

## Lesson Plan: Police, Race and Unrest in America's Cities

By Rachel Roberson

### Initial writing prompt:

*Has the relationship between police and communities of color improved or gotten worse in the last 50 years? Explain your answer in light of recent events.*

Right: A child runs from armed National Guardsmen during the 1967 riots in Newark, NJ.  
(Photo courtesy of the NY Times)



### Objectives

- ◆ Students analyze, evaluate and compare/contrast the findings of the Kerner Commission of 1967 and the Ferguson Commission of 2015.
- ◆ Students read and primary and secondary source documents.

### Relevance

Students evaluate the findings of the 1967 and 2014 commissions in light of the current national debate about police violence in communities of color.

### Lesson Structure

Have students read the following Lowdown post: [Uprising! Lessons from the Race Riots of 1967](#)

**Go deeper:** compare/contrast the primary source excerpts from the Kerner and Ferguson commissions.

### Focus and discussion questions

- ◆ What happened in Newark and Detroit in the summer of 1967?
- ◆ According to the Kerner Commission, what was the cause of these riots?
- ◆ What were some recommendations the Kerner Commission made, based on its findings?
- ◆ What happened after the release of the Kerner Commission report? Why?
- ◆ What were the recommendations of the Ferguson Commission? How are they similar/different to the Kerner Commission findings?
- ◆ How have phone cameras and social media changed the public's response to police violence?
- ◆ Is another national commission is needed to investigate police-community violence today?

## Compare/contrast: 50 years ago and today

Using a compare/contrast tool like [this interactive Venn diagram](#) or a [printable compare/contrast template](#) (both from ReadWriteThink ), have students work in teams to compare/contrast a topic from the Lowdown post or the attached primary source documents. Please also share examples of your students' interactive Venn diagrams on [KQED Teach](#).

Example topics:

- ◆ Responses to police violence in the 1960s vs. today
- ◆ Kerner Commission recommendations vs. Ferguson Commission recommendations
- ◆ Economic impact of the 1960s riots vs. the impact of the Ferguson riots ([this Time article has Ferguson economic impact data](#))

## Extension activities

### Expressive

Students choose one of the recommendations from either the Kerner or Ferguson commissions (i.e. reforming sentencing laws, creating two million jobs) that they think will have the greatest impact. Using an online poster-making or presentation tool such as [Prezi](#), [Easel.ly](#), [Piktochart](#), [Infogr.am](#), students design a poster that illustrates how their choice will have a positive community impact. Templates that show **cause/effect** or **if/then** scenarios will work best for this assignment.

### Deeper Civic Engagement

Students make their voices heard using the information in this lesson and other research by participating in [Letters to the Next President 2.0](#). This national initiative gives youth a platform to express their opinion about election issues that matter most to them. For more resources and examples, see also [KQED's student video project](#).

## Common Core reading/writing standards

### [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#): Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9](#) Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take

### [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1](#)

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence