

# Lesson 17, Worksheet 1

## Newspaper Account of the Tobacco Factory Riot

ATTEMPT TO BURN THE FACTORY DOWN

### INTENSE EXCITEMENT

The Arraignment of the Parties--They are Held to Bail

August 5, 1862

Yesterday afternoon, one of the most disgraceful riots, which has ever happened in this city, took place at the tobacco manufactory of T. Watson & Co. in Sedgwick street between Degraw and Harrison streets, and which, but for the timely appearance of the police, aided by some citizens, might have resulted in a most fearful tragedy. The riot occurred between a party of the locality, and a number of negroes, who are employed at the factory. The following are the facts in the case as far as our reporter could ascertain from different sources:

There are two tobacco factories in the locality adjoining each other, one of the belonging to Mr. Watson and the other owned by Mr. Lorillard. At the establishment of the latter, there are some two hundred and twenty persons, consisting of boys, men, and girls employed, and of these one hundred and sixty are white and fifty are colored. The white men attend to the pressing and general manufacture of the tobacco and the colored people make the tobacco into rolls, a branch of business in which the foreman of the establishment says they are more expert than others, having been used, some of them, to do it in the South. The white men working in this factory earn an average of \$10 per week, while the colored men generally average \$14 per week. The white girls, on the other hand, earn from \$4 to \$9 per week and the colored girls from \$2 to \$6.

In the factory of Mr. Watson, where the riot occurred there are seventy-five persons employed altogether, of whom, fifty are colored and twenty-five white...The colored people who work in the factory, are none of them residents of the locality, but reside mostly in New York, and in the outskirts of this city, and it is said that for some time past,

considerable ill-feeling has existed between them and the people residing in the vicinity of the tobacco factories, most of whom are Irish, but nothing of a serious nature occurred until Saturday night last, when two men who work in a factory at the foot of Sedgwick street, were returning home from their work, and stopped at Grady's liquor store, in the neighborhood of the factories to take a drink.

Two colored men were standing in the doorway as they were going in and one of the white men asked the colored men to move out of the way, and allow them to get in the store. One of the negroes replied that they would not move; that they had as much right there as any other men and he was about to say more, when one of the white men knocked him down. This led to a fight which was promptly stopped by the police at the time, but the utmost excitement pervaded the residents of the neighborhood, and the most extravagant stories were circulated, and the matter was talked over by white working people of the neighborhood, and the most improbable stories told to excite their rage. It was said that white girls had been insulted by the negroes, but as far as our reporter could ascertain, there was no foundation for such stories...on Sunday morning Mr. Hignet, the foreman of Lorillard's factory, was notified by a friend of his that the negroes working in the factory would probably be attacked during the day by the excited population of the place. This was about 7 o'clock, and as the negroes came to their work he sent them home to avoid the trouble...Mr. Hignet then went into Watson's factory and advised the colored workers there to leave...but they declined to do so. A large number of them were present at the emancipation celebration, in Myrtle Avenue Park, and there were only about 20 in the place at the time, of which 5 were men and the remainder women and girls....

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about half-past twelve a party of some 400 men and boys, some of them very much intoxicated, came rushing toward the factory...and immediately surrounded the building, while some entered the ground floor to look for the negroes. Officers Oats and Byrne, of the 43rd precinct, arrived about the same time, and tried to prevent the men from entering the factory, but they were unable to do so. The negroes, who were all on the upper floor, barricaded the stairway with boxes, boards, etc, and then as their assailants made their appearance at the bottom, would lunge everything within their reach at them. In this way they managed to keep their assailants off until the arrival of Inspector Folk with a strong detachment of policemen from the 41st and 44th precincts...

While the negroes in the inside of the building were keeping their assailants at bay, the crowd outside commenced a general onslaught on the building with brickbats and stones, smashing all the windows, and when they found it impossible to get at the negroes in any other way, one of the rioters proposed that the building should be burned down, and a rush was made for a large pot of liquorice and whiskey, which under the supposition that it was tar, was emptied and attempted to be set fire to, but the rioters only succeeded in starting a slight flame, which was soon extinguished by the police... The police finally succeeded in forcing the rioters from the locality and arrested the following: Patrick Keenan, Michael Maher, William Morris, John Long, Cuas Baker (colored), Chas. Baylers, Thomas Clark and Joe Flood.

A strong detachment of police were stationed in the locality this morning, in anticipation of another outbreak, but as none of the colored people employed in either of the factories come to work there was no disturbance. Various rumors were afloat in the neighborhood...the most important of which was that the negroes employed in the factory had been engaged all last night in arming themselves in case of another attack...It is stated that the officers who were first at the scene of the riot, allowed their feelings against the negroes to interfere with their

duties, and that instead of attacking the white rioters they struck at the negroes with their clubs. None of the negroes are at work today, and but few of the white people, in either factories.

Source: *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 5, 1862