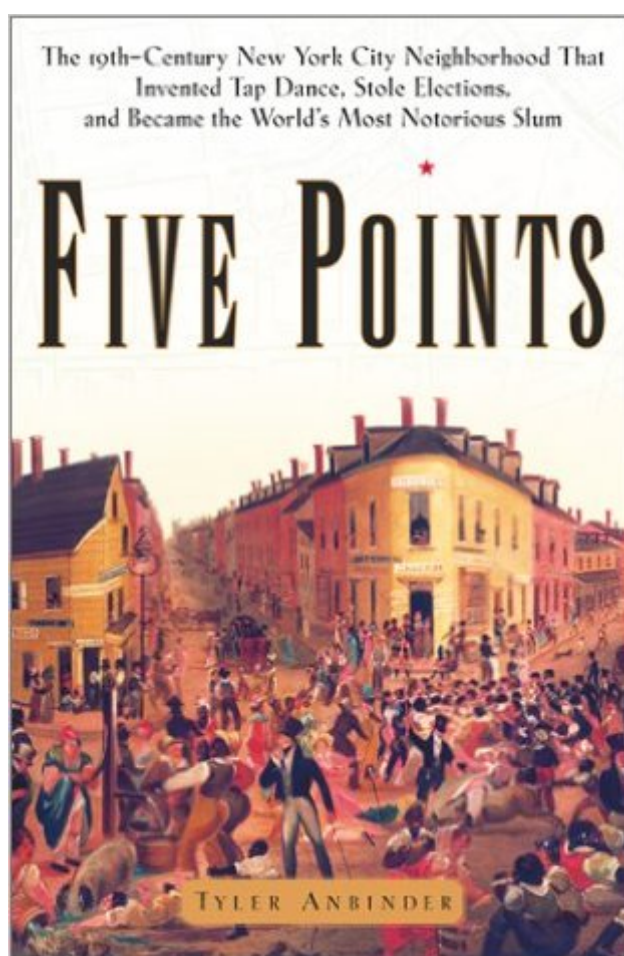


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# Five Points: The Nineteenth-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections And Became The World's Most Notorious Slum



## Synopsis

The very letters of the two words seem, as they are written, to redden with the blood-stains of unavenged crime. There is Murder in every syllable, and Want, Misery and Pestilence take startling form and crowd upon the imagination as the pen traces the words." So wrote a reporter about Five Points, the most infamous neighborhood in nineteenth-century America, the place where "slumming" was invented. All but forgotten today, Five Points was once renowned the world over. Its handful of streets in lower Manhattan featured America's most wretched poverty, shared by Irish, Jewish, German, Italian, Chinese, and African Americans. It was the scene of more riots, scams, saloons, brothels, and drunkenness than any other neighborhood in the new world. Yet it was also a font of creative energy, crammed full of cheap theaters and dance halls, prizefighters and machine politicians, and meeting halls for the political clubs that would come to dominate not just the city but an entire era in American politics. From Jacob Riis to Abraham Lincoln, Davy Crockett to Charles Dickens, Five Points both horrified and inspired everyone who saw it. 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. Tyler Anbinder offers the first-ever history of this now forgotten neighborhood, drawing on a wealth of research among letters and diaries, newspapers and bank records, police reports and archaeological digs. Beginning with the Irish potato-famine influx in the 1840s, and ending with the rise of Chinatown in the early twentieth century, he weaves unforgettable individual stories into a tapestry of tenements, work crews, leisure pursuits both licit and otherwise, and riots and political brawls that never seemed to let up. Although the intimate stories that fill Anbinder's narrative are heart-wrenching, they are perhaps not so shocking as they first appear. Almost all of us trace our roots to once humble stock. Five Points is, in short, a microcosm of America.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 544 pages

Publisher: Free Press; First Edition edition (September 4, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0684859955

ISBN-13: 978-0684859958

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 1.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (82 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #364,149 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #7 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts > Dance > Tap #689 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Urban #6601 in Books > History > Americas > United States > State & Local

## 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 its 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. An binder 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.

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