



Shutting Out the Sky: Life in the Tenements of New York, 1880-1924 (Jane Addams Honor Book (Awards))

By Deborah Hopkinson

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In a stunning nonfiction debut, award-winning author Deborah Hopkinson focuses on five immigrants' stories to reveal the triumphs and hardships of early 1900s immigrant life in New York.

Acclaimed author Hopkinson recounts the lives of five immigrants to New York's Lower East Side through oral histories and engaging narrative. We hear Romanian-born Marcus Ravage's disappointment when his aunt pushes him outside to peddle chocolates on the street. And about the pickle cart lady who stored her pickles in a rat-infested basement. We read Rose Cohen's terrifying account of living through the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, and of Pauline Newman's struggles to learn English. But through it all, each one of these kids keeps working, keeps hoping, to achieve their own American dream.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 5-8-Through the stories of five immigrants, the world of New York City's tenements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries comes alive with descriptions of the newcomers' struggles and triumphs as they attended night school, abandoned customs, or in other ways acclimated to life in America. Some came as children, others as teenagers, all eager either to succeed on their own or to help their families. Leonard Covello, who left Italy and arrived at Ellis Island with his mother and younger brothers six years after his father, became a high school principal. Pauline Newman began her working career in 1901 as a child laborer in the garment industry and later became one of the first women organizers of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Citing sources, Hopkinson quotes frequently from her subjects' and others' writing, and provides a detailed and intimate picture of daily life in Manhattan's Lower East Side. The text is supported by numerous tinted, archival photos of living and working conditions. Although this book will appeal to students looking for material for projects, the writing lends immediacy and vivid images make it simply a fascinating read.

Carol Fazioli, formerly at The Brearley School, New York City

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Gr. 5-12. In the tradition of Russell Freedman's *Immigrant Kids* (1980), but much more detailed, this history of the 23 million immigrants who came to New York City from southern and eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century humanizes the statistics by weaving together the personal stories of five young people with the social conditions that caused them to emigrate, what they left behind, what they hoped for, what they found, and how they changed America. Amazing documentary photos by Jacob Riis and many others, as well as riveting quotes from archives and memoirs, add depth and drama to the accounts of young people, from street to school to sweatshop. At 16, Marcus Ravage convinces his parents to sell the family cow to pay for his journey from Romania. Lithuanian immigrant Pauline Newman becomes one of the first women labor organizers. Italian American Leonard Covello is ashamed to bring his friends home, even as he learns that he can become American without rejecting where he came from. Meticulous documentation, including full chapter notes, will help the many young people--and their parents and grandparents--who will want to know more and to research their own family roots. *Hazel Rochman*

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Review

Voice of Youth Advocates

(June 1, 2004; 0-439-37590-8)

Hopkinson describes life in the tenements by artfully weaving together the firsthand accounts of five people who immigrated to New York as young teenagers at the turn of the twentieth century. After introducing their stories, she tackles her topic by subject, bringing each voice to comment on the physical conditions of the tenements, the work available to immigrants, play, education, and food. By incorporating direct quotes and nicely reproduced archival photographs, the author brings the tenement experience to life for the reader. Notes at the end fully document all her sources, while a time line and further reading give readers access to more information. The book is beautifully designed, with plenty of space given to the photographs, so that no page is text heavy. The square, open format definitely gives it the look of a "children's book," although

middle school readers at the upper range of the book's audience will get the most out of this excellent source. There is little available on the topic for this age. Although both excellent books, Linda Granfield's *97 Orchard Street*, New York (Tundra, 2001/VOYA December 2001) is a less engaging read, and Raymond Bial's *Tenement* (Houghton Mifflin, 2002) is for a somewhat younger audience.-Nina Lindsay.

Kirkus STARRED

September 15th, 2003

Between 1880 and 1919, 23 million people came to America, most through the port of New York and most from eastern and southern Europe. Five young individuals and their experiences represent those masses in this well-conceived volume. Hopkinson covers the journey, Ellis Island, tenements, street life, work, reform movements, and education, always rooted in the actual stories and words of individual immigrants. Archival photographs—including many by Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis, excerpts from autobiographies and oral histories, and meticulous documentation, with a section on resources for young readers, make this an excellent model of historical writing. Hopkinson's enthusiasm for research, primary sources, and individual stories that make history come alive is evident throughout this excellent work. Nonfiction at its best and a good companion to Mary Jane Auch's *Ashes to Roses* (2002), Johanna Hurwitz's *Dear Emma* (2002), and other recent works on the subject. (foreword, afterword, timeline, notes, photo credits, index)

Horn Book Magazine

(January 1, 2004; 0-439-37590-8)

(Intermediate, Middle School) Hopkinson describes Jacob Riis's 1890 book exposing the deplorable conditions of New York City tenement housing as having "such powerful pictures and words that readers were carried directly into the world of the tenements." The same can be said of Hopkinson's own absorbing look at the lives of immigrant children and young adults in New York at the turn of the twentieth century--a time of unprecedented immigration to America. This well-organized social history covers a lot of ground and draws much of its intensity from firsthand accounts. The opening chapters reflect the progression many immigrant children (and adults) made from dreams of easy wealth and happiness to the bleak reality of tenement life. The accessible narrative, effectively supported by well-placed sepia-toned archival photographs, documents the struggles of young immigrants (including dangerous living and working conditions, poverty, lack of education) to carve out better futures for themselves and their families in spite of the obstacles they faced just to survive. A final chapter, filling in later accomplishments made by five specific young people, ends the book on a note of promise. A timeline, list of further reading, bibliography, chapter notes, and index enhance this fascinating glimpse into the past. Copyright 2004 of The Horn Book, Inc. All rights reserved.

School Library Journal

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