

You Can't Evict a Movement:

**Strategies for Housing Justice
in the United States**

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INTRODUCTION


“You Can’t Evict a Movement: Strategies for Housing Justice in the United States” is a part of *Viewpoint Magazine*’s “movement inquiry” series, in which we ask people across the United States to share organizing experiences so that local lessons can be bridged towards more regional, national, and international strategies. With this resource, we encourage radicals to make time to reflect, regroup, and more widely circulate our work. We hope that as these stories are shared, new connections will be made, and that a larger struggle for our cities’ futures can be waged.

It seems that every week there are new, ever more dire, statistics about how unaffordable urban centers in the United States have become for the multi-ethnic working and workless poor, and how quickly these cities are being forced to suit the whims of the wealthy. The violence of these changes reverberates and affects education, health, homelessness, police brutality, and unemployment. As neoliberal gentrification accelerates to outrageous levels, we focus on three epicenters of housing struggles – the Bay Area, Chicago, and New York City – as well as a national housing rights alliance, to share emerging and long-term strategies of resistance. In doing so, we intend to amplify a national conversation about how to combat the displacement, inequality, and violence that constitute gentrification.

These seven organizations shared reports with us:

In the Bay Area, the **Anti-Eviction Mapping Project** and the **San Francisco Tenants Union** have been central to struggles both recent and decades-long. The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project uses radical mapping, data visualizations, and oral history to document the dispossession and political economic landscape of Tech Boom 2.0 in the Bay Area. For over 45 years, the San Francisco Tenants Union has provided invaluable tenant counseling and organizing, while helping to write and affect housing policy in San Francisco, using a model that is entirely member-funded. Since the rise of neoliberal urban policies in the 1980s, the Bay Area has become a ground zero of gentrification and resistance, where longstanding claims to the right to transform public space have given rise to some of the most creative direct actions.

In Chicago, **Centro Autónomo**, linked with the Mexico Solidarity Network, opened a community center in September 2006 in the Albany Park



neighborhood that “constructs community, builds political consciousness, and unites people in and around the Latin@ immigrant struggle.” The **Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign**, founded in 2009 by South Side Chicago residents and students, has transformed dozens of abandoned properties, in order to move “homeless people into people-less homes.” Both of these groups have helped shape a larger struggle over the future of Chicago amidst Rahm Emanuel’s controversial 2-term mayoral tenure (2011-present), the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union momentous strike, and rampant police violence that has endured for decades.

In New York City, the **Crown Heights Tenant Union** was founded in summer 2013 by longtime neighborhood residents, Occupy Wall Street participants, Urban Homesteading Assistance Board [UHAB] organizers, and the Crown Heights general assembly to build tenant power and fight the cycle of displacement in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. One year later, anarchists at the Base in Bushwick, Brooklyn, created the magazine *Rent is Theft* to “challenge conventional wisdom about rent and housing, and attack the problem from a radical perspective.” Steeped in histories of squatting, tenements’ reforms, and eviction resistance, New York City now suffers a rapid displacement/development cycle, and in June 2015 underwent changes in rent regulations that may signal a slow erosion in tenants’ rights.

Nationwide, **Right to the City** was formed in January 2007 as an alliance of economic, racial, and environmental justice organizations, and has developed a network with 57 groups across 22 cities to “halt the displacement of low-income people, people of color, marginalized LGBTQ communities, and youths of color from their historic urban neighborhoods.” Through their work, we see the contours of what a national movement for housing justice can look like.

Viewpoint Magazine envisions this roundtable as a beginning, not an end. We welcome your ideas, feedback, critiques, as well as your support in sharing this resource with friends and neighbors, in workplaces and organizing meetings, at rallies and direct actions, and beyond. You can access this pamphlet at ViewpointMag.com/roundtables/housing-justice to share online and print out. We are eager to work with activists to collectively create future roundtables on the struggles unfolding today – Black and Brown liberation, climate justice, education, feminism, LGBT power, youth-led migrant struggles, and many more. To get involved, please email us at roundtables@ViewpointMag.com.

tied to local cost of living, wages, unemployment, and other social and economic justice metrics.

- Support organizing and alliance building of most-impacted residents to build collective bargaining, win renters rights, prevent evictions, fight foreclosures, and secure public options for federal affordable housing entities rather than privatizing public assets (i.e. Fannie/Freddie, NHTF, HUD).
- Experimenting with trans-local policy interventions on the municipal and state levels, such as anti-speculation tax, just cause eviction and renters rights laws and ordinances.
- Supporting local assemblies of renters nationwide (TinyURL.com/RenterNationAssemblies2015).



Occupy Our Homes, but we have shied away from having many national direct actions because of resources and money to make them happen. We would need more capacity to build that out.

There needs to be more autonomous grassroots movement-building space because when you are mobilizing within the context of a national nonprofit, the staff are expected to hold down many of the aspects of the work, while the members of the groups expect for you to house and accommodate them. Plus, bail funds are often needed. If the housing movement was organized in chapters across the country, like the Black Lives Matter movement is now, and implemented the Right to the City frame and Right to the City's political education program, that could really start generating more momentum in the housing justice movement and maybe change that expectation. Creative fundraising is key. I think we all know the revolution will not be funded by foundations, but we all know that we need money to have powerful movements.

If you were to imagine a world in which housing and land care works the way you believe it should, what would this look like?

It would look like lovely, beautiful, accessible, environmentally sound housing for all people. It would mean that people would engage their neighbors and community in collective planning. It would mean that people would fight hard to stay and maintain their communities and neighborhoods. It would mean, however, a fundamental shift in how capitalism currently works.

Our Renters' Bill of Rights (bit.ly/RenterNationReport) lays out our concrete policy recommendations –

Community control of land & housing! We are working toward this by:

- Taking housing off the market through establishing community land trusts, coops that allow for people to build equity through renting in a shared trust.
- Documenting and sharing lessons of national and international models of decommodified and non-market housing.
- Building political power through civic engagement strategies so we can have control over resource, zoning, planning and development of our communities.
- Creating real affordability: Securing definitions of “affordable” that are



ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT (Bay Area, California)

by Erin McElroy and Karyn Smoot

www.AntiEvictionMap.com

Housing laws, landlord/tenant practices, and indigenous land rights vary substantially between different counties, cities, states, and national borders. First, what particular laws, practices, and policies has your group had to address? Second, how did you learn about all these distinctions (for example, through independent research, by working with radicals lawyers, etc.)? Lastly, do you think it would be possible, despite all these differences, to coordinate housing/tenants/land struggles at the national level?

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project [AEMP] is one of many collectives and organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area fighting current tides of gentrification. While primarily we are a data visualization, data analysis, and storytelling collective that documents the dispossession of Bay Area residents, we also participate in direct action and mutual aid organizing on the ground, often in solidarity with other groups such as Eviction Free San Francisco, the San Francisco Tenants Union, Tenants Together, the Justice for Alex Nieto Committee, to name a few. While we endeavor for our work to abet in collaborative efforts to shift local policy, we don't imagine that reform alone will be able to mitigate gentrification, particularly because it is so connected to global capitalism and deeper histories of modernity. Therefore, while we remain in active conversation with efforts to curb policy locally, often engaging in the very research used to back such endeavors, (for instance, researching abuses of local and state policy that abet speculators and sharing economy corporations in profiting off of the evictions of tenants), we also remain critical of the very structures that comprise local and state understandings of property, governmentality, geopolitics, and land occupation. Thus we effectively embrace a two-prong strategy interested in both reform and decolonization.

The struggle over housing implicitly intersects with many other struggles – against racism and police brutality, for immigration and indigenous rights, over higher wages at work, etc. How has your organization tried to link these struggles and what challenges have you encountered?

The struggle for housing does intersect with those against racism, police brutality, immigration, fair pay, and indigenous rights, to name a few. We constantly work to map these struggles and shared systems of oppression in our data work, but we find that these connections are best made through the narrative side of our project. Our oral history project, which maps deep neighborhood and personal histories upon a backdrop of evictions, has numerous stories in which these intersections become visceral. Not only do we gather stories of those who have been evicted, but we also include stories of those impacted by gentrification in other ways, such as through police violence, increased racial profiling, and immigration struggles.

Our oral histories, which are on an interactive online map (TinyURL.com/AEMPmap), but also on a mural and in zine form, include the stories of those who knew Alex Nieto, who was murdered by the San Francisco Police Department in May of 2014, ostensibly for being brown in a whitening neighborhood. During the mural dedication (TinyURL.com/AEMPmural), numerous tenants who have been fighting displacement gathered with Alex's parents to speak about their loss, describing his death as a tragically lethal consequence of gentrification. They reminded us that as people are displaced and new settlers arrive, particularly settlers with racial and class privilege, the police are more likely to surveil neighborhoods and "protect" newcomers from their neighbors of color.

Alex's mural portrait lives in Clarion Alley, across from the Mission Police Station, and adjacent to Valencia Street – perhaps the most gentrified street in the Mission today, in which artisanal cupcakes and barber shops line the streets, upon which Google and other tech buses pick up tech workers to transport them to Silicon Valley, nearly every fifteen minutes. As our research has found, 69% of no-fault evictions in San Francisco happen within four blocks of tech bus stops, a figure we often invoke at protests and bus blockades.

Earlier in 2015, for instance, over a hundred people participated in a direct action in which a tech bus was blockaded in front of the Mission Police

rently dealing with mortgage issues with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Rep. Elizabeth Warren will be present and we are calling it the #massaction4homes. This is an example of working with local leaders and organizers to address a national issue.

In 2015, Right to the City has shifted to what we call a translocal strategy of really engaging in supporting the local work and the build out of local renter assemblies. This shift has led to many more affected residents on calls.

How do you apply pressure to state housing legislation (i.e. rezoning, rent regulation, foreclosures), real estate development (displacement, vacancies, gentrification), and government/business land seizures, while also doing work that is independent of their deliberation cycles?

Our local organizations do this and we support their work.


What readings and organizing resources help inspire and guide your work?

Here are some of the readings that have been guiding the morals and principles of the Homes for All campaign. These have been broadly shared amongst our base:

- Rise of the Renter Nation Report - bit.ly/renternationreport
- Rise of the Corporate Landlord Report - bit.ly/corplandlordreportdl
- Causa Justa::Just Cause: Development without Displacement – Resisting
- Gentrification in the Bay Area - goo.gl/lFimDH
- The Case for Reparations - goo.gl/iWMaJg
- Ferguson: Gentrification and its Discontents - goo.gl/13eB9d
- Extreme Gentrification in the Bay Area - goo.gl/dOdM95
- History of Land & Housing in the US Timeline - goo.gl/hNGJX9

What role does direct action (i.e. rent strikes, resisting evictions, street marches, land occupations) figure into your organizing? Can you imagine a nation-wide direct action strategy around housing?

Right to the City has been effective in building a good solid frame in terms of our analysis of the crisis and how to act. We have done some excellent national actions, along with groups like the Home Defenders League and



housing, but this work has not completely developed, mostly due to our limited capacity.

Concretely describe a campaign you've created in the past.

We had a national campaign with several organizations to remove Ed Demarco from the post of acting director of the Federal Housing and Finance Agency and to replace him with Mel Watt.

We won this victory over the course of a year. Demarco was a Bush appointee in the pocket of Wall Street banks, and hardly ever took any stance on the issues of predatory lending. Working with National People's Action and the New Bottom Line, we created several online petitions over the course of a year, generating thousands of signatures. We had a direct action where 5 women of color from organizations in the Right to the City Alliance, called the "Fannie Freddie 5," held down a street in DC and were arrested. We also brought an eviction notice to Demarco's lawn in Silver Springs.

We then had a very public action that went viral, where homeowners and renters in crisis went to a hearing in which DeMarco was testifying and they snuck behind him and got into the cameras of C-SPAN with protest signs saying "Drop DeMarco" "Fund the National Housing Trust Fund" and "We need Principal Reduction" This was a pivotal action in the campaign. Through an executive order, Obama was able to bring Mel Watt in as the new director. There has definitely been a shift in the relationship with the FHFA and housing justice groups, but we are now still demanding principal reduction from Mel Watt.

How do you involve homeowners, tenants, and/or land stewards as co-organizers?

As a national organization we involve them by cultivating them as national spokespeople to press, and inviting them to help make decisions about all of our campaigns and the national agenda at many levels. However, we often work more directly with paid organizers and directors and so sometimes that means that we cannot access them as readily as a local organization could.

We have been expanding our base through national webinars on topics that really engage them. Hundreds of people are on these calls. On Sept. 30th, we are sending a bus of residents down from Boston to DC who are cur-

Station with banners that read "Gentrification is Violence," and with signs of Alex Nieto and Amilcar Perez-Lopez, an indigenous Guatemalan immigrant also murdered by the police this year in a gentrifying neighborhood. After Amilcar was shot in the back and killed, his roommates, also undocumented, were evicted from their home, which was then advertised at over \$4000/month. Like our mural, direct actions against police brutality and gentrification call attention to the fact that evictions do not happen in isolation; they are accompanied by increases in racial profiling and are fueled by shifts in political economy in which units are forcibly vacated so that speculators can profit off of those with more money, ie. those in tech.

Concretely describe a campaign you've created in the past.

Last year in 2014 the AEMP partnered with the Anti-Displacement Coalition [ADC] – a coalition that encompasses most housing organizations in the city – to push for a ballot measure that would impose a tax on real estate speculation, so that speculators who flipped buildings within five years of ownership would have to pay the city based on a graduated percentage. With the statewide group, Tenants Together, we researched every single Ellis Act that had occurred in the city to determine how quickly after new ownership tenants were evicted through this state based no-fault eviction mechanism. The Ellis Act, written in 1985, allows landlords to evict tenants for no fault of their own if those landlords desire to exit the rental market, and it has been wildly abused by speculators in San Francisco from the time of the Dot Com Boom onwards.

Our research found that 80% of Ellis Act evictions transpire within the first five years of ownership, and that 60% occur within the first year alone. This research informed the drafting of the ballot measure, which the ADC then organized for the speculation tax to be voted upon in November 2014, known as Prop G. The real estate industry felt so threatened by the possibility of Prop G passing that they raised two million dollars to defeat us through harsh propaganda campaigns. While they did defeat us in the end, organizing around Prop G helped the ADC grow and solidify, and now the coalition is pushing for another measure to strengthen the Just Cause ordinance so that is more difficult for landlords to push tenants out for "low-fault" evictions, which have been steadily on the rise in San Francisco. At the moment, tenants can be evicted for hanging laundry out on the line, even if they have been doing so for decades. Recently a building in Chinatown fought against such a wrongful eviction and won, but more and more tenants are being displaced for petty breach violations, which the end

ADC is petitioning to shift through the introduction of “Just Cause 2.0.”

How do you involve homeowners, tenants, and/or land stewards as co-organizers?

Recently the AEMP was involved in a direct action campaign with a friend of ours, Benito Santiago, who was being Ellis Act evicted from his home by a speculator known as Pineapple Boy LLC. We researched all we could on Pineapple Boy LLC, to find that it was one of several aliases for the real estate speculator Michael Harrison, co-founder of Vanguard Properties – one of the largest real estate corporations in San Francisco. Benito, a Filipino elder born and raised in San Francisco, is well known in the anti-eviction movement for his drumming and chanting at protests for countless tenants across the city, but he is also well known in other circles, as he is a teacher in the Unified School District, specializing in teaching drumming to youth with disabilities. He also leads dance lessons at the I-Hotel, a Filipino community center and home of the largest anti-eviction fights in San Francisco’s history.

Benito, himself a senior and a person with disabilities due to a racist hit-and-run in the 1980s, decided that he would fight day and night against his impending eviction, and with Eviction Free San Francisco, he participated in marches, rallies, and occupations of Vanguard Properties. After his fourth visit to Vanguard in which employees violently dragged out protestors, Harrison rescinded the eviction, marking a huge success for Benito and the anti-eviction movement across the city. Harrison had bought Benito’s building solely to flip it and profit, and had only owned it for three months prior to handing Benito his first eviction notice. Now that the eviction was withdrawn, Harrison wanted nothing to do with 151 Duboce, and put it back on the market. With Benito, the Tenants Union, and Eviction Free San Francisco, we contacted the Community Land Trust [CLT], a citywide nonprofit that under the right circumstances can buy buildings and take them off the market. After months of negotiating, the CLT bought Benito’s building, meaning that Benito now pays rent to the city via the CLT, ensuring that he will never again be evicted from his home of 20 years.

How do you apply pressure to state housing legislation (i.e. rezoning, rent regulation, foreclosures), real estate development (displacement, vacancies, gentrification), and government/business land seizures, while also doing work that is independent of their deliberation cycles?

fication.org) and in Boston there is a Right to Remain coalition. These formations are addressing the intersections of gentrification and police presence in communities that are transitioning. They are creating large coalitions that cross the sectors of housing, transportation and labor. These types of formation are the future in fighting for sustainable homes and communities.

The struggle over housing implicitly intersects with many other struggles – against racism and police brutality, for immigration and indigenous rights, over higher wages at work, etc. How has your organization tried to link these struggles and what challenges have you encountered?


We write statements and articles that show the intersections as we see fit. As Right to the City Alliance’s communications director, I am always pushing us to really do more line development, meaning articulating our stance on issues, because the media is interested in these intersections and often times organizations are hardwired not to integrate. Here are two of our statements that try to show this integration:

“We Can’t Win a Right to the City Unless Black Lives Matter”
(TinyURL.com/RttCBLM)

“There Goes the Neighborhood – Time for Students to Ally with Long Time Tenants” (TinyURL.com/RttCStudentsTenants)

Often times, organizations put political education last. The priority is mobilizing the base around the policy fight. But as more radical journalists are gaining support, the journalists from The Atlantic for example, they are looking for people who are doing the day-to-day organizing to have experts on hand who can frame the issue for them. And because we are so busy trying to figure out how to get abuelita to the meeting, we may not have time to think through the role of neoliberal urban development in the planning of cities.

But, on the hopeful side, more of it is happening. You can see that Black Lives Matter is integrated with the Fight for 15 and the immigrant rights movement. So, the potential is there and growing. We also hold webinars to check in on Black Lives Matter work, and around the time of the People’s Climate March, many of our organizations were doing work on climate justice. So, we definitely try to make space for intersections. The immigrant rights movement has also reached out to us about sharing cases of



I think it is overall challenging to coordinate a national movement around housing because some rent laws or housing policies are decided at the state level and others at the municipal level, so it really is assessing each city to see where the power lies and then the groups in that city articulating their needs from the Alliance. Often times we can support local work through online petitions, developing story banks, and creating more of a buzz on social media. We have also done tailored trainings for our base depending on their needs in topics like how to organize tenants, and how to tell your story effectively.

As a national formation, we have found that we have to tie the local policy work to some general demands, but we must also make a more comprehensive statement and contribute to a growing national dialogue about gentrification and displacement. Our idea of getting to scale, thereby effectively expanding our base and the momentum of our movement, would be to see if several cities could organize local groups to be part of a city-wide right to the city effort.

Several groups are trying to coordinate at the national level. But the goal of why is not clear. “Homes for All” is an expression of housing organizing at a national level. The issue is that at times, the consistent engagement with the Right to the City or the “Homes for All” platform is difficult to maintain with just one national organizer. Also, while national housing policy is important to have an influence over, it does not directly affect many of our communities. It takes a long time before the funding trickles down to the city, and often gets stuck there, instead of going to nonprofit and community developers like 5th Avenue committee in Brooklyn, or East LA Community Corporation in Los Angeles, that develop plans with community members and have a vested interest in housing that is community not market controlled. We feel that these players, often have the best plans and intentions for building truly affordable housing.

OCCUPY was the closest to bringing a national expression to a fight for public space. However, there needs to be a bridge between creating momentum and cultivating fighters for the long term. Right to the City has been doing this on the land and housing front, but we would need a lot more mass training, political education, and commitment to a “right to the city” in local work in order for our ideas and work to spread and create a real national movement momentum. *I want to be clear that I mean a commitment to the ideas, not necessarily to the organization.* Currently in Brooklyn, there is the Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network (BANGentri


While we are actively involved in campaigns to amend and introduce different legislation that would curb abuse of real estate speculation, Airbnb and short term vacation rentals, and luxury development, and while we are also involved in direct action campaigns working with tenants to help fight individual eviction cases, we do not imagine that legislation alone will or even could solve the eviction crisis. We intentionally create maps and engage in qualitative work that points to larger entanglements that are rooted in racialized, classed, gendered, and colonial structures.


For instance, we recently mapped all 311 calls made to the city, to query if such calls are an indicator of gentrification, given that the majority of calls are requests to “clean up,” and given the neighborhood breakdown and technologies used to make the calls. This map was not part of a campaign to end the 311 mechanism, but used to question the racialized implications of the technology. We’ve also mapped demographic shifts, from the loss of the black population in the Bay Area to the loss of the youth population in San Francisco to the amount of vacancies in neighborhoods with high homeless populations. Additionally, we’ve mapped killings by police officers in both San Francisco and Oakland, and the fires that have killed and displaced tenants across SF.

With such maps, we don’t imagine that in making them we will undo cycles of gentrification and dispossession, but we hope that in disseminating them that we will contribute to shifts in dialogue that understand gentrification as more than being evicted from a home, but as a mutating process that is enmeshed in deeper modern/colonial systems that produces multiple forms of dispossession along lines that are racialized, classed, and gendered. We hope that our work, while contributing to legislative shifts – that if passed will indeed keep people in their homes – will also further expand conversations and movement building.

What readings and organizing resources help inspire and guide your work?

While many of us are in active relationship to existing discourses on gentrification, within and beyond the academy, we also maintain intimate ties to direct action organizing, much of which challenges dominant social science narratives of and on gentrification. We find that often texts within sociology and geography for instance sacrifice deep narrative histories for positivist analysis. While recognizing the value of works emerging from these fields, we have been drawn to decolonial and postcolonial scholar





ship, and work emerging from within critical race and ethnicity studies, feminist studies, and indigenous studies. In other words, while learning from critical works by anticapitalist and Marxist scholars such as Neil Smith, we realize that historical materialism alone isn't enough to address the gravities plaguing the San Francisco Bay Area. Thus we find texts such as those by Katherine McKittrick, Neferti Tadiar, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and Jodi Byrd extremely helpful in forming analysis around the colonial, gendered, and racialized histories that render some lifeworlds more valuable than others. We have also been inspired texts written by local scholars, poets, and academics, such as Tony Robles, Nancy Mirabal, and Fernando Marti, to name a few.

What role does direct action (i.e. rent strikes, resisting evictions, street marches, land occupations) figure into your organizing? Can you imagine a nation-wide direct action strategy around housing?

We have participated in countless direct actions with numerous groups around the Bay Area to fight the impositions of displacement and deterritorialization. We've disrupted open houses at the former homes of tenants killed by police or who have died due to "root shock" upon removal. We've occupied City Hall to demand a moratorium on luxury development. We've taken over streets and blocked Google and other tech buses, calling attention to the entanglement of tech and real estate in contemporary political economy. Additionally, at times we've collaborated with groups beyond the Bay Area. For instance, earlier this year we worked with groups in New York and Barcelona to protest the impact that the Wall Street investment company Blackstone is having on both sides of the Atlantic. While we held a protest outside of their SF headquarters, the same day Tenants Together released a map and report of all of their California owned properties, activists in New York and Barcelona held a similar protest, since Blackstone, internationally headquartered in New York, is behind a major wave of foreclosure evictions in Spain. We would love to participate in more actions such as this, especially since today transnational corporations and global capital shelter so many of the mechanisms of displacement that we witness locally and beyond.

If you were to imagine a world in which housing and land care works the way you believe it should, what would this look like?

Due to the nature of mapping work – especially oral history mapping – we are conscious of the wide array of voices that make up San Francisco, and

RIGHT TO THE CITY ALLIANCE (United States)

by Lenina Nadal


www.RightToTheCity.org

Housing laws, landlord/tenant practices, and indigenous land rights vary substantially between different counties, cities, states, and national borders. First, what particular laws, practices, and policies has your group had to address? Second, how did you learn about all these distinctions (for example, through independent research, by working with radicals lawyers, etc.)? Lastly, do you think it would be possible, despite all these differences, to coordinate housing/tenants/land struggles at the national level?

Right to the City is a national alliance that takes on both national and translocal work. On a national level we have fought for and won funding to the National Housing Trust Fund, the only national fund for affordable housing for extremely low-income people in the country. We have also won some small reforms in how Housing and Urban Development [HUD] deals with foreclosed properties and the offering of those properties to nonprofits as opposed to hedge funds and private equity firms. We have had a longtime relationship with the Federal Housing and Finance Agency and have negotiated to keep several people across the country in their homes.

On the local level, many of our groups have passed and won renter protections, and our member group in Providence, Rhode Island – DARE – won just cause eviction in 2014. The Just Cause law provides incentives for mortgage lenders to work with owners to avoid foreclosure through affordable modifications and principal reduction. It is also a disincentive to process foreclosures on multi-family properties since the bank knows it will have to keep the tenants and can't empty the building. We continue to support and document victories around renter protections at a local level through the national Right to the City Alliance network. This allows for groups to learn from one another. Many of our local victories (TinyURL.com/Homes4AllVictories) are shared throughout the Alliance.

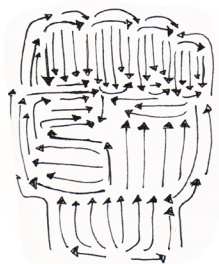
We work with the National Community Land Trust network and other allies who have already formed effective land trusts, or are forming them now, in order to create a toolkit for our network on how to create this type of permanently affordable housing.



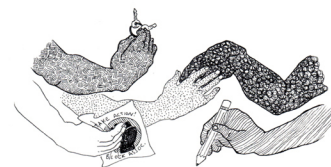
(both Latino) were in a city park after dusk. The park didn't have a closing time posted, but that didn't stop the NYPD from threatening to arrest them for being in there. During the confrontation, an affluent white couple walked by with their dog. The hypocrisy was too apparent for the cops to continue their charade, and they left. It's not hard to see that if that had not happened, our friend could have spent that night behind bars for legally walking around a local park, all in the name of profit.

Rent is Theft's conclusion is that the political system is not only complicit in gentrification, it is a primary driving force. Even liberal politicians are concerned more about capitalist profit than the well-being of poor residents. Thus, we strongly advocate for direct action against the capitalist forces driving the process, and we push for a world beyond capitalism. Though we are just a publication, many of our contributors collaborate with groups such as the Brooklyn Solidarity Network, which uses turn-of-the-century union organizing techniques to pressure landlords into capitulating to the demands of their tenants. We also advocate for rent strikes, squatting, and the forceful taking of property by tenants such as the example of Christiana toward the end of the magazine. We believe, unabashedly, that the social relations between landlords and tenants are inherently exploitative and unjust. Thus we support any and all resistance against that social relation, regardless of whether those methods are condoned by the legal system. Through our research, it is clear that the laws of our city and country are made in favor of the wealthy, and stifle resistance from the poor. Thus we don't advocate for working with politicians, though we don't specifically condemn it either.

Rent Is Theft believes in a world in which communities are controlled by its residents, not by politicians. We believe in a world without landlords in which housing is communalized. We exist to propose anarchism as a viable option for a human society, free from the domination of capital, state, and police. We call for a permanent rent strike!




thereby make any unified analysis impossible. However, it is clear that we are witnessing a time in San Francisco's history where the needs of many are being subverted to make way for a monolithic vision of the city, funded by the wealthiest and most privileged. It's become clear that in order to secure any future for the region's poor, working class, immigrant, indigenous and black populations, we need permanently affordable housing, and collective access to and control of public goods. These are only some of the simple needs that have become clearer in the current fight against rampant eviction and real estate greed. Recent victories by the Community Land Trust have shown the city that it is possible to establish housing with stable rent for posterity. Their victories feel very much tied to our work because they were gained through relentless direct action and cross-organization collaboration – and as such they are a huge source of hope. Still, it is abundantly clear that we need much more than this to create a truly life-affirming city and world.



SAN FRANCISCO TENANTS UNION (San Francisco, California)
by Andrew Szeto
www.SFTU.org

The San Francisco Tenants Union now enters its forty-fifth year of existence, founded in 1970, in the midst of global cries against neoliberal austerity and calls to challenge anti-Blackness. The SFTU has long fought against the forces of urban redevelopment that have caused mass displacement, from the evictions of Filipino seniors at the International Hotel in 1977 to the dot-com boom of the late 1990s that erased San Francisco neighborhoods wholesale, and which set the stage for this current wave of tech fueled hyper-gentrification. The challenge we face as an organization with these roots has been to remain relevant amongst current times of vast economic inequality and the emergence of new social movements against police/state violence on Black people. We must develop critical analyses for addressing the materiality of such racial and gendered violence.

Our organization's model may be positioned to meet and champion the demand that housing is a human right but serious contradictions in our



work must be addressed. The San Francisco Tenants Union is run collectively and almost entirely membership supported. We have retained our autonomy to both provide critical tenants rights counseling services through our volunteer run drop-in clinic and to push through and advocate for legislative reforms without state or funding limitations. As a collectively run organization, we are positioned to reject the growing influence of the non-profit industrial complex and embrace the calls for mutual aid and self-determination. Still-growing contradictions from our structure are proving to be limitations. Within the context of entrenched neoliberalism and colorblind/multicultural SF politics, our work must be attuned to the local histories that have shaped the political and economic landscape in which we meet the demands for “housing for all.”

San Francisco, long championed for its “diversity” and “multiculturalism,” is facing heightened class warfare, within which the right to housing has been at the front. And it is the city’s Black and Latina/o population that is most directly affected by racial capitalism’s destruction. Multiculturalism pervades the political common sense of this city, reducing the uneven terrain through which development and gentrification have been conditions of continual violence against Black and brown lives in favor of a generalized “housing” or “affordability crisis.” By centering an imagined political affinity amongst “tenants” and “renters,” we’ve often displaced intersectional critiques about how housing inequality affects communities differentially.

But it is the largely Latina/o and immigrant Mission District that has been center in the fight against gentrification. The neighborhood has been the subject of countless media stories from across the globe as the community has challenged the tech industry’s gentrification of poor and working class families through immense real estate speculation. The murders of Alex Nieto and Amilcar Perez-Lopez have pushed the housing rights movement to seriously address the interconnections between police violence and surveillance with evictions and displacement as a mechanism of dispossession and death.


The city’s Black population has dwindled to below six-percent as the city continues to push these communities further into the periphery to make way for a class of tech workers, oblivious to its industry’s excesses. These forces of white supremacist and anti-black racism manifest themselves further in the city’s recent approval to hire 700 more police officers over the next few years and the pending fight against a new jail project, where

cation would probably get us in more trouble than it was worth, so we toned it down, but expanded the scope of the project. *Rent Is Theft* was born.

The goal of *Rent Is Theft* was to provide a contemporary, revolutionary anarchist perspective on gentrification and resistance against it. Our core message, as detailed in our mission statement, was that the cause of gentrification was not the individual consumers in the market (hipsters, transplants, yuppies, etc.), but capitalism itself, and those who hold power in the capitalist system. It was important to us to speak in colloquial language, and completely avoid archaic leftist jargon and orthodoxy. We began researching the history of our own city through various resources – which are cited in the publication – and showed that gentrification was the joint program of wealthy landlords, powerful development firms, conservative think-tanks, and the city governance itself.

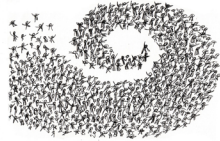
White supremacy was a constant theme that continued to rear its ugly head in our research. A good example is our very own Bushwick. In the 1960’s, Bushwick was a mostly Italian neighborhood, in which most of the residents owned their homes. As more black people moved from the South to New York, wealthy speculators began stoking the flames of racist fears within the white residents. The speculators convinced these residents that their new black neighbors would drive the value of their property down, so the speculators were able to buy the homes from the residents for below market price, and then sell the homes to new black tenants at above market price, in collusion with corrupt city appraisers. In the 70’s and 80’s, realtors took advantage of the Federal Housing Authority [FHA] insurance program to sell mortgages to poor black and latino families, knowing the residents would likely default. Through scams like these, realtors and landlords were able to become extremely wealthy at the expense of the poor.

Another recurring theme in our research were the police. To make neighborhoods “acceptable” to more affluent tenants, heightened policing programs like Broken Windows and Stop-And-Frisk were used to target people of color in their communities. Through unaffordable ticketing, petty arrests, and general harassment, they were able to begin clearing out the neighborhoods of “undesirables”. The role of the police is absolutely essential to gentrification, thus we see an unavoidable connection between the anti-police struggles of the Black Lives Matter movement – which was just beginning at the time of publication – and the anti-gentrification movement. One collaborator told a story about how he and his friend



(Oxford: December 3, 1964). (TinyURL.com/MalcolmX1964)

- ° Ronald Lawson, ed., *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984* (New York: 1986). (TinyURL.com/RonaldLawson1986)
- ° Robert M. Fogelson, *The Great Rent Wars: New York, 1917-1929* (New Haven, CT: 2013).
- ° Roberta Gold, *When Tenants Claimed the City: The Struggle for Citizenship in New York City Housing* (Urbana, IL: 2014).



RENT IS THEFT (Brooklyn, New York) **www.RentIsTheft.org**

Hipsters, transplants, yuppies, cultural invasion: These are some of the typical reasons many people give for the onslaught of gentrification. They often revolve around liberal individualism, and the "invisible hand of the free market." To those of us on the far-left of politics, all of these explanations tend to be unaware of, or ignore, potential structural issues for gentrification. In the summer of 2014, The Base (TheBaseBK.org) – an anarchist social and political center located in Bushwick, Brooklyn – hosted a reading group in which participants studied Neil Smith's *New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (TinyURL.com/NeilSmith1996). The book was a more Marxist analysis of class dynamics and the capitalist system in regards to the unseen forces behind gentrification. Though the book at times took a position that was too orthodoxly Marxist for many of the participants in the group, it addressed gentrification in a systemic way that most people tend to gloss over.

Before even finishing the book, we became so excited with its fresh perspective that we wanted to do something to spread the ideas of gentrification as a structural issue inherent to neo-liberal capitalism. This unassuming reading group began talking about planning demonstrations, or films, or speak-outs. However, there are already a lot of groups doing actions like these, so we wanted to do something different. One member of the group, perhaps a little too excited by talks of resistance, suggested making a pamphlet detailing extra-legal direct action that could be taken against the wave of condos and evictions. Pamphlets aren't exactly a new thing, but the content was definitely going against the grain of typical anti-gentrification rhetoric. Eventually, it was decided that such an incendiary publi-

Blacks make up 56% of the jail population. The histories of racialized dispossession of the historically black Fillmore District and the current redevelopment of the Bayview and Hunters Point neighborhoods are further evidence of what some have called "the afterlife of slavery". Indeed, it would be fair to say that Black life does not matter in this city. The fight for housing justice must engage with these particular histories and realities.

The San Francisco Tenants Union has been many steps behind in this regard as an organization that has not been accountable to such communities. Our work, which originated through 1960s and 70s social movements characterizes the city's counter-cultural ethos, but has remained at an impasse with respect to emerging conversations of racial justice. Basic aspects of inclusive movement building, like having Spanish and Chinese speaking tenants rights counselors, multi-lingual handouts and resources, and, importantly, a racially diverse collective membership have been low priorities for thus far. This negligence has happened despite our central location in the Latina/o Mission District.

While we remain a key "voice" in the housing justice movement, the contradictions of our work have become more apparent and are urgently in need of address. Groups like the Right to the City Alliance serve as markers of how a group like ours, with a mission of serving a universal renting class, can engage explicitly with questions of racial justice. Their valuable writings (TinyURL.com/RttCBLM) and reports (TinyURL.com/RttCreports) in which they demand a right to the city is in and of itself a more holistic analysis of the forces that shape and place demands for affordable housing.

It is because of our structure that we can and many times do speak out in solidarity with groups like the No New SF Jail Coalition (NoNewSFJail.wordpress.com), a group abolitionist organizations pushing to stop the construction of a new jail and to push for alternatives to incarceration, and autonomous groups like Eviction Free San Francisco (Eviction-FreeSF.org) and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, whose mutual aid direct action and radical counter-cartography has been influential in dictating the terms of engagement with the technocratic and data-driven playing field of city politics. We are able to support other grassroots efforts by allowing space to use our institutional legitimacy to further radical social and economic change.

The spotlight is on this city, and, certainly, resistance to neoliberal urban

development has been strong. Clearly our work has been influential in protecting and saving the livelihoods of countless renters in this city and we enjoy strong public and political support. But we must be honest about whether our work is building towards a housing justice movement that meets the calls to center a racial justice framework and that addresses the structural conditions of racialized urban poverty and displacement. As scholar Jared Sexton suggests, “Which side you are on is easier to assert than to ascertain.” These questions are of course not limited to just our organization. We open this discussion, now, to our comrades in San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, and across the country to reflect and grow: What kind of housing justice movement are we building?



CENTRO AUTÓNOMO (Chicago, Illinois)

by Barbara Suárez Galeano, Antonio Gutierrez, Alejandro Monzón
www.MexicoSolidarity.org/CentroAutonomo/en

Housing laws, landlord/tenant practices, and indigenous land rights vary substantially between different counties, cities, states, and national borders. First, what particular laws, practices, and policies has your group had to address? Second, how did you learn about all these distinctions (for example, through independent research, by working with radicals lawyers, etc.)? Lastly, do you think it would be possible, despite all these differences, to coordinate housing/tenants/land struggles at the national level?

Centro Autónomo, located in Chicago, includes members from all around the city. Our tenants and housing work usually starts by sharing information with our community regarding their rights as homeowners and tenants. We have done a lot of research which has been complemented by what we’ve learned from working with the Lawyer’s Committee for Better Housing, particularly in the process of struggling against 3 mass evictions in our neighborhood (Albany Park). An example of this was finding out that, currently, state law prohibits the implementation of rent control in any area of Illinois. This means that in our fight against gentri-

osal for the General Membership Meeting. The rights and benefits of CHTU members will be further refined as the CHTU grows in power, our bylaws are amended, our relationships with legal service providers are strengthened.

Bylaw Provision 1.3, which specifies that no landlords or agents of landlords will be admitted to the membership of the CHTU, has provoked considerable debate inside the Tenant Union, given the historic role of Black real estate capital in opening neighborhoods like Harlem and Crown Heights to Black workers in the first decades of the twentieth century. However, the vast majority of members of the Tenant Union – most of whom are long-term Black residents of Crown Heights – argue that tenants cannot effectively organize when brokers or landlords are able to influence or benefit from the work of the Tenant Union, and that no landlords or brokers should be allowed to join meetings of the CHTU. This is not an easy question, especially at a time of renewed attempts to disfranchise Black workers and vicious cross-class political attacks on people of color in the United States. This complex intersectionality of class and race will be discussed widely inside the union in a renewed debate over the bylaws.

But for now, the bylaws stand as unanimously ratified after a year of debate and consensus.

What readings and organizing resources help inspire and guide your work?

The CHTU draws strength and inspiration from the labor, Civil Rights, Black Power, and immigrant movements of New York. Our model descends from two streams. First: the tenant and labor organizations that Black workers and people of color have built up in Brooklyn and New York, ranging from tenant associations in buildings to Black Power unionism on the job (with unions like Local 1199 in the 1960s and 1970s). Second: the early-twentieth century tenant unions of the Lower East Side, frequently in alliance with the Socialist Party – when Jewish immigrants brought direct action from the sweatshop home to the tenement.

These histories are documented in texts such as the following. Also included in this reading list are CHTU members’ favorite texts about the struggle for new rights and real equality, and how to fight:

° Malcolm X, The Oxford Union Debate / By Any Means Necessary

mmunities in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Toronto, California, Latin America, Florida, Portland, Atlanta, Seattle, Boston, Spain, and on and on and on. In Jamaica, West Indies, developers are purchasing beach-front property and are able to privatize the beaches and close access to the very beaches that the locals have had access to all of their lives. Meanwhile, in Brooklyn, the West Indian culture which defines Brooklyn is being harried and pushed out, especially on Labor Day – when our neighborhood is host to the largest Afro-Caribbean festival in North America.

‘Gentrification’ is also an attack on the culture of the Black working class, people of color, and young migrant workers in the city. The steel drum bands – all the bands, really – have no place to practice. Developers are moving them from the vacant spaces to build housing or recreation for the rich and transient. Black people’s parties are being shut down by the police, saying they have noise complaints, or there is no license for a business. The same policy does not apply to the recently opened bars and restaurants, the ones that cater to white people. The CHTU is cognizant of and fights against Jim Crow businesses in the neighborhood.

In the fight for people power over buildings and land, tenants are the class – a class that is far from uniformly treated, exploited, or oppressed, a class of all nations, each with its own history at the hands of capitalism. In the Crown Heights Tenants Union, we have yelled, screamed, chanted, marched, rallied, taught, fought, supported, reached out, loved, and linked. We can unite and fight, under the leadership of the tenants who have fought the most dire everyday struggles against the landlords and bosses. We believe that there can and will be a nation-wide (and global) strategy for action on housing.

How do you involve homeowners, tenants, and/or land stewards as co-organizers?

The CHTU’s bylaws require that only rank-and-file Tenant Union members, and not paid staff members of the non-profit organizations or unions, are voting members of the Tenant Union. The bylaws, which the CHTU’s General Membership Meeting ratified in August 2015 after a year of deliberation, also clearly lay out our organizational model – how we have built a democratic union led by tenants. They can be read at TinyURL.com/CHTUBylaws.

Everything that comes out of the CHTU Organizing Committee is a prop-

agation and for tenants’ rights, we must be creative and use both the law and social protest to make our voices heard.

We believe that by fomenting a collective consciousness of our oppressions within a neoliberal capitalist system, we can build an organized movement of resistance at a national level. This means maintaining a critical analysis of our realities – both towards those we confront, and towards the oppressive dynamics we may reproduce within our movements (willing or unwillingly).


The struggle over housing implicitly intersects with many other struggles – against racism and police brutality, for immigration and indigenous rights, over higher wages at work, etc. How has your organization tried to link these struggles and what challenges have you encountered?

Centro Autónomo is a diverse organization with varying initiatives, from the homeowners and tenants in our housing movement, to our adult education programs (ESL and High School) which are guided by the principles of popular education, as well as our nascent women’s labor cooperative. We also collaborate with Organized Communities Against Deportations [OCAD], a local Chicago organization, on anti-deportation work in our community, and offer different talks about our intersectionality as individuals living within a system that exploits and marginalizes us all, granted in very different ways. We try to link our struggles through our monthly assemblies, which provide a space for us to discuss the Centro’s ongoing work and to present any proposals regarding upcoming actions, activities, and use of funds.

There are a myriad of challenges that surface when carrying out this type of work. Some of these include the reality of sexism within our community, of racial prejudice towards other ethnic and racial groups, and of classism. We also have to constantly confront the tendency of being seen as a service organization and not a community center geared towards solidarity and cooperation. Our goal in the midst of this all is to empower our community to recognize their collective power in enforcing their rights, and the detrimental effects of the ideologies that pit us against one another.

Concretely describe a campaign you’ve created in the past.

Centro Autónomo is part of a national coalition commonly referred to as the Fannie/Freddie 99 Coalition. As part of the coalition, we launched a



campaign in the summer of 2014 to pressure Director Mel Wat from the Federal Housing Finance Agency [FHFA] to sign a new policy to allow homeowners facing foreclosure and evictions to buy back their homes. Winning this has opened up a new set of possibilities for homeowners that might be able to have access to this option. The buy back campaign first began with a set of 3 regional actions sharing the same message: in Chicago, Atlanta, and Boston. Here in Chicago, we got 150 people to show up to our action, and collaborated with organizations from Detroit, Minneapolis, and Chicago to push the initiative through.

How do you involve homeowners, tenants, and/or land stewards as co-organizers?

During our bi-weekly meetings with the housing members, we usually have a topic of discussion in the beginning of the meeting. These discussions can go from the latest housing news, information regarding legal proceedings against illegal bank operations, or sharing news on actions and initiatives from organizations in the US and abroad. We also provide workshops to our members, such as: storytelling, speaking in public, banner making, etc. In these workshops we also strive to demystify legal processes that usually alienate homeowners from their own legal defense. We capacitate them so as to ensure they understand these processes and are able to share this information with others, creating a chain-reaction.

How do you apply pressure to state housing legislation (i.e. rezoning, rent regulation, foreclosures), real estate development (displacement, vacancies, gentrification), and government/business land seizures, while also doing work that is independent of their deliberation cycles?

We tend towards describing our work as the sword and shield dual approach. We rely on legal battles as our shield, which helps us delay evictions, pressure banks, and could potentially prove rather costly for investors aiming to gentrify our neighborhoods. Our sword, or rather what we understand to be our real strength, is social protest. We rely on strength in numbers, our relationship with sister organizations both within and outside Chicago, and the courage and commitment of our community to confront head-on the abusive practices of banks, legislators, and landlords.

What readings and organizing resources help inspire and guide your work?

averse to exercising that power to reshape the political terrain on which elected officials act, or to working with elected officials who have publicly backed our demands.

We see State power as a tool to win our demands – the law is a blunt weapon. But it is only one weapon – one that it is impossible to wield without the continuous struggle of an independent social movement of tenants and workers, fighting the landlords and bosses for new rights and real equality – and fighting, at the same time, to control the use of the State power.

The struggle over housing implicitly intersects with many other struggles – against racism and police brutality, for immigration and indigenous rights, over higher wages at work, etc. How has your organization tried to link these struggles and what challenges have you encountered?

The CHTU was built as an explicit alliance of long-term Black, West Indian, and working class tenants along with newly-arriving tenants in Crown Heights. We place strong emphasis on the leadership of Black and working-class tenants, but we build a union of all tenants in Crown Heights. Our fundamental analysis is that the cycle of displacement and overcharge is a cycle of exploitation: landlords and brokers force out the Black and working-class communities that have built up this neighborhood for generations. The same landlords and brokers then bring in new tenants, who they illegally overcharge. While this cycle affects long-term and new tenants in radically different ways, the CHTU believes that the only way to break this cycle is to unite and fight on all tenants' shared and intersecting demands – on a building level and against one landlord, and on a neighborhood level, against all landlords.

This fundamental solidarity of tenants, and this model, could well be used to build tenant unions on a citywide, national, or international scale. Even though developers and landlords have money, we have people power. The CHTU's visibility and militancy strengthens tenants' fortitude. It gives tenants courage and restores their faith that they are not alone in the fight to make a housing a social right under tenant control, rather than become a luxury.

'Gentrification' – the laundering of fictitious finance capital through buildings and land into 'real' capital – has wrought global destruction. It is ripping away the very fabric of humanity. Gentrification has devastated co-

office, stopping traffic on 41st and Third Avenue for nearly 10 minutes. Hundreds of tenants were arrested blockading the entrance to the Governor's offices in Albany. We demanded that the State Assembly, Senate, and Governor radically strengthen the tenant protections under the rent stabilization law.

Many of the current rent laws' pro-landlord provisions were written into law by real estate lobbyists in the 1990s and in the first half of the last decade during the height of the neo-liberal assault on the historic victories of workers and tenants in the United States.

Legal incentives that facilitate displacement include:

- Vacancy decontrol, which allows landlords to increase the rent 20% every time a tenant moves out;
- Preferential rent, a blanket term for several different landlord scams, all of which involve the inflation of the 'legal' rent while charging a lower rent (a rent that can be revoked at any lease renewal – leading to rent increases of hundreds of dollars, overnight);
- The individual apartment improvement [IAI] surcharge, in which the landlord is allowed to claim a rent increase in proportion to the cost of 'renovations' in an apartment;
- The major capital improvement [MCI] surcharge, in which the landlord is allowed to claim a building-wide rent hike for purchasing or repairing necessary capital machinery, like boilers or elevators, or for renovations to the common areas of the building.

The CHTU has also intervened in electoral politics, to prevent landlord power from corrupting political processes in our neighborhood. We created a simple pledge for a special election over a vacant New York Assembly seat, calling on all four candidates to refuse any campaign contributions made by real estate interests (landlords, developers, brokers, and investors). Only one candidate – Diana Richardson, who ran solely on the Working Families Party ticket, independent of the Democratic Party – publicly endorsed the pledge and returned campaign contributions already accepted. Richardson won the election with twice as many votes as any of the other three candidates – making Crown Heights the first district in New York State to elect an independent social democrat to the Assembly in generations. While Assemblymember Richardson has consistently fought alongside tenants in her term to date, the CHTU remains independent of all candidates and elected officials. We make no endorsements – we build our own power as a social movement. However we are not

One of the major organizing inspirations are the Popular Organization Francisco Villa-Independiente [OPFVII], commonly referred to as the Panchos, in Mexico City. They are a housing organization that just celebrated their 25th anniversary assemble by thousands of families in the capital alone. Their movement began as a reaction to the lack of dignified housing in México City, and has since grown to occupy and eventually own nine different tracts of land throughout the city. These land takeovers are now home to thousands of families who enjoy the amenities of dignified housing through their own hard work (the communities are maintained and kept safe by the families themselves).

What role does direct action (i.e. rent strikes, resisting evictions, street marches, land occupations) figure into your organizing? Can you imagine a nation-wide direct action strategy around housing?

The group started by doing an occupation of a house that was vacant in our neighborhood. After much discussion, we came to the realization that no one was willing to live there for fear of facing legal repercussions. Therefore, although no one actually ever stayed in the property, it was used as a communal space for community meetings and gatherings. As a housing group, we have done rallies outside banks, disrupted public auctions of our members' properties, done huge caravans by bus to go to the private residence of one of the executives of Freddie Mac, and continue to learn from other movements in order to expand our repertoire of social protest forms.

If you were to imagine a world in which housing and land care works the way you believe it should, what would this look like?

One of our biggest criticisms of a so-called "free market" logic regarding housing is that it leaves out those who are most vulnerable in favor of those who can pay the most. In an ideal world, land would not be part of a private market – it would not be bought or sold and most of all it would not exist for the benefit of one sole individual or investor. We see land as something that should not be a commodity. Having a dignified home is a human right that needs to be recognized and enforced so as to ensure that we do not continue to victimize and brutalize the lives and livelihood of many in defense of a limited few. The goal is to take land and housing off the market. We need to work on creating affordability in our cities and protecting our current residents instead of displacing them. True to our anti-capitalist orientation, we see that the defense of land is inherently tied to the defense of health, labor, education, etc., against a dehumanizing capital-

ist system.



CHICAGO ANTI-EVICTION CAMPAIGN (Chicago, Illinois)

www.ChicagoAntiEviction.org

Housing laws, landlord/tenant practices, and indigenous land rights vary substantially between different counties, cities, states, and national borders. First, what particular laws, practices, and policies has your group had to address? Second, how did you learn about all these distinctions (for example, through independent research, by working with radicals lawyers, etc.)? Lastly, do you think it would be possible, despite all these differences, to coordinate housing/tenants/land struggles at the national level?

South Africa's Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign directly inspired our group. During a decade of militant activity, our counterparts built an independent social movement that brought in people ranging from the homeless person to the homeowner. While we drew on their example, we knew we couldn't just copy what they did, but we had to learn how we could apply their example to our particular context in Chicago. In doing this, we benefited from the advice of radical lawyers and academics, especially those who informed us of loopholes in the law we could use. It is with this sort of help that we learned about the exception in Illinois' trespassing law for those who go onto a property with the intent to beautify it, a loophole that provides some cover for our home liberation efforts.

At the end of the day, however, most of what we have learned has been through a process of trial and error, where our group has made a habit of learning from our own experience as well as those of other groups fighting the destruction of public housing, keeping families in their homes after foreclosure, and reclaiming vacant property around the country. Indeed, it is the experiences of organizations in other parts of the country that have pushed us to sharpen our sense of how particular policies and laws work locally. In instances where national struggles can not be coordinated simply on the basis of a common target (e.g. Bank of America, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, etc), this sort of sharing of local campaign experiences, and from there, organizer exchanges, could

Our demand is for a binding collective bargaining agreement between tenant-power committees in the buildings of Crown Heights and all of our landlords – to create new rights in our own buildings and to prefigure fundamental reforms at the State level. Our demands include:

- Immediate moratorium on all evictions.
- An immediate and permanent end to the harassment of long-term tenants.
- An immediate and permanent end to the overcharge of new tenants.
- Roll-back of all rents to pre-renovation levels, followed by a five-year rent freeze and re-regulation of all apartments.
- Equal high-quality repairs for all tenants.
- Tenant power over renovations and community control over the leasing of commercial space in our buildings.

We know we have to win new rights in our buildings before we can win them at the State level. We see landlords and their investors make their own laws in our buildings every day – through fraudulent evictions and manipulation of the Housing Court system; by refusing repairs to long-term Black and working-class tenants; by illegally overcharging new tenants.

Because landlords so frequently use the Housing Court system to harass or evict tenants, the Tenant Union has built a rank-and-file mutual aid system to confront landlords in the courtroom. CHTU Housing Court Solidarity Committee members accompany Tenant Union members in Housing Court – joining volunteer legal aid attorneys. This combination of tenant-power solidarity and scrupulous alliances with attorneys committed to our movement has allowed us to stop every attempt to evict a CHTU member in the three years since the Tenant Union was founded. We also benefit from the donated staff time of organizers from several different non-profit organizations, especially the old Lower East Side squatters' group Urban Homesteading Assistance Board [UHAB].

The CHTU believes that it is impossible to change the law in fundamental ways without direct action, targeting both the landlords and the State. Earlier this summer, the CHTU joined the strongest citywide tenant movement in a generation to demand a radical overhaul of the New York State rent laws, which currently reward landlords for pushing people out. CHTU members joined and helped to lead mass sit-ins in the New York State Capitol and overnight occupations of the Capitol grounds. We dropped a massive banner on the avenue in front of the Governor's New York City

CROWN HEIGHTS TENANT UNION (Brooklyn, New York)

by Natherlene Bolden, Joel Feingold, Esteban Girón & Donna Mossman, for the CHTU Organizing Committee
www.CrownHeightsTenantUnion.org

Housing laws, landlord/tenant practices, and indigenous land rights vary substantially between different counties, cities, states, and national borders. First, what particular laws, practices, and policies has your group had to address? Second, how did you learn about all these distinctions (for example, through independent research, by working with radicals lawyers, etc.)? Lastly, do you think it would be possible, despite all these differences, to coordinate housing/tenants/land struggles at the national level?

The Crown Heights Tenant Union [CHTU] views the law and the state power as blunt weapons. In the landlord's hands, the law has been used to bludgeon tenants and to displace nations from the places they have built up for generations. In tenants' hands, the law could be used to achieve new social rights and advance the cause of real material equality – but only if we are able to overcome the current law's bias in favor of landlords and real estate capitalists over tenants and workers.

The Tenant Union confronts and fights to transform the law at every level:

- First, we fight the law at its capital base – in the apartments and hall ways and commons of our buildings. We fight our landlords every day to stop the cycle of displacement and overcharge.
- Second, we fight the law's operation, in the courtroom and in the City and State housing bureaucracies, where we beat back eviction, over charge, and unequal repairs with mutual-aid legal defense.
- Third and finally, we fight to transform the re-creation of the law at the level of the State's legislative and executive functions, by demanding that the State write our new rights into law – providing tenants and workers with additional legal weapons to continue the fight for real equality.

We begin with direct action – ranging from pickets in front of buildings to sit-ins in legislative chambers, from silent courtroom takeovers to direct economic leverage: the mass rent strike, a weapon that we have not yet used but believe will be necessary. To win new rights will require the exercise of tenant power; we will have to shut down the landlord's profit machine.

be the basis of linking housing and land struggles throughout the country.

The struggle over housing implicitly intersects with many other struggles – against racism and police brutality, for immigration and indigenous rights, over higher wages at work, etc. How has your organization tried to link these struggles and what challenges have you encountered?

Since its founding in 2009 by Cabrini-Green public housing residents and their allies, the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign group has lent its support to a variety of struggles. Drawing on the experiences of public housing residents themselves, much of this solidarity has focused on issues of police brutality, education policy, economic inequality, and government austerity. At times, efforts to broaden this solidarity to other issues has been hindered by the tangible marginalization of poor and working class Black families, reflected in the sense that if we were to extend our support to those in struggle around other issues, this action would not be reciprocated. Over time, we have made some headway on addressing this issue by promoting political education among our members that focuses on peoples-centered human rights as well as strongly encouraging our allies to address issues of class bias and anti-black racism.

Concretely describe a campaign you've created in the past.

Our group is currently based on the South Side of Chicago. In April of 2014, Illinois state representative Monique Davis (D), one of the most senior legislators from this area, moved forward House Bill 5395. If enacted, this law would have fundamentally changed the way evictions are done in Chicago and surrounding suburbs by making it possible for a landlord to have a police officer or any other third party enforce an eviction order. For months, our group joined other organizations in speaking out against the bill, repeatedly pointing out that it would have severely weakened tenants' rights during a moment in which Chicagoans have seen the loss of tens of thousands of affordable housing units. We encouraged our members and supporters to speak out while the bill was still in committee, nearly swinging the Judiciary Committee's vote against this proposed bill. When the committee narrowly approved an amended version of the bill, a half dozen campaign members traveled to the state house to confront their representatives, peeling away a co-sponsor and helping to swing key representatives against it. Framing the bill as an effort to privatize evictions, our group led the way in blocking house leaders from bringing HB 5395 up for a vote, while also laying a foundation that has helped to make easier subsequent

efforts to oppose other reactionary laws.

How do you involve homeowners, tenants, and/or land stewards as co-organizers?

The Campaign has intentionally built a membership base ranging from homeless people to homeowners. Much of this has been done by focusing on the fundamental human right to housing and emphasizing the benefits to the broader community when this right is enforced by the people themselves. This approach has made a lot of sense during the housing crisis to people on the South Side, with many homeowners under threat of eviction, and many neighborhood residents living down the block from a vacant home that could become a haven for crime. This importance of our human rights approach was best reflected in the response of our members to Rep. Davis' eviction privatization bill. Even though some of our homeowners are also landlords and would have benefited from weaker tenants' rights laws, they recognized that her measure would have undermined the human right to housing, with the potential to boomerang back against them at some point in the future.

How do you apply pressure to state housing legislation (i.e. rezoning, rent regulation, foreclosures), real estate development (displacement, vacancies, gentrification), and government/business land seizures, while also doing work that is independent of their deliberation cycles?

While decisions by government officials and land speculators are important, our group focuses primarily on organizing those who are being directly impacted by these decisions to act independently to enforce their human rights. We believe that winning these rights will ultimately come from our own efforts to enforce them. It is important for us to pressure the government and business, but at the end of the day, we win by enforcing our human right to housing, by any means necessary.

What readings and organizing resources help inspire and guide your work?

We were deeply inspired by the militant example of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, reflected in "Fighting Foreclosure in South Africa," a 2009 open letter written by this movement to U.S. activists. We have also drawn on documentaries about South Africa like *The Shock Doctrine* (2009) and *Dear Mandela* (2012) because they put struggles over land and

housing in a broader context. Our understanding of human rights, home liberations, and black-led organizing has been informed by Carol Anderson's *Eyes off the Prize*; the U.S. Human Rights Network's *Born of Struggle, Implemented through Struggle*; Laura Gottesdeiner's *A Dream Foreclosed*; as well as the documentaries *Inside Job* (2010) and *Taking Over, Taking Back* (2013).

What role does direct action (i.e. rent strikes, resisting evictions, street marches, land occupations) figure into your organizing? Can you imagine a nation-wide direct action strategy around housing?

Direct action is at the core of our focus on enforcing human rights. We rely on the power of being based in the community. If the bank puts a family out, we rally the neighbors to put them back in their home. If a bank leaves a home vacant, we work with the neighbors to turn it into a home for a homeless family. This approach could be the foundation for a strategy that goes beyond calls for a national Day of Action by first building up local capacity through tactical training and political education. With some support, this local capacity can provide the foundation for a coordinated series of rent strikes, much like those in the 1960's, as well as building occupations, like those carried out by the National Union of the Homeless in the early 1980s. We only get what we are organized to take, so we need coordinated actions that raise the issue of housing justice, call for changes in policy, and use direct action to actually put in place the change that we are demanding.

If you were to imagine a world in which housing and land care works the way you believe it should, what would this look like?

Our vision is of world where housing and land are decommodified – meaning that they are no longer treated as something to be bought and sold on the market. Instead, we relate to land and housing in a way prioritizes our basic needs for food, shelter, and a broader community. With our right to housing secure, we have a foundation from which to ensure that all of our human rights are respected.

