



POLITICAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

WHAT'S WRONG WITH NEW YORK?:
Conservative Activism 1962-1980



OVERVIEW

Students will use photography, historical quotations by prominent speakers, and oral histories to examine conservative activism in the context of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s and early 1970s.

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will learn about the Hard Hat Riot of May 8, 1970, by examining a historical photograph.
- Students will analyze quotations from conservative and antiwar activists to uncover their contrasting ideologies.
- Students will conduct oral interviews to discover more about this recent history.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Grade 6:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7

Integrate information presented in different media or formats as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

Grade 7:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.9

Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

Grades 9-10:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums determining which details are emphasized in each account.



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KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

■ Conservative

■ Hard Hat

■ Patriotism

■ Rhetoric

■ Riot

■ Symbol

■ Oral History

ACTIVISTS

■ J. Daniel Mahoney

■ Kieran O'Doherty

■ Peter Brennan

■ Rosemary Gunning



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WHAT'S WRONG WITH NEW YORK?: Conservative Activism 1962-1980**INTRODUCING RESOURCE 1****Benedict J. Fernandez, *Pro-Vietnam-War Demonstration, New York, 1970*. Museum of the City of New York.**

On May 8, 1970, New Yorkers for and against the Vietnam War collided in a striking demonstration known as the Hard Hat Riot. Earlier that week, four students were killed protesting the Vietnam War at Kent State University in Ohio. New York City's Mayor John Lindsay ordered all flags at City Hall to be flown at half-mast to mourn these students. On May 8, 1970, antiwar activists gathered together at City Hall to protest the Kent State shooting and the Vietnam War.

Peter J. Brennan, a strong supporter of the war and President of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, organized a counter-rally of 200 construction workers in hard hats. Holding signs saying "All the Way, USA!" and "America, Love it or Leave it," the construction workers broke through the thin line of police and raised the flag to full-mast. These protesters felt that lowering the flag disgraced the soldiers fighting overseas and validated privileged students who were exempt from the draft. The fight over the flag continued for hours, injuring over 70 people, including four policemen. Later that month, Brennan presented President Nixon with a hard hat inscribed with the words "Commander-in-Chief." Photographer and activist Benedict J. Fernandez captures the chaotic scene in the photograph *Pro-Vietnam-War Demonstration, New York, 1970*.



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Benedict J. Fernandez, *Pro-Vietnam-War Demonstration, New York, 1970*. Museum of the City of New York.

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- Describe the scene in this photograph. Who are the activists? How are they expressing their beliefs? (Read the introduction to this photograph for more information).
- What does the American flag symbolize to the protesters? Why is it worth fighting over?
- Imagine you are the photographer. What do you hear, see, and feel on this street?
- Read the article “No Choice but to Protest and Take Pictures” by Andrew Boryga about photographer Benedict J. Fernandez. What does it mean to be an activist?

For the article, visit:

http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/no-choice-but-to-protest-and-take-pictures/?_r=0

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INTRODUCING RESOURCE 2

Quotations from Conservative and Antiwar Activists

For middle and high school students, examine the rhetoric of these activists' statements about the Vietnam War.

Conservative Activists	Antiwar Activists
<p>"The hard hat will stand as a symbol, along with our great flag, for freedom and patriotism to our beloved country."</p> <p><i>Peter J. Brennan, President of Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, 1970</i></p>	<p>"We should use hard reason to solve our problems rather than hard hats."</p> <p><i>Francis T.P. Plimpton, Lawyer and President of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, 1970</i></p>
<p>"Outside of God, [the flag] is the most important thing I know. I know a lot of good friends died under this. It stands for the greatest: America."</p> <p><i>John Nash, Printer at The Evening News of Newark and Veteran of World War II, 1970</i></p>	<p>"Let me say finally that I oppose the war in Vietnam because I love America."</p> <p><i>Martin Luther King Jr., Pastor and Activist, 1967</i></p>
<p>"I'm very proud to be an American, and I know my boy that was killed in Vietnam would be here today if he was alive, marching with us... I'll tell you one person who smuged the name of my son and that was Mayor Lindsay. When he stands up and says men who refuse to serve in the armed forces are heroic, then I presume by the same category that my son was killed in Vietnam is a coward, the way he thinks."</p> <p><i>Robert Geary, Office Worker for the Colonial Hardware Coporation, 1970</i></p>	<p>"I felt strongly that the United States had lost its leadership of the free world and that the United States was now despised by hundreds of millions of people who used to believe in the United States around the world... What's the use of a physician like myself in helping to bring up children to be killed in a cause which is ignoble?"</p> <p><i>Dr. Benjamin Spock, Pediatrician and Officer of the National Conference for New Politics, 1968</i></p>

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DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- Compare and contrast these quotations by conservative and antiwar activists. How do their views differ?
- How would you describe the tone of these speakers? Underline the words that affect your understanding of the speakers' tone as they express their point of view.
- What is similar about the rhetoric in the excerpts of both conservative and antiwar activists? What would the symbol of the American flag mean to each side?



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ACTIVITY

Explain to your students that the Hard Hat Riot took place in the recent past and that there are members of their community that lived through the Vietnam War. Have each student create a list of questions that they would like to ask someone who lived during this time. Have your students read the recommended newspaper articles first so they can ask informed questions.

Suggested questions:

- What are your memories of the protests for and against the Vietnam War?
- Did you fight in the war or know someone who did? Do you remember the news coverage at the time? Are there any visuals that you saw on the television that left an impression?
- Did you participate in protests concerning the war? What were your views on the war at the time? Do you hold the same views today in hindsight?
- Do you remember the Hard Hat Riot in New York City in 1970?
- From your perspective, why was the flag used as a symbol by both conservative and antiwar protesters? What does the American flag symbolize to you?

Challenge your students to interview someone they know that is over 60 years old using these questions and adding their own, or invite a speaker to school to be interviewed by your class. If the equipment is available, the students may wish to record their interviews if the speaker gives them permission to do so. Next, have your students select their favorite quotations from their interviews to share with their class and explain why they made this selection. Finally, discuss as a group their experiences documenting an oral history. What did they learn from this process? What was challenging? What other sources might they reference to learn more about this time period?

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ADDITIONAL READING**THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES**

“War Foes Here Attacked by Construction Workers; City Hall is Stormed” by Homer Bigart, May 9, 1970, outlines the fight over the flag that took place during the Hard Hat Riot.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9906E1DF1439E63BBC4153DFB366838B669EDE>

“Thousands Assail Lindsay in 2d Protest by Workers” by Homer Bigart, May 12, 1970, describes Conservative protests in lower Manhattan with telling commentary from some of the activists.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9B06E7DC123DE532A25751C1A9639C946190D6CF>

“For the Flag and for Country, They March” by Francis X. Clines, May 21, 1970, provides a fascinating selection of quotes from Conservative activists.

<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1970/05/21/80027300.html?pageNumber=22>

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

“Obama Begins Commemoration of Vietnam War” by Peter Baker, May 28, 2012, explores the significance of President Obama’s recent statements about the Vietnam War.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/us/politics/obama-begins-commemoration-of-vietnam-era.html>



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