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**Le domestique, lieu de production du politique / Le parlementarisme au prisme du modèle de Westminster : continuité, rupture, évolution**

# Criminal Housing: Photographs of African American Dwellings and the Visualization of Structural Violence in the Black Radical Press of the 1960s and 1970s

*Logements criminels : photographies des habitations africaines-américaines et visualisation de la violence structurelle dans la presse radicale noire des années 1960 et 1970*

15 July 2025.

**Eliane de Larminat**

🔗 <http://preo.ube.fr/textesetcontextes/index.php?id=5497>

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PREO

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1 This article studies the specific modes of visibility of housing in the Black radical press of the 1960s and 1970s, and how this site relates to violence, which it makes tangible in the landscape. The Black radical press refers here to the two bi-weekly or weekly newspapers published by the Nation of Islam (hereafter NOI) and the Black Panther Party (hereafter BPP): *Muhammad Speaks*, published from 1961 to 1975, and *The Black Panther Black Community News Services* (here-

after NOI) and the Black Panther Party (hereafter BPP): *Muhammad Speaks*, published from 1961 to 1975, and *The Black Panther Black Community News Services* (hereafter *The Black Panther*), later renamed *The Black Panther Intercommunal News Service*, published from 1967 to 1980. The function of these publications was to spread the alternate worldviews of the two major Black radical organizations of the period. The Nation of Islam, created in the 1930s and headed by Elijah Muhammad, combined Islam and Black nationalism; it had grown into a working-class mass movement after Malcolm X became a prominent figure of the organization in the 1950s, criticizing the integrationist approach of the Civil Rights movement. The Black Panther Party was a Marxist, revolutionary group founded in 1966 in Oakland, California (in the wake of Malcolm X's assassination), out of the perceived need for self-defense from police brutality. Both organizations' publications combine reports of systemic exploitation, news about the organizations, and their agendas (a formal program of ten points reproduced in issues of *The Black Panther*, and a more mobile, and often sermon-like, corpus of slogans and images deployed in *Muhammad Speaks* in a special feature comprising around eight pages from the late 1960s on). They stand out in their media context, as each had a very large circulation: at their peak, 600,000 for *Muhammad Speaks* in 1972 and over 100,000 for *The Black Panther* in 1970 (Wolseley 1990: 90; Raiford 2011: 180). In terms of their content, they developed specific editorial styles, with images playing an important role. This, combined with the importance of editorial or opinion content, made them "quasi-magazines" according to Roland Wolseley in his survey of the Black press (1990: 90, 141).

- 2 So far, their "visually dominant newspaper style" (Doss 2001: 179) has been studied only for *The Black Panther*, where artist Emory Douglas (the BPP's Minister of Culture) was visual editor, both responsible for the layout and contributor of images (Rhodes 2007: 91-115; Raiford 2011: 177-204). This publication combined photographs and numerous drawings (especially images of guns, panthers, and policemen as pigs) (Duncan 2016; Gaiter 2012; Gaiter 2018). Meanwhile, *Muhammad Speaks* has been analyzed mostly in terms of its text contents, for example the sections devoted to the alternate way of life promoted by the NOI or the articles penned by women (Gibson 2015; Jeffries 2014). It has also been approached in relation to its editorial structure

(Wolseley 1990; Helgeson 2014; Carroll 2017) and mode of distribution. Both papers were indeed central to their organizations' memberships and finances. And yet, images were also key to *Muhammad Speaks*, a publication addressing a readership with various levels of literacy and trying to redirect how African Americans viewed themselves and the white power structure. Images functioned in similar rhetorical terms to the text content: celebration (of Black beauty and Muslim discipline, of development in decolonized and non-aligned countries), and denunciation (of violence and exploitation, of imperial wars)—these two angles being an integral part of “a self-consciously counter-hegemonic picture of the world,” meant as “radical truth-telling” (Helgeson 2014: 215).

- 3 This article argues for including these two activist publications in the study of the uses of visual and especially photographic materials by African American militant organizations—as Leigh Raiford (2011) has done with the BPP alongside SNCC. Based on the study of all issues of both journals in digitized and/or microfilm form, it focuses on a particular category of images that were strongly and continuously published in both periodicals, often in striking visual forms: images of housing. It is important to note that this overview began with visually scanning undigitized microfilms of *Muhammad Speaks*, and the method of research was therefore not keyword search but direct visual recognition of houses, porches and interiors. This qualitative form of research, reliant on human attention, identifies legible images—photographs that look like housing, and often like houses— at a glance. They signal a distinct presence of housing in the pages of these publications. The images are also not extracted, but approached as part of newspaper pages and whole issues, as they were related to distinctive themes of the organizations and publications (such as genocidal socio-economic conditions). This paper explores how a media discourse is constructed in both intensive and extensive ways—in the discursive power of visual and textual arrangement on specific pages, and in the cumulative effects of certain tropes (in images, but also in words used in captions and article).
- 4 Housing was an important focus of both organizations: for the BPP, it was an aspect of inequality (alongside food and access to healthcare), and more specifically of the state of siege that Panthers denounced in African American neighborhoods (alongside police harassment). It

was also point number 4 of the party's 1966 program, titled "We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings." For the NOI, housing was a category of the "clean living" promoted by the organization, and in its extant form a materialization of the subordinate place assigned to African Americans in the United States. The main focus of the NOI's discourse of separatism was on land, and what would be needed to create the conditions of independent life for African Americans: "good homes," farming land and machinery, industries and hospitals. While the NOI promised suburban-style houses if African Americans channeled their energies towards building "a world for self" away from Whites, the BPP advocated for cooperative housing. Though those outcomes were different, as envisioned by two organizations following divergent strategies (Black revolution vs. Black nationalism), the then-current housing conditions (rural wooden houses, rickety back porches, squalid apartments with lead paint) were relentlessly denounced by the images published in both papers. And if the examination of all images related to housing in the two publications reveals *Muhammad Speaks*' distinctive, though not exclusive, focus on the rural southern wooden house, while *The Black Panther* paid more attention to the substandard interiors or the back porches of multi-family buildings in the urban neighborhoods that were the focus of the BPP's local chapters' community programs, both publications had a national coverage of socioeconomic conditions—with housing, and its distressed materiality, a micro-geography of national importance.

- 5 During the 1960s and early 1970s, racial crisis and conflict appeared to move from Southern states, with the Ku Klux Klan still burning crosses and rural voters being registered, to Northern and Western ghettos, where the urban crisis, riots, and decaying ghetto conditions redefined racial issues. This geographical shift also implies distinct residential typologies, from the agricultural to the urban. Out of the two publications under study, *Muhammad Speaks* is the one that straddles almost the entire decade of the 1960s: published out of a major Northern city (Chicago), it always covered both Northern and Southern sites and struggles and it did not separate political disenfranchisement from poverty. This corresponds to the definition of the Civil Rights Movement as not confined to the South, which has been acknowledged by recent historiography. As this article will explore, in

the Black radical press the spectacle of housing implied a national geography of structural violence that was continuously imposed on African Americans. And while this reading of the poor dwelling as violence was most radical in *Muhammad Speaks*, where it was presented as the materialization of genocide, *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther* will be considered in parallel throughout this article because they each capitalized on housing as both visible social conditions and a space intrinsically linked with externally imposed violence.

- 6 The iconography of ill-housing is so strongly associated with a mainstream, middle-class, reformist gaze (Stange 1989b) that it is useful to sketch an alternative genealogy. The article will briefly go back to the 1941 book *12 Million Black Voices*, as a left-wing Black phototextual indictment of racism across the land, which constitutes a precedent for the way the Black radical press of the 1960s made use of housing photographs. It will then outline how images of dwellings encapsulated landscapes of violence in a form that was easy to insert on the newspaper page, and how iconotextual combinations scripted housing as the tangible form of structural and diffuse violence. The comparison between the treatment of residents in the images published by *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther* also reveals divergent treatments of agency and resistance: fighting back from the home is central to Emory Douglas's images for *The Black Panther*, while in *Muhammad Speaks* the existing shack can only work as a foil for the desired future of wealth and independence—at the expense of residual integrity for the figures of dwellers in the photographs. The sustained and different focus of each journal on images of housing suggests how plastic this site/sight can be for a gaze that aims at contesting and transforming the present.

## 1. Housing photographs and crime narratives: 20<sup>th</sup>-century Black voices

- 7 There is a rich US history of photographing housing as not just an element of decor, but rather as a destructive force. Since Jacob Riis's photographic exposure (1890) of “how the other half lives” in the

Lower East Side, substandard housing has been visualized photographically as a cause of disease, the source of adverse and dangerous cultural effects, and a factor of crime. In keeping with an older urban visual culture, the middle-class audience and readership of Jacob Riis was led to view the slums not just as a place of misery, but also as a site of locally generated violence that threatened to spill over into the rest of the city (Stange 1989a). Such a vision was reactivated in what became a massive mid-twentieth-century drive against slums and blighted areas, alongside a more socially-minded vision that focused on the suffering inflicted by overcrowded, decayed and dangerous housing on the residents of poor neighborhoods (Zipp 2012).

- 8 But the most striking visual genealogy for the treatment of housing in the 1960s in the Black radical press is to be found in Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941), which also recodes substandard and overcrowded housing as violent crime on both ends of the South-to-North Great Migration<sup>1</sup>. Drawing on the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographic file, this phototext follows African Americans from Southern fields, complete with broken porches and burning shacks, to Northern ghettos, with their overcrowded and decayed apartments. The Southern rural and Northern urban sections contain echoing images, such as children asleep in barren rooms (1941: 63, 84, 85, 107). Additionally, in the binary structure of the book, the threshold between rural and urban spaces is residential: the middle section, entitled "Death on the City Pavements," opens on the title printed over the ramshackle back porch of a Chicago three-story tenement, standing tall on the page (1941: 91). This is followed by a section on the housing conditions inflicted by the "bosses of the buildings," a formula echoing the "lords of the land," with the famous pages structured by the anaphora "The kitchenette is..." at the beginning of each paragraph (105-111). The most famous of these stanzas declares that "The kitchenette is our prison, our death sentence without a trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not only the lone individual, but all of us, in its ceaseless attacks" (106). As established by Paula Rabinowitz, Richard Wright was influenced both by newspaper exposés of housing conditions in the South Side of Chicago—he collected clippings on this subject among others in the late 1930s (Rabinowitz 2001: 111, 115)—and by true-crime

magazines; he fused these different sources in what Rabinowitz terms “documentary noir.” It is in fact striking that the book’s version of the key 1930s documentary scene of the poor dwelling, where newspaper pages are used as wallpaper (Hills 2011: 229-231), illustrates here the text’s segment that focuses on the love of books among the young dwellers of such housing (Wright and Roskam 1941: 63). In the photograph, newspaper pages are used not just as wall papering but also as tablecloth on a table where five youths are gathered, all reading books, in a striking visual alignment between media culture (including books by Wright and Roskam) and poor dwellings. As Rabinowitz puts it, the book

supplements the crime narrative—or, better, inverts it—to make clear that *the crime*, that which the American people, or at least white Americans, had been lied to and been lying to themselves about, was the crime of slavery and its attendant Jim Crow laws and culture of racism. This was *the true crime story*. (Rabinowitz 2001: 108)

- 9 And as suggested by the layout of the “Death on the City Pavements” page, where the silhouette of housing stands as both a site and a figure, housing conditions are a key contemporary instrument of this crime. Quite logically, on the next pages, they are shown and described as actively pressing upon the bodies that inhabit them.
- 10 The South Side of Chicago, a site of overcrowding, segregation, and housing-related deaths (including by fires or the collapse of back porches), is indeed famously central to this phototextual narrative, which offered the most significant publication of FSA photographer Russell Lee’s photographic work in that city in 1941 (Stange 2003; Natanson 1992). But Wright and Roskam’s book is significant less in terms of the photographic material per se than in its selection, sequencing, and pairing of the images with text; and the first segment of this migration narrative also includes a strong focus on Southern rural housing conditions. In the book as a whole, there is thus an insistent focus on domestic spaces in various African American geographies, and the association of decay with death is strong, throughout the book and national space; doesn’t the silhouette of a light-colored pile of rubble in a Chicago empty lot photographed by Russell Lee (Wright and Roskam 1941: 114) echo the round shape of the earth tomb photographed by Walker Evans in Alabama (55)? The book’s as-

sociation of violence, housing, and racial inequality signals a distinct Black radical voice in the photographically saturated media of the middle decades of the twentieth century—with housing photographs positioned in a different genealogy from that of mainstream reform photography: housing not just a factor of criminal activity, but as racial crime.

- 11 In the years after World War II, the intersection of crime and housing would take a more literal form, especially in Chicago—that city being both the main northern geographical focus of *12 Million Black Voices* and the home of the Johnson Publishing Company (with its two key African American magazine publications, *Ebony* and *Jet*, respectively founded in 1945 and 1951) and later of *Muhammad Speaks*. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Chicago's residential areas became the field of an urban guerilla war with both mob violence and individual attacks on homes, as African Americans tried to move out of overcrowded neighborhoods into houses and apartments in the South West of Chicago (Hirsch 1998; Smith II 2012). *Ebony* belatedly covered the subject when it published a six-page photoessay on the neighborhood violence that was set off in South-West Chicago by the 1953 arrival of an African American family in the public housing development of Trumbull Park ("Riot Victim" 1954). Adam Green has suggested that the coverage of that crisis in *Ebony* in 1954 mediated this housing project for the African American audience of the Johnson press as a site of communal contemplation of Black domesticity under threat (Green 2007). But as a group that until the mid-1960s was mostly focused on Black middle-class success and depended on advertising revenue (in contrast with *The Black Panther*, and with *Muhammad Speaks* where only Black Muslim businesses advertised), the Johnson press generally provided little coverage of violence and poverty (Stange 2001)<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, these two themes were a major focus of *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther*, next to both organizations' affairs and international news. And Wright's steadfast denunciation of housing conditions and violence in *12 Million Black Voices* resonates with the way *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther* covered housing as criminal evidence, and more specifically in their visually charged treatment of this nexus of housing and violence.

## 2. Everyday sensationalism? Dwellings as visual material in *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther*

- 12 In this section, I focus on the way a certain basic photogeneity and legibility of houses is worked into newsworthiness in both *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther*. These publications often used images of architectural structures to illustrate situations of violence, both violence directly targeting the architectural structure of the pictured house and more generic situations of oppression. I return later to the coding of houses as landscapes of violence, but to establish images of housing structures as a photojournalistic trope in both publications I first outline how they come to feature in the newspapers, in terms of subject matter of articles, of the sourcing of images and of the layout of pages.
- 13 The house under attack (usually a wooden house in a residential urban environment) is central to the early issues of *The Black Panther*, which was started as a news organ for the party and naturally reported on the numerous police attacks on the premises of city-level BPP chapters. This was often showcased in a visually intensive way—either through detail or accumulation, with a close up on bullet marks or with spreads showing only captioned photographs of impacts, shattered glass, burned out window frames (“1218 28th Street,” *The Black Panther*, April 6, 1969, p. 9-11), and sometimes neighboring homes blasted in the bombing of a BPP chapter (*The Black Panther*, May 11, 1969, p. 2-3). The structures attacked were political bases, but they looked like the rest of the neighborhoods where they were established, with wooden frame houses (see *The Black Panther*, September 20, 1969, p. 3 or December 11, 1971, p. 3). And this visual coverage also included homes of non-Panthers targeted by the police, as in the two photographs of bullet-riddled window and door which framed the photograph of a woman and her children in an article by the Illinois chapter of the BPP, entitled “Chicago Gestapo Attacks Residents of Altgeld Gardens Community” (*The Black Panther*, April 10, 1971, p. 5). When this type of illustration peaked after December 1969, with

multiple publications of the photographs of the Chicago apartment where Fred Hampton and Mark Clay were shot to death by the FBI and the Chicago police, the central image was that of the stained mattress where Fred Hampton had bled to death—an eminently private space memorialized as the absence of sanctuary (*The Black Panther*, December 13, 1969, p. 15; September 18, 1971, p. 6). The photographs of attacked chapters also stand out because they are most often records of specific material injuries. These are procedural images, such as could be included in a legal file or a complaint. The same type of images is regularly used to illustrate articles about “inhuman” or “indecent” housing; the photographs of problematic housing situations (regularly included in the newspaper after the party’s turn to community programs in 1969) focus on objects and surfaces as often as on lived spaces. Images that illustrate specific housing code infractions, with a distinct vernacular quality, thus make their way in the newspaper. These pictures were presumably provided by local groups working on denouncing certain housing conditions in specific buildings; they are grassroots images. And beyond photographs, the visual texture of distressed housing is also developed in many of Emory Douglas’ back covers—with peeling, cracked or unplastered walls, cockroaches and rats, hammering a visual motif of poverty and harassment (rats are also used in the paper as animal equivalents for landlords and capitalists)<sup>3</sup>.

- 14 The simplicity of many of *The Black Panther*’s photographs of domestic surfaces, and the distinct journalistic treatment that turns them into newsworthy material by pairing them with the fourth point of the program (“We Want Decent Housing Fit for the Shelter of Human Beings”), can be compared with *Muhammad Speaks*’ reliance on simple photographs of single houses. Including a picture of a house where an event took place or where a protagonist (victim or perpetrator) lives, is one of the journal’s basic illustrative formulas, an element of décor almost like a headshot. Sometimes, the house photograph is one ingredient in a sort of micro-photoessay (one house, one portrait, one group portrait, for instance; or, one house, one accessory, one portrait).
- 15 Focusing on the photographic credits suggests that housing is among the subjects that are routinely visually sourced by *Muhammad Speaks*. While most published photographs are uncredited, the cases where

credits appear show that, quite logically, photographing houses is typically done by a reporter who provides his own images alongside his text. Among the credited photographs showing dwellings, except for a few images that are credited to external sources, the images for which an author is indicated span a wide range: the very simple image of “the house where I grew up” by a Black Muslim reflecting on his own trajectory (Minister Clyde Rahaman, “Minister Who Survived the Hell-Holes of Mississippi Thankful for Muhammad,” *Muhammad Speaks*, June 10, 1966, p. 25); simple outside views of dwellings to illustrate local articles, either to provide basic locational elements or to illustrate economic conditions, provided for example by a Muslim journalist called Nathaniel 10X, who regularly wrote and photographed for *Muhammad Speaks* from 1970 to 1975 (figure 1); but also richer documentary images, exemplified by Chester Sheard’s (figure 2). A regular contributor of texts and images, and sometimes photoessays heavy in housing photographs, for instance “Life in a Captive Nation” (figure 3), with pictures of interiors and exteriors of wooden houses in Mississippi, Sheard pursued a career as a photojournalist beyond his work for *Muhammad Speaks*, especially in jazz clubs (O’Donnell 2016). And while it remains difficult to assess exactly what was internally produced or sourced elsewhere, this duo of identified “housing photographers” indicates that the newspaper had its own regular and significant supply of housing pictures from the field.

Figure 1. Nathaniel 10X, "Mansions and Shacks Reveal Savage Rulers in Alabama," Muhammad Speaks, August 25, 1972, p. 4.

MUHAMMAD SPEAKS

AUGUST 25, 1972



REV. J. TITUS ALDRIDGE stands in front of his mansion on Kirkwood Drive. Black residents say the owners of the two above locations are the same. Mrs. Mildred Aldridge is said to be Rev. Aldridge's wife. (Photo by Nathaniel 10X)



CONDEMNED SHACKS make up more than 95 per cent of housing for Blacks in Eutaw, Alabama. These Black children are not likely to forget these sordid conditions, even though they are smiling now, many will soon be aware of those who forced these conditions upon them. Black residents say this cluster of shacks is owned by Mrs. Mildred Aldridge, wife of a local white minister. (Photo by Nathaniel 10X)

## Mansions and shacks reveal savage rulers in Alabama

By Nathaniel 10X

EUTAW, Ala. — "It has come to me that in the state of Alabama, in Greene County, Alabama, there are big plantations owned by white people and their stately white houses sit up on hills and the slaves live in surrounding shacks. These Black people work hard for a very small pay. It is said by some that the salaries range from 25 cents a day to \$2.50 a week. Rough clothes to work in are furnished them."

THE ABOVE WORDS are taken from the August 30, 1968 article written by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, called Slavery in Alabama and Mississippi. Now about four years later, Muhammad Speaks visited Green County and very little has changed.

This is obvious as you enter the County Seat at Eutaw. Here it is next to impossible to miss the unpainted random shacks where most of the local Blacks live, because these unlivable dwellings are situated on most of the main roads that enter the town.

The city is so small, however that it is also difficult to overlook the contrast that occurs as unpainted shacks give way to majestic mansions occupied by affluent white people.

Nearly all of the houses where Eutaw Blacks are forced to live have been condemned. Many of them were condemned more than a year ago, residents say, some of them even longer.

**SLUM WHITE FATCATS**

Muhammad Speaks learned that the majority of the dilapidated, condemned shacks are owned by Eutaw's richest whites.

THERE IS a cluster of approximately twelve shacks on Springfield Avenue, in a section called "Binert's Quarters." In full view of the food stores where local Blacks through the pines is a \$6,000 mansion occupied by white slumlord Wesley Binert, for whom the quarters are named.

Near Binert's quarters are two \$75,000 mansions owned by the Banks brothers, James and W. C. The Banks control the food stores where local Blacks must buy the majority of their food and the appliance store which supplies them household wares.

Across the tracks, beyond the cotton gin and other local industry on Prairie Avenue, is perhaps the worst shacks in all of Eutaw, a cluster of approximately ten shacks also on a main road.

RESIDENTS told M.S. that the receiver of the rent for these houses was Mrs. Mildred Aldridge the wife of Rev. J. Titus Aldridge pastor of Eutaw Baptist Church. The Aldridge's own a mansion on the corner of Kirkwood Drive worth approximately \$100,000.

Although most of the houses are classified as "unfit for human occupancy" many slumlords such as Wesley Binert still continue to collect exorbitant rent for the shacks.

**\$600 PER YEAR**

In Binert's quarters and other dwellings throughout the city Black residents pay between \$50 and \$60 per month rent, one resident told Muhammad Speaks.

While this might seem reasonable in some places, here the average yearly income is less than \$800. Which means that most residents actually earn less than \$15 per week. Poor Blacks here are classified as the fifth poorest county in the U.S.

Although the physical dwellings here and the statistical poverty is alarming, it does not really tell the whole story.

"In many towns and cities of the southern states (even their capitals) you will find the Black man living in a very bad condition. His toilet is sometimes an open boarded up place, stinking right there in the city, diseasing the citizen, because of that evil genius, the white man, who wants to give all the worse he can to a people who have served him as slaves for four hundred years. This is going on in the South. Get it for yourself," Messenger Muhammad wrote.

ALTHOUGH THIS article was written over four years ago, the only changes visible are rural changes where the lack of work has forced Blacks to seek dwellings in the small towns where they hope to find work.

"Little Black children are walking around with sores — pus running out of them — for lack of medical attention. Little Black children are dying of disease, right in the false 'freedom' of the U.S.A.," he wrote.

These children here, are the sons, daughters, cousins and nephews of many Black people all across the United States. They are the ones who truly carry the title "manchild" of womanchild. They know suffering.

This is not to say that all white people here are living in luxury, but the overwhelming majority of white homes are so far superior to that of Blacks, that is alarming.

Despite the fact that Blacks comprise more than 35 per cent of the population of Green County, nearly all of the wealth is controlled by whites.

But in a certain corner of Green county, there is a visible sign of what Blacks can do once they are united, and have the proper leadership.

Many Blacks here are already aware of the Great Light of Islam, and the name Muslim is no longer foreign. Most can give accurate directions to the Muslim Farms and many farm hands can give the Muslim greeting of As-Salaam Alaikum.

The name Muhammad is said these days with ease and many of the local farmers look forward to when they will be blessed to see the Messenger of God, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, because most residents know that Messenger Muhammad is directly responsible for the ray of hope that can be seen on the horizon in the lives of Blacks of Greene County, Alabama.



THE OLD AND THE YOUNG are affected by deplorable housing in Eutaw. This family lives near "Binert's Quarters," a notorious slum owned by slumlord Wesley Binert. (Photo by Nathaniel 10X)

Figure 2. Chester Sheard, "Surviving Politically in Mississippi," *Muhammad Speaks*, February 5, 1971, p. 7.

FEBRUARY 5, 1971 MUHAMMAD SPEAKS

## Surviving politically in Mississippi

By Leon Forrest

JACKSON, Miss. — Some of the delegates were courtly and folksy, and others were self-moving, yet others were professional and of course they tended to move along side of the more traditional, preacher types with the deep church roots showing in their manners and voices, but they had all gathered here to participate in the 2nd statewide conference of Black elected officials within this commonwealth.

**CHAIRMAN OF THIS** conference and the first Afro-American since Reconstruction to win a seat in the legislature of this poverty ridden state, Robert Clark, confided his hopes for the convention to this reporter on the second day of deliberations.

"I would hope that the individual Black elected officials and indeed each of the participants would come away with the realization that his base of strength and concerns is larger than the area he represents or lives in...So that the individual can address himself to the whole range of our problems even as he moves to change and shape events within his region and develop the total community. On the other hand the problems Blacks face here, even in Mississippi, are not always so different from what you face in the North, are they?"

Rep. Clark has a divided constituency of 55 per cent Black and 45 per cent non-Black. There are 82 counties in Mississippi and Rep. Clark feels that if Blacks do their homework, stay relevant, and develop deep links across the state, as indeed this conference might suggest, then they can win control of 82 counties in the November, 1971 elections. And that is the hopeful part of Rep. Clark's outlook, juxtaposed with realms of misery and poverty. For the main problem that Rep. Clark faces is the Mississippi cross — desolate lack of economic resources, across the board racism, and the power elite in the Washington Senate, who have not the slightest concern about the poor and the Black of Mississippi. Rep. Clark says he realizes that his constituency supports itself by "day labor, farming, and welfare."

But Rep. Clark's eyes radiate, when the subject goes back to the question of Black voting potential in the state. "We have 300,000 registered voters, today; we have a potential of some 500,000. And even though Rep. Clark hammers away at the need for job, Black control of self-determination, better health care and education, he has no need of different arguments to offer to keep the growing number of Black young people, from the ages of 18 through 30, in Mississippi and willing to live and endure the swiftly perishable life. The dreadful events at Jackson State of last year, (within a stone's throw from the Heidelberg Hotel, where this convention is being held) certainly argue against patience, and Mississippi.

**REP. CLARK'S MAIN** arguments for hope are simply: "I remember when we didn't have any voters on the rolls." Yet Rep. Clark himself, faces the quicksand against change rampant in the white Mississippi mind, each day in the House of Representatives, where he remains the only one. "Currently Bob Clark serves on 5 committees, which sorely tests his time and potential power for concentration on any one particular aspect towards survival in Mississippi. But he places stress and emphasis upon that old Black historical plea (and there is nothing wrong with it!) "Get an education and get qualified. Like those Black legislators during the Reconstruction period, Rep. Clark stresses education. And he is most proud of the bill he has introduced in the Mississippi House, calling for compulsory attendance in schools up to the age of 18. So too is Charles Evers, Mayor of Fayette, Mississippi, who has gone against the law by introducing compulsory education in his town thereby incurring state wrath from white elected officials, who wish to see the poor, but particularly the Blacks without education, and all of the implications and calls to revolution. In this generation, an education might suggest. Previously of course certain whites — even in the South — advanced education for the Negro as a way of soothing and culturally upstaying the natives. It was meant to be a kind of intellectual lobotomy; and a kind of emasculation of the brain.

CHARLES EVERS, on stage and off is most engaging, daring and full of political savvy, alongside of a profound business which he almost always projects. Meeting at the Masonic Temple here in Jackson, Evers, told an afternoon gathering: "This is a new day. The fact

(Continued on page 1)



Rep. Charles Diggs



LIVING CONDITIONS HAVEN'T changed much in Mississippi for Blacks over the years. Lack of proper nourishment, jobs and general indifference emanating from the white community created a situation of apathy which forced Black people to band together in search of political help from Black politicians. (MS photo by Chester Sheard)

**NOTICE**

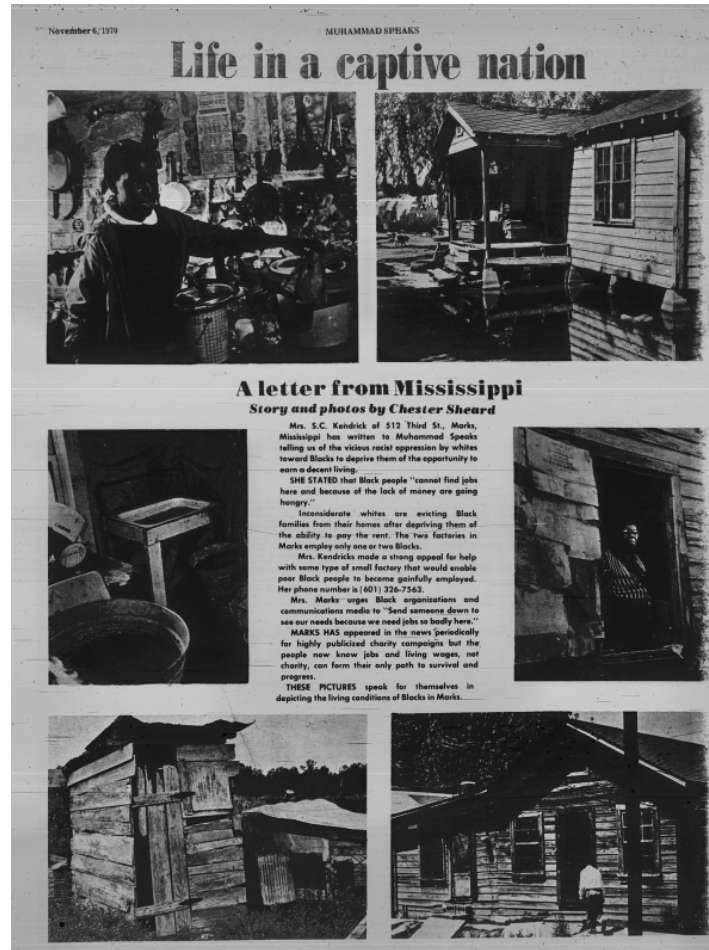
TO THE DONORS TO THE EMERGENCY DRIVE.

PLEASE PUT YOUR NAME AND COMPLETE ADDRESS IN YOUR LETTER WITH YOUR DONATIONS SO THAT WE WILL KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU AND WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE A RECORD OF YOUR DONATIONS. THANK YOU.

ELIJAH MUHAMMAD, Messenger of Allah

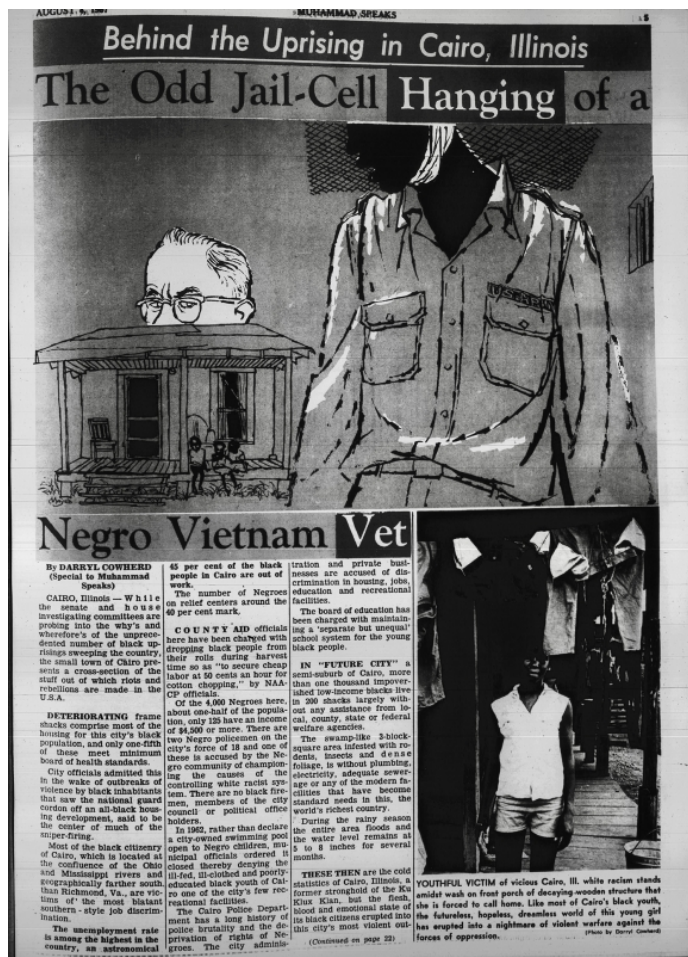
Hear Mr. Muhammad Speak on radio 1330 (AM) SUNDAY 2:30 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. WEAW EVANSTON CHICAGO

Figure 3. Chester Sheard, "Life in a Captive Nation," *Muhammad Speaks*, November 6, 1970, p. 7.



- 16 The editorial treatment of these images also shows various forms of capitalization on housing material: the basic 'photo-essay' formula mentioned above; the standalone feature with one or two images occupying some empty space in the layout with a more or less developed caption, standing in for a state of affairs and producing a focus on a sort of micro-landscape; full pages of visual reportage on Southern conditions. One page in a 1967 article about riots in the starkly segregated town of Cairo, Illinois provides several examples of the editorial treatment of photographs of dwelling, on a visual or textual level (figure 4).

Figure 4. "Behind the Uprising in Cairo, Illinois: The Odd Jail-Cell Hanging of a Negro Vietnam Vet," *Muhammad Speaks*, August 4, 1967, p.5.



Photograph by Darryl Cowherd.

17 These riots were triggered by a hanging in prison, and the cartoon at the top pairs this scene (with window bars on the right that evoke a cell) with a front view of a wooden house, which is in fact exactly copied from a photograph from the same story published in the following issue ("Story of White Savagery in South Illinois [sic] 'Hell Hole,'" *Muhammad Speaks*, August 11, 1967, p. 25). This 'documentary' basis for cartoons seems to be specific to housing. The social, political and economic conditions in the town of Cairo are illustrated by a photograph of a young woman standing on a porch; the trousers hanging from a clothesline over her stress that this is a domestic space, but they are also reminiscent of the hanging body of the man in the drawing—in fact the trouser legs almost align with the off-frame legs of the hanging body. This disturbing echo is just one ex-

ample of the powerful and often strange visual editing, almost reminiscent of photomontage, that can be observed in *Muhammad Speaks*. The caption also includes a typical element of the editorial handling of pictures of housing, in its first sentence: “YOUTHFUL VICTIM of vicious Cairo, Ill. white racism stands amidst wash on front porch of decaying wooden structure that she is forced to call home.” The final words reject the assimilation between photographed domestic scenes and words such as “home,” “shelter” or “living” room, often used in captions with quotation marks that call out the inadequacy of the space of reference. It should also be noted that the article describes the local housing to which African Americans are confined as “shacks.” This is a keyword in *Muhammad Speaks*, used to refer to most dwellings in the rural South (and often used in captions to name the architectural element in photographs of dwellings in part or whole). The quasi systematic use of this derogatory one-syllable word instead of “house” is all the more striking as *Muhammad Speaks*, edited by radical but veteran journalists who had worked for other media (Helgeson 2011: 209-122; Carroll 2017: 161), uses significantly more neutral language in its articles than *The Black Panther*, a publication famous for speaking “the language of the people” in Bobby Seale’s terms (Streitmatter 2001: 225). The houses to which African Americans are restricted are clearly subject to a special negative treatment.

### **3. Architectural structures and structural violence**

Figure 5. "Will Preston Cobb Die for a White Man's Crime?" *Muhammad Speaks*, July 5, 1963, p. 5.



18 The newsworthiness of houses in *Muhammad Speaks*, and especially (but not exclusively) wooden Southern houses, corresponds to the capacity of this architectural artifact, closely cropped, perhaps accompanied by its dwellers posing in front of the house but exclusive of other contextual elements, to stand for a landscape of oppression. Take one set of photographs (figure 5), published twice in July 1963 and February 1965, at different stages of the judicial procedure that is reported on ("Will Preston Cobb Die for a White Man's Crime?" *Muhammad Speaks*, July 5, 1963, p. 5; Jermiah, "World Protest Blasts Georgia's Plan to Kill Preston Cobb," *Muhammad Speaks*, February 12, 1965, p. 21). Headshots are combined with an external view of a wooden house said to be the home of a young Black man accused of a crime. If this allegedly simple visual material is published again after two years, it is also because the housing photograph offers a powerful

entanglement on this page. The case involves gun violence, judicial oppression and economic exploitation: Preston Cobb has been wrongfully accused of murdering a man who is his landlord. The article stresses the racial power structure implied in the Southern agricultural system of land ownership; in the caption of the photograph showing a family lined up next to what is described as a “shack” on a “plantation,” the reference to the living conditions of the young man then leads to the mention that he is now “under the shadow of the electric chair”— a strange alignment, where the Jim Crow systems of sharecropping and criminal justice seem to collapse onto each other. The economic injustice of the post-plantation shack, rooted in the crime of slavery, compounds and foreshadows the more immediate injustice enacted on Cobb; it is both context and alternate materialization.

- 19 Still more striking, in the way it maximizes the house photograph on the page, is an August 1964 story on voter registration in Fayette County (Tennessee) (figure 6). It opens on a half-page photograph of one small wooden house, in a monumentalizing slightly low-angle shot. The ominous shadow created by a half open door and small porch adds a subtly haunted atmosphere. The caption is clear as to the rhetorical function of such an architectural artefact, described as symbol and mute testimony, which somehow gets the people in the next photographs moving:

This weather-scarred and time-buffed shack, like many others serving as ‘shelter’ for Negro families in Fayette County, Tennessee, *symbolizes* the bitter bleakness in the lives of 21,000 Negroes under domination of 7,000 whites and *mutely testifies* why Black American residents of Fayette County are beginning to flex their political muscles so that when they speak in the future the white minority will be forced to listen [my emphasis].

Figure 6. Sylvester Leaks, "Chapter II in Fight to Free Fayette County," Muhammad Speaks, August 28, 1964, p. 11 and 12.



- 20 The combination of the small house with its single window, and the groups of people registering and gathering in the next photographs, echoes the caption's focus on the county's 21,000 African Americans—each one of whom could somehow turn out through the open door. One could even say, after Ariella Aïsha Azoulay writing about Palestinian houses destroyed by the Israeli armed forces (2013), that such a house becomes a public square—a place where the disenfranchisement of a whole class of citizens becomes visible, can be discussed and denounced<sup>4</sup>.
- 21 Those are but two examples of numerous instances where inequality and exploitation, sometimes explicitly traced to slavery, are materialized by houses, their decayed porch, their run down and barren interior. The connections with violence are laid out by the accompanying text (as in the title of the Nathaniel 10X article in figure 2, "Mansions and Shacks Reveal Savage Rulers in Alabama"), or by the sheer

fact of illustrating-through-architecture. Take the case of Nacogdoches, a Texas town whose ultra-violent policing and racist institutional treatment of African Americans was so shocking that it was covered both in *Muhammad Speaks* in 1971 (with images and texts by Chester Sheard) and in a series published by *The Black Panther* during the Summer of 1975 and April 1976. Sheard's illustrations for *Muhammad Speaks* include three exterior and interior dwelling views, plus a photograph of a pair of hands. These views illustrate African Americans' conditions in the town; they also stand in for photographs of violence that are not available to the journal. When *The Black Panther* covers the same policing practices several years later in its series "Nacogdoches, Texas: Racial Violence 'A Relic of the Past,'" it relies on another type of alternate illustration, thematically closer but factually more remote, with old photographs of lynchings in Mississippi, Minnesota and Indiana in the 1920s and 1930s<sup>5</sup>. Lynching photographs are arguably the maximum intensity images that the radical press reproduces (*Muhammad Speaks* also published several of them in its early years)<sup>6</sup>. It is therefore all the more striking that in the fourth installment of the series, instead of a lynching picture, the article on Nacogdoches is illustrated by the photograph of two persons standing next to a wooden house, presented as "an example of the dilapidated housing which is prevalent in the rural South" (*The Black Panther*, September 1, 1975, p. 8). It is both another relic of the past and the materialization of a more chronic form of violence, effected through relegation and poverty.

- 22 The reading of substandard housing suggested here, as a visualization of structural forms of violence enacted on a whole racial and economic group, also rests on very explicit discourse in both publications at the turn of the 1970s, connecting housing conditions and the notion of genocide against African Americans. This idea had been conceptualized in the early postwar years with the petition "We Charge Genocide" submitted to the United Nations in 1951 by William Patterson and Paul Robeson. It was taken up again by Malcolm X before his death, as part of a turn towards the notion of human (rather than civil) rights (Nier III 1991). The BPP used the concept from the beginning of the movement, first to describe the way it was targeted by the US government, but also to denounce specific policies such as African American women's disproportionate sterilization or under-

maintained and segregated public housing (Roman 2016: 19–20). Articles stated that housing was involved in a genocidal plan in “the form of failure or deliberate refusal to provide shelter that’s fit for the housing of human beings” (Ronald Tyson, “When one walks through Boston’s South End, he is confronted by a scene that quickly reminds him of genocide,” *The Black Panther*, August 8, 1970, p. 3), be it in public housing or slum housing (“We Find the Slumlords Guilty of Genocide,” *The Black Panther*, November 21, 1970, p. 6). In fact, until 1971, genocide was linked mostly with housing and policing (Roman 2016: 20)—two salient aspects of neighborhood conditions.

- 23 Both the NOI and BPP saw genocide in sterilization and birth control programs targeting specifically African American women (Caron 1998). Interestingly, in both *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther*, articles on the subject tended to be illustrated by photographs showing women and children in their homes or on porches (“Can’t Be Mothers Again,” *Muhammad Speaks*, December 15, 1962, p. 4; *Muhammad Speaks*, May 1970, p. 19; “Sterilization—Another Part of the Plan of Black Genocide,” *The Black Panther*, May 8, 1971, p. 2). *Muhammad Speaks* was most steadfast in associating the notion of genocide with images of housing, an early case being a page of photographs by Chester Sheard, with a heavy focus in the captions on the materiality of housing detailed in the photographs, entitled “Silent Genocide: Mississippi” (*Muhammad Speaks*, November 29, 1968, p. 15); and the first really explicit instance being the publication, in December 1969, of a photograph by Bruce Davidson portraying a child in an alley, flanked with the U.N. definition of genocide in the caption, to illustrate an article about slums (“Government Agencies Say, ‘We Know How Bad Slums Are,’ But Slums Grow Worse,” *Muhammad Speaks*, December 1969, p. 5)<sup>7</sup>. The newspaper later introduced the phrases “genocidal conditions,” “genocidal living conditions” and “genocidal housing.” This conflation of genocide and housing is of course evocative of the terms “domicide” or “urbicide.” Here I however prefer to keep the formulas used by the newspaper itself, as they bear witness to a specific grafting of the concept of genocide onto an ongoing motif of concern and alarm, and also illustrate in their adjectival structure the practice of montage (visual and textual) in the newspaper.

- 24 In January 1970, the caption for a standalone photograph of a courtyard with wooden stairs and a family in the background started with “Genocidal living conditions have been calculatedly inflicted upon the Black people of the U.S. for four centuries” (*Muhammad Speaks*, January 16, 1970, p. 7). A few weeks later, an article about U.N. related news (an important focus in *Muhammad Speaks* through the decade), entitled “U.S. Fears to Sign U.N. Treaty against Genocide,” was illustrated by three photographs, including the view of a woman standing in a room strewn with papers, captioned “Mid-winter eviction” (February 27, 1970, p. 3). The caption reads the image in terms of government-guaranteed rights to work, housing, healthy food and medical treatment—and concludes that “the denial of these things to any people, nation or minority nationality is legally termed genocide.” While this is a scripting of a photograph in terms of human rights law, the facing photograph, which pictures a young girl in front of a house missing part of its sideboards, relies on a more sensorial texture: the girl “walks past the visible evidence of genocide,” thus supposedly made more tangible (in keeping with the many images of substandard housing in the journal). The caption repeats how economic and educational discrimination are part of the definition of genocide, albeit here “more subtle than Nazi Germany’s.” The face of housing, between sensationalism and systematicity, connects the journalistic work of compiling facts and reporting on conditions with the rhetorical work of sounding alarm.
- 25 The mix of facts, concept, and texture, is illustrated in a particularly striking way in a later instance of a housing photograph portraying “genocidal conditions” (figure 7). In November 1970, an article focuses on economic conditions in Marks, Mississippi (“Blacks Main Victims of Serious Economic Depression in Marks,” *Muhammad Speaks*, November 13, 1970, p. 11). The article is illustrated by a frontal view of a wooden house, with a couple of inhabitants on the porch, taken by Gini Hubbard for the Office of Economic Opportunity. The caption is particularly precise, providing socio-economic reporting characteristic of the leftist editorial staff at the newspaper:

Quitman Cty., Mississippi is in desperate need of industrial development, but under the present system of investing in economic development, geographical areas are forced to compete against one another in order to ‘attract industry’ with cheap labor, low tax struc-

tures and other conditions which involve bribery, kick-backs and wholesale swindling. Quitman County has been unsuccessful in this rat-race, so jobs and job training are unavailable for most Blacks and many whites, too. Housing of many Black families, whose ancestors built the cotton industry, shows real face of genocide.

Figure 7. "Blacks Main Victims of Serious Economic Depression in Marks," Muhammad Speaks, November 13, 1970, p.11.



Photograph by Gini Hubbard for the Office of Economic Opportunity.

26 The somewhat abruptly landing on the housing-as-genocide vignette shows that montage is at work at all scales of the iconotextual layout. Once again, antiquated and dilapidated housing conditions, here supplemented with the dirty and ragged clothes either worn or hung to dry, serve to bridge an individual situation (the photographed family) with a collective state of oppression. But precisely, the representativeness seems to preclude any other form of agency; the face of gen-

ocide may be visible, but that of the woman standing on her porch is missing, and there does not seem to have been any opportunity for “front performance” (Erving Goffman’s phrase) in an attempt to maintain composure or show a measure of agency (Aubert 2014: 13). The steadfast condemnation of the bad dwelling implies a relentless victimization of the dwellers.

## 4. Counter strategies, directed at or based in dwellings

27 *12 Million Black Voices* concluded with the evocation of a collective, interracial, Marxist vision of liberation:

The seasons of the plantation no longer dictate the lives of many of us; hundreds of thousands of us are moving into the sphere of conscious history.

We are with the new tide. We stand at the crossroads. We watch each new procession. The hot wires carry urgent appeals. Print compels us. Voices are speaking. Men are moving! And we shall be with them... (Wright and Roskam 1941: 147)

28 Those closing lines are followed by the photograph of a man looking up in the sun, on the doorstep of his wooden house. The shared future is here visible from the shack, even from inside the shack where the man must have been standing a moment before he was photographed; this is the opposite of the dark perspective in the gaze of the young woman of Cairo, Illinois (figure 4). The lyrical dimension of this photograph in *12 Million*, its narrative opening, is different from the stark immobilization of the typical *Muhammad Speaks* version of the “doorstep portrait” (Aubert 2009). To take one more example of this formula: the children in figure 8, caught up by the lens, lined up dazed and unsmiling (but for one older child), cannot tell any other story than that of a harvest of poverty, as per the title of this article about a rape case (“Georgia’s Harvest of Rape and Poverty,” *Muhammad Speaks*, August 16, 1963, p. 3). And while any type of comparison between photography and rape should of course be treated with extreme caution, it remains tempting to read a faint echo of the subject of the article in the representational violence involved in such an exposure.

Figure 8. "Georgia's Harvest of Rape and Poverty," *Muhammad Speaks*, August 16, 1963, p. 3.

MUHAMMAD SPEAKS

## Georgia's Harvest of RAPE and POVERTY

**AMERICUS, Ga.** — Of all the victims of criminal rape, the poverty-stricken black women in America's Southeast remains the most molested and the most unprotected.

As it was in slavery and as it has been ever since, the rape of Negro women by white men continues without a pause in remote, rural areas.

Unnoticed, unreported, causing hardly a ripple in the daily scheme of American life — the rapes go on today a young girl; tomorrow a teenager; the next day her mother, or a grandmother.

**THE RAPESTS** are hardly ever caught because they are sought in the rare instances when one is taken into custody, and later tried, the "punishment" is negligible, if any, representing at worst a "slap on the wrist" for "getting caught."

In the latest outrage, a Georgia sheriff refused to believe that an 18-year-old Negro girl was raped by a white man five days before she died.

The sheriff discounted the rape charge despite the fact the girl was seen by her brother as the rapist forced her into his car, then seen again later by her mother, bloodied and hysterical — as the man let her out of his car.

**ANNIE B. Hayes**, eldest of nine children of Mr. and Mrs. James B. Hayes, was returning from a trip to the store and was just 200 yards from her home in a rural area near Cobb, Ga., when she was forced into a car driven by a white man, later identified as a bread salesman.

He was the same man, she later told her mother, who had been sitting in a black car outside the store and who had watched her enter and leave.

Annie's brother, 12-year-old James, saw the car stop on the road shoulder near his sister. When he ran down the road to investigate, the man was pulling his sister into the car. He had his hand over Annie's mouth.

**THE BOY** related that the man said: "If you tell anything of what you've seen or heard I'll come and kill you and the rest of the kids and dump you in the river so no one ever sees you no more."

James said the man was white and drove a black 1949 two-door Ford. He stated the man never got out, but pulled Annie into the car, bumping her against the steering wheel in the process.

He said he had seen the man at least twice before, her rape.

When he drove slowly past the store and was just 200 yards from her home in a rural area near Cobb, Ga., when she was forced into a car driven by a white man, later identified as a bread salesman.

**LATER THAT** evening, Annie's mother, Mrs. Hayes, heard a cry outside the home of Mrs. James Miles, where she was working.

Mrs. Hayes rushed to the door and saw her daughter in the car with a white man. By the time she got to the street, Annie had reeled from the car, which raced away.

Her clothing was torn and bloody and she was crying hysterically.

Mrs. Miles, who is white, drove Annie and her mother home, where Annie sobbed the story of how the man had raped her.

**PUT TO** bed, she grew steadily worse and four days later was taken to the hospital in Americus, Ga. She died the next day.

It was only after her death that Annie's mother reported the rape to Sheriff Fred Chappell of Sumter County, she said she had been afraid to report it.

The sheriff came to her home with an agent of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. The agent however, reportedly called her "a damned liar" when she told what she knew of her daughter's rape.

**THEIR FACES** still mirror their grief and shock, Mr. and Mrs. James Hayes are the parents of the 18-year-old girl who died five days after she was raped by a white man. Sheriff refused to believe the girl had been raped.

AUGUST 16, 1963

### To Whom Death Is Meted

In all of the Southern states, statistics show that 100 Negroes have been officially put to death for rape, as compared with only 42 whites since 1930.

These are the grim figures which prove beyond a doubt that there is a double standard of life and death for Negroes and whites in the United States of America.

Prisoners in Southern states executed for rape under civil authority since 1930. From United States Department of Justice National Prisoner Statistics, April, 1963.

SOUTH ATLANTIC		
	White	Negro
Delaware	1	3
Maryland	6	18
District of Columbia	2	2
Virginia	21	1
West Virginia	1	1
North Carolina	4	41
South Carolina	5	37
Georgia	3	38
Florida	1	35
EAST SOUTH CENTRAL		
	White	Negro
Kentucky	1	9
Tennessee	5	22
Alabama	2	29
Mississippi	1	21
WEST SOUTH CENTRAL		
	White	Negro
Arkansas	1	17
Louisiana	1	22
Oklahoma	4	4
Texas	13	66
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>392</b>


**White Cops Under Fire for Beating of 3 Negro Teens**

**HOUSTON, Texas** — Two during the beating, which lasted more than five minutes, and two others are slated to be fired as the aftermath of the brutal beating of three Negro boys.

The three boys, Edward Simms, 17, Arthur Johnson, 17, and Benjamin Davis, 19, charged they were slugged with backhands and kicked to have occurred.

The arrests grew out of an incident in which Mrs. Dorothy Griffin, wife of one of the cops, said that a Negro youth had tried to get into her car. The three boys were picked up in the area in which the incident was said to have occurred.

**POVERTY IN GEORGIA** — Seven of the eight remaining Hayes children stand outside the shack they use for a home in Cobb, Ga. Annie Hayes' 12-year-old brother, James, saw abductor forcing her into a car. The man told him that everyone in his family would die if he told what he saw.



29 Quite typically, the caption refers to the architectural structure in the back as "the shack they use for a home." The repeated treatment of the shack as a disaster, a site of horror, an anti-sanctuary, can in fact be contrasted with bell hooks's reclaiming of the very word "shack" in an essay on domestic spaces, nurturance, and the beauty of Black lives: "Black Vernacular: Architecture as Cultural Practice." The text is included in the collection *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995)—a book with an external view of a small wooden house reproduced on its cover. This essay traces the formation of a distinct, reassuring, empowering relationship to space that is grounded in the "lovely shack[s]" (149) of family and friends in the South during her childhood. "No matter how poor you were in the shack, no matter if you owned the shack or not, there you could allow your needs and desires to articulate interior design and exterior surroundings" (150). At stake

is the reclaiming, for poor African Americans and especially for women, of taste, practice, and agency—all things that are negated, with no exception, in the visual treatment of poor dwellings in *Muhammad Speaks*.

Figure 9. *Muhammad Speaks*, November 14, 1969, p. S12.



30 The political project of the NOI was one of separation, and of building independent resources for African Americans. The newspaper's end section, which at the turn of the 1970s deployed slogans and the program of the NOI, repeatedly included photographs of construction machinery, hospitals, factories, or new suburban tracts (figure 9) that should be "ours," in the words of Elijah Muhammad; there was also regular inclusion of photographs and drawings of real or projected NOI real estate (especially in Chicago)<sup>8</sup>. The wholesale rejection of the shack must be read in relation with the NOI's distinct project of uplift, also visible in the importance of uniforms. The distinct Marxist

political orientation of the BPP is well rendered by the contrast in the housing horizons they offer: for the NOI, middle-class suburban housing; for the BPP, housing cooperatives. In the images published in its news organ, the neighborhood-based mobilizing strategy of the BPP is most visible in the presence of inhabitants, who are not presented simply as oppressed. With rare exceptions, adults and children are smiling; they point specific problems in their space; they raise their fists, carry signs. (In a 1969 photograph, a man seems to be raising his fist; he is in fact dangling a dead rat, while standing on a litter-strewn patch of grass across the street from a wooden house from which people are either moving out or being expelled: Bennie Harris, East Oakland Branch, “Denial of Decent Housing,” *The Black Panther*, March 31, 1969, p. 8. The dynamic, protesting figure directly echoes the tone of the article and the program point printed on top of the photograph: “We want decent housing fit for shelter of human beings.” The photographed man is clearly part of the “we” that is speaking and demanding.)

- 31 A final example, specific to *The Black Panther*, of how the dwelling can picture violence, is the drawings or serigraphs dramatizing self-defense from the heart of homes, in a more or less fantasized way, which is part of how Emory Douglas, the newspaper and more broadly the BPP leaders “visualized imagined agency” (Gaiter 2018: 300). While *The Black Panther* often included drawings of African Americans shooting pig-policemen, there are several instances of drawings that illustrate the slogan “shoot your landlord.” One example is a back cover by Douglas, with a woman sitting in her dilapidated interior, a rifle resting on her lap which is also for the moment directed at a rat hole (back cover of the September 12, 1970 edition)<sup>9</sup>. This is one striking visual instance of a woman (and an older woman) holding a rifle in *The Black Panther*. An earlier image by Douglas shows a woman standing on her kitchen table, fighting rats on the ground with broom and jug—in what is also a reversal of the stereotypical scene of a woman perched on a chair because a mouse is in the room (back cover of the July 25, 1970 issue). The text at the top asserts that this state of affairs gives her the right to kill “greedy slumlords.” An image that is reproduced on two back covers a few months apart shows a woman who has grabbed a big rat at the throat (back covers of the June 12, 1971 and January 22, 1972 editions). These

non-photographic visualizations form a distinct subcategory of images, of literal fighting from everyday conditions. But the dilapidated interior is also the scene where after 1971 Douglas inserts small photographic fragments that appear as buttons on clothes or as frames on the wall, representing the party's community programs and more specifically the breakfast program (which offers a collective service for a moment typically spent in the home) or advertising candidates in local or national elections (see for example the back covers of April 17, May 8 and May 15 editions). Instead of being projected as the architectural opposite of the dilapidated wooden dwelling, as in the real estate imagery of the NOI, the program is here "mounted" within the existing interior. The distressed dwelling is no longer photographed, but it is the richly textured location for the achievement, in the photographable present, of a communal organization; and in those back covers—a visual format often offering "empathic portraits" contrasting with the more disturbing cartoons inside the newspaper (Garter, 2012: 251)—the distinctly gendered space of the home, with its women and children, can be pictured as a place from where to practice both self-defense and nurturing, individually and collectively.

## Conclusion

- 32 The stark differences in how both publications handle the distressed dwelling and its inhabitants under attack should by no means distract our attention from what these images represent in both cases: important space devoted to domestic sites along pages and issues, strong verbal and visual resonance for easily recognized architectural material, and a redefinition of built structures as tools of mass destruction. In years when urban riots could work towards deflecting any white guilt for living conditions in ghettos, through the motif of people perceived as being intent on destroying their own neighborhoods, this steadfast, creative coverage of oppressive housing units stressed that violence came from the outside, and was directed closest to bodies. With all these interior and exterior views of distinct dwellings and buildings, both destroyed and destructive, that are disseminated in both publications, it is as if the *fait divers* and the documentary had been merged, the most private space of the home transformed in an eminently public surface for measuring violence against a class and race-defined group.

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1 It is estimated that six million African Americans migrated from Southern rural states to Northern industrial centers between 1916 and 1970. The bulk of this Great Migration had been completed by 1940.

2 The Black press's visual investment in nice homes in the 1950s is also noted by Gwendolyn Brooks in her 1953 novel *Maud Martha*, as the eponymous character repeatedly muses on the fact that the *Chicago Defender's* photographers tend to come into well-appointed apartments to celebrate African American successes (1993: 56, 61).

3 See the back covers gathered in Durand 2007.

4 This has special resonance in the South of the United States, marked by a historical absence of Black public spaces. This focus on the individual home thus reflects a distinctive spatial condition. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper for this suggestion.

5 These include a photograph of Robert McDaniels being lynched in 1937 in Duck Hill, Mississippi, two details of the photograph of the Marion, Indiana 1930 lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, and one detail of the Duluth lynching of Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie in 1920—with a confusion between these last two events. "Nacodoches, Texas: Racial Violence 'A Relic of the Past,'" Part 1-4, *The Black Panther*, August 4, 1975, p. 7; August 11, 1975, p. 11; August 18, 1975, p.11; and September 1, 1975, p. 9.

6 While this practice harks back to the use of photography in the anti-lynching campaigns of Ida B. Wells and the NAACP, it uses images that can be described as historical. The lynching photographs that are published in the 1960s and 1970s are always from before World War II— an arguably recent past, but with a temporal dimension quite distinct from that of photographs of colonial violence in the Belgian Congo in the early 1960s, which were published in *Muhammad Speaks* in a synchronous mode that is more typical of the news media.

7 The photograph, while being credited to Bruce Davidson and to Magnum Photos, is reproduced from the book *The New City* edited by Donald (spelled Konald in the caption) Canty, a collection of papers from conferences held in 1969 by the National Committee on Urban Growth Policy. It does not

seem to correspond to any direct collaboration with Davidson; it confirms how the newspaper assimilated external images to its own worldview (here, genocide).

8 See for example “Good Homes, Progress by the Hon. Elijah Muhammad,” *Muhammad Speaks*, p.S8-9.

9 See also smaller cartoons of a man shooting into a white landlord’s head, and a woman waiting out at the door with a rifle, alongside articles about violent conflict between landlords and tenants. *The Black Panther*, December 19, 1970, p. 3.

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### English

This article studies the modes of visibility of housing in the Black radical press of the 1960s and 1970s, in *Muhammad Speaks* and *The Black Panther*, and how this site/sight relates to violence, which it makes tangible in the landscape. An object of particular attention in the political and social discourses of both the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party, the distressed dwelling is also visual capital that can be put to use in the visual editorial practices of both publications, and woven within textual, conceptual, and narrative engagements with both acute and chronic forms of racist violence.

### Français

Cet article étudie les modes de visibilité du logement dans la presse radicale noire des années 1960 et 1970, dans *Muhammad Speaks* et *The Black Panther*. Il s’attache à la façon dont ce lieu se rapporte à la violence et dont il la rend tangible dans l’espace. Objet d’une attention particulière dans les visions politiques et sociales de la Nation of Islam et du Black Panther Party, le logement indigne est aussi un capital visuel qui peut être mis à profit dans les pratiques visuelles éditoriales de ces deux publications, dans des élaborations textuelles, conceptuelles et narratives de formes aiguës et chroniques de violence raciste.

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### Mots-clés

Muhammad Speaks, The Black Panther, 12 Million Black Voices, logement, cabane, photographie, violence

### Keywords

Muhammad Speaks, The Black Panther, 12 Million Black Voices, housing, shack, photography, violence

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