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1907, oil on canvas, 26 in. x 32 in., The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.



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## 27.–28. John Sloan

(1871–1951)

*The Wake of the Ferry II*

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*Six O'Clock, Winter*

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### Biography

John Sloan, a member of a group of early-twentieth-century American artists labeled “The Eight,” is perhaps best known for his advocacy of gritty realism in art and for his depictions of city scenes. Sloan was born in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, in 1871. When he was six, his family moved to Philadelphia in search of financial stability. In 1888 Sloan’s father lost his job; the sixteen year old dropped out of school and took a job at a downtown bookstore to help support his family. It was here that he developed a lifelong passion for reading authors like Walt Whitman, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant. It was here also that he first became interested in art, particularly the prints of artists including Honoré Daumier and William Hogarth. He taught himself to etch by copying prints by such masters as Rembrandt. It was Robert Henri who first introduced Sloan to Daumier’s prints, which satirized nineteenth-century Parisian society (see figure 18, Tab 4—Primary Sources). Sloan felt that Daumier “was a caricaturist, a satirist, but he was never cruel” in his depictions of people. Daumier recorded the life of working class citizens in Paris, just as Sloan later focused on the downtrodden masses of New York. “I am a realist, working in the tradition of Daumier, Courbet, Rembrandt, and Carpaccio. I am more interested in the noble commonplace of nature than in the curious: believing that form and color are tools of the artist’s imagination in re-creating life” (Scott 1971, 16).

In 1892, at the age of twenty, Sloan joined the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as a newspaper illustrator (see figure 7, Tab 4—Primary Sources). The turn of the twentieth century was the heyday of artist-reporters, who rushed to the

### Themes

*The Wake of the Ferry II*

Transportation

Identity—The Individual in the City

Mood

Storytelling and Narrative

*Six O'Clock, Winter*  
Buildings, Bridges, and Monuments

Transportation

Technology and Transformations

Work

New York

Color

Movement

Mood

news scene to record every detail. With the widespread use of the camera, artist-reporters would soon be surpassed by photojournalists (see figure 8, Tab 4—Primary Sources).

It was from this group of artist-reporters that the so-called Ash Can school of realistic art was born a decade later. Sloan, Everett Shinn, William Glackens, and George Luks worked as illustrators for newspapers and spent hours on the street, recording scenes of city life that changed their opinions of what art should be about. Sloan and his artist friends studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which was a very conservative institution at this time. Finding this system too restrictive, Sloan and his friends, under the tutelage of the older artist Robert Henri, broke away from the academy to form the Charcoal Club in 1893. At the club they read authors such as Emerson, Whitman, Zola, and Thoreau, and drew from live models.

One by one, these artists began to move to New York City. Sloan was reluctant to leave the only home he had really known, but as photographs became more widely used in newspapers, there was no need for Sloan's talents as a newspaper illustrator. When he lost his artist-reporter job in 1903, he and his wife Dolly soon left for New York. The Sloans found an apartment on West Twenty-third Street, in the seedy Tenderloin district of Manhattan. It was here that Sloan began his "City Life" series of etchings including scenes of the working-class engaged in daily activities. During what he called "nightly vigils," Sloan enjoyed peering into the tenement windows of his neighbors and witnessing rooftop scenes from his upper-story studio. These observations of real and intimate moments of New York denizens became the subject matter of his art. In 1909 Charles Wisner Barrell of *The Craftsman* magazine noted that "New York to him [Sloan] is America crystallized, and from his roof or studio window he can watch the pageant of humanity stream by in all its million phases" (Scott 1971, 20). Sloan's paintings were never intended as social criticism, but as simple reflections of city life.

Sloan and his friends soon became known as the Ash Can school. With unrefined, everyday subject matter, their work was often considered vulgar and unseemly. Members of the Pennsylvania Academy believed that art should be charming and include idyllic, rural landscapes and portraits of refined ladies and gentlemen. Yet, Sloan believed that "the real artist finds beauty in common things" (Shi 1995, 262). Because of disagreements with the members of New York's National Academy of Design jury on which he served, the group's leader Robert Henri announced that he and his friends would hold an exhibition in the Macbeth Gallery in February 1908. Henri, Sloan, Glackens, Luks, and Shinn were joined by Arthur B. Davies, Maurice Prendergast, and Ernest Lawson, and christened themselves "The Eight."

In 1910 Sloan joined the Socialist Party and contributed illustrations to the magazine *The Masses*. Later, dismayed by the reported atrocities of World War I, he came to believe that Socialism was not the answer, and he distanced himself from Socialist causes.

Sloan continued to take odd jobs as an illustrator and was not able to sell any of his paintings until 1914. Also at this time he began spending his summers away, first in Gloucester, Massachusetts and then in Santa Fe, New Mexico. With a change in scenery, his subjects turned from dingy city scenes to nudes and landscapes. In 1916, to supplement his income, Sloan began teaching at the Art Students League in New York where some of his most notable

students included Alexander Calder, David Smith, John Graham, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and his future second wife, Helen Farr. In 1918 he became the president of the Society of Independent Artists, a post he held until 1944. Sloan continued to teach until trouble with his eyesight forced him to retire in 1938. In 1939, with Farr's help, he compiled information for *The Gist of Art*, a book based on his lectures.

In the 1940s Sloan became increasingly interested in nudes, and his work began to take on an abstract quality. He experimented with colored glazes and used bold crosshatching. He continued painting New York scenes until the late 1940s, but he became less interested in city subjects and painted fewer of them. A year before his death, he was awarded the Gold Medal from the American Academy of Art. John Sloan died of cancer in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1951.

## ***The Wake of the Ferry II*** **Subject**

*The Wake of the Ferry II* is an example of John Sloan's depictions of modern city life in New York at the turn of the twentieth century. Painted in 1907, Sloan's depiction serves as a document of the ferry, one of the earliest forms of mass transportation. Yet, Sloan's painting is not merely a historical record—it is a painting filled with strong emotion. Using neutral grays and swaying diagonals, he portrayed a solitary figure in stormy weather, which gives the picture a somber mood. The figure is most likely a portrait of his first wife Dolly, who often felt homesick for Philadelphia and made frequent trips alone to visit Pennsylvania. In his diary, Sloan noted that he often felt "aimless without her" (Passantino 1999, 341). The original version of *The Wake of the Ferry*—begun on March 19, 1907 and now at the Detroit Institute of Arts—was damaged by Sloan in a fit of anger resulting from a fight with Dolly. The Phillips Collection owns the second version of the painting begun on May 8, 1907.

The lonely figure leaning on the ferry's rail is in stark contrast to photographs of ferries from this time frame (see figure 12, Tab 4—Primary Sources). Ferries transported hundreds of passengers across the waters around New York City. They not only carried commuters to and from work, but also the millions of immigrants who poured into the city via Ellis Island from 1892 to 1924 (see figure 14, Tab 4—Primary Sources). Sloan has eliminated the teeming masses from the deck of the ferry to reveal a lone passenger caught in deep thought (see figure 13, Tab 4—Primary Sources).

The use of dark, neutral hues emphasizes the gloomy mood, adding to the feeling of sorrow and loneliness. Collector Duncan Phillips noted: "Sloan, during that earlier New York period, was a splendid painter and space composer. He could take the ugly facts of a scene like the deck of a ferry boat on a rainy day and make his use of gray not only dramatic but infinitely subtle in its scale of 'values'" (Phillips 1926, 51). The figure is cast in shadow as she stares out over the water, perhaps contemplating the ghostly outline of the boats on the horizon. The ferry is rocked by whitecaps, indicating rough waters, and the fog obscures visibility. The tilted angle of the ferry's deck adds an aura of uneasiness to the scene.

Sloan's point of view places the viewer on deck, standing unnoticed behind the figure. From this particular vantage point, Sloan pulls the viewer into the painting, creating a palpable sense of the rocking motion of the ferry.

During late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ferry was a popular subject for both artists and writers. Sloan was an avid reader and often discussed the poetry of Walt Whitman with his fellow Ash Can school artists. Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" was a well-known poem about the ferry in New York (see Tab 4—Primary Sources for excerpts from Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"). Whitman used the crossing of the ferry as a metaphor for the passage of time, as he contemplated the significance, or insignificance, of a person's life in the ever-growing and ever-changing city at the turn of the twentieth century. Similarities between Whitman and Sloan have been noted: "Like Whitman, he saw in the grimy city a landscape of robust beauty and sensual allure, a peopled world full of pathos and humor that forever pricked his unexampled curiosity" (Shi 1995, 261–262).

Other artists also chose the ferry as a subject for their works. In 1890 Charles Henry Miller (1842–1922) painted *Scene on the East River with the Ferry "Queens,"* and John Henry Twachtman (1853–1902) painted *Little Giant* about ten years later. What sets Sloan's painting apart is the unusual point of view. While Miller and Twachtman depict the ferry in full view as if seen from the docks, Sloan creates a more intimate view from the deck of the boat. Lewis Hine and Alfred Stieglitz took photographs that focused on the role ferries played in immigration at the turn of the twentieth century. Hine's *Italian Immigrants on Ferry* (1905) and Stieglitz's *The Steerage* (1907) document the actual immigration of people to the United States while Sloan's painting depicts the sensations of motion and mood (see figure 14, Tab 4—Primary Sources).

## Style and Technique

*The Wake of the Ferry II* is an unusual painting in Sloan's oeuvre because it is a reproduction of the earlier work, *The Wake of the Ferry*, which Sloan damaged. At first glance, the two paintings appear almost identical in composition, but upon closer inspection, it is clear that the artist changed the composition and reduced his palette to neutral grays in the later painting.

In the earlier work, the stylistic influence of Robert Henri can be seen in the bold and spontaneous brushwork, a technique Henri adopted from the paintings of Diego Velázquez and Frans Hals. In 1893 Henri introduced Sloan to Beisen Kubota, a Japanese illustrator and art commissioner to the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago. Sloan, who had already begun to collect Japanese ukiyo-e prints by the early 1890s, was impressed with Kubota's Asian brush-and-ink technique called sumi-e. Kubota taught Sloan this brush technique with its emphasis on the contrast of black and white. Sloan adapted the fluid style and tonal grays of sumi-e to his own painting technique, which can be seen in *The Wake of the Ferry II*.

Similarities between this painting and Daumier's work are found in the use of light and dark as well as subject matter (see Honoré Daumier, Nos. 6 and 7, Tab 1—Works of Art). Daumier's

paintings and prints often depict society's downtrodden, with a strong emphasis on mood. As a teacher, Sloan told his students to "study Daumier's drawings. See how he expressed the feeling of light playing over the form. See how he used light and shade to design. In the hands of a master, light and shade is one of the great qualities of art" (Sloan 2000, 63).

## ***Six O'Clock, Winter*** **Subject**

Five years after *The Wake of the Ferry II*, John Sloan painted *Six O'Clock, Winter* (originally titled *Third Avenue, Six O'Clock*). In this painting, Sloan continued his study of city life and transportation, but this time he depicted one of the many elevated trains that lined the city (see figure 16, Tab 4—Primary Sources). The elevated trains, or "Els," stretched the length of Manhattan, running parallel to the numbered avenues. Elevated trains, one of the earliest forms of rapid transit in the United States, developed in New York City in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first El (1867) ran along Ninth Avenue, connecting Dey Street to 29th Street. The Third Avenue El opened in 1878, and a Second Avenue El in 1880. The early Els, powered by noisy, grimy steam engines, were replaced by electric engines between 1900 and 1904. By 1921, at the peak of its usage, the El system carried an estimated 384 million passengers annually. The Els remained in service until 1955, when the last one operating, the Third Avenue El, closed.

*Six O'Clock, Winter* shows the elevated train—identified as the Sixth Avenue El by Duncan Phillips—near the height of its popularity in 1912. The El's massive form looms above the multitudes of commuters and workers on the streets below. Sloan was keenly interested in depicting the dynamics of crowds. This painting directly contrasts his earlier *The Wake of the Ferry II*, which shows only a single passenger. The addition of a tumultuous crowd changes the mood from one of quiet contemplation to the animated atmosphere typically associated with the hustle and bustle of New York City. The El changed the way that people traveled to and from work and created a new class of commuter. Public transportation now extended the boundaries of the city and increased the commuter's mobility, forever changing city life.

Sloan experimented with the effects of artificial lighting, depicting a crowd at dusk, their faces eerily illuminated by the glow of the train's electric lights from above and the shops at street level. The figures in the lower left corner of the composition are cast in strong light, creating a mask-like appearance, while the faces on the right are covered in shadow, making their features nearly indistinguishable. In his *Gist of Art*, Sloan instructed his students how to "draw a crowd of people in a street or room or landscape." He wrote:

... decide whether you want to say that the people dominate the place or that the place is more important than the people. Think of the crowd as a bulk, a chunk of form that has top and front and back. Get the structure of the whole group as a shape, and then describe the shape by saying that it is composed of people. Study the way Daumier and Rembrandt drew groups and crowds. See how they got the gesture of the group. If you go through their drawings you will find many studies of the same group

of people drawn from different positions and in different lighting. They drew the same places over and over again until they got a concept that fully expressed this (Sloan 2000, 78).

In *Six O'Clock, Winter* Sloan emphasized the powerful force of the locomotive over man. The figures appear almost insignificant under the shadow of the machine's imposing hulk.

Movement is also an important aspect of *Six O'Clock, Winter*—not only the movement of the crowd below, but also the train's movement. Although the El has come to a stop for passengers to board or disembark, its power and potential for movement can be felt in the strong diagonal as well as the dynamic perspective. Sloan gives the impression that the El will roar out of the station and off the canvas in a matter of seconds. Its power and importance to society is emphasized through its superior position over the heads of the commuters who are dwarfed by its massive form.

## Style and Technique

Although the theme of city life and transportation is still present in *Six O'Clock, Winter*, the style has changed considerably from Sloan's earlier painting, *The Wake of the Ferry II*. Sloan concentrated more on the effect of color and light than in his earlier *The Wake of the Ferry II*, abandoning the neutral grays of Japanese art and of his mentor, Robert Henri. Sloan's new interest in color theory is attributed to an interest in the theories of Hardesty Maratta. In June 1909 Henri introduced Sloan to Maratta's sophisticated color system, which included a highly structured, systematized formula for color relationships.

Sloan also experimented with the effects of natural and artificial light. As the sun set on a winter evening in New York, he captured the appearance of the fleeting light. *Six O'Clock* depicts the moment when the streetlights and artificial lighting of businesses at street level begin to flicker on, compensating for the diminishing daylight.

In the 1938 retrospective catalogue of the exhibition held at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, the El is identified as "the Third Avenue elevated structure near Eighteenth Street." Quoted from Sloan, the passage goes on to describe *Six O'Clock* as "an average New York crowd dispers[ing] from work. The last rays of the winter sun affect only the sky. I might note here that the pictures from 1909 took on specifically adjusted color qualities. The same palette is never used again. The technical means as far as pigment is concerned are established in advance. Painted from memory" (Phillips Academy 1938). Sloan often painted from memory and extolled the virtues of this technique to his students, informing them that:

... when a great draughtsman like Daumier wanted to draw a tree in an illustration he didn't have to rush out to the country to see nature. His memory was stored with the observations of many trees. He knew how they looked under different conditions, in wind and rain. He knew the character and smell of the forest. And he knew how to



represent the kind of tree he wanted in any position or place because he was familiar with the forms (Sloan 2000, 150).

## Curriculum Connections

**Social Studies:** Have students discuss how both Daumier and Sloan were advocates for the working class. What problems did the working class face in nineteenth-century France? In early twentieth-century America?

SS 1, 4, 5, 6

**Social Studies:** Research the appearance of the ferry in the United States (see figure 12, Tab 4—Primary Sources). How long had the ferry been in operation before Sloan painted his *The Wake of the Ferry II*? What is the significance of the ferry in early twentieth-century America? On immigration (see figure 14, Tab 4—Primary Sources)? Explain the importance of the ferry to the growth of New York.

SS 3

**Language Arts:** Have students write an interior monologue from the point of view of the person on the deck of *The Wake of the Ferry II*. Who could she be? How does she feel? Where is she going? Where has she been? What is awaiting her over the horizon? Suggest parameters for the assignment: prose or poetry; length; identify the passenger's gender, occupation, and specific conflict.

LA 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12

**Language Arts/Visual Arts:** While John Sloan's painting, *The Wake of the Ferry II*, was inspired by Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," the two views of the ferry are dramatically different. Whitman, for example, used the ferry crossing as a metaphor for the passage of time, as he contemplated the significance, or insignificance, of a person's life in the ever-growing and ever-changing city at the turn of the twentieth century. Have students discuss excerpts from Walt Whitman's poem, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (see Tab 4—Primary Sources for excerpts), and then visually read and discuss Sloan's painting. In small collaborative learning groups, have students use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two works. Beneath the diagram each group could write a conclusion about the artists' views of the ferry based on the information in the diagram, using a compound-complex sentence.

LA 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12    VA 2, 3, 4, 6

**Visual Arts:** Sloan used mainly blues and grays in this painting. Why did he paint *The Wake of the Ferry II* monochromatically? Have students create a monochromatic painting.

VA 1, 2, 3

**Visual Arts:** Compare *The Wake of the Ferry II* to a Japanese sumi-e painting. How are the techniques and style similar? Different?

VA 1, 2, 4

**Social Studies/Language Arts/Visual Arts:** After looking at Sloan's painting *Six O'Clock, Winter*, have students read excerpts from the chapter entitled "Six O'Clock," in Theodore Dreiser's *The Color of a Great City* (see Tab 4—Primary Sources for excerpt). Students could discuss what six o'clock symbolizes. Who leaves work at this time of day? How does Dreiser's appraisal add new meaning to Sloan's painting?

SS 2, 3 LA 1, 3 VA 3, 4, 5, 6

**Language Arts/Visual Arts:** In *Six O'Clock, Winter*, Sloan depicted an elevated train in New York with crowds on their way home from work. His viewpoint is from the crowded platform below, looking up at the train. Have students compare and contrast Sloan's viewpoint to William Dean Howells's character in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (see Tab 4—Primary Sources for excerpt). What does this character like about her viewpoint on the El? Students could also look at the turn-of-the-century photograph of the El for a clearer understanding of its placement within the city (see figure I6, Tab 4—Primary Sources).

LA 1, 3 VA 3, 4, 6

**Visual Arts:** Sloan was greatly influenced by Honoré Daumier. In Sloan's notes about crowds, he tells his students to look to Daumier. Have students compare Daumier's *The Uprising* (see No. 6, Honoré Daumier, Tab 1—Works of Art) to Sloan's *Six O'Clock, Winter*. What lessons did Sloan learn?

VA 2, 3, 4

**Science/Visual Arts:** Discuss how Sloan captured the fleeting light of dusk in *Six O'Clock, Winter*. What happens to your eyes at this time of day? Research rods and cones.

SC 2, 3, 4

**Social Studies:** Have students research the rise and fall of the elevated trains in Manhattan (see figure I6, Tab 4—Primary Sources). Who traveled on the Els? What caused their demise?

SS 8

# Mood



5. Crite



6. Daumier



12. Hopper



17. Lawrence, Panel No. 1



27. Sloan



28. Sloan

From the hectic rush-hour commute to the jubilant neighborhood parade, this grouping of images illustrates some of the moods of the city. An artist uses mood to express his or her feelings for a subject and to make a connection to the viewer. Often the artist considers the mood of the work of art its most important component. Notice how Lawrence and Sloan evoke a mood full of hustle and bustle. Both artists group multiple figures together and place them on diagonals to evoke this feeling of activity. Daumier also depicted a crowded city scene; however, observe how the emphasis on the central figure with the upraised gesture changes the painting's mood.

## Curriculum Connections

**Music/Language Arts:** Have students make sounds using voices or instruments to create the mood of the city. Have students tell a story as sounds are made, bringing the story to life.

MU 2, 3 LA 5

**Visual Arts:** Have students study Hopper's *Approaching a City* and Sloan's *Six O'Clock, Winter* and *The Wake of the Ferry II*. All of these images are about transportation and commuting. Have students compare and contrast how they convey mood differently.

VA 3

**Visual Arts:** Have students discuss the reasons why darker colors are thought to evoke powerful responses and create a sense of mystery. Why do dark and neutral hues tend to be disquieting? What do these colors remind us of? To make these questions more concrete, ask students when they feel safer—in the daytime or at night. What kind of mood do we associate with night? Why?

VA 2

**Visual Arts:** Based on the discussion above, have students create their own night or dark city image beginning with black or dark blue paper and using pastels or crayons. Compare these works to pastel or crayon images created on white paper. Note the difference in the mood.

VA 1, 2, 3

**Language Arts/Visual Arts:** In *The Wake of the Ferry II*, John Sloan used a few details to evoke a solemn and somewhat sad mood. Haiku poetry uses a similar technique—a few, carefully chosen words evoke a feeling. Have students brainstorm descriptive words that convey the mood of the Sloan painting. Then have them create a haiku poem about it (first line: 5 syllables; second line: 7 syllables; third line: 5 syllables).

LA 5 VA 3

# Let's Go!

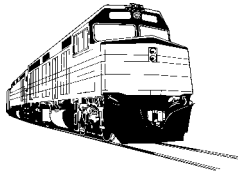
Identify each mode of transportation. Name an advantage and a disadvantage for each.



What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Advantage? \_\_\_\_\_

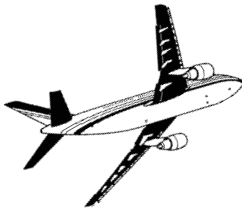
Disadvantage? \_\_\_\_\_



What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Advantage? \_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantage? \_\_\_\_\_



What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Advantage? \_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantage? \_\_\_\_\_



What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Advantage? \_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantage? \_\_\_\_\_



What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Advantage? \_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantage? \_\_\_\_\_



What is it? \_\_\_\_\_

Advantage? \_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantage? \_\_\_\_\_

# Excerpts from *The Color of a Great City*

by Theodore Dreiser, 1923

## Neighborhoods

Yet before I was fifteen years in the city, all of the additional bridges, other than Brooklyn Bridge which was here when I came and which so completely served to change New York from the thing it was then to what it is now, were already in place—Manhattan, Williamsburg, Queens Borough Bridges. And the subways had been built, at least in part. But before then, if anything, the great island, as I have said, was even more compact of varied and foreign groups, and one had only to wander casually and not at any great length to come upon the Irish in the lower East and West Sides; the Syrians in Washington Street—a great mass of them; the Greeks around 26th, 27th and 28th Streets on the West Side; the Italians around Mulberry Bend; the Bohemians in East 67th Street, and the Sicilians in East 116th Street and thereabouts. The Jews were still chiefly on the East Side.

Being fascinated by these varying nationalities, and their neighborhoods, I was given for the first year or two of my stay here to wandering among them, as well as along and through the various parks, the waterfronts and the Bowery, and thinking, thinking, thinking on this welter of life and the difficulties and the strangeness of it. The veritable tides of people that were forever moving here—so different to the Middle-West cities I had known. And the odd, or at least different, devices and trades by which they made their way—the small shops, trades, tricks even. For one thing, I was often given to wondering how so many people could manage to subsist in New York by grinding hand organs alone, or shining shoes or selling newspapers or peanuts, or fruits or vegetables from a small stand or cart.

## Going to Work

Have you ever arisen at dawn or earlier in New York and watched the outpouring in the meaner side-streets or avenues? It is a wondrous thing. It seems to have so little to do with the later, showier, brisker life of the day, and yet it has so very much. It is in the main so drab or shabby-smart at best, poor copies of what you see done more efficiently later in the day. Typewriter girls in almost stage or society costumes entering shabby offices; boys and men made up to look like

actors and millionaires turning into the humblest institutions, where they are clerks and managers. These might be called the machinery of the city, after the elevators and street cars and wagons are excluded, the implements by which things are made to go....

Already at six and six-thirty in the morning they have begun to trickle small streams of human beings Manhattan or cityward, and by seven and seven-fifteen these streams have become sizable affairs. By seven-thirty and eight they have changed into heavy, turbulent rivers, and by eight-fifteen and eight-thirty and nine they are raging torrents, no less. They overflow all the streets and avenues and every available means of conveyance. They are pouring into all available doorways, shops, factories, office buildings—those huge affairs towering so significantly above them. Here they stay all day long, causing those great hives and their adjacent streets to flush with a softness of color not indigenous to them, and then at night, between five and six, they are going again, pouring forth over the bridges and through the subways and across the ferries and out on the trains, until the last drop of them appears to have been exuded, and they are pocketed in some outlying side-street or village or metropolitan hall-room—and the great, turbulent night of the city is on once more.

## Six O'Clock

To me, personally, there is no hour which quite equals that which heralds the close of the day's toil. I know, too, that others are important, the getting up and lying down of men, but this of ceasing after a day's work, when we lay down the ax or the saw, or the pen or pencil, stow our machine, take off our apron and quit—that is wonderful. Others may quit earlier. The lawyer and the merchant and the banker may cease their labors an hour earlier. The highly valued clerk or official is not opposed if he leaves at four-thirty or at five, and at five-thirty skilled labor generally may cease. But at six o'clock the rank and file are through, "the great unwashed," as they have been derisively termed, the real laboring man and laboring woman. It is for them then that the six o'clock whistle blows; that the six o'clock bell strikes; it is for them that the evening lamps are lit in millions of homes; it is for them that the blue smoke of an evening fire curls upward at nightfall and that the street cars and vehicles of transfer run thick and black.

The streets are pouring with them at six o'clock. They are as a great tide in the gray and dark. They come bearing their baskets and buckets, their armfuls of garnered wood, their implements of labor and of accomplishment, and their

faces streaked with the dirt of their toil. While you and I, my dear sir, have been sitting at our ease this last hour they have been working, and where we began at nine they began at seven. They have worked all day, not from seven-thirty until five-thirty or from nine until four, but from seven to six, and they are weary.

You can see it in their faces. Some have a lean, pinched appearance as though they were but poorly nourished or greatly enervated. Some have a furtive, hurried look, as though the problem of rent and food and clothing were inexplicable and they were thinking about it all the time. Some are young yet and unscathed—the most are young (for the work of the world is done by the youth of the world)—and they do not see as yet to what their labor tends. Nearly all are still lightened with a sense of opportunity; for what may the world not hold in store? Are not its bells still tinkling, its lights twinkling? Are not youth and health and love the solvents of all our woes?

These crowds when the whistles blow come as great movements of the sea come. If you stand in the highways of traffic they are at once full to overflowing. If you watch the entrance to great mills they pour forth a living stream, dark, energetic, undulant. To see them melting away into the highways and byways is like seeing a stream tumble and sparkle, like listening to the fading echoes of a great bell. They come, vivid, vibrant, like a deep, full-throated note. They go again as bell notes finally go.



## Excerpt from *A Hazard of New Fortunes*

by William Dean Howells, 1890

At Third Avenue they took the Elevated for which she confessed an infatuation. She declared it the most ideal way of getting about in the world, and was not ashamed when he reminded her of how she used to say that nothing under the sun could induce her to travel on it. She now said that the night transit was even more interesting than the day, and that the fleeing intimacy you formed with people in second and third floor interiors, while all the usual street life went on underneath, had a domestic intensity mixed with a perfect repose that was the last effect of good society with all its security and exclusiveness. He said it was better than the theatre, of which it reminded him, to see those people through their windows: a family party of work-folk at a late tea, some of the men in their shirt-sleeves; a woman sewing by a lamp; a mother laying her child in its cradle; a man with his head fallen on his hands upon a table; a girl and her lover leaning over the window-sill together. What suggestion! what drama? what infinite interest! At the Forty-second Street station they stopped a minute on the bridge that crosses the track to the branch road for the Central Depot, and looked up and down the long stretch of the Elevated to north and south. The track that found and lost itself a thousand times in the flare and tremor of the innumerable lights; the moony sheen of the electrics mixing with the reddish points and blots of gas far and near; the architectural shapes of houses and churches and towers, rescued by the obscurity from all that was ignoble in them, and the coming and going of the trains marking the stations with vivid or fainter plumes of flame-shot steam formed an incomparable perspective. They often talked afterward of the superb spectacle, which in a city full of painters nightly works its unrecorded miracles; and they were just to the Arachne roof spun in iron over the cross street on which they ran to the depot; but for the present they were mostly inarticulate before it. They had another moment of rich silence when they paused in the gallery that leads from the Elevated station to the waiting-rooms in the Central Depot and looked down upon the great night trains lying on the tracks dim under the rain of gas-lights that starred without dispersing the vast darkness of the place. What forces, what fates, slept in these bulks which would soon be hurling themselves north and south and west through the night! Now they waited there like fabled monsters of Arab story ready for the magician's touch, tractable, reckless, will-less—organized lifelessness full of a strange semblance of life.

# Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

by Walt Whitman, 1856

I

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!  
Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!  
On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more  
curious to me than you suppose,  
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my  
meditations, than you might suppose.

2

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,  
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated  
yet part of the scheme,  
The similitudes of the past and those of the future,  
The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street  
and the passage over the river,  
The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away,  
The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,  
The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,  
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,  
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to  
the south and east,  
Others will see the islands large and small;  
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,  
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,  
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the  
ebb-tide.

3

It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,  
I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,  
Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,  
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,  
Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh'd,

Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood yet was  
hurried,  
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd pipes of  
steamboats, I look'd.  
I too many and many a time cross'd the river of old,  
Watched the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating with motionless  
wings, oscillating their bodies,  
Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in strong  
shadow,  
Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south,  
Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,  
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,  
Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit  
water,  
Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and south-westward,  
Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,  
Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the vessels arriving,  
Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,  
Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the ships at anchor,  
The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars,  
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine pennants,  
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilothouses,  
The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,  
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,  
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolic-some crests and  
glistening,  
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite storehouses  
by the docks,  
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by the  
barges, the hay-boat, the belated lighter,  
On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly  
into the night,  
Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and yellow light over the tops of  
houses, and down into the clefts of streets.

4

These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,  
I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river,  
The men and women I saw were all near to me,  
Others the same—others who look back on me because I look'd forward to them,  
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)



Figure 7. *John Sloan and the art staff of the Philadelphia Inquirer, 1894*, photograph, Sloan Collection, Delaware Art Museum.

**BEST RESULTS**  
 THE PRESS  
**BEST RESULTS**

PHILADELPHIA, MONDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 3, 1896. FIFTEEN PAGES.

SCENE ON CHESTNUT STREET AT THE HEIGHT OF THE GREAT CONFLAGRATION

The Firemen kept a close fight, although leaving little of the advantage of a large supply of water. The Water Tower Furnace escaped harm, but the fire had to be fought to reach the top stories.

**GREATEST FIRE IN MANY YEARS.**  
 Buildings and Goods Destroyed.  
 Large Store Completely Destroyed.  
 State Lumbermen & Co's Store, Lumber Yard and Warehouse Completely Destroyed.  
 FIRE TOWER AT THE SCENE.  
 Close of the Firemen's Fight.  
 FIREMEN KEEPING FIGHT.  
 WATER TOWER AT THE SCENE.  
 FIRE TOWER AT THE SCENE.

**MORE TROOPS TO GO TO CUBA.**  
 FOR 1500 MORE TO BE SENT TO SERVICE AGAIN IN REVOL.  
 GOVERNMENT OF CUBA.  
 MORE TROOPS TO GO TO CUBA.

**MARKET REPORT.**  
 Wheat, Flour, Corn, etc.

**COMMODITY REPORT.**  
 Oil, Sugar, etc.

**FINANCIAL REPORT.**  
 Bonds, Stocks, etc.

**PERSONAL REPORT.**  
 Local news items.

WHEAT	...
CORN	...
RYE	...
BARLEY	...
OATS	...
...	...

**LOCAL NEWS.**  
 Various news items from Philadelphia.

Figure 8. Front page of the Philadelphia Press, February 3, 1896.



Figure 12. *John G. McCullough, Ferryboat, 1896, photograph, The Byron Collection, The Museum of the City of New York.*



Figure 13. P. L. Sperr, *St. George, Staten Island area from ferry*, 1936, photograph, The New York Public Library.

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