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## **Urban Race Riots: Are They Predictable, Preventable, and Pedagogically Relevant?**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 11.02.05  
by Jeremy B. Landa

Some 235 years since the United States declared independence from Great Britain and almost 150 years since the Civil War and Reconstruction ended slavery in the U.S., the nation is still dealing with racial tension. Hidden to different degrees at different times, the racial component of society results in a tension sometimes characterized by peaceful coexistence, by protests, or occasionally by violent riots. The 1960s were punctuated by rapid societal shifts in the social constructs that existed. The distance of several decades now allows space for students of history to question why these events occurred, how these events affected American cities, and whether these events are predictable or preventable. This unit attempts to explore these questions.

The unit uses chaos theory to conduct a case study on two cities that had race tension; one city, Detroit, had a riot, while the other, New Haven, nearly erupted in violence, but did not. The case study will ask students to examine individuals and events before, during, and after the conflict and generalize from both micro- and macro-dimensions of history, looking for similarities across different scales. The unit pushes students to consider how processes of thinking about race came to be accepted structures in society. Using Thomas Jefferson's only book for dramatic effect, students will understand how racial dichotomies have become an entrenched part of American society, easing only fitfully over time. This unit, at its core, should highlight the power of the individual to influence history through his or her decisions, as well as the lack of predictability of the world. This unit has been designed for grades 9-12 in United States history but could also be used in sociology, *Facing History and Ourselves*, or African American history courses in high school.

(Recommended for U.S. History and Sociology, grades 9-12)

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