

HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES – Jacob Riis



This pioneering work of photojournalism by Jacob Riis focused on the plight of the poor in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City and greatly influenced the future of “muckraking” journalism. 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 underserving (mostly unemployed and intractably criminal). He wrote with prejudice about Jews, Italians, and Irish, and he stopped short of calling for government intervention and assistance. Still, the catalyst of his work was a genuine sympathy for his subjects, and his work shocked many New Yorkers. His book was broken into a series of 25 chapters, each with photographs and Riis’ description and analysis. Below is an excerpt from the preface and introduction of his book.

“How the Other Half Lives” (1890)

“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. There came a time when the discomfort and crowding below were so great, and the consequent upheavals so violent, that it was no longer an easy thing to do, and then the upper half fell to inquiring what was the matter. Information on the subject has been accumulating rapidly since, and the whole world has had its hands full answering for old ignorance.”

KEY WORDS

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Summary in **THE AUTHOR’S WORDS**

In his book *How the Other Half Lives*, photojournalist Jacob Riis...

Summary in **YOUR OWN WORDS**