

## Forced Out by a Landlord With Gentrification In Mind: Best #Cityreads of the Week

A round-up of the best stories on cities and urbanism we've come across in the last seven days.

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["Out With the Poor, In With the Rich: The Landlord's Guide to Gentrifying NYC,"](#)  
Simon van Zuylen-Wood, *Bloomberg Businessweek*

In the summer of 2002, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the emir of Qatar, bought a couple of adjoining Beaux Arts town houses on East 72nd Street just off Central Park. He paid \$26 million for the pair—a vast markup, it might have seemed, from a comparable purchase made earlier in the year. That March, a Manhattan landlord named Steve Croman had scooped up a six-story, 19,000-square-foot manse across the street for only \$5.5 million. Croman's town house came with a problem: It wasn't a private home, but an apartment building of 23 below-market units, classified by New York state as rent-stabilized. That meant he could charge his new tenants only gradual, minor upticks in rent. But what might have

appeared to be a dead-end investment was in fact an audacious, buy-low proposition. If Croman could get his tenants out, the building's value would soar.

Croman's plan revolved around a little-used clause of the state rent-stabilization code that allows a landlord to evict tenants if he claims a building as a personal home. Almost immediately after buying the property, he served residents with lease termination notices and approached them with buyout offers. Alarmed, the tenants, who were paying as little as \$844 a month in a neighborhood where studios tended to rent for three times as much, lawyered up and agitated to stay. Samuel Himmelstein, an attorney who represented several of them, argued at the time that the personal-use clause was meant to cover a few apartments at most. "I've never seen anything on this scale," he [told](#) the *New York Times*.

As legal proceedings unfolded, 12-14 E. 72nd St. became less and less livable—a tactic, tenants were certain, to get them to capitulate and accept buyouts. Bob Leighton, a criminal defense attorney who lived in the building for 35 years, says Croman tried something new practically every day: "He would remove the washing machines. He tried to close the front door, make everybody go through the basement. He got rid of the super, then had a part-time super who did nothing." Another former tenant forwarded me a 15,000-word document detailing four years of tribulations: No hot water. No cold water. Rodents. Severed phone lines. Holes in ceilings. A fire. "He was taking the building apart, bit by bit," says Malcolm Kirk, a photographer who paid less than \$1,000 a month for a third-floor studio he shared with his wife.