

Mustering Men during the Civil War: Fighting for Freedom, Imposing the Draft

an in-archives exercise by Athena Devlin

featured on [TeachArchives.org](http://www.teacharchives.org) at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/civil-war-draft/>

Students examine primary sources related to the Civil War draft and discuss contemporary public opinion about the war as well as the role that race and class played in the drafting of men.

Introduction

This exercise enables students to understand the most important aspects of drafting and recruiting men to fight in the Union Army during the Civil War.

The documents that students analyze were created during a tumultuous time period in which several revolutionary things happened: the Emancipation Proclamation was issued; African Americans were allowed to join the army; the Enrollment Act was passed, establishing the federal draft; and the New York City draft riots occurred. Through the documents, students witness the fatigue of war, growing federalism, and the way that race and class shaped the lives and opinions of Americans in the north.

These primary sources are both accessible and surprisingly complex, making them ideal teaching materials for a course that includes students of different experience levels.

Objectives

Students should be able to:

- Identify and compare various forms of 19th-century communication
- Analyze related primary source documents
- Properly reference and cite documents in a post-archive writing assignment or oral presentation

Context

Before visiting the archives, students need historical context on the draft, African American soldiers, and the New York City draft riots.

This can be delivered via lectures and/or class readings. *Slaves No More* includes an excellent essay on the role of black soldiers; *New York City Draft Riots* and *The Devil's Own Work* both include good overviews of the draft riots. See Further Reading below for citations.

Visit

Number of Visits: 1

Duration of Visit: 1 hour 15 minutes

Agenda

15 minutes **Standard introduction**

30 minutes Document stations

30 minutes Wrap up

In small groups, students analyze and discuss the documents at 1 of 4 stations. They also prepare a brief summary of their findings to be delivered at the end of the visit.

Station 1: Calling Men to Arms

The documents at this station address how rhetoric of race and class was employed to inspire patriotism and spur recruitment. Students compare two broadsides: one aimed at working class white men, another at African Americans. See handout [here](#).

Station 2: Avoiding the Call to Arms - Substitutions

This station introduces students to the policy of substitution, one of the ways that some Americans (mostly wealthy ones) could avoid combat. Students examine a government order requiring soldiers to muster or furnish a substitute. See handout [here](#).

Station 3: Avoiding the Call to Arms - Desertion

This station introduces an illegal way to avoid the draft: desertion. This broadside includes data from which students can begin to create a profile of deserters in this area. *The professor should provide a calculator at this station. See handout [here](#).

Station 4: The Draft Riots

Students should use the date of this broadside to infer that this proposed meeting of “merchants, bankers, and merchants’ clerks” occurred during the New York City draft riots. See handout [here](#).

Wrap Up

Gather students back together and give each group 3 minutes to report back on their findings. After each presentation, the professor should take 1 – 2 minutes to highlight takeaways for the whole class and to segue to the next group. Reinforce the exact dates of each document to show causality between the stations. This will help the class build a

clear chronological narrative about recruitment, reactions to the draft, and the resulting riot in New York City.

After all of the groups have presented, spend 10 minutes on a class discussion.

- Ask students to identify historical actors in their documents and to compare their options: enlistment, substitution, desertion, or protest.
- Discuss how someone's race and socio-economic class would affect their options.
- Ask students how the language of race and class was used to influence 19th-century readers of these documents.

End Products

As homework, students pose 2 – 3 questions that were raised but not answered by the documents they saw in the archives. This can be submitted using a course management site like Blackboard, posted on a class blog, or handed in the next day in class. Those questions could become the basis for an assignment that combines primary source analysis with secondary source research.

Archival Material Used

“Colored Citizens to Arms!” circa 1863, M1975.387.1; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

“Greasy Mechanics Attention!” circa 1861-1865, M1975.815; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

“Attention! Merchants, Bankers...,” 1863, 1975.386.1; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

“Company Order No. 4,” June 19, 1863; Civil War collection, 1977.200, box 2, folder 6, “Published Orders 13th Regt 1863-4”; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

Descriptive List of Drafted Men Who Have Failed to Report, 1863, M1975.860; Brooklyn Historical Society. [click for image](#)

Further Reading

Berlin, Ira. *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Bernstein, Iver. *New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Schechter, Barnet. *The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America*. New York: Walker & Co., 2005.

This Exercise Was Used In

AMS1001 Introduction to American Studies Introduces American Studies and interdisciplinary methods to first- and second-year students. Required for completion of certificate program in American Studies.

Adaptability

This exercise could be adapted to English composition or history courses at the high school and college level.

Course Materials (included)

Station 1 Handout

Station 2 Handout

Station 3 Handout

Station 4 Handout

Cite This Exercise

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In-Archives Handout

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Part of an in-archives exercise at <http://www.teacharchives.org/exercises/civil-war-draft/>

Station 1: Calling American Men to Arms

“Colored Citizens to Arms!” circa 1863, M1975.387.1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

“Greasy Mechanics Attention!” circa 1861-1865, M1975.815; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Your group has 25 minutes to examine the two documents closely and to discuss the following:

- What do you think a broadside is? Where do you think someone would have seen it?
- Why do you think of the term “Greasy Mechanics?” Why do you think the “Engineers and Artisans” are referred to this way?
- What is promised to these white northern laborers? How is the south portrayed in this broadside? What reaction is expected from the presumed audience?
- What concepts are invoked to encourage black volunteers?
- What can you infer about the differences between the military experiences of black and white Americans?

Spend 5 minutes summarizing your findings. Be prepared to report back to the whole class.

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Station 2: Avoiding the Call to Arms - Substitutes

“Company Order No. 4,” June 19, 1863; Civil War collection, 1977.200, box 2, folder 6, “Published Orders 13th Regt 1863-4”; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Your group has 25 minutes to examine the two documents closely and to discuss the following:

- This is an order issued by the United States government. Who is being ordered? What are they being ordered to do?
- Describe in your own words the policy of substitution.
- Who do you think was able to find a substitute?
- Who do you think agreed to be a substitute? Why would they do this?

Spend 5 minutes summarizing your findings. Be prepared to report back to the whole class.

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Station 3: Avoiding the Call to Arms - Desertion

Descriptive List of Drafted Men Who Have Failed to Report, 1863, M1975.860; Brooklyn Historical Society

Your group has 5 minutes to examine the two documents closely and to discuss the following:

- What do you think a broadside is? Where do you think someone would have seen it?
- What information does this broadside contain?
- Why would this information be conveyed in a broadside (as opposed to another form of communication)?

Each person in your group should take 20 minutes to gather and analyze the data for one of the following sections.

- Job: **Tally** the professions of the deserters.
- Race: what **percentage** of deserters were African American?
- Hometown: **Tally** the hometowns of the deserters.
- Age: find the **range** and **average** of the ages of deserters.

As a group, compile a profile of a deserter in this area based on your data analysis.

Spend 5 minutes summarizing your findings. Be prepared to report back to the whole class.

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Station 4: The Draft Riots

“Attention - Merchants, Clerks...,” 1863, 1975.386.1; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Your group has 25 minutes to examine the two documents closely and to discuss the following:

- What do you think a broadside is? Where do you think someone would have seen it?
- Can you locate the date on which this item was created? You should recognize this date from class lectures.
- What is the “present crisis” mentioned the broadside?
- Who are the “merchants, bankers, and merchants’ clerks?” What do you think their opinion of the draft would have been?
- What do you think will happen at the 2:00 meeting?
- What “immediate action” is proposed in the document?

Spend 5 minutes summarizing your findings. Be prepared to report back to the whole class.