

Sample DocBlock, Second Quarter

Title: How the Other Half Lives

Author: Jacob Riis

Date: 1890

- A. Historical Situation - Industrialization in the United States expanded enormously after the Civil War, with numerous consequences. Cities are rapidly growing, but without planning or infrastructure improvements, life there was dirty, dangerous, and desperate. Immigrants were flooding into the country as well to fill the growing demand for unskilled factory labor. Unfortunately, the working conditions were often inhumane and the wages far too minimal to meet people's needs. This resulted in the creation of massive slum areas in the cities where the majority of the population lived in cramped, unhealthy, and dangerous conditions.
- B. Riis' purpose in writing the book from which these excerpts were drawn was to bring awareness to the intense poverty and horrific living conditions for the working poor in industrial cities. He hoped to spur his audience to action to advocate for change to political systems and to become involved in organizations and movements bringing aid, services, and education to the poor.
- C. Jacob Riis' document is directly tied to the growth of industry in the US, particularly to the demand for unskilled labor. Since the jobs performed by workers demanded so little skills, workers were easily replaced, meaning desperately poor workers were forced into accepting low wages. A second historical development this document mires is the labor movement, where workers advocated for themselves in an attempt to improve their working conditions and pay. Finally, this document is an example of the larger muckraking reform movement and is similar to works such as Lincoln Steffens' "Crime of the Cities" where he exposed the corruption in city governments and political systems.
- D.
 - 1. From this document we can determine that Jacob Riis had a genuine desire to make the broader public aware of the conditions in which the working and immigrant classes were living in the cities. We can also tell from the racist stereotyping in the document that his beliefs were still shaped by negative images of the populations he was seeking to help. It is hard to determine how much he may truly believe and how much was catering to his audience, but it definitely gives the impression he wants to create change not just for the betterment of the people in these situations, but also to "clean up" the cities.
 - 2. We can see in this document that the conditions in which people were living and working in American cities was deplorable. We can also see that they had no social safety net or infrastructures upon which to rely in these desperate situations. Lastly, it becomes obvious that even advocates of reform were often motivated by condescension as much as or even more than by a desire to improve life for those in poverty.
- E. This document is a good example of the theme of Culture and Society since it illustrates the clash of culture and Americans attempts to shape social structures and improve societal institutions.