

Title: Empty Narratives of Urban Resistance: The Community Land Trust

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Abstract:

A small part of the self-help housing campaign has been the slow emergence of the Community Land Trust (CLT) movement. CLTs are heterogeneous in terms of their scale and urban/rural contrast and because the motivation behind their inception appear to be so different. We initially outline here the contradiction between housing as the process of activism and housing as a commodity. This is important because we see in the former means by which community organising can be explained, but show the former to be understood in terms of class analysis. We then consider activism through the four phases of direct action suggested by Ward and go on to look specifically at two CLTs, both in major US cities.¹ These two cases, one in Boston and one in New York, offer an insight into why a particular type of community organizing took place. We see a stand against gentrification in the heart of Manhattan, radical action to secure the ownership of land and to prevent displacement in a Lower East Side neighbourhood. In contrast, the second case shows a stand against the violence exerted in the degeneration of a South Boston neighbourhood. Here we see a community conversant with civil rights struggles able to secure the compliance of the local state through their direct action. Narratives of resistance, we suggest, rely on activists and professionals who both share similar aims and develop a symbiotic relationship in resisting the hegemony of private capital and the state.