

WHITE SMOKE SUN / COURIER

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The Summer of '63 - For three days, tempers flared under the a blistering summer sun and riotous mobs wreaked havoc and destruction in one of the largest cities in the country. They smashed windows and looted the home of the Mayor. They burned the home of the U.S. Postmaster. Police stations, a Methodist church, hotels, drugstores, clothing stores, factories, saloons, and even an orphanage went up in smoke. Only after 150 soldiers fired into a crowd of 2,000 rioters, killing 12, did the chaos begin to die down. Was this Kent State Ohio during the Viet Nam War protests of 1970? Think again.

Recognized as one of the most tumultuous times in American history, the draft riots of New York City caused property damages estimated at \$5,000,000 and ultimately, more than 400 people killed yet, it is a little discussed topic. This may be because Unionists who adhere to the idea that the war was just about slavery and the boys in blue knowingly fought for the higher cause of freedom for their brothers, struggle with the reality that not every draftee saw the war through rose colored lenses. Many poor Irish saw the coming wave of freedmen as "illegal immigrants," waiting to take away their jobs and what little else they had. Remember, the war was going poorly at this point. The North had suffered a string of losses. There was even talk among several Northern States of secession. The result...by August 1863, nearly 10,000 troops from southern battlefields (Gettysburg) patrolled the streets of New York City and Brooklyn. Of the 292,441 men called in the draft, 39,877 failed to report, which caused Lincoln and Stanton to ask Congress to pass a bill making it

no longer possible for a drafted man to pay \$300 for exemption or to hire a substitute and thus force compliance.

The topic of the draft riots is well treated in many interesting books, including "The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War" by Iver Berntsen. Another very good book, "Upon the Altar of the Nation," by Harry S. Stout, also addresses the moral effect the riots had on the American psyche, and is a very good read. Bringing out such historical tidbits from the dark side of our American revisionist history is only one obligation we all have as reenactors. After all, if we don't tell it like is, who will?