

Day

Urban Castles

Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism in New York City, 1890-1943

In the first comprehensive investigation of the role of landlords in shaping the urban landscapes of today, Jared Day explores the unique case of New York City from the close of the nineteenth century through the World War II era. During this period, tenement landlords were responsible for designing and shaping America's urban landscapes, building housing for the city's ever-growing industrial workforce. Fueled by the illusion of easy money, entrepreneurs managed their buildings in ways that punished compassion and rewarded neglect and created some of the most haunting images of urban squalor in American history. Urban Castles mines a previously uninvestigated body of tenant and landlord newspapers, journals, and real estate records to understand how tenement landlords operated in an era before tenant rights developed into a central issue for urban reformers. Day contends that perhaps more than any other group of property owners urban landlords stood upon the very fault lines of class, ethnicity, and race. In contrast to many urban histories set in executive boardrooms and state houses, and which chronicle struggles between large corporations, government officials, and organized labor, this fascinating work deals with the more chaotic world of small-scale entrepreneurs and their frequently antagonistic relationships with their customers working-class tenants. Urban Castles is a richly informative chronicle of the dark underbelly of America's emerging welfare state. The neglected side of this important story covered by Day's research says much about the sea changes in landlord-tenant relations and urban policy today.

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