

THE VANCOUVER HOCKEY RIOT

Introduction

Focus

In June of 2011 a crowd of unhappy hockey fans rioted in the streets of Vancouver, causing millions of dollars in damages following their team's loss in the final game of the Stanley Cup playoffs. This *News in Review* story focuses on what steps the police are taking to identify the rioters, questions about how prepared the city was for the riot, and the impact of social media on mob behaviour.

On June 15, 2011, the city of Vancouver erupted in violence as a riot began following the final Stanley Cup playoff game between the Vancouver Canucks and the Boston Bruins. Angered by their team's loss, some Vancouver fans took out their frustration by engaging in destructive and criminal behaviour. One hundred and sixty people were admitted to area hospitals with riot-related injuries. Millions of dollars of damage to storefronts, cars, and property resulted. Hundreds of windows were smashed and merchandise was stolen. The city was outraged and embarrassed by the behaviour of the rioters, and many citizens felt that history was repeating itself. The last time the Vancouver Canucks lost in the Stanley Cup playoffs, back in 1994, a riot also occurred. People wondered why the city's police force had not been more prepared this time. Others felt the police force acted effectively and with great restraint, bringing the riot to an end after only three hours.

The main difference between the riots of 1994 and 2012 relates to advances

in communications technology. Social media impacted the riots in several ways. The acts of the rioters were communicated to other people in real time, leaving a trail of electronic evidence capturing the responses of the perpetrators, spectators, and those caught up unexpectedly in the violence. Rioters admitted afterward that they felt that they were egged on by those wanting to capture graphic photos and videos on their phones. However, these same photos and videos later became evidence that helped identify those responsible for the criminal acts committed during the riot. The electronic evidence also portrayed instances of bravery by citizens attempting to stop criminal behaviour and protect people and property.

The riot provoked sober reflection on the nature of violent acts and mob violence in particular. Eight months after the riot, investigators are still sifting through evidence and are just beginning to bring those allegedly involved in criminal acts to trial.

To Consider

1. Can you give any examples of mob violence—both contemporary and historical—either in Canada or other countries?
2. Why do you think large crowds can erupt into violence after a sporting event?
3. Is there any way to prevent the mob violence that results after sporting events? Why or why not?

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Video Review

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner or in a small group discuss and respond to the following.

1. When you think of the word *riot*, what images come to mind?

2. How do you think social media could affect the gathering of evidence when criminal acts take place?

3. How do you think social media could affect people's behaviour in crowds?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. How many rioters were involved in the Vancouver riots?

2. How much damage did they cause?

3. What event triggered the riot?

4. Why did it take so long to gather evidence to charge rioters?

5. How did Digital Multimedia Processing Lab assist in the investigations?

6. What quantity of high-tech evidence had to be examined?

7. Why do business owners affected by the riot want tough criminal charges brought against those responsible for causing damages and theft?

8. Why did some people oppose televising the court proceedings?

9. What happened in the proceedings against G20 rioters that the Vancouver police do not want to repeat?

10. What reasons does Trevor Holness offer to explain his behaviour in the 1994 hockey riot?

11. Why does Holness think a jail sentence will benefit him?

12. Why does he think jail sentences are not a good idea for those who participate in riots?

Post-viewing Questions

1. After viewing the video, revisit your responses to the Pre-viewing Questions. Did watching the video help you respond to the questions in greater depth? In what way?

2. Do you think that Trevor Holness learned from his past mistake? Why or why not?

3. How do you think the courts and society should deal with those convicted of participating in the riot? Why?

4. Do you think that sports crowds are more likely to become violent than other groups of people? Why or why not?

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Anatomy of a Riot

Did you know . . .

Riot police use many non-lethal means to help to disperse a crowd. A flash bang is a grenade used to incapacitate people by disorienting their senses. A flash of light blinds people for five seconds and the loud blast disturbs the fluid in the ear, causing dizziness.

Focus for Reading

As you read the following section, make a list of what you think are the main a) causes and b) consequences of the Vancouver hockey riot.

A City Erupts

The city of Vancouver was on maximum alert on June 15, 2011. A highly anticipated hockey game in the Stanley Cup finals between the home team, the Vancouver Canucks, and the Boston Bruins was about to take place. Fans hoped that their team would soon be hoisting up the Stanley Cup before an estimated 100 000 celebrants. The city had spent millions of dollars to set up and provide security for Fan Zones in several areas of the city. These zones boasted giant outdoor television screens where people could watch the game with other fans in a controlled environment.

Instead of a celebration, however, the Canucks lost and chaos ensued. Vehicles were set on fire, including police cars. Windows of businesses were smashed, and looting of goods in the downtown core commenced. The 400 Vancouver police officers who had been patrolling the Fan Zones with what was described as a “meet and greet” tactic were quickly regrouped and redeployed in riot gear. At one intersection alone, 10 police officers were pelted with bottles and showered with obscenities. The air stank of smoke caused by burning rubber from hundreds of fires in trash cans and dumpsters. Shards of broken glass littered walkways. Portable toilets were overturned. The police were heard telling people to “just go home” over and over again. They resorted to flash bangs and tear gas in an attempt to break up the crowds. Fistfights and stabbings occurred throughout the city. Thousands of

Tweets, photos, and videos from people on the street as well as live television coverage meant that people could follow the unfolding events in real time. People could brag about their exploits on Facebook or use texts to tell friends where looting was under way.

The Aftermath

Three hours later, at approximately 12:30 a.m., the crowds had dispersed and the police issued a statement that the downtown core was secure. Nearly 100 people were arrested—the majority males under the age of 20. Nine police officers and several firefighters were injured. In the aftermath, citizens of Vancouver expressed embarrassment and remorse that the riots had happened and caused such bad publicity for their city; news of the Vancouver hockey riot had gone viral, being picked up and broadcast by media outlets around the world. The events in Vancouver seemed to solidify the widely held international stereotype of Canadians as a normally quiet and inoffensive people who tend to go wild whenever hockey is involved. The next day, hundreds of people showed up with brooms and garbage bags to help clean up the city. Questions were posed to police and city officials about the causes of the mob violence, the preparedness of the police force, the effectiveness of police tactics, how criminals would be brought to justice, and how future unrest of this nature could be prevented before it occurred.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, share the information about the causes and consequences of the Vancouver hockey riot you recorded in your list. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. With your partner, discuss what you think is the most important consequence of the Vancouver hockey riot. Give reasons for your choice.
3. Do you think a similar disturbance could ever occur in your community? Why or why not?

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Assigning Responsibility

Previous Canadian Hockey Riots

In 1955, violence erupted in Montreal after Canadiens star Maurice Richard was handed a suspension by NHL Commissioner Clarence Campbell for breaking his stick over an opposing player's head and hitting a linesmen. Many fans believed that Campbell, an anglophone, had acted too harshly and in a discriminatory manner against Richard because of his francophone background. The riot resulted in arrests and property damage.

In 1986, 5 000 jubilant Montreal fans who were celebrating the Canadiens' Stanley Cup win over the Calgary Flames rampaged through the city's downtown. Officials were so poorly prepared to stop the violence that Quebec courts ruled the city's police force criminally negligent.

Riot Kiss Goes Viral

In the midst of tear gas, pepper spray, and a police line, a young couple lay on the road engaged in a passionate kiss. Vancouver-based photographer Rich Lam snapped the photo, which received world-wide attention.

Focus for Reading

Immediately following the riots, a debate began about the causes of the riot and who was to blame for the ensuing violence. Who and what do you think were responsible for the Vancouver hockey riot? Read the following quotations, which provide different perspectives on the event, and complete the following questions.

1. What viewpoint does each person hold in terms of the causes of the riot and who was involved?
2. What voices are missing? What other viewpoints may exist?
3. What other questions do you have?
4. Who or what do you think was responsible for the Vancouver riot?

“Canuck fans did not riot in downtown Vancouver following Game 7 on Wednesday night. Nor did hockey fans burn cars, attack police, and loot stores. The rioting was started by a small group of thugs intent on recreating the shame of 1994 and using the big game as the launching pad.” — Editorial, *Kamloops This Week* (June 16, 2011)

“Who were they? Hooligans, but also anarchists and people with a prior intent to be violent, drunks, but also some who had a few too many. They were overwhelmingly men. They were hosers. Some just appeared to think it was all a lark. And yes, many of them were hockey fans.” — Bruce Dowbiggin (“Usual suspects,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 17, 2011)

“I asked [Police] Chief Chu whether he thought it was a good idea in the future to allow 100 000 people to gather downtown for hours, while consuming massive quantities of alcohol. He was non-committal. Well I think he was being polite. It's a stupid idea. And it shouldn't happen again unless there are extraordinary precautions taken that would make the likelihood of this happening again impossible.” — Gary Mason (“The Vancouver police deterrent that wasn't,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 17, 2011)

“The fact is, it's easier to blame hooligans and professional nihilists for what happened than confront the more disturbing possibility that under unique situations that wonderful teenage boy who lives next door is capable of becoming unglued.” — Gary Mason (“Hidden faces, painful truths,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 18, 2011)

“What surprised him [CTV reporter Rob Brown] was the mob mentality that developed among the thousands of people gathered downtown. Some fans were there simply to watch the game but ended up joining rioters—or were at least entertained by them: ‘All of a sudden they're smashing things, all of a sudden they're jumping on a burning car and falling into the flames and thinking it's funny.’” — Matthew Hoekstra, (*Richmond Review*, June 16, 2011)

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Responses to the Riot

Social Media

Alleged Facebook post the night of the riot: "Maced in the face, hit with a baton, teach gassed twice, 6 broken fingers, blood everywhere . . . flipped some cars, burnt some cop cars, I'm on the news . . . one word . . . history :) :) :)" The posting abruptly disappeared after a friend replied, "Take this down, it's evidence!" — Margaret Wente ("Canada's really horrible week: Goofs, goons and guilt," *The Globe and Mail*, June 17, 2011)

Reading Prompt

Since riots are random, spontaneous, and unpredictable events, how can police anticipate them and respond to them? As you read this section, give examples of what you think could be the advantages and disadvantages of a quick and aggressive police response to a riot. Are there other effective ways you can think of to stop rioting?

The Police Investigate

Following the June 15 riot in Vancouver, citizens demanded that those who engaged in criminal behaviour be brought swiftly to justice. The same social media that had been used to record the events of the riot were now sought by the police as evidence. The city's police set up a special channel for people to upload photos and videos. A day after the riot the Web server crashed after nearly 2 000 items were shared. This evidence played a significant role in identifying and charging those directly involved. Young men turned themselves in to police after being "outed" by their own postings, their friends, and even their parents.

Public anger grew over the next number of months because, despite thousands of photos and hours of video evidence, no charges had been laid. The Vancouver police were struggling to process the huge volume of information that they had received from the public. More than 3 500 e-mails had been submitted within weeks of the riot, and many came with attached photos, videos, or links to social media sites.

Police Chief Jim Chu retracted an earlier statement in which he blamed the riots on a small group of anarchists, as it became apparent that the first people who admitted to police their involvement in the riot had no previous criminal record. Police also had to issue a statement urging the public not to take justice into its own hands. Some

suspects had been subjected to Internet harassment such as the posting online of their addresses, phone numbers, and places of employment or school they attended. Social ostracism and vigilantism became electronic as "shaming sites" emerged on the Internet. Water Polo Canada suspended one of its Olympic hopefuls after he was identified as attempting to ignite the gas tank of a police car. His family received threats and had to move temporarily from their home. Some of the young men and women involved in the disturbances lost part-time jobs after their employers discovered evidence of their participation in the riot on social media sites. Many apologized to the city and its citizens on the very same sites. Forty-one of the looters eventually turned themselves in voluntarily.

Outrage over the Outrage

A new riot phenomenon had emerged: outrage over the outrage. Some of the shaming sites had a menacing tone that threatened and denounced in vicious terms those involved. The new online mob didn't care about justice and the legal system; it demanded revenge. Many people thought that the rioters were receiving the punishment they deserved. Others worried that some of the images being shared may have been digitally altered and that effective justice was best left to the police and courts.

A provincial review was called for to look into the riot. Chu and Vancouver

mayor Gregor Robertson agreed that the police had been understaffed in dealing with the riot. The report stated that the police underestimated the number of drunken fans who would show up for Game 7 of the Stanley Cup playoffs and how early they would arrive. But the report also stated that no “plausible number” of police officers could have prevented the rampage once 155 000 people flooded into downtown Vancouver. The report’s recommendations included considering a ban on the consumption of alcohol on public transit, improved co-ordination between Vancouver’s regional police forces, and a special court to deal with riot-related offences. The report also advocated the future use of cell broadcasting to communicate emergency text messages to all cell phones within range of a single or series of cell phone towers.

Parallels with London

The people of Vancouver looked to the swift and alleged harsh convictions in the United Kingdom following the London riots in August 2011 and wondered why the Vancouver police force could not

respond in the same way. Police blamed overworked investigators and red tape for slowing the legal processes down. In a speech in the B.C. legislature, Premier Christy Clark said she thought that all court proceedings should be televised. The provinces request for TV cameras was rejected by the judge presiding over the first court hearing because he believed the cameras would slow down an already overworked system. This first rioter was sentenced to 17 months in jail for throwing a road barricade, a newspaper box, and a mannequin through a storefront window. Prosecutors stated that the 20-year-old man had suffered from more than a momentary lapse of judgement and applauded the length of the sentence.

As of late February 2012, 140 criminal charges have been brought against 52 people. Police have recommended a total of 350 criminal charges against 125 suspected rioters, but those charges must first be approved by Crown prosecutors. Chu said that the eight months it took to bring the first case to court was not unusual in such circumstances, but many Vancouver residents disagreed.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, share the information you gathered about the Vancouver police service’s response to the riot and whether there were other effective ways of preventing the violence.
2. Some people believe that putting television cameras in the courtroom during the riot trials would help prevent future mob behaviour and increase public faith in the justice system. Others believe that the cameras would only serve to shame the defendants, who deserve a fair trial with the presumption that they are innocent until proven guilty. What do you think?
3. Police must expect that every move they make is subject to the scrutiny of electronic media. This may influence the extent of force used and the fact that the initial police response was subdued. What do you think?

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The Riot from Different Perspectives

Focus for Reading

The Vancouver riot was a complex human event. Different viewpoints on the causes and the proper punishment for offenders exist. Our understanding of any event is deepened by considering multiple perspectives. Consider the following perspectives on this particular riot and on violent mob behaviour in general. After you read each perspective, answer these two questions.

- What have you learned about the riot?
- How has this new information changed the way you think about the riot and those who participate in riots?

1. Heather Bourke, theatre-goer

Heather Bourke was attending a performance of *Wicked* at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre with her husband, right next to where the riots began. Bourke, 32, is 5 1/2 months pregnant and the mother of a two-year-old boy. “. . . At intermission the curtain went down and someone came on the public address system and said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, due to a situation outside, please remain inside the building.’ Everyone just froze. Then everyone went to the windows and stared out. It was unbelievable right in front of us: cars on fire, people being beaten up all around us, every direction you looked—smoke. . . . After the play was over, we were told to remain seated while Vancouver police worked out a safe way for us to leave. We had no idea what was happening. . . . Before we left, we got specific directions: You must turn right, do not turn left. A man sitting beside us with an 11-year-old daughter asked how we were getting home. He drove us right to our door.” — *The Globe and Mail*, June 15, 2011

2. Sioban Ethier, photographer

“I saw some guy beating on a newspaper box. I didn’t care so much about the newspaper box but I was really angry about what was happening. Adrenalin kicked in and I just went and I said, ‘Stop.’ He couldn’t really get across me to the newspaper box. He stopped and froze. Someone else said, ‘You’ve got to just let it go.’ I said, ‘No, I’m not.’ Then I turned around and four policemen came and they took him, and handcuffed him. Then I heard [the crowd] yelling at the police, ‘Let him go! Let him go!’ — Ian Bailey, Sunny Dhillon, Marsha Lederman and Robert Matas (“I was scared,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 17, 2011)

3. Trevor Holness, describing the feeling of participating in the 1994 Vancouver hockey riots in a CBC interview with Ian Hanomansing

“Like exhilaration. There were things happening all around you. I was feeling really drunk, that, I know. That had a lot of affect on a lot of us back then, and just like this recent one, a lot of it was fuelled by alcohol. So I just felt kind of open to what was going to happen. Like whatever was going to happen, I wanted to be a part of it. I don’t remember exactly what I said, I was really intoxicated, but I was taunting them [the police]. I was mad at them and it was a daredevil move where I just went out there and I’m like, ‘I’m not scared of you guys, you know? I’m not intimidated

by your guys,' and, you know, I was a little upset, a few of my friends had gotten the club that night—one of my friends got one of his teeth smashed, so at that point I was just telling them I wasn't happy with everything. I was blaming them, I guess."

4. Commentary on the video evidence

"And there's plenty of disturbing video. A group of young women are fighting off a gang of drunk males who are attempting to destroy a car. They are surrounded by a group of slack-jawed young males, passively watching. So much for chivalry.

"In another video, a man is attempting to defend The Bay from being vandalized. He gets beaten up for his troubles. Fortunately a few people jump in to defend him, but most stand and watch." — Editorial ("A black mark for Vancouver," *Richmond Review*, June 17, 2011)

5. Mandeep Hayer, volunteer citizen who cleaned up after the riot

"Having lived in Vancouver all of my life, and knowing what this city meant to me, I knew I also needed to be part of this. I called several of my friends and we decided we needed to be downtown first thing in the morning to try and help our city. We arrived downtown at 8 o'clock and joined the hundreds of proud citizens who were already working away trying to clean up this horrible mess. Everyone from little children to the elderly were doing everything they could, picking up little pieces of glass, cigarette butts, anything to clean our beautiful city. At the moment I had never felt prouder to be from Vancouver; this is what the real Vancouver was about: pride, community, and love. I couldn't help but shed a tear as I saw a place that was tormented that night restored to all its glory by its loving citizens." — Derek Jory, ("Honouring our heroes," www.canucks.nhl.com, September 30, 2011)

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Activity: Why do young people riot?

Riots are random, spontaneous, and essentially unpredictable events. Because they are so rare, they are difficult to study scientifically. The social science fields of psychology and sociology offer theories to attempt to explain why young people in particular are likely to engage in riots.

Typically a riot begins with a trigger event. This event, such as the result of a sporting event or the arrest or death of an individual, causes an initial outburst of violence. A riot begins when a critical mass of people join in the violent behaviour. Some theorists claim that rioters are marginalized people from socio-economically or racially disadvantaged groups. Their lack of power in society makes them more willing to destroy public and private property and harm other citizens and police as a demonstration of their frustration. These ideas have been advanced in order to explain the wave of race riots that swept cities in the U.S. during the 1960s, the Rodney King riot in Los Angeles in 1992, and the riots that occurred in London and other British cities in August 2011.

Older theories point to a mob mentality or the idea that people become irrational when in a large crowd. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, believed that when riots break out, a “group mind” takes over, loosening the inhibitions that would normally constrain individuals from committing violent or criminal acts on their own. However, such theories have been largely discredited by current social science research. People do remain rational individuals when in a crowd, but their social identities become more fluid as they interact with other participants in the events.

Activity: A Panel Discussion on “Why do young people riot?”

You will present a panel discussion that attempts to answer the question, “Why do young people riot?” You will be assigned to role-play a specific participant who has a unique perspective in answering the question (some suggestions are below; your class may think of other perspectives).

You are responsible for gathering and summarizing your research and presenting your findings in a clear, concise, and persuasive manner. Your teacher will act as the mediator who asks focused questions concerning your research findings and conclusions.

Panel Participants

- A sports psychologist on the psychology of fan violence
- A medical view of how binge drinking affects a young person’s brain
- A psychologist’s view of the differences between males and females with regard to aggression and violence
- Clifford Stott’s research on riot behaviour: “The elaborated social identity model,” <http://mindhacks.com/2011/08/10/riot-psychology/>
- A police chief explaining the importance of tactics during a riot (mounted units, canine units, tear gas, noise cannons, water cannons, rubber bullets, strategic formations, kettling)
- A sociologist’s view of the role of social media in individual and group behaviour
- An investigative journalist’s view of the causes of the August 2011 London riots