

“Detroit 1967: The Fire This Time”

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LESSON OVERVIEW:

“When the dust settled, 43 people were dead, 1,189 were injured, over 7,200 arrests had been made, and more than 2,000 buildings had been destroyed. It remains one of the worst riots in American history, and gave Detroit the sad distinction of being the only city that required federal intervention three separate times. The riot received the kind of widespread media attention that plagues a city for decades. Detroit burning was an indelible image.” This passage comes from the pages of Peter J. Hammer and Trevor W. Coleman’s book, *Crusader for Justice* (Hammer, Peter J., and Trevor W. Coleman. *Crusader for Justice*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2014. 93-94. Print.). In Detroit’s 300-plus year history, the 1967 riots stand as its arguably worst event. This lesson will have students compare and contrast the three riots Detroit endured and brainstorm solutions, so they never happen again. Judge Damon J. Keith, a native Detroiter was deeply affected by these riots, as all Detroiters were. He stated the following: *“I am aware of all the sociological reasons as to why crimes are committed and understand most of them, but I say to you that while we work to eliminate poverty, substandard housing, inadequate education and all the evils that are the byproduct of a racist society, we must also, without delay or equivocation, strive to make this city of ours a safe place in which to live, in which to raise our children, in which to enjoy the fruits of our labors and our God-given rights”*. (Darden, Joe T., and Richard W. Thomas. *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts, and Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide*. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013. 105-06. Print.). Although Judge Keith’s words are over forty years old, these sociological underpinnings and struggle to transcend them are still very much part of today’s world.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to brainstorm the roots of conflict in order to draw psychological and philosophical parallels to the history they will learn. Students will then explore various sources in order to compare and contrast the three riots Detroit has endured. Students will then further draw more comparisons and find common themes by studying Detroit’s 1967 and Watt’s 1965 riots as case studies. Students will then evaluate the reasons for urban riots and devise solutions to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL CONTENT EXPECTATIONS (STANDARDS):

8.3.5 Tensions and Reactions to Poverty and Civil Rights – Analyze the causes and consequences of the civil unrest that occurred in American cities by comparing the civil unrest in Detroit with at least one other American city (e.g., Los Angeles, Cleveland, Chicago, Atlanta, and Newark). (*National Geography Standard 12, p. 208*)

TIME REQUIRED: One or two class periods.

ERA: USHG ERA 8 – POST-WORLD WAR 11 UNITED STATES (1945 -1989)

MATERIALS:

- Packet of source materials for the four riots (Detroit in 1863, 1943, 1967 and Watts 1965)
- Venn diagram and T-chart graphic organizers
- Pencils and paper

RESOURCES: *Click on Separate Links to Access Them*

- 1) Triple Venn Diagram for Three Detroit Riots
- 2) Fishbone Diagram in order to find common themes between Watts 1965 and Detroit 1967
- 3) Packet of sources for all four case studies

PROCEDURE:

- 1) Hand every student a half-sheet of scrap paper. Set a clock for three minutes and ask all the students to answer anonymously the following prompt: “Think about the angriest you’ve ever felt and what was done to you that made you feel that way”? Take attendance and get things in order to start class as they write and then collect the half-sheets at the end of the three minutes.
- 2) Read the student responses and have a volunteer transcribe upon the board some reasons that provoked their anger. Have the volunteer place tally marks next to repeated answers. Connect these sentiments to how people were agitated enough to riot in the historical examples students will be learning about in a brief lecture.
- 3) Hand students the worksheet packet that contains the four sources and two graphic organizers and instruct them to fill in information onto the organizers as you present it to them.
 - a) Show the videos related to each primary source and then have students read the excerpts on the pages. Students will then fill in pertinent information on their graphic organizers.
 - b) Once they fill in their graphic organizers on their own, transcribe them on your board and model what it should look like. Emphasize key aspects of the history. Students will fill in any voids in missing information.
- 4) To end class, divide students into groups of three or four and pose the task of preventing riots by doing the following:
 - A) List the root causes and reasons why riots have happened and why they may happen in the future.
 - B) Then devise policy solutions that lawmakers and judges would support. Also, discuss ways non-governmental entities such as the education system, mass media, pop culture, and individuals can improve circumstances to lessen the odds of another insurrection happening again.

EXTENTION ACTIVITIES:

- 1) Read *Crusader for Justice* by Peter J. Hammer and Trevor W. Coleman (2014)
- 2) Arrange for a trip to the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights at Wayne State University. <http://law.wayne.edu/keithcenter/index.php>
- 3) Play the MC5's, *The Motor City is Burning* and have students discuss what they're singing about. Link can be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK30LkzRP_0
- 4) Play to the class the NBC special report, "Summer of 1967: Aftermath of Detroit Race Riots". Link can be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOoW0U6g_E&feature=share

EVALUATION:

Students will be assessed for the day using a rubric and on three questions that will appear on the next examination. These three questions are found at the bottom of the rubric.

SOURCE #1: RIOTS OF 1863

Watch Video link at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clbUwEuKhN0#t=95>



Source: "Voices of the Civil War Episode 14: "Detroit Draft Riot"" *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 25 July 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clbUwEuKhN0#t=95>>.

Then read the following:

While the Civil War seemed far away, civil behavior in Detroit was in danger. Violence and theft were common as the main commercial streets and the waterfront were deserted at night. Burglaries and muggings were happening at an alarming rate. Merchants were worried and suspicious as they locked their establishments at night and didn't feel any safer when they returned home, as the better neighborhoods were targeted by thieves.

Negroes were targeted on the morning of March 6, 1863, when a mob of hoodlums rampaged along Brush and Beaubien south of Gratiot. Many were beaten and their homes looted and torched, while others escaped the mayhem and sought refuge in Canada. The riot was touched off when an angry mob tried to lynch a black man accused of raping two nine-year-old girls- one of whom was white. Authorities held the mob in check while getting the prisoner to safety. The angry mob then turned their attention to the nearby neighborhood. When the riot ended, 35 structures had been destroyed by 20 fires. The prisoner- named William Faulkner- was later proven innocent when the girls admitted they fabricated the charges.

Source: Cohen, Irwin. *Echoes of Detroit*. Haslett, Michigan: City Vision Publishing, 2000. 23. Print.

SOURCE #2: RIOTS OF 1943

Watch video link at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YP9cbo5CkU>



Source: "1943 Riots." *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 25 July 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YP9cbo5CkU>>.

Then read the following:

The war created more job opportunities at higher wages, and thousands of black families moved to Detroit in the year and a half since war was declared. Southern whites also joined the influx and competed for many of the same positions open to blacks.

The fires that raged within both groups couldn't be extinguished easily and added to the prejudice already reigning in the city. June 20, 1943, was a hot Sunday afternoon. Rumor fueled small incidents between blacks and whites. Each side heard that a woman and her baby of their color was thrown off the Belle Isle Bridge during a racial melee.

Mobs seeking to defend their side roamed the streets looking for trouble. Blacks struck first when an unsuspecting white pedestrian was beaten unconscious and run over by a taxicab. White owned stores were looted and motorists were pulled from their cars and severely beaten.

Gangs of whites took over Woodward Avenue downtown, pulling black people off streetcars and beating them. Blacks trying to escape the downtown mayhem by paying admission to movie theaters and hiding in the darkness weren't always successful. A black man was found dead in a theater seat with six bullet wounds, and another seeking refuge in the Federal Building was beaten to death on its Fort Street steps.

Many blacks were beaten in the presence of police officers. Many were beaten by police officers. Many were killed by police officers. Police killed a total of 17 people—all black.

On Monday night the first contingent of federal troops arrived. They made themselves visible and encamped on the vast lawn of the Public Library and various other public locations.

The violence produced 34 deaths and 676 injuries. Of the 1,838 arrested, 82 percent were black. It was time for Detroit's officials to take a hard look at the 3,400-man police force. The boys in blue were only slightly over one percent black.

Source: Cohen, Irwin. *Echoes of Detroit*. Haslett, Michigan: City Vision Publishing, 2000. 80-81. Print.

SOURCE #3: RIOTS OF 1967

Watch video link at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZMCTQSVReM>



Source: "Detroit Riot 1967/ Mr. Jacobs." *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 25 July 2015.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZMCTQSVReM>>.

He knew the raging anger that created it and the oppressive circumstances that set off the fury. For many years in Detroit, black frustrations roiled just underneath the city's surface: poverty, rampant discrimination, overcrowded and inadequate housing, terrible schools, and an overall sense of hopelessness.

The 1967 riots, or "urban rebellion," as many black scholars refer to it, began in the wee hours of that Sunday morning, July 23rd, after police raided an after-hours drinking club in a black neighborhood, at the juncture of Twelfth and Clairmount Streets. In Detroit, such unlicensed clubs were commonly referred to as "blind pigs". This one was located on the second floor above a print shop.

On Saturday night, about eighty people had crammed inside to celebrate the return of two Vietnam War veterans. It was not, by its nature, a combative gathering. But in a typical roughshod and over reactive way, the Detroit police, upon learning of the celebration, decided to detain everyone in the club. This drew a crowd of onlookers.

As the patrons were being herded into a line of police vehicles, the crowd began to jeer the police. Confrontations ensued. Insults flew back and forth. Shoving and tussling began, and before long, people began to toss rocks and bottles as the squad cars pulled away. It wasn't long before someone smashed the windows of the clothing store next door, and from there vandalism, looting and arson took root. It began to spread throughout the neighborhood and quickly grew through the entire west side of the city. Blacks throughout Detroit had seemingly had enough of racism and contempt from the overwhelmingly white police force. The flames were fanning out of control.

Late Monday night, President Johnson finally gave the order. By Tuesday, some 8,000 National Guardsmen were deployed. Eventually, nearly 5,000 paratroopers and 360 Michigan State Police would be added to the force. For much of that week, Detroit screamed, smoked and smoldered.

When the dust settled, 43 people were dead, 1,189 were injured, over 7,200 arrests had been made, and more than 2,000 buildings had been destroyed. It remains one of the worst riots in American history, and gave Detroit the sad distinction of being the only city that required federal intervention three separate times. The riot received the kind of widespread media attention that plagues a city for decades. Detroit burning was an indelible image.

Source: Hammer, Peter J., and Trevor W. Coleman. *Crusader for Justice*. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2014. 87-93. Print.

SOURCE #4: WATTS RIOTS OF 1965

Watch video link at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Au9oohI1MuM>



Source: "Watts Riots Los Angeles CA 1965 HD Historic Footage." *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 25 July 2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Au9oohI1MuM>>.

The Watts Riot, which raged for six days and resulted in more than forty million dollars' worth of property damage, was both the largest and costliest urban rebellion of the Civil Rights era. The riot spurred from an incident on August 11, 1965 when Marquette Frye, a young African American motorist, was pulled over and arrested by Lee W. Minikus, a white California Highway Patrolman, for suspicion of driving while intoxicated.

As a crowd of onlookers gathered at the scene of Frye's arrest, strained tensions between police officers and the crowd erupted in a violent exchange. The outbreak of violence that followed Frye's arrest immediately touched off a large-scale riot centered in the commercial section of Watts, a deeply impoverished African American neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles.

For several days, rioters overturned and burned automobiles and looted and damaged grocery stores, liquor stores, department stores, and pawnshops. Over the course of the six-day riot, over 14,000 California National Guard troops were mobilized in South Los Angeles and a curfew zone encompassing over forty-five miles was established in an attempt to restore public order.

All told, the rioting claimed the lives of thirty-four people, resulted in more than one thousand reported injuries, and almost four thousand arrests before order was restored on August 17. Throughout the crisis, public officials advanced the argument that the riot was the work outside agitators; however, an official investigation, prompted by Governor Pat Brown, found that the riot was a result of the Watts community's longstanding grievances and growing discontentment with high unemployment rates, substandard housing, and inadequate schools.

Despite the reported findings of the gubernatorial commission, following the riot, city leaders and state officials failed to implement measures to improve the social and economic conditions of African Americans living in the Watts neighborhood.

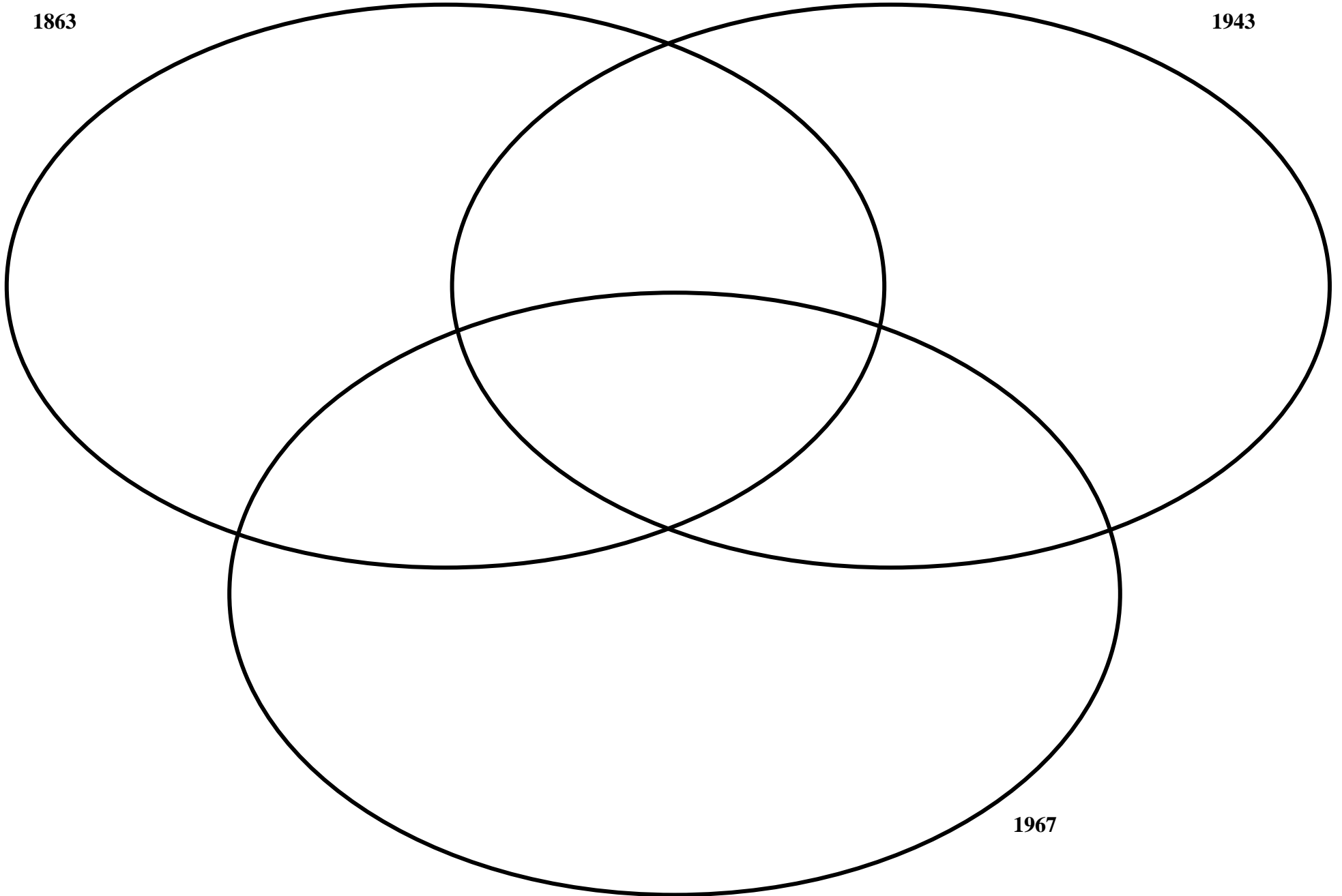
Source: "Watts Riots." *Civil Rights Digital Library*. Digital Library of Georgia, 18 Apr. 2015. Web. 25 July 2015. <http://crdl.usg.edu/events/watts_riots/?Welcome>.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST DETROIT'S THREE RIOTS

Name _____ Date: _____ Class period: _____

1863

1943

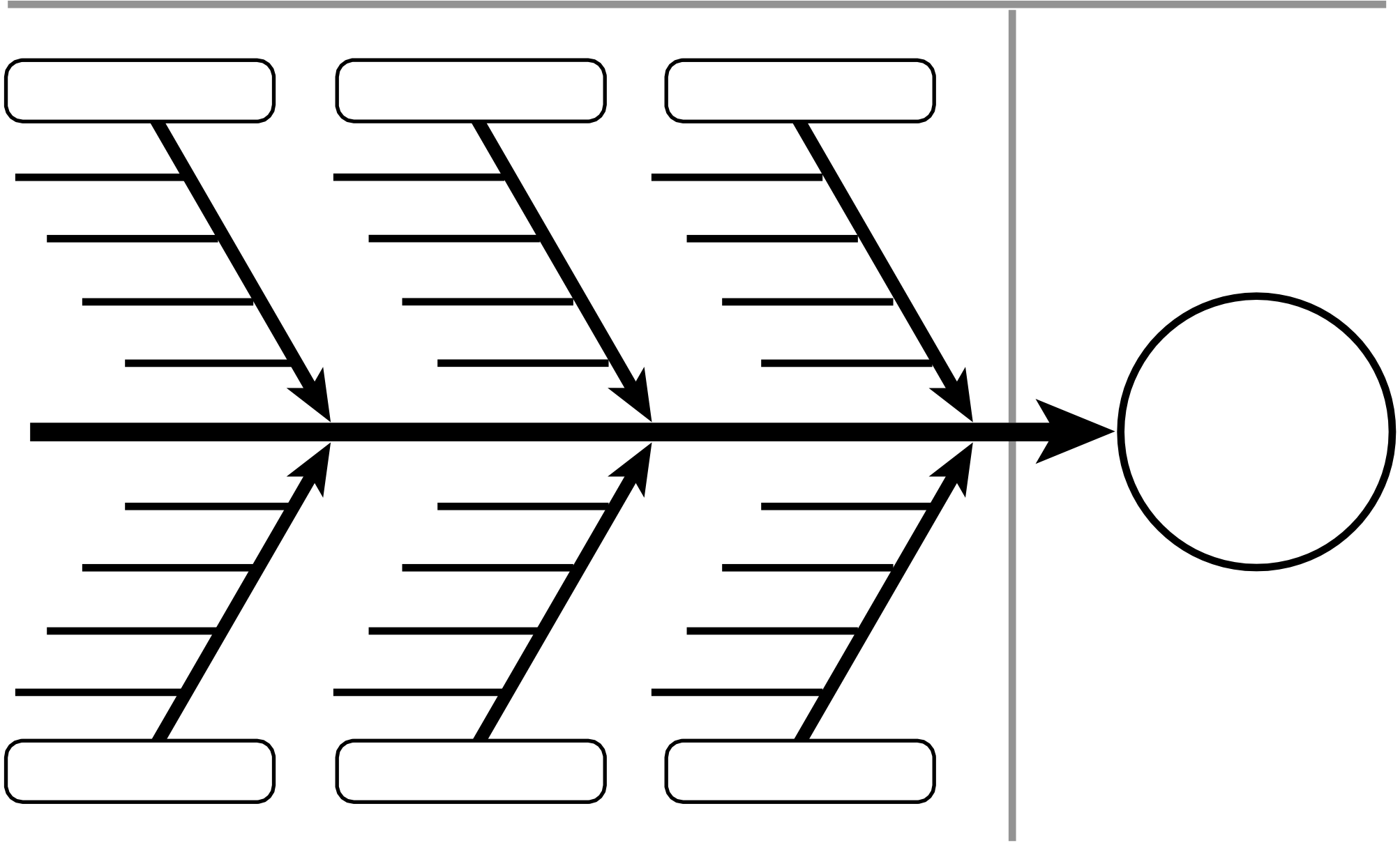


1967

Watts 1965 & Detroit 1967

Causes of Riots

Effects



RIOTS LESSON- DAY'S RUBRIC

STUDENT NAME	<u>Contribution:</u> Provided useful ideas and relevant information.	<u>Working with Others:</u> Listened, shared, and worked well with peers.	<u>Focus:</u> Stayed focused on the task and what needed to be done.	<u>Completion:</u> Graphic organizers and group brainstorm completed.	POINTS EARNED /12
1.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
2.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
3.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
4.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
5.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
6.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
7.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
8.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
9.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
10.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
11.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
12.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
13.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
14.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
15.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
16.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
17.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
18.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
19.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
20.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	

21.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
22.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
23.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
24.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
25.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
26.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
27.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
28.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
29.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
30.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
31.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
32.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
33.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	
34.	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	3 2 1 0	

EXAM QUESTIONS STEMMING FROM TODAY IN ORDER FOR YOU TO PREPARE:

- A) What were the causes of the three Detroit riots?
- B) What are some common themes behind insurrections that were demonstrated in the comparison you did between Watts 1965 and Detroit 1967?
- C) What must be done in multiple facets of society to lessen the chance of future riots?