

The Houston Race Riots: Lesson Plan

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The Houston Race Riots

Lesson Plan

Grade Levels: 9-12

Duration of Lesson: 50 minutes to 90 minutes

Learning Objectives

- Predict the outcome of the race riots in Houston in August of 1917
- Compare their predictions to the actual outcome of the case

Summary:

Students will read a set of documents that break down the details of the Race Riots that broke out in downtown Houston in the summer of 1917. The students will then predict what they think the outcome of the violence will be. They will then compare their predictions to the actual results.

Materials:

- Outcome document (best if placed into an envelope for each group)
- Background information on the riot
- Discussion Questions- listed in the post-assessment

Instructional Background Material:

The Houston riot of 1917 is emblematic of the racial tension in Texas as well as the South as a whole. During World War I, when Black soldiers were called to protect their country but were denied the rights granted to their white counterparts and grew increasingly tired of the racial restrictions imposed on them. On the night of August 23, 1917 a riot tore through the streets of downtown Houston. The resulting violence remains the only example of a race riot where more whites died than African Americans.

Key Understandings:

- Racial tensions erupted when African Americans were being asked to defend their country but marginalized or brutalized by that country
- The Houston Race Riot is unique in that it resulted in more violence toward whites than African Americans.

Instructional Steps:

1. Teacher should give students a copy of the background information on the Houston Race Riot. Students can read the short background essay individually or as a group.

2. In groups, students should work to determine

- What caused the riot?
- Predict what the aftermath of the riot will be.

3. Once the students feel as though they have arrived at a successful conclusion, the teacher should hand out the actual outcome (preferably in an envelope)

Post-Assessment:

Teachers should use the following questions to facilitate a post lesson discussion:

- Did your prediction of the aftermath of the riot match up with the reality of the event? Why or why not?
- Did the actual outcome surprise you?
- Do you feel as though the soldiers were right to mutiny?
- What role did the policy play in the events?
- Was this kind of racial violence inevitable in this time period?

Extension Activities:

- Students can compare the treatment of black soldiers during World War I and World War II and focus on the Double V Campaign during the Second World War. How did the treatment of black soldiers in World War I compare to the treatment of black soldiers in World War II? Compare their answers to the questions on whether the soldiers had the right to mutiny with their reactions to the Double V Campaign in World War II? Did they change their minds? Why or why not?
- How do the issues of police brutality in this event compare to today?