

Hidden Social Agendas and Housing Standards: The New York Tenement House Code of 1901

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Using the New York Tenement House Commission of 1900 and its proposed code of 1901 as a case study, this article describes how building standards are a source of "hidden social agendas." Through research on the "social context" of the Commission and examination of its proposed code, it is shown how the Commission's concern for social order and family preservation manifested itself in regulations for tenement hallways, water closets, airshafts, and bathrooms. This concern led to standards which resulted in privatization of the dwelling unit.

In 1901 the New York State Legislature adopted as law the recommended code of the New York Tenement House Commission of 1900. Its immediate importance was to signal the death of the infamous dumbbell tenement; its long term significance was to serve as the foundation for the modern day housing code, building code, fire code, and zoning code. While the legislative history of this document has been well researched (Lubove, 1962; Ford, 1936; Freidman, 1968), its sociology has not.

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The material for this article is based on the author's dissertation: "A Sociology and History of Housing Standards as Found in Two Case Studies: The New York Tenement House Commission of 1900's Proposed Code of 1901 and The Committee on the Hygiene of Housing of the American Public Health Association's 'A Proposed Housing Ordinance of 1952.'" Princeton University, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, 1975.

This paper presents a case study investigation of the New York Tenement House Commission of 1900 and its code, specifically examining the way in which social and cultural biases entered into the development of standards and how they subsequently influenced the content of those standards.

An inquiry into the means by which social and cultural factors influence the content of a housing code (or any professional standard) must be based on the understanding that standards are not wholly derived from scientific fact. Rather, they are a combination of fact and informed professional judgment of those considered "expert" in the field. In a review of housing codes for the National Commission on Urban Problems of 1968, Eric Mood commented that:

A careful and thoughtful analysis of the rationale of most housing standards will reveal that largely they were promulgated by

the considered opinions and professional judgements of technicians, scientists, and others' (Mood, 1967:3).

According to theorists of applied science, the necessity for relying on such professional judgement stems from the inadequacy of available scientific knowledge to provide all the answers needed in order to make decisions (Millikan in Perin, 1970:13). To fill in these gaps, each profession develops a subculture of wisdom which is passed on along with available findings of research (Parsons, 1951:430, 434; 1953:34). Unchecked by an objective screening process, a profession's "wisdom" can become the vehicle for transmitting social and cultural biases into its standards development process. These factors and their effects can be brought out by analyzing the "wisdom" of a profession and the subcultural context under which it has developed.¹

Social Context of the New York Tenement House Commission and Its Code

The primary source of information about the commission and its activities is its official report, *The Tenement House Problem*, edited by Robert deForest, president of the commission, and Lawrence Veiller, its executive secretary.² Using the information provided in these documents to determine the social motives and values of the Commission poses procedural problems. Such historical records are likely to be biased as hidden agendas or motives tend to be suppressed in order to create a good or socially acceptable image (Hays in Lipset and Hofstadter, 1968: 203). Thus, a literal interpretation of the information provided in these documents would be misleading. Similarly, many of the social assumptions of the authors are likely to be hidden because of the "taken for granted" character of everyday social life (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Thus, sociological imagination is used as a tool of historical inquiry. That is, sociological concepts such as social class, social order, and family structure are examined as clues to the social context against which historical

events occur (Lipset, in Lipset and Hofstadter, 1968: 23). Several social historians employing this approach have researched the era surrounding the Commission's activities (Lubove, 1962; Davis, 1967; Bremner, 1956; Hays, 1957). A review of their work provided the necessary basis for defining the social-historical context of the Commission which in turn served as the framework for analyzing its documents.

The Social-Historical Context of the New York Tenement Housing Commission of 1900

The social-historical context of the Commission of 1900 was the "social justice movement" of the American Progressive Era. The Commission's principal institutional link to the social justice movement was the New York Charity Organization Society, its principal backer and founder. Like many other organizations of its kind to be found in major American cities at the turn of the century, it worked side by side with settlement house workers, labor reformers, and public health officials in the name of social reform (Lubove, 1962; Bremner, 1956). The intended beneficiaries of their work were the men, women, and children of the American working class (Link and Catton, 1967). The scope of their activities ranged from women and child labor reform to anti-saloon campaigns, from minimum wage legislation to tenement house regulation.

The social classes most often associated with the social justice movement were the middle and upper-middle classes (Lubove, 1962; Davis, 1967; Bremner, 1956). Their willingness to come to the aid of the poor was motivated by: 1) a conviction that man-controlled actions caused the suffering of the poor rather than Divine Justice (Link and Catton, 1967); 2) a concern for the distance that had come to exist between the social classes (Davis, 1967); and 3) a fear that a large proportion of foreign immigrants who composed the working class would fail to become properly socialized to American values and beliefs (Lubove, 1962). The principal task of the social justice reformer was to close the gap between rich and poor by improving the working class family's standard of living and

socializing them to American middle class values. Fearful of the possibility of socialist or anarchist motivated strikes or riots, many reformers believed they were in a desperate battle to secure social order (Lubove, 1962).

The social ordering element which received the reformers' greatest attention was the working-class family. While not explicitly identified as the focus of reform activity by either historian or reformer, activities such as child labor reform, women's labor reform, temperance leagues, tenement house reform and the playground and public school movements all contributed to aspects of protecting family life. These acts of family preservation can be roughly divided into three categories: a) child-saving, b) mother-saving, and c) father-saving.

Child-saving: In New York, the concern for children of the poor arose in part from the increased presence of large numbers of roving gangs of lawless children, not unlike those immortalized in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. The subject of Charles Loring Brace's book, *The Dangerous Classes of New York*, was not the slum dweller, but rather his progeny (Lubove, 1962). The parents of these children, forced to work all day in the sweat shops or the factory, were left with little time to provide an adequate home life and hence proper socialization of their children. Under extreme conditions, some children were intentionally abandoned. To counteract this trend, social reformers promoted programs which occupied those children and taught them better ways of life. Brace's Children's Aid Society of New York, for example, sought to find families in the country who would take in slum children and would give them the discipline of farm life, hopefully making them responsible citizens (Bremner, 1956). The playground movement, formal recreation programs, and summer camps supported by institutions such as settlement houses were meant to compete with the enticements offered by street gangs and to give supervised order to youthful mischievousness. An additional concern of equipping them

with useful skills and a sense of citizenship led to active support of public education and vocational training (Davis, 1967). While substituting in part for the orderly family life many of these children were believed to be lacking, it was hoped that the resocialization these reforms provided would have immediate impact in bettering family life. It was particularly hoped that the values learned in the classroom would be carried back to the home (Bremner, 1956).

Mother-saving: A necessary extension of child-saving was mother-saving. Women's labor reform sought to reduce the time and work load on women, thereby allowing them energy to attend to proper child rearing. Minimum wage advocates sought to preserve the mother-child relationship by stipulating that a father's wage should be sufficiently large to eliminate the need for sending the mother or children under sixteen out to work (Bremner, 1956). Support for widows' pensions (our Aid to Dependent Children) rather than institutional confinement of children was likewise based on the importance of preserving the mother-child relationship (Bremner, 1956).

Father-saving: Father-saving is characterized by minimum wage and temperance reform. In addition to freeing women and children from work, minimum wage enhanced the father's image as the family provider. Temperance or antisaloon reform was meant to help keep the father's earnings intact for family support rather than squandered on alcohol, gambling, or prostitution. Elimination of the saloon would also restore to the family a sober authority figure. Proper socialization of the family could not occur unless all its family members, including the father, were present.

Family Preservation, Housing Reform and Neighborhood Planning

The freeing of mother and child from the labor market through wage and labor reform and the husband from drink and the saloon created time and actors for the re-creation of a family life pre-

viously torn asunder by forces beyond the individual family's control. The remaining problem was the creation of a suitable place for family life, a home. This cause was taken up by the tenement house reformer and settlement worker. To them the tenement house was not a "home," and they criticized not only the physical conditions of the tenement but also habits of housekeeping. Reformers believed that poor housekeeping, the preparation of unappetizing food, filthy surroundings, and foul odors inhibited family life by driving family members into the street (Lubove, 1962). "Model flats" were established to teach good housekeeping practices to slum housewives so that they could provide a home environment the reformers felt was necessary for family life to flourish (Davis, 1967).

Severe overcrowding was a condition housing reformers believed threatened proper family life. The concentration of innocent children and worthy poor with criminals and incorrigibles was believed to erode the former's chance of escaping the influence of bad habits and deviant role models. Within the slum dwelling unit itself, crowding meant the lack of privacy among family members and the threat of exposing children to indecent acts of their parents. Says Lubove:

Here was a capital offense against middle class standards of moral deportment: "the absence of all necessary accommodation in many dwellings, and the crowded state of rooms which defies all attempts at decency and modesty breaks down the barriers of self-respect, and prepares the way for direct profligacy" (Lubove, 1962: 7).

The reformer's concern for family preservation did not end at the walls of the house but extended into the community. As an alternative to the cramped quarters of the tenement, reformers sought to provide meeting places outside the home. Settlement houses thought they were providing alternatives with their meeting rooms for poetry readings and cultural activities (Davis, 1967). A more popular idea was to use the public

school as a community rallying point. Through after-hours programs and social events, the public school brought the children and parents of many families together in a common meeting place (Lubove, 1962). From this emerged the idea of creating neighborhoods, each with their separate school, an idea which became crystalized in Clarence Perry's famous "neighborhood unit plan" which, interestingly enough, was originally called "A Scheme of Arrangements for the Family Community" (Davis, 1967: 239-240).

Linkages of the New York Tenement Housing Commission of 1900 to the Social Justice Movement

Careful analysis of the Commission's records shows that it shared several institutional and ideological links with the social justice movement. Many of its members participated in other social reform activities as can be seen from Figure 1. Of the sixteen Commission members, eleven had such social reform backgrounds. Three were involved with settlement houses: Lawrence Veiller, I. N. Phelps Stokes, and James B. Reynolds, head worker of University Settlement. Two members represented labor reform: William O'Brien, a labor official, and Otto Eidlitz, who served several government labor reform commissions. Otto Eidlitz was also prominently known for his work in housing as the president of the U.S. Housing Corporation of 1918, the nation's first venture in socialized housing. The largest reform representation on the Commission was the New York Charity Organization Society (NYCOS): E. R. L. Gould (appointed but did not serve) of the City and Suburban Homes Company, a limited dividend housing company; Robert W. deForest, president of the NYCOS; Paul T. Cravath, a lawyer; I. N. Phelps Stokes, architect; and Lawrence Veiller. These five individuals also had the distinction of having served on the Tenement House Committee of the NYCOS. They have, therefore, been grouped along with Alfred T. White of model tenement fame under the broader category of housing reformers (Lubove, 1962: 162; *Who's Who in America*, Volumes I and II).

FIGURE 1 — Institutions of the Social Justice Movement Represented on the New York Tenement House Commission of 1900.

Housing Reform	Labor Reform	Settlement House Work	Miscellaneous
NY COS:	Otto Eidlitz	James B. Reynolds	Myles Tierney (New York Catholic Protectory)
Robert W. deForest	William J. O'Brien	I. N. Phelps Stokes	
Lawrence Veiller		Lawrence Veiller	
I. N. Phelps Stokes (E. R. L. Gould)*	Public Health		
Paul T. Cravath	George B. Fowler, M.D.		
Alfred T. White	Committee of Fifteen		
Otto Eidlitz	Alfred T. White		
William A. Douglas	Robert W. deForest		

Sources: Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums*, p. 126; and *Who's Who in America*, Volumes I and II.

No association was found for: Charles Brown, Raymond T. Almirall, F. Norton Goddard, Hugh J. Bonner, and Williams Lansing.

* Charles Brown substituted for E. R. L. Gould when Gould declined his appointment.

Review of the Commission's membership also shows a heavy representation from the professions and, therefore, affiliation with the middle and upper classes. This professional representation is shown in Figure 2. Robert deForest, Paul T. Cravath and William Douglas were lawyers; I. N. Phelps Stokes, Raymond Almirall, and William Lansing were architects; Otto Eidlitz was an engineer; Reynolds was a clergyman; and George B. Fowler was an M.D. (Lubove, 1962: 126;

Who's Who in America, Volumes I and II). The Commission's strongest link to the upper class was Robert deForest, who Lubove characterized as "A New York aristocrat sensitive to the social responsibilities which his position imposed," adding that, as one of New York's most distinguished civic leaders, "no committee for civic reform was complete" without him (Lubove, 1962: 154, 155).

FIGURE 2. — Professions and Occupations of the Members of the New York Tenement Commission of 1900.

Lawyers	Architects	Builder/Realtor
Robert W. deForest	I. N. Phelps Stokes	Myles Tierney
Paul T. Cravath	Raymond T. Almirall	Otto Eidlitz
William A. Douglass	Williams Lansing	(Engineer)
		Charles Brown
Merchant	Prof. Reformer	Medicine
Alfred T. White	James B. Reynolds	George B. Fowler, M.D.
F. Norton Goddard	(Clergy)	
	Lawrence Veiller	
Miscellaneous		
Hugh J. Bonner (New York Fire Chief)		
William J. O'Brien (Labor Union)		

Source: Roy Lubove, *The Progressive and the Slums*: 126, and *Who's Who in America*, Volumes I and II.

Analysis of various sub-committee reports of the Commission reveals that the Commission shared many concerns with the social justice movement as the following titles suggest: "On Moral and Social Influences of Tenement House Life," "Tenement House Labor (Sweatshops)," "Policy (Gambling) — A Tenement House Evil," and "Prostitution as a Tenement House Evil" (deForest and Veiller, Vol. I and II, 1903). A shared major concern was the working class and the working class family, as indicated in the opening of the Commission's final report:

Of all the great social problems of modern times incident to the growth of cities, none is claiming public attention in a greater degree than that of the housing of the working people . . . Homes are quite as much needed to make good citizens as to make good men. Accordingly as the working people are provided with better or poorer homes will the government, morals, and health of a city be better or worse (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol I, 3).

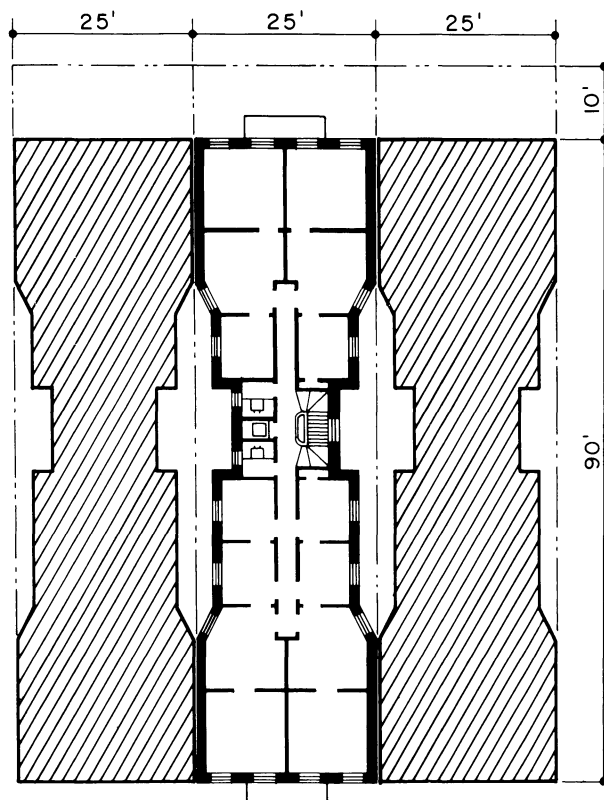
The concern for the general reform issue of social order was reflected in the references to citizenship, government and morals in special reports to the Commission: "Foreign Immigration and the Tenement House in New York City" by Kate Holladay, and "Small Houses for Working-Men" by H. L. Cargill (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vols. I and II).

Social Content of the New York Tenement House Code Of 1901: Family-Saving Through Housing Standards

Since it was through changes in the physical layout of the tenement that the code was to bring about changes in the social life of the family, the design characteristics and typical living conditions of the tenement dwelling are fundamental to understanding the social context of the code.

The Architectural Context: The Dumbbell Tenement

The principal object of concern of the Commission was the so-called "dumbbell" tenement, the predominant tenement design used at the turn of the century in New York City. This tenement stood five, sometimes six or seven stories tall on a lot 25 feet wide, the same width as the building, and 100 feet deep, of which the building occupied 90 feet (deForest and Veiller, 1903). Figure 3 shows a typical dumbbell tenement floor plan. On each side of each building was an indentation of 29 inches that ran 50-60 feet long which gave the building its distinctive dumbbell shape. The combined indentation of two buildings built side by side created an "air shaft" upon which 50-70 rooms depended for light and air. Given the narrow dimensions, light and air reached barely half this number.

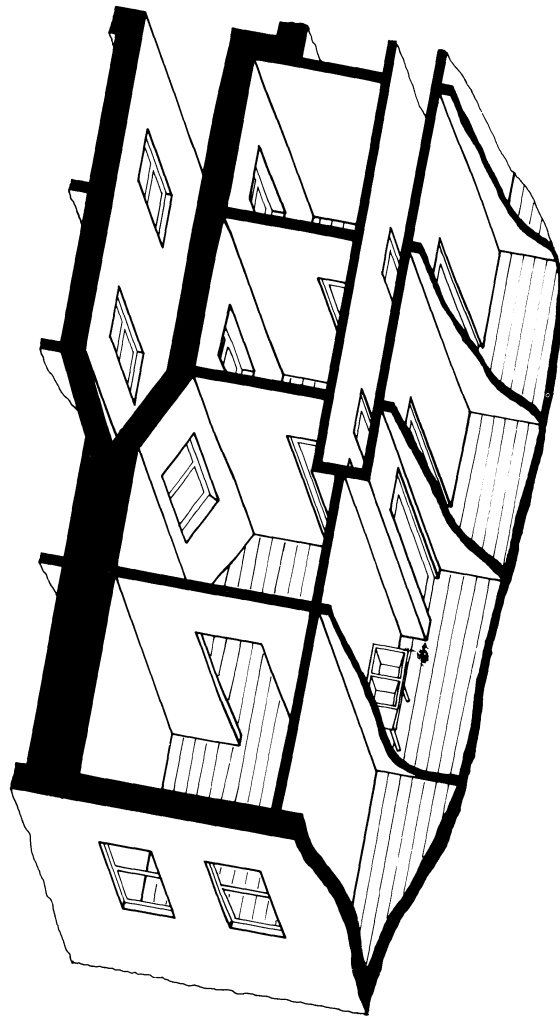


**FIGURE 3. — Plan
"Old Law" or Dumbbell Tenement**

On the tenement's first floor were typically two store fronts, one on either side of a 3-foot hallway. The hallway extended back some sixty feet and was lit by single windows at the bottom of the dark air shaft at the hall's rear. Each floor above was generally divided into four sets of apartments. The front apartments consisted of four rooms each and the rear apartments of three. Thus, seven rooms lined each side of a 3-foot hall, from front street to back yard, for a total of fourteen rooms per floor. Of these fourteen rooms, only four received direct light and air from the street or the small yard at the back, the rest having to depend on the air shaft (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol I, 7-16).

Figure 4 gives an idea of the interior of one of these apartments. The front room was a parlor that measures about 10 feet, 6 inches by 11 feet, 3 inches. This room often had to double as a bedroom. The next room back was a kitchen and general purpose living room. It was "furnished" with a deep double washtub, and this was the only plumbing connection in the apartment. The toilet, located in the hallway, was shared with a neighbor. A chimney flue in the wall was available for attachment of the occupant's own heating stove. Behind the kitchen were two very small bedrooms which measured 7 feet wide by 8 feet, 6 inches.

According to Commission reports, it was difficult to carry on "normal" daily household routines in these cramped quarters (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vols. I and II).³ Clothes washing, dish washing, and personal hygiene competed for the single sink, as there was neither bathtub nor shower in the apartment nor in the whole building. Wet wash had to be carried to the roof for drying for all except occupants of back apartments who could string a washline out over the back yard. Garbage, carried down the narrow stairwells, soiled floor and walls, which, in turn, soiled clothes and clean wash. Ventilation in the summer was poor; windows to the air shaft were often nailed shut to keep out odors from the accumulation of foul refuse at the base. This often necessitated summer sleeping on roofs, sidewalks and



**FIGURE 4. — Axonometric
Old Law Tenement
Front 4-room apartment**

fire escapes. In the winter, shoddy construction allowed drafts from windows as well as from cracks in the walls and floors. Thin walls provided poor sound insulation from the airshaft and amplified noises when windows were left open.

One can imagine the effect of this lack of privacy on preserving family life, at least as perceived by the Commission. Children could see and hear things they shouldn't. Appropriate behavior presented by parents was undermined by

the visibility of other's bad examples. Matters of family privacy (arguments, marital problems) were difficult to hide from the rest of the tenement world. It is also possible that the Commission believed protection of the fidelity of the parents was at stake, what with other tempting opportunities visibly available. Overall, the air shaft was believed to contribute to undermining the integrity of the family unit through depriving it of privacy. By quadrupling the minimum dimension of the air shaft, the Commission attempted to secure some modicum of privacy for the family. Parents could now exert more control over their children's exposure to the world.

The New Law and Its Effects: Technological and Sociological

The Commission summarized their perception of tenement conditions into five principal concerns, none of which explicitly identified issues of working class family life:

- 1) Insufficiency of light and air due to narrow courts or air shafts, the undue height of the buildings, the occupation by the building of too great a proportion of the lot area.

- 2) Danger from fire.

- 3) Lack of separate toilet and washing facilities.

- 4) Overcrowding.

- 5) Foul cellars and courts, and other like "evils," which may be classed as bad house-keeping (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 6).

Each of these concerns was dealt with in the new code summarized in Figure 5. Attention to the practical problems of health, safety, and sanitation tended to obscure the Commission's concern for working class family life. For example, the concern about fire led to the specification that strategic parts of the building be fire-proofed, and to specifications for the design and placement of fire escapes. Nearly one-third of the code was devoted to fire related specifications. Similarly, sanitation and health concerns resulted in specification that toilets previously shared in tenement halls, be located within apartments. Inspections had shown that such facilities when shared between tenants were not kept clean. However, be-

hind some of these practical problems and their technical explanations and solutions could be found underlying social concerns.

A good example is the problem of "insufficiency of light and air." This concern was motivated principally by public health concern over the contagion of tuberculosis.⁴ The solution to this problem was largely technical. Darkness, dampness, and the lack of ventilation characteristic of the lower floors of most "old-law" tenements were believed to propagate the development and spread of TB. Bacteriological research had demonstrated that exposure of TB particulates floating in the air to sunlight and fresh air effectively destroyed them. In an attempt to open up the tenement, the new code established a minimum size for interior courts, a minimum size and number of windows per room and a minimum distance between buildings. The long, narrow air shaft was replaced by courtyards of at least 24 x 24 feet.

While the technical reason for enlarging the air shafts into courtyards was to solve health problems, the same solution also helped ensure privacy between families. The air shaft, as narrow as it was, allowed for both a direct view into a neighbor's window and for easy sound transmission. This aspect did not go unnoticed by the Commission:

From other points of view than that of light and air, the air shaft stands condemned. It serves as a conveyor of smells and noise and is one of the greatest elements in destroying privacy in the tenement house. Through it one hears the sounds that occur in the rooms of every other family in the building, and often in these narrow shafts the windows of another apartment are not more than 5 feet away. Privacy under such conditions is not only difficult, but impossible. The attention of the Commission had been called to the fact that these conditions had led in numerous cases to *grave immorality* (my italics, deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 14).

FIGURE 5. — Titles of Substantive Content of 1901 Proposed NY Tenement House Code.

CHAPTER II	CHAPTER III.	CHAPTER IV.
Fire Protection	Light & Ventilation	Sanitary provisions
Title I - New Law	Title I - New Law	Title I - New Law
11. Fire-proofing	51. % lot occupied	91. Basements and cellars
12. Fire-escapes	52. Height limit	92. Basements and cellars
13. Roof Bulkheads	53. Yards	93. Shafts, court areas, and yards.
14. Stairs & Public Halls	54. Interior - 12'	94. Water supply
15. Stairs, fp*	55. Corner - 10'	95. Water Closet (W.C.)
16. Stairs, nfp*	56. Street to street	96. Plumbing access
17. Stairs, dimensions	57. Courts	
18. Stair-halls	58. Outer courts	Title 2 - Old Law
19. Stair-halls	59. Outer courts	97. Basements and cellars
20. Entrance-halls	60. Outer courts	98. W.C.
21. 1st tier of beams	61. Inner courts	99. Public sinks
22. partitions	62. Inner courts	100. Privy vaults and school sinks.
23. Cellar stairs, nfp	63. Inner courts	
24. Cellar stairs, fp	64. Outer and Inner	Title 3 - All
25. Stair closet	65. Rear tenements	101. Basements and cellars
26. Cellar entrance	66. Bldg. on same lot w/tenement.	102. Cellar walls and ceilings.
27. Fire stops	67. Rooms, Lighting and ventilation of	103. Roofs.
28. Wooden tenements	68. Windows in rooms	104. Water supply
	69. Windows in W.C.	105. Cleanliness of bldg.
Title 2 - Old Law	70. Rooms, Size of	106. Shafts and courts
29. Fire escapes	71. Alcoves	107. Court and shaft, walls
30. Fire escapes	72. Halls	108. Wall paper.
31. Fire escapes	73. Halls	109. Receptacles for ashes, garbage, and refuse
32. Bulkheads	74. Stair Halls	110. Prohibited uses
33. Stair Halls	75. Privacy	111. Janitor.
34. Fire damaged tenements.		112. Overcrowding
	Title 2 - Old Law	113. Space around pipes.
Title 3 - All	76. Lot %	
35. Fire Escapes	77. Yards	
36. Stairways	78. Additional rooms	
37. Shafts	79. Rooms, Lighting and ventilation of	
38. Plastering	80. Public halls, Lighting of	
39. Wooden bldgs.	81. Light and vent shaft	
40. Combustible stores		
41. Bakers and fat boiling	Title 3 - All	
42. Flammable Liq. Storage.	82. Light, hallways	
	83. Skylights	
	84. Chimneys	
	85. Vent shaft	

*fp - fireproof
*nfp -non-fireproof

The practice of presenting a problem and a technical solution and then appending a moral, albeit euphemistic, secondary justification is a common pattern throughout the Commission's works. Four examples in addition to the case of privacy and the air shaft are presented as additional evidence of this practice: 1) Morality and Tenement Hallways; 2) Privacy and Water Closets and Baths; 3) Privacy and the Bedroom; and 4) Prostitution and the Tenements. Because the technical justifications were rarely separated from the social reasons, both are presented for each of these examples.

1) Morality and Tenement Hallways

Sections 72, 80 and 82 of the proposed code dealt extensively with the natural and artificial lighting of tenement hallways. Fire protection was the technical reason given for the artificial lighting requirements. Persons returning home in the evening to dark tenement hallways would strike matches to find their way and carelessly throw them away. This was the cause of many tenement fires. Provision of permanent artificial hall lighting would discourage this practice and reduce fire risk. Section 80 also helped by specifying that wooden door panels of apartments be replaced by glass to allow natural light from the apartments into the halls.

From a footnote to Section 80, it was also determined that an additional reason given for the provision of hall lighting was the prevention of "grave moral evils" (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. II: 130). Dark hallways, it was found, provided tempting if not convenient places for young men to seduce "innocent" young women. In the Commission's view, this undermined virtues and the prospects of respectable parenthood:

More serious, even, than the evils due to dirt and lack of ventilation are the moral evils of these places.

The following part of a letter from the vicar of St. Augustine's Chapel . . . expresses better than can be done in any other way the dangers of the dark hallway:

" . . . From confidential communications that have been made to me by young women themselves, I know that numbers of respectable girls have been seduced at the very thresholds of their homes. A party, or the theatre, or a ball, and a late supper with wine, leading to improper liberties in the lonely streets on the way home, then the dark and at the time lifeless halls and stairways of the tenements, and the sin is done, the apartment door alone hiding the erring daughter from the sleeping mother. Whatever the girl's wishes may be, she can do nothing — shame prevents her from crying out then and there, and arousing the whole house."

The fact is, dark halls and staircases are destructive to morality, since they give constant opportunities and furnish most plausible excuses for personal familiarities of the worst kind between the sexes (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 19).

Lighting of tenement hallways, then, was in part motivated by concern for preserving the morals of youth.

2) Privacy, Water Closets, and Baths

Similar fears of opportunities for impropriety as well as notions of decency motivated provision in the code for private water closets (W.C.'s) for each family. It also prompted the decision not to provide public baths in the tenement house. With respect to separate W.C.'s (Section 95), the general report merely says, "This, the Commission believes, is required by common decency and morals . . ." (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 24). The report on sanitation expands the meaning somewhat: "on the ground of privacy, especially for the women and children of the family, they are much to be preferred" (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 314). This implies that women and children were threatened in some fashion. Presence of saloons in the tenements provided at least one threat. Saloons, often located on the first floor of tenements, did not provide their own

W.C.'s. Their customers would, therefore, use the hall W.C.'s meant for the tenants. The specter of women and children going out into the halls to use the W.C.'s and being accosted by drunk, immoral men was probably at the fore of several Commission members' minds in drafting this particular provision of the code.

Similar logic resulted in the Commission's decision not to provide public baths in tenements. Since provision of private baths in each apartment would necessitate a significant rent increase, the alternative was to provide common baths or showers shared by a number of families. However,

this does not commend itself to the judgment of the Commission. Tenement dwellers say that these baths would rarely be kept clean, and that they would be loath to use them (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 47).

Besides the possibility of exposure to improprieties, there was fear for contraction of "social diseases" from other people using the facility. (This was probably a fear in the case of shared W.C.'s as well.) Thus, bathing facilities and W.C.'s were either to be separate and private or else not to exist at all.

3) *Privacy and the Bedroom*

In order to conform to Section 95, provision of a private W.C., the Commission foresaw that architects or contractors could merely alter access to the W.C. without changing its present location behind the back bedroom (see Figure 3). To the Commission, this offered a threat to privacy in the bedroom, through which W.C.-bound tenants would now pass. Therefore, it was specified in Section 75 that "access to every room including bathrooms and water-closets compartments, shall be had without passing through any bedroom" (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. II, 128).⁵ Explanation is found in Veiller's footnote:

The Commission recommends that this requirement be embodied in the law, as it is

obvious that it is not conducive to morality or decency to make it necessary for people to pass through a bedroom in order to reach the water closet (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. II, 128).

Besides securing privacy for the parents (and protection of children from sights they shouldn't see), this provision also ensured privacy from lodgers, some of whom were prostitutes.

4) *Prostitution and the Tenements*

The Commission saw prostitution as a serious threat to tenement family life, so much so, that they devoted a whole title of the proposed code to its prohibition. The Commission's concerns are clearly spelled out in their general report:

Evidence has been submitted that the protests of the dwellers in the tenement houses immediately affected, as well as those of their neighbors, have been alike unheeded, and in spite of the best efforts of careful parents, the very house in which the family has dwelt, selected because it was thought to be free from this curse, has furnished the temptation against which parental care and anxiety have been in vain. The dangers of this situation to those of tender age in the tenement houses is alarming (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 50-51).

The report goes on to explain how harlots sought to win the affections of children by offering them generous pay in return for simple errands or chores. In the process, children gained considerable "knowledge" of the prostitute's trade. This, understandably, alarmed the Commission. Their sympathy was on the side of the parents, desirous of protecting their children.

The anxiety of reputable parents living in houses upon which these harlots have descended is most pitiful. One of our charity workers stated that she had heard women living in tenement houses thus infected be-

moan the birth of a daughter because of their fear of the dangers to which she would be exposed (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 51).

In addition to concern for the fate of children, the Commission was also worried about the effect that the presence of prostitutes would have on adolescents, both male and female. For the men, it placed constant temptation at the very door to their homes. For the young women, the fate might be more serious. It was feared that the young working girl, struggling to earn a meager wage, would inevitably compare her material well-being with that of the conspicuously better off prostitute, and succumb to the trade.

The very sight of this contrast with their own condition raises despairing questions, disappointments, and bitterness. After the shock occasioned by the knowledge of the character of prostitutes has subsided, as it inevitably will, if the evil is encountered daily, the girls are led to consider the words of the tempters. The fall of many girls, daughters of honest and reputable parents, has undoubtedly been due to this contamination (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 51).

The Commission's interest in prostitution, then, was directly related to a desire to preserve the family. By knowing that this moral threat was to be eliminated from the tenement environment altogether, parents could rest secure that their efforts to raise virtuous children would not be undermined. This the Commission accomplished by making it a crime for landlords to rent apartments to known prostitutes.

Family Preservation and Privatization of the Dwelling Unit

While these individual regulations and their moral underpinnings are significant evidence of the Commission's concern for family preserva-

tion, an equally important consideration is the cumulative effect these manipulations had for "privatizing" the dwelling unit. Standards which increased the size of interior courts, increased the distance between wings of buildings, and thereby set up visual and acoustical buffers between individual dwelling cells. The regulations which caused the W.C.'s to be drawn into each dwelling unit can also be interpreted as a mechanism for reducing intrusions of one household on another by reducing shared paths. Such public spaces as remained (e.g., hallways, stairwells) were neutralized by constant natural and/or artificial lighting. It was in isolating the dwelling that the overall objective of preserving the family unit through insuring its privacy was attained.

The conclusion that "privatizing" the dwelling unit was an overall objective of the Commission is supported by two preoccupations of the Commission: a desire to separate respectable working class from disrespectable working class and the belief that the single family dwelling unit was the best housing solution. The character of the poor was believed by the Commission to differ among the various immigrant groups which made up the working class of New York. This problem was analyzed for the Commission by Kate Claghorn in her report "Foreign Immigration and the Tenement House in New York City" where she posed the basic question: "Did the immigrant cause the evils of the tenement house, or did the tenement house corrupt the immigrant?" (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. II, 73). She found that the current housing problems were not the fault of recent immigrants but were caused by the presence of a wretched dwelling environment which, in its overcrowdedness, forced the innocent and well-meaning immigrants to be exposed to a residual of past immigrants of the lowest character. This residue, she argued, was the result of a:

special winnowing process which was all the time going on to draw off the enterprising and industrious to the railroads and farms of the West, leaving behind the paupers and

vagrants, who were, even before the elements were thus separated, an unduly large proportion of the Irish population (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. II, 75).

By contrast, her careful research showed that the present wave of immigrants, Italians and Hebrews, were of good character, "industrious, saving, careful of property . . . distinctly on the upward road . . ." (Ibid).

It was the belief of Ms. Claghorn and apparently of the Commission that the corrupting influences of earlier immigrants could be tempered by improving tenement conditions, specifically in maximizing the possibility of their encountering the more respectable.

The most serious evil is wrought by bringing sober, decent, orderly people, as most of the new immigrants are, in contact, in the tenement house, with the corrupted remnant of an earlier generation. . .

A better housing system — some little forethought in providing properly for the needs of new immigrants would do away with many of these evils (Ibid: 88-89).

Thus, the code regulations which effected greater privacy for the dwelling units were not only meant to abstractedly protect family from family, but specifically to protect immigrant families of good character from immigrant families of bad character.

Given the Commission's preoccupation with minimizing the infringement of one household on another's privacy, it was not surprising to discover that the Commission considered the single family dwelling unit (SFDU) as the most desirable alternative to the tenement house. Lacking the problems of air shafts, dark public hallways, and shared W.C.'s, the SFDU was the Commission's ideal of a home for the working class family.

Adequate light and air, perfect sanitation, even passable home environment, cannot be provided by the best tenement house which is commercially possible on Manhattan Island. . . Ideal conditions in these particulars can only be obtained when each family occupies its own separate house. The fewer families in each house and the larger air space around it, the nearer approach to this ideal (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol. I, 5).

The commission even advanced a theory that natural passions in humans existed for "home seeking," meaning the single family dwelling unit:

Two great instincts . . . operate to the same end (of "home seeking"). One is the instinct of woman for her own abiding place, the other the love of children (Ibid: 352).

The Commission was so convinced that the single family dwelling unit was the solution to the tenement house problem that it employed H. D. Cargill to conduct a study of the possibility of "Small Homes for Workingmen." While the ultimate conclusions of Cargill's research was that SFDU's were too costly to build in New York, this concern and the desire to protect the respectable working class family only serves to reinforce the contention that, through privatization of the dwelling unit, family preservation was an implicit, if not explicit, objective of the standards makers of the NYTHC of 1900.

Conclusion

It is the general contention of this research that hidden social agendas are not only to be found in the assumptions of the designer or planner but also in the development of the building regulation standards he or she must work with. These implicit social agendas arise from the cultural con-

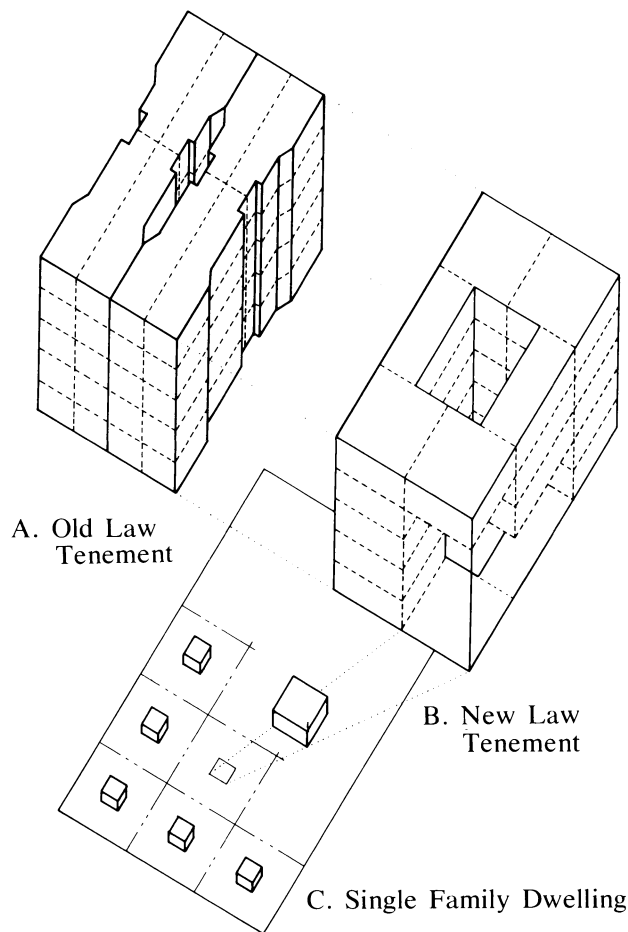


FIGURE 6. — Evolution of “Privatizing” the Dwelling Unit

text of the professional wisdom required to fill the gap between practical need and available research knowledge. The cultural context of the New York Tenement House Commission of 1900 was found to be the social beliefs and institutions of the “social justice movement” of the American Progressive Era. The primary belief which influenced the content of the Commission’s Code was family preservation. While the efforts of other contemporary social reformers freed family members from the temptations of the street and the demands of factory labor, the efforts of the NYTHC of 1900 created a suitable home for working class

family life. The sum effect of regulating tenement hallways, water closets, air shafts, and bathrooms was to achieve a “privatization” of the dwelling unit which protected not only the privacy of family from family but individual family member from individual family member.

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Notes

1. While the Commission was not the arm of any particular professional institution, social historian Roy Lubove (1962) has characterized its work as professional in nature, particularly as represented by the efforts of its full-time, paid, executive secretary, Lawrence Veiller:
Veiller . . . was a professional reformer who usually worked through some organization to mould public opinion and impose his will upon recalcitrant legislators . . . Like any true professional, he knew his subject thoroughly. Veiller was an expert legislative draftsman and political in-fighter, and in his grasp of structural technicalities he was the peer of any architect or builder (Lubove, 1962: 120).
2. Veiller used his work with the Commission as a basis for launching a national housing reform campaign which culminated in the formation of a professional housing association known as the National Housing Association. In addition to the professional approach of Veiller, the Commission membership was well represented by the professions of law, medicine, architecture, and engineering.
3. The report of the Commission and its proposed code were published in a two volume manuscript, *The Tenement House Problems*, edited by Robert deForest, president of the Commission, and Lawrence Veiller, its executive secretary. This work contains not only the Commission's final report, but also several dozen additional reports authored by recognized housing experts of the time.
4. The basis for most of the material on tenement life is the Commission's report "Evils as Seen by the Tenants" (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol I, 383-418).
5. In addition to a public hearing on "Tenements and Tuberculosis," the Commission produced two additional reports on the subject: "Tuberculosis and the Tenement House Problem" by Herman M. Biggs, M.D., a former president of the American Public Health Association; and "The Relation of Tuberculosis to the Tenement House Problem" by Arthur R. Guerard, M.D. (deForest and Veiller, 1903: Vol I).
6. This provision of the code has carried down even into today's modern housing code. See Section 8.07 of the "APHA-PHS Recommended Housing Maintenance and Occupancy Ordinance," in *Basic Health Principles of Housing and Its Environment*, American Public Health Association, Washington, DC, 1971:100.