

# Writer creative writing sample

Countries, United States



### **Summary of American Experience: New York Season 1, Ep. 3 " New York: Sunshine and Shadow (1865-1898)"**

The third episode of the seven-part documentary about the history of New York, takes the viewer to the second part of the 19th century, a period rich in radical changes that affected the lives of its ever-growing population. The documentary starts right after the end of the American Civil War and ends two years before the beginning of the 20th century. It follows a chronological approach, beginning from the events of 1865 and moving towards narrating the major events and the lives of important personalities that shaped the city's history.

The documentary begins by telling the story of the Central Park, the construction of which continued right after the civil war. It was a place that united the inhabitants of New York. But, the second part of the 19th century in New York was marked by great oppositions: discoveries, inventions, massive constructions –including the construction of the Brooklyn bridge–, the creation of a true Metropolis and wealth on one hand, and extreme poverty on the other. Hence, the title, Sunshine and Shadow.

As New York moved towards capitalism, the Wall Street began to rise, roads and railways were built and the city expanded rapidly as its population grew. In 1871, an economic scandal exploded, with a powerful politician, William M. Tweed being accused of corruption and of stealing thousands of dollars. It is suggested by various speakers however, that he took the blame for many corrupt New Yorkers. The scandal was followed in 1873 by the greatest financial crisis of the 19th century with the bankruptcy of the Northern Pacific Railroad and the largest American private bank. This had a domino

effect with severe repercussions especially for the lower classes, the masses of immigrants that continued to come to the city creating a multicultural, cosmopolitan town, but who suffered from extreme poverty and lived under terrible circumstances. Another individual, J. P. Morgan, led the way to recovery with his actions known as “morganizing”.

It was during this time of recovery that electricity hit the streets of New York, also partly sponsored by Morgan. It was also at this time –and specifically in 1883- that the Brooklyn bridge first operated uniting New York and Brooklyn. It was an unprecedented achievement in terms of scale and construction techniques and was celebrated magnificently. Celebrations were marred one week later when a woman’s slip led to panic and a stampede that cost the lives of several people.

In 1886, New York acquired its most known monument, the Statue of Liberty, a gift of the French that took decades to materialize as the New Yorkers were required to pay for the pedestal on which it would stand.

As New York bloomed, millionaires chose the city to be their home and by 1890 half of the richest people in the USA resided in the city and its suburbs, bringing with them a luxurious and often extravagant lifestyle that contrasted dramatically with the masses of poor, the homeless and the children forced to work for long hours in other parts of New York. No other document probably describes better the lives of these people than the book *How the Other Half Lives*, written by an immigrant, Jacob Riis who had experienced the tragic circumstances of the slums and who took advantage of a new photographic technique to present to the world an uneasy reality. The publication of the book seemed to mobilize many New Yorkers who

offered to help; among them a young politician, Theodore Roosevelt. In the spirit of giving to the city, individuals helped in the creation of cultural centers, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Carnegie Hall and the Library.

## **WORK CITED**

" New York, Season 1, Ep. 3 " New York: Sunshine and Shadow (1865-1898)".

The American Experience: New York, a Documentary Film. Dir. Ric Burns.

PBS. 2004.