



Ed Koch and the Rebuilding of New York City (Columbia History of Urban Life)

Jonathan Soffer

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In 1978, Ed Koch assumed control of a city plagued by filth, crime, bankruptcy, and racial tensions. In 1989, by the end of his mayoral run and despite the Wall Street crash of 1987, neighborhoods and infrastructure were being rebuilt. Unlike many American cities, Koch's New York was growing, not shrinking. Gentrification brought new businesses to neglected corners and converted low-end rental housing to coops and condos. Nevertheless, not all the change was positive-AIDS, crime, homelessness, and violent racial conflict increased, marking a time of great, if somewhat uneven, transition.

For better or worse, Koch's efforts convinced many New Yorkers to embrace a new political order that subsidized business, particularly finance, insurance, and real estate, and privatized public space. Each phase of the city's recovery required difficult choices between moneyed interests and social services, forcing Koch to be both a moderate and a pragmatist as he tried to mitigate growing economic inequality. Throughout, Koch's rough rhetoric (attacking his opponents as "crazy," "wackos," and "radicals") prompted the charge that he was racially divisive. The first book to recast Koch's legacy through personal and mayoral papers, authorized interviews, and oral histories, this volume plots a history of New York City through two rarely studied but crucial decades, the bankruptcy of the 1970s and the recovery and crash of the 1980s.

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