

Housing Justice League Newsletter

July 2020

Housing Justice League's Mass Meetings are Virtual

Housing Justice League has shifted to virtual mass meetings during the pandemic. Please be on the lookout for emails leading up to the third Tuesday of the month with instructions on how to join us online!

Race, Class and Division: Housing Justice League Summer Dialogue Series

Join us for a series of discussion sessions based on selected short films and readings

Protesters around the world have been taking to the streets to express their grief, fear, and frustration over a system that fails to reckon with the pain and harm it inflicts on Black people, indigenous people, and people of color. Black communities are leading calls for justice and pushing for long term changes that will dismantle the racist systems that hold us back.

This summer, Housing Justice League will host a series of dialogues on race, class, and division. Power imbalances based on race and class permeate our society, communities, and organizations. Systematic racism is deeply rooted in our history, culture and institutions - even "progressive" institutions - and there is no way to escape it. Visible or not, its impacts are ever-present. Because race, class, and lived experiences are complex, these conversations can be contentious and scary to have, but if we ignore this call for justice, freedom, and equality, we may be risking the long-term sustainability of our movement.

To help us build our work in this multicultural and intergenerational organization, it is important to have such dialogues. They can be some of the most powerful learning we can experience. We are asking for facilitators of the group dialogues.

The Album this summer will be LEMONADE by Beyonce, the first week we invite you to listen and learn the lyrics to the single Freedom!

The 1st film: Discussion Facilitated by Alison Johnson Wednesday July 29th, 2020

I Am Not Your Negro, is a 2016 documentary film directed by Raoul Peck, based on James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript, *Remember This House*. It brings to life James Baldwin's urgent ideas about race in America even if it leaves out a key aspect of the writer's life and work: his sexuality.

SONG: *Freedom* by Beyonce

The 1st reading: Discussion facilitated by Karimah Dillard Wednesday August 5th, 2020

The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House by Audre Lorde. "Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women -- in the face of tremendous resistance -- as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought."

SONG: *Hold Up* by Beyonce

The 2nd Film: Harriet, facilitated by Tanya Washington Wednesday August 12th, 2020

More to come soon! If you are interested in leading a discussion, please email us at housingjusticeleagueatl@gmail.com.



Affordable Housing Policy Work Updates

Over the last several months, the policy working group has shared Housing Justice League's Affordable Housing Policy Package with Atlanta city council members. The reception has been mixed, with most council members showing support for at least one of the six policies outlined in the Package. We are currently in the processes of gathering endorsement for the policies from other housing and justice organizations throughout Atlanta to increase our sway with politicians. We are also in the process of publishing an op-ed advocating the necessity of these policies in a local paper. The op-ed will help launch our more public campaign, in which we will really try to put pressure on local officials to make these ideas a reality. As COVID has changed the nature of organizing, this campaign will be mostly online, and we have updated our website accordingly. We've also made graphics that can be shared on social media to explain what the six policies are and how they work to create and preserve affordable housing. Check all this out on the new webpage: <https://www.housingjusticeleague.org/policy-work>

Eviction Court and Eviction Defense/Hotline Update

Housing Justice League's Eviction Defense work took a new direction beginning in March with the arrival of coronavirus. Since millions of tenants are out of work and unable to pay rent, many additional communities now face the threat of eviction, adding to the already-existing eviction crisis in the metro Atlanta area. To respond to this crisis, we set up the HJL COVID-19 hotline which operates 7 days a week from 9:00 to 6:00. Volunteers provide referrals to direct service organizations, legal aid, and to the HJL call-back team which provides ongoing organizing support to tenants who want to fight for their homes.

We have been busy staying abreast of the constantly changing developments with the Supreme Court of Georgia and the local magistrate courts, mainly the Fulton County Magistrate Court so that we are able to relay critical information to tenants. On July 10, the Supreme Court of Georgia released its latest Order extending the Statewide Judicial Emergency. The Order set the pause on answer deadlines, that had been in effect since the first Order on March 14, to terminate on July 14. This meant that tenants who received eviction filings between March 14 and July 14 had seven days from July 14 to file their answer.

Housing Justice League took this to be a major concern because when a tenant does not file their answer, they face a default judgment (meaning the landlord wins automatically), and can be forcibly removed from their home by the state. Many tenants that received an eviction weeks or months before July 14 were suddenly facing an impending deadline. Since Fulton County

Magistrate Court has said [it will not require any in-person hearings until November 13](#), and since it is backlogged with cases, **filing an answer could make the difference of being evicted next year instead of next month.**

To respond, we organized a Dekalb and Fulton County-wide canvass to tell tenants they should file their answer. With the help of Elora Raymond a GA Tech, we were able to use court data to reach the right people. In Dekalb and Fulton counties about 4,600 tenants had evictions filed against them during the judicial emergency and only 10 percent had filed an answer. Collectively we were able to canvass 70 buildings and reach over 1,000 individual units with information. It was amazing to see how quickly people mobilized to help out. We are so grateful for your support. We are still waiting to learn what impact our efforts had and we will share that information with canvassers.

Because the dominant housing system in our society is ruled by land-lord(hoard)ers who have an entire legal system to prop up their continued access to tenants' hard-earned (and also exploitative) wages (known as rent), the courts will continue to prioritize landlords' control over their properties above all else. All of the concerns that the court has expressed that relate to the global pandemic have to do with the court staff and attorneys, rather than the prospect of what it means for public health to force thousands of people facing disproportionate rates of covid from their homes and impose debt on them. **Email evictiondefense@housingjusticeleague.org if you want to help canvas this week!**