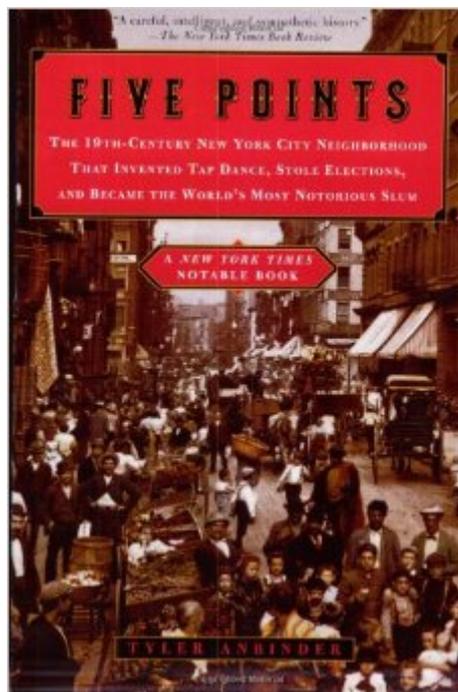


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Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, And Became The World's Most Notorious Slum



Synopsis

All but forgotten today, the Five Points neighborhood in lower Manhattan was once renowned the world over. It housed America's most impoverished immigrants—the Irish, Jews, Germans, Italians, and African-Americans. Located in today's Chinatown and Little Italy, Five Points played host to more riots, scams, prostitution, and drunkenness than any other neighborhood in America. But it was also crammed full of cheap theaters, dance halls, prizefighting venues, and political arenas that would one day dominate the national scene. From Jacob Riis to Abraham Lincoln, Davy Crockett to Charles Dickens, Five Points horrified and enthralled everyone who saw it. Drawing from letters, diaries, newspapers, bank records, police reports, and archeological digs, award-winning historian Tyler Anbinder has written the first history of this remarkable neighborhood. Beginning with the Irish potato famine influx in 1840 and ending with the rise of Chinatown in the early 20th century, the story of Five Points serves as a microcosm of the American immigrant experience.

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Customer Reviews

First off, I must point out that I work about eight blocks away from the infamous Five Points intersection in New York City. Also, I am very familiar with American history. With these two points mentioned, I will say that I thoroughly enjoyed and learned a lot from this book. If you are considering reading "Five Points", it is very important that you assess beforehand what you hope to get out of this book. It has the potential to be either VERY rewarding and informative to you OR, to bore the life out of you and make you want to fling it in the trash! This book is certainly NOT for the

casual reader. It is remarkably detailed and meticulous in research chock full of 66 pages of footnotes and a small font, select bibliography of five pages. I had the great advantage of being able to walk over on my lunch hour and follow the included maps around the neighborhood to see where these locations were and, in some cases, see the still standing buildings mentioned in the text. If you are not from New York City or familiar with it's history, this book can be painfully tedious. If this book was a college course, I would estimate it to be either of the 300 or 400 level. Some may take issue with the way the material is arranged. Trying to write about a whole neighborhood with so many layers of diverse history is no easy task. I personally enjoyed the format once I got used to it. Anbinder starts each chapter with a prologue vignette of a few pages describing an event or person who well exemplifies the topic following in the main chapter. I found myself going back at the end of each chapter and re-reading the prologue with the new information just gleaned in mind. The chapters cover the historical making of the Five Points neighborhood, why the neighborhood inhabitants originally (mostly the Irish before the Civil War) came there, how and where the residents lived there, how they worked and what they did, the politics the neighborhood was involved in over the years, the diversions and entertainment found in the neighborhood, types of vice and crime seen there, religion and reform issues (including extensive accounts of the activities of the Five Points Mission and the House of Industry), the infamous riots the neighborhood was a part or cause of (mostly in the 1850s), the neighborhood changes underway during the Civil War and the rise of Tammany Hall, the remaking of Five Points after the Civil War as Italians became more prevalent, the life and activities of the Italian majority in the 1870s and 1880s, the influx of Chinese to the neighborhood and the making of Chinatown, and the activities of Jacob Riis and other reformers towards the eventual demolition of much of Five Points in the 1890s. The author fills in some background information on discussed topics, but it helps greatly to be already familiar with the era's history. Examples would be needing to know the basics of Andrew Jackson and his "Democrats" before fully understanding the causes and issues relating to the rioting so common in Five Points before the Civil War or, familiarity with what Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall was. Some may also quarrel with the need for extensive statistics about the nationality makeup of individual Five Points tenements or the amount of money in residents bank accounts over the years, but extreme details such as those give insights to how New York City has become what it is today. Causes of the rise of the modern fire and police departments, some unions, gangs, and building code details are just some of the contemporary NYC realities that can trace a significant portion of their origins to Five Points. With the previously mentioned warnings in mind, I highly recommend "Five Points" to the ravenous history student. This is no beach read or intro to Five Points. It is thick

and heavy like cheesecake, but make sure you know that you love cheesecake before trying this supreme example!

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I am also a native New Yorker like the first reviewer. And I am also a history buff. This book is not tedious, and does not read like a text book. It's a page turner, it's addictive... and packed with every detail about this era in New York. You will come away with knowledge that such difficult times did exist, and be grateful that you did not have to endure them.

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