

Jacob Riis:
Social Reform for the ‘Other Half’

<http://32974347.nhd.weebly.com/>

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For this year's theme of "Leadership and Legacy", I chose Jacob Riis, because his work both reflected my interests and tied well into the theme. I am personally interested in photography and its usages in journalism to evoke powerful emotions. Jacob Riis was the founder of "photojournalism" and the first muckraker to reveal the truth about immigrant conditions of New York. At first, I thought about researching Emmeline Pankhurst, a leader of the suffragette movement in Britain, but I ultimately decided that Jacob Riis and his moving photographs would be more suited for a visually appealing website.

As my research first began, I was reading various websites to get a general idea of Riis' biography and profile. Then, as time progressed and I started delving deeper, I checked out many books from the library. Books that Riis wrote himself, such as How the Other Half Lives and The Making of an American were vital books for me to obtain. I was also able to acquire two antique books that Riis wrote; one containing his autograph. Books written by scholars such as Daniel Czitrom and Bonnie Yochelson's Rediscovering Jacob Riis and Janet Pascal's Jacob Riis: Reporter and Reformer were especially helpful. Although unable to get any primary source interviews, as the time period was too long ago, I was able to get email and phone interviews with various professors and scholars to enhance my knowledge about the subject. Luc Sante was able to give me a better idea of the extent of Riis' legacy on the lives of immigrants and Ted Gup gave me valuable insight on Jacob Riis' legacy in muckraking journalism. Tyler Anbinder helped me understand Jacob Riis' influence and Andrew Dolkart provided me with information about Riis' relevance to current day New York.

I chose the website category because I am experienced in the field and love designing websites in general. I have done a website for National History Day for the past two years in junior division and have thoroughly enjoyed the process. Additionally, for such a topic as Jacob Riis, a website would have been the best fit to show a large array of his photographs and media to enhance the viewers' knowledge. I started one page at a time, in order to better show the process of events that occurred.

Jacob Riis relates to this year's theme of "Leadership and Legacy" because Riis' photographs opened the eyes of the middle-class and wealthy of New York to the plight and suffering of the poor immigrants. He was the leader of muckraking journalism and the usage of photography to pioneer reform, thus prompting many later leaders and muckrakers were heavily impacted by his work. His photographs influenced the passing of many reforms and legislation to help improve the lives of New York's poor and to improve conditions in New York's infamous slums. Thus, through his leadership in muckraking journalism, Riis left a legacy on New York's immigrants, laws, landmarks, and numerous later social reformers.