



Riot

Walter Dean Myers

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As the Civil War rages, another battle breaks out behind the lines.

During a long hot July in 1863, the worst race riots the United States has ever seen erupt in New York City. Earlier that year, desperate for more Union soldiers, President Abraham Lincoln instituted a draft—a draft that would allow the wealthy to escape serving in the army by paying a \$300 waiver, more than a year's income for the recent immigrant Irish. And on July 11, as the first drawing takes place in Lower Manhattan, the city of New York explodes in rage and fire. Stores are looted; buildings, including the Colored Foundling Home, are burned down; and black Americans are attacked, beaten, and murdered. The police cannot hold out against the rioters, and finally, battle-hardened soldiers are ordered back from the fields of Gettysburg to put down the insurrection, which they do—brutally.

Fifteen-year-old Claire, the beloved daughter of a black father and Irish mother, finds herself torn between the two warring sides. Faced with the breakdown of the city—the home—she has loved, Claire must discover the strength and resilience to address the new world in which she finds herself, and to begin the hard journey of remaking herself and her identity.

Addressing such issues as race, bigotry, and class head-on, Walter Dean Myers has written another stirring and exciting novel that will shake up assumptions, and lift the spirit.

Riot Details

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From Reader Review Riot for online ebook

Cindy says

Post Civil War race riots (caused by unemployed southerners (b&w) immigrating to the north for nonexistent jobs). Written as a play with several actors narrating parts. Interesting and educational - I appreciated author's discussion at end.

My dad saw these riots in pre-WWII Washington, DC - same cause and same racial lines. It's not race it's survival...blaming race is bigotry, lack of jobs for survival is a continual source of frustration and anger - to this day. Outsourcing doesn't help, high wages causes high pricing causes outsourcing to cheaper workers.

Apologies to those who saw review before this was edited on...I reread it and thought first draft was incomplete, which it was.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Grandma Bev for TeensReadToo.com

RIOT by Walter Dean Myers tells the story of the beginning of the Civil War, and the 1863 insurgency in New York City.

President Lincoln had started a draft to gain more soldiers for the Union Army, but there was a clause in the law that allowed the wealthy to pay a three-hundred dollar fee and hire someone else to go to war in their place. In New York City, tempers exploded into a vicious race riot.

Claire is the daughter of a mixed family. Her mother is Irish and her father is black. She has been secure in her identity, but now everything is different. Black Americans are being murdered and beaten, and even a foundling home is looted and burned as the uprising turns into one of the worst race riots in American history.

The streets and Claire's neighborhood are no longer safe. And then the soldiers that are called back from Gettysburg to settle the dispute are equally brutal.

Claire is considered all black by people she considered friends and they are turning against her for that reason. She begins to question her identity. Great characters and a fast-moving plot kept me glued to the pages.

Myers has written this story in the form of a screenplay in an untraditional book, with an unblinking look at racial relations during that time period. It gave an immediacy to the action that most novel forms would not have been able to achieve. It is a very entertaining story, and I painlessly learned a lesson in American history.

Jennifer says

I like Walter Dean Myers, but I liked nothing about this book. Written as a screenplay, it lacked the depth of exposition. As a screen play it was weak with camera directions and scene explanations that did not feel authentic. Dialog was horribly artificial. Very disappointing.

Jennifer says

I loved the subject material of *Riot* and the way in which it portrays race relations, class relations and Civil War politics in a way that isn't black and white. I think that *Riot* would be a wonderful choice for a youth critical reading circle.

The good things said, however, I didn't particularly like *Riot*, or at the very least, I was incredibly disappointed since the subject matter has so much promise. I thought that the dialog was heavy-handed and not believable, especially the dialog from the teenage Claire. Furthermore, Claire's repeated dialog to the effect of "I don't want to be seen as black or white; I just want to be seen as a person" irritated me as oversimplified, with the problem that many supposedly multicultural works have in advocating for "colorblindness" rather than the infinitely more complex idea that there's no such thing as being colorblind, and that if there were, we would be blind to cultural richness and diversity of experience as well. The half Irish-American, half African-American Claire also seemed contrived to try to have a main character that wouldn't tip the reader too much in the favor one "side" (the predominantly working class Irish-American rioters versus the African Americans).

I also didn't think that the screenplay format helped convey the messages and story more effectively, considering that it seems as if Walter Dean Myers expected it to be read rather than acted (which I think would've actually made it more emotionally engaging).

P.S. I listened to the audiobook, so my feelings could've been swayed in either direction because of that. I liked some of the voice acting, but Claire's actress didn't convince me.

P.P.S. My opinion of *Riot* was improved by listening to the timelines of historical events as well as Walter Dean Myers's afterword and interview.

Josiah says

Walter Dean Myers was the winner of the inaugural Michael L. Printz award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature for his inventive novel *Monster*, and his 2009 book *Riot* has resurrected some of the unusual elements found in that earlier release.

Riot is definitely not your average juvenile novel. The entire story is written in the format of a screenplay, complete with directions about the kind of shots the camera will be taking, annotations for the musical score, fade-ins/out, and various other film direction. I think that Water Dean Myers is an outstanding writer who could also be a good movie director, if the right film came along.

Riot is a novel of historical fiction set during the New York City race riots of 1863. This portion of Civil War

history is not generally too well known, but is a compelling and sobering chapter to the goings on between the Union and Confederate armies that helps shed more light on the myriad of smaller conflicts that were tangled up inside the war itself. Irish immigrants who had come to the United States after the Great Potato Famine were having a difficult time of it, living in poverty and fighting to gain even modest employment. When President Lincoln triggered the military draft in 1863, many of these Irish immigrants saw their own involvement in the war primarily as freeing the black slaves so that they could turn right around and take away the jobs of the Irish citizens. Furthermore, the poverty-stricken Irish were angry that the U.S. government was allowing wealthy people to buy their way out of their draft duties with a three hundred dollar exception payment, something that they themselves could never hope to afford.

Ultimately, it seems that the race riots depicted in this book were yet another cause for bloodshed in a damaged and divided young nation. All of the anger, sadness and fear of racism is vividly brought out in *Riot* through the multidimensional characters that Walter Dean Myers has so thoughtfully created. This is a good, solid book that will have readers pondering the way that they see themselves and others, and the standards by which they, themselves, would want to be measured.

Logan W says

Riot is a book about a fifteen-year-old girl named Claire who is an Irish-African American. She lives in New York City in 1863 during the New York draft riots. The story revolves around Claire and her struggle to find her inner identity as she watches the two groups that make up her heritage fight against each other.

While being a quick read, it is written as a screenplay, which makes it difficult to read with stage directions and director's notes scattered within the dialogue. These stage directions chop the dialogue and distance you from the story. The scenes also cut back and forth right before important parts of the story. This also adds to the chopped feeling of the dialogue. For those reasons, I do not recommend this book.

Nefertari says

Listened to the audiobook full-cast version of this novel. I don't recommend it. Usually, I enjoy full-cast productions of audiobooks, but this read like a screenplay. While that worked for some of Myers' novels, listening to the narrator constantly say "Cut to...Cut to...Cut to..." is grating after a while.

As for the story itself, it's a good examination of a riot that doesn't get much attention outside of "Gangs of New York." But the main character of Claire is annoying, and her dialogue is more than a little heavy-handed. Yes, you do need to find out who you are and understand how the world sees you. Doing that in the middle of a violent citywide riot is downright stupid, and a little out of character with Claire's sensible nature otherwise.

Ellen says

Couldn't read it! The stage directions distanced me from the story and became increasingly annoying. (Usually love this author.)

Ka'leneReads says

GoodRead

Kammera says

This would be an excellent book for social studies and doing a cross curricular unit in school. Its a fast read, written in Dialogue form. The author adds the history behind the story at the end including pictures. I would read that part first before beginning to read the story. Riot is set in New York City in 1863 when the Civil war was taking place. A civil disturbance rocks the city as the Irish target the Blacks and the Army is trying to squash the unrest. Claire, is the young 15 year old trying to make sense of it all as she is half black,half white. This disturbance brings all the ugliness out of people and shows the reader how absurd and ridiculous the reasons people have for racism. The looters and rioters were just greedy looking for an excuse to steal and looking to blame others for their problems.

Chandler Jechura says

On the topic of the Civil War, many people know about the war between the South and the North, at little else. The scope of the Civil War, both its feelings and underlying causes, are far greater than one may initially realize. The idea that the war was fought to end slavery may have been the goal at it's end, but it certainly was not the initial goal. Initially, many people volunteered in order to preserve the Union of the United States, with many people believing that secession amounted to treason. Yet, the war, as it is with any conflict, cannot be generalized so. Although there are many people who believe that the North was a shining Utopia of freedom for former slaves, nothing could be farther from the truth. There were many different people who were just as racist as there brothers to the south, and often enacted policies and political views that perpetuated racist ideals well into the 20th century.

It is with this in mind that we come into the screenplay *Riot* by Walter Dean Myers. When I looked at this book on Goodreads, I was surprised to find that this book had a 3.2 rating average (For the record, about 4.0 is average for most books on Goodreads) ! This is because that Myers manages to do what all great historical fiction does: take the wider events of a historical time period and narrow it down to the microcosm of a family or individual. It is an excellently done book about how racist ideas can spread and cause violence, even in the midst of fighting for freedom. This book also can be used to explore the different ideas of supply and demand in economics, with the irish immigrants living in already squalor and poverty fighting for the few jobs available, worried about the freed African Americans coming to work for even lower wages. In short this book is an excellent example of that, and it shouldn't be discounted because of it.

I will say that I did listen to this as a stage play with a full cast, so I would recommend that that be how one reads this text. It was excellently done, and I think that is superior over a simple paperback form.

In any case, I would say that this book should not be missed, and is vastly underrated. I give it a five out of five!

Melody says

This audiobook plays like a movie! The voice actors, music, sound effects, and background noises were all perfect. I give the production values 5 stars, but the actual story had problems. I love Walter Dean Myers and I see what he was aiming to do with our main character Claire... it just didn't work.

A lovely voice actor brought her to life but wow **her character arc was weak**. It started out strong and ultimately left me feeling underwhelmed. The hyperfocus on Claire simply wanting to be a human being and wishing that other people would basically be colorblind is rightfully naive for someone her age (15). What doesn't make sense here is how idealistic she is for her age and the time period. I find it VERY hard to believe that the Riots, which was brought to life beautifully and detailed in such a way that it didn't feel too much like a history lesson, are Claire's first ever encounter with racist folks. There is just no way. She behaves as if NYC had no racial tensions or class disparities before the Riots. This is in the Civil War and even if slavery wasn't a thing in NYC, racism never went anywhere. And even if racism had never personally affected her before, which again I find hard to believe for this time period, she maintains her naivete about race even after learning about the black orphanage raid and witnessing black people being attacked in the streets. Claire being white-passing wasn't a good way to explain away her ignorance about racism.

Claire's constant insistence to her father that she was not a child and that she had to go out into the world and find out who she is and what it means to be a black woman was so cheesy and heavy handed. Claire is sweet, but it was over the top. That could have been written better. The church scene was honestly how the whole book should have been written when it came to Claire approaching the lofty issues around her biracial identity. It was subtle and it was showing, not telling.

This combined with the fact that a 15 year old girl who is a little naive about the seriousness of what's going on with the riots and comes across as somewhat sheltered is just gonna... up and decide to explore the city alone to find her identity was too on the nose and kind of ridiculous. Again, Claire's motivations would've been much more powerful if her goal was to convince her Irish crush to not riot or to find her best-friend Priscilla who disappears after the wonderfully written historically accurate orphanage attack. Making her whole motivation "I'm gonna go into the dangerous streets alone to prove I'm a human being and not just a white passing black chick" was not good storytelling and not logical. I get that being a teen means you're gonna do stupid shit but if Claire was scared for her safety why would she willingly put herself in harms way like that?

Anyway - the timeline at the end and some of Myers' commentary in the author notes were educational. This is definitely an interesting chapter of history that was insightful to learn about.

Kelly Moore says

Walter Dean Myers makes an incredibly important contribution to literature for kids. He's always writing about topics that kids really want to know about in a sophisticated yet accessible way.

In this novel he uses a screenplay style like he did for *Monster* to write about the riots that took place in New York City during the Civil War. It's a part of American History that a lot of people don't know about, and

Myers does an incredible job of bringing the experience to life in this book. He doesn't dumb anything down - the material is challenging, but he portrays the events so vividly that readers will want to understand it.

Emily says

Myers takes what seems to be a fascinating piece of history and cuts it into a script, resulting in choppy, fragmented and unconsuming reading. What worked for contemporary reading like Monster is incredibly ineffective for this historical book. I want to know more about this time period, but will need to look elsewhere to find it. Junior high readers beware...your teachers are sure to force this upon you!!!!

Elianna Grunden says

A neat way to present a racial riot although I didn't particularly enjoy it because of how my mind already works. The audiobook is written and spoken with the "camera shots" (angles, perspectives, distances, etc.) along with the regular dialogue and acting. My mind would be putting the situation and the photo of the scenes when suddenly the narrator would say "medium frame on so-and-so... now closer shot." Or I'd be listening to the narrator when he'd suddenly focus on some random like "overhead view... we see a group of larger white ladies seeking fruit" but the screen just described had nothing to do with what happened next. Aside from the confusing and interrupting narration, the story was interesting, following a young girl who is half Irish and half African-American trying to find her true self and where she fits in the riot.
