



### **Friends of Abolitionist Place (FAB)**

***Continuing the work started by Mama Joy Chatel, who fought to preserve & honor the legacy Brooklyn's Abolitionist History.***

Contact : [friendsofabolitionistplace@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofabolitionistplace@gmail.com)

#227AbolitionistPlace #BlackLandmarksMatter #MamaJoyLives

Instagram @friendsofabolitionistplace

Facebook @friendsofabolitionistplace

Twitter @227Place

## **Friends of Abolitionist Place's Statement on New Park Development on Abolitionist Place (Jan 31, 2022)**

Friends of Abolitionist Place (FAB) is a Black-led, non-profit organization, created to continue the legacy of Mama Joy Chatel, who dedicated her life to preserving abolitionist history in Downtown Brooklyn. Her house at 227 Duffield Street - now 227 Abolitionist Place - was a hub of resistance to slavery in pre-Civil War Brooklyn, and a center for Black cultural celebration into the twenty-first century. After sixteen years of struggle, on February 2, 2021, FAB successfully won the landmarking of 227 Abolitionist Place, which stopped the demolition of that house, a site critical to the history of the Underground Railroad.

Now, we are asking Brooklynites, activists, grassroots organizers, and freedom fighters to join us in making sure that the forces of gentrification don't further destroy the history of Black Brooklyn while co-opting the language of our liberation.

For the last two decades, the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and their greedy allies in the real estate industry have been waging a campaign of cultural erasure against the Black people of Brooklyn, including Mama Joy. They destroyed homes through the use of eminent domain, displaced us and our neighbors, all the while dressing up their actions as "in the best interests of the community." They promised jobs and an economy that would benefit us all; but since the 2003 rezoning of Downtown Brooklyn, all we've seen are more luxury high rises, gentrification, and the destruction of Black wealth.

Now, the EDC is co-opting the language of "abolition" to distract us from that history.

**Abolition is a multi-century tradition of radical multi-racial cooperation to dismantle racist oppression. It is not a buzzword that can be whitewashed by the very people who perpetrate its erasure.**

We know better and demand Reparations for Gentrification. #ReparationsforGentrification.

The new proposed park at Willoughby Square - rightly renamed Abolitionist Place for the block's history of radical resistance to slavery and oppression - is a much needed green space in a land of luxury high-rises. **Just as 19th century Black suffragists supported fellow freedom fighters, we**

**welcome Sister Kameelah Rashad - whose art installation the EDC has chosen as a centerpiece for the park - as part of our long struggle for a more democratic Downtown Brooklyn.**

Instead of involving the community in the park design process as promised, the EDC chose to make plans behind closed doors. The EDC assumes that we have forgotten that they spent the last twenty years erasing the same history they now wrap themselves in. We have not forgotten that they bulldozed homes, intimidated residents, and belittled our struggle. We have not forgotten that they spent millions of dollars on lawyers to discredit the local freedom fighters, like Mama Joy, whose blood, sweat, and tears are the reason we remember the abolitionists whose memory is the block's namesake.

Now, they slip on the "abolitionist" brand like the latest fashion trend. We see through their use of art and activism as nothing more than a marketing strategy.

**We demand Reparations for Gentrification.**

1. As the Black-led organization rightly representing the leadership and legacy of sixteen years of struggle to preserve the abolitionist history of Downtown Brooklyn, we demand to be included in all decision-making on the development of Abolitionist Place.
2. The EDC must admit that their flagrant use of "eminent domain" destroyed homes, families, and communities, leaving us with only this small green space and the newly preserved Truesdell-Chatel House at 227 Abolitionist Place as physical reminders of the neighborhood's radical Black history.
3. While we appreciate the introduction of public art into the community space, the EDC must incorporate the vision of Sisters of Freedom into the plans for the park, adding visible evidence of Brooklyn's Black women freedom fighters into our city's mostly white male artscape.
4. We demand the development of a comprehensive plan for preserving the abolitionist heritage of Brooklyn, and that plan must be driven not by the forces of gentrification, but by the community members who have dedicated their lives to the preservation of that history.

**We urge the EDC to do the right thing by combining Kameelah's vision with the Sisters in Freedom Monument, which long-time activists believe is the most visible way to honor the Brooklyn women who fought the evils of white supremacy.**

Sincerely,  
 The Board of Directors Friends of Abolitionist Place  
 Shawné Lee  
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