

**Title:** The Oil Springs Race Riot

**Subtitle:** Reading and Answering Questions

**Duration:** 1-2 classes

**Best Courses Fit:** Canada: History, Identity, and Culture, Grade 12



### **Background Knowledge**

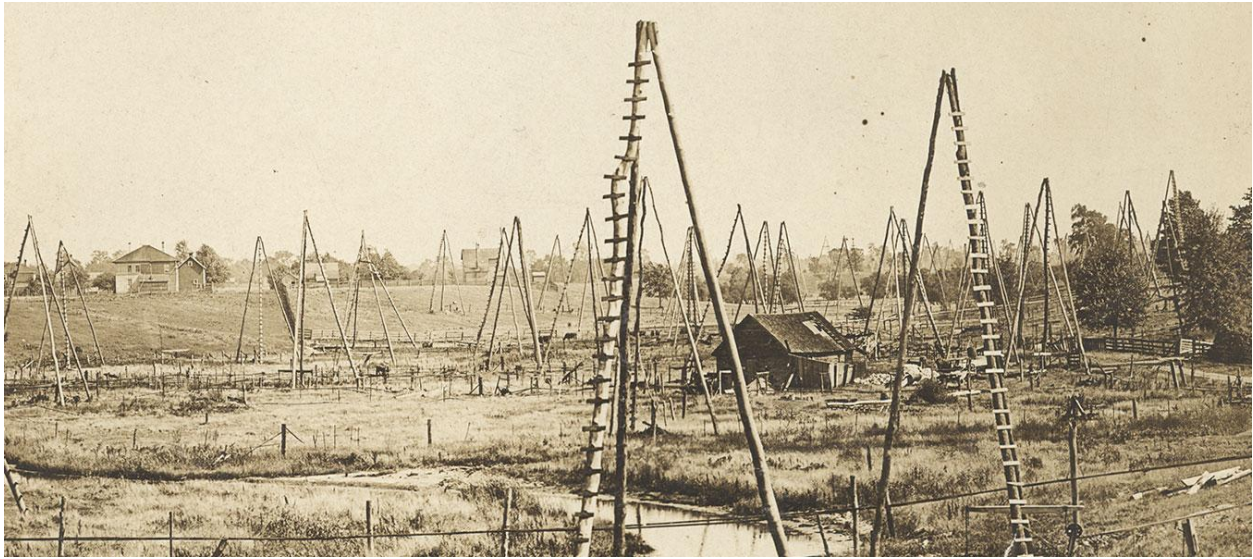
The Village of Oil Springs is located in Lambton County, Ontario, Canada. The village, an enclave within Enniskillen Township, is home to the Oil Museum of Canada. Oil Springs was the site of North America's first oil rush which is why the village's name was changed to Oil Springs. It quickly became a bustling town. The oil boom was attractive to many, including African-Americans who were fleeing oppression in the United States.

In March of 1863, a race riot took place in the village of Oil Springs.

### **Tasks**

1. Review the image and articles.
2. Respond to the questions in complete sentences.
3. Complete the writing assignment.

**Document A**



Source: *Photo of Oil Springs and Three Pole Wells, 1858*. Oil Museum, Lambton County Library

**Document A**

<b>Why is this image historically significant?</b>
<b>What historical event is connected to the image?</b>

According to SHEG, an image is historically significant if it:

- was important or influential at the time an event occurred
- had lasting effects on people and/or society
- was a moment of change or transition in history,
- was representative of broader trends or changes in society

**Document B - News Article**

Source: *The Liberator*, Boston, Massachusetts, March 27, 1863.

**THE ASSAULT UPON NEGROES IN CANADA.** We find the following additional particulars of the recent brutal demonstration at Oil Springs, Canada West, in the *Detroit Free Press*:—

“A riot of a serious character occurred here on Saturday night, owing to a grudge against the colored people. The rioters, to the number of 80 or 100, assembled at the east end of the town, chose a captain, and then marched to the dwellings of the negroes. On arriving at their destination, they ordered the negroes to leave town; and, before they had time to obey the order, the mob commenced their work of destruction by destroying the furniture belonging to the negroes, and then fired the houses, of which four were destroyed, and beating any negro they could catch. Detective McKain swore in a number of constables, and succeeded in capturing three of the rioters. It was reported that one negro was killed, but it is now denied. One is badly hurt. The others ran to the woods and escaped. Great excitement still prevails here.”

**Document B**

<b>Sourcing</b>
Who wrote this article?
Why was the article written?
Provide one reason you might trust this source.
Provide one reason you might not trust this source.

**Contextualization**

What do you think might have been the motive for the riot?

Circle words or phrases used to describe Black people in terms of race. Why might these words have been used?

**Close Reading**

According to this article, what did the angry mob do?

According to the headline, what happened?

How does this article portray race relations in Oil Springs in the 1860s?

Document C

Source: *The Liberator*, Boston, Massachusetts, March 27, 1863.

**The Montreal *Commercial Advertiser* says:—**

“Oil Springs has been indulging in an eruption of negrophobia; and this odoriferous neighborhood yesterday disgraced itself by an emute directed against the colored inhabitants, whose houses were destroyed, and themselves driven to the woods. As those who have sustained losses have their legal remedy against the municipality, it will find this kind of amusement more expensive than profitable. We trust the Government will take care that the aggressors are brought to exemplary punishment.”

<b>Sourcing</b>
Where was this source produced?
How might this information influence the accuracy of the information?
<b>Contextualization</b>
Why do you think “negrophobia” might have been a problem in Oil Springs in the 1860s?
How does the author generally feel about the incident? Cite evidence.
<b>Close Reading</b>
Why do you think the author wrote, “ <i>As those who have sustained losses have their legal remedy against the municipality, it will find this kind of amusement more expensive than profitable?</i> ”



Document D

Source: *Brooklyn Evening Star*, Brooklyn, New York, Mar 21, 1863.

**NEGRO RIOT IN CANADA.**—A serious riot occurred at Oil Springs, Canada West, on the night of the 14th, between the whites and negroes. The whites organized a force, marched to the negro quarters, ordered the blacks away, destroyed their property and burned their houses. The negroes fled to the woods. Three of the rioters have been captured. Several are wounded.

**Document D**

<b>Sourcing</b>
Where was this source produced?
How much time elapsed between the riot and this article?
<b>Contextualization</b>
What does this article suggest about the White mob?
Would you characterize Oil Springs as a racist town back then? Explain.

<b>Corroboration</b>
How does Document B support Document D?
How does Document B contest Document D?
<b>Close Reading</b>
According to the headline, what happened?
Is the headline accurate? Explain.

**Writing Assignment - What caused the Oil Springs Race Riot?**

My position:

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Complete the organizer below and then write your response in the box. Use evidence from at least three documents to support your claim.

Evidence