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1861 - A Riot in Baltimore (3 documents)

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Currier & Ives. The Lexington of. United States Maryland Baltimore, 1861. [New York: Published by Currier & Ives, ?] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/91721234/>.

General Winfield Scott, who led the Union army at the beginning of the Civil War, has been a General in the American military since 1814. Scott faced an imminent threat to Washington D.C. Because Scott was from Virginia, Lincoln sent an emissary to ask whether the general would remain loyal to the United States during Lincoln's inauguration, and ensure the safety of Washington. Scott responded, "I shall consider myself responsible for [Lincoln's] safety. If necessary, I shall plant cannon at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, and if any of the Maryland or Virginia gentlemen who have become so threatening and troublesome show their heads or even venture to raise a finger, I shall blow them to hell." Scott helped see that Lincoln was safe during his trip to Washington, as he passed through Maryland. He also Lincoln safe during his inaugural, which ultimately was conducted without a major incident. Lucius E. Chittenden was an American author, lawyer, and peace advocate. A Republican advocate before the Civil War, in 1860 he was chosen in February 1860 as a Vermont representative to the Washington Peace Conference. The Peace Conference had the objective of preventing Civil War. A great challenge was marching through Baltimore, as by U.S. troops attempted to peacefully march to Baltimore before the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. Here, Lucius Chittenden recounts a military confrontation between troops and a mob of angry white Southerners in Baltimore.

While the city stayed in the Union, a significant number of slaveholders. With them came the possibility of violence. Lincoln made it to Washington for the inauguration, but the confrontation included some humiliation for the incoming president who, acting on fears of assassination, sneaking into the city in the middle of the night.

A Riot in Baltimore (document 1)

Lucius E. Chittenden, Recollections of President Abraham Lincoln and His Administration (New York, 1891), 37-39.

“The grand old man lay upon the sofa. He raised his gigantic frame to a sitting posture. There was infirmity in the movements of his body, but it was forgotten the moment he spoke, for there was no suspicion of weakness in his mind.”

When I [Lucius Chittenden of Vermont] told the General Scott of fears that the [electoral]

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“vote will not be counted nor the results declared,” Scott replied, “Pray tell me why it will not be counted?”

“I have said that any man who attempted by force or unparliamentary disorder to obstruct or interfere with the lawful count of the electoral vote for President and Vice-President of the United States should be the lashed to the muzzle of a twelve-pounder and fired out of a window of the Capitol. I would manure the hills of Arlington with fragments of his body, where he is Sen. or chief magistrate of my native state! It is my duty to suppress insurrection-- *my duty!*”
... “I have the assurance of the Vice-President of the United States that he will announce the election of the President and Vice-President, and that no appeal to force will be attempted. His word is reliable. A few drunken rowdies may risk and lose their lives; there will be nothing which deserves the name of a revolution. But no promises relieve me from my duty. While I command the army there will be no revolution in the city of Washington!”

A Riot in Baltimore (document 2)

Col. Edward F. Jones of Massachusetts gave orders to march peacefully, but a riot broke out.

“Report of [Colonel Edward F. Jones,” April 22, 1861, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880) Series 1, Volume 2: 7.

“The regiment will march through Baltimore in columns of sections, arms at will. You will undoubtedly be insulted, abused, and perhaps assaulted, to which you must pay no attention whatever, but march with your faces square to the front, and pay no attention to the mob, even if

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they throw stones, bricks, or other missiles; but if you are fired upon, and any of you are hit, your officers will order you to fire. Do not fire into any promiscuous crowds, but select any man whom you may see aiming at you, and be sure you drop him.”

“They proceeded to march in accordance with orders, and had proceeded but a short distance before they were furiously attacked by a shower of missiles, which came faster as they advanced. They increased their step to double-quick, and pistol-shots were numerous fired into the ranks, and one soldier fell dead. The order “Fire!” was given, and it was executed; in consequence several of the mob fell, and the soldiers again advanced hastily. The mayor of Baltimore placed himself at the head of the column beside Captain Follansbee, and proceeded with them a short distance, assuring him that he would protect them, and begging him not to let the men fire. But the mayor’s patience was soon exhausted, and he seized a musket from the hands of one of the men, and killed a man therewith; and a policeman, who was in advance of the column, also shot a man with a revolver. They had last reached the cars, and they started immediately for Washington.....

A Riot in Baltimore (document 3)

While Baltimore Mayor George William Brown claimed he was trying to control the Pratt Street Riot, he became involved in a plot to burn down a bridge crucial for getting to Washington. Access to the capital by rail and over the bridge was essential because it provided the only route to Washington and the Union government. Brown later denied involvement in the plot to destroy the bridge.

[Mayor] George William Brown, Baltimore and 19 April, 1861 (Baltimore: Isaac Friedenwald, 1887), 43-44.

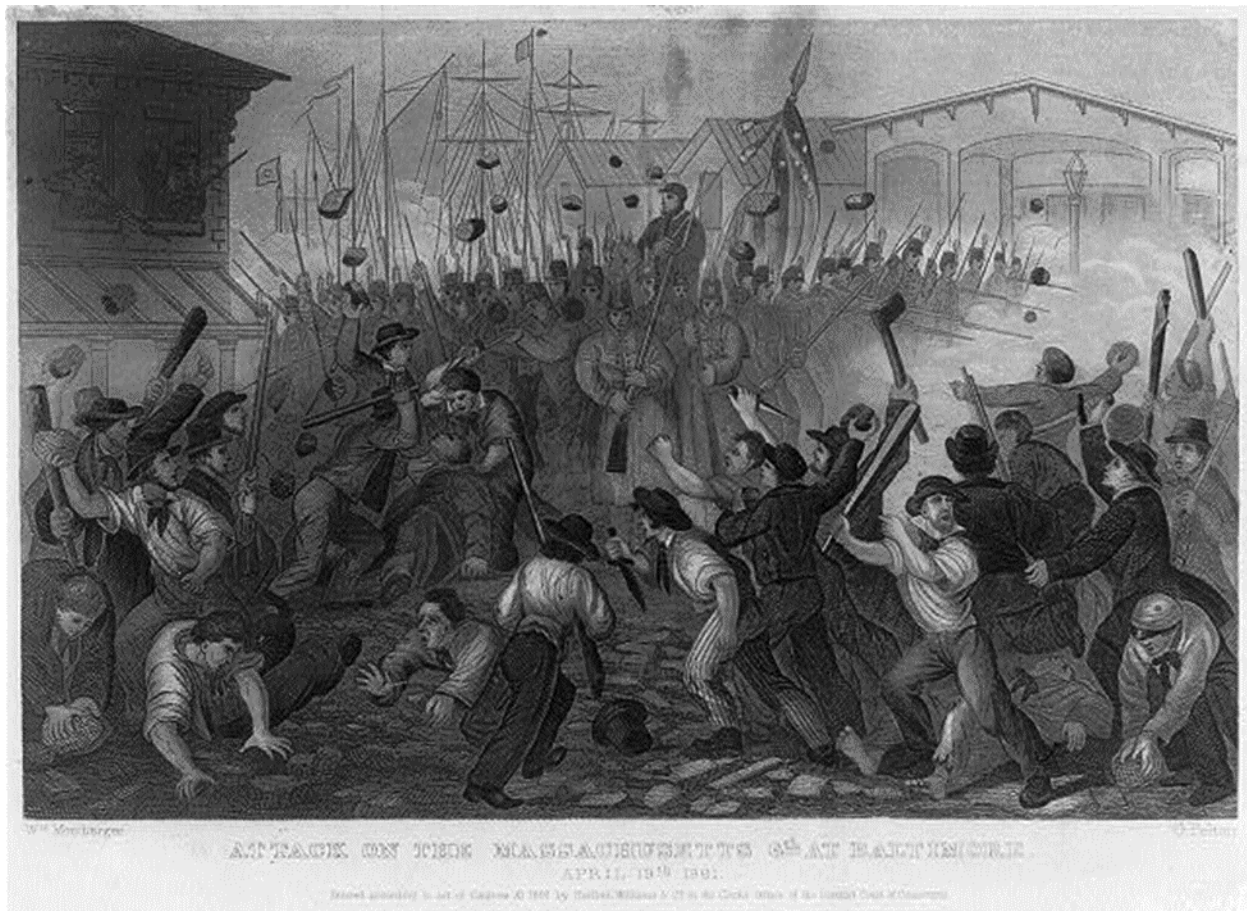
They were firing rapidly, sometimes backward, over their shoulders. So rapid was the march that they could not stop to take aim. The mob, which was not very large, as it seemed to me, was pursuing with shouts and stones, and, I think, and occasional pistol-shot. The uproar was serious.

The column continued its march. There was neither concert of action nor organization among the rioters. They were armed only with such stones or missiles as they could pick up, and a few pistols. My presence for a short time had some effect, but very soon the attack was renewed with greater violence. The mob grew bolder. Stones flew thick and fast. Rioters rushed at the soldiers and attempted to snatch their muskets, and at least on two occasions succeeded. With one of these muskets a soldier was killed. Men fell on both sides. . .

The soldiers fired at will. There was no firing by platoons, and I heard no order given to fire. I remember that at the corner of South street several citizens standing in a group fell, either killed or wounded. It was impossible for the troops to discriminate between the rioters and the by-standers, but the latter seem to suffer most, because, as the main attack was from the mob pursuing the soldiers from the rear, they, in their march, could not easily face backward to fire, but could shoot at those whom they passed on the street. Near the corner of Light street a soldier was severely wounded, who afterward died, and a boy on a vessel lying in the dock was killed, and about the same place three soldiers at the head of the column leveled their muskets and fired into a group standing on the sidewalk, who, as far as I could see, were taking no active part. The shots took effect, but I cannot say how many fell. I cried out, waving my umbrella to emphasize

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my words, "For God's sake don't shoot!" but it was too late. ... It then seemed to me that I was in the wrong place, for my presence did not avail to protect either the soldiers or the citizens, and I stepped out from the column....



Attack on the Massachusetts 6th at Baltimore, ca. 1862. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004680236/>.

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