
New York City draft riots

The **New York City draft riots** (July 13 to July 16, 1863; known at the time as **Draft Week**^[1]) were violent disturbances in New York City that were the culmination of working-class discontent with new laws passed by Congress that year to draft men to fight in the ongoing American Civil War. The riots were the largest civil insurrection in American history.^[2]

President Abraham Lincoln diverted several regiments of militia and volunteer troops from following up after the Battle of Gettysburg to control the city. The rioters were overwhelmingly working-class men, primarily ethnic Irish, resenting particularly that wealthier men, who could afford to pay a \$300 commutation fee to hire a substitute, were spared the draft.^{[3][4]}

Initially intended to express anger at the draft, the protests turned into an ugly race riot, with the white rioters attacking blacks wherever they could be found. At least 100 black people were estimated to have been killed. The conditions in the city were such that Major General John E. Wool, commander of the Department of the East, stated on July 16, "Martial law ought to be proclaimed, but I have not a sufficient force to enforce it."^[5] The military did not reach the city until after the first day of rioting, when mobs had already ransacked or destroyed numerous public buildings, two Protestant churches, the homes of various abolitionists or sympathizers, many black homes, and the Colored Orphan Asylum at 44th Street and Fifth Avenue, which was burned to the ground. The children were not harmed.^[6]

Background

New York's economy was tied to the South; by 1822 nearly half of its exports were cotton shipments.^[7] New York had such strong business connections to the South that on January 7, 1861, Mayor Fernando Wood called on the city's Board of Aldermen to "declare the city's independence from Albany and from Washington"; he said that it "would have the whole and united support of the Southern States."^[8] When the Union entered the war, New York City had many southern sympathizers.^[9]

The city was also a continuing center of immigrants; since the 1840s, most were from Ireland and Germany. In 1860, nearly 25% of the New York City population was German-born and many did not yet speak English. During the 1840s and 1850s journalists had published sensational accounts, directed at the working class, dramatizing the "evils" of interracial socializing relationships and marriages; reformers joined the effort.^[6] Newspapers carried derogatory portrayals of blacks and ridiculed "black aspirations for equal rights in voting, education, and employment". Pseudo-scientific lectures on phrenology were popular, although countered by doctors.^[9] At the time, some areas of the city, such as Lower Manhattan, had mixed populations of residents.

The Democratic Party political machine of Tammany Hall had been working to enroll immigrants as U.S. citizens so they could vote in local elections, and had strongly recruited Irish, who already spoke English. In 1863, with the war continuing, Congress passed a law to establish a draft for the first time, as more troops were needed. In New York City and other locations, new citizens learned that they were expected to register for the draft to fight for their new country. Black men were excluded from the draft as they were not considered citizens. Free black men and immigrants competed for low-wage jobs in the city.^[6]

While New York political offices were held by Democrats, the election of Abraham Lincoln as president had demonstrated the rise in Republican political power nationally. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 alarmed much of the working class in New York, who feared that freed slaves would migrate to the city and add further competition to the labor market. There had already been tensions between black and white workers since the 1850s, particularly at the docks. In March 1863, white longshoremen refused to work with blacks and attacked 200 black men. In this area of the city, there were a variety of interracial venues of brothels and bars, and neighborhoods were mixed in terms of residents. Men also competed as hacks, craftsmen and other jobs.^[6]

Riots

Monday

There were reports of rioting in Buffalo, New York, and certain other cities, but the first drawing of numbers on July 11, 1863 occurred peaceably in New York City. The second drawing was held on Monday, July 13, 1863, ten days after the Union victory at Gettysburg. At 10 a.m., a furious crowd of around 500, led by the Black Joke Engine Company 33, attacked the assistant Ninth District Provost Marshal's Office, at Third Avenue and 47th Street, where the draft was taking place.^[10] The crowd threw large paving stones through windows, then burst through the doors and set the building ablaze.^[11] When the fire department responded, rioters broke up their vehicles. Others killed horses pulling streetcars and smashed the cars. To prevent other parts of the city being notified of the riot, they cut telegraph lines.^[10] Many of the rioters were Irish laborers who feared having to compete with emancipated slaves for jobs.^[12]

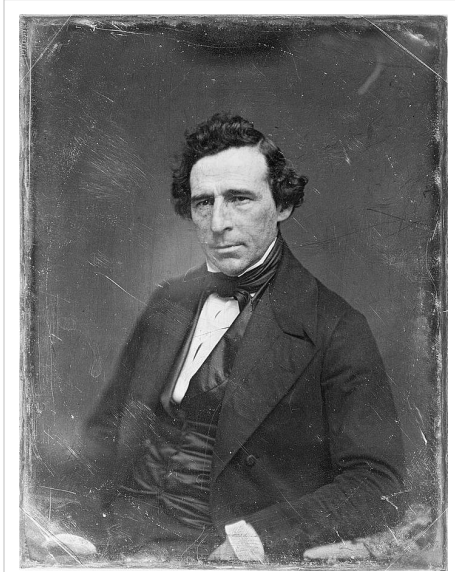
Since the New York State Militia had been sent to assist Union troops in Pennsylvania, the New York City Police Department was the only force to try to suppress the riots.^[11] The police superintendent, John A.

Kennedy, arrived at the site on Monday to check on the situation. Although not in uniform, he was recognized by people in the mob who attacked him. Kennedy was left nearly unconscious, having had his face bruised and cut, his eye injured, lips swollen, his hand cut with a knife, and beaten to a mass of bruises and blood all over his body.^[13] Police drew their clubs and revolvers, and charged the crowd, but were overpowered.^[14] The police forces were badly outnumbered and unable to quell the riots; however, they did keep the rioting out of Lower Manhattan, below Union Square.^[15] Immigrants and others in the "Bloody Sixth" Ward, around the seaport, refrained from getting involved in the Draft Riots.^[16]

The Bull's Head hotel on 44th Street, which refused to provide alcohol, was burned. The mayor's residence on Fifth Avenue, the Eighth and Fifth District police stations, and other buildings were attacked and set on fire. Other targets included the office of the *New York Times*. The mob was turned back at the *Times* office by staff manning two Gatling guns.^[17] Fire engine companies responded, but some of the firefighters were sympathetic to the rioters, since they too had been drafted on Saturday.^[14] Later in the afternoon, authorities shot and killed a man as a crowd attacked the Armory at Second Avenue and 21st Street. The mob broke all the windows with paving stones ripped from the street.^[10]

Rioters turned against black people as their scapegoats and the primary target of their anger. Many immigrants and the poor viewed free black men as competition for scarce jobs, and worried about more slaves being emancipated and coming to New York for work.^[6] Some rioters thought slavery was the cause of the Civil War. The mob beat, tortured and/or killed numerous black people, including one man who was attacked by a crowd of 400 with clubs and paving stones, then lynched—hanged from a tree and set alight.^[10]

The Colored Orphan Asylum at 44th Street and Fifth Avenue, which then provided shelter for 233 children, was attacked by a mob about 4 in the afternoon. It was a "symbol of white charity to blacks and of black upward



John Alexander Kennedy, NYC police superintendent (1803–1873)



Bull's Head Hotel, depicted in 1830, was burned in the riot.

mobility."^[6] A mob of several thousand, including many women and children, looted the building of its food and supplies, but spared the children, who were led to safety. The mob burned the building to the ground, destroying it in 20 minutes.

Throughout the areas of rioting, mobs attacked and killed at least 100 black people, and destroyed their known homes and businesses, such as James McCune Smith's pharmacy at 93 West Broadway, believed to be the first owned by a black man in the United States. While removed from the midtown area of the riots, white longshoremen used the chaos of events to "remove all evidence of a black and interracial social life from the area near the docks. White dockworkers attacked and destroyed brothels, dance halls, boarding houses, and tenements that catered to blacks; mobs stripped the clothing off the white owners of these businesses."^[6]

Tuesday

Heavy rain fell on Monday night, helping to abate the fires and sending rioters home, but the crowd returned the next day. Commerce in the city was halted, with workers joining the crowd. Rioters attacked the homes of notable Republicans, including the activist Abby Hopper Gibbons, among others.^[18] Governor Horatio Seymour arrived on Tuesday and spoke at City Hall, where he attempted to assuage the crowd by proclaiming the Conscription Act was unconstitutional. General John E. Wool, Commander of the Eastern District, brought approximately 800 troops in from forts in the New York Harbor and from West Point. He also ordered the militias to return to New York.^[14]

Wednesday and Thursday: order restored

The situation improved on Wednesday, when assistant provost-marshal-general Robert Nugent received word from his superior officer, Colonel James Barnet Fry, to suspend the draft. As this news appeared in newspapers, some rioters stayed home. But some of the militias began to return and used harsh measures against the remaining mobs.^[14]

Order began to be restored on Thursday, after a peaceful rally of 5,000 at Old St. Patrick's Cathedral to hear Archbishop Hughes. The New York State militia and some federal troops were returned to New York, including the 152nd New York Volunteers, the 26th Michigan Volunteers, the 27th Indiana Volunteers and the 7th Regiment New York State Militia from Frederick, Maryland, after a forced march. In addition, the governor sent in the 74th and 65th regiments of the New York state militia, which had not been in federal service, and a section of the 20th Independent Battery, New York Volunteer Artillery from Fort Schuyler in Throgs Neck. The New York State militia units were the first to arrive. By July 16, there were several thousand Federal troops in the city.^[5] A final confrontation occurred on Thursday evening near Gramercy Park. According to Adrian Cook's analysis in his *Armies of the Streets* (1974), twelve people died on the last day of the riots in skirmishes between rioters and the police and army, including one African American, two soldiers, a bystander, and two women.

Aftermath

The exact death toll during the New York Draft Riots is unknown, but according to historian James M. McPherson (2001), at least 120 civilians were killed. At least eleven black men were lynched.^[19] Violence by longshoremen against black men was especially fierce in the docks area.^[6]

The most reliable estimates indicate that at least 2,000 people were injured. Herbert Asbury, the author of the 1928 book *Gangs of New York*, upon which the 2002 film was based, puts the figure much higher, at 2,000 killed and 8,000 wounded,^[20] but this figure is not widely accepted and is considered myth.^[21] Total property damage was about \$1–5 million (\$15 – \$75 million in 2011, adjusted for inflation).^{[20][22]} The city treasury later indemnified one-quarter of the amount. The historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote that the riots were "equivalent to a Confederate victory".^[22] Fifty buildings, including two Protestant churches and the Colored Orphan Asylum, burned to the ground.

During the riots, landlords had driven blacks from their residences, as they feared their buildings being destroyed. As a result of the violence against blacks, hundreds left New York, including James McCune Smith, moving to Williamsburg, Brooklyn (still a separate city) and New Jersey. The white elite in New York organized to provide relief to black riot victims, helping them find new work and homes. The Union League Club and the Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People provided nearly \$40,000 to 2500 victims of the riots. By 1865 the total black population had dropped to under 10,000, the lowest it had been since 1820. The white working class riots had changed the demographics of the city and exerted their control in the workplace; they became "unequivocally divided" from blacks.^[6]

On August 19, the government resumed the draft in New York. It was completed within 10 days without further incident. Fewer men were drafted than had been feared by the working class: of the 750,000 selected nationwide for conscription, only about 45,000 went into service.^[23]

While the rioting mainly involved the working class, middle and upper-class New Yorkers had split sentiments on the draft and use of federal power or martial law to enforce it.^[24] Many wealthy Democratic businessmen sought to have the draft declared unconstitutional. Tammany Democrats did not seek to have the draft declared unconstitutional, but helped pay the commutation fees for those who were drafted.^[25] In December 1863, the Union League Club gained permission to raise a regiment of black soldiers, outfitted and trained them, and saw the thousand men off with a parade through the city to the Hudson River docks in March 1864; a crowd estimated at one hundred thousand watching the procession led by police and members of the Union League Club.^[6]

New York City's support for the Union cause continued, however grudgingly. Gradually southern sympathies declined in the city. Its banks eventually financed the war, and the state's industries were more productive than the entire Confederacy. By the end of the war, more than 450,000 soldiers, sailors and militia had enlisted from New York State, which was the most populous at the time. A total of 46,000 military men died during the war, more from disease than wounds.^[8]

Order of Battle

New York City Police Department

New York Metropolitan Police Department under the command of Superintendent John A. Kennedy.

Commissioners Thomas Coxon Acton and John G. Bergen took command when Kennedy was seriously injured by a mob during the early stages of the riots.^[26]

Precinct	Commander	Location	Strength	Notes
1st Precinct	Captain Jacob B. Warlow	29 Broad Street	4 Sergeants, 63 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
2nd Precinct	Captain Nathaniel R. Mills	49 Beekman Street	4 Sergeants, 60 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
3rd Precinct	Captain James Greer	160 Chambers Street	3 Sergeants, 64 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
4th Precinct	Captain James Bryan	9 Oak Street	4 Sergeants, 70 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
5th Precinct	Captain Jeremiah Petty	49 Leonard Street	4 Sergeants, 61 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
6th Precinct	Captain John Jourdan	9 Franklin Street	4 Sergeants, 63 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
7th Precinct	Captain William Jamieson	247 Madison Street	4 Sergeants, 52 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	

8th Precinct	Captain Morris DeCamp	126 Wooster Street	4 Sergeants, 52 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
9th Precinct	Captain Jacob L. Sebring	94 Charles Street	4 Sergeants, 51 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
10th Precinct	Captain Thaddeus C. Davis	Essex Market	4 Sergeants, 62 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
11th Precinct	Captain John I. Mount	Union Market	4 Sergeants, 56 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
12th Precinct	Captain Theron R. Bennett	126th Street (near Third Avenue)	5 Sergeants, 41 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
13th Precinct	Captain Thomas Steers	Attorney Street (at corner of Delancey Street)	4 Sergeants, 63 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
14th Precinct	Captain John J. Williamson	53 Spring Street	4 Sergeants, 58 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
15th Precinct	Captain Charles W. Caffery	220 Mercer Street	4 Sergeants, 69 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
16th Precinct	Captain Henry Hedden	156 West 20th Street	4 Sergeants, 50 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
17th Precinct	Captain Samuel Brower	First Avenue (at the corner of Fifth Street)	4 Sergeants, 56 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
18th Precinct	Captain John Cameron	22nd Street (near Second Avenue)	4 Sergeants, 74 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
19th Precinct	Captain Galen T. Porter	59th Street (near Third Avenue)	4 Sergeants, 49 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
20th Precinct	Captain George W. Walling	212 West 35th Street	4 Sergeants, 59 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
21st Precinct	Sergeant Cornelius Burdick (acting Captain)	120 East 31st Street	4 Sergeants, 51 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
22nd Precinct	Captain Johannes C. Slott	47th Street (between Eighth and Ninth Avenues)	4 Sergeants, 54 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
23rd Precinct	Captain Henry Hutchings	86th Street (near Fourth Avenue)	4 Sergeants, 42 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
24th Precinct	Captain James Todd	New York waterfront	2 Sergeants and 20 Patrolmen	Headquartered on Police Steamboat No. 1
25th Precinct	Captain Theron Copeland	300 Mulberry Street	1 Sergeant, 38 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	Headquarters of the Broadway Squad.
26th Precinct	Captain Thomas W. Thorne	City Hall	1 Sergeant, 66 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
27th Precinct	Captain John C. Helme	117 Cedar Street	4 Sergeants, 52 Patrolmen, and 3 Doormen	
28th Precinct	Captain John F. Dickson	550 Greenwich Street	4 Sergeants, 48 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	
29th Precinct	Captain Francis C. Speight	29th Street (near Fourth Avenue)	4 Sergeants, 82 Patrolmen, and 3 Doormen	
30th Precinct	Captain James Z. Bogart	86th Street and Bloomingdale Road	2 Sergeants, 19 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	

32nd Precinct	Captain Alanson S. Wilson	Tenth Avenue and 152nd Street	4 Sergeants, 35 Patrolmen, and 2 Doormen	Mounted police
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New York State Militia

Unit	Commander	Complement	Officers	Other Ranks
65th Regiment	Colonel William F. Berens	400		
74th Regiment	Colonel Watson A. Fox			
20th Independent Battery	Captain B. Franklin Ryer			

Union Army

Union Army under the command of Brigadier General Harvey Brown.

Chief of Staff: Major General C.W. Sandford.

Commander of artillery: Captain Henry F. Putnam, 12th United States Infantry Regiment.

Provost marshals tasked with overseeing the initial enforcement of the draft:

- Provost Marshal General James Fry
- Assistant Provost Marshal General Robert Nugent:
 - On 13 July 1863, during the first day of rioting, in command of the Invalid Corps: 1st Battaion

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton authorized five regiments from Gettysburg, mostly federalized state militia and volunteer units from the Army of the Potomac, to reinforce the New York Police Department. By the end of the riots, there were over 4,000 soldiers in New York City.

Unit	Commander	Complement	Officers	Other Ranks
26th Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment	Colonel Judson S. Farrar			
5th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment	Colonel Cleveland Winslow			
7th New York National Guard Regiment	Colonel Marshall Lefferts	800		
8th New York National Guard Regiment	Brigadier General Charles C. Dodge	150		
9th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment	Colonel Edward E. Jardine			
11th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment	Colonel Henry O'Brien (killed)			
14th New York Volunteer Cavalry Regiment	Colonel Thaddeus P. Mott			
22nd New York National Guard Regiment	Colonel Lloyd Aspinwall			
47th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment	Colonel Jeremiah V. Meserole			
152nd New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment	Colonel Alonso Ferguson			

Fictional portrayals

- *The Banished Children of Eve, A Novel of Civil War New York* (1995) by Peter Quinn
- *On Secret Service* (2000) by John Jakes
- *Paradise Alley* (2003) by Kevin Baker
- *New York: the Novel* (2009) by Edward Rutherford
- Newt Gingrich's alternate history novel *Grant Comes East* (2004)

Theatre and film:

- The short-lived 1968 Broadway musical *Maggie Flynn*, starring Shirley Jones, was set in the Tobin Orphanage for black children (modeled on the Colored Orphan Asylum).
- *Gangs of New York* (2002), a film directed by Martin Scorsese, culminating in the riots; it portrayed conflated, mostly fictional events and was criticized for its inaccurate history by the journalist Pete Hamill, among others, as Five Points did not participate in the draft riots.^[21] It purportedly portrayed "the birth of Manhattan and the way the different waves of immigrants have shaped New York City's evolution".^[27]

Notes

- [1] Barnes 5 ([http://books.google.com/books?vid=LCCN01016825&id=0mUod9zTN4kC&pg=PA2&vq="Riot+Week"](http://books.google.com/books?vid=LCCN01016825&id=0mUod9zTN4kC&pg=PA2&vq=))
- [2] Foner, E. (1988). *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, The New American Nation series, pg. 32, *New York: Harper & Row*
- [3] "The Draft in the Civil War" (<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h249.html>), U-S History, Online Highways LLC
- [4] William Bryk, "The Draft Riots, Part II" (<http://www.nypress.com/article-6235-the-draft-riots-part-ii.html>), *NY Press*, August 2, 2002, Blog post
- [5] "Maj. Gen. John E. Wool Official Reports for the New York Draft Riots" (<http://www.civilwarhome.com/woolor.htm>). *Shotgun's Home of the American Civil War, Blog*. Retrieved 2006-08-16.
- [6] Leslie M. Harris, "The New York City Draft Riots" (<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/317749.html>), excerpt from *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, University of Chicago Press, 2003
- [7] "King Cotton: Dramatic Growth of the Cotton Trade" (<http://nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit/T1/G1/G1ReadMore.php>), New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War, New-York Historical Society, accessed May 12, 2012
- [8] Roberts, Sam (December 26, 2010). "New York Doesn't Care to Remember the Civil War" (<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/26/new-york-doesnt-care-to-remember-the-civil-war/?ref=nyregion>). *The New York Times*. .
- [9] *New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War Online Exhibit* (<http://www.nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit>), New York Historical Society, (November 17, 2006 to September 3, 2007, physical exhibit, accessed May 10, 2012
- [10] "The Mob in New York". *The New York Times*. July 14, 1863.
- [11] Schouler, James (1899). *History of the United States of America, Under the Constitution*. Dodd, Mead & Company. pp. 418.
- [12] Foner (2002), *Reconstruction*, p. 33
- [13] Barnes, David M. (1863), pg. 12
- [14] Rhodes, James Ford (1899). *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850*. Macmillan. pp. 320–323.
- [15] Barnes, David M. (1863), pg. 6
- [16] Bernstein, Iver (1990), pgs. 24-5
- [17] <https://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/harp/0801.html>
- [18] Bernstein, Iver (1990), pgs. 25-6
- [19] McPherson, James M., *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p. 399
- [20] Asbury, pg. 169
- [21] Pete Hamill (2002-12-15). "TRAMPLING CITY'S HISTORY 'Gangs' misses point of Five Points" (<http://knickerbockervillage.blogspot.com/2007/11/gangs-of-new-york-2.html>). *New York Daily News*. .
- [22] Morison, Samuel Eliot (1972). *The Oxford History of the American People: Volume Two: 1789 Through Reconstruction*. Signet. pp. 451. ISBN 0-451-62254-5.
- [23] David Donald, *Civil War and Reconstruction* (2002), pg. 229
- [24] Bernstein, Iver (1990), pg. 43
- [25] Bernstein, Iver (1990), pg. 44
- [26] Costello, Augustine E. *Our Police Protectors: History of the New York Police from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*. New York: A.E. Costello, 1885. (pg. 200-201)
- [27] "Gangs of New York Introduction" (<http://web.archive.org/web/20071010141659/http://www.shell.linux.se/treggy88/Leo/gony/gangs.html>). Archived from the original (<http://www.shell.linux.se/treggy88/Leo/gony/gangs.html>) on 2007-10-10. Retrieved 2007-12-08.

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External links

- *New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War Online Exhibit* (<http://www.nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit/>), New-York Historical Society, (November 17, 2006 to September 3, 2007, physical exhibit)
- Leslie M. Harris, "The New York City Draft Riots of 1863" (<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/317749.html>), excerpt from *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 279–288
- "New York Draft Riots" (<http://www.civilwarhome.com/draftriots.htm>), 2002, source Civil War Society's *Civil War Encyclopedia*, Civil War Home website maintained by Shotgun
- "New York Draft Riots" (<http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1863/august/draft-riots.htm>), First Edition Harper's News Report, Son of the South Website
- "1863 New York City Draft Riots" (<http://www.mrlincolnandnewyork.org/inside.asp?ID=91&subjectID=4>), Mr. Lincoln and New York website
- A Map of Events ([http://www.timespacemap.com/search/eventsearch.htm?_what="new+york+draft+riots"&_mctype=0](http://www.timespacemap.com/search/eventsearch.htm?_what=)) mentioned in this article
- Movie History: Choice Critics (http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/2006/6/2006_6_24.shtml)
- Bill Bigelow, "The Draft Riot Mystery" (<http://zinnedproject.org/posts/1150>), 9-page lesson plan for High School Students, 2012, Zinn Education Project/Teaching for Change

Article Sources and Contributors

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