



JANA LEO'S *RAPE NEW YORK*: SCARY TALE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BAD LANDLORD WON'T FIX YOUR FRONT DOOR LOCK

BY ELIZABETH DWOSKIN

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Author Jana Leo

If someone strolls into your building because the front door's lock is broken, forces his way into your apartment, and then rapes you at gunpoint, can you sue your landlord?

The answer is yes, of course. And a new book, *Rape New York*, by conceptual artist and former Cooper Union prof [Jana Leo](#), unfolds the tragic and strange court saga about what happens when a woman decides to do just that.

Rape New York opens with a terrifying scene.

In January 2001, a man showed up at the door of her apartment at 408 W. 129th Street in Harlem, and raped her at gunpoint. He had entered through the lobby door, which, like that of many neglected buildings, had broken locks.

At the police station, Leo asked if the cops could force her landlord to replace the locks. She had begged the landlord for repairs long before the rape. But she writes that she was told that the police had no authority to change the locks on a privately owned building. When she called her landlord to complain, she was told, "If you don't like it, move out."

This was the second break-in at gunpoint that had taken place in Leo's building. "My life was worth less than the cost of a lock to my landlord," Leo writes.

Her landlord, Steven Green, had been named to the [Voice's 10 Worst Landlords list in 1990](#) and was later dubbed by the *Post* as the "[landlord from hell](#)." (Green is no relation to Stephen L. Green, a mega-landlord who is the brother of former Public Advocate Mark Green.)

In Leo's case, she didn't give up. She brought a civil suit against her landlord, who was a notorious real-estate figure both here and in Florida; the case became a six-year-long battle. During that time, the rapist was found through DNA matching, convicted, and sent to jail.

Meanwhile, the landlord argued that Leo was at fault because she "had let the attacker in," even though he was holding a gun in her face. The judge sided with Leo and found the landlord negligent in not providing a safe building.

But because the property happened to have changed hands on the day of the rape, it was unclear whether the new landlord or the old landlord was responsible (Green was the old landlord). The case was finally settled out of court, on the day before it was scheduled for trial.

Leo not only wrote this book about her case; she also [staged an exhibition](#) about it at [Invisible-Exports](#) (an art space on Orchard Street just north of Canal Street).

Green wound up [stiffing the city for more than \\$2 million in fines](#) for numerous violations in numerous buildings, and he moved on to new ventures in Tennessee and Florida. He eventually got his due. In January 2007, Green was [convicted and sent to jail for fraud](#) in Florida. He had used a false Social Security number on a multimillion-dollar loan and had failed to pay taxes.

During the widely publicized Florida case, Green was [hailed as a great guy by celebrities](#) such as *Sopranos* star Lorraine Bracco.

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