

Issue: Urban Living Concerns

Reform Leaders: Jacob Riis, Lawrence Veiller, Theodore Roosevelt

Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives*, Studies of the Tenements of New York

Riis was a photojournalist who documented the conditions of tenement life and produced a report he later turned into a book called How the Other Half Lives.

“When once I asked how many people might be living in one of these tenements I was told: One hundred and forty families, one hundred Irish, thirty-eight Italian, and two that spoke the German tongue...One may find an Italian, a German, a French, African, Spanish, Bohemian, Russian, Scandinavian, Jewish, and Chinese neighborhood in the city.....New York's wage-earners [workers] have no other place to live...They are truly poor and have no better homes and pay **exorbitant** {very high} rents which keep rising...The homes are its workshops also....men, women, and children—at work in a single small room to make extra money...

In the depth of winter the attention of the Association was called to a Protestant family living in a garret in a miserable tenement in Cherry Street. The family's condition was most deplorable. The man, his wife, and three small children shivering in one room through the roof of which the pitiless winds of winter whistled. The room was almost barren of furniture; the parents slept on the floor, the elder children in boxes, and the baby was swung in an old shawl attached to the rafters by cords by way of a hammock. The father, a seaman, had been obliged to give up that calling because he was in consumption, and was unable to provide either bread or fire for his little ones.

Excerpts from the Tenement House Commission Report, 1900

Of all the great social problems of modern times, none is gathering more attention than the housing of the working people...which is aggravated by the herding of men and women under conditions which inevitably produce disease and crime...it is only by providing home for the working people, homes of a kind that protect life and health and make family life possible and free from immorality, that the evils of crowded city life can be overcome...good homes are quite as much needed to make good citizens as they are to make good men...

During the past twelve months 41 persons have been burned to death in tenement houses in this city [New York]...47% of all fires in this city occur in tenement housing...during the years 1898-1899, there were 6,324 fires in tenement houses in New York...

Lower East Side Tailor Shop, Immigrants Making Clothing in their Tenement



[Lodgers in a crowded Bayard Street tenement - "Five cents a spot."](#) Jacob Riis 1890



[Yard in Jersey Street \(now gone\) Where Italians Live in the Worst Slums](#) Jacob Riis (before 1898)

Image caption: It costs a dollar a month to sleep in these sheds



Children Playing in the Street by a Dead Horse, 1911



Tenement Room, New York





A family in their one room tenement apartment.

In 1900, reformer Lewis Veiller, working for the Tenement House Commission, made a Tenement House Exhibition to urge action in urban reform.



Laundry hanging between tenement buildings



Tenement bedroom



Garbage in an air shaft



Girl standing by the water closets (water closets were toilets, similar to portapotties)