**Empire State**
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# Empire State

Vanity, thy name is architecture, and men bemused by the race for the tallest building in the world. If there was ever a Can't Win proposition, this is it. Today's first is always tomorrow's second and the title is as ephemeral as the clouds that gave the skyscraper—first called the cloudscraper—its name.

Only economics stopped the race originally. Now, with innovations in elevator arrangements, the number of space-eating cabs has been cut and the competition for the world's tallest is on again: World Trade Center, Sears in Chicago, and an improbable late entry, the Empire State Building. The architects—each man kills the thing he loves—are making a serious study of literally raising the roof. It would be replaced, at enormous expense and if technology permits, under awe-inspiring difficulties of demolition and erection, by 33 new income-producing stories, eleven more than now.

It isn't as if the present building were small, or in need of desperate economic measures. But more important than all that is one fact that is conspicuously ignored. The characteristic silhouette of the Empire State Building stands for the city of New York almost uniquely; there is no stronger symbol in the twentieth century. Its Art Deco tower is not just the most important local landmark, still upstaging the graceless new flattops that outbulk it; it is also an undisputed artistic monument of international stature. The architects make it clear that it could not be reproduced. That unmistakable tower —against New York's sometimes brilliant and brittle sky, or incandescent sunsets, or even dissolved in the mists of smog—is New York.

It does no good to speculate at what point real estate becomes art, or history, or a talisman of place. When it does, it enters the public domain. To destroy it is an act of urbicide.