

0. LIFE IN FIVE POINTS - Story Preface

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3. LIFE IN FIVE POINTS

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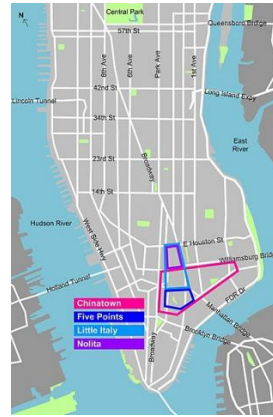
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The "Five Points" neighborhood of New York City, which spawned 19th-century gangs, was located in what we now call "Lower Manhattan." This map, by "Stilfehler at wikivoyage," is online via Wikimedia Commons.
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Wealth and poverty often exist side-by-side and so it was in Five Points.

The Tobias Hoffman family, who owned a bakery, used expensive porcelain dishes. Others, who worked in nearby tanneries, slaughterhouses and breweries, were "jammed" into tenement flats. Often, they had no money for food.

Five Points was a noisy part of New York. Normal life - not just gang fights - took place on the streets. Women and girls (in Five Points and throughout the city) were paid extremely low wages. Children sometimes said that they "didn't live nowhere."

The tenements of New York were filled with desperately poor people who could not make a decent living. Their doors were often marked by a "white badge of mourning," signifying the death of a child.

Jacob Riis - who photographed people and conditions in the city - provides details in his famous work, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (originally published in 1890):

...for five years past one person in every ten who died in this city was buried in the Potter's Field. These facts tell a terrible story. The first means that in a population of a million and a half, very nearly, if not quite, half a million persons were driven, or chose, to beg for food, or to accept it in charity at some period of the eight years, if not during the whole of it. There is no mistake about these figures. They are drawn from the records of the Charity Organization Society, and represent the time during which it has been in existence. (How the Other Half Lives, by Jacob August Riis, [page 243](#).)

Although life in Five Points was difficult, archeological digs have unearthed evidence of legitimate businesses. Fencing operations, which were "shops for the reception and purchase of stolen goods," were not the only business establishments in the area's slums. Five Points was always a mixed residential, industrial and commercial neighborhood. Retail shops prospered along Chatham Street (now called Park Row).

Rum shops and saloons were also permanent fixtures of the Five Points' landscape.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/LIFE-IN-FIVE-POINTS-Gangs-of-New-York>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

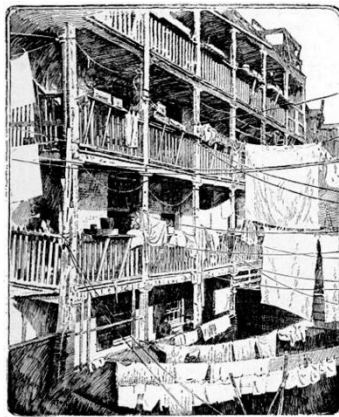
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Tenement of 1863, for twelve families on each flat.*
D, DARK. L, LIGHT. H, HALLS.

* This "unventilated and fever-breeding structure" the year after it was built was picked out by the Council of Hygiene, then just organized, and presented to the Citizens' Association of New York as a specimen "multiple domicile" in a desirable street, with the following comment: "Here are twelve living-rooms and twenty-one bedrooms, and only six of the latter have any provision or possibility for the admission of light and air, excepting through the family sitting- and living-rooms; being utterly dark, close, and unventilated. The living-rooms are but 10 x 12 feet; the bedrooms 6½ x 7 feet."

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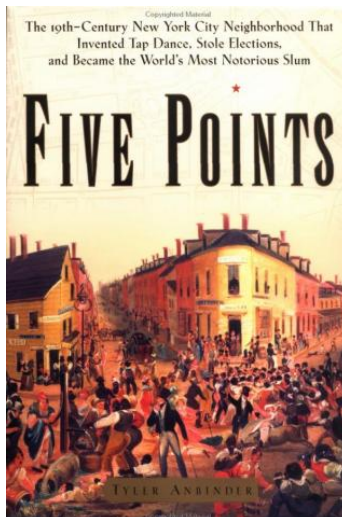


Tenement Flats

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.

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Life at Five Points Told in Story by Tyler Anbinder

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