



Teaching Revolution '67

Review by Jillian Saccone

Nineteen-Sixty Seven was one of the most turbulent years in the history of the United States. Urban riots in minority communities shook the nation. *Teaching Revolution '67* documents events in Newark, New Jersey during the summer of 1967. It explores social and economic injustices that led to an eruption of violence and civil unrest for five days.

The curriculum was developed by a number of New Jersey social studies teachers in conjunction with the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. One of its goals is to stimulate a broader understanding of the meaning of democracy as students explore roles played by the local, state, and federal governments and actions taken by the citizens of Newark.

The curriculum is divided into three units: Government and Civics, Economics and Geography, and Media and The Newark Riots. It includes a 90-minute documentary film that explains the underlying conflicts in American society at the time including racism, police brutality, inner-city poverty, white flight, suburbanization, and political corruption. It also explores the rioting that took place from July 12-17. The film is the centerpiece of many of the lessons in the package. It successfully provides students with a sense of what it was like living in Newark that summer.

The Newark riots were precipitated on July 12, 1967 by a rumor that a police officer beat an African American man over a traffic ticket so severely that the man needed medical attention. The following day a mass demonstration protesting police brutality erupted into violence, the setting of fires, and looting. On July

14 National Guard was sent to Newark to reestablish order. Barbed wire fences were placed in the streets and National Guard units and police opened fire on housing projects in African American neighborhoods claiming they were firing at "snipers." Twenty-two people were killed, over one hundred people were injured, and about a thousand were arrested. On July 17, the National Guard was ordered to leave the city to help relieve the tension between the military and Newark's citizens.

The film that accompanies this curriculum is well done; it depicts the civil unrest that summer in Newark and would be a valuable addition to the curriculum in any classroom, not just in New Jersey. The research conducted by the authors of the curriculum package demonstrates command of a great deal of information, however, this can be a problem. In some lessons the level of detail obscures the main points.

A focus on essential questions would be useful. As I read through the curriculum I considered the following. Why did the protest get out of control? Why would people destroy their own neighborhoods? Was this a police riot? Were the police persecuted? Why were conditions in Newark so bad? Why is it important to learn about civil unrest? I liked the curriculum focus on media and media bias. This has given me a number of teaching ideas for my own classroom.

Teaching Revolution '67 would work best if it were better integrated into the overall high school curriculum. Events in Newark could be placed in a timeline of events in the entire country. Students could read *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry in English classes while studying about the Newark Riots in social studies.

The simulation lesson would be more engaging for students if they were assigned to be specific participants (neighborhood residents, political leaders, activists, police, national guardsmen, etc.) in the events that unfolded. The package could also be coupled with civics projects. Students should be able to take what they learned from an in-depth study of events in Newark to become community activists addressing ongoing problems in their neighborhoods. An important question to be explored would be: How can civil unrest be avoided in the future? Students would develop problem-solving skills and develop the habit of participation.