



## WORKS

# Our house: Why Protecting the Right to Squat is a Defence of Radical Black History

Lisa Insansa

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Squatting has been a means to live, resist and organise for generations. The unused buildings that spill over a city's landscape and latent land that grounds our surroundings become used and repurposed by homeless people, activists and those seeking – or who are forced – into an alternative lifestyle. Squatting has also played a key part in radical Black British history, a history that is continually under threat. The recent proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts bill (PCSC) only furthers this threat, dragging the squatting movement and Black radical history in the maelstrom of authoritarian state violence.

Over the years, squatters' rights have been slowly eroded as successive governments have allied with property developers and private landlords. For a long time, it was legal to squat (the act of occupying an empty building or piece of land) a residential building. However, in 2012, a change in legislation criminalised this type of squatting and made it only possible to occupy commercial properties. Today, if the new PCSC bill gets passed, it would become a criminal offence to trespass on private property (currently it's a civil matter) where a vehicle is present, directly affecting GRT communities who could instantly lose their way of life, as well as squats that rely on vehicles, and ultimately providing a stepping stone to the eradication of squatting altogether. This is a worrying reality for those who have nowhere else to go and for those who use squats as a political tool.

While the squatting community can often appear as just another white-dominated space, it is important to recognise the legacy of Black squatters and how they weaved their cultures and strategies of resistance into the movement. After the Empire Windrush docked on British shores in 1948, helping to kick off a wave of Caribbean migration, thousands of Black people moved into cities that had been chewed up by six years of war. This flow of migrants found themselves locked into a crisis where the supply of decent and affordable housing was diminished, and the roots of institutional racism were firmly planted.

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