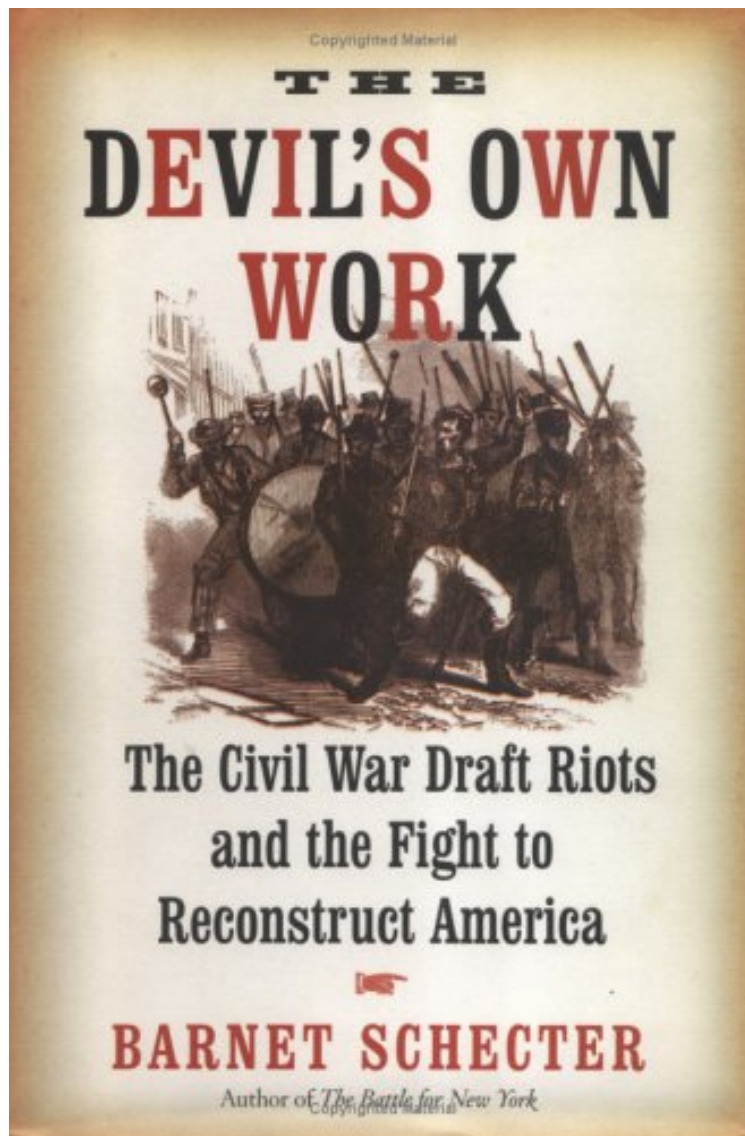


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The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America

Barnet Schecter

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Barnet Schecter : The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Devil's Own Work: The Civil War Draft Riots and the Fight to Reconstruct America:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Fenian BrotherhoodBy Cabin DwellerThis is a 2005 work by

Barnet Schecter. It starts slowly and ends after its title suggests. On the subject of abolition, *Freedom's Journal* was the nation's first [black] newspaper and the start of no less than 15 similar newspapers in New York City before the Civil War ended. The paper started in 1827. Tying the story of Irish to blacks by measure of their inherent suffering, Schecter reports on page 51 some details about the Potato Famine: 2 million people, about a third, of Ireland's population was eliminated in the late 1840s by one million dead of starvation of one million to the United States. Since this history covers more than the story entails, it is worth mentioning that the same page says that the June Days riots in Paris left ten thousand people dead or injured in 1848. The riots in the title don't start until Chapter 6, which starts on page 96. Lincoln's motives and personality never get to front and center, which isn't disappointing because it forced the scholarship to become more original. But so much of the research was tangential and sometimes irrelevant, and sometimes too basic. The place of two prominent New York politicians, Horatio Seymour and Fernando Wood, is sufficiently explored. Seymour is an ugly and uninteresting character. Wood, including his marriage to a 16-year-old and his role in the House about the 13th Amendment, is a dynamic part of politics playing to hatred. It would seem to be a fact that New York has improved over the years and lives up to the melting pot better now than in all of the 19th century. Wood's realpolitik also has more flare than anything about a Tweed. The Tammany Hall histories never appeal to me, and Schecter includes 1869-70 information as a type of unwanted bonus or page filler. The only Irish appeal in the book, as opposed to honest and courageous stands of blacks or kindly German neighbors or discreetly activist Quakers, concerns the Fenian Brotherhood. Then I may have read 100 or more pages of more anonymous mob violence. It is interrupted by the \$300 clause, but if I already know about this, then one mob looks like a hundred. Officially, it started on a Monday and went through Wednesday. The Democratic powers in the city took steps necessary to keep federal intervention at bay. On page 258, Democrats/Irish have their way again. Ultimately, sixty-seven people were found guilty. Twenty-five of them were given six months or less in the city jail, while plea bargains ensured light sentences for many of the rest. The man who led the attack on [a black family], killing the mother, was sentenced to two years in the state prison at Sing Sing. Many of these lenient sentences were viewed as exorbitant for theft, since they were the same punishments. To repute Sherman, there then came a 1864 plot to burn New York City and Chicago one hotel at a time. There is also the most interesting personal narrative in what it uncovers for me, that of Horace Greeley. After all the grief he famously gave Lincoln for putting Union before Abolition, he became a Jefferson Davis sympathizer and paid part of his 1867 bail in Richmond. He also cleared the air that his stance against slavery was actually not for racial equality for the integrity of free labor. At least he was not a coward during the riots. I would like to know the crux of his feud with William Cullen Bryant.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very informative. By Kindle Customer. This book was very informative and the facts were very well written. The editing for the Kindle edition needed work, the first word was missing or misspelled in every chapter, along with other spelling errors. There was also no question of Schecter's political leanings, so impartial he was not. But given the lack of material out there on the Civil War Draft Riots it certainly was educational.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. They all loved New York so much, they tried to destroy it. By Barton J. Chandler. This book reveals the reality behind draft riots of 1863 and "The Gangs Of New York." Today when we say "gangs," we usually envision young punks committing horrendous crimes, but in the bad old days, these gangs were the analog of today's organized crime and the Mafia. However, Schecter's book goes beyond that, it is richly informative and researched on its subject, and has the reminiscent feel of "you are there," of the civil war books by Bruce Catton. The City is not the one we are familiar with, or idealize. People are in constant fear of losing their jobs; they have to put up with a seeping, filthy, overpopulated Hobbesian battlefield. Schecter uses Horace Greeley as a grand example, a man solely focused on abolishing slavery, who still does not get it, oblivious (from time to time) to the impoverished working man who is bound in a subsistence slavery, with no way out and no future. What you can say about Greeley is what gives the old maxim its truth: The road to hell is paved with the best intentions. No wonder the Irish immigrants used the draft law, which permitted the rich to escape military service, for what followed; the melting pot of NYC this time is the perfect mix for rioting: racism, bigotry, and class struggle. The corrupt politicians, racist utopians, and Southern agitators, know for a certainty that they are doing The Devil's Own Work, and stoke class warfare to combustion. We also see New York's Finest, the nascent Metropolitan Police Force, with a solid sense of duty (surprising in 1863), risking their lives, again and again, outnumbered, trying working day and night to save the city. The one thing we never understand about these urban dwellers of the 19th century is that, the Lincoln Administration initiated the Homestead Act in 1862, and perhaps it was only a risky chance, but a chance nevertheless, to get out of the slums and disease, and start over. This was one sure way of avoiding the draft, and facing less danger. Still we have a mass of people sticking with the devil that they know. And we are also faced with the result of the war and end of Reconstruction in 1877: Nothing has changed, blacks in the South are still slaves except in name, and the Northern working class is still impoverished. Schecter has given us an exciting and action-packed look at the home front, and enables us to see that no matter how much time goes by, the beast of corruption, is still the handmaiden of democracy. All in all this is a fantastic view of life, in America's greatest and most evil of cities.

On July 4, 1863, Robert E. Lee and his Confederate army retreated in tatters from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and the

Union began its march to ultimate victory in the Civil War. Nine days later, the largest riots in American history broke out on the streets of New York City, nearly destroying in four days the financial, industrial, and commercial hub of the nation. Northerners suspected a Confederate plot, carried out by local "Copperhead" sympathizers; however, the reality was more complex and far-reaching, exposing fault lines of race and class still present in America today. Angered by the Emancipation Proclamation, issued six months earlier, and by Abraham Lincoln's imposition of the first federal military draft in U. S. history, which exempted those who could pay \$300, New York's white underclass, whipped up by its conservative Democratic leaders, raged against the powerful currents of social change embodied by Lincoln's Republican administration. What began as an outbreak against draft offices soon turned into a horrifying mob assault on upper-class houses and property, and on New York's African American community. The draft riots drove thousands of blacks to the fringes of white society, hastening the formation of large ghettos, including Harlem, in a once-integrated city. As Barnett Schecter dramatically shows in *The Devil's Own Work*, the cataclysm in New York was anything but an isolated incident; rather, it was a microcosm within the borders of the supposedly loyal northern states of the larger Civil War between the North and South. The riots erupted over the same polarizing issues--of slavery versus freedom for African Americans and the scope of federal authority over states and individuals--that had torn the nation apart. And the riots' aftermath foreshadowed the compromises that would bedevil Reconstruction and delay the process of integration for the next 100 years. The story of the draft riots come alive in the voices of passionate newspaper rivals Horace Greeley and Manton Marble; black leader Rev. Henry Highland Garnet and renegade Democrat Fernando Wood; Irish soldier Peter Welsh and conservative diarist Maria Daly; and many others. In chronicling this violent demonstration over the balance between centralized power and civil liberties in a time of national emergency, *The Devil's Own Work* (Walt Whitman's characterization of the riots) sheds new light on the Civil War era and on the history of protest and reform in America.

From *Publishers Weekly* The 1863 draft riots in New York City, the bloodiest in the nation's history, emerge as a microcosm of the convoluted and contradictory politics of the Civil War era in this absorbing study. Historian Schecter (*The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution*) pens with a gripping account of the five days of rioting. But he also probes beneath the turmoil to examine the ethnic, religious and class conflicts that made the confrontation so explosive. The rioters, largely working-class Irish Catholics, vented their fury at a draft law that exempted those who could pay \$300, at the city's WASP Republican business elite and, inflamed by racist demagoguery, at African-Americans with whom they competed for low-wage jobs and status in America's racial hierarchy. Schecter contends that these dynamics played out nationally in the gradual demise of Reconstruction, thus setting the stage for racial and labor conflict in the century to come. Copiously researched and highlighted with a wealth of period commentary, his lucid narrative colorfully recreates a historical watershed and offers a rich exploration of the Civil War's unfinished business. 40 bw photos, maps, not seen by PW. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *Booklist* When fireman Peter Masterson led a mob's attack on a federal draft office, producing the first murders of New York City's 1863 riot, he ignited social tinder that was not exclusive to New York in mid-nineteenth-century America. Historian Schecter backgrounds his thorough account of the tumult with social disorders that frequently occurred elsewhere. To existing social resentments, particularly of Irish immigrants toward economic competition from blacks, the Civil War added its combustibles, for New York was not stoutly Unionist. Peace Democrats dominated its politics; its business class sympathized with the South; and its Copperhead newspapers denounced the war and the draft. These factors affected the course of events that Schecter masterfully narrates. From Masterson's initial incitement to the frenzy's subsidence several days and hundreds of deaths later, the author moves seamlessly between the conflagration on the street and the frantic attempts of authorities to quell the mayhem, and explains the affair's ramifications on the Reconstruction era. An excellent encapsulation of the war's social context in the North. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "A fascinating look at the explosive resentment and rage that ignited deadly Civil War draft riots... thought-provoking and meticulously rendered." -- Jay Winik, author of *April 1865: The Month That Saved America* "Schecter provides the most detailed narrative of the riots, and also places them within the national context of the Civil War." -- James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom* "[Schecter's work] is a masterpiece of historical writing, the first work to place [NYC] draft riots in their full context." -- Kevin Baker, author of *Paradise Alley* "[Schecter's] brought the terrible days of death, fire, and looting in Gotham to life with vivid prose and thorough research." -- Kenneth T. Jackson, Columbia University, editor-in-chief, *The Encyclopedia of New York City*