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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

Tyler Anbinder

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All but forgotten today, the Five Points neighborhood in Lower Manhattan was once renowned the world over. From Jacob Riis to Abraham Lincoln, Davy Crockett to Charles Dickens, Five Points both horrified and inspired everyone who saw it. While it comprised only a handful of streets, many of America's most impoverished African Americans and Irish, Jewish, German, and Italian immigrants sweated out their existence there. Located in today's Chinatown, Five Points witnessed more riots, scams, prostitution, and drunkenness than any other neighborhood in America. But at the same time it was a font of creative energy, crammed full of cheap theaters, dance halls, and boxing matches. It was also the home of meeting halls for the political clubs and the machine politicians who would come to dominate not just the city but an entire era in American politics.

Drawing from letters, diaries, newspapers, bank records, police reports, and archaeological digs, Anbinder has written the first-ever history of Five Points, the neighborhood that was a microcosm of the American immigrant experience. The story that Anbinder tells is the classic tale of America's immigrant past, as successive waves of new arrivals fought for survival in a land that was as exciting as it was dangerous, as riotous as it was culturally rich.

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