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Gateway to the Promised Land: Ethnicity and Culture in New York's Lower East Side (Revealing Antiquity; 8)

Mario Maffi

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The cultural diversity of America is often summed up by way of a different metaphors: Melting Pot, Patchwork, Quilt, Mosaic-none of which capture the symbiotics of the city. Few neighborhoods personify the diversity these terms connote more than New York City's Lower East Side. This storied urban landscape, today a vibrant mix of avant garde artists and street culture, was home, in the 1910s, to the Wobblies and served, forty years later, as an inspiration for Allen Ginsberg's epic Howl. More recently, it has launched the career of such bands as the B-52s and been the site of one of New York's worst urban riots. In this diverse neighborhood, immigrant groups from all over the world touched down on American soild for the first time and established roots that remain to this day: Chinese immigrants, Italians, and East European Jews at the turn of the century and Puerto Ricans in the 1950s. Over the last hundred years, older communities were transformed and new ones emerged. Chinatown and Little Italy, once solely immigrant centers, began to attract tourists. In the 1960s, radical young whites fled an expensive, bourgeois lifestyle for the urban wilderness of the Lower East Side. Throughout its long and complex history, the Lower East Side has thus come to represent both the compulsion to assimilate American culture, and the drive to rebel against it. Mario Maffi here presents us with a captivating picture of the Lower East Side from the unique perspective of an outsider. The product of a decade of research, Gateway to the Promised Land will appeal to cultural historians, urban, and American historians, and anyone concerned with the challenges America, as an increasingly multicultural society, faces.

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