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Henry Mayhew: London Labour and the London Poor, 1861
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Background

Henry Mayhew (1812–1887)

Henry Mayhew was born into a wealthy London family, one of seventeen siblings. As a youth Mayhew was rebellious and ran away from boarding school, causing his father to enlist him involuntarily in the East India Company as a means of instilling discipline. After returning from this service Mayhew briefly tried a law career, but found it distasteful, quickly abandoning the profession to become a freelance journalist. Unable to support himself through this work, Mayhew moved to Paris to escape his creditors. In Paris he became part of a circle of young expatriate novelists and writers and in 1841 Mayhew collaborated with his friends to found the satirical weekly serial *Punch*. In 1849 Mayhew accepted the journalistic assignment that would define his career, agreeing to become the London correspondent for a large-scale survey of Britain's working poor, sponsored by the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper. His unflinching treatment of the life of the poor was shocking and controversial and his contributions were often censored by the editors. By 1850 Mayhew either quit or was fired from the project, but continued to publish articles on the London poor independently until 1852. These articles were later collected and published in four volumes titled *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861).
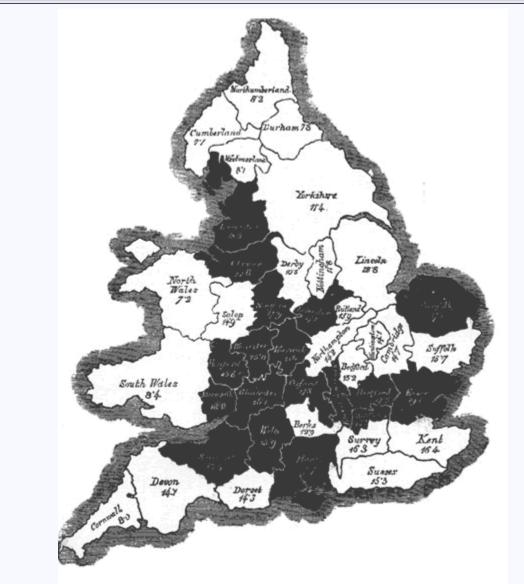
Innovation

Mayhew approached his work on *London Labour and the London Poor* ethnographically, venturing directly into the poorest parts of London to interview his subjects directly. The first three volumes contain biographical sketches of the flower girls, cat and dog meat dealers, pickpockets, prostitutes, and others who

struggled to eke out a living in Victorian London. His writing captured the conditions of their daily life and recorded their utterances in a form that many have described as the best oral history of the period.

The fourth volume, which Mayhew wrote only a portion of, departed from this format to analyze the characteristics and activities of criminals in Britain and Wales. Mayhew completed a series of choropleth maps for this volume to illustrate the criminal statistics of each county. The maps, rendered in simple black and white, addressed a variety of topics including the overall intensity of criminality in each county, the intensity of "ignorance" (illiteracy), the number of illegitimate children, rates of teenage marriage, and the number of crimes committed by women. In each case, counties below the average were represented in white and counties above the average were shaded in black. Mayhew also printed the county average within the county boundaries and included detailed data tables along with each map. Mayhew's maps were an important innovation in the study of crime, providing easy to read evidence of the spatial concentration of crime and suggesting that crime would be found in relationship to other variables, such as illiteracy.

Mayhew's maps were among the earliest attempts to study crime using cartographic techniques. Along with other early criminologists, such as Joseph Fletcher, Mayhew was part of the "cartographic" or "geographic" school that flourished in criminology between 1830 and 1880 (Phillips 1972). His work laid the foundation for 20th century efforts to understand the relationship between criminal activity and such "ecological" variables as urbanization, poverty, and disease. Several criminologists working in the mid-20th century, such as Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, also used maps to explore the spatial relationship between criminal activity and these ecological variables, constructing detailed maps of crime in major cities like Chicago (Shaw and McKay 1942). Today, law enforcement officials also make use of geographic techniques to understand the causes and spatial organization of crime. Many American cities have implemented sophisticated computerized crime mapping systems to improve crime prevention efforts (Cho 1998).

Mayhew portrait from *London Labour and the London Poor*, (Vol 1). New York: Augustus M. Kelley.

The Intensity of Criminality

Map showing the number of criminal offenders to every 10,000 of population in each county of England and Wales.

The counties printed black are those in which the number of criminals is above the average. The counties left white are those in which the number of criminals is below the average. Averages

were calculated from the returns for the last ten years.

Map Source: *London Labour and the London Poor*, volume 4. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967.

Publications

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