

# 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 seige by NYPD, pouring tar on the street and welding their doors shut.



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

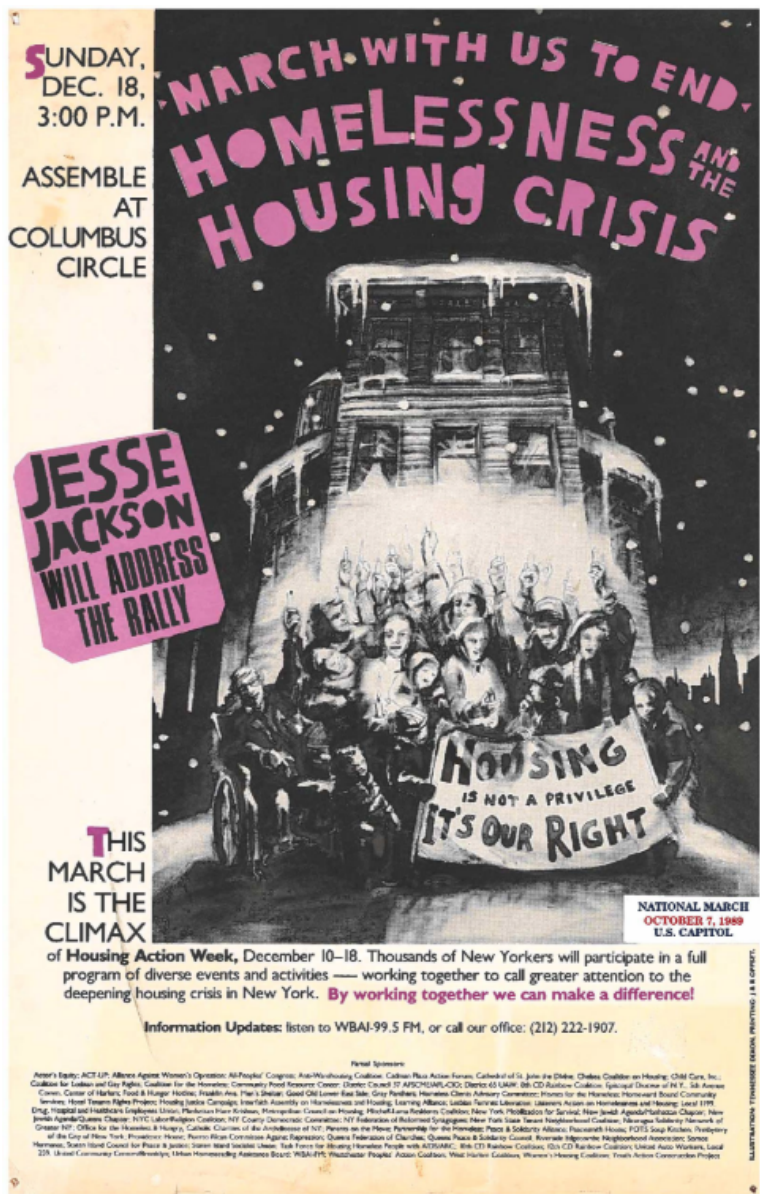


Targeting Landlords

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.

