



# The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America

*Wendy Gamber*

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## **The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America** Wendy Gamber

In nineteenth-century America, the bourgeois home epitomized family, morality, and virtue. But this era also witnessed massive urban growth and the acceptance of the market as the overarching model for economic relations. A rapidly changing environment bred the antithesis of "home": the urban boardinghouse. In this groundbreaking study, Wendy Gamber explores the experiences of the numerous people—old and young, married and single, rich and poor—who made boardinghouses their homes.

Gamber contends that the very existence of the boardinghouse helped create the domestic ideal of the single family home. Where the home was private, the boardinghouse theoretically was public. If homes nurtured virtue, boardinghouses supposedly bred vice. Focusing on the larger cultural meanings and the commonplace realities of women's work, she examines how the houses were run, the landladies who operated them, and the day-to-day considerations of food, cleanliness, and petty crime.

From ravenous bedbugs to penny-pinching landladies, from disreputable housemates to "boarder's beef," Gamber illuminates the annoyances—and the satisfactions—of nineteenth-century boarding life.

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