

***A Russian-Jewish immigrant, Michael Gold,
describes his experiences in the early 1900s.***

I can never forget the East Side street where I lived as a boy.

Excitement, dirt, fighting, chaos! The noise was always in my ears. Even in sleep I could hear it; I can hear it now.

Did God make bedbugs? One steaming hot night I couldn't sleep for the bedbugs. They crawl slowly, bloated with blood, and the touch and smell of these parasites wakens every nerve to disgust.

It wasn't a lack of cleanliness in our home. My mother was as clean as any German housewife; she slaved, she worked herself to the bone keeping us fresh and neat. What was the use; nothing could help it; it was Poverty, it was the Tenement.

When I woke in the morning, I was never greatly surprised to find in my bed a new family of immigrants in their foreign baggy underwear.

They looked pale and exhausted. They smelled of the disinfectant that they had been soaked in at Ellis Island, where

the ships deposited the immigrants. The stink sickened me. "Why did I choose to come to America?" asked my father of himself gravely, as he twisted and untwisted his mustache in the darkness. "I will tell you why."

How full I was of all the stories that were told in my village about America! In America, we believed, people dug under the streets and found gold anywhere. In America, the poorest ragpicker lived better than a Roumanian millionaire. In America, people did little work, but had fun all day. "Soon, I came to understand it was not a land of fun. It was a Land of Hurry-Up. There was no gold to be dug in the streets here. So I worked! With my hands, my liver and sides! I worked! But I will show your mother how a man makes his fortune in America! I am certain to be rich! I will make a school teacher out of you, Esther! And you, Mikey, will be a doctor. It is a great thing to be a doctor. It is better to have wisdom than to have money. I will earn the money, Mikey, and make you a doctor!"