



Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology, and Urban Ambition in America, 1829--1929 (Studies in Industry and Society)

Molly W. Berger

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From the time they emerged in American cities in the 1820s, commercial luxury hotels were far more than places where a traveler could eat and sleep -- they were icons of style, opulence, and technological sophistication. Molly W. Berger offers a compelling history of the American hotel and how it captured the public's imagination as it came to represent the complex -- and often contentious -- relationship among luxury, economic development, and the ideals of a democratic society. From New York to San Francisco and points in between, Berger profiles the country's most prestigious hotels, including Boston's 1829 Tremont, which served as a model for luxury hotel design; San Francisco's world famous Palace, completed in 1875; and Chicago's enormous Stevens, built two years before the great crash of 1929. The fascinating stories behind their design, construction, and marketing reveal in rich detail how these buildings became cultural symbols that shaped the urban landscape. Though America's large, luxury hotels were impressive architectural and corporate accomplishments, they were lightning rods for public debate about urban development and economic power. Inside the buildings unfolded human dramas that shaped ideas about race, gender, and class. Berger deftly explores the tension between both elite and egalitarian values that surrounded America's luxury hotels. The American hotel evolved into a "machine for living," soaring to skyscraper heights, defining ideas about technological innovation, and creating a unified system of production and consumption unique to the modern world. Hotel Dreams is a deeply researched and entertaining account of how the hotel's material world of machines and marble integrated into and shaped the society it served.

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