

NYC TENANT

MOVEMENT HISTORY

Pre-Christian Calendar-1860:

The Lenape lived in what is now New York City. Beginning in 1609, the Dutch colonized the Lenape's territory and slaughtered their people, granting land to wealthy Dutch families. The Dutch used slave labor, a practice that the English continued after taking possession of New York in 1664. By 1773, 42% of NYC households had slaves. In 1839, tenant farmers began the Anti-Rent movement in the Hudson Valley.



1867-1901: First Tenement Laws

Poor and working class people, especially immigrants, lived in cramped and unsanitary tenement housing. Draft and unemployment riots, and militant labor strikes erupted. The city passed safety regulations to quell unrest and fight disease.



1902-1930: Rent Strikes and Socialist Organizing

In 1904, tenement women organized the city's first rent strike! The socialist party then helped organize a series of rent strikes in Harlem and Brooklyn, meanwhile gaining a following in NY by organizing for workers rights and free speech. More rent strikes erupted during WWI, in part due to high rents due to a housing shortage. The state passed concessionary laws regulating rent in order to curtail socialist power, but enshrined the principle that landlords can claim a profit from rent. Rent control legislation began and ended in the 1920's.

1930s: The Great Depression, The Communist Party, and Mass Tenant Mobilizations

The Great Depression began in 1929. Communist-led Unemployment Councils organized rent strikes and eviction resistance--including moving furniture back in--and in Communist stronghold neighborhoods it became impossible to evict tenants. In 1933, more than 200 buildings in the Bronx went on rent strike, many winning rent reductions; mass rallies and violent confrontations with the police broke out. In 1934, rent strikes in Harlem and Knickerbocker Village erupted. City-wide tenant federations formed. The first public housing in the U.S. was created. U.S. Racist "redlining," which further segregated neighborhoods, was built into federal mortgage policy.

1940s: WWII, White Flight, and Urban Renewal

As African Americans and Puerto Ricans relocated to the city to escape economic and political violence, white residents moved to the suburbs. In 1943, tenant and union groups successfully demanded a rent freeze in New York City as part of the federal government's WWII price controls, a victory which nonetheless overshadowed rent strikes and other radical tactics. Urban Renewal and slum clearance began, displacing low-income people of color.



1950's: Resisting Slum Clearance and Urban Renewal

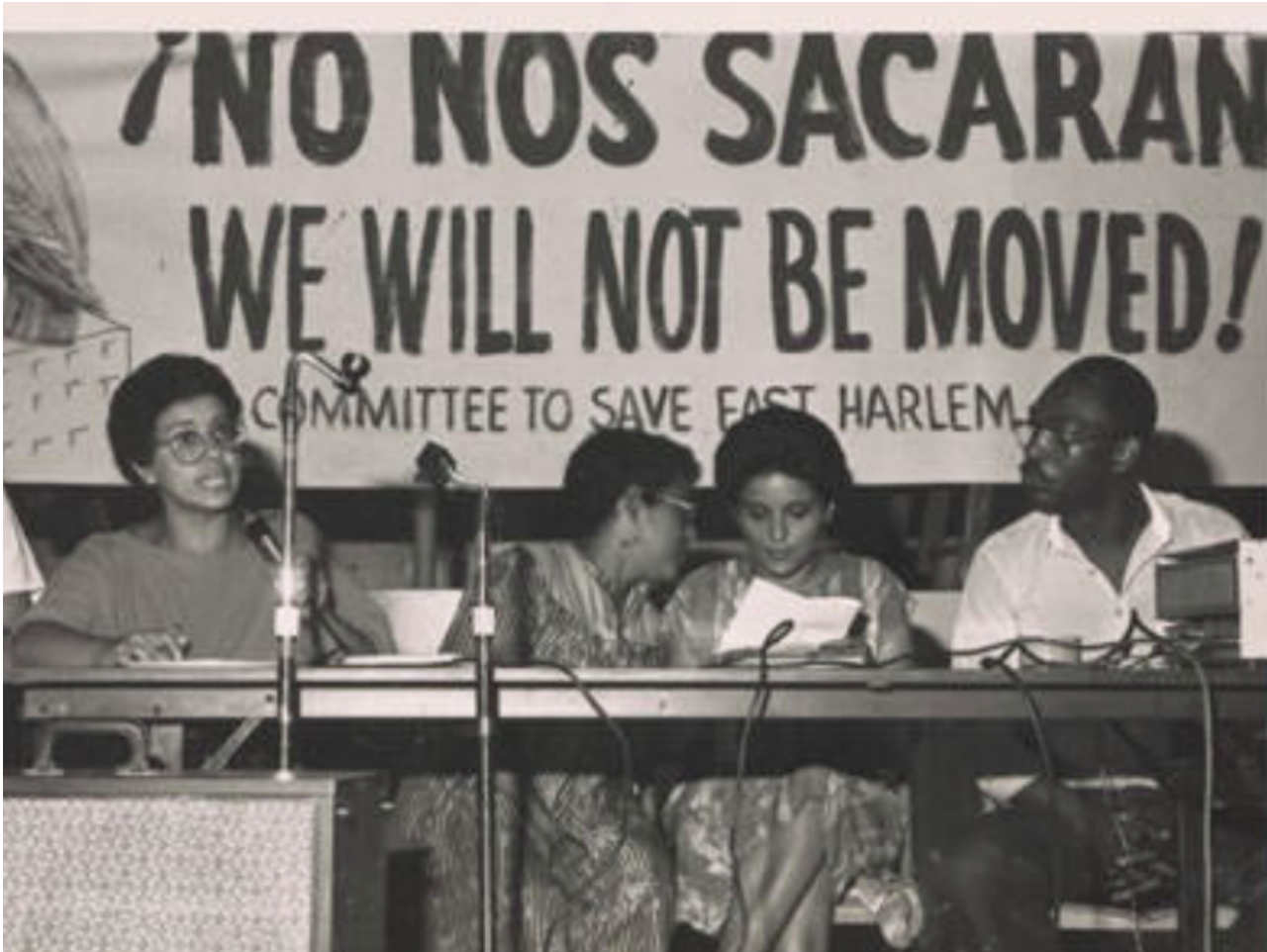
Tenants and organizers resisted urban renewal projects and displacement, forming the Met Council on Housing. NY enacted state rent control laws. Black organizers fought against racial discrimination in public and private housing.

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.

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.

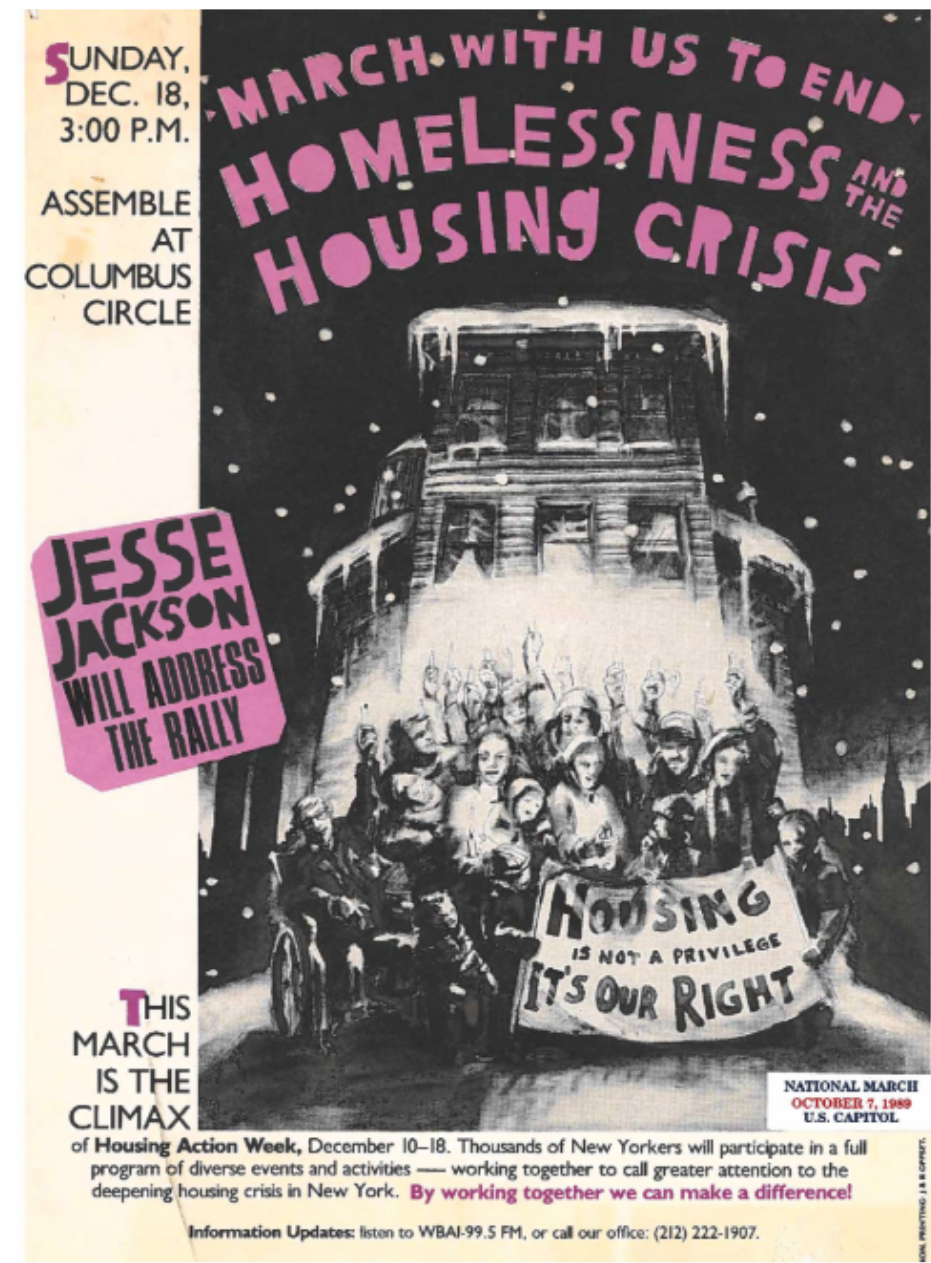


1980's: Gentrification and Mobilization for the Homeless and SRO Tenants

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.

