BACKGROUND



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This image depicts President Lincoln visiting the battlefield at Antietam with General McClellen. The ghastly loss of life, during this Civil-War battle, led to America's bloodiest day. Even in the 21st century, that record still stands. Image online via the U.S. National Archives.

In the summer of 1863, Americans were killing each other throughout the North and South. Engaged in Civil War after the South seceded from the Union, the country was rocked by massive loss of life.

On a single day the prior year (September 17, 1862), about 23,000 men died on a <u>battlefield</u> near <u>Antietam bridge</u> in <u>Sharpsburg</u>, <u>Maryland</u>. With so much blood turning the <u>landscape red</u>, it remains the deadliest day in American history.

How did this happen? A cornfield—which still had high stalks on that September day—provided cover for Union troops creeping toward Confederate lines. The height of the corn, however, did not prevent the Confederates from expecting a battle.

About 200 yards from the Union soldiers, Confederates from Georgia were on their stomachs, waiting for the enemy to emerge from the cornfield's protection. When they could see their targets, the Georgians stood up and fired.

Chaos enveloped as 10,000 soldiers were killed or wounded just in the first phase of the fight. Keith Snyder, an Antietam park ranger, provides some history:

The smoke, the noise, the artillery is crashing in from all directions. It's just a concentrated terror.

So much death left the Union's commander-in-chief with a serious problem: <u>Abraham Lincoln</u> needed more fighting men. But by passing a law to draft as many men as possible, Congress also created a loophole for the wealthy. Anyone able to pay \$300 could avoid the draft.

Less than two weeks after a https://dec.ar.july.com/html (during July of 1863) claimed more than 45,000 casualties (including approximately 8,000 deaths), New York City erupted in a different kind of battle. The city's gangs (including those from Five Points and the Bowery) joined a riot of men opposing the new Conscription Act (which created "the first national draft system").

Who were these gang members? What kind of life did they lead in 19th century New York? Do pictures of the actual people, and their neighborhoods (like Five Points and the Bowery) still exist?

Turns out, a wealth of archival evidence can help us piece together what life was like in New York City between 1840 and 1863.

Media Stream

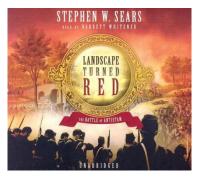


President Lincoln at the Antietam Battlefield

Image, Courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Landscape Turned Red - by Stephen W. Sears

Image online, courtesy <u>barnesandnoble.com</u> website.

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Abraham Lincoln, Union's Commander-in-chief

Courtesy of the National Archives

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