The Baltimore Riot, or Pratt Street Riot as it is also known, occurred on April 19, 1861. While on their way to Washington, D.C., soldiers from the Sixth Massachusetts Regiment were attacked by a mob of citizens as they passed through the streets of Baltimore, Maryland. Disorder in the city lasted into the night, when the Mayor of Baltimore and the Police Commissioners ordered the railroad bridges north of the city to be burned to prevent further movements of troops through the city. Four soldiers and 12 civilians were killed, while several dozen soldiers and civilians were wounded. This demonstration of southern sympathies and mob violence worried Union officials and soon led President Abraham Lincoln to take measures to ensure Maryland would remain loyal to the Union. By the end of May, 1861, Maryland was under martial law and controlled by Federal troops garrisoned in the state.

Background
Following the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860, seven Deep South states seceded during the winter of 1860-1861. As a result, Marylanders faced a difficult period of economic and political strife, since the state had cultural and business ties to both the North and the South and felt the pull of allegiances to both sections. Maryland’s geographic location as a border state also assured that it would be contested ground should armed conflict occur. During the winter and early spring, citizens throughout the state held mass meetings in support of the Union or for secession respectively.

These allegiances grew more contested following the first military engagement of the Civil War at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Seeing the imminent danger of war, Maryland’s governor Thomas H. Hicks refused to call the state legislature into session to decide on the issue of secession. Hicks supported the Union and hoped to keep his state neutral by waiting until the passions of Fort Sumter had cooled to convene the legislature. Southern-sympathizing Marylanders were also waiting, although they waited to see if Virginia would secede from the Union before they pushed their own state toward secession. President Lincoln’s April 15 call for troops in response to Fort Sumter led to the secession of Virginia on April 17 and to the riot that occurred on April 19.

The Riot
Encouraged by Virginia’s secession, and angered by Lincoln’s willingness to use force to coerce the southern states, Maryland’s southern-sympathizing population was more active than ever in the state. As a result, when troops passed through Maryland on April 18, rumors circulated that groups of citizens were planning to obstruct the transport of troops through Baltimore the following day. The Sixth Massachusetts arrived on the scene in the midst of these hostilities.

The Sixth Massachusetts was responding to Lincoln’s April 15 call for volunteer soldiers when they arrived in Baltimore shortly before noon on the April 19. Col. Edward F. Jones, an officer of the Sixth, was warned by railroad personnel of the rumors while en route, and he instructed the soldiers to load their weapons but issued the order that no one was to fire unless ordered to do so. When the Sixth

Massachusetts arrived on the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad at the President Street Station in Baltimore, they had to wait for the horses to be hooked to the cars.

At that time, to continue on the journey south to Washington, train cars were typically pulled along tracks through the city by horses to the Camden Street Station of the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad, where
they were reconnected to B&O engines to proceed southward. Seven companies of the Regiment were successfully pulled through the city in this manner. However, as citizens learned that troops were arriving in the city, mobs began to gather along the streets and build blockades on the rails between the stations. The remaining four companies of soldiers (around 250 men) were forced to disembark and march to the Camden Station.

Although Police Marshal George Kane and Mayor George Brown provided a police escort of some 50 men for the troops, crowds along the streets began throwing rocks and bricks at the soldiers. Several shots were fired at the troops by individuals in the crowd and, when one soldier fell dead, the officers ordered the men to return fire into the mob. Mayor Brown marched at the head of the column of troops for a period of time to attempt to calm the mob, but he was unsuccessful. The Sixth Massachusetts, with a police escort surrounding them, proceeded quickly down Pratt Street and eventually arrived at the Camden Station, where they boarded a train for Washington.

**Aftermath**

That afternoon, Mayor Brown organized a mass meeting in Monument Square hoping to persuade the citizens to remain calm. Fearing that this plea by public officials was not enough, the mayor met with Gov. Hicks and several other city officials in the evening to discuss options. Realizing that more troops were on the way, Mayor Brown ordered a group of men to burn the railroad bridges north of the city. Several bridges were accordingly damaged (but not destroyed) later that night.

The following weeks were tense ones, as the railroad companies reestablished lines allowing troops to pass through Maryland again. Fearing a repeat of the riot, President Lincoln took measures to keep Maryland in the Union. On May 13, 1861, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Butler arrived by ship in Annapolis and quickly marched units of soldiers into Baltimore. Guns were placed on Federal Hill and troops were stationed throughout the city and surrounding countryside to keep order among the citizens. Over the course of the next few months, Lincoln ordered many suspected southern-sympathizing members of the state legislature to be arrested by the military and held without trial as political prisoners.

The Baltimore Riot forced President Lincoln to essentially capture Maryland and prevent the state from seceding. It also further galvanized allegiances for both the Union and the Confederacy throughout the nation, as it was the first bloodshed in the Civil War, since there were no casualties at Fort Sumter.
Document L

The Baltimore Riot, 1861

The Massachusetts Volunteers fighting their way through the Streets of Baltimore on their march to defense of the National Capitol April 19th, 1861

Source: Library of Congress
http://loc.gov/pictures/item/91721234/