HOW COMMUNITIES HAVE FOUGHT AND WILL FIGHT AGAINST EVICTIONS
As long as there have been evictions—legal and extralegal—there have been eviction blockades. We, in taking up this work, acknowledge that this struggle falls within a tradition and continuum of anti-oppressive communal resistance. As such, while this brief account will look at more explicitly analogous iterations of eviction defense, it is necessary to recognize the broader, and ongoing, history of folks protecting their homes and communities from the threat (and too often, the actualization) of violent displacement within the specter of white supremacist settler colonialism.

Eviction blockades surge during crises. We saw this during the Great Depression. In 1930, the National Unemployment Council, with its mission of keeping people safely in their homes, was founded in Chicago; it quickly expanded to hundreds of branches across the states. Here in New York City, in 1932 alone, 185,000 families received eviction notices. Responding to this, communities throughout the city, but particularly in black and brown neighborhoods (Harlem maybe most focally) tapped into the Unemployment Council’s frameworks and formed loose-knit and decentralized eviction blockade networks. When the marshals would show up to a household with the intention of eviction, the neighborhood would show up too. Hundreds of people would gather outside of their neighbor’s home and would form a wall, physically blocking the violent marshals from entering. Direct action, in this case, resulted in 77,000 families retaining their safety within their homes despite having received legal eviction notices.

It’s important to note, of course, that this means that over 100,000 people were still evicted despite widespread organization. What this tells us is that eviction blockades are only ever bandaids—deeply necessary bandaids—to systemic oppressions that require systemic solutions: namely, abolition. What this tells us is that the eviction blockades we are currently doing are an urgent facet within the larger project of abolition.

In Toronto, at the same time, the Communist Party of Canada organized unemployed workers into a roving anti-eviction unit; operating through phone-trees, this group could, at a moment’s notice, gather hundreds of people who could camp out in front of at-risk homes for days at a time. Sometimes these blockades included theatrical confrontations with state agents wherein daring neighbors would snatch eviction papers out of the hands of deputies and sprint off into a maze of alleyways. Of this, Bill Walsh, a communist involved, said: “We believed that if enough people took on the local authorities, someday soon they would be ready to take on the state.” In protecting ourselves and our neighbors we acknowledge that we are confronting the oppressive systems and regimes that police agents represent. Our actions here are never alone enough to overcome the state’s forces of oppression, but in these struggles glimmer the possibilities of doing just so.

More contemporarily, after the economic crisis that was (and is) the neoliberal decay of 2008, we saw another surge in evictions and eviction resistance. In South Africa—and we recognize that the struggle to keep people safely in their home, and safe from the violence of the capitalist state, is transnational and transgenerational—activists formed the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. This is from their mission statement:

We take action to get land and houses and also to prevent banks from stealing our land and houses. When a family gets evicted and has nowhere else to go, we put them back inside. ... When government cuts off our electricity, we put it back on ... We break the government’s law in order not to break our own (moral) laws. We oppose the authorities because we never gave the authority to steal, buy and sell our land in the first place. - WCAEC (2009)

Here we note the importance of community and consent. Or as we declare it in the streets: Who Keeps Us Safe? We Keep Us Safe!
At the same time in Spain, some 500 people were being evicted each day. In response to this and to widespread neoliberal austerity measures, a network of activists and anarchosyndicalists launched the Indignados Movement: culminating in massive street actions, these revolutionaries occupied banks that were foreclosing on homeowners and employed direct eviction defenses in their communities.

Even more recently, we look to our comrades in New Orleans, who just a couple months ago physically barricaded the entrance to the city’s housing court, where evictions were set to begin. Tenant activists, like the Canadian communists in the 1930s, physically ripped eviction papers out of the hands of violent lawyers. This shows us the continuity of this struggle, and that some tactics—particularly those that visibly embarrass the agents of our pain and displacement—are timeless. This shows us too that evictions are multifaceted operations of violence, are mammoth and intricate machines set on consuming us, and that confronting them in each arena—in front of peoples’ homes, taking over eviction lawyers’ offices, placing ourselves in front of housing court, on the fucking internet, in statehouses and in legislation—is absolutely imperative.

What this brief history is meant to display is that the eviction defense networks that are popping up right now are by no means new: they are iterations of a fight we have fought for as long as displacement has been threatened. For as long as racial capitalism continues to cyclically crater and subsequently displace and murder swaths of the people in order to subsist, eviction defenses will be necessary and widespread. As a part of an abolitionist vision, eviction defenses attend first to the needs of the people.

Solidarity Forever.
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, KNOW YOUR POWER

GOOD NEWS
NO EVICTIONS BEFORE OCTOBER 1ST!
Whatever threats you may be receiving have no legal authority to evict you, no matter how scary they may be.

All cases filed after March 16th (about 200k) are suspended.
After October 1, these cases will be low priority.

NYC tenants have Right To Counsel, which provides legal representation in many cases.
It is uncertain exactly how many tenants will get a lawyer, but the courts have indicated they want everyone to be represented.

BAD NEWS
Courts are moving pre-COVID cases filed on March 16th or prior (about 14k) forward, with a focus on virtual cases but no evictions can be carried out until October 1st.

CALL THE NYC HOUSING HELPLINE
You can call 311 or email civiljustice@hra.nyc.gov for free legal advice and counsel about tenancy, eviction or landlord-tenant disputes, regardless of immigration status.

START OR JOIN A TENANTS ASSOCIATION
Landlords are most powerful when they’re targeting tenants individually. But tenants can fight back—there’s power in numbers. Talk to your neighbors! They could be having similar troubles, and no one should be going through them alone. Your local tenant union can help you organize. Check brooklynevictiondefense.org/resources for a map of orgs.

CALL YOUR STATE SENATOR
Housing justice organizations are calling for NY state legislature to:
- Cancel Rent
- Extend the Moratorium for At Least One Year
- House the Homeless

Let them know that October 1st is not long enough!
Sen. Velmanette Montgomery: (718) 643-6140 / montgome@nysenate.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has federally issued a “Temporary Halt in Residential Evictions to Prevent the Further Spread of COVID-19” until December 31st. We advise that individuals DO NOT use this declaration without legal representation, because it requires the tenant to promise to pay as much as they have (instead of spending on food or other necessities).

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER FROM YOUR LANDLORD OR THEIR EMPLOYEES, CALL BROOKLYN EVICTION DEFENSE
A network of tenant unions and individuals in Brooklyn have come together to do what the NYPD won’t do—physically show up to keep you safe in your home. Check the back cover for contact info.

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So what happens after the 1st?
Only time (and Cuomo) will tell, but here’s what you can do
EVICION DEFENSE 101

Since the emergence of COVID-19 in March, over 1 million New Yorkers have lost their jobs. For tenants already squeezed by an exploitative housing market, this has made it impossible to keep up with rent. More than 1.5 million New Yorkers are at risk for eviction when housing court reopens, and at all levels, the government has refused to offer meaningful support. Due to the decades of gentrification benefiting landlords and private equity corporations, the wave of evictions will hit working-class Black and brown New Yorkers the hardest.

In the face of this unprecedented crisis, neighborhoods across the city have forged networks of mutual aid and coordinated resistance. Building on the tradition of collective care that has always been the bedrock of Black and brown communities, these new formations have come together to keep people fed, keep people healthy, and in the case of BED, keep people in their homes.

What is an eviction defense?
Eviction defense is a direct action strategy where neighbors and comrades come together to intervene in an eviction and prevent community members from losing their homes. Like any direct action strategy, eviction defense looks different depending on the situation. Some may involve close work with lawyers to negotiate with the landlord. Others may require a more confrontational approach at housing court, in the neighborhood, or on a tenant’s front stoop.

Before things get to that point though, it’s important to build community power by connecting with your neighbors. Solidarity with other tenants can be a vital source of support, especially for the most vulnerable renters. This solidarity can take many forms—keeping track of who is unable to pay rent, sharing information and pooling resources if someone has immediate needs, and educating each other about tenants rights and tenant power in NYC (see page 8 for more).

As more neighbors join the fight, you can identify shared demands for your landlord (e.g. essential maintenance/repairs, rent freeze/cancellation) and begin discussing how to escalate if those demands aren’t met.

If more support is needed, get in touch with local housing/tenant organizations. Groups like Crown Heights Tenant Union, Full Time Tenant Union, Bushwick-Bedstuy Tenant Coalition have significant experience organizing members of their communities and can offer resources and support. Connecting with other groups across the city can be especially powerful when taking stronger direct action, like staging a rent strike or holding an eviction blockade.

How does an eviction defense work?
The first step of an eviction is a notice from the landlord about their intention to sue and their reasoning for doing so (e.g. nonpayment of rent, violation of lease terms, etc.). Unless a grace period is explicitly outlined in the lease or rental agreement, a “nonpayment of rent” notice can be drawn up the day after the rent is due. This is not an eviction notice, it informs the tenant that they have 14 days to pay the rent before eviction proceedings begin in housing court.

This is the best time to reach out to neighbors and begin mobilizing in response to the eviction threat. If demands to protect the most vulnerable renters have not already been drafted, work with the community to put those in place. Before directly confronting the landlord, it is important to take a few safety precautions like: changing the locks on the door, making access to water and electricity won’t be disrupted, and informing neighbors of any immediate needs in case of emergency.

Once the immediate safety of any at-risk tenants is secure, the group may want to escalate. A first step might be delivering the
The only way to completely end the scourge of evictions in New York is to build a powerful tenant movement that transforms housing from a financial investment into a human right. After you finish this zine, go talk to your neighbors, build a tenant association, go connect with your local housing justice organization and get involved. There are over five million renters in New York City; many of those renters run essential services and if they are sufficiently coordinated, they could shut the whole City down.

United, we are more powerful than we could possibly imagine.

How to show up at an eviction defense
Evictions are a form of state-sanctioned violence; they are stark examples of our society prioritizing landlords over tenants and profit over people. Like other forms of violence aided by the state, this means evictions take place at the intersection of anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. These systems of oppression operate even within spaces of collective resistance, and an effective eviction defense prioritizes the safety of Black, trans, and working-class members of the community.

An effective eviction defense also prioritizes the leadership of impacted tenants. Participants should follow the direction of tenant organizers, regardless of personal politics or preferred tactics. This is especially important at direct actions, like an eviction blockade, where the needs and risk for a tenant can change in an instant.
Is your landlord harassing you?
Is your landlord threatening you with eviction?

¿Tu propietario te está acosando?
¿Estás siendo amenazado con desalojo?

房东威胁要驱逐您吗？
房东在骚扰您不付租金吗？

YOUR NEIGHBORS ARE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU!
¡TUS VECINOS ESTÁN AQUÍ PARA APOYARTE!
您的邻居在这里支持您！

📞 (917) 982-2265
📧 brooklynevictiondefense.org
✉️ brooklynevictiondefense@gmail.com
📸 @brooklynevictiondefense