

Historical Context / Background Knowledge: Lesson Plan

Focus question: What was on young New Yorkers' minds when they envisioned the future of their city in 1965?

Lesson objectives: Students will (1) identify common themes in different essays, (2) discuss how they may have affected a young person's perspective of the future, and (3) compare those concerns to their own.

Resources and Materials:

Four sets of essays from "[New York's Future as I View It](#)"

Set of Essays #1: Remaking Space in the '60s: Urban Renewal, Slum Clearance, and Suburbanization

Key concepts for this bit:

- White flight, suburbanization.
- Great migration.
- Urban renewal, slum clearance.
- Deindustrialization
- Urban Crisis, Fiscal Crisis, Tax Base

Essays:

1. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/cul:sbcc2fr0n7 (Imagines a future city where everyone lives in the suburbs, and schools, retail, and industry leave the city too in order to serve the suburban population.)
2. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/cul:44j0zpc9pk (As a nice foil to the essay above, reflects on the drawbacks and suburban life and predicts that people will begin moving back to the city – potentially causing displacement of low-income NYers)
3. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/5vcx-6y67 (“crisis” narrative as a result of the loss of high earners to the suburbs and the arrival of low-income people – proposes community organizing against juvenile delinquency and job training to solve the urban crisis)
4. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/bfaf-e055 (talks about Harlem and the LES as “depressed areas” but believes urban renewal plans can save the city)

5. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/qyme-jg30 (calls for the “razing of the Harlems of our city,” talks about blight, wants to “excavate superhighways”)
6. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/shyy-hb81 (proposes “an urban renewal program to completely revitalize the waterfront, the West Side, and north Manhattan”)
7. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/ev9c-ge55 (mentions middle-class outmigration and Puerto Rican and Black immigration, rising crime, substandard housing)

Set of Essays #2: Fighting for Racial Justice: the Harlem Riots and School Boycotts

Key Concepts:

- Racial justice and the Civil Rights Movement in Postwar NYC
- Protest and dissent
- Segregation and discrimination in housing and education

Key timeline points

Date	Event (N) = National (L) = Local	Source
May 17, 1954	(N) <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas</i> . Supreme Court rules that school segregation is unconstitutional.	https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/brown-v-board-of-education
May 31, 1955	(N) <i>Brown II</i> .	https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/brown-v-board-of-education
1956	(L) NAACP Schools Workshop formed to integrate New York City schools.	https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/civil-rights#:~:text=By%20the%201964%20federal%20Civil,school%20boycott%20protesting%20segregated%20schools.
September 4, 1957	(N) The Little Rock Nine.	https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement-timeline
1958	(L) The Harlem 9.	https://docs.google.com/document/d/17HAtwyeqzEVN37

	into law.	s/black-history/civil-rights-movement-timeline
July 18-24, 1964	(L) Harlem insurgency; Harlem experienced its first major riot in over 20 years, sparked by the killing of James Powell, a Black teenager, by an off-duty white police officer. The insurgency resulted in one death, over 100 injured, and approximately 450 arrests.	https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-race-riot-of-1964 Secondary literature: + Christopher Hayes, <i>The Harlem Uprising Segregation and Inequality in Postwar New York City</i> (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).
February 21, 1965	(L/N) The assassination of Malcolm X.	https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement-timeline .

Potential discussion questions:

- What connections can you make between New York City's school boycott of 1964 and the wider Civil Rights Movement?
- What connections can you make between the New York City school boycott and Harlem insurgency of 1964?
- What do you make of frequent mentions of urban "slums" especially those cited in Harlem?

Secondary resources: Could be part of the model/teach section to help students understand the struggle around desegregation in New York City public schools.

- <https://www.tenement.org/blog/the-1964-freedom-day-boycott-in-new-york-city/>
 - This blog post provides background information on the 1964 Freedom Day boycott for school desegregation in New York City.
 - Video clip of Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell speaking about the 1964 school boycott: https://crdl.usg.edu/record/ugabma_wsbn_wsbn36360
 - PBS education has a number of background essays and helpful videos surrounding Harlem in 1964 and the Harlem riots: <https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/amex26-soc-64ntharlem/1964-anger-in-harlem/>
1. <https://doi.org/10.7916/ptzg-1397>

- a. This essay discusses contemporary poverty in Harlem, mentions the Harlem riots of the summer of 1964, and refers to ongoing racial segregation in the New York City public school system.
2. <https://doi.org/10.7916/j3s9-fa29> -
3. <https://doi.org/10.7916/11d8-g866>
 - a. This essay also discusses poverty in Harlem, casts blame on slumlords, and gestures to economic reinvestment (perhaps urban renewal) in the neighborhood as a resolution. Refers to ongoing unrest in the city over the struggle for racial justice and also refers to the Harlem riots the year prior.
4. <https://doi.org/10.7916/6vgy-7e79>
 - a. This brief essay identifies the school boycott as a major Civil Rights action. The essay continues to discuss the poor conditions in slums, and their continued existence as a hub for crime and juvenile delinquency.
5. <https://doi.org/10.7916/cn75-pj07>
 - a. This essay touches on continued racial segregation as well as wider racial discrimination. The paper quickly registers concerns over unemployment, urban slums, and rising crime.
6. <https://doi.org/10.7916/j3s9-fa29>
 - a. Most detailed description of Harlem insurgency, Kitty Genovese connection

Other essay options

7. <https://doi.org/10.7916/vn5s-8p21>
 - a. Harlem riots, environmental pollution.
8. <https://doi.org/10.7916/2hc4-4w15>
 - a. Harlem/Selma comparisons.
9. <https://doi.org/10.7916/vz3c-m268>
 - a. Selma comparison, housing, debate as organizing theme.
10. <https://doi.org/10.7916/qe97-b414>
 - a. Dated Harlem riots, discrimination against Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers discussed.
11. <https://doi.org/10.7916/fzrm-vb08>
 - a. Discussion of the oppression of Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers.

Set of Essays #3: Cold War in the Aftermath of the Missile Crisis: the United Nations and the Atom Bomb

Key concepts for this bit:

- Nuclear War, World War III
- Cold War, Soviet Union
- United Nations

- Decolonization

Essays:

1. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/zrbq-re97 (Describes a post-apocalyptic New York emerging out of World War III)
2. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/n15e-mj17 (Lists a series of international problems brought to the UN recently, and hopes that the organization will help prevent WWII, thus making New York a safer place to live)
3. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/fdch-3r10 (the typing here isn't great but the idea is quite original – in 2265, a Staten Islander looks at the rest of the city for the first time since it was all covered by the fog ensuing from a Soviet nuclear bomb detonation, describing what has and hasn't changed since the bombing)
4. https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/new_york_future/10.7916/jxzm-j658 (predicts that as the UN matures, New York will become an even more undisputed center of international politics)

Set of Essays #4: A Greener New York: Pollution and Emerging Environmentalism

Key Concepts:

- Pollution and industry
- Industrial New York
- Environmental consciousness
- Historical empathy: industrial pollution and climate change

Key timeline points

Date	Event	Source
1948	Donora smog	Jacobs, E. T., Burgess, J. L., & Abbott, M. B. (2018). The Donora Smog Revisited: 70 Years After the Event That Inspired the Clean Air Act. <i>American journal of public health</i> , 108(S2), S85–S88. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304219
1953	Severe smog event in New York City.	https://gothamist.com/news/fl-ashback-the-citys-killer-smog
1963	Severe smog event in New York City	https://gothamist.com/news/fl-ashback-the-citys-killer-smog

		https://academic.schafferlibrarycollections.org/s/american-environmental-history-hst-225-fall-2021/item/6853
1965	Clear Air Act of 1965.	
May 1966	New York City passes Local Law No. 14—an anti-pollution act to reduce the air contaminants produced by burning refuse and fuel (non-motor fuel).	https://www.resources.org/archives/smognew-york-city/
November 1966	Severe smog event in New York City: a mix of sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide engulfed the city. The toxic air caused approximately 200 recorded deaths. + New York City’s first air pollution alert	Dougherty, Richard. "N.Y. SMOG ALERT: WARNING 1ST IN CITY'S HISTORY NEW JERSEY, CONNECTICUT ALSO STIFLED." Los Angeles Times (1923-1995), Nov 26, 1966. http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/n-y-smog-alert/docview/155588247/se-2
1970	Creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.	

Key questions:

- What environmental concerns did young New Yorkers have in 1964?
- What was urban smog? What caused New York City’s rising air and water pollution?
- How does New York City fit within national histories of environmentalism and environmental justice?

Resources:

- + Photos of 1953 smog: <https://gothamist.com/news/photos/flashback-the-citys-killer-smog>
 - + 1966 temperature inversion educational video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6kceYFOj4w>
1. <https://doi.org/10.7916/xrhf-1a45>
 - a. Thorough description of contemporary air pollution and causes
 2. <https://doi.org/10.7916/9avx-ja18>

- a. All about pollution, names industry and automobiles as causes; grounds in specific issues and facts.
- 3. <https://doi.org/10.7916/x9wx-yg10>
 - a. Describes 1963 incident, very helpful for this reason!
- 4. <https://doi.org/10.7916/9dcp-hv42>
 - a. First half is about air and water pollution. Mentions LA and London, but doesn't elaborate on the events – it may be in the teacher's best interest to incorporate some minor secondary literature in the lesson prior so students have the needed context.

Additional essays

- 5. <https://doi.org/10.7916/cqvy-hn91>
 - a. This one is...not the strongest! But it talked about thermal inversion and that's helpful for timeline purposes
- 6. <https://doi.org/10.7916/0ypt-fy48>
 - a. Not very descriptive of pollution issue or (directly) of ascendant environmentalism, but creative example of young New Yorker's dreaming of a clean city - fantasy future NYC with no pollution
- 7. <https://doi.org/10.7916/1qqc-k268>
 - a. New York considered a Simpson's dome???
- 8. <https://doi.org/10.7916/5b7y-mj70>
 - a. General air pollution complaints, mentions Wagner but not very well grounded in facts.

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- 1. **Introduce the Unit / Motivate Students:** Show the class the call for submissions to the "New York's Future As I View It" essay contest.
 - 2. **Model / Teach:** This portion depends on if we want to develop one lesson per theme or encourage students to explore different themes within the same lesson. In the first case the teacher can begin with a short video or photos of whichever theme the lesson seeks to explore. For example, if the lesson is on struggles for racial justice in New York in

1964-1965, they could show the video of Malcolm X and Adam Clayton Powell discussing the Freedom Day Boycott. We can develop short memos on each theme for the teacher's to lecture from to provide background information to the students.

3. **Group work:** Split the class into four groups. Each will be given one set of essays (selected as they relate to a theme, but the theme is not disclosed). Ask students to read their essays, then discuss what they may have in common.
4. **Assessment:** have a representative from each group debrief the rest of the class on what that group's essays were about. After each report, ask students from the other groups to bring up present-day concerns they feel are similar to those presented on.