



# Triangle: The Fire That Changed America

*David Von Drehle*

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On March 25, 1911, as workers were getting ready to leave for the day, a fire broke out in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York's Greenwich Village. Within minutes it spread to consume the building's upper three stories. Firemen at the scene were unable to rescue those trapped inside: their ladders weren't tall enough. People on the street watched in horror as desperate workers jumped to their deaths. 146 people died — 123 of them women. It was the worst disaster in the city's history. Not only a chronicle of the fire, but also a vibrant portrait of an entire age, this book follows the waves of Jewish and Italian immigration that inundated New York in the early century, filling its slums and supplying its garment factories with cheap labor. It portrays the work conditions that led to a massive waist-workers' strike in which an unlikely coalition of socialists, socialites, and suffragettes took on bosses, police, and magistrates. Von Drehle puts a human face on those who died in the fire, and shows how popular revulsion at the Triangle catastrophe led to an unprecedented alliance between idealistic labor reformers and the supremely pragmatic politicians of the Tammany machine.

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