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The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis

Jerald E. Podair

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On May 9, 1968, junior high school teacher Fred Nauman received a letter that would change the history of New York City. It informed him that he had been fired from his job. Eighteen other educators in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville area of Brooklyn received similar letters that day. The dismissed educators were white. The local school board that fired them was predominantly African-American. The crisis that the firings provoked became the most racially divisive moment in the city in more than a century, sparking three teachers' strikes and increasingly angry confrontations between black and white New Yorkers at bargaining tables, on picket lines, and in the streets.

This superb book revisits the Ocean Hill–Brownsville crisis—a watershed in modern New York City race relations. Jerald E. Podair connects the conflict with the sociocultural history of the city and explores its legacy. The book is a powerful, sobering tale of racial misunderstanding and fear, a New York story with national implications.

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