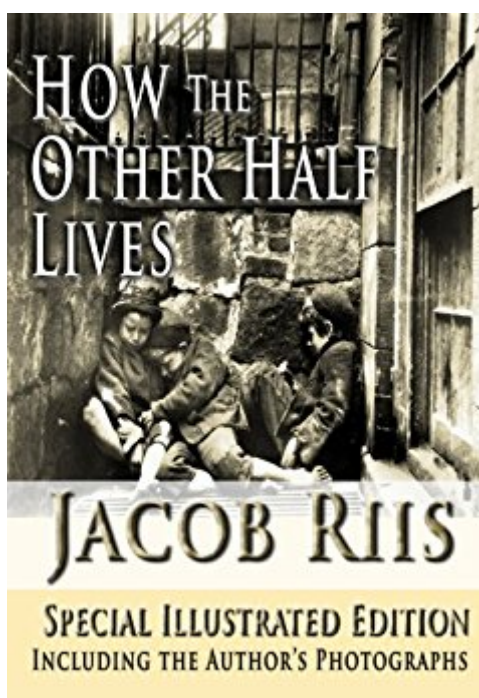


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How The Other Half Lives Special Illustrated Edition Including The Authorâ€™s Photographs [Illustrated]



Synopsis

* Includes the original author's photographs Jacob August Riis (May 3, 1849 - May 26, 1914) was a Danish American social reformer, muckraking journalist and social documentary photographer. He is known for his dedication to using his photographic and journalistic talents to help the impoverished in New York City, which was the subject of most of his prolific writings and photography. He helped with the implementation of "model tenements" in New York with the help of humanitarian Lawrence Veiller. As one of the most prominent proponents of the newly practicable flash, he is considered a pioneer in photography.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York is the 1890 publication of photojournalism by Jacob Riis, a book that documented the squalid living conditions in New York City slums during that era. It was also considered the root of future "muckraking" journalism, as it exposed conditions in the slums to New York City's upper and middle classes. Jacob Riis emigrated from Denmark to the U.S. in 1870. After a series of menial jobs, he worked his way up and became a police reporter whose work appeared in a number of New York newspapers, documenting the

living and working conditions of the poor. As a writer and early photojournalist, he served as a mediator of sorts between working-class, middle-class, and upper-class citizens. Riis argued for sanitation, better housing, adequate lighting and the construction of city parks and playgrounds. He saw middle-class and upper-class citizens as benefactors, and encouraged them to take an active role in defining and shaping their communities. Riis believed that charitable citizens would help the poor when they saw for themselves how "the other half" lived. In the introduction to this book, Jacob Riis wrote: "Long ago it was said that 'one half of the world does not know how the other half lives.' That was true then. It did not know because it did not care. The half that was on top cared little for the struggles, and less for the fate, of those who were underneath, so long as it was able to hold them there and keep its own seat." Riis wrote his book to call attention to the living conditions of what was more than half of New York City's residents during the late 19th century. He described the cheap construction of the tenements, the high rents, and the absentee landlords. He lamented the city's ineffectual laws and urged private enterprise to provide funding to remodel existing tenements or build new tenements. Riis was different from other 'muckraking' journalists and authors who wrote about urbanization issues, as he proposed actual solutions to New York City's tenement problems. His book was a publishing success, as it sold eleven editions in five years. Riis mostly attributed the plight of the poor to environmental conditions, but he also divided the poor into two categories: deserving of assistance (mostly women and children) and undeserving (mostly the unemployed and chronic criminals). He wrote with an edge of condescension about Italians, Irish and Jews, as can be seen in the pages here, and he stopped short of calling for government intervention. The catalyst of his work illustrated a genuine sympathy for his subjects, and his work shocked many New Yorkers. But no copy is complete without the black and white engravings of many of Jacob Riis's photographs, as they had enabled readers to better understand the problems that plagued New York City. And that's where the problem with this book starts, as there are editions with no photos or illustrations at all, which completely reduces his efforts as his images had a purpose. My review here is based solely on one edition: *How The Other Half Lives* Special Illustrated Edition Including the Author's Photographs [Illustrated] This particular Kindle edition is generally formatted in a readable style. It's loaded with the black & white photos that had been taken by Jacob Riis during that time, though the years have not been kind to them, as can be evidenced in many of the similar remaining books that were in print during that time. Books of this type were generally not printed on archival paper, and though the text can be recreated and corrected through the scanning process, sadly, many of the photos cannot be done the same way. In the case of this particular Kindle edition, one needs to position the cursor over the photo and

'click' on it when the magnifier appears, and the image then appears much larger on the Kindle screen. On the text captions the downside, many if not most of the photos don't match up to the text captions, and for that I've docked a point from this otherwise excellent historical edition. I read this book from cover to cover on my Kindle 2, fascinated by the topic from a historical sense, but also because of the place that Jacob Riis holds in the history of photojournalism as one of the most famous proponents of the newly practicable casual photography. Camera lenses of the 1880s were extremely slow, and thus photography wasn't of much use for reporting about conditions of life in dark interiors. In January 1888, Riis paid \$25 for a 4½" x 5" box camera, plateholders, a tripod and equipment for developing and printing, and as a result of his experiments, he is considered one of the fathers of photojournalism due to his discovery of the use of flash in photography. If you get any edition of this classic by Jacob Riis, this "How The Other Half Lives" is the one to get, as it has the author's photos, and despite the fact that the placement of the images doesn't match the captions, it's the best one that I've found in a Kindle edition to date. One can only hope that the publisher will correct this in the next edition. 10/29/2012

For the reprint of HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES by Jacob Riis I'm offering up five stars for the informational content but only three or less stars for the photo and graphic reproductions. For its era (and perhaps ours as well) Riis shed some much needed light on the horrible living and social conditions of those in NYC's Lower East side and the city's miserably poor in general. This should be mandatory reading in school today if only to show the reality of the Immigrant's struggle in New York City from the 1850s to 1880s. Had it not been for his photographs and articles then the pain and sorrow certainly would have continued. Reform then was a slow process but at least with the focus that Riis and others provided it began to come about. The contents of the book are heartbreaking; dire poverty, 30,000 orphans living on the streets, over-crowded and run down tenements, pervasive homelessness, crime, overall despair for those caught up in it, and, of course, those making a profit on other people's misery. Riis had the courage to step up and expose the problems when even those in positions to do something about it remained silent or simply ignored the situation. Consider what a Minister said to Riis after he spoke on the problems of the city's poor at a city church. 'Are you not looking too much to the material condition of these people and forgetting the inner man?' said the religious leader. Riis told him, 'No! for you cannot expect to find an inner man to appeal to in the worst tenement-house surroundings. You must first put the man where he can respect himself. To reverse the argument of the apple; you cannot expect to find a sound core in a rotten fruit.' Google Riis to view the quality photos that this edition of the book didn't

seem to have. So like I said, 5 stars for Jacob Riis and his work but 3 stars or less for the print quality of the photos that surely would have spoke volumes.

The book is a classic, should be required reading by all informed citizens, but it is the edition I have problems with (Digireads, with a different cover), as it looks like a Friday-afternoon pirated scan and paste and get-it-to-the-market job...without any front matter or bibliographic references as to who is responsible for this re-issue. I then bought the Kindle version, and it is the same thing, except worse, as now you cannot even see what page (of the original) you are on. There seems to be a tendency to totally ignore the conventions of printed materials that grew over four centuries (sorry, I am an academic! but my students need to know who did what to a text and when, and why it makes a difference, especially when the book in question impacted so many lives. There are so many underpaid doctoral students out there who could have been hired to write a two page Preface for the contemporary reader -- and maybe a footnote here and there -- who is now suddenly faced with an 1890 social reformer without any kind of critical or cultural coordinates.)

I visited the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in NYC where I first encountered this book. Shamefully as a native New Yorker I've heard the Riis name my whole life but was unfamiliar with his work. This is an amazing exposé on inner city life in NYC. It is the hard facts & observations that are the history upon which "Gangs of New York" & other works are based. The critique is so cutting, so bare, & so honest it is shocking. Some of the social issues addressed are still so current however that it makes it difficult to believe it is written almost 150 years ago. Most are aware of the "dark days" of New York's tenement past. This work lays it bare. I highly recommend reading it in combination with a visit to NYC's Lower East Side, Little Italy, & Chinatown where you can walk what was once "Five Points" "Paradise Park" & "The Bend" & if you're very aware....can feel those days connect with you.

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