How the Other Half Lives (The Bedford Series in History and Culture)

Jacob A. Riis
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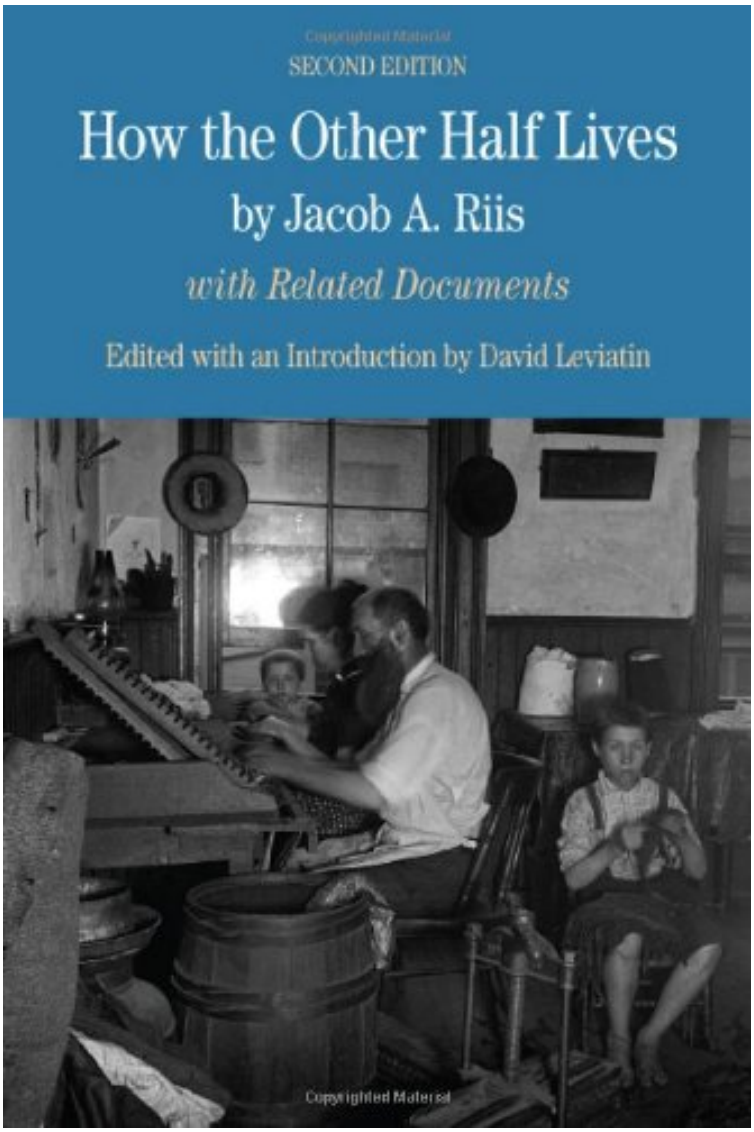

#667191 in Books 2010-09-22Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 8.22 x .53 x 5.48l, .60 #File Name: 0312574010304 pages | File size: 31.Mb

Jacob A. Riis : How the Other Half Lives (The Bedford Series in History and Culture) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How the Other Half Lives (The Bedford Series in History and Culture):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Highly recommended book about European immigrant poverty in America ghettosBy RichardWonderful book, I got it since my great g-parents, grandparents and parents came from the

Victorian to 1935 era of in Manhattan. They left Ireland to make their fortune here. I was aware of some of the poverty and conditions, but this book really shows how awful and harsh the immigrants had things and especially their children living sometimes on the streets. They suffered much, and people have no idea except for eyewitness accounts of the appalling conditions of shelters, work houses, suicides, alcoholism that they fell into after leaving their poor home countries for a better life in America. This is a classic by Jacob Riis and a window into a world unknown to most people. He attempted to alleviate the bad living conditions of poor people by exposing their living conditions to the middle and upper classes. Think things are bad now?, You should see how bad, "bas is", as you travel with the writer into ghettos and alleyways of working people toiling to just eke out an existence at long hours, often working at home making clothes and other goods to sell.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. How to water down the How the Other Half Lives, Schools ignoring the benefits of teaching this bookBy CustomerThis isn't a bad copy of this text. However, Many Urban Historians such as myself look to this piece in order to gain an understanding of the environment in the tight ghettos of the lower east side of Manhattan. This piece is something that I would chronicle as being an important piece of urban literature, among the likes of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle. Jacob Riis took a long time and effort in providing illustrations and photographs in his original copies. However this copy contains no photographs, thus removing a monumental element of the effectiveness of this piece. When this piece was first released, the images provided sent a chill into the readers. Simply due to the fact of knowing that there were young immigrants, mainly children who were living in squalor six blocks beyond their comfortable abodes.Lack of Photographs aside, this is an important and historical piece of work in American, Urban American, and New York History. Unfortunately many schools neglect to included this in required reading, which is honestly disgraceful. If I were to turn back to teaching, I would include this in my syllabus. This should be required reading for all!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Testament To The Value of Investigative JournalismBy Gordon HastingsJacob Riis's book How The Other Half Lives, written in 1890, remains an outstanding example of the importance of investigative journalism and the continued vitality of the Fourth Estate.Jacob Riis was among the earliest of what Theodore Roosevelt later termed " muckraker", "taking the rake to uncover the most unpleasant conditions in American society." In Riis's case, the issue was the plight of thousands of immigrants living and working in horrid conditions in the New York City tenements of the late 19th century. How The Other Half Lives is not a historical novel but rather a work of non-fiction, well researched reporting, personally witnessed by the journalist.Riis was himself an immigrant, born in Denmark among a family of fifteen children. He apprenticed as a carpenter in Copenhagen but discouraged by job availability he immigrated to the United States in 1870 at age 21. Having caught a brief glimpse of the squalid living conditions among immigrants in New York's tenement district, he left for western Pennsylvania and found work there as a carpenter. Perceived as being taken advantage of by his employers, he returned to New York as a salesman of flat irons whereupon he saw an advertisement for a Long Island newspaper looking for an editor. Thus, with no experience as a writer, he began his career in journalism. He later accepted a position as a reporter for The New York News Association where he began writing with assignments covering both the rich and the impoverished. Riss was aware of conditions among the extremely poor in New York from his previous brief stay in and around the notorious Five Points. However, his job at the NYNA, the New York Sun and later in a big step up to the New York Tribune , he found a pulpit from which to begin informing the public on How The Other Half Lives . Riis turned his print platform into a personal crusade, attempting to alleviate the bad living and working conditions of the poor by exposing their horrid circumstances to the people who could make a difference, the middle and upper class of the city and its political establishment. Riis was perfectly willing to hold both the upper class and politicians accountable for the exploitation of men, women and children in both employment and housing. The pages of his early articles for Scribner's Magazine and later in the complete volume How The Other Half Lives are so vivid that uninformed critics, in disbelief, termed the details of his reporting an exaggeration and sensationalism.Surely this work is an early reformist look at income inequality but Riis referred to this large percentage of the New York City population as a class unto itself, literally without identity or voice, enslaved by landlords who exploited their fears. The same people were recruited as the machinery of piecework in the early garment and cigar making industry at wages below any standards of decency. The tenement districts in New York exploded with thousands of men, women and children crowded into one or two rooms often without ventilation, sanitation or running water. Riss estimated that at one fifth of the city's population lived under these conditions.There is a major difference between Riis's reporting and sensationalism. Riis spent months in the tenements, which were factories by day and barely livable sleeping quarters by night. His research was impeccable and he was among the very first reporters to incorporate photo journalism into his stories, utilizing the newly invented flash to photograph his subjects in their darkened rooms. His work was the beginning of photo journalism, adding documentation to the written word. The photos and editorial content had dramatic impact with his readers and ultimately gained the attention of New York's newly elected Police Commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt. Riis became an advisor to Roosevelt, escorting him on nighttime tours for the commissioner to see for himself how the poor were forced to live. Many credit this educational relationship with Roosevelt as the beginning of the Progressive Movement, a hallmark of TR's future presidency.After Roosevelt's election he wrote this tribute to Riis. " Recently a man, well qualified to pass judgement, alluded to Mr. Jacob Riis as '

the most useful citizen of New York.' The countless evils which lurk in the dark corners of our civic institutions, which stalk abroad in the slums, and have their permanent abode in the crowded tenement houses, have met in Mr. Riis the most formidable opponent ever encountered by them in New York City."How The Other Half Lives was first published as an article in Scribner's Magazine in 1889, but while working for the New York Sun, Riis expanded the work into the book, complete with his photographs and published it a year later. A much less famous work by Riis, Children of the Poor was published as a sequel in 1892. In it Riis wrote of children he had encountered while researching How The Other Half Lives.Riis was not alone among a new breed of investigative {muckraker) journalists. In 1872 Julius Chambers wrote an expose of institutional horrors in Bloomingdale Asylum and in 1887 Nellie Bly wrote Ten Days in a Madhouse a story of patient abuse in Bellevue Hospital. By the turn of the 20th century McClure's Magazine had assembled a group of new muckrakers including Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens and Ray Stannard Baker, exposing the Standard Oil Trusts and labor unrest in the coal mines and steel mills.One wonders how slowly reform among the immigrants of New York's tenements may have come without the reporting of Jacob Riis. How The Other Half Lives punctuates the importance of investigative journalism in the fabric of a democracy. In the 20th Century we saw the results of the journalistic work of the Washington Post's Ben Bradlee, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in their reporting of Watergate. Currently we are witnessing excellent journalism in the New York Time's recent series Invisible Child, the brilliant work of reporter Andrea Elliott and the ongoing reporting of Times business journalist Gretchen Morgenson, together with her book Reckless Endangerment.In this readers view, Television, the 24-hour cable news cycle and the endless world of blogs have a long distance to travel before coming close to the credibility and impact of the work of Jacob Riis and those following in his footsteps. If you are a student of New York, treat yourself to a journey back to the nineteenth century and read How The Other Half Lives. It will make you want to keep buying a newspaper, print or digital! For more see gordonsgoodreads.com

Jacob Riis's famed 1890 photo-text addressed the problems of tenement housing, immigration, and urban life and work at the beginning of the Progressive era. David Leviatin edited this complete edition of How the Other Half Lives to be as faithful to Riis's original text and photography as possible. Uncropped prints of Riis's original photographs replace the faded halftones and drawings from photographs that were included in the 1890 edition. Related documents added to the second edition include a stenographic report of one of Riis's lantern-slide lectures that demonstrates Riis's melodramatic techniques and the reaction of his audience, and five drawings that reveal the subtle but important ways Riis's photographs were edited when they were reinterpreted as illustrations in the 1890 edition. The book's provocative introduction now addresses Riis's ethnic and racial stereotyping and includes a map of New York's Lower East Side in the 1890s. A new list of illustrations and expanded chronology, questions for consideration, and selected bibliography provide additional support.

From the Back CoverIn How The Other Half Lives New Yorkers read with horror that three-quarters of the residents of their city were housed in tenements and that in those tenements rents were substantially higher than in better sections of the city. In his book Riis gave a full and detailed picture of what life in those slums was like, how the slums were created, how and why they remained as they were, who was forced to live there, and offered suggestions for easing the lot of the poor.About the AuthorDAVID LEVIATIN (Ph.D., Harvard) has taught American studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, the University of Rhode Island, and Charles University in Prague. In addition to the publication of numerous articles, Leviatin is the author of Prague Spring: Notes and Voices from the New World (1993) and Followers of the Trail: Jewish Working-Class Radicals in America (1989). He is also a freelance photographer whose photos have appeared in several major publications including the New York Times Magazine.PENGUIN CLASSICSHOW THE OTHER HALF LIVESJacob A. Riis (18491914) was the first reformer to effectively convey to a wide public the unacceptable nature of living conditions endured by the urban poor. His use of the relatively new medium of photography brought an unprecedented power to his message.In 1870 Riis, born in Ribe, Denmark, arrived in New York as a Danish immigrant, one among thousands of the poor, friendless, and unskilled. Like so many, he frequently spent nights in police station lodging houses, the shelters of last resort in late nineteenth-century New York. He soon left the city to work at an assortment of rural jobs, but returned in 1877 to find steady employment as a police reporter for the Tribune (187788) and, later, the Evening Sun (188899). New Yorks police headquarters was then on Mulberry Street, in the heart of the Lower East Side slum district. As Riiss familiarity with the neighborhoods squalid living

conditions deepened, he began to employ his journalistic skills to convey his revulsion to the public.For ten years (187787) Riis wrote and lectured stressing his view that the poor were victims rather than makers of their fate, a concept then emerging among social reformers. However, despite his considerable rhetorical skills and instructional use of statistics, architectural plans, and maps, Riis was unable to communicate the elemental shock he felt on his nightly sorties through the worst slums. It was the 1887 invention of flash photography which allowed photographs to be taken in the darkest tenements that provided Riis with a powerful new resource. Initially employing amateur and professional photographers, and later on his own, Riis photographed the horrors of slum life specifically to shift prevailing public opinion from passive acceptance to a realization that such living conditions must be improved.Armed with this visual evidence, Riis added magic lantern slide shows to his lectures. Local newspapers reported that his viewers moaned, shuddered, fainted, even talked to the photographs he projected, reacting to the slides not as images but as a virtual reality that transported the New York slum world directly into the lecture hall. Riiss predominantly middle-class audiences may never have experienced slum life, but they immediately understood it as a severe and intolerable threat to human dignity. But for Riis, even the verisimilitude of photography, made doubly powerful by the novelty of the medium, was not enough. At times he manipulated his subjects in an attempt to heighten the impact of his pictures. In some of his photographs, for example, young boys huddle over a ventilation grate as though it is their only refuge against the cold. But some of the boys can be seen smiling slyly at the camera. They know the picture is posed.Once technical methods were developed for printing photographs with integrated text, Riis condensed his magic lantern shows into a series of half-tone photographic illustrations (together with line drawings) for his first book, How the Other Half Lives (1890). Its runaway success proved that he had captured the publics interest in the everyday life of the urban poor. Many publications followed in the wake of this path-breaking book, each incorporating the rapidly improving technology of photographic reproduction. As his reputation continued to grow nationally, Riis became a major influence in launching tenement housing reform, improving sanitary conditions, creating public parks and playgrounds, and documenting the need for more schools.The thirty photographs reproduced in this Penguin Classics edition are drawn from The Jacob A. Riis Collection at the Museum of the City of New York. (Statement by Leslie Nolan, Curator, Prints Photographs, reprinted courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.)Luc Sante was born in Verviers, Belgium, and emigrated to the United States as a child. He has lived in New York City since 1972. He is the author of Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York (1991), Evidence (1992), and The Factory of Facts (1998). He has also worked as a book, film, art, and photography critic for many publications.HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVESStudies Among the Tenements of New York----------JACOB A. RIISWITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BYLUC SANTELIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS PHOTOGRAPHSAll photographs are part of the Jacob A. Riis Collection of the Museum of the City of New York. The Collections catalog numbers appear in parentheses following the captions.Hells Kitchen and Sebastopol (#115)The Ashbarrel of Old (#112)Upstairs in Blindmans Alley (#192)Gotham Court (#24)An Old Rear-Tenement in Roosevelt Street (#97)In the Home of an Italian Rag-picker, Jersey Street (#157)The Mulberry Bend (#114)Bandits Roost (#101)Bottle Alley (#109)Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement Five Cents a Spot (#155)An All-Night Two-Cent Restaurant in The Bend (#104)The Tramp (#91)Bunks in a Seven-Cent Lodging House, Pell Street (#28)Smoking Opium in a Joint (#F)The Official Organ of Chinatown: Telephone Pole with Notices Stuck On (#260)Knee-pants at Forty-Five Cents a Dozen a Ludlow Street Sweaters Shop (#149)Bohemian Cigarmakers at Work in Their Tenement (#147)A Black-and-Tan Dive in Africa (#163)In Poverty Gap, West Twenty-Fourth St. An English Coal-Heavers Home (#154)Prayer Time in the Nursery, Five Points House of Industry (#124)Street Arabs, Mulberry Street, Retreat in Church Corner (#122)Didnt Live Nowhere (#DE) Street Arabs at Night, Mulberry Street (#123)Getting Ready for Supper in the Newsboys Lodging House (#165)A Downtown Morgue (#162)Typical Toughs (From the Rogues Gallery) (#6-s)A Growler Gang in Session (#140)Hunting River Thieves (#144)Sewing and Starving in an Elizabeth Street Attic (#146)A Flat in the Pauper Barracks, West Thirty-Eighth Street, with All Its Furniture (#151)ILLUSTRATIONSTenement of 1863, for twelve families on each flatTenement of the old style. Birth of the air-shaftAt the cradle of the tenement. Doorway of an old-fashioned dwelling on Cherry HillWoman at wellOpium pipeA tramps nest in Ludlow StreetA market scene in the Jewish quarterThe old cloes man in the Jewish quarterThe open doorBirds-eye view of an East Side tenement block (from a drawing by Charles F. Wingate, Esq.)The white badge of mourningDispossessedThe trench in the Potters FieldCoffee at one centEvolution of the tenement in twenty yearsGeneral plan of the Riverside Buildings (A. T. Whites) in BrooklynFloor plan of one division in the Riverside Buildings, showing six apartmentsINTRODUCTION1How the Other Half Lives is one of those unusual books that changed history in a material way, directly affecting the lives of millions of people. Jacob Riis wrote it for no other purpose than to call attention to the horrendous living conditions of the poor in New York City, and to insist on reform. It had an immediate impact, selling out numerous printings and being hailed in the press and preached from the pulpit, and the reforms it recommended were largely undertaken, albeit gradually.Riis begins his most famous work with a brief historical overview: tenements were initially single-family dwellings, cut up into apartments to accommodate the masses, and by and by speculators began building them from scratch, using cheap materials and employing shortcuts in every aspect of construction, making houses that were unsafe, unhealthy, and uncomfortable even when new. He

then takes the reader on a tour of the downtown slums, taking on a guides voice Be a little careful, please! The hall is dark and you might stumble over the children pitching pennies back there that echoes the one employed by Charles Dickens on similar excursions in his American Notes (1842) and subsequently exploited by numerous anonymous authors of pamphlets who described the slums for the titillation of middle-class readers.Then Riis displays the citys numerous and varyingly shadowy ethnic groups: the Italians, the Jews, the Bohemians (Czechs and Slovaks), the blacks, the Chinese. He does not spare the reader his opinion of the habits and practices of these groups, some of which, while time-honored, are barely comprehensible to the Danish-born author. He goes on to describe the plight of the citys poor children, many of them homeless, having been cast out by families no longer able to support them. He writes of the disastrous effects of alcohol, alludes circumspectly to the opportunity and danger that prostitution presents to poor girls, deplores mendicants and others dependent on charity. Then he briefly outlines the work of reform groups and private charities, and lauds those few builders who have invested in the planning and erection of model tenements, solid and sanitary. He is a moralist, but one grounded in daily reality, who believes that cleanliness is quite literally next to godliness, or at least an absolute prerequisite for it. Sunlight, air, and the eradication of filth are for him the agents that will drive out crime, disease, illiteracy, inertia, and despair. He concludes with an appendix of sobering and inarguable statistics. That the density of population in the Lower East Sides Thirteenth Ward was nearly ten times greater than for the city as a whole speaks volumes all on its own. To be sure, such facts were available elsewhere to interested parties at the time Riis wrote, but he had to make his readers interested. The books immediate mission was to take on the willed ignorance of the middle and upper classes, who knew that there was human misery in their city but preferred to believe that it was deserved, perhaps even chosen, by its victims.Riis very likely never imagined that How the Other Half Lives, his first book, would still be widely read over a century after its publication in 1890. He certainly did not write the book with posterity in mind; he was a pragmatist above all, and his concern was social change, not aesthetics or philosophy. He did not polish his prose style to a fine sheen, and he did not unduly indulge in large, chiseled truths, both matters that preoccupied his contemporaries. Literary writers of the time who chose as a subject the conditions of the poor in New York City tended, when they were not content with picturesque surface, to emphasize universal qualities, transcending the merely local and transient. Yet Riis, who dealt rigorously in specifics, has endured where most of them have not. Neither was Riis a social prophet, properly speaking. He did not have a vision of historical destiny or a program for redressing social ills so that they would stay redressed. His agenda restricted itself to the apparently mundane: proper housing and sanitary conditions, along with parks, playgrounds, and decent schools. But in its very simplicity his work qualified then as revolutionary.In other ways Riis might seem an odd candidate to be our elective contemporary, as any classic worth its shelf space must be. He is very much of his time, meaning among other things that he is pious and judgmental. He does not hesitate to qualify or even dismiss entire ethnic groups according to the received wisdom of the era, which held that blood was destiny, and he liberally applies the word heathen to non-Western traditions. For him as for many of his peers, Roman Catholicism is the very limit of the exotic. He is always ready to broadcast his impatience with practices and views he does not understand. His idea of morality, for that matter, often rings strangely to our ears not that his standards arent scrupulous, but that they sometimes seem confounded with mere sentimentality. His belief in the uplifting power of nature, for example, is unexamined and can at times resemble a fetish, not unlike his fixation on Christmas, which to him is a necessity that overrides differences of religion. He can sound by turns like an overgrown child, a town scold, a paternalistic dispenser of virtue, a tourist of misery. His incessant invocation of such mantras as home and family and work might provoke us to brand him a demagogue.And he does not inquire very deeply into the causes of the conditions he describes. Perhaps he cannot afford to, we might think. It is one thing, after all, to attack slumlords who are themselves immigrants, or pennyante Tammany Hall bosses whose influence does not extend beyond their ward, and quite another to take on those native-born aristocrats who own so much of the total wealth of the nation that the rest of society is forced into a cycle of mutual predation in order to survive on the margins. He certainly seems to accept wealth and poverty as given he is content to cite the adage The poor will always be with us. His solutions all hinge on private charities; he opposed to the end of his life such anodyne propositions as public housing and municipal land ownership. And his reverence for order is unflagging; his view of slumlords and bosses is nearly matched by his contempt for the radicals who might have been his allies. These he lumps under the heading of anarchists, at the time a buzzword equivalent to terrorists.But then, he got things done. Very few works of social criticism have ever had an effect as immediate, concrete, and measurable as How the Other Half Lives. The worst of the rookeries he describes were torn down. New laws were passed and old ones enforced to ensure minimal standards of hygiene and comfort in multiple-family dwellings. The infamous lodgings for the homeless in the cellars of police stations, intended for emergencies but persistently overcrowded and rife with abuses of all kinds, were closed and replaced by a much cleaner and better appointed shelter on a barge in the East River. Parks were established; public bath-houses were built. New schools whose design incorporated playgrounds went up one by one. The settlement-house movement was born and flourished. At length, and not without grave difficulties, child-labor laws were enacted, eventually on a national level.Riiss impact as a journalist as both writer and photographer was no less significant. He did not invent documentary reportage, having been anticipated in this by Henry Mayhew, whose groundbreaking LondonLabour and

the London Poor was published nearly a half-century earlier. Neither was he the first journalist to decry the living conditions of the poor in New York City; James D. McCabes Lights and Shadows of the Great City (1872) and New York by Sunlight and Gaslight (1882), for example, both raise many of the same questions Riis does, albeit without proposing solutions, and they are scattered amid a hodgepodge of anecdotes and attitudes concerning miscellaneous other aspects of the city. And his was not the first stern voice to reprove his fellow citizens on the score; Charles Loring Brace, who went on to found the Childrens Aid Society, had similarly thundered in The Dangerous Classes of New York, published in 1872. But unlike Mayhew, whose book came in several stout volumes, Riis kept his work short and to the point; his indictment was more honed and precise, his writing less complacent and voyeuristic than McCabes; unlike the sermonizing Brace he focused on the immediate and practical.A century later we are apt to overlook the modesty and economy of Riiss work. When we stumble on his rhetorical tropes and his rehearsals of moral verities we need to remember that in the context of the time such ornaments were in Riiss writing pared to the bone. Compared with his journalistic contemporaries he is uncommonly colloquial, unmannered, and lucid. Riis cites figures, not just statistics but exact sums paid in rent for particular rooms in particular circumstances. His slum-dwellers are not shadowy abstractions but individual humans with variegated personal histories. He does not content himself with characterizing their living conditions by the laying on of adjectives, but gets down to mundane facts: windows, floors, stoves, furniture. And we might consider that one reason he did not take on the larger causes of urban poverty was that he saw the value of limiting his focus to problems that could be solved right away. Riis was not a theorist or a scholar or a belletrist, not even so much a voice crying out in the wilderness as a hand on the emergency brake.In its form as well as its content How the Other Half Lives galvanized a generation and continues to exert influence. It pioneered the style of crusading journalism called, at first disparagingly, muckraking. Lincoln Steffens, Ida Tarbell, and Upton Sinclair, among others, learned from Riis the use of specific hard fact as a tool and a weapon, and they went on to wield it against such formidable nemeses as Standard Oil, the railroads, and the meatpacking industry. Their work in turn led directly to investigative journalism, still practiced despite a shifting climate of acquiescence to power in the major news media. Riiss use of photography to point his words and flesh out his anecdotes is no less important, endowing an entire legacy of its own. Among the photographers who followed Riiss lead in this regard were Jesse Tarbox Beals and Lewis Hine, whose early concentration on child labor had a thorough if delayed impact, as well as the photographers employed by the Farm Security Administration during the Depression Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, and many others who set down the faces and surroundings of the impoverished and uprooted with a strict and non-judgmental plainness that Riis was the first to employ, achieving beauty despite himself. In Riiss work we can even find a forecast of documentary film, a discipline whose social mission was not yet born at the time of his death in 1914.There is another reason why How the Other Half Lives remains compelling so long after its first publication, one that is rather more ironic and bitter. The book haunts us because so much of it remains true. While its lasting social effects were many there are no more windowless rooms, double-decker tenements, cellar apartments, dwellings accessible via alleys, doughnut bakeries in basements, sweatshop franchises in slum flats the living conditions of the poor remain abominable. New York Citys homeless population, virtually nonexistent a few decades ago, is again what it was at the time Riis wrote, and now in addition there are people living on the streets of cities and towns where such a thing would have been unthinkable in the last century. The sweatshop is as much a feature of the recent immigrants daily hell as it was in 1890. The face of misery has been altered to some degree, but not its substance. The housing project, a concept that would have sounded nearly Utopian a century ago in its allowance for light and air, has proven to contain as much potential for harm as the tenements of Riiss day. For example, Riis might have seen its staircases made of steel and set in concrete wells as the fulfilling result of his agitation against wooden steps and wells open to the hallways, which acted as flues when fire broke out. But we know from recent instances that housing-project stairs can be firetraps just the same, thanks to cheap combustible paint applied to the walls.For that matter, it is hard to imagine what Riis would make of the fact that in lower Manhattan, the dumbbell tenements he regarded as a halfway measure at best, their tiny rooms and narrow airshafts just marginally acceptable, are not only still standing in great numbers but have become middle-class habitations with correspondingly high rents. Riis always sounds incredulous when he considers a city whose millions of inhabitants live packed together in hives, while all around, just a few miles away, are rustic and underpopulated suburbs. Now this urban core has become increasingly privileged, while the inner ring of suburbs is the new dumping ground for the poor of the metropolis. And rural poverty, which Riis ignored and only came to acknowledge in his last years, has remained a largely neglected feature of the landscape. How the Other Half Lives is a work of major historical importance, and it is also a template for much work that remains to be done. Far from resting as an artifact of the past, it stands as a reproach and a goad to later generations.2Jacob Augustus Riis was born on May 3, 1849, in Ribe, Denmark, a picturesque medieval town in Jutland, the part of the country attached to the mainland and adjacent to the German duchy of Schleswig-Holstein. He was the third of fourteen children, including a foster child. He outlived all but two of his siblings; six did not survive childhood, and most of the others died of tuberculosis as young adults. His father was a school-teacher; the family was poor but respectable. The young Riis was encouraged to pursue his education but instead chose to become a carpenter. He went to Copenhagen for his apprenticeship, and upon

receiving his certificate in 1869, he proposed marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Elisabeth Gjortz, and was turned down. This, combined with the scarcity of work in Denmark, spurred him to emigrate to the United States.In the spring of 1870 he sailed from Copenhagen to Glasgow, and from there to New York. Riiss idea of America had been colored by popular literature, notably the works of Fenimore Cooper; not long after landing he used up most of the money given him as a parting gift by his friends in Ribe on a pistol, which he wore slung from his belt until a friendly policeman stopped him in the street and suggested he leave the weapon at home. He had arrived with letters of introduction to the Danish consul and to the president of the American Bank Note Company, who had been rescued from a shipwreck by acquaintances of the Riis family, but both men happened to be in Europe at the time. His attempts at finding work in New York unavailing after five days, Riis signed on with an agent rounding up laborers for an iron works on the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania. The workers were given free train tickets; Riis was amazed to see his fellow conscripts debarking and disappearing at stops all along the route. By the time he arrived at the works, only one other man remained.He worked as a carpenter at the plant for a bit over a month, until news reached him that France had declared war on Prussia. Expecting that Denmark would join the fray on the side of France Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein had a long history of antipathy he rushed back to New York to enlist. He had no luck, however; he was summarily dismissed by the Danish Consulate, the French Consulate, a club banquet of Frenchmen whose voices he had heard from the street, and Charles A. Dana, editor of the New York Sun, who took one look at him and handed him a dollar, which Riis angrily refused. He pawned the last of his belongings and set out in search of work. He went unpaid at a clay bank in New Jersey, quit a brickyard after six weeks for another futile attempt at enlisting in the Franco-Prussian War, took a job as a stoker only to see the ship sail away without him. He found himself penniless in the streets of Manhattan.He slept in doorways and was moved along by the cops, combed futilely through ash barrels, found a bit of good luck at the kitchen window of Delmonicos, where a cook took pity on him and came out with rolls and meat bones. This went on for weeks. At one point he adopted a small stray dog who had shared his doorway. One October night the weather was sufficiently bad that he was forced to seek shelter at the Church Street police station. During the night he suddenly realized that the locket he wore around his neck, which contained a lock of Elisabeth Gjortzs hair and had been given to him by her mother, had been stolen. When he complained to the desk sergeant he was put out. The dog, which had been awaiting him outside, growled when he saw Riis being manhandled, whereupon the doorman grabbed the dog by its back legs and beat its brains out on the steps. Riis in his ineffectual fury pelted the building with paving stones. Finally two cops frog-marched him to the nearest ferry and ordered him out of town.He resumed his wanderings, doing odd jobs, working as among other things a disastrously ineffective traveling salesman. When he tried to peddle an illustrated set of Dickens, for example, his sample volume was Hard Times, its title alone enough to kill sales. Back in the city, he got a job as a reporter for a syndicate, the New York News Association. His first assignment was to cover a lunch meeting at the Astor House, which he managed to do on an empty stomach. By the following year, 1874, he had garnered sufficient experience to become editor of the South Brooklyn News, a sheet run as a mouthpiece by local politicians. A few months later he had raised enough money to buy it. He wrote the entire contents of the four-page weekly himself, solicited all the advertisements, ran the copy to the printer, and carted the edition back to the office; he did everything but peddle it. Having established himself, he sold the paper after a year, returned to Denmark, and married Elisabeth Gjortz. When the couple came back to Brooklyn, though, the problem of employment arose again. Riis floundered at ventures in advertising, collaborated on an ill-fated plan to publish a city directory of Elmira, New York, and finally, in 1877, got a job as a reporter for the New York Tribune.He worked long days for $25 a week, covering far-flung and generally colorless events until one day, a few months into his tenure, he was racing back to the office with a story when he ran headlong into the city editor and knocked him down. The next day he expected to be fired but instead was assigned to the police bureau. He established himself at the press office at 301 Mulberry Street, across from the main police station; this was to be his headquarters for the next twenty-four years. He quickly developed a system for covering police cases, eventually coming to rely, as Lincoln Steffens relates in his autobiography, on a dogsbody, Max Fischel, a little old round, happy Jewish boy,1 to case the pigeonholes in various offices in police headquarters and determine the items worthy of pursuit. Meanwhile Riis staked out the nearby slums as his particular field. Other reporters in the bureau had worked out a combine, allowing themselves to be fed stories by police spokesmen and covering them by means of a rotating pool, which allowed them to spend most of their time playing cards. Riis followed his own leads or those suggested by Max Fischel, worked incessantly, and regularly netted scoops. As he went on to write for one after another of the citys newspapers The Morning Journal, The World, The Mercury, The Graphic, The Standard, The Mail and Express, and, most significantly. The Evening Sun he developed his own quite idiosyncratic style. He avoided journalistic boilerplate and wrote with his heart on his sleeve. In fact he committed the cardinal sin of the newspaper code, and it became his signature: he regularly and overtly inserted editorial commentary into his stories.It did not take him long to become obsessed with housing reform, and to fixate chiefly on the police-station lodgings, scene of his darkest moment of despair, and on the throbbing slum known as Mulberry Bend. This large, elbow-shaped block, bounded by Mulberry, Baxter, Bayard, and Park streets, was a survival and outgrowth of the Five Points, the citys oldest slum, which in turn had originated with the shanties that grew around the Collect Pond, in the eighteenth century, when the area was the foul and shunned

tannery district. The Five Points had ostensibly been razed and reformed by the end of the Civil War, as a particular result of the Draft Riots of 1863, in which many of its inhabitants were implicated, but in fact its business had simply been transfered a block or two north. Mulberry Bend was an agglomeration of tenements and shacks built in ad hoc fashion around and against one another and run through by numerous alleys, each of which developed a particular unsavory reputation: Bottle Alley, Bandits Roost, Bone Alley, Thieves Alley, Ragpickers Row, Kerosene Row. Scenes of misery and criminality existed in ceaseless profusion: infanticide, uxoricide, grudge killings, gang hideouts, starvation, opportunistic epidemics the list was endless for one mere block, albeit one inhabited by shifting thousands. Riis spent a great deal of time there, operating under his notion that anyone penetrating was safe as long as he attended to his own business, and he made a point of walking by every night on his way from the office to the Brooklyn ferry.Riis wrote many stories about the Bend and its lesser analogues the city was well supplied not only with slum districts but with such concentrated fortifications of misery as Gotham Court and The Big Barracks and The Ship. He covered fledgling attempts at reform, too, beginning with the Drexel Committee investigation that began in 1884 and bore fruit that included the Small Parks Act of 1887 which, however, took another decade to be acted upon. Frustrated by the limitations inherent in conveying conditions in the slums through mere words, he began to consider the use of photography. In 1887 he read a four-line dispatch from London that told of advances made in the use of flash-lighting, and he was moved to action. Soon he had assembled a group consisting of Dr. John Nagle, chief of the Bureau of Vital Statistics at the city Department of Health, and the amateur photographers Dr. Henry G. Piffard and Richard Hoe Lawrence. The quartet made a series of nighttime trips into the Bend and other slums, into needled-beer saloons and police-station lodgements and opium dens, and together produced many of the best-known photographs associated with Riis. The flash awoke sleepers and momentarily blinded drinkers and workers and nursing rriothers, pinning them in their surroundings and shocking them into submission to the lens, also allowing Riis and party to get away without fuss. The method was intrusive, but necessary, a questionable means to an unquestionable end. The results first appeared in the Sun on February 12, 1888, in an unsigned article by Riis that described the process, accompanied by twelve line drawings based on photographs, since newspapers then could not manage the expense and difficulty of halftone reproduction.Riiss accomplices had by this time tired of the pursuit, and he attempted to hire professionals. The first, a Sun employee named Collins, proved slow; the other, probably the studio photographer A.D. Fisk, was caught selling prints behind Riiss back, among other torts. Riiss attempts to go it alone were spotty. In one case his flash set a room on fire, and while some daylight shots turned out fine, others were ruined by exposure problems. In any event, for all that the pictures have endured, his photographic career was brief. Riis made maximum use of the photographs, however, not only to illustrate six of his books (How the Other Half Lives, Children of the Poor, A Ten Years War, The Making of an American, The Battle with the Slum, and The Peril and the Preservation of the Home), but also as lantern slides to illustrate lectures he began giving in 1888 and continued until his death. Although their influence was immediate, they were initially so little valued that when the writer and photographer Alexander Alland, Sr., sought them out in the 1940s, he found negatives, slides, and prints, some much the worse for wear, neglected and stuffed in boxes in the attics of various of Riiss former dwellings. Without Allands intervention they might well have been thrown away.How the Other Half Lives, published by Scribners in the autumn of 1890, was an immediate and thorough success. It sold many copies, and made Riis an authority overnight, bringing him numerous requests for lectures from educational, religious, and social bodies of all sizes for whom the books contents were revelatory. It also garnered generally favorable reviews, although it is noteworthy that one anonymous reviewer, writing in The Critic of December 27, 1890, judiciously expressed the books shortcomings:His book is literally a photograph and as such has its value and lesson, but also its serious limitations. There is a lack of broad and penetrative vision, a singularly warped sense of justice at times, and a roughness amounting almost to brutality. The Heathen Chinee and the Russian Jew fleeing from persecution in his own land, find no mercy in Mr. Riiss creed.2This blunt summary shows that Riiss myopia in regard to cultures more foreign than his own origins was not strictly a function of the times in which he lived. Its components were twofold: the first was that as an immigrant he felt entitled to measure others by the standards to which he himself adhered, with particular respect to industry and to assimilation the Chinese galled him with their loyalty to their own language and practices, for example, and he hated tramps in view of his long years spent trying to avoid their state. The second was perhaps more aesthetic: he scores the Bohemians for what he considers the ugliness of their language, the Italians for their religion and their ostensible disorder, and so on. Nevertheless, he was able to learn, to some degree; his attitude toward the Jews noticeably softens through the course of his works. It is also interesting that Riiss attitudes toward black people and toward women both look rather progressive in the context of his time. In his later works he lavishes praise on the female physicians who worked in the slums, and does not fail to note how their presence and works disrupted the biases of their patients who had grown up in masculine-centered cultures. His chapter on the Color Line in the present volume, while marked by many of the usual condescending features of racial assessment blacks are cheerful, love to gamble, and so on is still somewhat more generous and affectionate than many of the corresponding inventories he carries out on European tribes. His photographs of black people are evenhanded as well, generally portraying them as dignified and worthy of stature; this is also true of his pictures of American Indians.Riiss next book was Children of the Poor (1892). In his autobiography he alludes to the

critical consensus that it had more bones than his first, no doubt referring to its greater reliance on statistics. It also devoted much more space to positive undertakings already in progress, such as the Fresh Air Fund, Boys Clubs, kindergartens, and industrial schools. It was nevertheless not a success. In its pages can also be found the first appearance of some children who were to become stock characters in his writings and lectures, such as Tony, the tough kid who eagerly accepted flowers from Riis to bring to his mother, and little Katie, who upon being asked what it was she did, replied, I scrubs. Not only do many of the books anecdotal children show up in his later books, but Riis also lightly fictionalized various of their stories for magazine publication, a way of reaching an audience whose reading habits might not include nonfiction books.Riis endlessly cannibalized and recycled his own work, words and pictures alike. His fictional and semifictional magazine stories, collected (with numerous overlaps) in Nibsys Christmas (1893), Out of Mulberry Street (1898), Children of the Tenements (1903), Is There a Santa Claus? (1904), Neighbors (1914), and Christmas Stories (1923), all have their very obvious origins in his reported pieces, gaining primarily in sentiment, although such was not lacking in their original incarnation. They are much in the mainstream of their time. How the Other Half Lives was at least partly responsible for the genre of sentimental and moralistic fiction set on the Lower East Side that found popularity in the middle 90s. Edward W. Townsends Chimmie Fadden (1894) and A Daughter of the Tenements (1895), for example, catered to the sensational appetite while soothing the moralizing conscience; the former in particular broadcast to an eager nation Bowery slang and the image of the urban bad boy, its archetypal elements appearing virtually unchanged more than fifty years later in the Bowery Boys series of B movies. On the other hand, there was Stephen Crane, who took the same material and made genuine literature from it. Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893), which at least one writer3 has alleged was revised subsequent to Cranes encountering Riiss work, looks at the worst and does not flinch. Even when Crane actively toys with the bathetic, as in A Dark-Brown Dog (circa 1892), a story that in outline sounds not unlike one of Riiss (a neglected child finds his only friend in a dog, which his father kills by throwing it out the window), his restraint and strict attention to visual detail make it all the more affecting while avoiding the purple.