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# **NYC TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background

When we won right to counsel, we wanted to contextualize the win in its time place and condition—to ground us in our mission of commitment of building tenant power and to understand this win in the larger context of a capitalist economy where housing is a commodity. We wanted to place the history of the coalition in the context of a larger history of the tenant movement—for all of the new tenant attorneys being hired, the new organizers and the new tenant leaders. What is the significance of this win in historical terms? This project began because I couldn't find any popular education materials on the history of the tenant movement. Coming out of tenant organizing in the Bronx, we had materials on Bronx history, and other organizations had pockets of curriculum about the history of the tenant movement, but there wasn't anything centralized that I could find. While there were a few great books, there wasn't any curriculum, meant for every day folks, that you could use at a tenant meeting, that could be alive, and added to, honoring the experiences of tenant leaders in our movements. This is an attempt to correct that. The movement history timeline technology is adapting and can be added to—over the years, new organizers can add to the history and extend it. Neighborhood based organizers can take this timeline, copy it, edit it and make it specific to their neighborhoods. It is meant to be alive. It's also meant to look at larger forces—social, political and economic—that shape the world in which we organize, often determine our internal struggles and limit or expand our demands. So the timeline looks at the history of tenant organizing, but also the larger context in which that organizing was happening. It's meant to inspire and to help create a foundation from which we can learn, so that we don't limit ourselves. In my experience, the tenant movement leans conservative, often deciding not to challenge the basic premise of private property and profit, but that's certainly not our history. And it certainly doesn't have to be our future. Looking at our work, what will future generations say about the history we create?

## How to Use This Curriculum & Resource Packet

This curriculum is meant to offer many options when facilitating a workshop, meeting, study group, etc., on the history of the tenant movement, as you go through the **Tenant Movement History Timeline**. The timeline has 67 slides with lots of information, pictures and videos. You could go through that without using anything in this packet. However, the curriculum includes general facilitation tips and principles (thanks to the Global Action Project), two different facilitation agendas, with small group and large group activities and guides to help digest the information, pull on the knowledge from the room as well as synthesize lessons learned. We also printed out each slide from the timeline, and laminated them, so that you could use the timeline in a place where you can't project as well as facilitate a journey through the timeline in small groups, rather than in one large group. If you're in NYC and part of the RTCNYC Coalition, you can borrow them! You can also print the slides yourselves. The film and reading list is meant to offer additional resources and tools. For example, you could use one or two of the slides, and some of the films listed and do an entire session on Redlining. Don't feel limited by the curriculum—use it as a starting point! Because this was created by the RTCNYC Coalition, the guide ends with an interactive activity about the history of the coalition and the campaign. It also offers an example of a history activity for any campaign. Lastly, if you create new curriculum or activities to facilitate learning about the tenant movement history, please share it with us!

## Acknowledgements

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## Disclaimers & Intentions

This is not an academic work. All history is subjective. Many of the historical events are interpreted through a particular political lense—it might not be yours. That's ok. Also, in telling any history and attempting to make it a popular education tool, a lot is inevitably left out—that too is a subjective act. Many things are left out simply by not knowing about them! That is a testament to the breadth of the tenant movement in NYC! There could be a book about each moment in history—there are a few—but this isn't meant to be that. Also, how do you tell the history of the tenant movement without telling the history of homelessness and homeless organizing, the history of the immigration movement, the workers movement, etc.—yikes! So it's not an exhaustive or comprehensive history, though plenty of people have told me it's too long! But, it's meant to be an overview, to help us identify patterns and forces and to inspire us to ask questions to guide our current strategies and struggles. For more of an in depth history, please refer to the recommended readings and films. Lastly, we aren't trying to make any money from it so please don't sue us for anything in it. I tried to do citations and credit folks appropriately, but many of the notes I took while reading books, I took not knowing I would use them for this, so we had to backtrack to do that and citations are admittedly not done properly. Please feel free to send edits and we'll try to make them where appropriate and based on our capacity. Also—make it yours! Use what you find useful, and leave the rest, accept it with the intention with which it was created—to remind us there is a vast and powerful history that should be accessible to all of us, to honor those who came before us, to inspire us to act and to hold us accountable to our future which is as bright as we make it.



### Susanna Blankley

Coalition Coordinator  
Right to Counsel NYC Coalition  
October, 2018





Image courtesy of Met Council on Housing

# FACILITATION TOOLS

*Best practices for creating a dynamic workshop and setting the stage for collective work.*

## WORKSHOP PRINCIPLES & FACILITATION TIPS

As a facilitator, you may be faced with the challenges of directing a group with diverse personalities and personal histories. Your job is to foster a safe space for people to both voice their thoughts and opinions and listen to each other and develop through their collective experience.

A good facilitator listens to the ideas that flow and skillfully challenges the group to think deeper and more critically about the subject matter.

By using affirming language, kicking back questions to the group, paraphrasing and using open-ended questions, the facilitator orchestrates the flow of conversation so that everyone is heard and hopefully, full of new ideas by the end of the workshop.

The facilitator should ask questions and guide participants so they can come to conclusions as a group. It's important to approach the conversation as a collective process so that workshop participants can support each other in their learning. If the group comes to an answer on their own, it will resonate stronger than if they were simply told something.

In addition, the facilitator should have their pulse on the mood and focus of the participants and conduct exercises that address group needs and have a clear objective and goal. For example, if the group comes in and everyone looks tired, an energizing activity would be advisable. Strive to provide as interactive a format as possible. Allow humor and excitement to thrive in the space. Be fun!

Most importantly, it is crucial to be aware of one's own "teaching model." Traditional forms of education tend to take a "talk down" approach; this implies that the teacher has more knowledge and experience than others in the room and that the teacher has all the answers.

Remember that you will be working with people from all walks of life who may experience much more than you when it comes to daily life and histories. As a facilitator, welcome your ability to learn and grow from the conversation you will engage in a learning community.



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**PROCESSING** is the act of asking provocative questions to help workshop participants derive greater meaning from the experience. It involves intensive focus and active listening. Good processing questions can make the difference between a mediocre and dynamic workshop. It takes practice and focus to find the right phrasing to bring out the most in an experience.

Processing well is the most difficult part of the facilitator’s job. The facilitator listens carefully to what is said (or not said), and affirms, paraphrases, and asks follow-up and kick back questions to keep the flow of conversation going.

We recommend that you take time to write out some processing questions in advance, and the questions you want the group to be thinking about to further the goals and objectives of the workshop.

After completing an activity, the facilitator can begin processing by asking, “Why do you think we did this? What purpose does it serve? What did you learn”?

*Note: Recall instances in your youth as well as now (if you’re an adult... but who’s counting) where you were able to gain new knowledge, as well as turn it into something useful. This can help you frame the processing.*

## PROCESSING BEHAVIOR

### 1. ACTIVE LISTENING

Demonstrate that you are focused by responding to comments and nonverbal body language. Demonstrate understanding and acceptance through voice tone, facial expression, eye contact, posture and gestures. By using writing, talking, acting, artistic, and other forms of expression each individual has an opportunity to engage.

### 2. ASK QUESTIONS

Ask questions to draw out information from participants and to spark dialogue. Do not pass judgment on participants’ answers, or use your own feelings to influence participants. Be present, focused and involved. The facilitator may also ask questions that encourage more serious discussion and personal exploration of issues such as “Could you relate that to anything in your lives?”

### 3. AFFIRM THE KNOWLEDGE IN THE ROOM

Affirm the feelings and ideas of participants to build an atmosphere of trust. Encourage everyone to share. Use language such as “good point”, or “excellent idea”, and affirm those who have taken an unpopular perspective, or take risks, which isn’t always easy.

### 4. PARAPHRASE AND KICK-BACK

The facilitator should briefly rephrase participants’ comments and feelings. Paraphrasing affirms people’s feelings, facts and needs. It also helps clarify people’s points and keeps conversation active. It is helpful to follow-up a paraphrase with a kick back question.

**EXAMPLE 1**

**Participant** *It's easier for young white people to get into college than young people of color.*

**Facilitator** *So what you're saying is that there is less opportunity for young people of color to further their education because of certain obstacles?*

**Youth** *Yeah, because our public schools don't provide the support.*  
(Clarifies and adds more info)

**Facilitator** *You're right! So, what support would you like to see in public schools?* (Affirms and kicks back)

**EXAMPLE 2**

**Youth** *Why did the journalist take that point of view?*

**Facilitator** *Anybody else know, why do you think the journalist focused on that perspective? Who owns this paper?*

Whenever possible, direct questions back to the group as a follow-up question. Participants learn more when they try to answer their own questions instead of having the facilitator give them an answer.

**5. USE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

The facilitator should get conversation moving by avoiding “yes” or “no” questions and asking questions that require a more thoughtful response. Closed questions begin with: *Is, Do, Who*. They often need to be followed up with open-ended questions. Open questions begin with: *Why, What, Explain, Tell me about, How*. **For example, instead of “Is making peace easy?” say: “What do the people in the film do to promote peace?”**

**6. PUT CLOSURE ON DISCUSSIONS**

When dealing with sensitive topics, try not to leave dialogue unresolved, even if the resolution is simply to say we don't have all the answers, we will have to explore this again next time. It may be necessary to approach certain individuals after the workshop is over to engage in additional closure. Also, be transparent with the participants; if you're not sure about something, welcome them to do some research.

**7. BREAK INTO SMALL GROUPS OR PAIRS**

It's important to break up the format of a workshop. Sitting in a large group for the entire time can be tedious and allows people to dominate. When discussing personal or controversial issues, certain people feel safer sharing in pairs or small groups. This is a way to get all people to contribute.

**8. CHOOSE THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL**

Choose the appropriate level of low, medium, or high-risk activity, depending on the specific group: how much contact they have had with each other, how well-bonded they are as a group. Listen to your gut on this one.

# TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY TIMELINE

## SAMPLE AGENDA 1



### 2.5-3 HOUR SESSION

Times depend on the size and participation of the group as well as on the facilitator.

TIME	ACTIVITY TITLE	ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS
15 mins	<b>Welcome, Intros and Goals</b>	Introductions, including intro to training, goals, agenda, community agreements...	Pre-written goals, initial draft of community agreements, additional butcher paper, markers
10 mins	<b>Tenant History Spectrogram</b>	A barometer activity to assess the knowledge of tenant organizing history in the room	Agree and Disagree Signs. Facilitation guide for the spectrogram with statements
60-90 mins*	<b>Timeline Journey through Tenant Organizing History</b>	Present the Timeline! Read through the slides as necessary, identifying any slides you may want to skip. Use the talking points to add any additional info for a particular slide	Computer, projector, wall, sound if you are playing any of the videos. If you don't have internet, as long as you download the timeline before going into a space without internet, it should still work in your browser. You can also print out the slides if you don't have a computer/projector and hand them out/read through them that way. (If you're in the RTCNYC Coalition, we've printed and laminated them for you to borrow).
30 mins	<b>Small Groups!</b>	Small Group Work looking to debrief the timeline and look at any lessons learned	There are two small group facilitation guides that you can use. In addition there is a key questions document, you could choose questions from that document and use any combination of them for a small group discussion. Butcher paper, tape and markers to write up key lessons learned
15 mins	<b>Large Group Presentations</b>	Reporting back from the small groups to share lessons	Participants will use the the butcher paper notes from the small group work to then present to larger group. This is the same butcher paper to be used for the next section, the dot democracy activity!
10 mins	<b>Gallery Walk And Dot-Democracy</b>	Participants use this space to assess what they've learned, note patterns in the timeline or case studies, vision future actions. Participants add dots to entries that resonated with them	Markers, Dot-Democracy Facilitation Guides
10 mins	<b>Evaluation/ Takeaways/ Closing</b>	Plus/Delta on the session and go around asking folks to share takeaways, lessons learned and action steps/commitments	Butcher paper, markers

\* Time for this depends on the knowledge of the facilitator, questions in the room, whether or not you play clips, whether or not you go through all the slides or skip some, use additional talking points or not, etc.



# TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY TIMELINE

## SAMPLE AGENDA 2



### 2–2.5 HOUR SESSION

*Times depend on the size and participation of the group as well as on the facilitator.*

TIME	ACTIVITY TITLE	ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	EQUIPMENT/MATERIALS
10 mins	<b>Welcome, Intros and Goals</b>	Introductions, including intro to training, goals, agenda, community agreements...	Pre-written goals, initial draft of community agreements, additional butcher paper, markers
10 mins	<b>Tenant History Spectrogram</b>	A barometer activity to assess the knowledge of tenants organizing history in the room	Agree and Disagree Signs. Facilitation guide for the spectrogram with statements
85–105 mins*	<b>Timeline Journey through Tenant Organizing History</b>	Facilitate the Timeline through Small Group Discussions	Computer, projector, wall, sound if you are playing any of the videos. Timeline cards. Butcher paper, markers, tape
10 mins	<b>Gallery Walk And Dot-Democracy</b>	Using the highlights created from the small groups, participants use this space to assess what they’ve learned, note patterns in the timeline or case studies, vision future actions. Participants add dots to entries that resonated with them	Markers, Dot-Democracy Facilitation Guides
10 mins	<b>Evaluation/ Takeaways/ Closing</b>	Plus/Delta on the session and go around asking folks to share takeaways, lessons learned and action steps/commitments	Butcher paper, markers

\* Time will depend on how long it takes each small group.

# SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION-BASED FACILITATION AGENDA



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Laminated/Printed timeline, divided into packets based on the small groups
- Markers
- Butcher Paper
- Tape

## LARGE GROUP SET UP & FACILITATION

### 15 MINUTES

1. Split the room up into 6 groups. You could have folks count off, make clusters where they are, etc.
2. Present the first 6 slides from the front of the room, on the pre-tenement history.
3. You're now going to go through the rest of the timeline in small groups, which are already set up.
  - Small Group 1: 1900–1930, Slides 7–18 (12 slides)
  - Small Group 2: The 1930s, Slides 19–27 (9 slides)
  - Small Group 3: The 1940s & 50s, Slides 28–36 (9 slides)
  - Small Group 4: The 60s & 70s, Slides 37–48 (12 slides)
  - Small Group 5: The 80s & 90s, Slides 49–58 (10 slides)
  - Small Group 6: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Slides 59–67 (9 slides)

## SMALL GROUP FACILITATION GUIDE

### 45–60 MINUTES

1. Each group has about 45 minutes for your small group discussion, and then you'll report back to the larger group.
2. Read each slide out loud in order. The numbers are on the back. Depending on the number of people in each group, each person may need to read multiple slides or you may need to have folks share. Before you read each slide say your name and PGP.
3. After you've read through all of the slides, answer the following questions:
  - What "aha" moments or key learnings did you have? (other ways to ask this: what did you learn? What are key takeaways?)
  - What patterns did you notice?
  - What questions do you have?
  - What are important lessons or key moments you want to share with the rest of the group?
4. Write up or draw out a summary of the slides and key lessons on butcher paper to share with the larger group. Can someone volunteer to write or draw?
5. Can someone volunteer to report back to the larger group?

# SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION-BASED FACILITATION AGENDA *cont'd*

## LARGE GROUP REPORT BACKS

### 15 MINUTES

1. Have each small group report back in order.
2. If you have a wall, you could tape each slide up on the wall in order, so that at the end of all the report backs, the whole timeline is up on the wall.
3. While each group presents, you could project the timeline on the wall in the background and scroll through the slides while folks are presenting. It could be distracting though, so you're choice.

## CLOSING

### 10 MINUTES

Take general questions and summarize key lessons learned.



# TENANT HISTORY SPECTROGRAM FACILITATION GUIDE

**APPROXIMATE RUNNING TIME: 10–15 MINUTES**

**WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION** An activity to gauge workshop participants’ opinions and understanding of tenants’ rights organizing.

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Better determine where participants’ assumptions and familiarity are regarding the subject of tenants’ rights, housing policy and community organizing
  2. Discuss and assess the narrative of tenants’ history, how culture and policy have framed this story and how alternative stories may disrupt and shift this history

**MATERIALS & MEDIA**

Butcher paper or chart paper; magic markers; **AGREE & DISAGREE** pre-written on large paper; Tenants History Questions pre-written on large paper; pre-written questions

**ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS**

- For this activity we’ve posted signs on opposite ends of the room, one that says **AGREE**, and one that says **DISAGREE**.
- Let’s clear the space between the two signs, and have all participants stand in the middle.
- Now, I’m going to make a statement. And then you are going to put yourself somewhere on the imaginary line between the **AGREE** and **DISAGREE** signs.
- This line is a spectrum, it’s not black or white; either/or, so you can indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement by where you stand on the line.
- The ends of the line (where the signs are) represent very strong agreement or very strong disagreement, and all of the space in between the signs represents degrees of agreement.
- After everyone has found their place on the line, I’ll call on people to explain why they’re standing in their spot.
- People will have an opportunity to respond to each other.
- Listen carefully to what other folks are saying. If you hear something that makes you re-evaluate where you’re standing, move to a new spot on the line!

**Here’s the 1<sup>st</sup> statement:**

*The tenant movement has historically been powerful*

- After folks take their position, ask why they’re standing where they are.
- Ask if anyone wants to change their position after hearing what someone said.



# TENANT HISTORY SPECTROGRAM FACILITATION GUIDE *cont'd*

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY STATEMENTS

- *Rent strikes are an effective tenant organizing tool*
- *The story of the fight for tenants' rights is portrayed very accurately in mainstream media*
- *Over time, the majority of housing policy that has become law, favors the rights of tenants*
- *Tenants and unions work well together*
- *Throughout NYC history, federal and state policy have greatly impacted the tenant movement*
- *The tenant movement made compromises it shouldn't have*
- *The tenant movement can learn from past victories and setbacks to achieve more equitable and just housing policy*

Again, after each statement is read and participants take their position, the facilitator will ask why they're standing where they are and if anyone wants to change their position.

## PROCESSING QUESTIONS

- *What did you notice about people's responses to the different questions?*
- *Was there a lot of movement across the room?*
- *Did anyone notice any patterns regarding their position on the Spectrum, was there anything common in the statements they agreed with or disagreed with?*
- *Are there things folks are taking away from the Spectrogram activity, that are helpful to your understanding or opinions around tenants' rights, policy or organizing around these issues?*
- *As you all bring this activity to your communities, what additional statements do you think could be added to this spectrogram activity? What statements may need to be adjusted?*

# SECTION OVERVIEW & ADDITIONAL TALKING POINTS



Mentioned videos can be found in the accompanying Film Guide. *Italicized terms are defined in the Glossary of Terms and Organizations.*  
 Developed by the RTCNYC Coalition and created for use with the Tenant Movement History Timeline  
 Last Updated: 8/21/18

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- *The guide is divided by eras or epochs of time. Each section gives you a general overview of that era as well as additional talking points and historical data/info for most, though not all of the slides.*
- *The information in the tenant movement history timeline isn't duplicated here. So, you could easily go through the timeline, with the content on each slide, and not use this guide. Or you could use the overview of each section and summarize the slides in the movement history timeline. Or it could be something you have on hand, in case you get a question about something you aren't sure about. Or you could use it in detail. Up to you!*

## PRE-TENEMENT HISTORY & FIRST TENEMENT LAWS

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- The establishment of New York City relied on the slaughter of the Lenape people, and the theft of their land, by Dutch colonizers. The Dutch brought the concept of private property to New York, as the government granted tracts of land to wealthy families and merchants.
- The city was then built using slave labor, a practice that the English continued after taking possession of New York in 1664. By 1773, 42% of NYC households had slaves; slavery was at the foundation of the New York economy.
- In the mid-1800s, tenant farmers rebelled against the feudal manor system in the Hudson Valley, in which wealthy patroons controlled vast swathes of land. The Anti-Rent Movement used a diversity of tactics to demand ownership of the land they occupied, forming armed bands to resist evictions, suing landlords, and lobbying the legislature.
- As New York City expanded, many poor and working-class people, especially immigrants, lived in cramped and unsanitary tenement housing. Draft and unemployment riots, and militant labor strikes erupted in response to these poor conditions and the inequalities of the industrial system. The city passes safety regulations in tenements in order to quell unrest and fight disease.

## PRE-TENEMENT HISTORY & FIRST TENEMENT LAWS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

#### 1. LAND OF THE LENAPE, PRE-CHRISTIAN CALENDAR-1700

- Before colonization, the Lenape had lived in the boroughs of New York since the Ice Age, or about 10,000 years.
- Like many other Native American tribes, the Lenape believed that land should be used communally by all members of a tribe—they did not share the same concept of land “ownership” that the Europeans brought with them upon colonization.

#### 2. DUTCH COLONIZATION, 1624-1664

- The Dutch named the city New Amsterdam as part of the New Netherland Colony; the city was renamed New York after British colonization.
- Slavery in New Amsterdam began in 1626. The Dutch West Indian Company brought 11 African slaves to the city. The slaves were captured by the Portuguese in West Africa. A Spanish slave ship brought them to the West Indies, where the Dutch West Indian Company bought them and brought them to New Amsterdam. The number of slaves in the colony exploded shortly after.
- For the Dutch, stealing Native American land meant introducing the concept of private land ownership and then violently transferring the land to Dutch owners. Selling Manhattan for \$24 used the imported concept of a legal sale to mask a conquest that resulted from decades of war.

#### 3. LAND GRANTS, SLAVERY, AND WEALTH CREATION, 1626-1827

- In 1664, when the British took control of New York, the population number was about 1800, 1500 of which were Dutch, Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh. 375 were African, 300 were slaves and 75 were free. At that time, the farms of free Blacks covered 130 acres in lower Manhattan, some of which is now Washington Square Park.
- Slavery
  - Slavery was key to the New York economy, and to the creation of wealth for much of the city’s upper-class population, whether they made money from trade, construction, land speculation, or industry. Thus, the institution of slavery was at the foundation of the infrastructure and economic systems still at work in New York today.
  - From 1701 to 1726, officially, some 1,570 slaves were imported from the West Indies and another 802 from Africa. New York soon had the largest colonial slave population north of Maryland. From about 2,000 in 1698, the number of the colony’s black slaves swelled to more than 9,000 adults by 1746 and 13,000 by 1756. Between 1732 and 1754, slaves accounted for more than 35 percent of the total immigration through the port of New York.
  - In 1711, a slave market was established on Wall Street and the East River, which operated until 1762.
  - In 1712, a slave rebellion occurred, and 26 slaves were sentenced to death.

## PRE-TENEMENT HISTORY & FIRST TENEMENT LAWS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

- The 1799 laws that began to phase out slavery held that babies were born into slavery and would then work as indentured servants until their 20s.

#### **4. MANHATTAN IS LEVELED AND MANHATTAN MILLIONAIRES, 1811**

- Around this time, the neighborhood called Five Points is built in Lower Manhattan and becomes the first slum in the country. The neighborhood was built on top of a pond, which due to poor engineering started to emit methane gas into the neighborhood, and which bred rats and malaria-carrying mosquitos. Everyone who could leave the neighborhood did, leaving poor Irish immigrants and Blacks behind to suffer the conditions.
- Chelsea, Murray, Fordham, and Morrisiana were all prominent merchants who made their fortunes during this time.

#### **5. THE FIRST ANTI-RENT MOVEMENT IN NY: TENANT FARMERS, 1839-59**

- The tenant farmers were fighting against the antiquated “manor” system, in which small-time farmers cultivated land which was controlled by patroons—landholders who controlled large swathes of territory. The manors of the Hudson Valley were a remnant of the feudal economic system of manorialism.
- The Anti-Rent Movement successfully dismantled the manor system in the Hudson Valley, after the New York Constitution of 1846 added provisions for tenants’ rights, including abolishing feudal tenures and outlawing leases that lasted longer than twelve years. The remaining manors dissolved, as patroons sold off their land.

#### **6. FIRST TENEMENT HOUSING LAWS, 1867-1901**

- Democratic Party political “machines,” such as Boss Tweed’s Tammany Hall, gained political power from the city’s European immigrant populations, exchanging votes in return for social services.
- The New Tenement Housing Act was opposed by the real estate industry on the grounds that it would discourage new construction—an early example of the way that opponents of housing regulation in New York use economic arguments to fight legislation intended to protect tenants.



## 1900–1930: RENT STRIKES AND SOCIALIST ORGANIZING

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- Rent strikes emerge as a tactic for contesting the imbalance of power between tenant and landlord. Immigrant Jewish women organize the city's first rent strike in 1904, following a mass boycott that successfully drove down the price of meat in their neighborhood. In the following years, the Socialist Party helps organize a series of rent strikes in Harlem and Brooklyn, meanwhile gaining a following in NY by organizing for workers' rights and against the federal government's violations of free political speech. Rent strikes later erupt during WWI, in response to high rents due to a housing shortage.
- The courts pass concessionary laws regulating rent in order to curtail socialist power—laws which enshrine the principle that landlords can claim a profit from rent.

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

#### 7. NYC'S FIRST RENT STRIKE, 1904

- The women collaborated with the synagogue, the labor unions, and mutual aid and benefit associations, and their campaign was a success! Strikers also formed the New York Renters Protection Association, to raise money through dues for people who couldn't pay rent.

#### 8. RENT STRIKES IN HARLEM AND BROOKLYN, 1907–08

- Strikers were considered dangerously radical, and red-baiting—harassing or persecuting someone based on known (or simply suspected) communist tendencies—was intense.

#### 9. TENANT POWER IS SOCIALIST POWER, 1917–19

- The Russian Revolution of 1917 was an important inspiration for the IWW and other radical workers around the world.
- An important part of the Socialist Party's strategy was organizing tenants into Tenant Leagues, groups which were the radical precursor to today's tenant unions and other neighborhood-based tenant organizations. These groups paralleled labor unions; they were similarly based on the principle of building collective power to claim control over the economic resources essential to life, taking this power away from abusive bosses and landlords.
- It's important to note the differences here between the IWW and the Socialist Party. Socialists were willing to work through the electoral system but Wobblies saw the capitalist state and its political system as illegitimate.

## 1900–1930: RENT STRIKES AND SOCIALIST ORGANIZING *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 10. JUDGE ACTIVISM, 1917–25

#### 11. RENT STRIKES ERUPT, 1917–18

- During WWI, the vacancy rate went from 5% to .36%.
- This housing crisis sparked speculation: landlords bought buildings, increased rents, and sold them at a profit based on increased rental income. Thousands of properties changed hands like this.
- The lessee system started here: landlords used to own buildings and manage them themselves (often having another job like a butcher), but if they owned multiple properties, they couldn't manage them themselves. They would lease buildings to a lessee for a yearly fee, (someone like a local businessman without enough capital to buy a building) who made a profit by increasing rents and curtailing services. This happened a lot in immigrant communities like the LES, and the lessee was hated and seen as a traitor because it was an Italian on Italian, or Jewish on Jewish transaction.
- When members of the Williamsburg Tenants League showed their tenant league card during an eviction, union movers refused to move out their stuff.

#### 12. MAYOR'S COMMITTEE ON RENT PROFITEERING IS FORMED, 1919

#### 13. THE RED SCARE, 1919–20

- After the Red Scare, during the early 1920's, Tenant Councils and Tenant Associations are formed as more conservative formations than the socialist tenant leagues and become aligned with the Democratic Party. These councils are also open to landlords and in general more middle class.
- The Palmer Raids are known as the precursor to the FBI.

#### 14. EMERGENCY RENT LAWS, APRIL–SEPTEMBER 1920

#### 15. RENT LAW RENEWAL FIGHTS OF THE 1920S, 1922–29

- There was an increase in housing construction through the 1920s, fueled by large tax incentives for new construction, in which developers recouped  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the cost. Citywide vacancy rate went from 0.15 % in 1921 to 7.76 % in 1928.
- As socialist activity declined, more conservative tenant associations took the lead on tenant organizing. Tenant leaders shifted their arguments to focusing on controlling rents for low income tenants only, rather than fighting to change the rent system as whole. This led to concessionary rent laws. By the time the rent laws expired in 1929 and were declared unconstitutional, there was very little activism around reinstating new laws.

## 1900–1930: RENT STRIKES AND SOCIALIST ORGANIZING *cont'd*

- SLIDE BY SLIDE**
- As the slide alludes to, the rent laws were both revolutionary in that they subordinated the owner’s ability to charge what the market could bear to the public good, and concessionary in that they established that a profit level was a key criterion to determine whether a requested rent increase was reasonable.

### 16. LITTLE MOSCOW: COMMUNIST COOPERATIVE HOUSING, 1925

- Video: 2 min, 42 sec.

### 17. HARLEM TENANTS LEAGUE, 1929

### 18. RENT STRIKES BECOME LEGAL AND THE MULTIPLE DWELLING LAW IS PASSED, 1929–30

## THE 1930S: THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND MASS TENANT MOBILIZATIONS

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- First came an anti-eviction movement, led by the communists that sought to reduce the impact of the Great Depression’s mass unemployment on beleaguered tenants. Unemployment Councils organize rent strikes and eviction resistance—including moving furniture back in to apartments—and in Communist stronghold neighborhoods it becomes impossible to evict tenants.
- Then came a campaign for tenement house upgrading led by social work and philanthropic organizations.
- Then, a campaign for public housing supported by liberals and tenant activists. The government builds the first public housing in the United States on the Lower East Side. Meanwhile, during the New Deal, racist “redlining” practices are built into federal mortgage policy, further segregating neighborhoods.

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 19. THE GREAT DEPRESSION, 1929–39

#### 20. TENANT POWER AND WORKER POWER UNITE, 1930–40

- The Communist Party was largely composed of Eastern European Jews living in self-contained neighborhoods. They maintained a faith in the ideals of the Soviet Union and were experienced in collective struggle both in American trade unions and European revolutionary movements. The party was willing to act outside the law and the established rules of political discourse to make its demands heard, making it an effective force for the tenant movement.
- Eviction resistance required only a handful of people to move furniture back into the apartment, because in general the neighbors were sympathetic. Most actions led to peaceful resolutions; part of their efficacy came from how expensive they made conducting evictions.

## THE 1930S: THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND MASS TENANT MOBILIZATIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

- No one had tried this tactic before the Communist Party did.
- The Communist Party also organized seven rent strikes in 1931 and 1932. This was a more difficult tactic, as tenants had to form committees, develop demands, negotiate, etc. The committees demanded that owners reduce rents in response to mass unemployment, which posed an implicit threat to the private ownership of housing.

### 21. THE BRONX IS ON FIRE, 1932-33

### 22. NEW DEAL: REDLINING BEGINS, 1933-37

- Video: 6 min, 4 sec.
- The precursor to the federal laws begins in Chicago. After the first great migration, there were a recorded 58 bombings of properties rented or purchased by African Americans in white Chicago neighborhoods. Neighborhood improvement associations formed, most of which were organized by the Chicago real estate board, to pressure white owners and realtors into refusing to rent or sell to Blacks. The CREB began its own policy of redlining, and tried to get their policy into law, but it was struck down by the supreme court in 1917. (Family Properties, 39-41)
- “In the 1930’s the US appraisal industry opposed the “mixing” of the races, which it believed would cause “the decline of both the human race and of property values.” They ensured segregation through their property rating system: A—green, B—blue, C—yellow, D—red. A were all white. Jewish neighborhoods were riskier and rated B or C. “If a neighborhood had Black residents it was marked D, red, no matter what their social class or how small a percentage of the population they made up. They were appraised as worthless or likely to decline. In short, they were redlined, and the FHA embraced this practice.” (Family Properties, 41-42)
- During the 1930s, residential and urban environments were becoming crucial circuits of investment that could act as an escape valve through which capital sought to manage the problem of over-accumulation.
- After WWI, by stoking demand for refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines and other domestic appliances, the privately-owned home became the heart, both economically and ideologically, of a world of commodities.
- When consumer purchasing power collapsed during the Great Depression, governments moved to shore up effective demand for housing. In response to the crisis posed by the Depression, the federal government created the regulatory structure that made the modern housing system possible. Through the FHA, the Glass-Steagall Act and other New Deal initiatives, the standardized mortgage was born. Without this stabilizing federal presence, widespread homeownership would have been impossible. But in the process, government and real estate together used redlining, discrimination, and restrictive covenants to entrench racist patterns of land use and to exclude African-Americans from home finance,



## THE 1930S: THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND MASS TENANT MOBILIZATIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

creating unjust housing patterns that continued to have destructive consequences far into the future.

- The housing system was thus anchored by state support. Instead of the European model of the nationalization of housing, our system was built upon massive government investment in infrastructure and equally massive government action around mortgage lending to finance private dwellings with debt. The result was a state supported system dominated by private ownership. Only in the 1940s did homeownership become the embodiment of the American Dream; homeownership rates increased sharply after 1950.

### 23. LANDLORDS AND STATE REPRESSION, 1933–37

- The Greater New York Taxpayers Association led three waves of evictions. In response, 3,000 people hurled stones and bottles at the police, and 1,500 fought the police for an hour and attacked a landlord. The Bronx Landlords Protective Association warned that “rent strikes can be compared to epidemics.”
- Landlords went to the mayor’s office to demand a strategy to suppress the strikes and won a series of injunctions and indictments.

### 24. HARLEM RENT STRIKE, 1934

### 25. KNICKERBOCKER VILLAGE RENT STRIKE, 1934

### 26. FIRST HOUSES: FIRST PUBLIC HOUSING BUILT IN THE UNITED STATES, 1935

- The First Houses are located at Avenue A & East 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, on the Lower East Side.
- One of public housing’s biggest supporters in New York was the tenement housing commissioner, Langdon Post. When he began his position, there was a high vacancy rate (due to evictions, abandonment, and doubling up), and by the end of his tenure he had tightened the housing market greatly, with help from the New Deal’s massive slum clearance program (more than 40,000 apartments had been removed from the low-rent market since 1933 through demolition, abandonment and transfer to non-residential use). His plan was “to create a housing shortage, because it’s the only way we will get decent housing”—meaning public housing, which he saw as the only solution for housing the poor.
- Communists during this period neither supported nor opposed public housing. They believed that a capitalist state would never be able to deliver what the people needed, and so instead advocated for worker-owned and worker-run housing—similar to the call for “social housing” today.

## THE 1930S: THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND MASS TENANT MOBILIZATIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 27. TENANTS UNITE THROUGHOUT THE CITY, 1936

- In 1936, the KV, Consolidated Tenants League and 18 other tenants' associations rallied to support striking building service workers, and to form a city-wide membership-based tenant organizing organization, which became known as the Tenants Council.
- The Council was rooted in settlement houses and philanthropic organizations and allied with Mayor La Guardia. They lobbied for low-rent public housing and improvement of living conditions, and offered tenant leaders space, funds, and help lobbying.
- Almost every city-wide neighborhood affiliate had a working relationship with a local unit of the Workers Alliance—the Communist-led organization of the unemployed—and many had close ties with the American Labor Party clubs.
- The Council embodied the ethos of the Popular Front left: simultaneously seeking respectability and projecting identification with the downtrodden; mingling mass protest with political bargaining; incorporating movements against racial discrimination into movement for social reform.

## THE 1940'S AND 50'S: WWII, WHITE FLIGHT, AND RESISTING URBAN RENEWAL

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- As African Americans and Puerto Ricans relocate to the city to escape economic and political violence, white residents move to suburban areas.
- In 1943, a coalition of tenant and union groups successfully demand a rent freeze in New York City as part of the federal government's WWII price controls; after the war, in 1950, New York enacts state rent control laws. The question of whether or not these tenant organizing victories overshadow rent strikes and other more radical tactics is an important one.
- Urban renewal and slum clearance begins, displacing low-income people of color. Tenants and organizers fight back against urban renewal projects and displacement.
- Black organizers fight against racial discrimination in public and private housing, as well as against displacement from slum clearance areas—a diversity of goals which ignites intra-movement conflicts over what racial and economic justice in housing looks like.

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 28. THE GREAT MIGRATION (SECOND WAVE) AND WHITE FLIGHT, 1940-70

### 29. WWII AND FEDERAL RENT CONTROLS, 1942

## THE 1940'S AND 50'S: WWII, WHITE FLIGHT, AND RESISTING URBAN RENEWAL *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 30. THE FIRST RENT FREEZE, 1943

#### • From Roberta Gold's Book, *When Tenants Claimed the City*:

- “Rent control came not because that movement had accumulated new organization strength, but because tenant work and tenant issues had been adopted by civil rights groups, trade unions, consumer organizations and left wing political clubs.”
- “New York’s renters were not in this struggle by themselves. They belonged to a dense network of left-liberal organizations: labor unions, communist and socialist political parties, cultural organizations and service centers that loomed large in the city’s landscape.... But in the 1940s and 50s, you could walk through large swaths of Manhattan—and the Bronx and Brooklyn—and find a whole blue-collar world verging on European-style social democracy. You’d pass by union-based health clinics and cooperative housing developments, left-wing party storefronts and their newspapers, cultural clubs with a political tilt. Woven into all this were neighborhood tenant associations, which ran “rent clinics” to educate tenants about their legal rights. On the LES, for example, the local tenant union shared an office with the labor party club. Without romanticizing all this as a paradise of class unity, we can appreciate that working people and their organizations and allies wielded power to advance their agenda in palpable ways, beyond what we know today. So when New York tenants faced the rent-control repeal crisis, they were already part of a network of communication and organization that could jump into action.”

### 31. STUY TOWN, 1943

### 32. MASS EVICTIONS AT NYCHA, 1946–47

### 33. SLUM CLEARANCE AND URBAN RENEWAL, 1949–74

- Video: 1 min, 14 sec.
- The precursor to these federal policies also began in Chicago. The Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (MHPC) (an elite reform organization concerned that slums that neighbored white businesses were causing people not to shop.) and the University of Chicago, united explicitly to minimize the Black presence in Hyde Park. Together, they wrote legislation in 1947, the Illinois Blighted Areas Redevelopment Act, which pioneered what would soon be urban renewal. The act created a new agency, the Land Clearance Commission, which could acquire land in “blighted” areas, demolish existing structures and then sell the land—at a huge discount—to private investors. “Although the act was designed by businessmen in order to subsidize private development, its supporters justified this state largesse in moral terms.... insisting it would improve the lot of the slum dwellers by forcing them to leave the slums.” (Family Properties, 47–48).

## THE 1940'S AND 50'S: WWII, WHITE FLIGHT, AND RESISTING URBAN RENEWAL *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

- Truman's federal housing act of 49, incorporated many of the key features of the Illinois law.
- Public housing played a role in slum clearance and urban renewal, as developers were awarded multi-million-dollar contracts to demolish neighborhoods and build public housing. There were both good and bad intentions for building public housing, as politicians vied for the political base of the building trades. Public housing was more expensive than the housing that it replaced; the bigger, newer, nicer buildings catered to middle class aspirations.
  - These projects weren't just racially segregated, but also ethnically segregated.
- "But while more public housing was authorized, the allocations were so inadequate that most displaced people were left on the streets. What's more, since the act allowed the location of federally funded public housing to be determined by local authorities, whites nationwide were given the power to exclude such housing from their communities." (Family Properties, 49)
- Save Our Homes and other anti-Urban Renewal groups were often viewed as the "fringe" and communist left.
- From Roberta Gold: "During this period, large liberal racial justice organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League made a priority of desegregation and integration for the black community, rather than demanding better conditions in the neighborhoods where they already lived. The freedom to live without racial barriers to movement is an important civil right, but nonetheless did little to help poor and working-class families who faced economic obstacles to leaving their neglected neighborhoods, such as Harlem and Bed Stuy. When Puerto Rican families on the West Side began organizing against urban renewal plans that would evict them from their neighborhood, the national NAACP refused to give their support, declaring that a plan to retain the neighborhood's low-income residents would perpetuate segregation—despite the fact that these families wanted to stay in their homes. The local chapter of the NAACP eventually endorsed the plan, and the city agreed to increase the low-rent housing quotient, though not enough to make up for all of the low-rent housing that was destroyed.... These competing visions of racial justice in housing—that is, whether the goal is for people of color to move out of the ghettos/barrios en masse, or to be able to have better homes/schools/services even while remaining in majority-minority neighborhoods if they so choose—continue to animate divergent efforts by Black and Latino tenants and housing advocates."

### 34. FIGHTING URBAN RENEWAL, 1949–62

## THE 1940'S AND 50'S: WWII, WHITE FLIGHT, AND RESISTING URBAN RENEWAL *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 35. NY ENACTS STATE RENT CONTROL, 1950

- Roberta Gold: “1950 was the year New York State enacted rent control. We can think of that as a high-water-mark of working-class political power. But even then, as now, the law contained a two-year sunset clause, meaning that tenants had to turn out every two years to get the law renewed. These protections have been chipped away in recent years, so that fewer tenants benefit from stable rents. This has gone hand in hand with shrinkage of labor unions and erosion of workers’ power.”

### 36. FIGHTING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING, 1951–68

## THE 1960S–1980S: RACIAL JUSTICE, SWEAT EQUITY, & THE RIGHT TO SHELTER VS. ABANDONMENT AND GENTRIFICATION

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- Major factors leading to displacement in the 1960’s–80s:
  - In poor neighborhoods: fires, absent services, unsafe buildings, stripping of pipes and appliances from vacant buildings, various forms of environmental racism
  - In working and lower-class neighborhoods: gentrification, manifested in evictions to make way for luxury redevelopment and brown stoning and hospital expansion
  - For middle class tenants: cooperative conversions with the eviction of non-purchasing tenants and buyouts of rent regulated apartments to move to decontrol rents.
- Tenants fight for their right to the city through sweat equity projects, mobilizations against homelessness, a few rent strikes, and a movement to preserve SRO housing.

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 37. THE BLACK PANTHERS, YOUNG LORDS, AND I WOR KUEN TAKE ON HOUSING AND HEALTH, 1960–75

- In 1970: I Wor Kuen helped physically move Chinese families into abandoned buildings surrounding an apartment building that the Bell Telephone Company planned to demolish to make room for a telephone switching station. The housing block still exists to this day as a result of this mobilization.

### 38. RENT STRIKES IN HARLEM AND BED STUY, 1963

### 39. SWEAT EQUITY AND TENANT TAKEOVERS, 1967–85

- Video: 27 min, 31 sec.
- The first low-income conversion to tenant ownership was initiated by a Harlem church in 1963.
- The city formed the Office of Special Initiatives (OSI) in 1969, headed by Robert Schur, a tenant lawyer, which helped establish low income co-ops

## THE 1960S–1980S: RACIAL JUSTICE, SWEAT EQUITY, & THE RIGHT TO SHELTER VS. ABANDONMENT AND GENTRIFICATION *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

(what we know today as limited equity HDFCS). 84% of these co-ops had ties to a neighborhood group—today only 24% do. Many couldn't make ends meet even with low rents.

- Sweat equity began with a Catholic priest, Father Robert Fox of East Harlem, who took over a building on 102<sup>nd</sup> street in 1969. Schur named the practice sweat equity and used the municipal loan program to fund materials and wages for the “sweaters.” This started a job training program funded by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act. Schur increased the receivership program (a law passed in the mid 60s) from 15 to 250 buildings.
- The financial crisis led to the collapse of the receivership program in 1975. However, media attention and press garnered a lot of support for sweat equity projects, from banks, churches, and foundations. This meant that folks who used to organize found themselves administering large projects, meeting stringent reporting requirements, and writing new funding proposals; they had to work intensely in a few buildings to rehabilitate them, no longer able to organize neighborhood residents.
- For every Banana Kelly, there were 10–15 tenant groups that started collecting their own rents, etc.
- Many neighborhood organizations stopped organizing tenants just when the rent strike strategy of spending rents on services and repairs and thus seizing de facto control of buildings, was being widely accepted and could have become a way of building considerable strength at the grassroots and forcing input to policy.
- Once speculation began and property values started to rise in the 1980s, the city cracked down on these projects.

### 40. STATE RENT LAWS, 1969–73

- The real significance of the Rent Stabilization Law was that it regulated buildings built after 1947, which had been left out of rent control.
- The city victories for tenants (SCRIE, etc.) were arguably overshadowed by the state Urstadt Law.
- On the Met Council split—at met council, there was real disagreement about the role of working with electeds and citywide rent strikes. The leadership at Met Council wanted to go on citywide rent strikes, while the organizers didn't think it was working. The organizers were fired and started what's now Tenants and Neighbors.

### 41. DISINVESTMENT, PLANNED SHRINKAGE, AND ABANDONMENT, 1970–75

- Abandonment reached epic proportions in 1966. More than 500,000 units were abandoned after 1965.
- At this time, the state also funded low interest mortgages for hospital expansion. City hospitals begin buying up buildings and land and hired relocation companies to empty buildings. Tenants organized to resist relo-



## THE 1960S–1980S: RACIAL JUSTICE, SWEAT EQUITY, & THE RIGHT TO SHELTER VS. ABANDONMENT AND GENTRIFICATION *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

- cation almost every time, forming citywide networks through the Save our Homes Committee. They won some concessions but mostly lost.
- “Burning of the Bronx:” in 1972 FDNY made cuts, closed firehouses in already vulnerable S. Bronx neighborhoods, and in 1975 closed even more (while keeping them open in rich neighborhoods, even when the City was bankrupt). Fires began in 1968 and got worse and worse as NYC continued to close the fire houses throughout the 1970’s. During the peak of the crisis, there were an average of 44 fires per night in the South Bronx. Remaining South Bronx firehouses go on 10,000 runs per year—more than anywhere in U.S. and (firefighters say) in the world. By the end of decade, 80% of South Bronx housing stock had burned to the ground, and over half a million people were displaced.
- Tenant advocates attempted to pass a bill banning retaliatory evictions for all tenants, not just rent regulated ones, but were not successful.
- In 1977, the city enacts En Rem, Local Law 45, allowing the city government to foreclose for tax arrears once owners were one year behind, as opposed to the old law of 3 years. As a result, the city became the owner of more than 16,500 buildings—the largest landlord in the city. However, the city didn’t want to be an owner, and it couldn’t sell the housing to private owners, so it created programs to sell the buildings back to tenants, including the Tenant Interim Lease (TIL) program, controlled by the Department of Alternate Management Programs (DAMP).
- During legislative fights over rent regulations in the late 1970’s, anti-regulatory advertisements showed stark pictures of abandoned housing and blamed this upon rent control and stabilization. The Emergency Financial Control Board, the State Moreland Commission, the Rand Corporation, and several leading papers and business weeklies also blamed the city’s financial crisis upon rent regulations, which they claimed had caused abandonment and therefore the erosion of the city’s tax base, and demanded that the regulations, rather than the housing, be abandoned.
- Co-op conversions became a way for the landlord to skirt the rent regulations, because they allowed for the eviction of non-buyers. NYSTLC passed legislation in 1974 that prevented evictions of non-buyers, unless 35% of tenants had bought in. Co-ops conversions nonetheless displaced many middle and low-income tenants throughout the city, and a series of new laws in 1977–1983 weakened the co-op conversion regulations.

### 42. RESISTING AUSTERITY—RENT INCREASES AND PEOPLES’ HOUSING CRIMES TRIAL, 1970

- Along with the Housing Crimes Trial, in response to the MBR increase the Met Council called a citywide rent strike. However, only a few buildings actually went on strike—perhaps because tenants were hesitant to go on strike for purely political purposes, when there wasn’t an element of self-

## THE 1960S–1980S: RACIAL JUSTICE, SWEAT EQUITY, & THE RIGHT TO SHELTER VS. ABANDONMENT AND GENTRIFICATION *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

interest (such as the need for repairs or a fight against rent increases) involved.

#### 43. OPERATION MOVE-IN, 1970

- In response to the creation of a sweat equity project after OMI, the group CONTINUE (Committee of Neighbors to Ensure a Normal Urban Environment), argued that there was a tipping point (20%) of Brown and Black people that would cause a white flight and which they would call “pollution”—and which would thus require an environmental impact statement. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and it was eventually dismissed. Eventually they built housing on the site, with 80% market-rate and 20% affordable—the exact ratio that CONTINUE argued was the upper threshold before the neighborhood was “polluted.”

#### 44. NYC HOUSING COURT IS CREATED, 1973

#### 45. RENT STABILIZATION AND WARRANT OF HABITABILITY, 1974–75

#### 46. CO-OP CITY GOES ON STRIKE!, 1975–76

- Rent strikes can demonstrate prioritizing the preservation of housing over private property—a statement that gained special significance as the city lost low- and moderate- income housing to abandonment, demolition, and gentrification throughout the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

#### 47. TENANTS TAKE ON THE BANKS!, 1975–77

- Video: 20 min, 23 sec.

#### 48. THE RIGHT TO SHELTER, 1979–2008

#### 49. MASS MOBILIZATIONS TO END HOMELESSNESS, 1980–88

- From May 1988–January 1989, during Koch’s administration, Homeward Bound led a six-month homeless encampment on the steps of City Hall. It began with Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness’s annual overnight vigil in May to push for funding for the city budget. The vigil lasted until January.

#### 50. ABANDONMENT AND GENTRIFICATION: TWO SIDES OF NEOLIBERALISM, 1981–89

- Many of these blows to housing rights occurred under the Reagan administration, from 1981–1989, whose policies in nearly every sector of social services tended toward austerity.

#### 51. OMNIBUS HOUSING ACT OF 1983, 1983

## THE 1960S–1980S: RACIAL JUSTICE, SWEAT EQUITY, & THE RIGHT TO SHELTER VS. ABANDONMENT AND GENTRIFICATION *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE 52. FIGHTING FOR SRO TENANTS, 1985–86

- In 1971, an SRO tenant union was formed.
- Single Room Occupancy units were created after World War II, in cities across the us, in order to supply transitional housing for folks coming back from the war as well as transitional housing for poor and homeless people. SRO's typically mean that tenants rent rooms, and share a bathroom, kitchen or both with other tenants in the buildings. They sometimes are referred to as hotels. While SRO tenants are rent stabilized they are also governed by additional laws specific to SROs. For example, there is a separate RGB vote for SROs and certificate of no harassment applies to all SROs anywhere in the city. There was a concerted effort in the 70's and 80's, where powerful interests fought to get rid of them. It was housing for the poorest New Yorkers and the class cleaning nature of the housing stock was severe. The housing movement generally lost this fight—as the vast majority of SRO units were lost.

### 53. ACT UP FIGHT BACK!, 1989

### 54. HOUSING NOW: NATIONAL MARCH ON WASHINGTON, OCTOBER 9, 1989

- When the march was being organized, there were many debates around whether the demand should be about a right to shelter or housing—eventually housing won out.

## THE 1990S: THE TENANT MOVEMENT ON THE DEFENSIVE

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- This is a period of major losses for the tenant movement, despite rigorous mass organizing efforts—culminating in Showdown '97, in which the state legislature issued a series of legislative blows to succession rights, rent stabilization, and housing court rights, including the solidification of vacancy deregulation.
- In 1995, squatters in the Lower East Side begin a long showdown with NYPD, eventually leading to the conversion of the squats into low-equity co-ops.
- Gentrification and co-op conversions continue throughout the city.

## THE 1990S: THE TENANT MOVEMENT ON THE DEFENSIVE *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE **55. TENANTS MOBILIZE ANNUALLY AROUND RENT INCREASES AT THE RGB, 1990–2000**

- Ed Hockman was the Chair of the RGB at this time and didn't believe in rent regulation—which is reflected in the large rent increases from the RGB in the 1990s.

### **56. VACANCY DEREGULATION: THE BEGINNING OF PHASING OUT RENT STABILIZATION, 1993–94**

- During the 1990s, the link between the real estate industry and city politicians was especially clear—for example, the current president of the landlord lobbying group called the Rent Stabilization Association (RSA), Joe Strasburg, was Governor Pataki's Chief of Staff.
- The tenant blacklist existed but wasn't yet in widespread use—that meant that tenants could use more ambitious strategies, such as rent strikes.

### **57. SQUATTERS STAND OFF, LES, 1995**

### **58. SHOWDOWN 97**

- Organizers sent buses of tenants to Albany every week, making the cover of the New York Post and the Daily News.
- One of the weaknesses of the tenant effort during Showdown 97 was its disorganization, and some major internal coalition challenges around strategy. For example, Giuliani was invited to go to tenant lobby day to speak at the rally in support of rent regulation and he publicly agreed. Met Council organizers objected because of his racist policing practices and said that if he spoke they would protest the rally. They were forced to disinvite the mayor, which is indicative of the coalition's internal differences.
- Another major defeat occurred when the legislature lowered the income deregulations overnight, affecting 500–600 people.

## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: FIGHTING FOR TENANT PROTECTIONS

### GENERAL OVERVIEW

- Under Bloomberg and De Blasio, tenants fight against rezonings and unaffordable “affordable housing” construction.
- In 2008, observing an increase in tenant harassment due to predatory speculation tactics, the Tenants United Against Harassment coalition wins the Tenant Protection Act.
- Tenants organize annually around rent increases at the RGB, and win rent freezes in 2015 and 2016!
- In 2017, the Right to Counsel Coalition wins guaranteed eviction defense for low income tenants, CATH wins the Certificate of No Harassment legislation, barring landlords with a history of harassment from accessing DOB permits and Stand for Tenant Safety wins a series of bills that prevent construction as harassment.

## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: FIGHTING FOR TENANT PROTECTIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

#### 59. REZONING FIGHTS AND “AFFORDABLE HOUSING” UNDER BLOOMBERG, 2002-14

- Video: 2 min, 54 sec.
- It’s important to know that while the rezonings are largely the agenda of the mayors, they still have to pass through city council. And while tenant organizing groups target their local city council members, one of the challenges is that the mayor commits capital investments and improvements in exchange for their vote, and many of those districts are starved for resources. The other challenge is that the council members who don’t represent the district, defer to the council member who does, so that they are extended the same courtesy if/when their district is rezoned. It means that you can’t organize the council as a body, like you would for legislation, and the particular council member has a lot of power but is under intense pressure from the mayor not to dissent.

#### 60. RENT LAW RENEWAL FIGHTS, 2003-18

- Here too, there are examples of the tension in the tenant movement, with two different coalitions R3 and ATP, working on similar platforms of strengthening and renewing the rent laws. Coordination and collaboration ebbs and flows over the years.

#### 61. LEAD LAWS ARE PASSED!, AUGUST 2004

- This fight began with the Young Lords in the 1960s-70s, who brought environmental racism to light in their campaign against lead paint. This work helped win an amendment to the Health Code in 1970, establishing that a landlord had to fix the issue—or HPD would have to—when a child is found to have lead poisoning. Landlords fought against the law and managed to strip it of all enforceability in 1999, setting the stage for the anti-lead efforts of 2003-4.
- Lead is an expensive paint, and so it was generally only used in middle class neighborhoods; as a result, there was a “lead belt” where poor folks moved into neighborhoods of old buildings that used to be middle class. Scientists across the country did studies about this.
- Activists picketed all of the fundraisers of New York City Council Speaker Gifford Miller in order to get the law passed.
- Union workers, who scrape paint off of bridges, were involved with the fight, as were members of the medical professions community and lawyers who work on personal injury cases.

#### 62. TENANT HARASSMENT AND THE TENANT PROTECTION ACT, 2006-08

#### 63. RENT FREEZES AND THE RENEWED FIGHTS AROUND THE RGB, 2014-17

## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: FIGHTING FOR TENANT PROTECTIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

#### **64. REZONING FIGHTS AND “AFFORDABLE HOUSING” UNDER DE BLASIO, 2015–18**

- Video: 3 min, 42 sec.
- The RAFA coalition ultimately split over the decision to support MIH. While the coalition had opposed MIH and the rezonings for over a year, showing massive tenant and labor solidarity, the coalition leadership decided they weren't winning and came out in support of MIH, cancelling a planned civil disobedience in protest of MIH in order to save some political capital. They did this to the shock of many coalition members, who left not long afterwards. While groups continued to fight the neighborhood based rezonings in their neighborhood-based coalitions, the citywide organized opposition to the rezonings died. This is reflective of the tension between smaller neighborhood-based groups, who feel they have systems of accountability to tenant leaders and community members and larger citywide mobilizing orgs, who often sacrifice the local for the global.

#### **65. RIGHT TO COUNSEL: NYC BECOMES THE FIRST CITY TO MAKE EVICTION DEFENSE A RIGHT!, 2017**

- Video: 4 min, 55 sec.
- Lots more info at [www.righttocounselnyc.org](http://www.righttocounselnyc.org)

#### **66. STAND FOR TENANT SAFETY!, 2017**

#### **67. CERTIFICATE OF NO HARASSMENT—A NEW TOOL FOR TENANTS, 2017**

- Video: 6 min, 13 sec.

#### **68. TENANTS STRENGTHEN RENT STABILIZATION!**

- In 2017, after decades of disappointment in tenant organizing on the state level, tenants formed the Upstate Downstate Housing Alliance, for the first time in decades forming a statewide coalition with tenant groups across NY state. This alliance then launched the Housing Justice for All Campaign, fighting for changes to laws on the state level.

#### **69. COVID**

- Blog and study about disproportionate impact of COVID on communities of color: <https://anhd.org/blog/frontline-communities-hit-hardest-covid-19>

#### **70. TENANTS FIGHT TO CANCEL RENT AND STOP EVICTIONS**

- Video: 3 min, 51 sec.
- It's hard to recount the pace, scale and depth of organizing of this time as well as the trauma and loss so many experienced. Many tenant leaders lost their lives to COVID and many lost family and friends. In addition, almost all organizing moved to a virtual setting.
- Given the nature of the crisis, the citywide tenants rights coalition Right to Counsel NYC Coalition and the statewide Coalition Housing Justice for All, decided to work together on Cancel Rent and the Eviction Moratorium.



## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: FIGHTING FOR TENANT PROTECTIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

RTC focused on the rent strike work and the political education for Cancel Rent and HJ4A focused more on the state legislative front though there was an attempt for close coordination. This collaboration lasted until the middle of 2021.

- See here for a list of all the demands during this time: [https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/demands\\_to\\_cancelrent\\_and\\_reclaimourhomes](https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/demands_to_cancelrent_and_reclaimourhomes)
- See here for the Rent Strike Toolkit and for Rent Strike Legal Support Guide that we created to support the lawyers defending the Rent Strikers: [https://www.righhtocounselnyc.org/supporting\\_rent\\_strikes](https://www.righhtocounselnyc.org/supporting_rent_strikes)
- The eviction moratorium was never issued for more than a few months so it was a constant fight to get it extended. Every time it was extended, some of the terms changed, so there was a constant state of mobilizing to win and adjusting and educating folks about their rights and how to use them every time changes were made. The eviction moratorium, in some form, lasted from March of 2020–December 2022. The decision not to fight to renew at the end of 2022 was both a political calculus and a contested decision. The tenant movement was split on this decision. But the large statewide coalition, Housing Justice for All decided it was more strategic to pivot to fight for Good Cause Eviction.
- The demand to #CANCELRENT was deeply and widely felt by most active members of the tenant movement but opposed by the larger more established groups for both ideological and strategic reasons. The more grassroots groups thought it was a logical solution, not even a bold one, but one that would meet the scale of need, create little to no burden on tenants and create an opportunity to shift from the neoliberal norms of bailing out the most wealthy. The more established groups thought it was unwinnable and also questioned the universality of it—supporting the notion that folks should prove their worth to stay in their homes. And unfortunately some of them actively opposed it. Internally, they raised challenges about its winnability on constitutional grounds—saying it would never survive legal challenges. The RTC Coalition formed a Cancel Rent Legal Research team that delved into every aspect of this critique (executive powers, takings, etc), and released memos and talking points. We also held two roundtables for lawyers that over 200 lawyers attended, walking them through this research and we held a training for organizers and tenants on how to push back against the claims that canceling rent was unconstitutional. We wrote a legal memo on this, an [FAQ](#), and [powerpoint for lawyers](#) and [one for organizers and leaders](#). Externally some of the groups, particularly legal services groups, pushed a different bill called the Tenant Safe Harbor Act, which basically said that if you were sued in non payment in court, you could raise a new defense for financial hardship because of covid and if you won that claim, then you couldn't be evicted but you could get a money judgment against you. The tenant community vocally opposed this bill because it was in direct contradiction to cancel rent, by solidifying the idea that the tenant owed debt and while a tenant couldn't be evicted in housing court, the money

## THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: FIGHTING FOR TENANT PROTECTIONS *cont'd*

### SLIDE BY SLIDE

judgment could lead to eviction in another venue. This bill unfortunately passed and made it really challenging to push Cancel Rent because it gave more conservative politicians an excuse not to even engage with Cancel Rent, which was a much more radical and bold demand, because they could falsely claim they'd already addressed the risk of mass evictions, precipitated by COVID. This was a deep moment of clarity about the different positions and politics of members in the tenant movement. You can read more about Cancel Rent here: [https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/faq\\_about\\_cancel\\_rent](https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/faq_about_cancel_rent)

## CITED BOOKS

*The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904–1984*, Rutgers University Press, 1986 (Ronald Lawson, Mark Naison, editors)

*When Tenants Claimed the City*, Roberta Gold, University of Illinois Press, 2014

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Thompson, Mindy Fullilove. *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, Random House Publishing Group, 2009

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Day, Jared. *Urban Castles: Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism in New York City, 1890–1943*, Columbia University Press, 1999

Starecheski, Amy. *Ours to Lose, When Squatters Became Homeowners in New York City*, The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Satter, Beryl. *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*, Macmillan, 2009.

















**6** *What surprised you about the history of policy fights and landlord retaliation in the tenant movement? What did you learn? What lessons do you think we can draw from this, for our work today? What are key pieces of this history that you want to make sure your community knows?*

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# OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR LARGE & SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION



**1** *Over time, the tenant movement has made concessions, demanding what they think they can get versus what they want.*

**A** *What are examples of when this happened?*

**B** *For example: The initial rent laws of 1920 covered everyone, regardless of how much the rent was. Over time, the movement conceded to the laws only covering “low rent apartments.”*

**C** *What do you think were the forces at play at the time? What do you think discussions with leaders and organizers were like?*

**D** *What lessons do you think we can draw from this today?*

**2** *At many points in history, the tenant movement in NYC did things that no one else had ever done. What are examples of this that you learned about? (ie, moving furniture back in, judges refusing to evict, going on strike to demand rent reductions just because rent was too high.)*

**A** *What do you think were the conditions that allowed them to take such bold action?*

**B** *What risks did they take?*

**C** *What did they win? What did they lose? What narratives were created about the tenant movement when they won?*

**D** *What lessons do you think we can draw from this, for our work today?*

## **Rent Strikes**

**3** **A** *There were periods when hundreds of buildings were on rent strike at once! What were they?!*

**B** *What do you think were the conditions that enabled mass rent strikes? Are there any conditions they had then that we could work on creating now?*

**C** *Why do you think bold actions have ebbed and flowed over time, instead of been a constant?*

**D** *These struggles showed that militancy could win gains but was also risky—thousands were evicted, there were violent confrontations with police—and tenants won rent reductions, repairs and other demands. What does this tell us about the nature of direct action?*

- 4** *What do you want this history to say 10 years from now? 20 years from now? 100 years from now? What will you do to help make that future a reality?!*
- 5** *What narratives do you hear about the tenant movement? How did learning this history change that? Or not? Knowing this history, what do you want your neighbors, your community to know about the history of the tenant movement in New York?*
- 6** *Federal and state policies have shaped the history of this country and the history of housing and the tenant movement in NY. Given that the federal government will continue to do that and that we are continually (in varying degrees) in opposition, what do you think the tenant movement history has to offer in terms of how to respond/relate, etc.?*

## ERA-BASED QUESTIONS

### · BEFORE 1860

What different forms of land ownership and control existed during this time? How did the economic developments of this period set the stage for housing struggles in the coming centuries?

### · THE 1930S

How did government housing reforms championed by liberals, such as public housing projects and other New Deal programs, conceptualize who should own and control housing?

- How did these theories of resource distribution differ from the Communist vision?
- The Communist Party combined tenant and worker struggles during this period. Why was this an effective coalition? Do we still see this kind of solidarity today?

### · STRATEGY CHALLENGES STARTING IN THE '50S

To what extent was radical action and rent bargaining by tenant associations undermined by government rent regulation?

- How do we see this tension—between the importance of fighting for government regulation, and more radical ideas about social housing—play out in the tenant movement today?
- How do these priorities relate to one another in terms of political strategy? What strategies do we choose and which have we left behind?

### · URBAN RENEWAL

This entire period is one of intense change and one of varied levels of resistance.

- Why do you think so many people accepted urban renewal in exchange for public housing?
- How does this relate to some of the choices we feel we have to make today?
- What lessons can we learn from this?

### · SWEAT EQUITY AND TENANT TAKEOVERS

- How did squats and “sweat equity” projects propose to solve the housing crisis in New York? How did these tactics differ from other forms of direct action, like rent strikes and demonstrations / sleep-outs / etc.?
- What economic and political conditions are each of these direct action tactics most suited to (or most likely to be successful in)?

### · 1960S-80S

Also thinking back to urban renewal resistance, what strategies did organizers use in struggles for racial justice in housing during this time? What different goals and visions did racial justice organizations fight for?



## ERA-BASED QUESTIONS

- Why did these organizations consider tenant power important for achieving racial justice?
- What does racial justice in housing mean for your organization?
- How does the tenant movement of today incorporate racial justice goals into its campaigns? Is there sufficient work being done on this issue?

### · THE 1990S

Why do you think the tenant movement found itself on the defensive during this period? What economic and political forces from previous decades set the stage for the rollbacks in tenant protections?

### · THE 2000S

If you could write the overview of the past ten years of tenant organizing in New York, based on your experience in the movement, what would you highlight? What are the most important economic or political forces shaping New York? What have been our key victories and defeats? How would you characterize our organizing strategies during this time?

## RTC-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- What are some examples from the timeline of using universal “rights” framework? (ie. Right to Shelter, Right to Housing (in the 1989 Housing Now March), Right to Counsel, etc.).
  - What are the challenges associated with a rights-based approach?
  - What are the strengths of this strategy?
- Where in this history do we see attorneys participating in the tenant movement?
  - What has been their role?
  - What are the limits of legal action? In what ways does it empower the movement?
- Are there any tactics from this history that you see a right to counsel enabling?



# TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY DOT-MOCRACY ACTIVITY GUIDE

**RUNNING TIME: 25 MINUTES**

**INSTRUCTIONS** *For this next part, we're all going to get up and do a little magic marker dot-mocracy.*

*We're going to walk up to the butcher paper, re-read and review the discussion notes from the 2 working groups. Perhaps start with the working group you were not a part of and use your marker to mark a dot next to the statement or discussion point that resonates with you.*

Facilitators allows appx 5 minutes for participants to make their marks and then asks the following questions. The other Facilitator can scribe participants' responses on a blank sheet of butcher paper.

- *Any reflections receive a majority of dots? What was the big winner?*
- *Any close runner-ups?*
- *What have been some of the gains and achievements in the tenants rights movement that connected with us?*
- *Were there patterns or recurring themes that people picked up on as they went through these particular stories?*
- *What might be some ways to extend or further develop this activity?*
- *Now how can we transform these reflections into an action list?*
- *Are there some that are more relevant to our communities than others?*
- *What are some key takeaways from the history of the tenant movement? What are you going to be taking back?*



Image courtesy of Maria Mottola

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*In this section you can find some additional materials and resources.*

### Handouts:

- **HIGHLIGHTS HANDOUT**

*a 2-page handout showcasing some of the key highlights of the tenant movement*

- **DIRECT ACTION HANDOUT**

*a 2-page handout showcasing some of the direct action highlights of the tenant movement*

### Also available:

- **FILM AND FURTHER READING LIST**

*For the films we found that weren't online, we bought DVD's and keep them in our office. You can email us at [info@righttocounselnyc.org](mailto:info@righttocounselnyc.org) and we are happy to lend them out, with some conditions that they are well maintained and that we get them back!*

- **GLOSSARY OF HOUSING/TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY TERMS**

*Again it's not exhaustive, use it as a baseline!*

### We are also including two appendixes:

- **RTC HISTORY ACTIVITY, FACILITATION GUIDE**

*This is an interactive activity that tells the story of the campaign that won RTC.*

- **RTC HISTORY ACTIVITY**

*Enjoy!*





# NYC TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY *cont'd*



## 1950's: Resisting Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal

Tenants and organizers resisted urban renewal projects and displacement, forming the Met Council on Housing. NY enacted state rent control laws. Black organizers fought against racial discrimination in public and private housing.

**1960's: Racial Justice and Tenant Power**  
 Congress of Racial Equality and Mobilization for Youth led rent strikes in Harlem and Bed Stuy, winning victories for strengthened rent control and improved conditions. Black Panthers, I Wor Kuen, and the Young Lords organized around housing and health. Rent Stabilization was established.

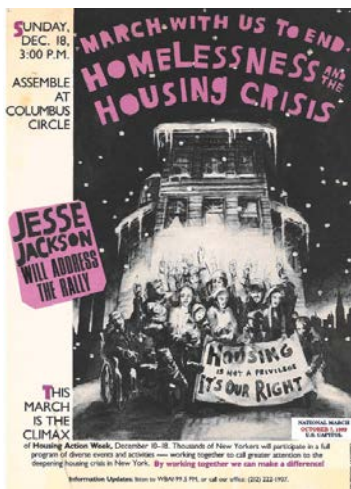
## 1970's: Abandonment, Sweat Equity, and Tenant Takeovers

The city began planned shrinkage and disinvestment from low-income neighborhoods, and many landlords abandoned their buildings. In response, would-be tenants moved into abandoned buildings and rehabilitated them: "sweat equity." In Operation Move-In, Puerto Rican families and activists took over 38 abandoned buildings on the Upper West Side. At the federal level, tenants defeated racist banking policies rooted in redlining. NYC Housing Court was created.



## 1980's: Gentrification and Mobilization for the Homeless and SRO Tenants

New York underwent rapid gentrification, with an influx of luxury housing and market rate co-ops. Activists fought for rent-subsidized housing and community-controlled planning. Homeless advocates won a series of Right to Shelter laws. Throughout the mid-80s, activists organized annual rallies to protest homelessness and the lack of affordable housing. Tenant advocates won anti-demolition and anti-warehousing laws to protect SRO units. In 1989, thousands marched on Washington for an end to the affordable housing crisis.



## 1990s: Major Losses for the Movement

In 1995, squatters in the Lower East Side began a long showdown with NYPD; the squats were converted into low-equity co-ops. Despite the mobilization of thousands of tenants, in 1997 the state legislature issued a series of blows to succession rights, rent stabilization, and housing court rights, including vacancy deregulation laws.

## 2000-present: Fighting for Tenant Protections

Under Bloomberg and De Blasio, tenants fought against rezonings and unaffordable "affordable housing" construction. Tenants organized annually around RGB rent increases, and won rent freezes in 2015 and 2016! In 2017, the Right to Counsel Coalition won guaranteed eviction defense for low income tenants, CATH won the Certificate of No Harassment legislation, and Stand for Tenant Safety won a series of bills to prevent landlords from using construction as harassment.



# NYC TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY



# NYC TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY

## DIRECT ACTION HIGHLIGHTS



### Rent Strikes

- 1839: Tenant farmers in the Hudson Valley formed the Anti-Rent movement, refusing to pay rent to their patroons.
- 1904: Immigrant Jewish women organize NYC’s first rent strike, after leading a boycott of LES butchers.
- 1907-08: The Socialist Party organized rent strikes in Harlem and Brooklyn. Teamster marshals refused to help evict tenants.
- 1917-18: Rent strikes erupted during WWI, including the No Heat/ No Rent campaign. 1,000 tenants went on strike in Crotona Park.



- 1932-33: Mass rent strikes occur in the Bronx! Many won rent reductions just by threatening to strike.
- 1934: Harlem tenants went on strike. That year, the Knickerbocker Village Rent Strike began when tenants moved into a new complex and found it unfinished and unsafe.
- 1963: Organizer Jesse Gray, CORE, and MFY helped Harlem and Bed Stuy tenants organize rent strikes and rent slowdowns (where tenants would withhold rent, pay and then withhold rent the next month to force the landlord into negotiations). Attorneys famously brought dead rats to housing court to support striking tenants.

### Eviction Defense

- 1839: Anti-Rent Movement farmers defended their land from a 500-man posse led by the Albany County sheriff.
- 1930-40: Communist-led Unemployment Councils organized eviction resistance and rent strikes en masse, moving tenants’ furniture back in when they were evicted. In certain communist stronghold neighborhoods, it was impossible to evict tenants.
- 1932: When landlords moved to mass-evict tenants during a rent strike in the Bronx, 4,000 tenants rallied and attacked the police.
- 1946: Tenants protest to block mass evictions of over-income tenants from NYCHA housing.
- 1995: LES squatters defended their homes from a siege by NYPD, pouring tar on the street and welding their doors shut.

# NYC TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY *cont'd*



## Theater

- 1970: Met Council, the Young Lords, and the Black Panthers held the People’s Court Housing Crimes Trial, indicting the city, the banks, and landlords with 13 different anti-tenant crimes.
- 2013: CASA hosted its own “People’s RGB Hearing” in the Bronx in protest of never-ending rent increases and the lack of public hearings outside of Manhattan
- 2014: Brooklyn Tenants United put Housing Court on trial



## Targeting Landlords

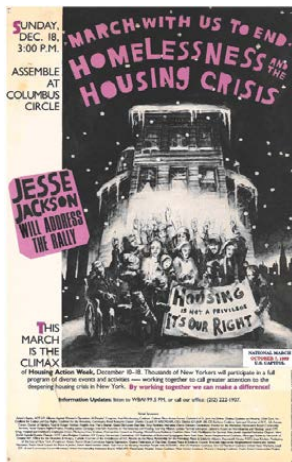
During the rent strikes of 1917 and 1918, tenants responded to evictions by picketing landlords’ houses and businesses.

1963: Organizers from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) confront landlords in Bed-Stuy, Harlem, and Newark.

Tenants across the city continue to confront landlords at their homes and offices over evictions, repairs, predatory equity, and other offenses.

## Sit-ins and Marches

- 1933: Communists hold mass sit-ins at Home Relief Bureau offices (the precursor to Public Assistance) until given the funds to pay rent.
- 1963: In solidarity with the civil rights movement, the Met Council on Housing sent a delegation to the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In 1989, thousands marched on Washington again to demand affordable housing and an end to the homelessness crisis.
- 1988: As the climax to the Housing Action Week of 1988, New Yorkers marched against homelessness and the housing crisis. Jesse Jackson addressed the rally!



## Alternative Housing and Squatting

- 1925: Communist and socialist cooperative housing developments opened in New York City. They were intentionally interracial, did not evict residents, and helped move their neighbors back in after evictions.
- 1970: In Operation Move-in, Puerto Rican families and activists took over 38 abandoned buildings on the UWS in protest of an urban renewal plan that would eliminate affordable housing in the area; many had previously been evicted.
- 1970: I Wor Kuen helped move Chinese families into abandoned buildings surrounding an apartment building that the Bell Telephone Company planned to demolish.
- 1967-1985: “Sweat equity” groups, many in the Bronx and UWS, squatted in abandoned buildings and rehabilitated them.





# TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY FILM LIST



## FILMS AVAILABLE TO BORROW FROM THE COALITION

Email us at [info@righttocounselnyc.org](mailto:info@righttocounselnyc.org)  
if you want to borrow a DVD.

### AT HOME IN UTOPIA [↗](#)

Really amazing film about the United Workers Cooperative Colony (The Coops), a co-op that was built by Russian Jewish communists in the Bronx. It follows two generations of residents, their commitment to racial equity and the rights of workers and tenants. (Corresponds to Slide 16)

### THE CASE AGAINST LINCOLN CENTER [↗](#)

**12 minutes.** Spanish with English subtitles. More than 20,000 Latino families were displaced to make way for Lincoln Center, home to the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Symphony. Juxtaposing the atmosphere of Lincoln Center with the vibrant street culture of a displaced neighborhood, the film correctly predicts the process by which the West Side was to be turned into a high-rent area for the upper middle class. (Corresponds to Slide 33)

### PALANTE, SIEMPRE PALANTE [↗](#)

**48 minutes.** 1996. By Iris Morales, this film documents the period from 1969 through the organization's demise in 1976. Through on-camera interviews with former members, archival footage, photographs and music, the documentary surveys Puerto Rican history, the Young Lords' political vision and actions, and the organization's legacy. (Corresponds to Slide 37)

### BREAK AND ENTER [↗](#)

**42 minutes,** 1970. This film captures the militant antecedents to today's housing reclamation movement in NYC. In 1970, several hundred Puerto Rican and Dominican families reclaimed housing left vacant by the city. (Corresponds to the Slide Slide 43)

### VANISHING CITY [↗](#)

Directed by Fiore Derosa and Jen Senko, 2009. Exposes the real politics behind the alarming disappearance of NYC's beloved neighborhoods. (Corresponds to Slide 50)

### REZONING HARLEM [↗](#)

**41 minutes,** directed by Natasha Florentino and Tamara Gubernat, 2008. Follows longtime residents of Harlem as they fight a 2008 rezoning that threatens to erase the history and culture of their neighborhood and replace it with luxury housing, offices and big-box retail. (Included in Slide 60)

# TENANT MOVEMENT HISTORY FILM LIST



## FILMS AVAILABLE ONLINE

### UNION MAIDS [↗](#)

51 minutes, which has footage of the communist rent strikes in the 30s in Chicago. (Corresponds to Slide 20)

### WHAT IS REDLINING? [↗](#)

3.5 minutes, Mindy Fullilove on Redlining—very good but the sound isn't great. (Corresponds to Slide 22)

### REDLINING: THE ORIGIN OF AMERICAN GHETTOS [↗](#)

3.5 minutes, covers the history of the FHA. (Corresponds to Slide 22)

### THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF HOW THE GOVERNMENT

#### SEGREGATED AMERICA: PART 1 [↗](#)

10 minutes, an interview with Richard Rothstein, the author of *The Color of Law*. (Corresponds to Slide 22)

### THE DISTURBING HISTORY OF THE SUBURBS [↗](#)

6 mins. settlers and suburbs, a funny video about redlining — *Very Good* (Corresponds to Slide 22)

### RACE, THE HOUSE WE LIVE IN [↗](#)

6 minutes — *Very Good* (Included in Slide 22)

### THE TRAGEDY OF URBAN RENEWAL [↗](#)

3 mins. (Corresponds to Slide 33)

### URBAN RENEWAL... MEANS NEGRO REMOVAL [↗](#)

1 minute, James Baldwin on Urban Renewal. (Included in Slide 33)

### HISTORY OF BANANA KELLY [↗](#)

27 minutes. Great footage of the Bronx in the 70s and 80s and tracks the squatters movement, sweat equity and rebuilding. (Included in Slide 39)

### PEOPLE'S FIREHOUSE [↗](#)

25 minutes. The community's response to arson and planned shrinkage (Corresponds to Slide 41)

### DON'T MOVE, IMPROVE! THE STORY OF ANNE DEVENNEY [↗](#)

20 minutes. Commissioned by the North West Bronx Clergy Coalition, this film chronicles the life of Bronx activist Anne Devenney. (Included in Slide 47)

### WE KNOW WHAT WE WANT [↗](#)

4 mins. Documents Bronx residents' resistance to rezoning plans under De Blasio (Included in Slide 64)

# FURTHER READING



## GENERAL TENANT MOVEMENT AND HOUSING HISTORY

- *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904–1984*, ed. Ronald Lawson, Mark Naison.
- *When Tenants Claimed the City*, Roberta Gold.
- *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*, David J. Madden and Peter Marcuse.

## ON RENT STRIKES

- *The Great Rent Wars, New York 1917–1929*, Robert Fogelson.

## ON LANDLORDS

- *Urban Castles: Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism, 1890–1943*, Jared N. Day.

## ON REDLINING, URBAN RENEWAL AND SLUM CLEARANCE

- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein.
- *Urban Renewal on the uws*, Oksana Mironova: <https://urbanomnibus.net/2015/06/the-scythe-of-progress-must-move-northward-urban-renewal-on-the-upper-west-side/>
- *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, Robert A. Caro.
- *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, Mindy Fullilove.
- *Family Properties*, by Beryl Satter

## ON GENTRIFICATION

- *City for Sale: Ed Koch and the Betrayal of New York*, Jack Newfield & Wayne Barrett.
- *New York for Sale*, Tom Angotti.

## ON ANTI-HOMELESSNESS ACTIVISM

- *Sleeping with the Mayor*, John Jiler

## ON RENT REGULATION

- *Let Them Rent Cake: George Pataki, Market Ideology, and the Attempt to Dismantle Rent Regulation in New York*, Craig Gurian: [www.antibiaslaw.com/sites/default/files/all/Cake.pdf](http://www.antibiaslaw.com/sites/default/files/all/Cake.pdf)

## ON SQUATTING

- *Ours to Lose: When Squatters Became Homeowners in New York City*, Amy Starecheski
- “Squatters of the Lower East Side:” <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/squatters-lower-east-side/>

## ON ZONING

- *Zoned Out! Race, Displacement, and City Planning in New York City*, ed. Tom Angotti and Sylvia Morse

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS & ORGANIZATIONS

**Alliance for Tenant Power** a grassroots organization which organizes for stronger rent stabilization protections. Along with R3, the Alliance helps organize protests in Albany around the renewal of State rent laws. (ATP is mentioned in Slide 60).

**ANHD** The Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, an umbrella organization of non-profit groups that was founded in 1974 to advance equitable housing policy and community development projects for low-income New Yorkers. (You can read more about the context for ANHD's founding in Slide 39).

**Article 7A** a section of the Real Property Actions and Proceedings Law which allows at least one third of the tenants living in a building to request that the court appoint a new administrator in the place of the building's owner, in response to conditions or acts dangerous to life, health or safety, harassment and/or deprivation of services. When a 7A is appointed, the landlord can't collect rent or manage the buildings, but he is still responsible for the mortgage! This proves to be an effective organizing tool. Also, tenants can request that a particular 7A administration, one they know or trust, be appointed to manage the building. (Mentioned in Slide 39).

**Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association** a direct services and affordable housing organization in the South Bronx, formed in 1978 when a group of Kelly Street residents occupied and rehabilitated a number of buildings. (You can read more about the context for BKICIA's founding in Slide 39).

**Black Panthers** formally known as the Black Panther Party, a black liberation organization active throughout the United States from 1966 to 1982. Founded in Oakland, California, the Panthers worked for community self-determination and against police violence and expressed solidarity with Third World liberation movements across the globe. (You can read about the Panthers' involvement with the tenant movement in Slide 37).

**CASA** Community Action for Safe Apartments, a project of New Settlement Apartments that uses collective action to fight for safe and affordable housing in New York City. (Mentioned in Slide 63).

**Certificate of No Harassment** a certification process aimed at discouraging tenant harassment by preventing landlords with a history of harassment from accessing DOB permits to conduct construction, demolition, or renovation projects. This legislation was won by the Coalition Against Tenant Harassment in 2017. (Read more in Slide 67).

**Coalition Against Tenant Harassment (CATHNYC)** a coalition of community organizations in New York City fighting against landlord's intentional displacement of low-income people through harassment tactics. (You can read about one of CATH's major victories in Slide 67).

**Division of Homes and Community Renewal (DHCR)** a state agency tasked with overseeing, regulating and enforcing the laws that govern rent stabilization. This agency is part of the New York State Department of Homes and Community Renewal (HCR.) (Mentioned in Slide 51).

**DOB** The NYC Department of Buildings, an agency which enforces the City's Building Code, Electrical Code, Zoning Resolution, New York State Labor Law and New York State Multiple Dwelling Law. (Mentioned in Slides 66 and 67).

**Gentrification** the physical and cultural transformation of a neighborhood that occurs when more affluent, and often whiter residents, move in, raising rents and property values, displacing low-income residents. Gentrification is part of a larger cycle of disinvestment and displacement, often resulting

from government policies. While individuals bear responsibility for their actions, governments, banks, landlords and investors are the main force of gentrification. (Read more in Slide 50).

**I Wor Kuen** a Marxist youth organization formed in New York City's Chinatown in 1969, in order to address the community's needs for health-care reform, draft counseling, and community control of housing. (Read more in Slide 37).

**IWW** the Industrial Workers of the World, or the Wobblies, is an international labor union founded in 1905, with ties to both socialist and anarchist movements. Watch a great documentary about them [here](#). (Mentioned in Slide 9).

**Land Grant** a tract of land given to a private owner (including individuals, businesses, and other institutions) by the government entity that previously controlled it. In early New York City ("New Amsterdam"), land grants were made by the Dutch government. (Read more in Slide 3).

**Land Lease** a contract which requires that a tenant pay rent in order to use a piece of land owned by a landlord. (Mentioned in Slide 3).

**Limited-Equity** a form of affordable co-op housing, reserved for residents under a certain income threshold. Housing Development Fund Corporations are a special type of limited equity housing cooperative in New York City which is incorporated under Article XI of the New York State Housing Finance Law. Under this law, the city of New York is able to sell buildings directly to tenant or community groups to provide low-income housing. Many HDFCs were created through a process of co-op conversion of a foreclosed, city-owned property. As of 2008, over 1,000 HDFC cooperatives have been developed in the city. Limited-equity co-ops in general constitute around 1/3 of all co-op units in New York City; the remaining 2/3 are market-rate co-ops, which are bought and sold at the market price and are generally unaffordable. (Mentioned in Slide 57).

**Maximum Base Rent (MBR)** a rent regulation system in which a maximum allowable rent is established for each rent controlled unit. The rents are established according to a formula calculated to reflect real estate taxes, water and sewer charges, operating and maintenance expenses, return on capital value and vacancy and collection loss allowance. The Maximum Base Rent (MBR) is updated every two years by a factor that incorporates changes in these operating costs. Every two years, the landlord may increase the rent up to 7.5% until the MBR is reached. (Mentioned in Slide 42).

**MCI** Major Capital Improvements. When owners make major systems improvements or installations to a building subject to the rent stabilization or rent control laws, they can apply to DHCR for approval to raise the rents permanently of the tenants based on the actual, verified cost of improvement or installation. The MCI allows the landlord to take the cost of needed improvements and pass it on to all tenants in the building through permanent increases in their rents, at a monthly rate of 1/84<sup>th</sup> of their costs. (In other words, even when the landlord has recouped his costs through the increases in rents, the rents never go back down.) Some examples of MCI items include boilers, windows, electrical rewiring, plumbing and roofs. Increases in rent for MCIs are not supposed to exceed 6% of the rent, per year. (Mentioned in Slide 60).

**MFY** Mobilization for Youth, a community based anti-poverty program, that used legal services, social work and direct action. They assisted Harlem and Bed Stuy tenants with rent strikes and rent slowdowns in the early 1960s. (Mentioned in Slide 38).

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS & ORGANIZATIONS

**Neoliberalism** a global economic system that is capitalism on steroids. It is characterized by cutting funding for social services, expanding capital across the globe and privatization of public goods. It is the current economic system under which we live today. During the 1980s, increasingly neoliberal economic policy in New York City contributed to gentrification, building abandonment, and the shrinkage of social services. (Read more in Slide 50).

**NYCHA** New York City Housing Authority is the city agency that oversees New York City's public housing stock. (Mentioned in Slides 32 and 34).

**OPA** Office of Price Administration, established by the Federal Government during WWII to put limits on rent and other necessary goods such as food. (Mentioned in Slides 29 and 30).

**Palmer Raids** a series of raids by the United States Department of Justice, which arrested and deported suspected radical leftists, including anarchists and socialists. The Palmer Raids were crucial to the formation of the FBI. (Mentioned in Slide 13).

**People's Development Corporation** a sweat-equity organization started by Ramon Rueda in the Morrisania section of the South Bronx in 1974. (Mentioned in Slide 39).

**Real Rent Reform Campaign** a coalition of community organizations, labor unions, tenant associations, and political groups that pushes for stronger rent regulation, tenant protections, and economic diversity in New York. R3 helps organize protests in Albany around the renewal of State rent laws. (R3 is mentioned in Slide 60).

**Red-lining** the practice of denying or limiting financial services to certain neighborhoods based on racial or ethnic discrimination. (Read more in Slide 22. Also mentioned in Slide 28 and Slide 47).

**Rent control** in New York City, a form of rent regulation which applies to those who have been living continuously in an apartment since July 1, 1971 or be the qualifying family member who succeeded to such tenancy. When vacant, the unit becomes rent stabilized. Rent control, like rent stabilization, is governed by the State. (Read more in Slide 35).

**Rent stabilization** in New York City, the most expansive form of rent regulation, also administered by the State, covers apartments in buildings of six or more units, built before 1974, where rents are under a certain rent threshold (currently 2,700). Rent stabilization means that the landlord must renew your lease and that the city appointed rent guidelines board decides on rent increases instead of your landlord. Rent stabilized tenants are also protected by many more laws that protect tenants' rights. Today, there are about a million rent stabilized apartments. (Mentioned in 40 and Slide 45).

**Rent Stabilization Association (RSA)** an organized group of rent-stabilized property owners in NYC that lobbies for laws that advance landlords' interests. (Mentioned in Slide 51).

**Rent strike** the collective withholding of rent, as a display of tenants' power. (Examples of rent strikes in Slides 7, 8, 11, 20, 21, 24, 25, and 27. Their legalization is mentioned in Slide 18. Read about factors causing a decrease in rent strikes in Slides 14, 15, and 30).

**Rezoning** changing the governmental classification and permitted uses of land in a particular neighborhood, often to allow for greater real estate development. (Read more about neighborhood resistance to rezonings in New York City in Slides 59 and 64).

**RGB** the Rent Guidelines Board, a 9-member board appointed by the mayor that votes every year on how much rents can go up at the time of

lease renewal for rent-stabilized and rent-controlled tenants.

There are 5 public members, 2 tenant members and 2 landlord members. (Mentioned in Slides 55 and 63).

**Robert Moses** a hugely controversial figure often called the "master builder," Moses was a New York City official largely responsible for the mid-century urban renewal plans, including highways and slum clearance projects, that community members and activists like Jane Jacobs and the Save Our Homes committees joined together to protest. Moses simultaneously claimed twelve government titles, including NYC Parks Commissioner and Commissioner of the New York City Planning Commission. Never actually elected to public office, he nevertheless wielded great power through the public authorities that he established and directed, and controlled an enormous amount of income, including tolls, from his various projects. His ability to independently issue bonds also freed him from the legislative "power of the purse" and the process of public comment, giving him relatively unchecked power to demolish and rebuild sections of the city at will. Due to these massive construction projects, New York now has the largest proportion of "public benefit corporations" in the country, which serve to build and maintain infrastructure, and are the largest source of the state's debt. (Mentioned in Slide 34.)

**Section 8 Voucher:** Section 8 vouchers provide rental subsidy to tenants. They allow tenants to pay only 30% of their income in rent. If the rent exceeds 30% of their income in rent, the Government pays the difference. Section 8 vouchers can be administered by NYCHA, DHCR or HPD. (Mentioned in Slide 45).

**Single Residence Occupancy (SRO)** a type of housing composed of single bedrooms and shared amenities, including shared kitchens and bathrooms, typically aimed at low-income residents. (Read more in Slide 52).

**Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal** Title 1 of the Federal Housing Act of 1949 creates a slum clearance program and the 1954 Housing Act creates urban renewal programs—both with significant federal funding. Heralded as progressive measures to replace bad housing with good, these programs made no provision to rehouse the the people whose buildings were demolished. In NYC by 1959, sixteen massive projects had displaced over 100,000 people who were disproportionately people of color. 5,000 families were displaced from the Upper west side, over 5,000 families were displaced to create the Cross Bronx Expressway and over 7,000 families were displaced from San Juan Hill to create Lincoln Center, just to name a few. In Root Shock, Mindy Thompson Fullilove estimates that 1,000,000 people in 2,500 neighborhoods in 993 cities over 25 years were displaced. (Read more in Slides 34 and 35. UR is also mentioned in Slide 26).

**Speculation** the practice of buying an asset (such as a building) with the expectation that its price will soon rise. It is also the practice of engaging in risky financial transactions in an attempt to profit from short term fluctuations in the market value. In housing, this can look like investors buying a building, actively displacing low-income tenants, recruiting higher income ones, and then selling the building to make a short term profit. (Mentioned in Slide 11).

**Squatters** people who obtain housing by living in abandoned or unused properties. In many urban areas, squatting took on political significance, as an alternative to the market-driven private ownership of housing stock. (Read more in Slide 43 and 57).

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS & ORGANIZATIONS

**Stand for Tenant Safety (STS)** a citywide coalition of organizations who are fighting to protect the lives and homes of New York City tenants where landlords are using construction as harassment, demanding the systemic reform of the Department of Buildings. (Read more in Slide 66).

**Sweat Equity** a process by which would-be tenants take over and rehabilitate abandoned buildings in order to secure ownership. Instead of making a down payment, they consider their labor (of their sweat) as the investment. In the 1970s, organizers were successful in developing a workforce system where squatters were paid for their sweat equity. (Mentioned in Slides 39 and 43).

**Tenants and Neighbors** a New York State-wide grassroots organization which advocates for stronger tenant protections, affordable housing, and organized tenant power. (Mentioned in Slide 40).

**Tenant farmers** farmers who cultivate land rented from a landlord. Tenant farming was common throughout the United States until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, including in the manor system of the Hudson River Valley and throughout the American South. In the South, tenant farming often took the form of “sharecropping,” in which the landlord required a share of the crops in return for the tools used to work the land—a highly exploitative system used to extract profits from the formerly enslaved Black population, as well as poor whites, after the fall of the plantation slavery system. Tenant farmers organized against the rental system across the country, including in the New York Anti-Rent Movement of the 1840’s and the Alabama Sharecropper’s Union in the 1930’s. (You can read about tenant farmer resistance and its connection to NYC tenant activism in Slide 5).

**Tenant harassment** a variety of different tactics used by a landlord or an agent of the landlord that are intended to make tenants uncomfortable, harassed, intimidated and even to force them to move out. This can include failure to make needed repairs, frivolous and repeated lawsuits, frivolous charges, utility shut-offs, intervening in tenants’ ability to organize, retaliation for enforcing tenants’ rights, buy-outs, and other illegal or intimidating activity. (You can read about organizing wins against tenant harassment in Slides 62 and 67).

**Tenement houses** over-crowded and dilapidated apartment buildings with high rates of disease and dangerous living conditions; most tenants were poor and working-class people, and many were immigrants. Tenements were the precursor to what we now call multiple dwellings. (Read more in Slide 6).

**UHAB** The Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, a non-profit established amid the housing abandonment crisis of the 1970’s, in order to help low- and moderate-income people attain building ownership through “sweat equity.” (Mentioned in Slides 39 and 57).

**Vacancy Decontrol** a state law that was passed by the landlord lobby in the 90s, that allows rents to be removed from rent stabilization and into the unregulated market, once the apartment is vacant and rents have reached a certain threshold (currently at 2,700). (Mentioned in Slides 45, 56, and 60).

**Warehousing** a practice in which landlords hold their properties vacant, contributing to the housing shortage in urban areas like New York City. Anti-warehousing laws include those that require landlords to rent all of their housing units or pay a tax penalty for holding properties vacant. (Mentioned in Slide 52).

**Warrant of Habitability** a law that the tenant movement won, requiring landlords to maintain apartments as safe and habitable. Units must have hot water, heat services, a functional electrical system, functional plumbing and smoke detectors, doors and windows with locks, and no pests. (Mentioned in Slide 45.)

**White Flight** From the 1940s–70s, due to both push and pull factors including the subsidizing of suburbia, racial restrictions in lending and real estate, redlining and disinvestment in urban neighborhoods with communities of color present, serial displacement through urban renewal, blockbusting and other racial fears, millions of white residents fled the cities for the suburbs across the county. (Read more in Slide 28).

**Young Lords** a Puerto Rican leftist organization that fought for socialism, internationalism, and self-determination for the Latino community. The Lords were founded in the 1960’s in Lincoln Park, Chicago, but had a large presence in New York, where they participated in struggles for housing and health. (Read more in Slide 37).



# APPENDIXES

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## RTC HISTORY ACTIVITY, FACILITATION GUIDE

### 10 MINUTES WHAT IS RTC AND WHY DID THE TENANT MOVEMENT FIGHT FOR IT?

- Show Video: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrlsSrRCuyg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrlsSrRCuyg) (5 minutes)
  - Note: *The film has subtitles in Spanish! Make sure to hit the “cc” button at the bottom right corner of the screen to turn the subtitles on.*
  - Load the video before you play it so that it doesn’t stall. We also have a version of the video downloaded, if you don’t have internet.
- After the movie, ask:
  - What did we learn about why tenants fought for RTC?*
  - Take answers popcorn style.
  - Conclusion Points to add if they aren’t brought up:
    - There are about 25,000 evictions in this city. 77% of families who were evicted, wouldn’t have been if they had had attorneys. That means landlords evict people not because they are right, but because they have power. RTC shifts that power. Not only will tenants start to win their cases, but we think landlords will stop suing tenants like they have been and this epidemic of evictions that our communities face will start to end. And that creates space for us to fight different battles.
    - RTC reminds us that we have rights. Also, it isn’t just about court and evictions. It’s about every time tenants are scared to call 311, to complain to their landlord, to organize in their building. RTC reminds people that being behind on your rent isn’t their fault! It’s the fault of a city where housing isn’t a right and landlords have too much power. Most everyone’s rent is too high—so that’s a political problem, not a personal one.
    - RTC will also inspire tenants to organize in their buildings, because they know if their landlord retaliates, they will be defended—because we, the tenant movement created a NEW RIGHT in this city.



# RTC HISTORY ACTIVITY, FACILITATION GUIDE *cont'd*

## 30 MINUTES HOW DID THE TENANT MOVEMENT WIN RTC?

### Activity Prep:

- Copy the timeline on bright colored paper, with english on one side and the corresponding spanish slide on the other. Make an additional copy of the activity for yourself (sometimes people can't find the paper and you need to step in and read a particular card). If you have interpretation, make sure the interpreter also has a copy!
- Have tape and wall space where you can put the history up.

### Facilitation Guide:

- 1) RTC is historic! How did we win this amazing victory? We are going to do an interactive game to tell the story of the campaign. Some of you have a piece of bright yellow paper under your chairs! If you do, please find it and pick it up now. Each piece of paper tells a bit of our story as the coalition!
- 2) Each paper is numbered. Who has number 1? Can you please come up to the front of the room and read it out loud?
- 3) After each history point is read, tape it on the wall.
- 4) Who has number 2? etc. There are a total of 20 slides.
- 5) When you finish the timeline, ask: Any reactions or lessons? Anything you learned that you didn't know?
- 6) The timeline ends in October 2017. But the coalition hasn't stopped organizing. Since October:
  - a) *Evictions have gone down by 24%. Filings have gone down by 10%. 15 zip codes have RTC (zip codes are being phased in over 5 years. Zip codes will be irrelevant by 2022)*
  - b) *Judges and court staff tell tenants about RTC and the court culture is changing*
  - c) *In April 2018, the coalition did Town halls in every borough to explain how RTC works, which over 600 tenants attended. Over 5,000 tenants received info about RTC during outreach for the town halls.*
  - d) *Organizing groups have been doing leadership trainings and tenant workshops with tenants who come to the town halls.*
  - e) *Organizing groups are forming tenants associations in every borough where folks have RTC to build tenant power.*
  - f) *In June, 2018, the coalition announced RTC 2.0 legislation:
 
    - i) *Increase income threshold from 200%-400%*
    - ii) *Mandate funding for organizing**



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**Housing Court, as we know it today, was created in 1973. By 1985, Housing Court Answers formed, advocating for changes to the court and calling the court an eviction mill.**

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**In 2012, Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) started a campaign to reform the Bronx Housing Court and Brooklyn Tenants United started a campaign to reform the Brooklyn Housing Court.**

**In March of 2014, the RTCNYC Coalition formed and worked with New York City Council members Mark Levine and Vanessa Gibson to introduce Intro 214, a piece of local legislation that would make the city responsible for providing low-income tenants with representation in Housing Court.**

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**In December of 2014, we held a day-long forum at New York Law School that drew over 450 people and featured prominent speakers such as then Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, New York City Human Resources Administration Commissioner Steven Banks and many more.**

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# In 2015, we took Comptroller Scott Stringer and Public Advocate Tish James on a tour of the Bronx Housing Court.



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**From March–June of 2015, we held four town halls in four different boroughs, which educated and engaged over 500 tenants and dozens of elected officials about the need for a right to counsel.**

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**In May of 2015, we released our own report about RTC called “Housing Justice: What the Experts are Saying on New Yorkers Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings,” at a press conference in front of Manhattan Housing Court.**

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**We developed a wide base of supporters that includes landlords, bar associations, unions, advocates for homeless people, advocates for seniors, advocates for disabled people, almost every civil legal services agency in the city, and many more.**

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**We made presentations to community boards throughout NYC, which resulted in all 42 community boards in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, as well as the borough boards in those boroughs passing resolutions in support of RTC.**

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**We collected close to 7,000 signatures on petitions addressed to the Mayor and Speaker in support of Right to Counsel.**

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**We gathered close to 100 signatures to a letter from Faith Leaders throughout the city, urging the Mayor to support Right to Counsel.**

**We worked with the New York City Bar Association to commission a study of the financial costs and savings of implementing the Right to Counsel, which showed that Right to Counsel would not only pay for itself but also save the city an additional \$320 million/year.**



**We rallied and organized a press conference and hearing on the bill in September of 2016, packing the steps and the chambers of City Hall to capacity. We coordinated a diverse set of panelists representing NYCHA, youth advocates, racial justice and civil rights advocates, women’s rights advocates, international human rights perspectives, health perspectives, labor support and many others, to demonstrate widespread support.**

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**In December of 2016,  
we organized and interfaith  
forum at the Mt. Olivet  
Baptist Church in Harlem  
with the Interfaith  
Coalition on Housing and  
Homelessness that called  
on the city to move forward  
with right to counsel as  
a moral imperative.**

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**In December of 2016, we organized a press conference on the steps of City Hall that drew more than 150 people, as we delivered both petitions and the letter from the faith leaders to the mayor and the speaker.**

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**And, throughout our efforts, we garnered an incredible amount of press coverage, including an endorsement from the NYT Editorial board and being named one of the top brilliant policies by the *New York Magazine*.**

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**On February 12,  
the Mayor and Speaker  
committed to passing  
and funding a right to  
counsel for tenants  
in housing court.**

**On July 20, 2017  
42 council members  
vote overwhelmingly  
to pass RTC!**

# The bill is signed into law on August 11, 2017!



**Implementation began  
in September and we  
had a party in October!**

# RIGHT TO COUNSEL NYC COALITION



*Image courtesy of Met Council on Housing*

For more information please visit us at [WWW.RIGHTTOCOUNSELNYC.ORG](http://WWW.RIGHTTOCOUNSELNYC.ORG)

*Curriculum design by Carl Petrosyan (allthingsaligned.com)*