

Tablet



The Scroll

JUSTICE IS SERVED: STEVE CROMAN, 'VILLAINOUS' NYC LANDLORD, CHARGED WITH 20 FELONIES

Croman, who faces up to 25 years in prison, feeds into an age-old Jewish stereotype. His son's rant doesn't help either.

By [Marjorie Ingall](#)

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This week the *New York Daily News* [reported](#) the story of despised NYC landlord Steve Croman's arrest on [20 felony charges](#). Twenty! The much-loathed Croman, who owns over 140 buildings across the city, possesses more of the East Village (my neighborhood) than any other landlord; he also controls great swaths of the Lower East Side. Commenters on local blogs like E.V. Grieve are now [dancing maliciously gleeful jigs](#).

The felony charges against the "[villainous landlord](#)" include grand larceny, criminal tax fraud, falsifying business records, and scheming to defraud; Croman could get up to 25 years in prison. In addition to the criminal charges, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman filed a civil suit against Croman, accusing him of harassing tenants and deliberately causing disruptive construction and dangerous conditions (which included creating clouds of lead dust at up to 65 times legal levels). The goal of all this, of course, was to force tenants to move out so that Croman could jack up rents. As if all this were not enough, Croman is also accused of failing to get necessary permits, ignoring stop-work orders, and refusing to fix decrepit conditions created by his illegal construction practices. In a press conference, Schneiderman called Croman "the Bernie Madoff of landlords." (Burn.)

Croman's mortgage broker Barry Swartz was **separately charged** on 15 felony counts; a beady-eyed ex-cop named Anthony Falconite, who Croman reportedly hired to intimidate and threaten tenants into moving out, was charged in the civil suit.

It must be noted that many of us are also psyched for the humbling of Croman's cro-Magnon son, Jake, a college student who was the subject of a viral video last March. The video shows young master Croman, who's surrounded by giggling, thuggy fraternity brothers, screaming homophobic slurs and threats at an Uber driver who refused to pick him up after he'd been banned by the company for previous bad behavior. (Croman **maintained** that the driver, Artur Zawada, had made anti-Semitic remarks, which Zawada denies...and which don't appear in the video.)

A snarky anonymous tribute site, [JakeCroman.com](http://www.jakecroman.com), quickly appeared after the video was released, like a beautiful rainbow after a downpour. Adorned with a photo of Jake, the logos of Jake's high school (Columbia Grammar and Prep), his college (the University of Michigan), and his fraternity, TKE ("Go Fightin' Douchebags!" the site cheers), the site collects Jake Croman stories. They are not favorable.

But lost in all this schadenfreude is the uncomfortable fact that Croman and his son are embodiments of unfortunate stereotypes about Jews: they're bloodsuckers; they're cheaters; they're entitled, crafty, unethical, Shylockian business jerks who get ahead through deception. Online commenters are now salivating for the heads of the three other most hated downtown landlords—Samy Mahfar, Ben Shaoul, and Jared Kushner (son-in-law of our own tangerine-tinted presidential candidate!)—and one can't help but note that they're all members of the tribe. This is not good for the Jews. Our people came up through this neighborhood and were the victims of discrimination and housing bias; how is it that we've become the unsavory developers?

Meanwhile, coincidentally, local blog The Lo-Down ran a **piece** on a new report from the [Furman Center](http://www.furmancenter.org) at NYU, which studies housing, neighborhoods and urban policy. The study shows just how radically the East Village, Lower East Side, and Chinatown have gentrified in the last two decades. These neighborhoods (which make up Community District 3, defined by East 14th Street to the north, the Bowery to the west, the East River to the east and the Brooklyn Bridge to the south), have experienced greater rent escalation than all but two other neighborhoods (Williamsburg and Central Harlem) in the entire city. Rents in NYC as a whole went up an average of 22 percent between 1990 and 2014, but they went up more than 50 percent in District 3. As the Lo-Down pointed out, the neighborhood currently ranks fifth in the city in terms of racial diversity, and has the second highest income diversity ratio—the gap between its poorest and wealthiest residents. We epitomize the haves and have-nots, all living cheek-by-jowl in one place.

Everyone who cares about this neighborhood's tradition of welcoming new immigrants and being a haven for poor folks should be paying attention to these demographic changes and pondering who benefits from them. Every Jew who cares about economic, ethnic, religious, racial, and creative diversity in the city, and every Jew who's attuned to the importance of mom-and-pop businesses and the well-being of longtime residents should be acutely aware of our history and our sacred duty to be a light unto the nations. Some of our peeps, apparently, aren't exactly living up to that standard.

Previous: ['Voice' Considers Bad Orthodox Landlords](#)

Marjorie Ingall is a columnist for Tablet Magazine, and [author](#) of Mamaleh Knows Best: What Jewish Mothers Do to Raise Successful, Creative, Empathetic, Independent Children.



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