



How the Other Half Lives

Jacob August Riis (1849 – 1914)

Read by:	Multiple readers	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
Length:	8 hours 45 minutes	Catalog:	DB-1135
Language:	English	UPC:	0683422134548
Style:	Collaborative	MSLP:	\$9.99
Genre:	History, Sociology		

How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York by Jacob Riis was a ground-breaking book that documented the squalid living conditions in the New York City tenements in the 1880's. The book evolved from a magazine article in Scribners magazine in 1889 and is one of the first examples of photojournalism. Riis, a successful police reporter, used the newly invented technique of flash photography to capture images of the dark, unlit corners of the slums. The title is a reference to a sentence in *Pantagruel* by Francois Rabelais: "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives". Combined with sketches, narrative and statistics, Riis portrayed a world unknown or overlooked by the middle- and upper-classes of

society where poor migrants and immigrants lived in unsanitary housing and often worked in sweatshops for pennies a day. He assumed that raising the consciousness (and conscience) of the public about the poor conditions and the crime rate, drunkenness and recklessness that were the consequence would motivate efforts to make improvements. The direct result was a decade of what we would now call "urban renewal" in the Lower East Side, where tenements were torn down, schools reformed, child labor eliminated and sweatshops closed.

Jacob August Riis (May 3, 1849 – May 26, 1914) was a Danish American journalist, photographer and reformer best known for *How the Other Half Lives*. Born the third of 15 children in Ribe, Denmark, he apprenticed as a carpenter and immigrated to the United States in 1870. He worked off and on as a carpenter in New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and western New York State, and began to write. During this time he was frequently homeless and experienced poverty first hand. He returned to New York City and worked as a flatiron salesman before becoming editor of the weekly *News* and then police reporter for the *New York Tribune*, where he covered stories in the most impoverished and crime-ridden areas of the city. He was one of the first to use flash photography as means of vividly capturing the squalor of the slums, and developed a photographic archive consisting of pictures taken by him and his team along with those of other amateurs and professionals. He gave lectures illustrated with slides that greatly increased the awareness of his subject and led to connections that, in turn, led to *How the Other Half Lives*, which sold well and made his reputation. In 1891 he exposed contamination in the New York City water supply, which led to life-saving improvements. He also worked with Theodore Roosevelt in 1895 in his efforts to reform the police in New York; later, President Roosevelt wrote a tribute that cited him as "the most useful citizen of New York".