were even sometimes sites of integration.
- **Police unions**, by contrast, function to protect officers and defend institutional authority, often resisting external oversight.

This comparison helps students understand why diversity within policing did not necessarily produce reform in the same way diversity within labor movements sometimes did.

Implementation Notes & Disclaimers:

Recommended Timing:

This lesson works best over one to two class periods. Teachers may pause the podcast at key moments to allow for clarification or note taking.

Scaffolding Inquiry:

Students may struggle to distinguish between representation and institutional power. Use guiding questions and visual organizers to help.

Facilitating Discussion:

Use structured discussion protocols (e.g., Think–Pair–Share) to ensure conversations remain grounded in historical evidence rather than opinion.

Creative Task Support:

Emphasize that the creative task is assessed on historical reasoning and use of evidence, not artistic skill. Offer models and planning time to support student success.

Modifications

Individual Student Learning Needs:

Allow students to demonstrate understanding through multiple formats (written, visual, oral, digital) for the creative task.

Allow students to select the creative format that best fits their strengths and learning preferences.

Language Support:

Provide a glossary with translations or images where possible.

Allow students to annotate sources or brainstorm ideas in their home language before responding in English.

Pair multilingual learners with supportive peers for discussion and station activities.

Engage: Change the People, Change the System?

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Warm-Up Prompt (Think–Pair–Share):

- If you add new people to an institution, does the institution change—or do the people have to adapt?
- Students respond individually, then discuss in pairs.
- As they're sharing, chart on the board. Make two columns:
 - *Institutions Change*
 - *Institutions Stay the Same*

Podcast Revisit: Episode 8 [Stay Dangerous](#). Use [Harvard Project Zero Thinking Routine: Claim, Support, Question](#) to lead discussion about the episode.

Suggested Time: 5-10 minutes

- Replay minute 20-25
- Then they'll discuss these questions in partners or groups
 - Why did city leaders decide to add Black officers to the NYPD?
 - What problems were they hoping to solve?
 - What limits were placed on Black officers once they joined?
 - What did he criticize about the department?

Explore: Evidence Stations – “Does Diversity Change Institutions?”

Suggested Time: 20 minutes

- Set up 4 stations around the room with short excerpts (from the podcast and primary sources).
- Station Themes [Lesson 8: Evidence Stations](#)
 - Black Officers & Representation
 - Power & Policing Structures
 - Labor Unions vs. Police Unions
 - Internal Critique
- At each station, Students will answer: What claim is being made? Who benefits? Does this support or challenge the idea that diversity changes institutions?

Elaborate: Structured Discussion – Claim on Trial

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

- Claim on the Board: *Diversity changes institutions.*
- Students must choose one of three positions: Agree, Disagree or It Depends
- Students must use **at least one piece of historical evidence** from the podcast or stations.
- Sentence starters provided:
 - “This example suggests diversity changes institutions because...”
 - “This evidence shows the institution remained the same because...”

(Evaluate) Summary: Unit Wrap up [Lesson 8: Creative Task](#)

Suggested Time: (This might turn into homework)

Creative Task – “Institution Remix” (Assessment)

Student Choice (Pick One):

- Create a mini-podcast script
- Design a political cartoon
- Build a timeline with commentary

Informed Action & Community

Connection: For an extension, students could research other institutions in our society (perhaps their local police department or even Congress) and look at diversity and analyze positions held by those institutions. They can use the essential question to think critically about those institutions.