
CSE 331

Software Design & Implementation

Winter 2020

“Section 8” – Common React Bugs, HW8

Administrivia

- Done with HW6!
- HW7 due today!
 - Reminder (1): Use a **DEBUG** flag to turn off an expensive **checkRep**
 - Reminder (2): Make sure **PathfinderTestDriver** constructor and **runTests()** are public.
 - Reminder (3): IntelliJ Ultimate (not Community) is recommended because it can help with JS/React. (Free for students, see Resources on course website.)
- HW8 due next Thursday.
 - HW9 due the following Wednesday.
- Any questions?

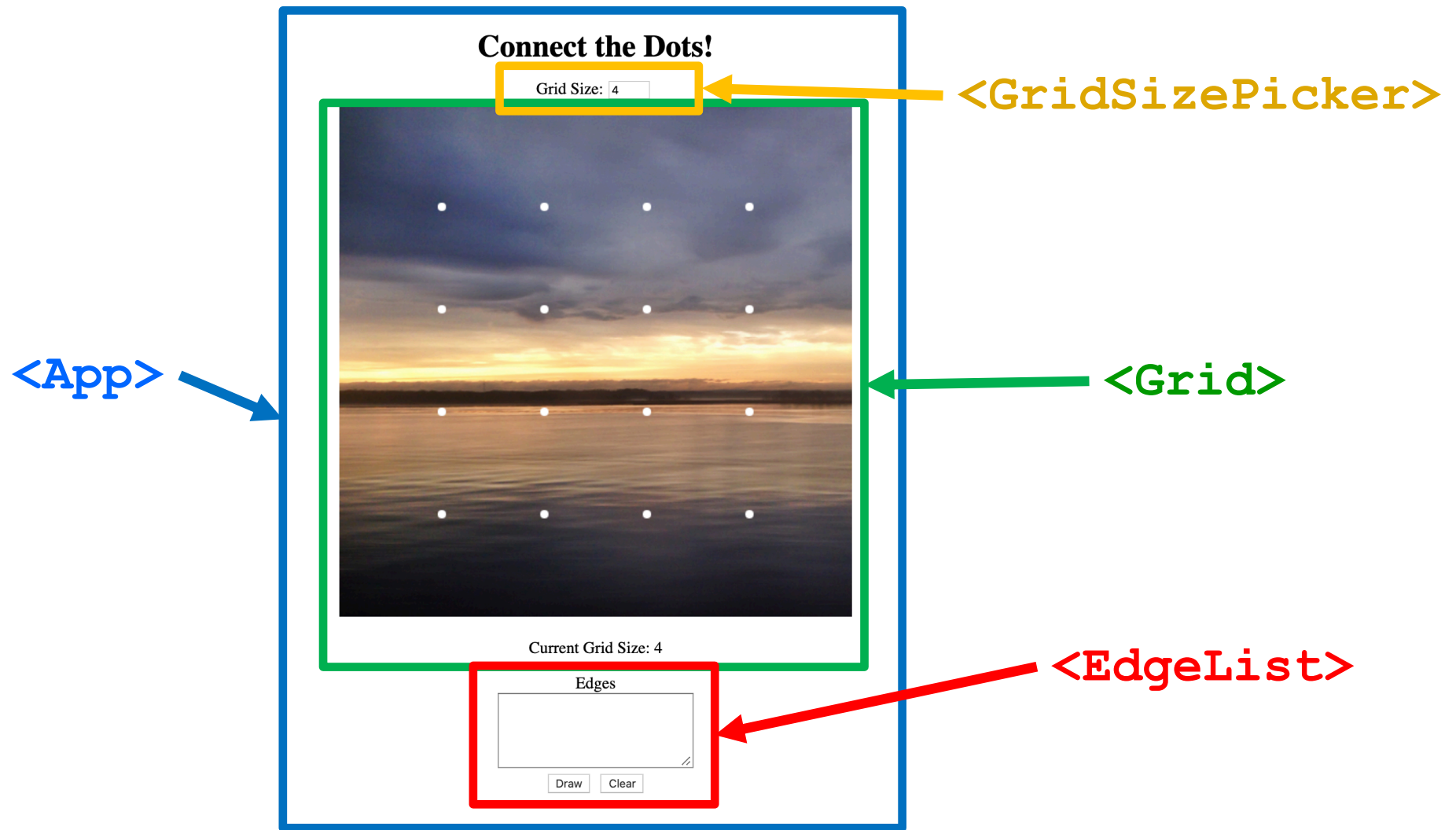
Agenda

- Overview of HW8 – “Connect the Dots”
- Common React bugs & how to fix them

HW8 Overview

- Starter code has (most of) the pieces, but not much functionality.
 - Lots of hard-coded values, placeholders (console.log instead of actually doing stuff), etc..
- Your job: "wire all the pieces together"
 - Accept user input
 - Process/parse the data
 - Error check – users do weird stuff, make sure you can't crash
 - Move data between components as necessary
 - Add the actual functionality in response to user input.
- Structure:
 - Top-level <App> component, with three child components.

HW8 Component Structure



Running a React App

npm: Similar to gradle, but we need to install manually the first time.

In the terminal, change directory until you're in the same place as the "**package.json**" file for the project you want to run.

To Install (first time): **npm install**

To Run (every time): **npm start**

Once started, you can edit and save files and the page will automatically reload – no need to restart. Use Control-C to shut down when you're done developing.

Common React Bugs

- Most common bugs in React are:
 - Reading from React state before the data has been populated.
 - Not properly understanding the React life cycle (the order that things happen within your app).
- This is because of specific **asynchronous updates** to React's internal representation of the webpage.
 - **Note:** There may be a very slight delay to updating your React components.
- **IMPORTANT:** You need to be careful when updating your React component's state and trying to access data!

Debugging React Strategies

When you hit a bug...

1. Walk step by step through the order that your code runs, checking how the state should be populated.
 - Use documentation about the React lifecycle to help you figure out which things happen in which order.
2. Put a `console.log()` in your methods if needed, and in `componentDidUpdate()` to check when your state was updated.
3. **Last resort:** Googling may be useful! Be very careful about this.

Bug 1 – “Read before Write”

Expected Functionality:

- Adds a canvas to the page and displays a blue rectangle immediately.

Current Functionality:

- **TypeError** when the page is loaded.

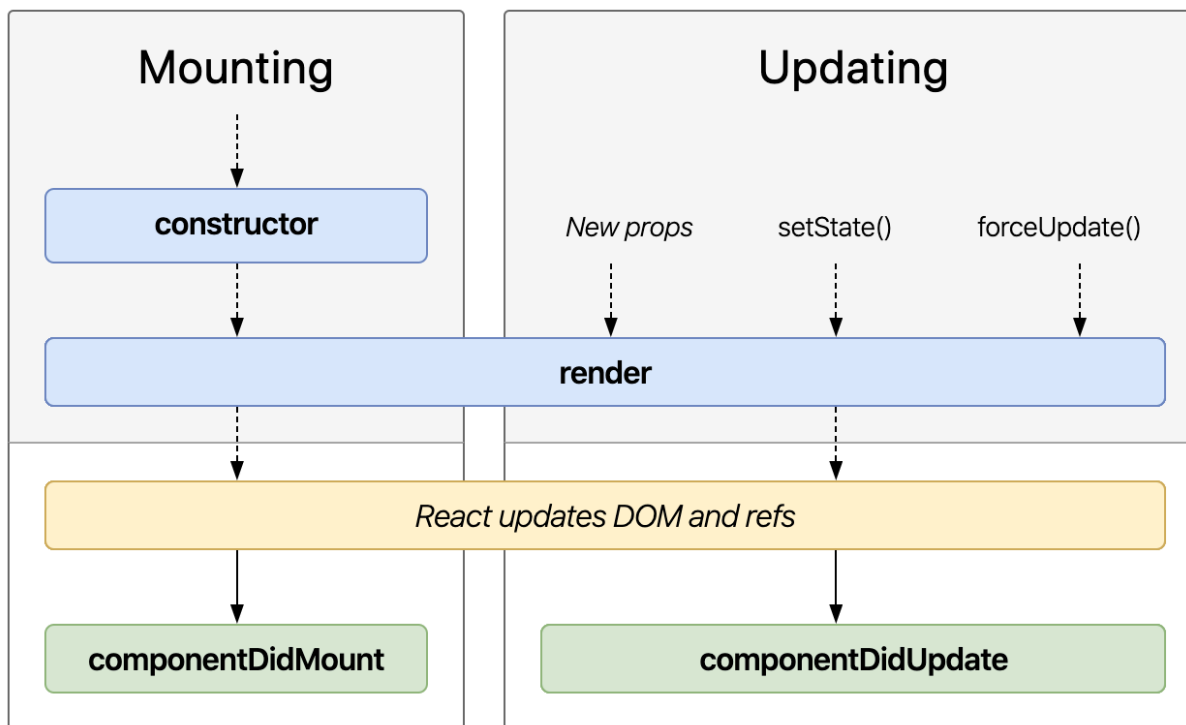
Bug 1 –The Problem

It seems like `this.canvasRef.current` is null, when it's supposed to be our Canvas object.

- Why doesn't the Canvas object exist yet? Let's think about how the `<canvas>` is eventually inserted into the page...
 1. Our component is created and inserted into the page (in this case by `ReactDOM.render()`)
 2. React constructs the component and then calls the component's `render()` to get the HTML tags we want.
 3. React inserts those tags into the webpage **and then** sets up all the reference objects.

Bug 1 – “Read before Write”

(Part of) The React Lifecycle

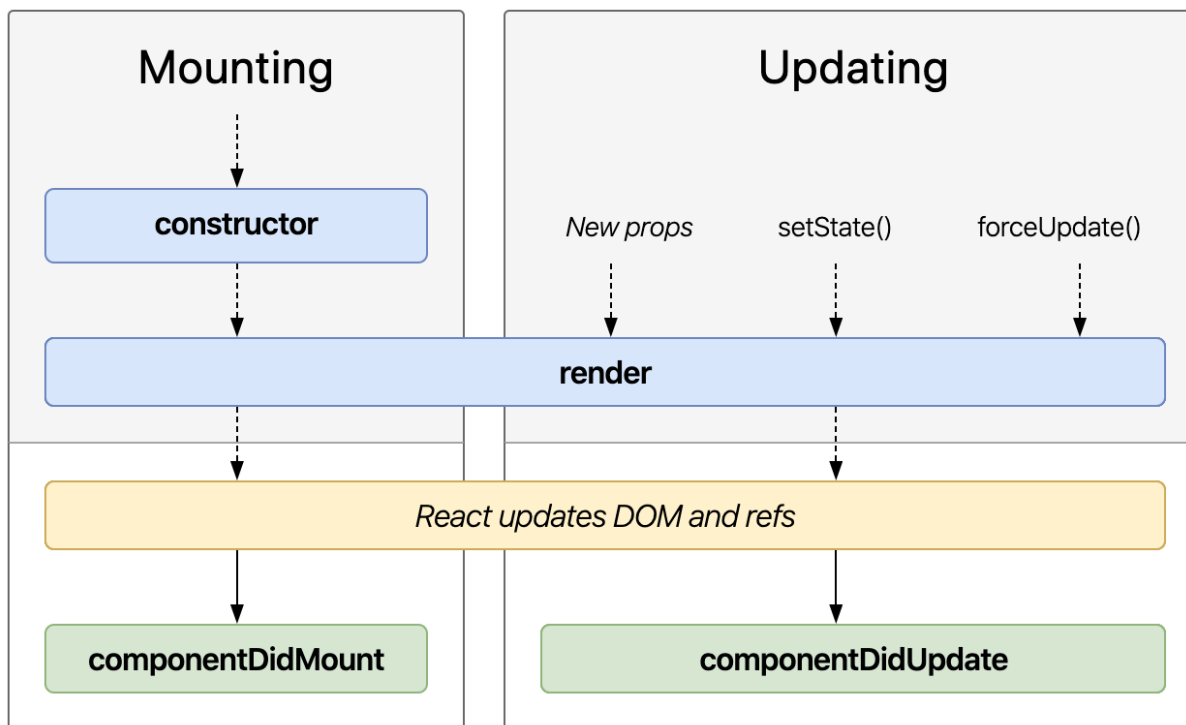


- Order that React calls methods.
- We're accessing the reference during the constructor
- React doesn't update the refs (yellow box) until after `render()` – so they don't exist when the constructor is running!

Image: <http://projects.wojtekmaj.pl/react-lifecycle-methods-diagram/>

Bug 1 – The Fix

(Part of) The React Lifecycle



Solution

Override

`componentDidMount`:
called when React is done
inserting all the DOM
nodes and updating refs.

In `componentDidMount`,
we know it's safe to use
the ref (“read”), since it's
guaranteed to happen
after the updating the refs
(the “write”) has finished.

Image: <http://projects.wojtekmaj.pl/react-lifecycle-methods-diagram/>

Bug 1 – The Fix

- Move the `updateCanvasImage` call into `componentDidMount`
 - Still called during the component "mounting" phase – so we're able to set up the "first look" of the canvas like we wanted.
 - Happens after React sets up our refs, so we know we'll have a valid Canvas object to work with.
- Common idea in React:
 - Set something up (like the `<canvas>` tag) and give it to React (by returning from `render`)
 - Some time later, React will do its job.
 - React makes a *callback* (like `componentDidMount`) to let us know that it's done and we can use whatever we set up (like accessing the Canvas through its ref).

Bug 2 – “React Doesn’t Know”

Expected Functionality:

- When the button is clicked, the message on the page changes to "I've been clicked!"

Current Functionality:

- The message on the page never changes.
- We know that the button event is working because the `console.log()` inside the listener is being run, so the bug must be somewhere else.

Bug 2 – The Problem

- The `this.clicked` variable is being updated correctly
 - You can print it out to double check, if you'd like.
- The only place we can modify what text is being put in the `<p>` is during the `render()` method – we need to return a different `<p>` element to change what's on the page.
 - But React doesn't know it's supposed to call `render` again!
 - More accurately: React doesn't know that the contents of the `this.clicked` variable matters for `render`.

Bug 2 – The Solution?

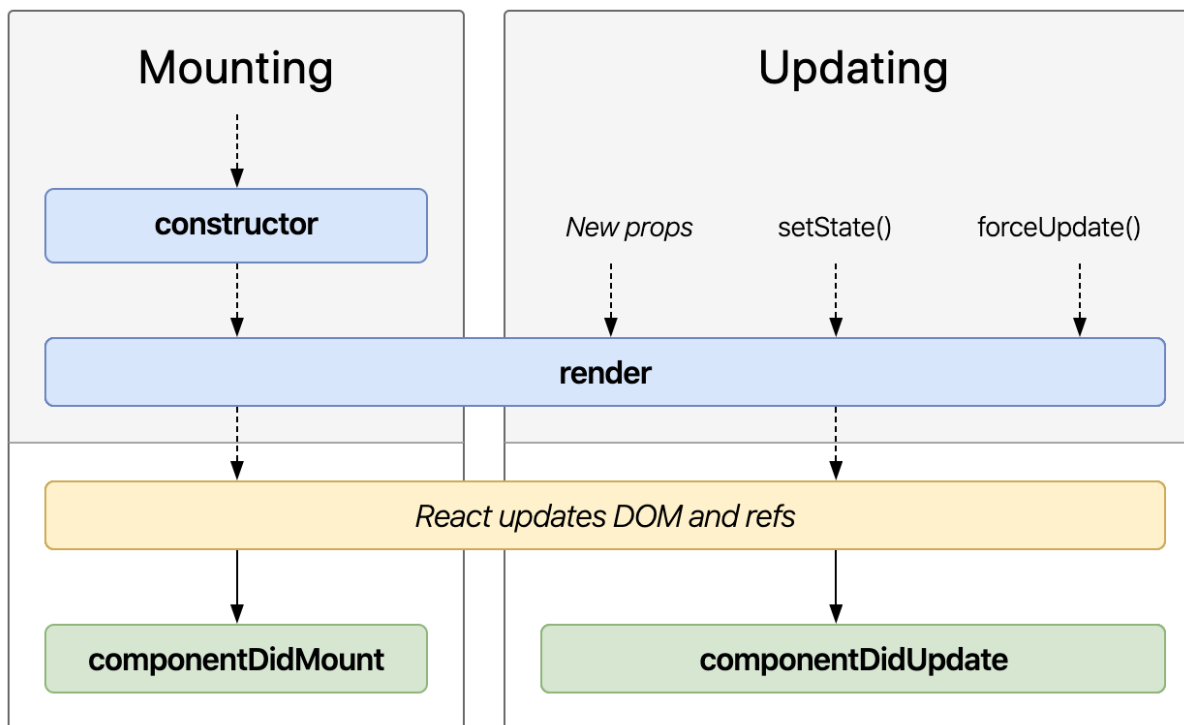
- React has a special place for variables that affect how a component renders: `this.state`.
 - Store an object (`{...}`) inside `this.state`, put whatever properties we want in that object to track the data we need.
 - Instead of `this.clicked`, we write `this.state.clicked`
- "clicked" isn't a special name here – just a variable name. Could easily call it `"this.state.pizza"`
- "state" **is** a special name: part of the React convention, React code expects that you store your state variables in `this.state`
- Not quite a fix yet, but a step in the right direction.

Bug 2 – The New Problem

- We're now storing our data in the right place, but we still aren't telling React when we change it.
 - React requires that you notify it when you *want* to change the data, *instead* of changing it yourself.
- To request a state change, call `this.setState` and pass it an object representing *the changes you want to make*.
 - You should never directly modify the contents of `this.state` (except for constructor initialization)
- Since you use `this.setState` (which is React code) to update the state, React knows that you'll need things to be updated based on what changed. (So, React will re-do the render).

Bug 2 – The Fix

(Part of) The React Lifecycle



Solution

By calling `setState` to update our state, we trigger a "component update cycle". During an update, React will change the state and then re-call `render()`. In `render()`, we can return the new text to be displayed on the page.

Bug 3 – “Read before Write (is done)”

Expected Functionality:

- When a button is clicked, a square of that color appears in the canvas.
- The current color is displayed in the text above the buttons.

Current Functionality:

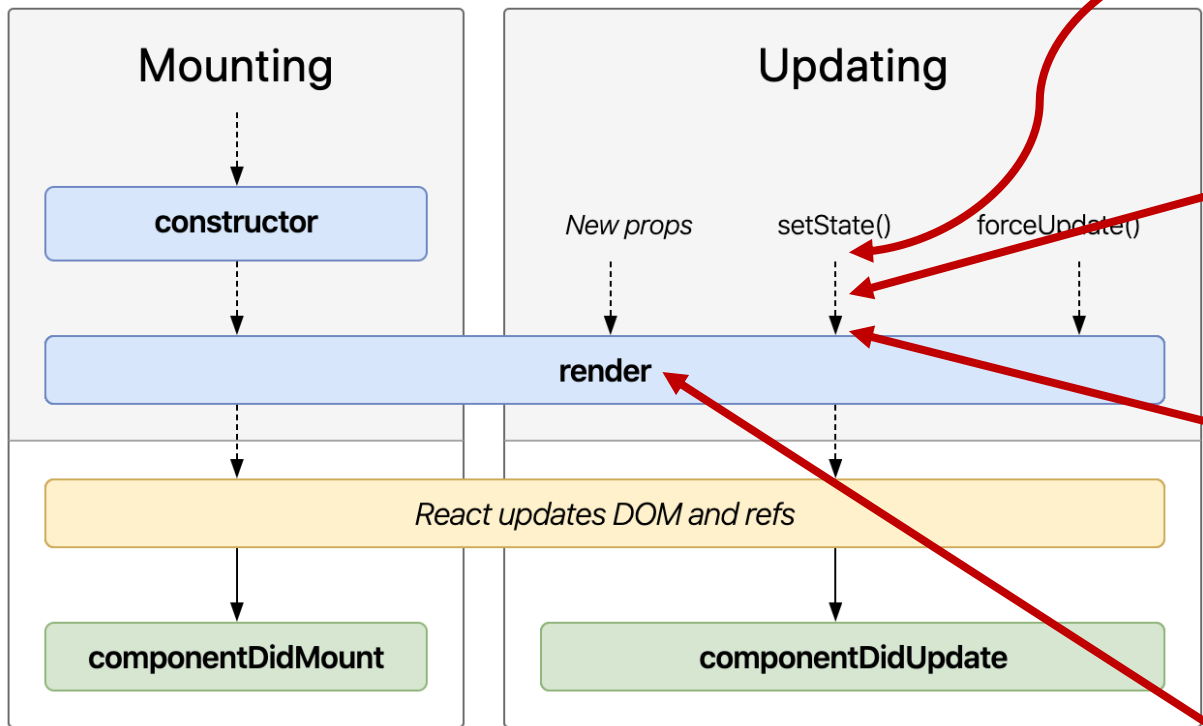
- The text above the buttons seems to be working correctly.
- The canvas is lagging behind one click – displays the color from two clicks ago instead of the most recent click.

Bug 3 – The Problem

- Remember that, in React, `setState` is a *request* for a *future change* to state. **When `setState` returns, the state has not yet been updated.**
 - React delays state changes for performance reasons.
 - Means we need to be careful about reading state: when do we know that it's guaranteed to be up-to-date?
- The problem is that we're trying to access the state immediately after calling `setState` – React hasn't gotten around to updating the state yet, so we're seeing the old value.
 - This is why the canvas is "lagging behind" by one: when we draw the canvas, we're seeing the value of state from the previous button press.

Bug 3 – What's Actually Happening

(Part of) The React Lifecycle



`setState` returns, our code keeps going

Our code calls `this.drawSquare`, which sees the old value still in `this.state`

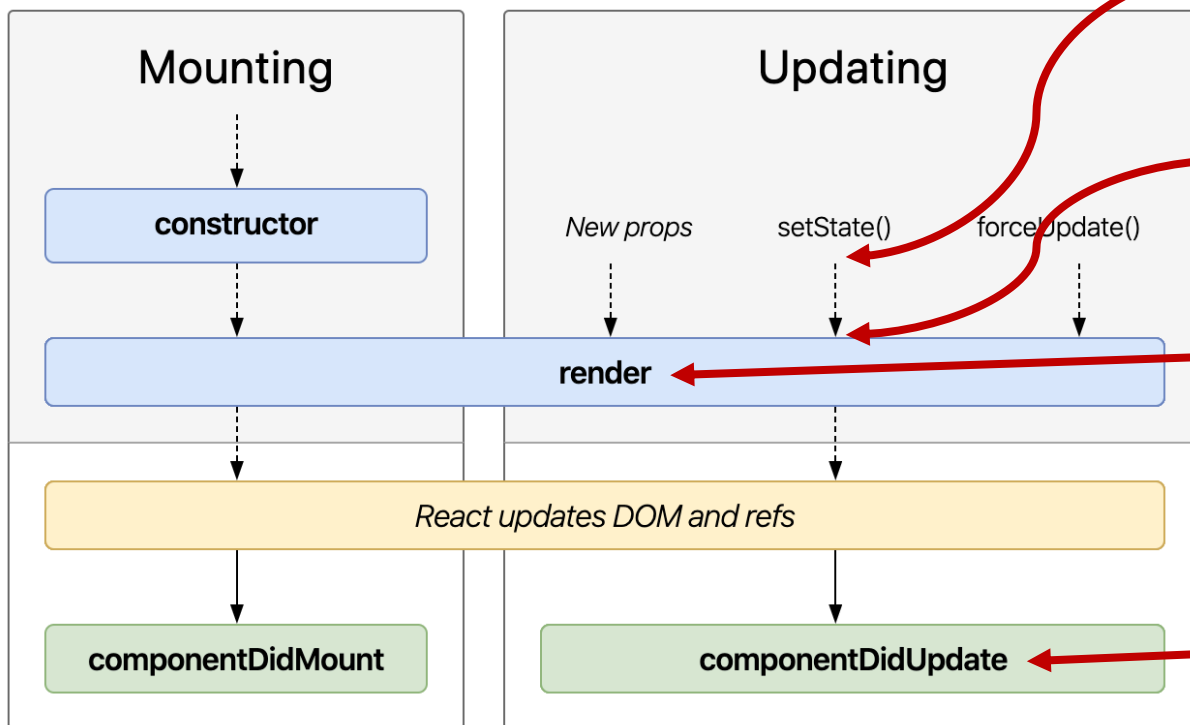
`this.state` gets changed later (by React)

The `<p>` gets updated here, which is why it sees the correct state (state is guaranteed to be updated before render is called)

Image: <http://projects.wojtekmaj.pl/react-lifecycle-methods-diagram/>

Bug 3 – The Fix

(Part of) The React Lifecycle



`setState` returns,
our code keeps going

`this.state` gets
changed later (by React)

`<p>` gets updated here, so
it sees the correct state

Solution

Should call `drawSquare`,
here, since it is
guaranteed to happen
after the `this.state`
value has been updated.

Image: <http://projects.wojtekmaj.pl/react-lifecycle-methods-diagram/>