

Five Points, Manhattan

Five Points (or **The Five Points**) was a neighborhood in central lower Manhattan in New York City. The neighborhood was generally defined as being bound by Centre Street in the west, The Bowery in the east, Canal Street in the north and Park Row in the south. The former neighborhood known as Five Points is now split between the Civic Center on the west and south and Chinatown on the east and north.

The name Five Points was derived from the five-pointed intersection created by Orange Street (now Baxter) and Cross Street (now Mosco); from this intersection Anthony Street (now Worth) began and ran in a northwest

direction, creating a triangular-shaped block thus the fifth "point". To the west of this "point" ran Little Water Street (which no longer exists) north to south, creating a triangular plot which would become known as Paradise Square or Paradise Park.

Five Points gained international notoriety as a disease-ridden crime-infested slum that existed for well over 70 years.



Five Points intersection painted by George Catlin in 1827; the triangular building in the center is located on what would be known as "Paradise Square", Anthony Street veers off on right, Cross Street on the left and Orange Street runs left to right in foreground

History

Collect Pond

The topography of the area that would become Five Points was a major factor in the progression of the neighborhood from middle class homes built upon reclaimed land to a sprawling, disease-ridden slum in a relatively short period of time.

The Collect Pond (or Fresh Water Pond) was a body of spring fed fresh water, occupying approximately 48 acres (194,000 m²) and as deep as 60 feet (18 m). The pond was located in an inverted U-shaped valley with a linear portion in the north heading northwest to the Hudson River. The eastern and western sections of the valley were separated by a hill the Dutch called *Kalck Hoek*, (Dutch meaning Chalk Hook), named for the numerous oyster shell middens left by Native Americans. The elevation rose in the south, with *Pot Bakers Hill* dominating the south southwestern shore.

The Collect Pond was located in the eastern section of the valley, with *Kalck Hoek* to the west and Bayard Mount-at 110 ft. the tallest hill in lower Manhattan, to the northeast. A stream flowed north out of the pond and then northwest through a salt

marsh (which, after being drained, became "Lispenard Meadows") to the Hudson River, and another stream, known as the *Old Wreck Brook* or the *Old Kil* flowed out from the southeast through *Bestevaer Swamp* (later *Beekman's Swamp*) called *Bestevaer Kreupelbosch* by the Dutch to the East River.^[1] The southwestern shore of the Collect Pond was the site of a Native American settlement known as Werpoes. A small band of Canarsie who were Munsee Indians, -the northernmost division of the Lenape- occupied the site until the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam was established.^[2]

The pond was the main source of drinking water for the City of New York^[3] and freshwater fish. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, various commercial enterprises were built along the shores of the Collect Pond, in order to use the water. These businesses included Coulthards Brewery, Nicholas Bayard's slaughterhouse on Mulberry Street (which was nicknamed "Slaughterhouse Street"),^[4] numerous tanneries on the southeastern shore, and the pottery works of German immigrants Johan Willem Crolius and Johan Remmey on Pot Bakers Hill on the



The Collect Pond and Five Points on the topographical map by Egbert Viele Five Points is where Park Street (Cross) intersects with Baxter Street (Orange) and Worth Street (Anthony)



The Lenape were the first inhabitants of what would become Five Points

south-southwestern shore.^[5]

The contaminated wastewater of these businesses flowed back into the pond, creating a severe pollution problem and environmental health hazard. Pierre Charles L'Enfant proposed cleaning the Collect Pond and making it a centerpiece of a recreational park, around which the residential areas of the city could grow. His proposal was rejected and it was decided to fill in the pond. This was done with fill partially obtained from leveling Bayards Mount and Kalck Hoek. The landfill was completed in 1811 and Middle class homes were soon built on the reclaimed land.^[6]

The landfill was poorly engineered. The buried vegetation began to release methane gas (a byproduct of decomposition) and the area, still in a natural depression, lacked adequate storm sewers. As a result, the ground gradually subsided. Houses shifted on their foundations, the unpaved streets were often buried in a foot of mud mixed with human and animal excrement and mosquitos bred in the stagnant pools created by the poor drainage.

Most middle and upper class inhabitants fled the area, leaving the neighborhood open to poor immigrants that began arriving in the early 1820s. This influx reached a height in the 1840s, with large numbers of Irish fleeing starvation in the Irish Potato Famine.^[7]

The Slum

At Five Points' "height," only certain areas of London's East End vied with it in the western world for sheer population density, disease, infant and child mortality, unemployment, prostitution, violent crime, and other classic ills of the urban destitute. However, it was the original American melting pot, at first consisting primarily of newly emancipated African Americans (gradual emancipation led to the end of slavery in New York on July 4, 1827) and Irish, who had been a presence in the area since the 1600s.

The local politics of "the Old Sixth ward" (The Points' primary municipal voting district), while not free of corruption, set important precedents for the election of non-Anglo-Saxons to key offices. Although the tensions between the African Americans and the Irish were legendary, their

cohabitation in Five Points was the first large-scale instance of volitional racial integration in American history. In the end, the Five Points African American community moved to Manhattan's West Side and to the then-undeveloped north of the island.

Five Points is alleged to have sustained the highest murder rate of any slum in the world. According to an old New York urban legend, the Old Brewery, an overcrowded tenement on Cross Street housing 1,000 poor, is said to have had a murder a night for 15 years until its demolition in 1852.^{[8][9]}

Five Points was dominated by rival gangs like the Roach Guards, Dead Rabbits and Bowery Boys. According to Herbert Asbury's book *The Gangs of New York*, police arrested 82,072 New Yorkers in 1862, or 10 percent of the city's population. In 1864, five police officers were murdered. To give a sense of the era, Asbury's book tells the



Mulberry Bend in the Five Points neighborhood (Jacob Riis c. 1896) looking north from just above Cross Street. The tenements on left were razed to create Mulberry Bend Park (now Columbus Park), the two tenements visible on right, 46 Mulberry Street (c. 1886) in foreground and 48-50 Mulberry Street on "Bend" are still there as of May 2011

story of a little girl who lived with 25 people in a small basement room and was stabbed to death for a penny she had begged. Asbury reports the girl's body lay in a corner for five days before her mother dug her a shallow grave in the floor.

Almack's (also known as "Pete Williams's Place"), an African American-owned dance hall located at 67 Orange St in Mulberry Bend (today's Baxter St.), just south of its intersection with Bayard St., was home to a fusion of Irish reels and jigs with the African shuffle.^{[10][11]} As it happened in other parts of America where different ethnic groups merged, but mainly European and African as done earlier by the New Orleans, Jamaican, Cuban and much earlier by Flamenco musicians, this music and dance had spontaneously developed on the street from competition between African American and Irish American musicians and dancers, spilling into Almack's, where it gave rise in the short term to tap dance (see Master Juba) and in the long term to a music hall genre that was a major precursor to American jazz and rock and roll. This ground is today occupied by Columbus Park, used primarily by residents of modern Chinatown.

Charles Dickens: American Notes for General Circulation



Charles Dickens in 1842



Coulthard's Brewery (c.1792), converted to a tenement known as "The Old Brewery" after Panic of 1837^[12]

Charles Dickens described Five Points in 1842 in his book *American Notes for General Circulation*:

"What place is this, to which the squalid street conducts us? A kind of square of leprous houses, some of which are attainable only by crazy wooden stairs without. What lies behind this tottering flight of steps? Let us go on again, and plunge into the Five Points."

"This is the place; these narrow ways diverging to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruit as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home and all the world over."

"Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken forays. Many of these pigs live here. Do they ever wonder why their masters walk upright instead of going on all fours, and why they talk instead of grunting?"^[13]

Infectious diseases

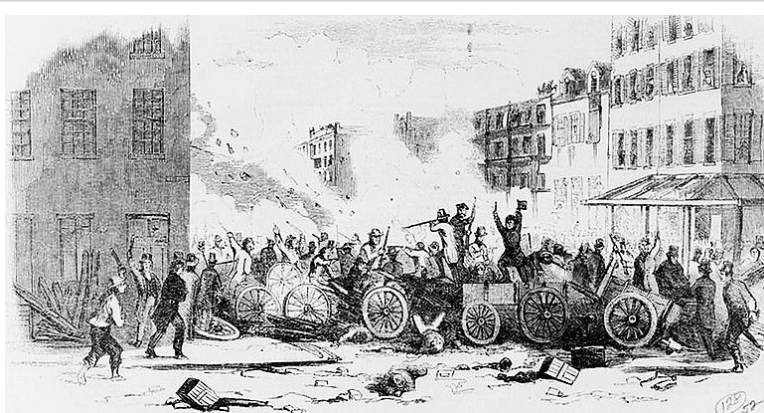
Infectious diseases such as cholera, yellow fever, typhus and tuberculosis plagued New York City since the Dutch colonial era. The poor sanitary conditions, overcrowded dwellings and lack of even rudimentary healthcare made impoverished areas such as Five Points ideal for the development and transmission of these diseases. Several epidemics swept the City of New York in the 18th and 19th centuries, some of which originated in Five Points. In June 1832, an outbreak of cholera in Five Points spread rapidly throughout the crowded, unsanitary dwellings of the neighborhood before spreading to the rest of New York City.^[14] Cholera epidemics would break out again in subsequent years in 1849 and 1866. These epidemics were seen by some as resulting from the immorality of the residents of the slum:

"Every day's experience gives us increased assurance of the safety of the temperate and prudent, who are in circumstances of comfort.... The disease is now, more than before rioting in the haunts of infamy and pollution. A prostitute at 62 Mott Street, who was decking herself before the glass at 1 o'clock yesterday, was carried away in a hearse at half past three o'clock. The broken down constitutions of these miserable creatures, perish almost instantly on the attack.... But the business part of our population, in general, appear to be in perfect health and security."

—"New-York Mercury, 18 July 1832"

Riots

Anti-abolitionist riots of 1834: Also known as the **Farren Riots**, occurred in New York City over a series of four nights, beginning on July 7, 1834. Their deeper origins^[15] lay in the combination of anti-Catholic nativism and Abolitionism among the genteel evangelical Protestants who had controlled the city since the Revolution and the fear and resentment of blacks among the growing numbers of Irish^[16] Among the casualties of the riots was St. Philip's Episcopal Church an African American church at 122 Centre Street which was sacked and looted by the white mob.



The Dead Rabbits Riot in 1857 on Bayard Street in the Five Points

“Brick-bats^[17], stones and clubs were flying thickly around, and from the windows in all directions, and the men ran wildly about brandishing firearms. Wounded men lay on the sidewalks and were trampled upon. Now the Rabbits would make a combined rush and force their antagonists up Bayard street to the Bowery. Then the fugitives, being reinforced, would turn on their pursuers and compel a retreat to Mulberry, Elizabeth and Baxter streets.”

— New York Times, *July 6, 1857*

Dead Rabbits Riot: The riot began when the Dead Rabbits destroyed the headquarters of the Bowery Boys at 26 Bowery on July 4, 1857. The Bowery Boys retaliated which led to a large scale riot which waged back and forth on Bayard Street between the Bowery and Mulberry street. There would be further rioting on July 5. The Bowery Boys and Dead Rabbits fought again in front of 40 and 42 Bowery Street (original buildings still extant in May 2011), erecting barricades in the street. On July 6 the Bowery Boys fought the Kerryonians (Irishmen from County Kerry) at Anthony and Centre Street.

Taking advantage of the disorganized state of the city's police force, brought about by the conflict between the Municipal and Metropolitan police, the fighting would spiral into widespread looting and damage of property by gangsters and other criminals from all parts of the city. It is estimated that between 800 and 1,000 gang members took part in the riots, along with several hundred others who used the disturbance to loot the Bowery area. It was the largest disturbance since the Astor Place Riot in 1849, and the biggest scene of gang violence, unsurpassed until the New York Draft Riots of 1863. Order was restored only by the New York State Militia, supported by detachments of city police, under Major-General Charles W. Sandford. Eight people were reported killed and at least 100 seriously injured although the number of killed and injured was probably much higher.

New York City draft riots (July 13 to July 16, 1863; known at the time as **Draft Week**^[18]) were riots in response to the Emancipation Proclamation which was signed into law in January 1863 and led to increased anxiety among New York's white proslavery supporters of the Democratic Party. Historians such as Eric Foner theorize that the riots were led by "the Irish" who feared increased "competition" from emancipated southern blacks fleeing to the north for the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs they often were employed in (policemen, schoolteachers, leather workers, etc.)^[19]

In March 1863, stricter federal draft laws were enacted which exacerbated the already volatile situation. All male citizens between twenty and thirty-five and all unmarried men between thirty-five and forty-five years of age were subject to conscription and were required to register for the draft. Those eligible for military conscription had their names entered into a lottery which favored the more affluent who could hire a substitute to fulfill their military service or pay the federal government three hundred dollars to avoid enlistment. Blacks, were exempt from the draft as they were ruled not to be citizens by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sanford* 60 U.S. 393^[20] (1857). The dwellings of African Americans were sacked and looted on various streets in Five Points.

President Abraham Lincoln sent several regiments of militia and volunteer troops returning from the Battle of Gettysburg to regain control of the city.^{[21][22]}

Social reformation

Various efforts by different charitable organizations and individuals, most Christian themed, attempted to ameliorate the suffering of the poor in Five Points. Padre Felix Varela- a Cuban-born priest, established a Roman Catholic parish -The Church of the Immigrants-later changed to Church of the Transfiguration, in Five Points in 1827 to minister to the poor Irish Catholics. The parish relocated to the corner of Mott and Cross Street in 1853 when they purchased Zion Protestant Episcopal Church (c.1801) from the Episcopalian congregation.

Slum clearance

The first call for clearing the slums of Five Points through wholesale demolition came in 1831 from merchants who maintained businesses in close proximity to the Five Points neighborhood. Slum clearance efforts (promoted in particular by Jacob Riis, famed author of *How the Other Half Lives*), succeeded in razing Mulberry Bend, one of the worst sections of the Five points neighborhood, which was turned into a park designed by Calvert Vaux called Mulberry Bend Park, now called Columbus Park,^[23] that opened in 1897.

"Petition to Have the Five Points Opened," 1831.



Bandit's Roost, located in the notorious Mulberry Bend fifty-seven years after "Petition to Have the Five Points Opened," in 1831 (1888 Jacob Riis)

Background information: Merchants owning property along the periphery of Five Points petitioned the municipal government in 1829 to demolish the heart of the slum by widening and extending Anthony and Cross Streets.

"That the place known as "Five points" has long been notorious... as being the nursery where every species of vice is conceived and matured; that it is infested by a class of the most abandoned and desperate character....

"[They] are abridged from enjoying themselves in their sports, from the apprehension... that they may be enticed from the path of rectitude, by being familiarized with vice; and thus advancing step by step, be at last swallowed up in this sink of pollution, this vortex of irremediable infamy.

"In conclusion your Committee remark, that this hot-bed of infamy, this modern Sodom, is situated in the very heart of your City, and near the centre of business and of respectable population.... Remove this nucleus—scatter its present population over a larger surface—throw open this part of your city to the enterprise of active and respectable men, and you will have effected much for which good men will be grateful."

- "Petition to Have the Five Points Opened," Board of Assistant Aldermen documents (24 October 1831), Municipal Archives, City of New York.^[24]

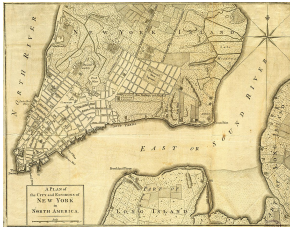
Modern era

What was Five Points is today covered in part in the west and south by large city, state and federal administration buildings and courthouses known collectively as Civic Center, Manhattan, plus Columbus Park, Collect Pond Park and Foley Square and various facilities of the New York City Department of Corrections clustering around lower Centre Street. The corrections facilities are the most direct link to the neighborhood's past, as the infamous Tombs Prison, in which many criminals from Five Points were incarcerated and quite a few executed, stood near the site of the current "City Prison Manhattan" at 125 White St. The northeastern and eastern portion of Five Points is now part of sprawling Chinatown. Many tenement buildings dating from the late 19th century still line the streets in this area.

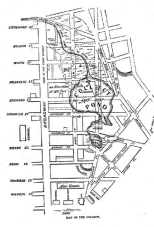
The exact location of the former "five points" intersection itself is currently the intersection of Worth (Anthony) and Baxter (Orange). Mosco (Cross) no longer extends to that intersection, and the section of Baxter south of it no longer exists. Little Water Street no longer exists.

Maps

The physical layout of the Five Points intersection changed throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.



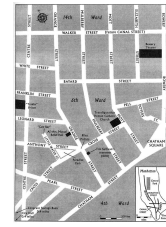
1776 British map showing the Collect Pond ("Fresh Water"), the canals used to drain the adjacent salt marsh and the tanneries on the eastern shore



1800 map with an 1873 street plan overlay the location of future Five Points intersection at lower right of Collect Pond



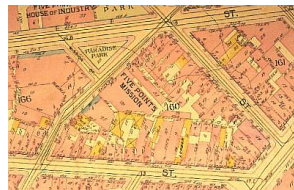
1831 map showing Five Points within the Sixth Ward



1851 map showing Five Points within the Sixth Ward



1853 map of Five Points intersection showing original street names



1902 map

Gangs of New York

Gangs of New York is a 2002 historical film set in the mid-19th century in the Five Points district of New York City. It was directed by Martin Scorsese and written by Jay Cocks, Steven Zaillian, and Kenneth Lonergan. The film was inspired by Herbert Asbury's 1928 nonfiction book, *The Gangs of New York*. It was made in Cinecittà, Rome, distributed by Miramax Films and nominated for numerous awards, including the Academy Award for Best Picture.

The film begins in 1846 and quickly jumps to 1862. The two principal issues of the era in New York were Irish immigration to the city and the Federal government's execution of the ongoing Civil War. The story follows gang



Set of *Gangs of New York* built at Cinecittà Studios in Rome, Italy

leader William "the Butcher" Cuttin (Daniel Day-Lewis) in his roles as crime boss and political kingmaker under the helm of "Boss" Tweed (Jim Broadbent). The film culminates in a violent confrontation between Cutting and his mob with the protagonist Amsterdam Vallon (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his immigrant allies, which coincides with the New York City draft riots of 1863.

In another film reference, in *The Sting*, mob boss Doyle Lonnegan (Robert Shaw) is known to come from Five Points; as part of the plan to gain Lonnegan's confidence, Johnny Hooker (Robert Redford) claims to be from the same neighborhood.

Gallery



African Burial Ground on the south shore of the Collect Pond-active until 1792, was the burial ground for New York City's free blacks and African slaves, located a short distance southwest of future Five Points intersection.



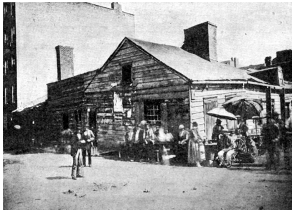
African American slave being burned at the stake after New York Conspiracy of 1741. 17 black men, two white men, and two white women were hanged at the gibbet next to the Powderhouse on the narrow point of land between the Collect Pond and the Little Collect, 13 were burned at the stake a little east on Magazine Street<ref>Digital History: Title: Fear of Slave Revolts Author: Daniel Horsmanden



Edward Mooney House built between 1785 and 1789 by wealthy butcher Edward Mooney on the corner of The Bowery and Pell Street on land seized from James Delancey, a British loyalist during the American Revolutionary War



The Bulls Head Tavern (c. 1755) located approximately at The Bowery and Canal Street served the thriving slaughterhouse and tannery industry, the area was surrounded by holding pens with slaughterhouses along Mulberry Street^[25]



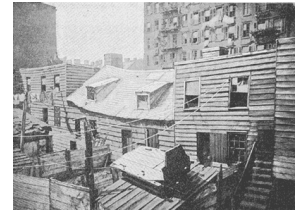
A corner building which served as a grocery store and liquor store on Orange Street and Anthony Street at the southwest corner of Mulberry Bend in Five Points (c. 1852)



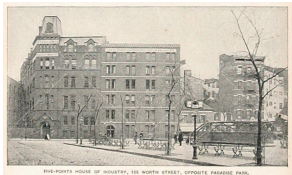
Five Points brick tenements began replacing older wooden buildings; the southwest corner of Mulberry Bend in Five Points with Orange Street running north



Bottle Alley located in Mulberry Bend just south of Bandit's Roost. A crime scene photograph used in a murder trial. The X marks location where victim was found.



Rear pre-Civil War Era tenements constructed of wood in Mulberry Bend in the Five Points neighborhood.



Five Points House of Industry at 155 Worth Street in 1893 opposite Paradise Square



Baxter Street Alley, Rag-Picker's Row" at 59 Baxter Street (c. 1898 Jacob Riis)



Barney Flynn's Old Tree House a bar in the Edward Mooney House in 1899 showing Chuck Connors^[26]



Chinese Theatre 5-7 Doyers Street, scene of multiple murders^[27]



Mulberry Street (c.1900) taken from west side of Mulberry north of Bayard Street looking toward Canal Street



New York Halls of Justice known as "The Tombs"



Chinese Tuxedo restaurant at 2 Doyers Street



Church of the Transfiguration (built 1801 as Zion Protestant Episcopal Church bought 1853 by Catholic Archdiocese of New York) on the corner of Mott and Mosco Streets. The parish was founded by Padre Félix Varela y Morales in 1827<ref>Church of Zion and St. Timothy (Protestant Episcopal) [28]



The Black Horse Tavern on the corner of Mulberry and Park Street, the Church of the Transfiguration is in the background; picture is c.1895-1899



Mugshot of Al Capone-nicknamed "Scarface", was member of the Five Points Gang along with Lucky Luciano

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- [3] Julia Solis: *New York underground: the anatomy of a city* p.76
- [4] [*New York Times*:ABATTOIRS.; History of New-York Slaughter-Houses-Interesting and Curious Data. (1866)<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F2091FFC3859107B93C3A9178FD85F428684F9>"]
- [5] *Craftsmen In Clay* (<http://www.corzilius.org/Narratives/AmericanCraftsmenInClay.htm>)
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- [11] Mark Kurlansky: *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell* p. 157
- [12] William Smith Pelletreau: *Early New York houses: with historical & genealogical notes*; p.208 (1900, reprint 2010) ISBN 1-176-32311-3
- [13] Charles Dickens: *American Notes for General Circulation* p.61
- [14] Stephanie True Peters: *Cholera: Curse of the Nineteenth Century* p.26
- [15] Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace devote a chapter, "White, Green and Black", of *Gotham: a history of New York City to 1898*, 1999:542-62 to the riots (pp 556-59) and their causes.
- [16] In 1827 Britain repealed legislation controlling and restricting emigration from Ireland, and 20,000 Irish emigrated; by 1835 over 30,000 Irish arrived in New York annually (Burrows and Wallace 1999:543).
- [17] <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/brickbat>
- [18] *Barnes 5* ([http://books.google.com/books?vid=LCCN01016825&id=0mUod9zTN4kC&pg=PA2&vq="Riot+Week"](http://books.google.com/books?vid=LCCN01016825&id=0mUod9zTN4kC&pg=PA2&vq=))
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External links

- Gregory Chritiano:Where the Gangs Lived-New York's Five Points (http://www.urbanography.com/5_points/5p2.html)
 - Official site of the federal government's Five Points archaeological dig (<http://r2.gsa.gov/fivept/fphome.htm>)
 - Article including contemporary news accounts of 1857 Police and Gang Riots (http://www.urbanography.com/5_points/index.html)
 - Five Points on Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&q=worth+st.+&+baxter+st.,+new+york,+ny&ie=UTF8&om=1&z=16&ll=40.714362,-74.000452&spn=0.006408,0.021629&t=h>)
 - 2004 Frances Carle (Asbury) (<http://herbertasbury.com/gangsofnewyork/>)
 - History of NY Chinatown and the Five Points (<http://www.nychinatown.org/history/1800s.html>) includes a map of the area then, and now.
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