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Interview Transcript

1.) What were the reactions of the following groups at the time: Upper-class, Middle-class, Lower-class/Immigrants?

I would say the upper and middle classes reacted with horror to what Riis found in the "slums" he wrote about. The lower class and immigrants were not so surprised because they lived in those "slums" and knew all about them.

2.) How was How the Other Half Lives Jacob Riis' most influential book?

It was most influential because it got the most publicity and really struck a chord with Americans who knew that immigrants must have lived in terrible conditions but never knew how bad they really were.

3.) What are some of the criticisms thrown at Jacob Riis today? Despite them, is he still a noteworthy leader?

The main criticism is that he posed people in the famous photos he took. Some people therefore doubt the veracity of these photos. He is still noteworthy anyway because even if posed, these photos reflect the reality of life in the tenements.

4.) How was Jacob Riis a leader in the field of muckraking journalism?

He was a leader because he was the first journalist to use photographs to document his stories. In a sense, he invented "photojournalism."

5.) Describe the Five Points and the impact Riis had on it.

Five Points in New York City was the most famous immigrant enclave in America in 1890 when How the Other Half Lives was published. Due to Riis's influence, the heart of the neighborhood, the infamous Mulberry Bend, was torn down and made into a park so that the children who lived in the surrounding tenements could have a clean and safe place to play.