



# Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century

By Nicholas Dagen Bloom

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**Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century** By  
Nicholas Dagen Bloom

When it comes to large-scale public housing in the United States, the consensus for the past decades has been to let the wrecking balls fly. The demolition of infamous projects, such as Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis and the towers of Cabrini-Green in Chicago, represents to most Americans the fate of all public housing. Yet one notable exception to this national tragedy remains. The New York City Housing Authority, America's largest public housing manager, still maintains over 400,000 tenants in its vast and well-run high-rise projects. While by no means utopian, New York City's public housing remains an acceptable and affordable option.

The story of New York's success where so many other housing authorities faltered has been ignored for too long. *Public Housing That Worked* shows how New York's administrators, beginning in the 1930s, developed a rigorous system of public housing management that weathered a variety of social and political challenges. A key element in the long-term viability of New York's public housing has been the constant search for better methods in fields such as tenant selection, policing, renovation, community affairs, and landscape design.

Nicholas Dagen Bloom presents the achievements that contradict the common wisdom that public housing projects are inherently unmanageable. By focusing on what worked, rather than on the conventional history of failure and blame, Bloom provides useful models for addressing the current crisis in affordable urban housing. *Public Housing That Worked* is essential reading for practitioners and scholars in the areas of public policy, urban history, planning, criminal justice, affordable housing management, social work, and urban affairs.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Nicholas Dagen Bloom's bold thesis is powerfully argued and effectively overturns much received wisdom about the history of public housing in the United States. This well researched and clearly written book will undoubtedly trigger a fierce debate both among historians and those interested in current housing policy."—Robert Brueggemann, author of *Sprawl: A Compact History*

"While high-rise public housing in the United States is widely regarded as a disaster, the experiment in New York City has thrived for more than seventy years. Nicholas Bloom's well-written, well-researched, and well-illustrated work provides the most sophisticated answers yet to this American paradox."—Kenneth T. Jackson, Columbia University

"Highly recommended."—*Choice*

"In *Public Housing That Worked*, Nicholas Dagen Bloom offers the best examination to date of the origins, choices, mistakes, and management of the New York City Housing Authority from its beginnings in the 1930s up through the present. He stresses effective management as the principal reason behind why the city's public stock of housing has survived in decent condition while scores of projects across the country have been demolished. The book should be essential reading for planners and policy analysts seeking a detailed look inside how and why New York's public housing became a notable if controversial exception."—John Goering, Baruch College and CUNY Graduate Center and former HUD project manager

#### About the Author

Nicholas Dagen Bloom is Chair of Interdisciplinary Studies at the New York Institute of Technology and author of *Merchant of Illusion: James Rouse, America's Salesman of the Businessman's Utopia*.

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