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Social Justice Walking Tour of
JACKSON HEIGHTS

ABOUT THE TOUR & THIS ZINE

The Jackson Heights Walking Tour is a radical introduction to the organizing history of DRUM and other communities in Jackson Heights to fight for justice, dignity and care for working class immigrants and all marginalized people.

The purpose of this zine is to memorialize the tour and make it accessible for folks to self-guide and lead the tour for themselves.

This tour was designed by Aria Hossain and Akash Singh, with the help of many, many people. We put together this tour to capture just some of the decades of organizing that DRUM and others in Jackson Heights have led to fight for justice, dignity and care for working class immigrants and all marginalized people.

We hope that this tour builds connections between participants and the people we meet in the neighborhood. We also hope that the stories touch your heart and inspire you to stay connected to the movements for justice that define the neighborhoods we make our lives in. What will we do with these stories now that we know them? What is our responsibility to our neighbors and our history?

As we finish this compiling this tour, the 2024 presidential elections are days away. Communities like Jackson Heights are already directly impacted by the anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric promoted by facists and centrists. How will we answer the call to keep us safe and organize to protect working people and immigrants?



ABOUT JACKSON HEIGHTS

For many, Jackson Heights is where they come for food and groceries, for some it is a place where they find community and for others, it is just a common subway transfer to other parts of NYC. No matter people's connection to this area, Jackson Heights is as vibrant as it gets. Jackson Heights is special because it is a neighborhood at the center of many neighborhoods where so many different communities have historically lived alongside each other. Jackson Heights has been home to Latinx, South Asian, and white, eastern european communities. Pakistanis and Indians began to migrate to the neighborhood starting in the 70s. Bengalis began to call Jackson Heights home starting in the 90s. And Nepalis and Tibetans started to arrive in the recent decade. There is also a vibrant LGBTQ+ community in Jackson Heights going back around 100 years.

Corona, the neighborhood to the east, is predominantly Latinx— with people coming from the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and Mexico.

Elmhurst to the south is East Asian and Southeast Asian, and Bengali. Little Thailand also calls this neighborhood home.

Woodside to the west was historically very Irish. Today, Filipinos, Nepalis, Salvadorans and other Latinx groups call the neighborhood home.

Jackson Heights' rich history of community organizing uplifts everyone, including working class people, undocumented immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people.

ABOUT US

Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) is a multigenerational, membership-lead organization that builds power within working-class South Asian and Indo Caribbean communities across NYC. DRUM was founded in 2000 in response to the growing number of working class South Asian and Indo Caribbean immigrants coming to NYC. At that moment, South Asians were increasingly criminalized by immigration enforcement and jailed in detention centers. DRUM members are working class and undocumented immigrant workers, women and youth organizing for justice from the local to the global.





STOP #1 DIVERSITY PLAZA + DRUM ACTIONS

73-19 37th Rd. Jackson Heights, NY, 11372

Before the construction of Diversity Plaza was approved by the city, there were a number of business owners organizing against it because of what it would entail for their customers. Previously, the area for Diversity Plaza was a bus stop which would bring in customers in Jackson Heights from pockets of Desi communities all across the city. According to business owners, the creation of the plaza would have taken away this valuable customer base. At the time the community was divided on what a space like this could mean for the neighborhood. Some local business

advocated against the plaza, while others in the community expressed a desire for it. The plaza was completed in 2012 and has become a beloved location by all for events and gatherings.

Since the construction of Diversity Plaza, this place has become an iconic landmark for Jackson Heights events and organizing. For DRUM, a lot of our campaigns and programming has been facilitated in the plaza. See some of those campaigns in the next page.

Eckshathe Dhaba: Eckshate means together in a lot of South Asian languages. Dhabas are roadside cafes. Eckshate Dhabas addressed the particular ways immigration and law enforcement affect women and the repression, policing, and violence women face in our homes and on the streets. Ekshate was developed by DRUM leaders to address the ways that gender-based oppression shows up in the lives of working class South Asian and Indo Caribbean women and girls.

Hate Free Zones: After Trump was elected president in 2016, local organizations seeing the threat that his administration would pose to working class immigrant communities launched Hate Free Zone (HFZ). HFZ was launched in Diversity Plaza where 1000+ individuals from diverse communities led a press conference and march through the heart of Queens (Jackson Heights, Woodside, Elmhurst, and Corona). A core component of HFZ was strategizing community defense systems to protect our communities from ICE and NYPD.

Scan the QR Code to watch the launch video for HFZ in 2016 which over 100 organizations representing NYC's working class and immigrant communities sponsored.



GET TO KNOW JACKSON HEIGHTS

Diversity Plaza is home to many different businesses and street vendors. They are an important part of what makes the Plaza such an important place for this community.

Below is a sample of a RAP SHEET that organizers use when we talk to workers in the neighborhood. Use the questions on the RAP SHEET to get to know a worker in the Plaza.

RAP SHEET

Introduce yourself and ask if the other person has a moment to talk. If you both speak another language like Bangla or Nepali, feel free to use that language.

Hi my name is [NAME]. I'm from [neighborhood] and I'm doing walking tour to get to know the workers of Jackson Heights.

- How long have you lived and worked in Jackson Heights?
- What are some places you think are important to this neighborhood?
- Who are the communities that make up Jackson Heights?
- What are some of the issues you think workers and immigrants face in NYC?
- What are your favorite food spots in Jackson Heights?



STOP #2

WORKING CLASS ORGANIZING IN JACKSON HEIGHTS

73-19 37th Rd. Jackson Heights, NY, 11372

Service workers are the backbone of Jackson Heights' economy. However, despite their work literally moving the bustling district, most of these workers experience wage theft and exploitation from their employers and cannot fight back in fear of losing their job or getting reported to ICE if they are undocumented. Here are a few DRUM member stories over the years, depicting the power and struggle of service workers in Jackson Heights.



NARGIS

On March 8, 2020, International Working Women's Day, around 100 people gathered in front of Sona Chaandi Jewelry Store to hold abusive local businesses accountable and stand up for women workers in Jackson Heights and globally. Nargis, DRUM member and former Sona Chaandi employee, shared her story of harassment and abuse in front of the jewelry store alongside other workers. She shared how she was paid \$70-75 per day for 10 hours of work for four years. Her boss, Dilip Malani, also verbally and sexually abused her and the other women employees who feared losing their jobs if they spoke out. Nargis and the women workers of DRUM sent a powerful message to the business owners of Jackson Heights: "If you mess with one of us, you mess with all of us!"



for \$1000 and left them without a means to make a living. They had no way to recover their lost belongings.

In his late 80s, Baul Dada organized with the Street Vendor Project and DRUM to challenge the city and sue them for damages. Alongside other workers, he was able to improve the conditions for vendors in NYC and win his lawsuit. The NYPD continues to harass street vendors all while the city itself has refused to issue permits to thousands of workers.

In 2022, at the age of 92, Baul Dada self-deported to Bangladesh after living undocumented for 42 years. Systematic and economic barriers failed Baul Dada; while he was working and providing for his family here in the United States, he has lost his youngest son and one of his son-in-laws back in Bangladesh.



BAUL DADA

Sanwar Ahmed, better known as Baul Dada, sold Jhal Muri and sang folk songs on the streets of Jackson Heights for over 12 years. In 2016, NYPD and agents from the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene confiscated Baul Dada's cart, supplies, and food and threw them all away. He was caught up in a sweep that fined hundreds of vendors

years. These agents especially targeted and took advantage of young Muslim and Arab men with minor legal offences, precarious immigration statuses, or intellectual disabilities. One such case included Jackson Heights resident Shahina and her son Shahawar Matin Siraj. In 2004, Matin was

SHAHINA

After 9/11, the NYPD and FBI entrapped Muslim men and boys in fake terrorist stories, ruining their lives and punishing their families for



approached by a NYPD informant who recorded conversations they had about the U.S. wars in the Middle East. The NYPD used the recordings to entrap Matin and incarcerate him.

In 2007, Matin was sentenced to 30 years in prison, a sentence which he is still serving. The day after his sentencing, immigration agents detained Matin's family with the intention to deport them to Pakistan. DRUM mobilized and advocated for their release. Ever since then, Shahina has spoken avidly against the post-9/11 law enforcement and surveillance. Shahina has always connected the issues she's faced as a working class, Pakistani immigrant to the issues that other Black and brown families within the US and globally experience.

KAZI FOUZIA

Kazi's story reflects the struggles faced by many undocumented workers in NYC.

Kazi worked as a seamstress making around \$50 per day for years after immigrating from Bangladesh over 15 years ago. In December 2010, while working for Shahil Fashion, a car hit her and threw her 13 feet while she was running to get more fabric from a store across the street. Her employer refused to

call an ambulance for her. Instead, he called a taxi to transport Kazi while she was still unconscious.

Because of the nature of the accident and Kazi's immigration status, she did not qualify for no-fault insurance, an insurance that covers for car-accident related medical bills. The hospital sent her home with painkillers even though she had numerous fractures and muscle pain. The owner of Shahil Fashion



fired her the next day because she could not work with her injuries. For 28 days, she was unemployed and had to take care of her injuries at home with the help of a few friends.

Soon after her accident, she joined DRUM where lawyers supported her to stand up to her former boss and win a settlement of \$2600. However she would emphasize that the money was not the important thing for her. When asked why she organizes with DRUM, Kazi says that she was angry. Her experience was not an isolated incident; many undocumented workers are exploited by their employers but do not get justice. Kazi's victory pushed her to organize her community and fight for undocumented workers. Kazi has organized for more than a decade with DRUM and currently serves as DRUM's Director of Organizing.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Safe communities are organized communities. Working class and undocumented immigrant communities face threats from the NYPD, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and are routinely taken advantage of by abusive bosses.

In order to stay safe in the face of these threats, we need to know our rights! Read the following scenarios based on the real life experiences of workers in Jackson Heights. What would you do in this situation? What rights do you have? At the end of this booklet we have attached a collection of KYR resources that we recommend reading and sharing with the people in your life.

UNJUSTLY FIRED

Saima is a 40 year old woman who works at a restaurant in Jackson Heights. She is a recent immigrant from Bangladesh and is currently undocumented. She waits tables at the restaurant and cleans the floors. Her boss pays her \$10/hour and she works around 50 hours a week.

One day while she was mopping the floor at the restaurant, Saima slipped and sprained her lower back. She goes to the emergency room and the doctors tell her that she needs to stay home from work to recover. When she calls her boss to explain that she is too injured to work, he fires her immediately.

What should Saima do?

STREET VENDOR HARRASSMENT

Mohammed is 50-years-old and works as a street vendor in Diversity Plaza selling Qurans, prayer mats, prayer beads, and other religious items. He wakes up before sunrise to bring his wares and his table to the plaza and set up his post for the day. Mohammed has been selling religious items in the plaza for years, and people regularly greet him.

Last week, NYPD and Department of Sanitation officers targeted street vendors in Diversity Plaza. The officers confiscated all of Mohammed's wares and issued him a ticket for \$1000.

What should Mohammed do?

Below we have some general reflections on the legal and organizing strategies that Saima, Geeta, and Mohammed could take. This is NOT legal advice. We also have seen how organizing can overcome obstacles that lawyers cannot. Check out the KYR guide at the end of this booklet.

SAIMA: NYC is currently an "at will" employment city, meaning that your boss can fire you without having to state the reason. She does qualify for emergency medicaid. Because her boss paid her under minimum wage she would potentially be able to file a wage theft cases.

Workers who have been unjustly fired in NYC have been organizing to pass the Secure Jobs Act, a law which would require employers to submit their reasoning for firing an employee. Undocumented workers and cash earners have also been organizing to pass the Unemployment Bridge Program, a fund which would support workers who lose their jobs but do not qualify for unemployment insurance.

MOHAMMED: The sale of religious materials is a protected activity under

WORKPLACE RAID

Geeta is a single mother who immigrated from Nepal with her 10-year-old child. Geeta works at a nail salon with a group of Nepali women. The owner of the salon told Geeta and the other women that he was willing to employ them even though they didn't have work authorization. The women all look out for each other and the environment of the nail salon is a big support for Geeta.

One day, ICE agents come by the salon and question the employer about the workers. The agents ask to see paperwork which proves that all the employees have work authorization.

What should Geeta do?

freedom of religion in the United States. In instances of street vendor harrassment, regardless of whether or you have a vending license, it is recommended to record the agents.

The process to get more licenses to street vendors has been held up by city hall. Organizations like the Street Vendor Project have been leading campaigns to demand more licenses and to fight back against the harrassment of workers.

GEETA: Geeta's boss should ask if the agents have a signed warrant. If they do, Geeta and the other workers should refuse to answer any questions without a lawyer present.

They should not run away as doing so can often be used against you by ICE. They should not sign any documents the agents show them.

STOP #3

JULIO RIVERA CORNER

Corner of 78th St and 37th Ave, Jackson Heights, NY 11372

The LGBTQ+ community has called Jackson Heights home for over 100 years. The neighborhood is home to many LGBTQ+ organizations serving Jackson Heights and Queens' diverse communities. One important location in Jackson Heights LGBTQ+ history is the Julio Rivera Corner which commemorates Julio Rivera, a gay Puerto Rican man who was brutally murdered by skinheads in 1990. Julio's friends and family advocated for NYC to recognize that Julio was targeted because he was gay. His murder gave rise to a new wave of LGBTQ+ activism in Queens, leading to the borough's first successful gay demonstration (a vigil for Julio) since 1969 and soon after establishing the annual Queens Pride Parade in 1993. Queens Pride was integral in pulling Queer folks into the spotlight and establishing that Queer people are important and celebrated

community members of Jackson Heights.

In June 2024, in recognition of the ongoing US-funded Israeli genocide in Gaza, Queens Pride had its first ever Palestine Solidarity Contingent led by LGBTQ+ Arab organization, Tarab NYC. Tarab and other groups who boycotted Queens Pride called out the zionism of Queens Pride sponsor, the LGBT Network. Pro-Palestinian activists and organizations were clear that the struggle for Palestinian liberation and the struggle for Queer liberation are one and the same.

Some notable LGBTQ+ figures and organizations that have called Jackson Heights home are: APICHA Community Health Center, Colectivo Intercultural TRANSgrediendo, Queens Pride House, Pauline Park, Lorena Borjas



South Asian Lesbian & Gay Association (SALGA) at the third annual Queens Pride/Photo by Richard Shpuntoff

QUEER IN OUR WORDS

Queens is a diverse borough, in terms of country of origin and also gender and sexual diversity. Queens belongs to all of us regardless of where we come from or whom we love.

Do you know the words associated with LGBTQI+ identities in your homelands and in other languages? What are they?

Are they offensive?

Do they resonate with your experience?

We speak so many languages, but it might feel like we don't always have the words to navigate our LGBTQI+ identities in languages other than English or even Spanish.

Below are some terms in Bangla, Nepali, and Urdu.



BANGLA:

সমকামী [shomokami]
Homosexual (gay/lesbian)

উভকামী [ubhokami]
Bisexual

রূপান্তরকামী [Rupantor-kami]
Transgender

তৃতীয় লিঙ্গ [tritio linggo]
Third gender

নিষ্কামী [nishkami]
Asexual

NEPALI:

तेस्रो लिंगी [tesro lingi] Third Gender
हिजडा [hijra] South Asian 3rd gender

URDU:

ہم جنس [humjins]

Gay/Lesbian

متجنس شخص [mutajannis shakhs]

Gender non-conforming /androgynous

خواب عورت [khawaja aurat]

Trans Woman

خواب سرائی [khawaja serai mard]

Trans Man

مختس [mukhanus]

Intersex

This is by no means a complete list.
Scan the QR code to go to the padlet
and add words that resonate with you!
PASSWORD: tritio-lingo-zindabaad



STOP #4

FOOD STOP: GORKHALI

77-04 Roosevelt Ave, Jackson Heights, NY 11372

Jackson Heights is home to approximately 35 Nepali restaurants! One of those restaurants, Gorkhali is run by Gyanu Thapa and her two daughters. This woman-owned business has a menu with all the Nepali favorites: jhol momo, chowmein, fried rice, a variety of thalis, and a lot more. Gorkhali has live music on weekends!

The Nepali community has grown rapidly in the past 10 years in New York and across

the country. Restaurants like Gorkhali are important because they are places for Nepalis to find familiar foods and connect with community.

Gyanu is the restaurant's cheerful owner. She came to the US about ten years ago and worked in other restaurants before opening Gorkhali. She knows the struggles of being a new immigrant, and carries that history with her as she runs her restaurant.



STOP #5

WORLD'S BOROUGH BOOKSTORE

3406 73rd St, Queens, NY 11372

Queens is “The World’s Borough” and this bookstore wears that title with pride! The World’s Borough Bookstore is an independent Latino-owned bookstore on the corner of 34th Ave and 73rd St which celebrates Black, Indigenous, People of Color authors and artists through books and events for the community.

Adrian, the store’s owner, exudes love for the neighborhood he grew up in. Part of the store’s mission is to create a space for community to have access to literature and art that represents people with roots from all over the world! The World’s Borough Bookstore has a kids room and a gift shop filled with small local vendors crafts, art and various creations. There’s also a mural and seating outside the store.

If you’re not sure what to read, then ask Adrian or anyone working at this welcoming and wonderful store for a recommendation. They won’t disappoint!



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JACKSON HEIGHTS TRIVIA

According to the BBC, approximately how many languages are spoken in Jackson Heights?

1. 160
2. 80
3. 25
4. 300

Jackson Heights was one of the first in the US to get into the _____ movement, encouraging folks to escape the concrete jungle of the city.

1. Urban Renewal
2. Garden City
3. Pre-K
4. Restaurant

Where was the first Queens Pride Parade?

1. Jackson Heights
2. Elmhurst
3. Hillside
4. Flushing

What was DRUM's first public action in Jackson Heights?

1. Justice for Amadou Diallo Mela
2. The People vs. Obama
3. Ekshate Dhaba-cito Natin
4. Stop the Disappearances Post 9/11

After Hispanic people, what racial group has the highest number of undocumented people living in the U.S.?

1. East Asian
2. Black
3. South Asian/Indo Caribbean
4. North African/Arab

Are undocumented workers in the U.S. protected by federal labor laws?

1. Yes
2. Yes, but only people with DACA/TPS
3. No

DRUM youth organized an action in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2014. Where was this action held?

1. Diversity Plaza
2. Travers Park
3. The laundromat in front of DRUM's office
4. Nepali Bhancha Ghar

Which famous black activist lived on 92nd street, near Jackson Heights?

1. Rosa Parks
2. Malcolm X
3. Martin Luther King
4. John Lewis

Which famous astronaut is 74th street named after?

1. Neil Armstrong
2. Yuri Gagarin
3. Kalpana Chawla
4. Abdul Ahad Momand



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS for NYPD/ICE interactions:

I DO NOT wish to speak with you, answer any questions, or sign any documents.

I am choosing to exercise my right to remain SILENT. If I am detained, I request to speak with an attorney immediately. I am also exercising my right to refuse to sign anything until I consult with my attorney.

I DO NOT consent to a search of my person, my belongings, or my home unless you have a warrant signed by a judge, or unless you are otherwise constitutionally permitted to conduct a search without my consent.

Do not carry any documents from the country where you were born. Do not carry your passport, birth certificate, or consular ID. Carry a local form of picture ID instead – a driver's license, school or work ID will do. Do not carry any false documents.

FOR MORE IN DEPTH KNOW YOUR RIGHTS MATERIALS, SCAN THE QR CODES ON THE RIGHT

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SCAN TO KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

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