



By the 1970s, the Black Caribbean community were tired of waiting at the end of council housing lists and being squeezed into one-room accommodation. Squatting became a necessity for some, as well as a political action against housing discrimination, meagre dwellings, gentrification and the ubiquitous racism of the state. A 1974 essay from *Race Today* on the topic of squatting explained that initially there were few Black people in the squatting movement of the late 1960s, due to a “cautious approach” bred as a result of being a minority immigrant population. However, as Black radical movements took root in Britain, the causes became intertwined and through the 1970s and 1980s, squatting – reclaiming and repurposing buildings – became a vital part of radical Black organising, especially in London.

Brixton in particular was the hub of political squats, not just for the Black radical tradition, but for white anarchist movements, LGBTQI+ communities and those who were rebelling against the authoritarian state. For example, the legendary 121 Railton Road squat in Brixton, which was opened in 1973 by Black British Panther and key Black squatters’ rights activist Olive Morris and her friend Liz Obi, ended up being re-squatted by these different movements until the end of the century.

While Black and white squatters would live on the same street and share information amongst each other, the experience of the two groups were not the same: “That the young blacks have been informed by the white squatting movement is true, but their squatting activities are qualitatively different from it,” continued the 1974 *Race Today* feature.

*The black squatting movement in Brixton has broken new ground. It is local council policy that the single person does not qualify for public housing and therefore the black youth seemed destined for a life of homelessness or hostel existence [...] They will not tolerate the one-roomed existence offered them nor continue to sleep rough and be objects of liberal pity.*

Through the squatting scene, Black Caribbean communities were able to set up radical bookshops, reggae and blues clubs – or shebeens – social centres and meeting spaces for activists. Groups such as the British Black Panthers and Brixton Black Women’s Group resisted the thieving nature of landlords and the grasping hand of the state by occupying these buildings and centring them in the community. This history is especially profound considering that London’s most “attractive” buildings were paid for with money drenched in the blood of enslaved and colonised Black people; in this way, their squatting can be viewed as reparatory justice.

*Through the squatting scene, Black Caribbean communities were able to set up radical bookshops, shebeens, social centres and meeting spaces for activists*

