

NEW YORK NEIGHBORHOODS

The Lower East Side



New York
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Library



STUDY GUIDE

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The Lower East Side of New York City is a neighborhood of constant change, within which one can find the impact of local, national, and international historical events.

Located on the southern and eastern side of Manhattan, close to the East River and Port of New York, the neighborhood developed early into an area that housed new immigrant groups, many of which started their American life there. The story of immigration in this neighborhood is richly textured, with immigrant groups overlapping, supplanting each other, and contributing to the character and face of the city. This immigration story also reveals prejudice and obstacles; the creation of social and cultural legacies; the positive and negative impacts of social reform; conflict and cohesion; persistence; hope; and, at times, devastating tragedy.

Although the neighborhood is best known for its links to the immigration story, the Lower East Side has also been influenced by events more common to the city as a whole. Identified as a “slum” from the start, the neighborhood was often seen as a place that needed improvement. As historian David Ward writes, “the slum has been an evocative and durable description of the squalid environs and pathological social conditions of the residential quarters of the poor.” For this reason, reforms in housing, education, and health were enthusiastically applied to the Lower East Side.

Housing development greatly changed the face of this neighborhood in the late-19th and the 20th centuries as New York City struggled to accommodate a growing population and contend with “slum clearance” mandates. As is true in most urban areas, the demolition of old buildings in favor of new development caused conflict. For the slums to be cleared and cleaned up, populations had to be displaced. This scenario played

itself out on the Lower East Side and created different perspectives on the issue, yielding a variety of results. This was also the case of sanitation and education reforms, which many historians argue forced new immigrants to Americanize quickly and thus abandon their original cultural heritage.

The following guide is meant to aid in a study of the nation’s story of immigration, in an examination of New York City history, or as a neighborhood case study. The goal of the guide is to supplement these narratives with the rich collections of The New York Public Library, and to bring to light new resources for teaching these topics. All of the resources in the guide can be found in the magnificent collections of The New York Public Library. The guide is organized thematically to focus on turning points in the history of the Lower East Side as they relate to local, national, and international events. It is primarily chronological, with some thematic sections overlapping in time. Each thematic section has a short introduction, followed by a collection of primary sources, their provenances, methods for interpretation, and suggested activities and resources.

For more information on this or other related topics, you can search NYPL collections at www.nypl.org.

Ward, David. “The Victorian Slum: An Enduring Myth?” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 66, No. 2 (June, 1976), pp. 323–336.

How To Use This Guide

Essential Questions to Guide a Unit of Study

The artifacts in this guide include a variety of prints, photographs, maps, and excerpts from manuscripts all found in the remarkable collections of The New York Public Library. These resources are organized into themes that reflect historical moments associated with the Lower East Side of New York, as well as more general themes in New York City and American history. As you go through this guide, it is useful to keep the following Essential Questions in mind:

- What are the patterns of city growth?
- How and why do cities change over time?
- How can images and text illuminate the story of city change over time?
- Are changes that occur in cities consciously or unconsciously created?
- What is the most important role of a neighborhood?

How to Make the Most of This Guide

Each section of this guide focuses on a particular theme associated with the growth of the Lower East Side. A historical overview introduces every section; it is followed by a few suggested activities and a series of primary sources from the NYPL collection illustrating each topic. A sequence of leveled questions is provided for every source in the guide. In a few instances, sources are grouped and share a set of questions (see Sections 2, 5, and 6).

Along with the specific suggestions and questions found in each section, we have also provided more general lesson activities that can be used for a critical inquiry of primary sources. These activities include methods for making observations and drawing inferences, comparing and contrasting documents, and developing connections between sources. These general activities can be used throughout this guide and can be adapted for use in groups, by different age levels, and to differentiate materials for instruction. These lesson suggestions are included in the following segment.

All of the images in this guide can be found on the accompanying CD, which can be displayed on a Smart Board or used with an LCD projector. You can also print images from the CD to use with your class.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS FOR RESOURCE ANALYSIS

Observation/Inference Chart

This activity helps students practice observations before drawing conclusions. It helps students to slow down their thinking so that they can base their opinions on facts. It builds on the observations and analysis of a large group, thus helping students to see the benefits of hearing others’ perspectives on a topic. It can also serve as an excellent jumping off point for generating questions.

This exercise works best with a visual document.

Project one of the images from the CD onto the Smart Board or use with the LCD projector. Using a simple chart (Graphic Organizer 1, p. 6), ask students to look at the document and write down their observations. They should categorize them into “observations” (facts) and “inferences” (opinions based on what they observe). Observations are something that all viewers can agree on. Inferences are particular to the viewer and reflect the viewer’s beliefs and experiences. After approximately 10 minutes, ask students to share their observations and inferences in a round-robin manner. You can ask students to clarify their inferences by asking, “What did you see that makes you say that?” After gathering the class’s observations and inferences, you can discuss: What more did we see in the document as we went along? What themes were raised? What new questions were asked? Did hearing other observations make you see the document differently? Are all of the observations truly factual?

Compare and Contrast

Choose two or three resources from the guide that you think lend to an interesting comparison. Students will compare and contrast these resources using a Venn Diagram (Graphic Organizers 2 and 3, p. 7). Look for differences in materials, points of view, representa-

tions of people and places, and ideas represented. Then share students' responses as a class, or ask students to write a short statement reflecting what they learned by comparing the two works.

Find the Connection

Some of the resources in specific sections clearly relate to and respond to one another. Students can find deeper meaning by working to discover how the resources connect. Try putting several resources together into a folder and giving the folder to small groups of two to four students. Ask students to consider the theme of the section they are studying and to see what connections that can draw from this series of resources. You might want to provide guiding questions for students based on the ones included in each section.

Jigsaw

Give individual students or pairs of students one document each from a section. Ask students to answer the questions accompanying that particular document. Have students pair with a new partner and share their discoveries, with the goal of coming up with a connection between their two documents. Students can then share their connection and documents with the class at large.

NOTES ON PRIMARY SOURCES

In this guide, teachers and students are challenged to explore the history of the Lower East Side by working with primary sources. The following types of sources are included in this guide:

Maps: Maps are depictions of land that often include boundaries, land formations, transportation routes, ownership, street layout, etc. Maps are always created with a specific purpose, and it is useful to consider for what reason a map was made and who made the map.

Prints: Prints are images that are rendered by hand and are generally meant to be replicated more than one time (the exception is a monotype). Conscious choices go into creating a print's composition, thus it is useful to examine each print carefully for details. Generally,

prints are as much a representation of an artist's point of view as they are a record of history. It is also interesting to consider where the print was published or put on view, and for what audience.

Photographs: Photographs capture a moment of life as seen by a photographer. Unlike prints, photographs are not rendered by an artist's hand, although they do represent how the photographer sees the world and could have been posed or staged. Both photographs and prints can help students to visualize what people, places, and objects looked like in the past.

Manuscripts: Manuscripts are handwritten or typed documents such as reports, diaries, letters, and notes that are generally not meant to be published for a wide audience. Thanks to their informal nature, manuscripts can provide an intimate look at a writer's world, including details of daily life and personal observations.

SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN EXAMINING PRIMARY SOURCES

1. What type of source is this?
2. When was it made?
3. Who was the audience for this source?
4. What is the point of view of this source?
5. What is one piece of evidence you can use from this source to support your opinion?

CONNECTION TO NEW YORK STATE STANDARDS

1.1 History of the United States

- know the roots of American culture and how different people played a role in creating it

1.2 History of the United States and New York

- study important ideas, cultural beliefs, and interactions of people from a variety of perspectives
- gather and organize information about the traditions transmitted by various groups living in their neighborhood and community
- compare and contrast the experiences of different groups in the United States

1.3 History of the United States and New York

- classify information by type of activity: social, political, economic, technological, scientific, cultural, or religious
- complete well-documented and historically accurate case studies about individuals and groups who represent different ethnic, national, and religious groups, including Native American Indians, in New York State and the United States at different times and in different locations
- describe how ordinary people and famous historic figures in the local community, state, and the United States have advanced the fundamental democratic values, beliefs, and traditions expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the New York State and United States constitutions, the Bill of Rights, and other important historic documents

1.4 History of the United States and New York

- the skills of historical analysis include the ability to: explain the significance of historical evidence; weigh the importance, reliability, and validity of evidence; understand the concept of multiple causation; understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments
- consider different interpretations of key events and/or issues in history and understand the differences in these accounts
- explore different experiences, beliefs, motives, and traditions of people living in their neighborhoods, communities, and state
- view historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music, and artifacts

3.2 Geography

- ask geographic questions about where places are located; why they are located where they are; what is important about their locations; and how their locations are related to the location of other people and places (adapted from National Geography Standards, 1994)

LINKS TO THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS FOR LITERACY IN HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing about or speaking to support conclusions from the text.

Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning and tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

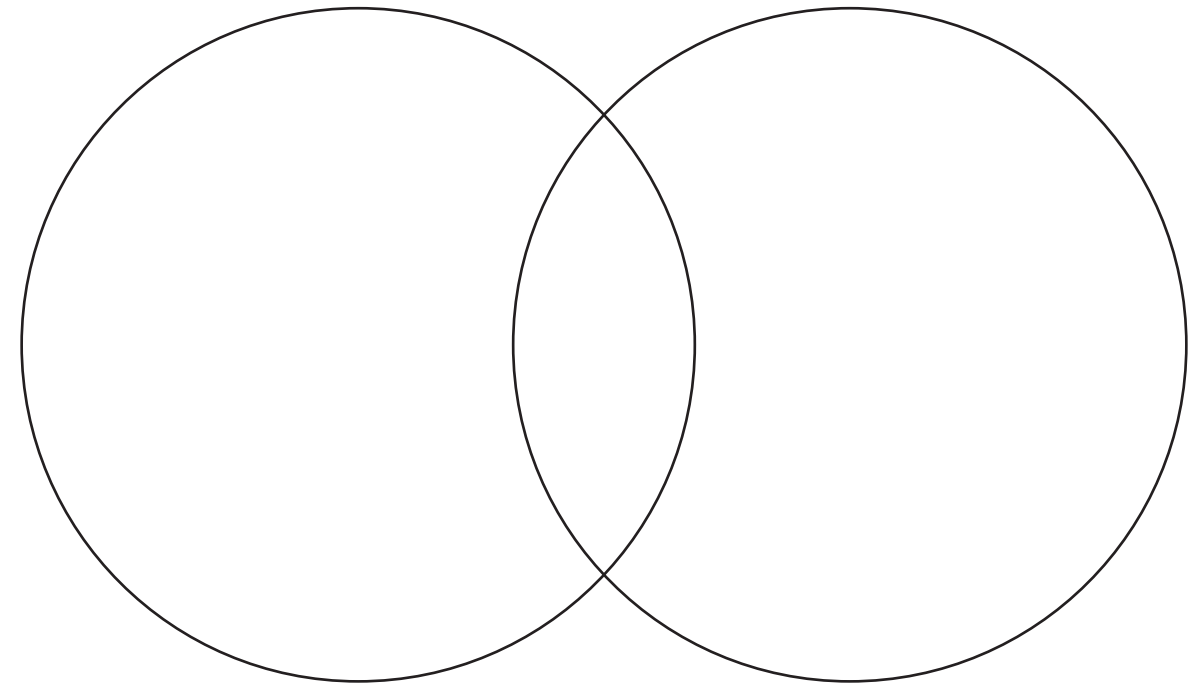
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the variety of reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches authors take.

Observation/Inference Chart

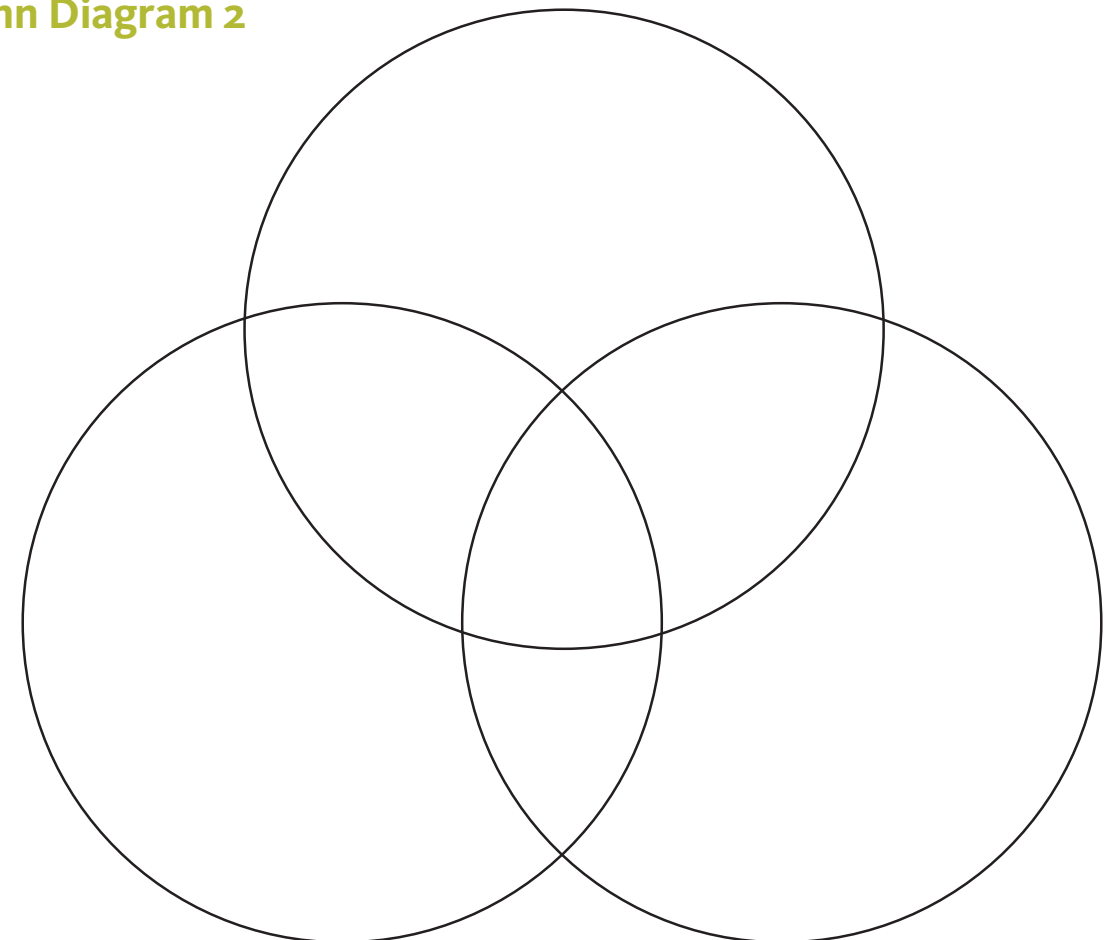
Observations	Inferences

Questions

Venn Diagram 1



Venn Diagram 2



Glossary

Observation: an act of noting or recognizing a fact

Inference: a conclusion derived from facts

Depiction: a picture representation

Perception: a way of seeing things based on your own point of view, or on the five senses

SECTION 1

American Revolution: a war between the British and its American colonies beginning in 1776 and ending in 1781, in which the colonies effectively won their independence

Loyalist: a supporter of the British during the American Revolution

Tenement: a multifamily dwelling or a rented apartment. In New York City, the word tenement came to be associated with a substandard, multifamily, walk-up apartment building

Rookery: a three- or four-story railroad flat with internal, windowless rooms

General Slocum: the name of a ferry that caught fire in June 1904 while carrying passengers from St. Mark's Lutheran Church, resulting in 1,021 deaths

Rural: of or relating to the country

Lithograph: a type of print in which the image is created in ink on a smooth stone or metal surface

SECTION 2

Immigration: the process of moving to a country where one is not native

Ellis Island: a gateway for millions of immigrants to the United States between 1892–1954

SECTION 3

Americanization: the process of conforming to American characteristics

Urban: of or relating to the city

Shtetl: a small Jewish town or village formerly found in Eastern Europe

Stereotype: a standard mental picture that is held in common by a group and that represents an oversimplification

Population: the whole number of people or inhabitants in a city, country, state, or region

Demographic: a statistical way of studying a group of people

Yiddish: a German-based language traditionally spoken by Eastern European Jews

Ghetto: from the Italian; a section of the city in which a member of a minority group lives because of social, legal, or economic pressure

SECTION 4

Reform: to put an end to a wrongdoing by introducing improvements or alternative courses of action

Settlement House: an institution providing various community services to city dwellers

Privy: an outhouse

SECTION 5

Slum Clearance: an act that provided federal funding to cities to cover the cost of acquiring areas of cities perceived to be "slums"

Cooperative Apartments: an apartment building in which each owner of a unit is a shareholder in the entire building

Tuberculosis: a highly contagious disease of the lungs that caused many deaths on the Lower East Side

Development Projects: large real estate projects

Residents: people who live in a building, neighborhood, or city

Vacant: empty, as in an apartment that has no one living in it

Abandoned: given up with no intention of returning

The Depression: a severe, worldwide economic downturn in the 1930s

SECTION 6

Municipal: under control of the local government, such as a city

Melting Pot: a term used to describe a mix of people who have all "melted down" into one group of people through assimilation

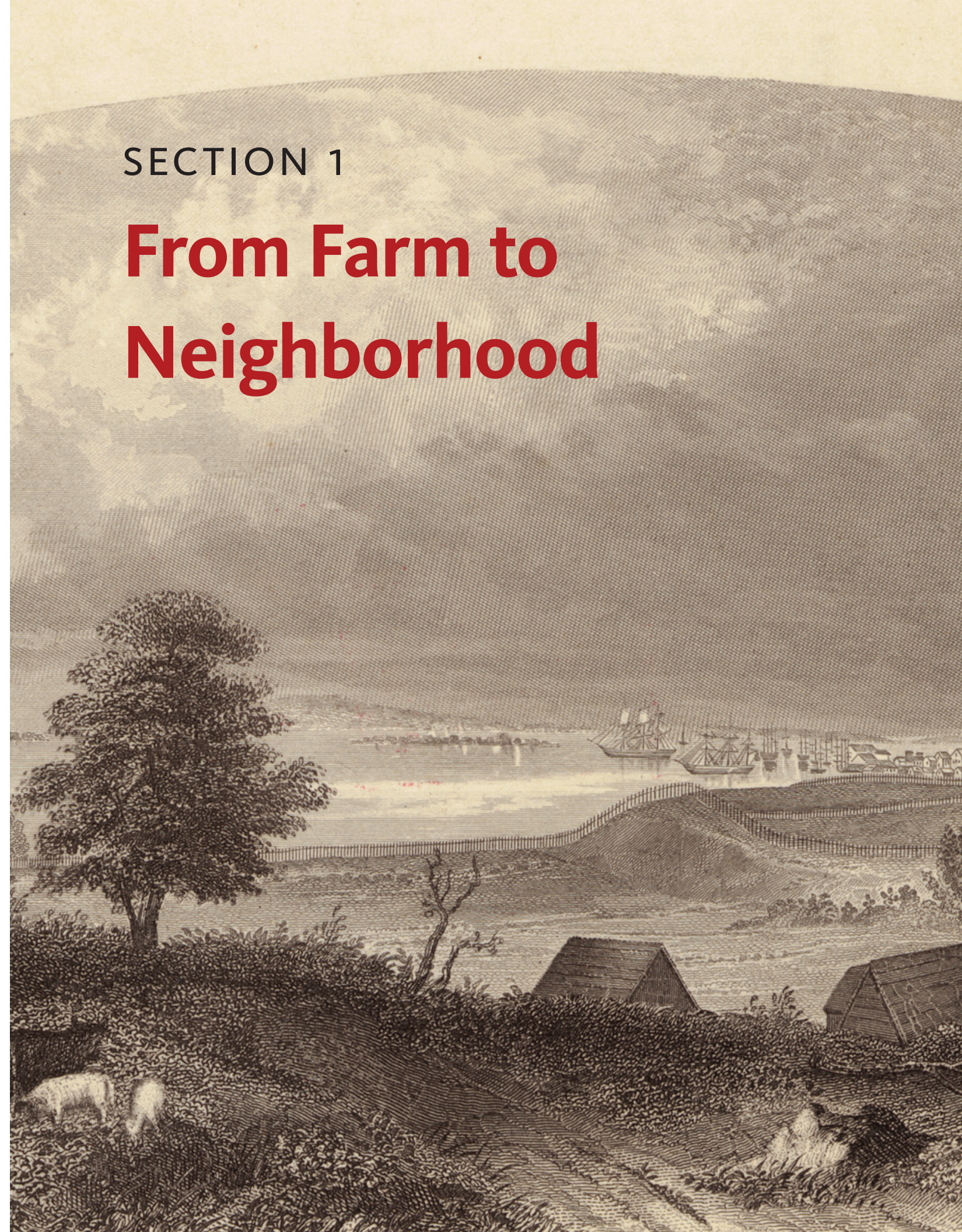
Assimilation: to become similar by adopting cultural traditions and values of a population

Refugee: one who has been forced to leave his or her country of origin for reasons of war, violence, or economics

Rural: of or relating to the country

SECTION 1

From Farm to Neighborhood



Though it is hard to imagine, New York City was once a fertile landscape of marshes and woods with a variety of wildlife and flora. Native American populations lived on the land for many years before and after it was settled by Europeans beginning in the 1600s.

The first of these immigrant settlers were primarily the Dutch, whose control was supplanted by the British in 1664. One of these settlers was Harmanus Rutgers (his brother, Anthony Rutgers, owned land west of the Bowery and Broadway). Prior to the American Revolution, Rutgers Farm stretched for most of what is now the Seventh Ward, taking in everything from Division Street to Catherine Street and from Montgomery Street to the East River. After Harmanus's death in 1755, the land was mapped into streets and building lots, but it was not developed until the early 1800s, when it became a site for tenement housing. In a section of this very same stretch of land, from Catherine Street to Market Street and from Monroe Street to Cherry Street, the city erected one of its earliest housing complexes, Knickerbocker Village, in the 1930s (the subject of a later chapter in this guide). A surviving print of Rutgers Farm from the 1700s provides a striking reference point for the layers of physical change in the area.

One of the earliest immigrant populations to settle on the Lower East Side en masse were the Germans, who arrived in great numbers in the mid-19th century. They largely lived in wooden walk-up apartments and rookeries (single-family homes divided into smaller living spaces) that were cheaply constructed and inexpensive

to rent. At the time of their settlement, the German Lower East Side was known as Kleindeutschland and was filled with cafés, beer halls, German grocery stores, and one of the earliest department stores, Ridley's, on Grand Street. By the late 1800s, other immigrant groups from around the world were arriving in New York and settling on the Lower East Side. At the same time, Kleindeutschland was beginning to shrink as Germans gained more financial and business success and moved north to other neighborhoods in the developing city. However, it was a devastating event that ended the Kleindeutschland era of the Lower East Side for good. This was the burning and sinking of the *General Slocum*. On June 15, 1904, the *General Slocum*, a ferry carrying passengers from the Lower East Side's St. Mark's Lutheran Church to their annual picnic on Long Island, caught fire. Hoping to outrun the flames, the ferry's captain ordered his crew to speed toward North Brother Island, only a few miles away, rather than beach the boat on the shores of the East River, which were closer. His decision, however, proved fatal. As the flames quickly engulfed the boat, the passengers—mostly women and children—either jumped into the water below or succumbed to the fire. A total of 1,021 people died. The captain, who survived, was convicted of criminal negligence. The devastation of this event rippled through the German community and hastened the pace of the exodus of German residents from the Lower East Side. A memorial to this disaster was erected and still stands in Tompkins Square Park.

The following documents each have questions for interpretation. In addition, you might want to try some of the suggested activities in the *How to Use This Guide* section of the resource.

Something to try: Ask students to find the location of Rutgers Farm on the map accompanying the print. Then look for the Division Street tenements. You can even chart the location of Knickerbocker

Village (Section 5). Think about how the neighborhood has changed and what social, economic, political, and technological factors prompted these changes.

Themes to consider: Ask students to consider the documents through the lens of how areas shift from rural to urban and how large events can impact a community.

RESOURCES

IMAGES 1 and 2. Rutgers Farm print and map

Near what is now East Broadway lay the Harmanus Rutgers Farm, adjacent to what was once the Delancey Farm. Rutgers Farm stretched to the East River, and this print depicts the land in the 1700s.

IMAGE 1. New York with Rutgers Farm, 1700s

NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.
Digital ID: 800075.



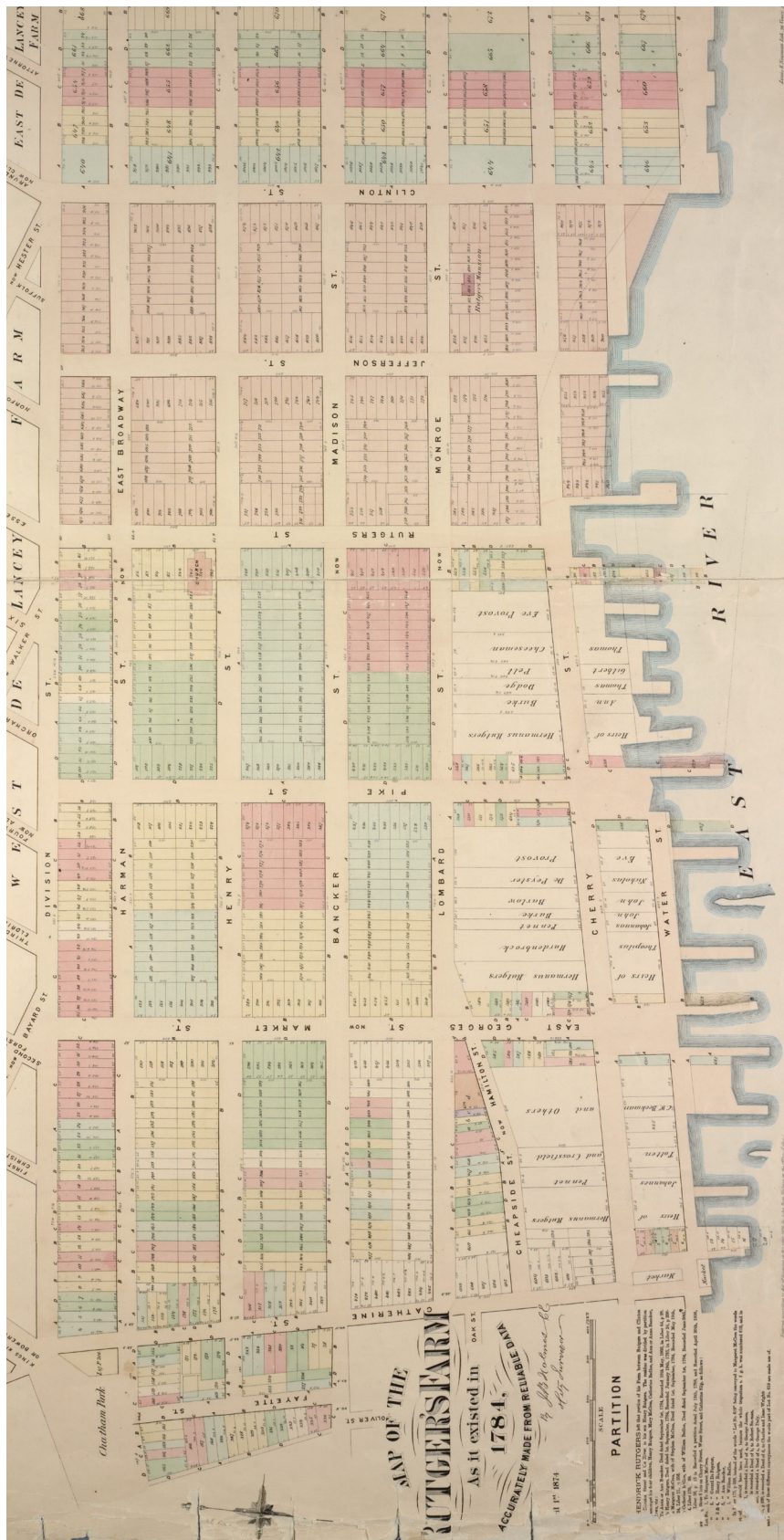
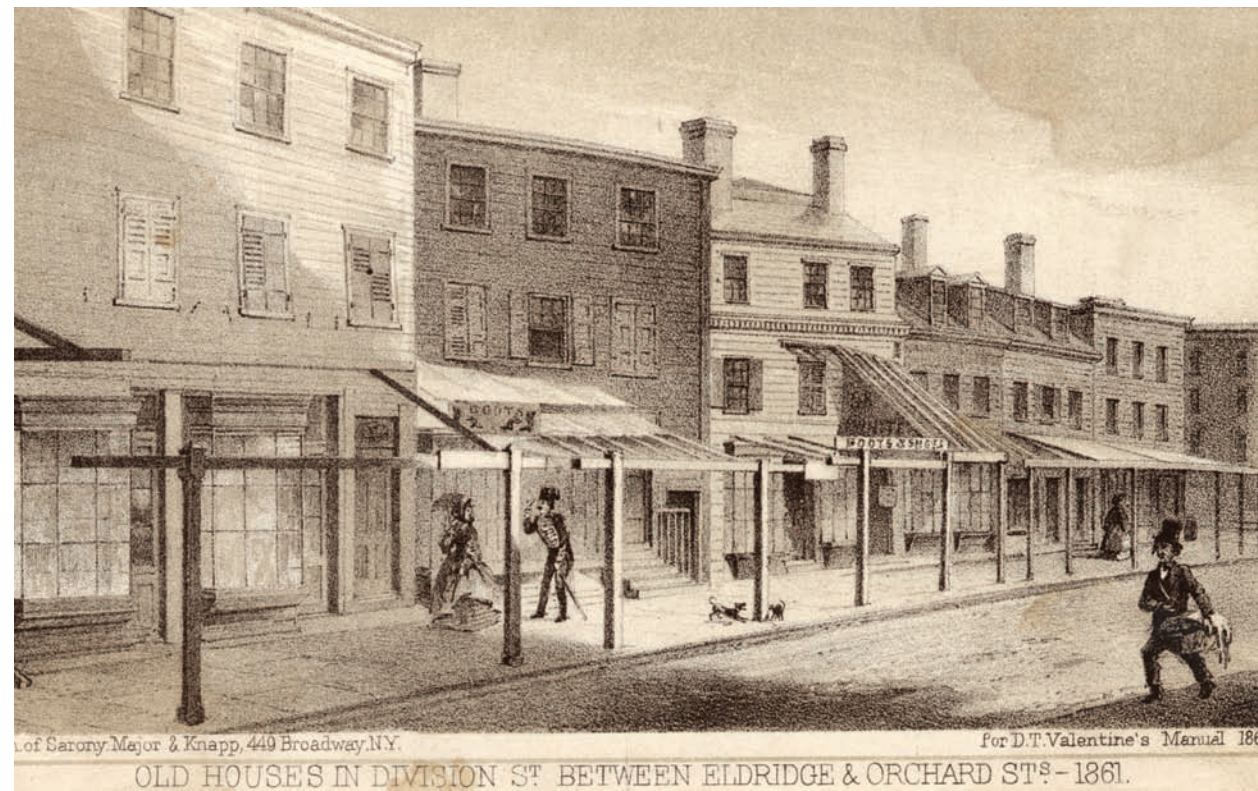


IMAGE 2. Rutgers Farm map

Louis E. Neumann. Map of Rutgers Farm as it existed in 1784.
 Hand-colored lithograph. New York: J. B. Holmes, 1874.
 NYPL, The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division,
 Lawrence H. Slaughter Collection.
 Digital ID: 1693357.



PRECEDING PAGE

TOP

IMAGE 3. Old houses on Division Street between Eldridge and Orchard streets, 1861

Lithograph. New York: Sarony, Major & Knapp Lithographers, 1861.
 NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.
 Digital ID: 809825.

BOTTOM

IMAGE 4. General Slocum funeral

NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Gustav Scholer Papers.

Questions and Writing Prompts

Section 1: From Farm to Neighborhood

IMAGE 1. Rutgers Farm print

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What activities might take place here? What might life have been like in this place?
3. Where do you imagine this place might be?
4. How can you compare this place to where you live?
5. This is the same land as what is now considered to be the Lower East Side, filled with apartment buildings, stores, schools, streets, parks, and bridges. What might have happened to change this neighborhood from farm to city?
6. Might it be possible to change New York City back to a farm? Why or why not?

IMAGE 2. Rutgers Farm map

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the boundaries of Rutgers Farm?
2. What lies across Division Street from Rutgers Farm?
3. How is the map divided?
4. What do you think the names on the map mean?
5. What do you think the numbers on the map mean?
6. Why do you think parts of the map are blocked in color?
7. This map shows the same area that was illustrated in the previous print. How has the area changed? What might be some reasons for these changes?
8. Who might have created this map and why?

In addition: Check out NYPL's *Mapping New York's Shoreline* historic flyover of Rutgers Farm: www.nypl.org/audiovideo/rutgers-farm-historic-view-flyover

IMAGE 3. Division Street in 1861

QUESTIONS:

1. Describe what you see in this image.
2. Where is this place located?
3. How does this place compare and contrast to that of Image 1? Both are in the same location as Rutgers Farm. How has the area changed by this point?
4. This print was made in 1861, more than 100 years after the print in Image 1. What social, economic, or political events might have occurred during this period of time to cause the neighborhood to change?
5. How might people in this place get their food, what kinds of work might they do, what might be the benefits or drawbacks of living in this time as compared to that depicted in Image 1?

Writing prompts:

- You are a landlord looking for tenants in 1861. What would your ad say?
- What conversation are the man and woman in Image 3 having? Write the dialogue.

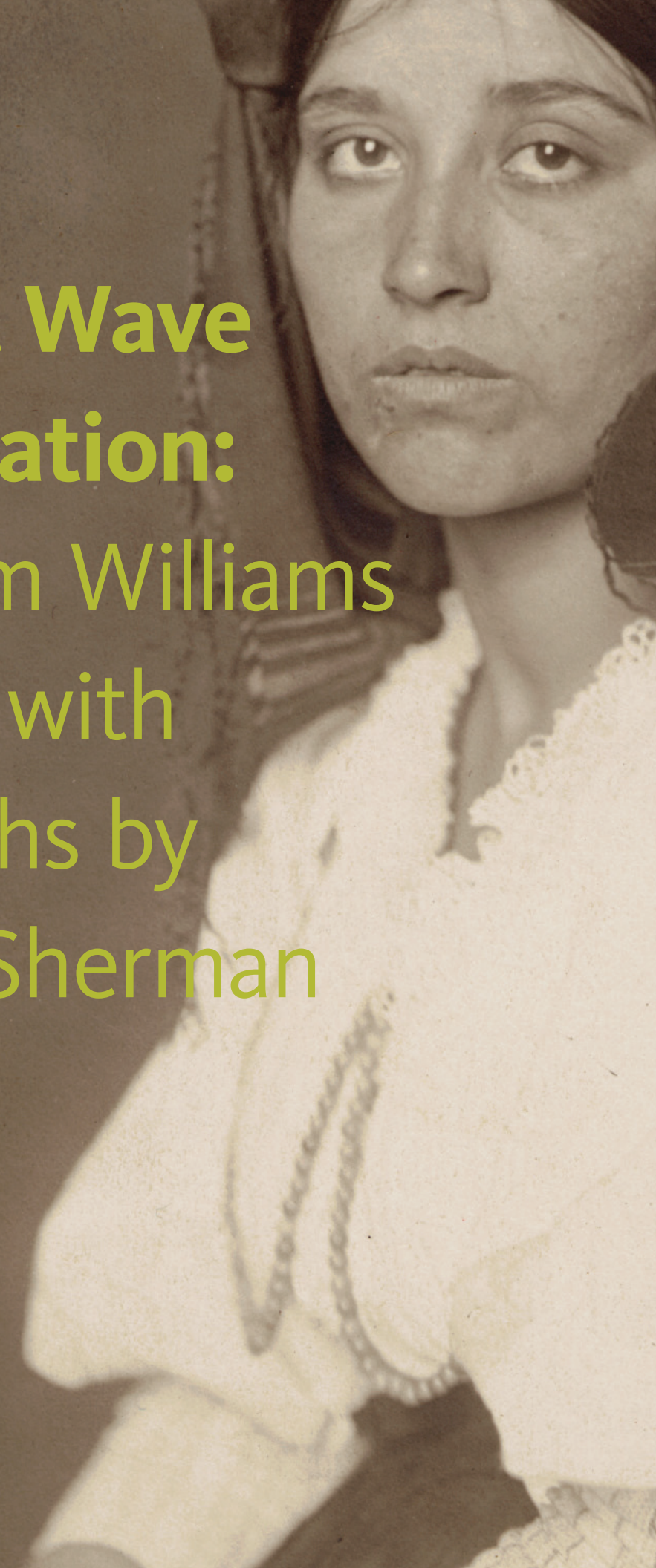
IMAGE 4. General Slocum funeral

QUESTIONS:

1. What is going on in this picture?
2. Where might this be taking place? What does the crowd suggest about what is happening?
3. Have you ever been in a crowd like this? What was the event? What were you feeling?
4. Give students background reading on the event. After the background reading, ask them to look at the image again. What do you see?

SECTION 2

**The Great Wave
of Immigration:
The William Williams
Collection with
Photographs by
Augustus Sherman**



THE COLLECTION

William Williams (1862–1947) collected these photographs while he was Commissioner of Immigration for the Port of New York at Ellis Island, 1902–5 and 1909–13; they came to The New York Public Library with the bequest of his papers, which are now held by the Manuscripts and Archives Division.

BACKGROUND

Under construction for two years, the Ellis Island immigration station opened in New York harbor on the first day of 1892. For the next two decades, it was the port of entry for most of the more than 12 million immigrants who made the journey to America. In 1907, the peak year of immigration, 3,000 to 5,000 newcomers a day were examined at Ellis Island as they sought permanent entry to the country.

Many photographers, such as Edwin Levick, who specialized in maritime subjects, were drawn to Ellis Island by the general human interest and newsworthiness of the scene; others, such as pioneering social photographer Lewis Wickes Hine (1874–1940), responded to the individual humanity of the immigrants' raw eagerness, symbolized for Hine by their humble possessions and their stoicism.

One amateur photographer, Augustus Sherman, the Ellis Island Chief Registry Clerk, had special access to potential subjects for his camera. It is possible, for example, that Commissioner Williams requested permission to photograph specific individuals and groups. It is also likely that Sherman's elaborately costumed subjects were detainees, new immigrants held at Ellis Island for one reason or another. While waiting for what they needed to leave the island (an escort, money, or travel tickets), some of these immigrants may have been persuaded to pose for Sherman's camera, donning their best holiday finery or national dress, which they had brought with them to their new home.

Sherman's photographs were published in *National Geographic* magazine in 1907. For decades, they hung anonymously in the Lower Manhattan headquarters of the Federal Immigration Service. Correspondence in

the William Williams Papers suggests that the Commissioner gave copies of Sherman's haunting photographs to official Ellis Island visitors as mementos.

RELATED RESOURCES

American Park Network. "Statue of Liberty National Monument: Photography." (c 2001)
www.americanparknetwork.com/parkinfo/sl/photo

Coan, Peter M. *Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words*. (c 1997)

Temple, Andrea and June F. Tyler. "Ellis Island: A Historical Perspective."
www.americansall.com/PDFs/02-americans-all/12.9.pdf

United States. National Park Service "Ellis Island."
 (2004) www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm

Yans-McLaughlin, Virginia and the Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island Foundation. *Ellis Island and the Peopling of America: the Official Guide*. (c 1997)

Library Divisions

- * Stephen A. Schwarzman Building/
 Manuscripts and Archives Division
- * Stephen A. Schwarzman Building/Miriam
 and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and
 Photographs, Photography Collection

Suggested Activities: There are two sets of photographs in this section. The first set of photographs was taken by Augustus Sherman, who worked at Ellis Island. Look at these images as a group. A series of questions for interpretation follows. In addition, you might want to try some of the suggested activities in the *How to Use This Guide* section of the resource.

Something to Try: There are two photographs in this section taken by Lewis Hine. Hine was a social reformer who also photographed immigrants on Ellis Island. You might want to compare his photographs to those taken by Augustus Sherman by using the questions written for analyzing the

Sherman photographs. In addition, you might want to consider the following questions:

- What information about these newly arrived immigrants is provided by each photographer?
- How are the photographers' depictions of the arriving immigrants different?
- Why might they have chosen to photograph them differently?
- Who might have been the audience for these images?
- Which do you think are more powerful? Why?

AUGUSTUS SHERMAN PHOTOGRAPHS



Slovak woman and children by Augustus F. Sherman, ca. 1905–1914
 NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
 William Williams Papers.
 Digital ID: 418048.



Italian woman immigrant by Augustus F. Sherman
NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.
Digital ID: 801540.



German stowaway by Augustus F. Sherman, ca. 1905–1914
NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division, William Williams Papers.
Digital ID: 418057.



Three women from Guadeloupe by Augustus F. Sherman, ca. 1905–1914
NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division, William Williams Papers.
Digital ID: 1206544.

Questions to Consider

Section 2: The Great Wave of Immigration: The William Williams Collection with Photographs by Augustus Sherman

Look at the Augustus Sherman photos as a group. Consider the following aspects of each image:

1. How are people dressed in the photographs?
2. How are people placed?
3. Do you think these photographs were posed or candid (taken without the subject's awareness or without their opportunity for posing)? What do you see that makes you say that?

4. What are some emotions portrayed in the photographs?
5. What might the photographer be trying to communicate?
6. For what purpose might someone take these photographs?
7. How might these subjects (people in the images) have been portrayed differently?
 - Slovak woman and children
 - Italian woman immigrant
 - German stowaway
 - Three women from Guadeloupe

LEWIS HINE PHOTOGRAPHS



**Italian family looking for lost baggage at Ellis Island
by Lewis Wickes Hine, 1905**

NYPL, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Photography Collection.

Digital ID: 79878.

Lewis Hine wrote his own notes about this image:

Italian Immigrants at Ellis Island 1905

Lost baggage is the cause of their worried expressions.

At the height of immigration, the entire first floor of the administration was used to store baggage.

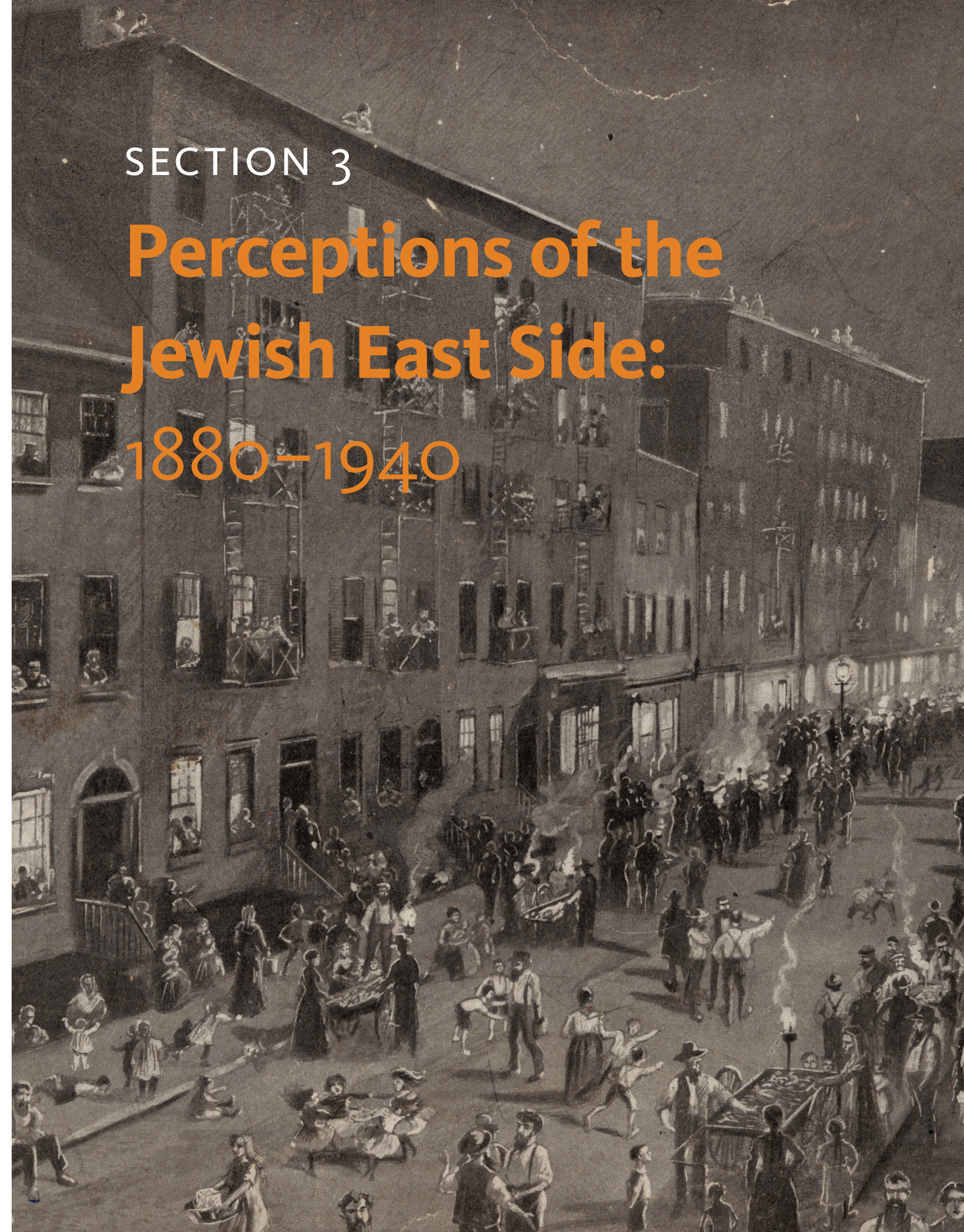
Photo study by Lewis W Hine.



**Jewish grandmother at Ellis Island
by Lewis Wickes Hine, 1926**

NYPL, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Photography Collection.

Digital ID: 79877.



SECTION 3

Perceptions of the Jewish East Side: 1880-1940

Records indicate that Jews began living on Manhattan Island as early as the mid-1600s (Limner, p. 129), but it was the late 1880s when a large influx began to leave Eastern Europe and settle in New York City.

These were primarily Jews from shtetls (small, Eastern-European, Jewish villages), often religious, generally poor, who, due to political persecution and economic hardship, were pressed to leave their homes (Limner pp. 130–133). Many of these Jewish immigrants made their way to America, and a large population of them settled on the Lower East Side. In fact, had it been a separate city, the Lower East Side would have been the largest Jewish city in the world in the late-19th century. Once there, communities from various European regions had to adjust not only to each others' customs, idioms, and traditions, but also to the cramped quarters in walk-up tenement apartments, to crowded streets, and to urban facilities. On the positive side, the community found social services available to them and formed active political, religious, and cultural organizations. Still, they were not immune to the kinds of discrimination and caricature that they had hoped to leave behind. Even well-meaning reformers such as journalist Jacob Riis were prone to stereotype Lower East Side Jews: “Money is their God,” he wrote. “Life itself is of little value compared with even the leanest bank account.”

For much of its history, the Lower East Side was defined by this large population of Eastern European Jews, so much so that it is difficult to think of the area as anything but Jewish. Countless movies, books, and photographs have cemented their stories into our collective memory. Indeed, historian Hasia Diner argues that, “the name ‘Lower East Side’ had become so

securely tied to the American concept of ‘Jewish’ [by the middle of the 20th century] that creators of texts and artifacts...and the audiences who engaged with them, understood that they functioned as synonyms for each other.” Like the Germans before them, the Jews made the Lower East Side their own—the streets became open-air marketplaces for kosher food and other goods; storefront synagogues were started on tenement parlor floors; and Russian-style cafés overflowed with political and cultural debate. When Seward Park Library opened its doors in 1909, other local cultural organizations met there as well, and the library became a hub of cultural activity. Though the Jewish population began to wane significantly toward the end of the Great Depression, remnants of a flourishing Jewish life still survive. One can walk the Lower East Side streets today and see synagogues both great and small, eat traditional Jewish foods, visit Judaica shops, and see store signs in Yiddish and Hebrew.

Limner, Ruth, in collaboration with the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. *Six Heritage Tours of the Lower East Side: A Walking Guide*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Riis, Jacob. *How The Other Half Lives*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010: 104.

Diner, Hasia. *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002: 57.

Suggested Activities: The following resources each have questions for interpretation and can be looked at individually or in a group. In addition, you might want to try some of the suggested activities in the *How to Use This Guide* section of the resource.

Something to Try: Ask students to consider the documents through the lens of both keeping tradition and assimilating to a new culture.

- Where can we find evidence that the Jewish community is holding onto its traditions?
- Where have older traditions been adapted to a new world?
- Where is there evidence of “Americanization”?

Ask students to “consider the source.”

- Who made these documents and for what purposes?
- How does who created the document influence how, we, the viewers, respond to it?

RESOURCES

MEETINGS HELD AT SEWARD PARK 1923

**East Side Debating Club. (Young men and women)
meetings weekly, September to June.**

**Yiddish Forum. December-April. Talks and
dramatic readings by Jewish authors and
critics, followed by discussion.**

**Yiddish Mothers' Club. Meetings weekly.
October to June. Discussion in yiddish of
books and current events, with occasional
outside speakers.**

**English classes for foreigners (men) August
September (continuation of summer school
classes)**

**Boy scout troop No. 236. Meetings twice a
week throughout the year.**

**Incognito Club of the White Door Settlement
(boys) meetings weekly October-June. Object
to inspire members with ideals of citizen-
ship.**

IMAGE 1. Meetings held at Seward Park Library 1923
NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
Seward Park Annual Reports.



IMAGE 2. Postcard of Essex and Hester streets
New York, Brown Brothers, ca. 190-
NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.
Digital ID: 837003.



IMAGE 3. Chicken Market, 55 Hester Street, Manhattan, by Berenice Abbott, 1937

NYPL, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Photography Collection.

Digital ID: 482844.

Excerpt from *New York in the Thirties* as photographed by Berenice Abbott:

“Kosher Chicken Market—Fresh Killed Hourly” reads the Yiddish sign of the East Side store. A complex dietary logic underlies the Jewish insistence that chickens must be newly killed before they are eaten and that before they are cooked they must be soaked in water for half an hour and drained and salted for an hour.



IMAGE 4. In the Ghetto (Dans le ghetto où grouille invraisemblable microcosme judaïque) by André J. Castaigne, 1922

NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.

Digital ID: 801459.



IMAGE 5. A hot night on the East Side—one of hundreds of similar scenes enacted at the same time
by A.V.S. Anthony, 1899
NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.

Questions to Consider

Section 3: Perceptions of the Jewish East Side: 1880–1940

IMAGE 1. Meetings held at Seward Park Library 1923

QUESTIONS:

1. What kinds of clubs are meeting at the library?
2. From the clubs listed here, what can we learn about the interests of the community?
3. Which clubs are helping the community to keep its traditions?
4. Which clubs are helping the community to adjust to American life?
5. What kinds of clubs and activities might we find at the library today?

IMAGE 2. Postcard of Hester and Essex streets, 190–

QUESTIONS:

1. What does this scene depict?
2. Why might this scene be chosen for a postcard?
3. Who might purchase this card to send?
4. To whom might this card be sent?
5. Choose a scene of New York City that you would want to depict on a postcard. To whom would you send your card and why? What would you write on it?

IMAGE 3. Chicken Market, 55 Hester Street, Manhattan, 1937

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What kind of business do you think it is?
3. Who might be the patrons (shoppers) who come here?
4. Why might the man be looking through the window? How would the image be different if he were not there?
5. How many languages does the store use to advertise? Why might it use more than one language?
6. Why might the photographer have felt this was an important image?

7. Have you ever seen a similar store? Where? What did it sell? Who were its customers?

Read the excerpt below, written by Elizabeth McCauseland, from Berenice Abbot's book *New York in the Thirties*:

“Kosher Chicken Market—Fresh Killed Hourly” reads the Yiddish sign of the East Side store. A complex dietary logic underlies the Jewish insistence that chickens must be newly killed before they are eaten and that before they are cooked they must be soaked in water for half an hour and drained and salted for an hour.

- What is the job of this particular store?
- Why does the store advertise “Fresh Killed Hourly”?
- How is this store helping the community to maintain its traditions?

IMAGE 4. In the Ghetto (Dans le ghetto où grouille invraisemblable microcosme judaïque)

QUESTIONS:

1. Make a list of five different characters you see in this image. What are they doing? What sounds might you hear if you were in this place? What smells might you smell?
2. Who might the couple in the middle be and what do you think they are doing? How are they depicted in relation to everyone else? What might they represent?
3. Who do you think was the audience for this image and why?
4. What does this image tell us about the point of view of the magazine it was in?
5. In what ways does this picture challenge the notion that the Lower East Side was a Jewish “ghetto”? Does it support the idea?

IMAGE 5. A hot night on the East Side—one of hundreds of similar scenes enacted at the same time

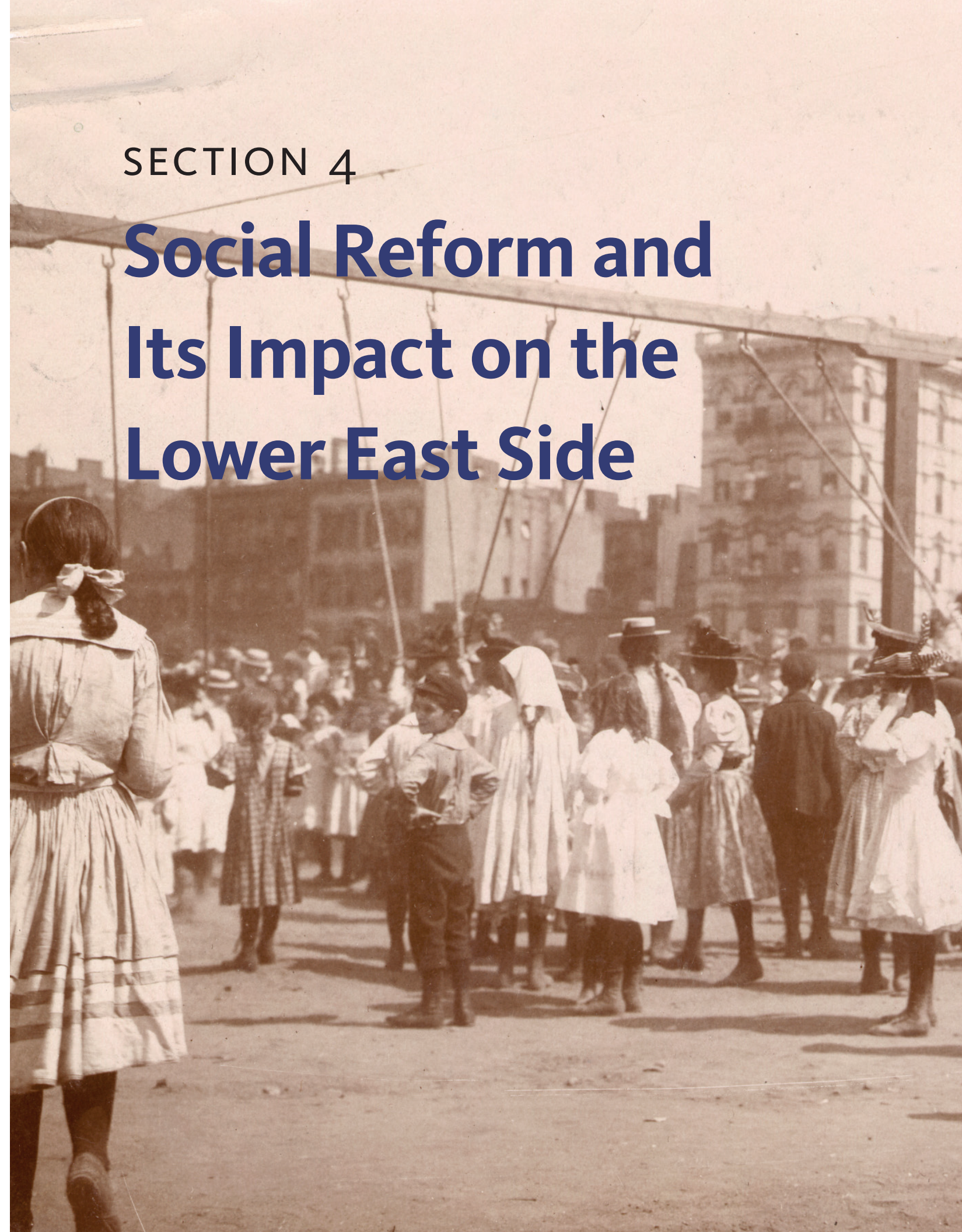
QUESTIONS:

1. What are five different activities you see happening?

2. Overall, how would you describe the mood of this image?
3. Compare this image to the last image in terms of character, activities, and mood. Things to notice: how people are dressed, how people are interacting, facial expressions.
4. What does this image tell us about the point of view of its creator?
5. Who might have been the audience for this image?
6. How might this image be different if it were a photograph?
7. Are there any qualities to this image that you can find in neighborhoods today?

SECTION 4

Social Reform and Its Impact on the Lower East Side



Living conditions in New York City in the late-19th and early-20th centuries were not always conducive to healthy and productive lives.

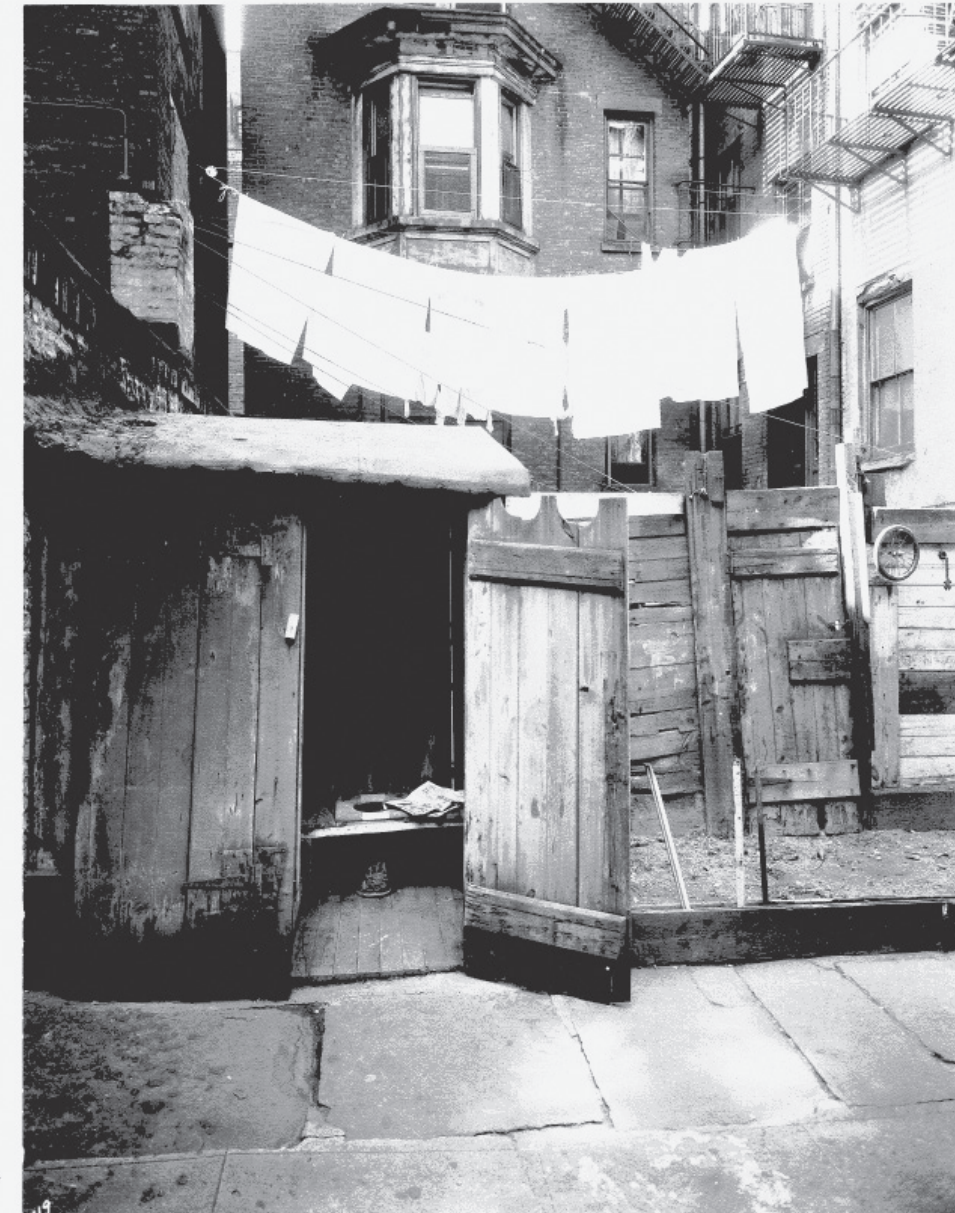
Families were often overcrowded into small, run-down tenement apartments that did not have running water or indoor plumbing, had very little light, and were often susceptible to fires. In addition, the close proximity of so many people in one place meant that disease spread quickly and easily. Many of the people most affected by these problems were new to the United States and had little money and few connections. Immigrant-aid societies, unions, and other organizations were established within the community to address these issues, but outside help arrived as well. In the late 1880s, socially minded citizens in major cities, such as Jane Addams in Chicago and Lillian Wald in New York, began recognizing the problems of the “urban poor,” and hoped to solve them through social reform. Although reform associations were not new in New York City at the time, this group of citizens, generally middle to upper-middle class and well-educated, was unusual both in their resolve and in their composition. Unlike past social-reform movements, for example, many of these activists were women. Using their knowledge, connections, wealth, and gumption, they helped create a variety of programs, parks, settlement houses, and public awareness of the issues of poverty.

Social reform on the Lower East Side took many forms. Institutions such as the Educational Alliance and the Henry Street Settlement were established to provide courses in English and citizenship, offer artistic activities for children, and even teach basic hygiene. Among the most famous of the reformers were two photographers whose work can be found among NYPL’s collections: the Danish-American journalist and reformer Jacob Riis and the American sociologist and photographer Lewis Hine. Riis and Hine were both committed to addressing the needs of New York City’s

immigrant poor, many of whom lived on the Lower East Side. Their photographs and writings continue to be valuable sources of information about New York City immigrant life in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. They also capture the disquieting attitudes toward immigrants that were prevalent at the time.

Suggested Activities: The following resources each have questions for interpretation and can be looked at individually or in a group. In addition, you might want to try some of the suggested activities in the *How to Use This Guide* section of the resource.

RESOURCES



Backyard Privy, Sole Toilet Facilities for an Apartment House

IMAGE 1. Outdoor privy

NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
Fred F. French Companies Records.

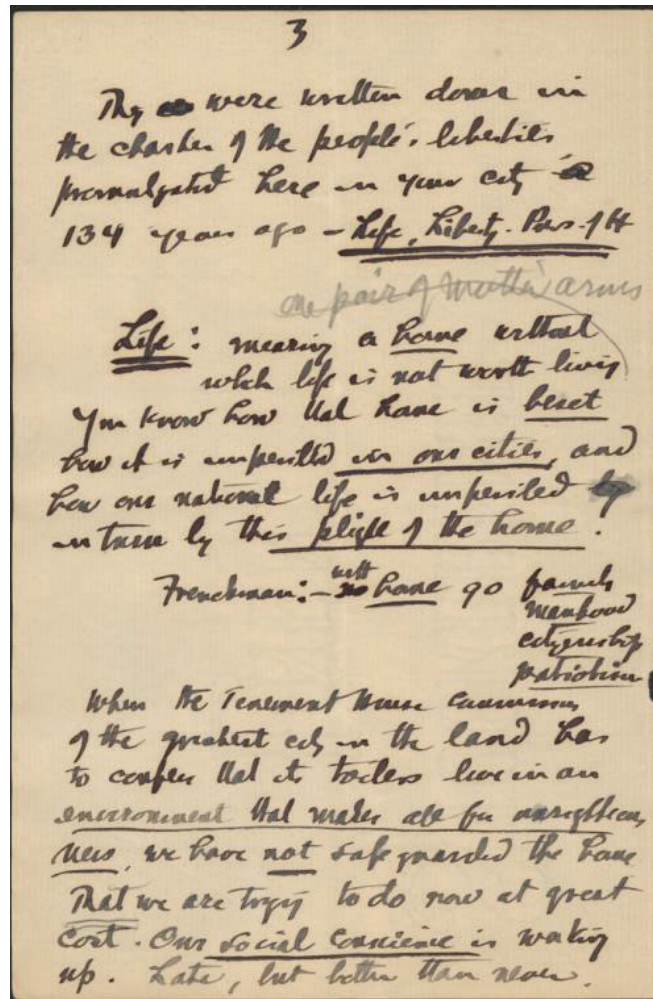


IMAGE 2. Jacob Riis papers, 1871–1916, bulk (1900–1910)

Jacob Riis: Miscellaneous papers and lecture notes, 1896, 1906, 1909, 1911, n.d.

NYPL, Manuscript and Archives Division.

Partial transcription of Jacob Riis's lecture notes:

They were written down in the charter of the people's liberties promulgated here in your city 134 years ago—
Life, Liberty, Purs of H

Life: meaning a home, without which life is not worth living
You know how that home is beset
how it is imperiled in our cities, and how our national life is imperiled in turn by this *plight of the home*.

Frenchman: — with home go family manhood citizenship patriotism

When the Tenement House Commission of the greatest city in the land has to confess that its toilers live in an *environment that makes all for [unintelligible]*, we have *not* safeguarded the home. That we are trying to do now at great cost. Our *Social Conscience* is waking up. Late, but better than never.

Today Jacob Riis is best known for his photographs depicting the derelict conditions of the urban poor in his book *How the Other Half Lives*. Along with this work, Riis was a social advocate and gave lectures on the conditions of the poor, stressing the rights of all to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”



IMAGE 3. Lower East Side playground on East Broadway, before WW I (Seward Park)

NYPL, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection.

Digital ID: 806210.

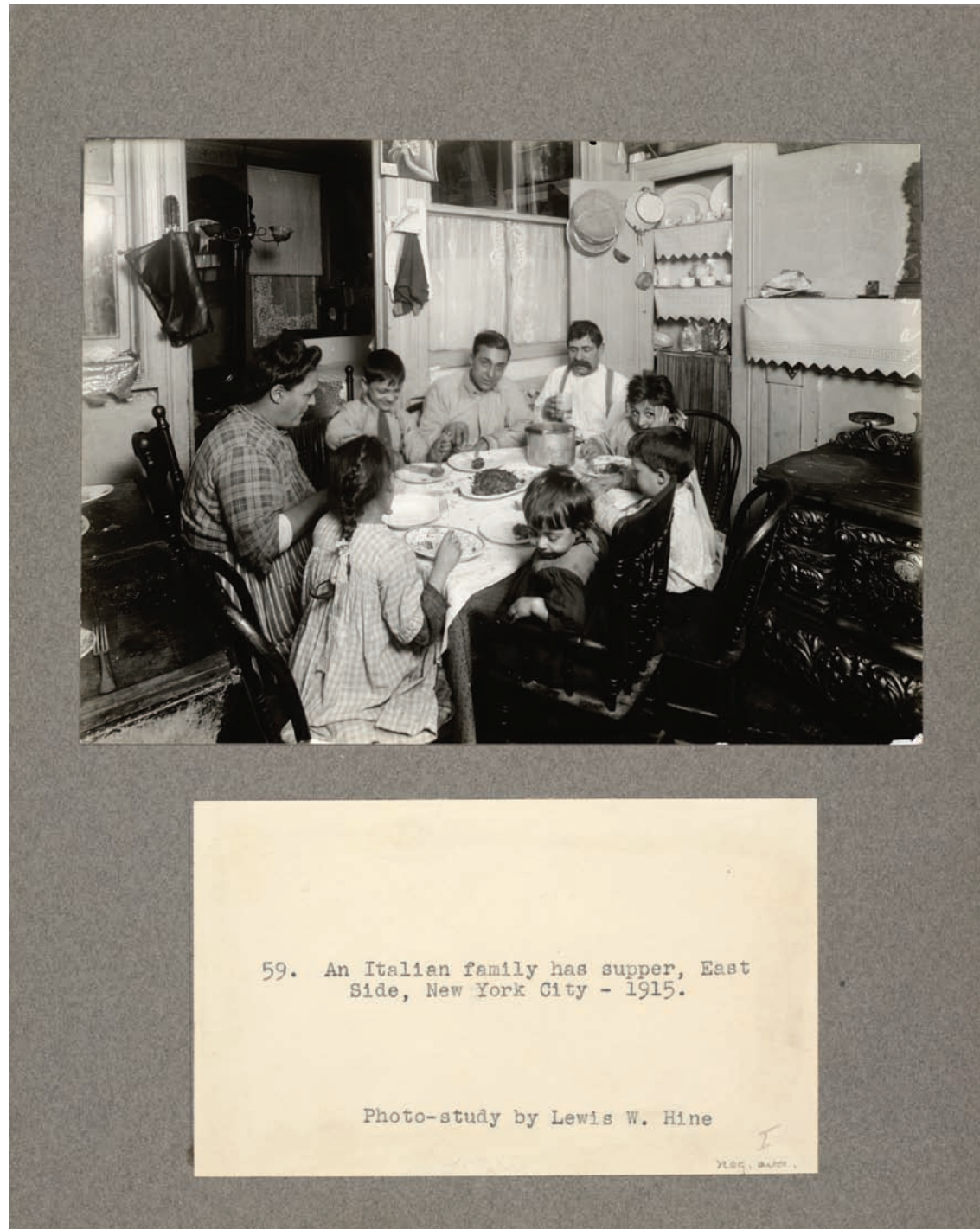


IMAGE 4. Italian family eating supper, East Side, New York City, 1915

NYPL, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Photography Collection.

Digital ID: 464293.

Questions to Consider

Section 4: Social Reform and Its Impact on the Lower East Side

IMAGE 1. Outdoor privy

QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe the condition of this privy?
2. Considering that this is the only toilet facility for the apartment building, what might be some health issues that arise?
3. What are some other health issues that might be problems for people (based on this photograph)?
4. Who might have taken this photograph and why?

IMAGE 2. Jacob Riis papers, 1871–1916, bulk (1900–1910)

Today Jacob Riis is best known for his photographs depicting the derelict conditions of the urban poor in his book *How the Other Half Lives*. Along with this work, Riis was a social advocate and gave lectures on the conditions of the poor, stressing the rights of all to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

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You know how that home is *beset*
how it is imperiled *in our cities*, and how our national life is imperiled in turn by *this plight of the home*.

Frenchman: — with *home go family manhood citizenship patriotism*

When the Tenement House Commission of the greatest city in the land has to confess that its toilers live in an *environment that makes all for [unintelligible]*,

we have *not* safeguarded the home That we are trying to do now at great cost. Our *Social Conscience* is waking up. Late, but better than never.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read these lecture notes. What is the subject of Riis’s lecture?
2. Who do you think are the people he is talking about?
3. To whom might he be speaking?
4. Where in the notes does he express emotion?
5. What do you think he means when he says “Our Social Conscience is waking up. Late, but better than never”?
6. Why might Riis be addressing this audience and not the “toilers” he mentions in his lecture themselves?

Extension: Look at some of Jacob Riis’s photographs. What is their point of view? How do they depict their subjects? In what ways might these photographs be helpful to his subjects? Could they be hurtful? How do they reflect what Riis wrote in his notes?

IMAGE 3. Lower East Side playground on East Broadway, before WW I (Seward Park)

Seward Park playground was created at the urging of photographer and social reformer Jacob Riis and Lillian Wald, the founder of the Henry Street Settlement. The playground was the very first municipal playground in New York City. It was created to provide a space for children living in overcrowded conditions to have a safe space to play outdoors.

QUESTIONS:

1. What kinds of things did the social reformers choose to include in the playground?
2. Describe the children you see, focusing on what they are doing and how they are dressed.
3. Where are the adults and what are they doing? Why might this be so?
4. When might this picture have been taken?

5. Compare this playground with modern playgrounds that exist today. How are they the same? How are they different?
6. What do you think we have learned about what makes a good playground over the years?

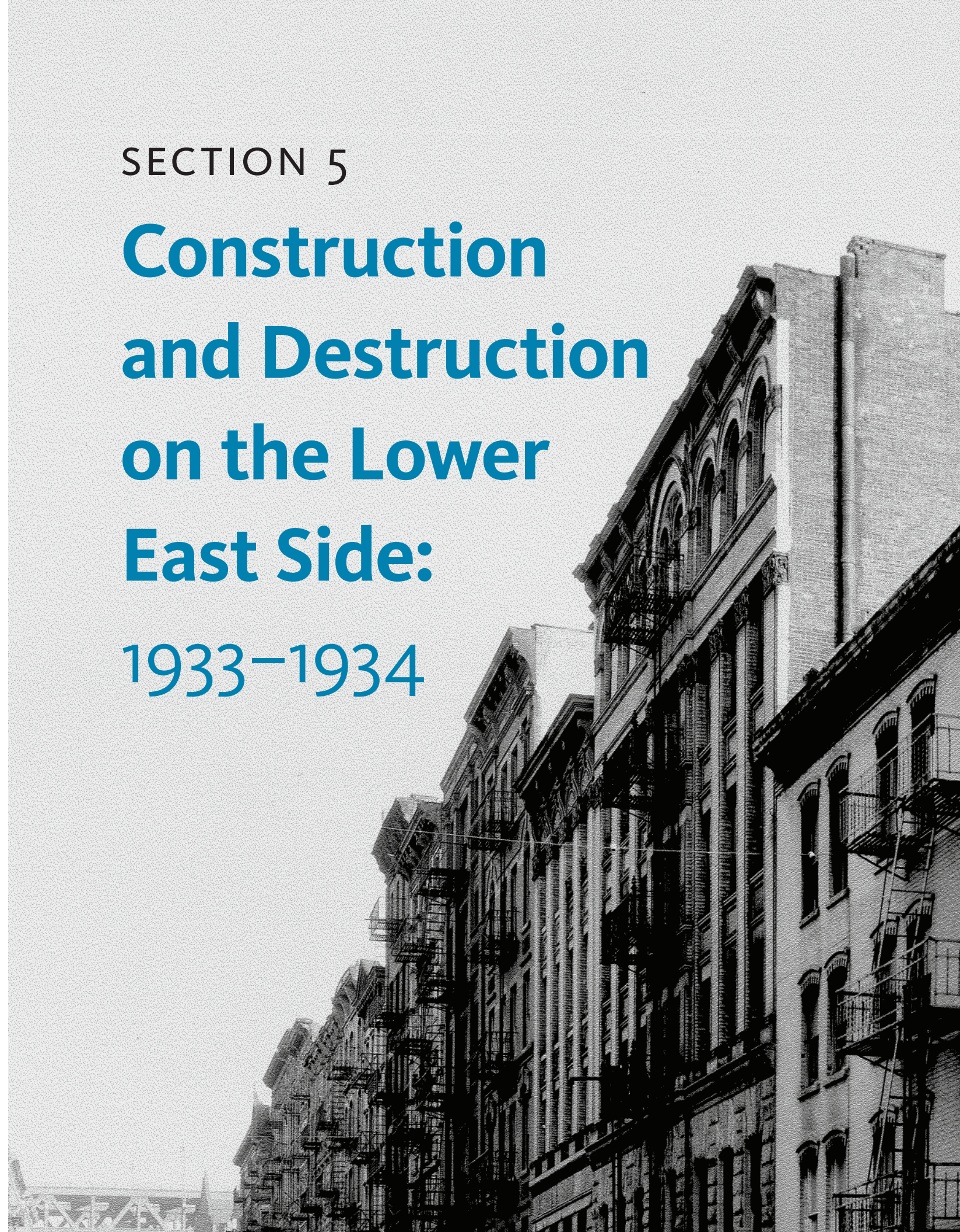
IMAGE 4. Italian family eating supper, East Side, New York City, 1915

QUESTIONS:

1. Have students focus on different elements of the photograph, such as facial expressions, clothing, and apartment furnishings. What do they tell us about the lives of the people in this photograph?
2. What do they tell us about the message the photographer is trying to send?
3. Who might have been the intended viewer of this photograph?
4. How might the photographer have chosen to depict these people differently to send a different message?

SECTION 5

Construction and Destruction on the Lower East Side: 1933–1934



New York City is defined by change. Those who live here long enough will see the city transform before their eyes.

Places are continually being torn down, recreated, rebuilt, and reused. The reasons for this constant redefinition of New York City are numerous: New technology, increased population, outdated modes of business, rehabilitation, vanity, overcrowding, overpricing, abandonment, and decline all contribute to neighborhood change and propel the people who make it happen.

New York City’s Lower East Side has gone through many of its own transformations, not only in terms of population, but also in physical scale. Small wooden tenements were replaced by taller, brick ones, the destruction of which made way for high-rise middle- and low-income housing complexes, which have been joined in recent years by other high-rise, luxury apartment buildings. Subways, parks, and highways have been built to meet the needs of a growing and more mobile population. Whatever the reasons that lay behind construction projects, they are often presented to address a community need.

In 1933, Knickerbocker Village was constructed on a block of the Lower East Side that was condemned as a slum. This block, called the “Lung Block,” between Catherine, Market, Monroe, and Cherry streets, had a series of apartments and rooming houses that housed working families. It was called the “lung block” because its excessive overcrowding led to rampant disease, particularly tuberculosis. According to reformer Ernest Poole, nearly 4,000 people lived on just that block in 1903. Thirty years later, the population was less dense, but the buildings had not seen much improvement. The plan to erect Knickerbocker Village was pitched as an opportunity to replace dilapidated housing with modern, middle-class facilities, allowing for a better living standard. In order to do so, the existing buildings were condemned and torn down and families were

displaced. This cycle of condemnation, displacement, construction, and repopulation fell under the name of “slum clearance.” Today, slum clearance is often seen in a negative light, because it disbanded communities of people who did not want to move and had established connections and family in its neighborhoods. Often projects such as Knickerbocker Village replaced long-time neighborhood residents with more well-to-do New Yorkers from other parts of the city. However, at the time, it was generally seen as a positive force, ridding the city of areas that were run-down and posed health hazards.

Like development projects today, Knickerbocker Village garnered a variety of opinions and generated debate. This construction project had specific stated intentions, some of which were fulfilled, and some of which were not. It can be interesting to consider how projects were viewed at the time they were created in relation to our perceptions of these projects today.

Suggested Activities: The following resources each have questions for interpretation and can be looked at individually or in a group. Images 2–5 are of the before, during and after the building of Knickerbocker Village. The questions that follow these images are meant to be used for all three as a group. In addition, you might want to try some of the suggested activities in the *How to Use This Guide* section of the resource.

Something to Try: Look back at the map and print of Rutgers Farm in Section 1. Try to find where Knickerbocker Village would be on the map. Look at a map of the area today. How has the neighborhood changed?

RESOURCES



Youth Learning to Gamble on Cherry Street Sidewalk
Most of These Boys are Our Tenants and Will be provided with More Wholesome Recreation When Knickerbocker Village is Completed

IMAGE 1. Youth learning to gamble on the Cherry Street sidewalk

NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
Fred F. French Company Records.



IMAGE 2. View looking east on Monroe Street from Catherine Street—phases of development
 NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
 Fred F. French Companies Records.



IMAGE 3. View looking east on Monroe Street from Catherine Street—phases of development
 NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
 Fred F. French Companies Records.



IMAGE 4. View looking east on Monroe Street from Catherine Street—phases of development
 NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division,
 Fred F. French Companies Records.

INFORMAL REPORT
 SEWARD PARK BRANCH 1933

"Slum Clearance" with an eye to the Lower East Side occupies much space in the papers, but little headway has been made. The "Lung Block" between Catherine, Market, Monroe and Cherry Streets was cleared late in the year by the Fred French Company which enlisted aid from the R. F. C. The project to rebuild 18 blocks in Corlears Hook Section, remains on paper. The Chamber of Commerce reports that more than 500 buildings are either boarded-up or vacant above the store floor.

INFORMAL REPORT 1934
 SEWARD PARK LIBRARY

Knickerbocker Village opened two units late in the year. Many of our neighbors have moved there, and some former readers have returned to live there. We have had a number of new applicants though Chatham Square, which is nearer, no doubt, gets the greater part of them. The Chamber of Commerce reports that in spite of depression, this section continues to lose its "middle class" tenant population. Those coming in are the higher income group going to Knickerbocker Village, or those incapable of paying as much as \$5.00 per room per month. A number of the very low income families have come from the Williamsburg area marked for slum clearance.

IMAGE 5. Excerpts from Seward Park Library
 annual reports 1933-1934
 NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division.

Questions and Writing Prompts

Section 5: Construction and Destruction on the Lower East Side: 1933–1934

IMAGE 1. Youth learning to gamble on the Cherry Street sidewalk

QUESTIONS:

1. Observe the image without the caption, then show students the caption; do our opinions of the photograph change?
2. What do you see in this photograph?
3. Who might have taken this photograph?
4. Who might be the audience for this photograph?
5. What do you think is the message of this photograph?
6. Do you think this photograph provides evidence that this area is a “slum”?

IMAGES 2–4. Views looking east on Monroe Street toward Catherine Street

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1. Print out the images and ask your students to put them in chronological order. Ask the students to describe how the neighborhood has changed.
2. Describe what you see in the first image. What might the advantages to living in the first neighborhood be? Disadvantages?
3. Describe what you see in the last image. What might some advantages to living in Knickerbocker Village be? Disadvantages?
4. Referring back to Section 4, Social Reform, why might the city want to build new structures such as Knickerbocker Village?
5. Make a prediction: After the building of Knickerbocker Village, what other changes might occur in the neighborhood? What do you think the neighborhood is like today?

6. Turn back to Section 1 and look at the map of Rutgers Farm. Can you find the block of Catherine, Cherry, Market, and Monroe? What was the neighborhood like then?
7. Can you trace the development of the neighborhood from the 1700s? How has it changed over time? What types of social and economic forces might have led to those changes?
8. What housing do you think would serve a New York City community best today?
9. Are there any areas in your own community that are being rebuilt? If so, why do you suppose that is happening?
10. In order to build bigger and newer buildings in a city as crowded as New York City, it is often necessary to tear down other structures and relocate residents and businesses. What do you think about this process? Is it okay to relocate people and businesses for new structures? Can New York City progress into the future without rebuilding?

IMAGE 5. Seward Park Library annual reports 1933–1934

QUESTIONS:

1. How do these reports describe the conditions on the Lower East Side?
2. What might be some reasons as to why this area would be called the “Lung Block”?
3. How has the area changed from 1933–1934?
4. According to these excerpts, who is moving to the Lower East Side in 1934? Why are they moving to the Lower East Side? Who is *not* moving into the neighborhood?
5. “Slum clearance” is no longer a term that people use to designate neighborhoods to be torn down and replaced. Can you think of any situations where it would be okay to tear down a neighborhood and build something new? What might be the challenges to doing so? What might be the benefits?

SECTION 6

Changing Lower East Side: New Communities as Seen Through the Eyes of the Library



The Seward Park branch of The New York Public Library (NYPL) opened on the Lower East Side in 1909. The library was established to serve a growing Lower East Side population that, at the time, consisted primarily of new Jewish and Italian immigrants.

Throughout the years, the library and its staff witnessed an incredible number of changes in the immediate neighborhood as well as in larger municipal, national, and international arenas.

Each year, the librarians at all NYPL branches are required to write an annual report discussing how the branches have served the communities in which they are located. The reports generally include a description of the community's population and the area's building developments; they also describe who is using the library. The Seward Park Library annual reports document yearly changes to the Lower East Side community and are a particularly good resource for learning about the changing neighborhood.

In the following excerpts, librarians at Seward Park reflect on the changes they witnessed in the community after World War II through the 1970s. The observations are made from the perspective of attempting to better serve the library's constituents. By reading the descriptions of who visits the library, we get a rich account of the changing population of the Lower East Side and some of the reasons for these changes.

Suggested Activities: Look at the text in this section as a whole. A series of questions for interpretation follow on the opposite page. In addition, you might want to try some of the suggested activities in the *How to Use This Guide* section of the resource.

RESOURCES

Excerpts from Seward Park annual report 1951:

The neighborhood

The report for 1947-48 says "The Seward Park neighborhood has again become a melting pot. Refugees are coming from all parts of Europe and many have settled in the Lower East Side tenements. Most of these are displaced persons who have been in one country after another." Four years later this is still true. And since the tenements are already overcrowded we find that we are losing many of our Jewish "good readers." Refugees are poor. Higher wages in this country have enabled some of the older inhabitants to move to less shabby apartments in other sections of the city. Then, too, the older group of refugees, while they came from different countries in Europe, were almost wholly Jewish and read and spoke the common language -- Yiddish. The new groups are by no means all Jewish and no one branch can supply books in many different languages.

Our largest new group, the Puerto Ricans (surveys show that there are about 10,000 of them in this section) do not, except in the case of the children, find their way to the library. Most of them are young people busy with home and babies, trying to adjust where adjustment is particularly difficult; a new language; a large and bewildering city, especially since they come from rural communities; laws and regulations which seem purposely bent on plaguing them. When they do come to the library even the small request for identification often disturbs them enormously. When they register we must take the greatest care to see that they understand what they are doing and that we do not frighten them into staying away afterward. They are pleasant, grateful for help, but Miss Wlodawsky, our foreign assistant, feels that there

has not been the demand for Spanish books we expected, except in the Children's Room", she adds. "There was not a great demand," she says, "not even from the Spanish students that came with the evening classes from Seward Park High School. They took out a few easy English books and not many returned for more. On the other hand the Yiddish and Russian speaking students became permanent borrowers."

The two housing developments already established in the neighborhood include a good many Negroes, again a new departure for the Lower East Side. Some of them come to the library and we find books on the Negro and by Negroes circulate continuously. Two future housing developments, the Madison Houses and the Corlear's Hook houses, and another building added to the Amalgamated Homes on Grand Street are all near Seward Park. All of the developments are not expected to have much effect upon the number of families, but, as in the former ones, the character of the population is almost always affected. It will be interesting to see what the future holds.

NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division.

Seward Park annual report 1971:

SEWARD PARK BRANCH
ANNUAL REPORT 1971

Seward Park Branch is in the heart of the old "Melting Pot." The neighborhood is constantly adding new people, institutions and needs without ever losing elements of the old. The Branch is near Essex Street, and running to the east and south, the area has been continuously torn down and rebuilt since the earliest days of public housing. Now work is starting to the north and a low income building is scheduled to open in March. In addition to all this lower, middle, and cooperative housing there are still many blocks of the worst kind of tenements.

West of Essex Street, mainly in old buildings, is a center of small Jewish Businesses which flourish because of low prices and variety - gold jewelry, china and small appliances on Canal; dry goods, yarn and fabric stores on Essex and Grand, and clothing stores which make Orchard a Sunday shopping center. Scattered around are a pickle center, kosher restaurants and food stores, a Jewish book store and innumerable shops selling religious articles. Many of these stores make a specialty of shipping to Israel and draw people from the whole metropolitan area.

There has always been a sprinkling of immigrants from all over, but for many years the majority were Jews, who, whatever their origins, had the common tie of Yiddish and a respect for learning. Many from the early 1900's still live here. The second and third generations have moved away and some returned since middle income housing has been built. Puerto Ricans and Blacks were the next large group, and in the last five years the Chinese have increased steadily. Incomes range from the very lowest to well up in the middle class. With all this diversity it is surprising that the tensions are relatively well controlled.

NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division.

Seward Park annual report 1972:

The adult readers are still mainly Jewish. The rate of increase of Chinese children and young adults has created a demand for Chinese materials in both English and Chinese which can no longer be satisfied by referring them to Chatham Square. This added to other ethnic interests, Jewish, Black and Puerto Rican, seems to leave little budget for anything else. What effect the opening of five new apartments will have is uncertain at the moment. Three middle income houses with 600 units are expected to open within the next three months and expected to have about 50% Black and Puerto Rican. Both expectations may prove wrong. The two low income houses with 360 units, about 1300 people, are being held up by court action appealing the assignment of tenants. If the lower court is upheld they will have about 60% Black and Puerto Rican.

Our Chinese language collection which has been supported by Manhattan Borough funds has been a tremendous success. Periodicals, many of them gifts, circulate well and of roughly 700 paperbacks over 500 were in circulation at the end of June. Most borrowers are teenagers and children who read both Chinese and English. The Chinese materials in the Children's Room are doing equally well.

By contrast the Spanish reading young adults do not use the Spanish collection. The only popular titles are light fiction which they take out for their mothers. One very bright boy told us bluntly that he does not want to read Spanish because he wants to read English and be an American.

NYPL, Manuscripts and Archives Division.

Questions and Writing Prompts

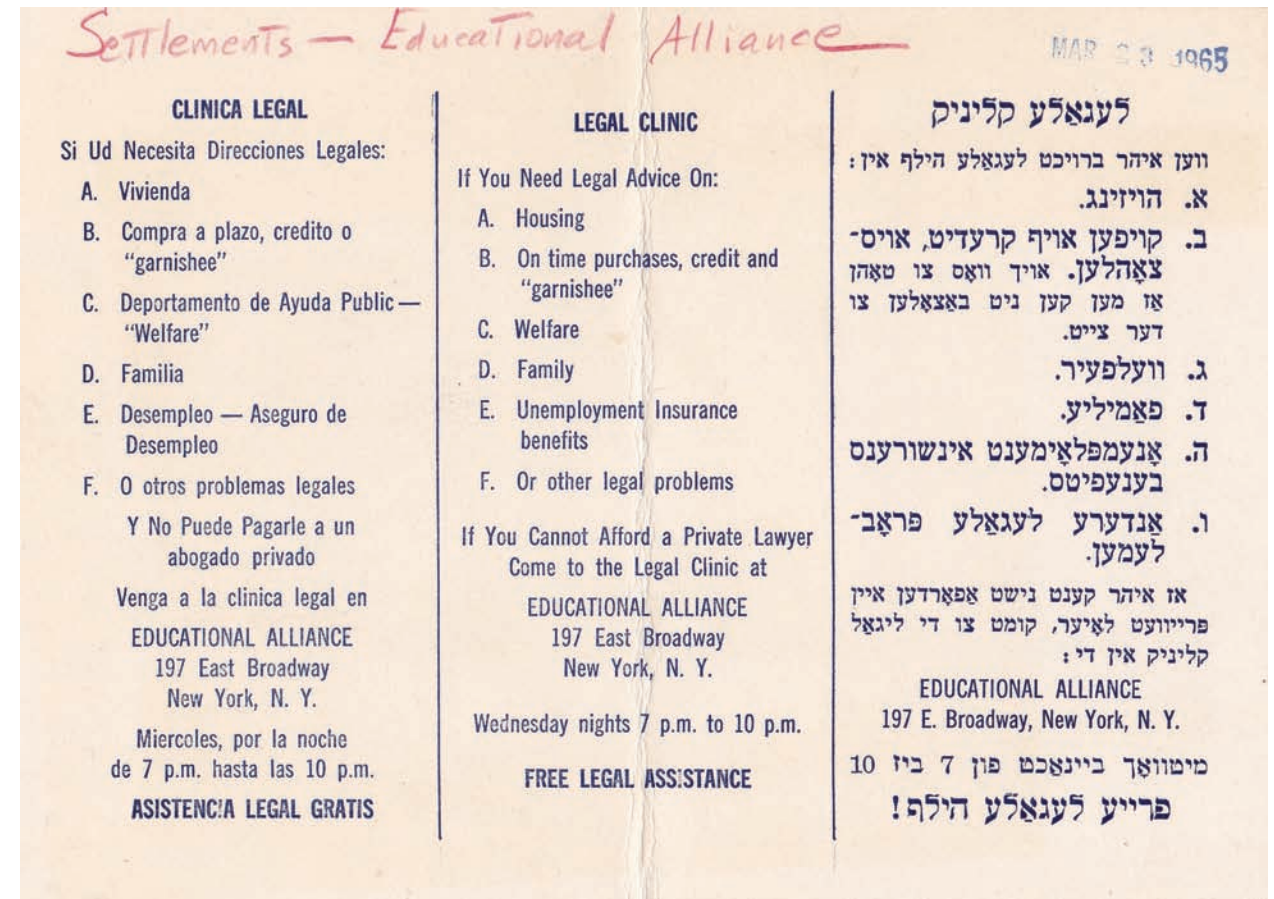
Section 6: Changing Lower East Side: New Communities as Seen Through the Eyes of the Library

Excerpts from Seward Park Library annual reports 1951, 1971, and 1972

The following questions can be used as a guide for interpreting all of the excerpts in this section:

- Who is moving to the Lower East Side after 1950? According to these reports, why is this new population moving to the neighborhood?
- Who is leaving the Lower East Side at this time? According to these reports, why are they leaving?
- Why might these communities be attracted to the Lower East Side?
- In what ways are the new populations similar to the older residents? In what ways are they different?
- What types of challenges are these new communities facing?
- Why might the library be focused on these communities?
- Where can you find evidence of the librarians' attitudes toward these new communities? What do these attitudes tell us about the librarian's role or about societal issues at the time?
- Aside from demographic changes, what other types of changes are taking place on the Lower East Side?
- How are the physical and demographic changes related?
- Looking at the descriptions the librarians give of the neighborhood, and thinking back to earlier sections of this guide, how has the Lower East Side neighborhood changed? In what ways has it remained the same?

- Are there patterns of neighborhood growth that you can identify? Were they addressed in earlier years of the neighborhood?
- In what ways is the library a good measure of neighborhood change? In what ways is it limited?
- If you were to rate the three following causes—economic, social, and political—on their impact on the development of the Lower East Side, in what order would you place them?
- Predict the future. How might the neighborhood look 50 years from today?



Educational Alliance flyer for legal clinic, in Spanish, English, and Yiddish, 1965
NYPL, Seward Park Library Archives.

QUESTIONS:

- What languages are on this flyer? Why might this flyer be written in these three languages?
- What does this flyer advertise? Why might this be of value to all three of these communities?
- What does this flyer tell us about the economic and social makeup of the neighborhood?
- Looking back at previous sections of this guide, how does this flyer provide evidence of neighborhood change?