

Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (Modified)

The Italian in New York

The Italian comes in at the bottom. In the slums he is welcomed as a tenant who "makes less trouble" than the Irishman: is content to live in a pig-sty and lets the rent collector rob him.

Ordinarily he is easily enough governed by authority—except for Sunday, when he settles down to a game of cards and lets loose all his bad passions. Like the Chinese, the Italian is a born gambler. His soul is in the game from the moment the cards are on the table, and very frequently his knife is in it too before the game is ended.

Chinatown

Red and yellow are the holiday colors of Chinatown, but they do not lend brightness in Mott Street. Rather, the colors only add a general dullness. Whatever happens in Chinatown goes on behind closed doors in stealth and secretiveness. His business, as his domestic life, shuns the light, less because there is anything to conceal than because that is the way of the man. The stranger who enters through the doorway is received with sudden silence, a sullen stare, and an angry "Vat you vant?" that breathes annoyance and distrust.

Jewtown

Poverty always goes along with dirt and disease, and Jewtown is no exception. The diseases these people suffer from are not due to intemperance or immorality, but to ignorance, want of suitable food, and the foul air in which they live and work. The homes of the Hebrew quarter are its workshops also. Every member of the family, from the youngest to the oldest, works, shut in the stuffy rooms, where meals are cooked and clothing washed and dried besides, all day long. It is not unusual to find a dozen persons--men women, and children--at work in a single small room. It has happened more than once that a child recovering from small-pox, and in the most contagious stage of the disease, has been found crawling among heaps of half-finished clothing that the next day would be offered for sale on the counter of a Broadway store.

Source: Excerpts from Jacob Riis's book *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890. Jacob Riis was a "muckraker" who photographed poverty in New York City's slums in the 1880s.