

BLACK SPOTS

In South Africa today a “black spot” is an African township marked for obliteration because it occupies an area into which whites wish to expand. The township may have been in existence for fifty years and have a settled population of twenty-five or fifty or seventy-five thousand people. Nonetheless, if the whites so decree, it can literally be wiped off the map and its people relocated in Government-built housing projects in remote areas.

Action is not taken under the right of eminent domain, for this old and well-understood principle of common law permits a government to appropriate property only for “necessary public use” and requires that “reasonable compensation” be paid. In South Africa, relocation serves only the repressive minority policy of *apartheid* and compensation is much less than reasonable.

Authority for relocation lies in the so-called Group Areas Act of 1950, a complicated piece of legislation, many times amended, whose purpose is to assure that each of the country’s racial groups shall live in isolation from the others; that nonwhite businesses shall not operate in white urban centers; and that the few property rights of Africans in urban areas shall be withdrawn.

Since the law went into effect, the Nationalist Government has carved the face of South Africa into a racial checkerboard of airtight black, white, Colored, and Indian squares. Hundreds of thousands of people have been uprooted in the process. Once an area is designated white, those disqualified by skin

color from remaining there must move out. Africans who owned property have had to sell at disastrously low prices and move to districts where landowning was forbidden. Traders from the Near East and Asia, who were among the first to start businesses in many towns, had to close up shop within a certain time limit and start over in some location far from the commercial districts where the customers are. A non-white reluctant to move is moved by force. His house is razed, his goods hauled away in a truck, and the hauling expense charged to him.

Not surprisingly, the whites choose for themselves those checkerboard squares where they are already entrenched: the commercial centers and attractive, close-in suburbs. And any African township which seems to be standing in the path of progress they designate as a black spot to be taken over by expansion.

The Government pays for the property it takes, but the sums are paltry and often tardy in coming.

Sophiatown, a lively center of African life and home-ownership in Johannesburg, was bulldozed into a flat expanse of rubble. The new white township that went up in its place was called *Triomf*, Afrikaans for “triumph.” Alexandra, another township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, is being converted into a vast hostel for unmarried domestic servants; there are no facilities for married couples. Eersterust township, near Pretoria, where Africans began buying freehold property at the turn of the century, was torn down and its residents forcibly relocated. Lady

Selborne, another old established township in the same area, also was being torn down in 1967, as this book was being written.

The Government describes relocation as “slum clearance” and likes to brag about its housing developments as the humanitarian solution to an “acute housing shortage.” But the African knows he is only exchanging a “slum” that was home for the sterile prison of a Government ghetto.

Historically, the “acute” housing problem is one the white establishment has brought on itself by continually ignoring the basic needs of the black population. The whites have always told themselves that the Africans were transients in the cities and would one day return to their tribal homelands. Among other things, this has been a rationalization for paying low wages (“he can grow enough to live on back home”) and failing to make provisions for housing (“he doesn’t belong here, anyway”).

Yet, as South Africa has grown, the whites have needed more and more black labor for commerce and industry and for domestic service. Blacks stream in from the outlands to the cities to join the labor force and become a permanent part of the urban population. Few—despite the white man’s fantasy—ever go the other way.

From the start, years ago, a few of the blacks took the initiative, saved what money they could, and bought freehold property. The land area available to them was limited, but ownership was not yet forbidden. As more Africans became “industrialized”—became urban workers—the first black landholders shared their property with the latecomers. They set up shacks in their backyards and rented or gave them to people who couldn’t find room elsewhere. Inevitably these neighborhoods soon trebled in population and, by Government standards, became overcrowded slums.

Even so, the old townships often contained a fair number of large and pleasant houses. Some were owned outright by successful Africans. Others were promotions by real-estate agents who made building loans to the occupants and took their title to the land as collateral. These occasionally were foreclosed when the family could not keep up the payments.

When the Government decided to move in, however, the good was destroyed with the bad, the large with the small, the expensive with the

cheap. Furthermore, everyone ended up in a four-room house—regardless of the size of his family or his income—because that was the only kind the Government built.

Subsequently, those who were not satisfied with the Government’s matchbox houses, and had the means to do something about it, built new ones in a small nearby area prescribed by the Government. Today these few nice houses on a few nice streets are the only relief from the prevailing monotony of the black townships. The Government never fails to show them off to tourists as proof that the African fares well in South Africa, although the guide forgets to mention that no black can own any land.

The white man, on the other hand, met his housing pressures by expanding outward and by paring away the black man’s few rights of ownership and occupation. He not only made room for himself, but he effectively destroyed any permanent foothold the African may have thought he had in the urban area.

I had often heard the warning, “When a black township stands where a white suburb wants to stand, the black one must go.” How true it was I learned one morning in 1960 when Government bulldozers came clanking down the road into the neighborhood where I lived. This was in Eersterust, a black freehold township ten miles east of Pretoria. Some would call it a slum and parts of it deserved the label. But I loved Eersterust. Our house was not fancy, but it was built of brick and had six rooms. (We also had recently erected a rental building on the back part of our lot with three two-room apartments. We had begun to get income from it, but were a long way from having paid for it.) I had lived most of my twenty-one years in that house, in that neighborhood. My father, a self-taught tailor, and my mother, a washerwoman, had raised their six children in the house. Most important, we owned the buildings and the land beneath them. In fact, the property had been in my mother’s family for half a century, since 1910. This was no mean achievement for an African family. The property represented the labor and savings of several lifetimes. To us it was a proud heritage.

But under the Group Areas Act, our township was marked for demolition and its citizens for relocation. Actually, it had been declared a Colored area. An older Colored area closer to the city had been

declared white and its residents were to be rehoused in Eersterust. The bile of *apartheid* flows downhill.

Once the bulldozers began their work, they were quick about it. Within minutes the black spot had been eradicated. Our neighborhood was rubble, our house a pile of bricks. For our heritage of half a century we were paid \$840.

My family, along with all the belongings we could carry, moved to Mamelodi, a new black "location" which the Government had put up on the far eastern edge of Pretoria. (The term "location" is deliberate: Since the African is regarded as an abstraction, without status or meaning in society, his physical displacement is also defined vaguely, rather than in terms of an entity whose inhabitants have legal rights and real responsibilities.) There we were assigned to a new house. Like our old one, it was built of brick. In fact, all Government townships are built this way: row upon identical row, acre after symmetrical acre, all exactly alike. Mamelodi had streets, but at that time they had no names. Each house could be identified only by its number. They ran from one up to ten thousand and eventually, I suppose, on to infinity.

Sometimes communities are moved even before housing is ready for them. In Besterspruit, a farming village in Natal, some two thousand Africans were forced to move, despite the fact that the crops in their fields were nearly ready for reaping, and pleas by the town council that the Government township was not yet built. The Government ignored both problems. It simply erected two noisome tent cities, reminiscent of Boer War concentration camps, and put the people in them until their matchboxes should be ready. A black spot is a black spot.

We were renters, now. The privilege of owning land was forever lost to us. We had been poor before. We were poorer now. In Eersterust everything we could earn had gone to buy enough to eat. Now we had to worry about paying the rent, as well. Unlike the white tenant, who at worst may be evicted for failure to pay his rent, the African who falls behind is subject to criminal prosecution and imprisonment.

The Government had put a roof over our heads and, by its own reckoning, owed us nothing more. But any good farmer does better by his cattle than the Government did for the new residents of Mamelodi. The houses were incomplete and soon began to crumble. The four small rooms had no doors, no plaster, and dirt floors. There was no running water; it had to be fetched from a tank in the street. Toilets were outside and used the bucket system. Hired crews were supposed to pick up and replace the buckets every few days, but they were sloppily supervised and came only when they felt like it. In no time at all, the streets were a mess. The stench was suffocating.

In Eersterust we had eight food stores in our immediate neighborhood to choose among. In Mamelodi the nearest shopping center was a half mile away and offered a much poorer selection.

Worst of all, the destruction of Eersterust had smashed the relationships we had enjoyed with our neighbors. Friends of many years' standing went out of our lives, for in Mamelodi we were not permitted to settle down with neighbors of our own choosing unless they happened to be of the same tribal background. Since we were Pedi, we were assigned to one area; our Venda, Ndebele, and Zulu friends went elsewhere, and our Indian neighbors were sent to another township. At that, we were better off than the families that were split up. Unless a man had lived in Pretoria and worked for the same employer for a certain length of time, he did not qualify for a house in Mamelodi. Since he could not provide a home for his family, he was sent to a bachelors' hostel and his wife and children exiled to a tribal area.

The homemaking instinct is strong. In time we rebuilt our lives. But it was never the same, for with Government housing came Government supervision. Mamelodi was run by a white superintendent with the assistance of a corps of sub-officials and municipal police to check on passes and enforce the laws. Whatever we did and wherever we went, white men's eyes were watching.

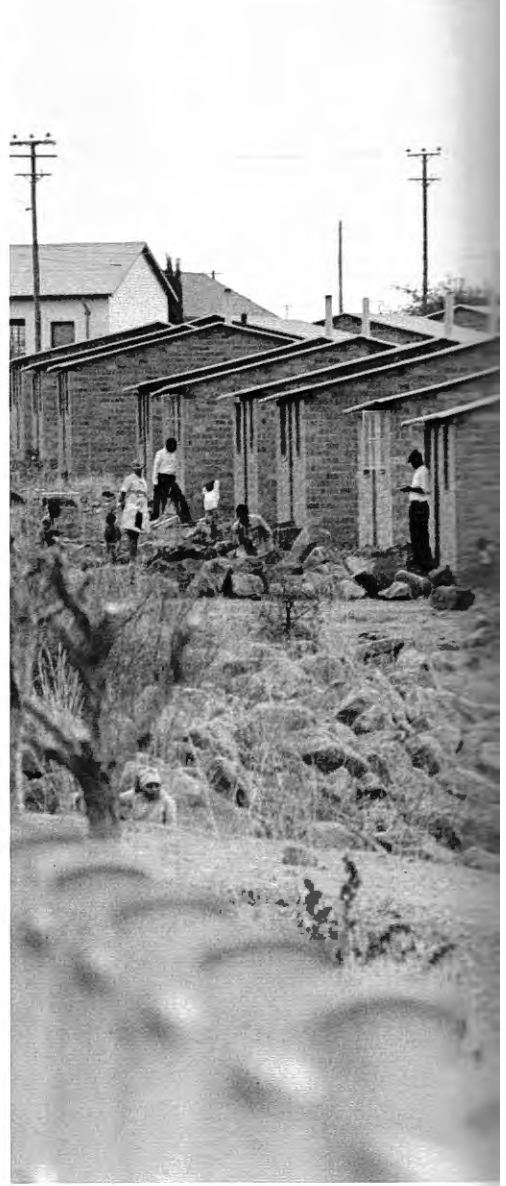




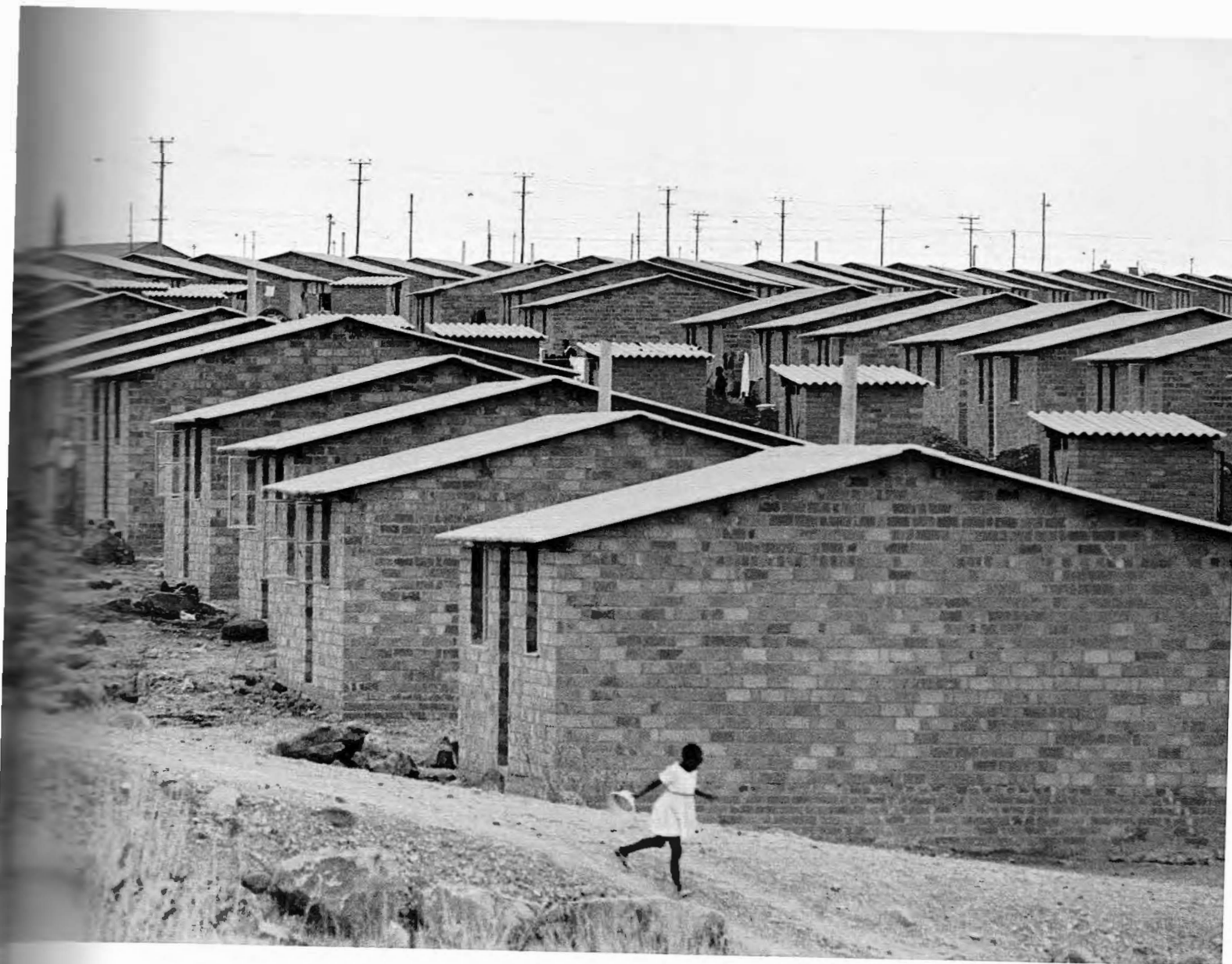
African township is bulldozed out of existence to make way for white expansion. Government trucks will move residents and their few possessions to matchbox houses in new locations, usually in remote areas, perhaps not even named on map. Even to live there, families must qualify. People at right did not, and thus have not only had their homes razed, but have nowhere to go.







Left: Community of two thousand people, uprooted before new township was ready for them, was moved into tent city, instead. Child sleeps outside rather than under stifling canvas. Above: Typical location has acres of identical four-room houses on nameless streets. Many are hours by train from city jobs. Sign warns that permits are needed to enter location.



WARNING.

THIS ROAD PASSES THROUGH PROCLAIMED BANTU LOCATIONS. ANY PERSON WHO ENTERS THE LOCATIONS WITHOUT A PERMIT RENDERS HIMSELF LIABLE TO PROSECUTION FOR CONTRAVENING THE BANTU URBAN AREAS CONSOLIDATION ACT 1945 AND THE LOCATION REGULATIONS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF JOHANNESBURG.

WAARSKUWING.

HIERDIE PAD LOOP DEUR GEPROKLAAMEERDE BANTOE LOKASIES. IEMAND WAT DIE LOKASIES SONDER 'N PERMIT BINNEGAAN OORTREE DIE BANTOE (STADSGEBIEDE) KONSOLIDASIE WET 1945 SOWEL AS DIE LOKASIEREGULASIES VAN DIE STADRAAD VAN JOHANNESBURG EN STEL HOM AAN BEVOLGBING BLOOT.

TEMOSO.

TSELA ENA E PHOLLE TSA MAKEISHENE A BATHO BA BATSO MOTHO OFE KAPA OFE EA TLAKENA MAKEISHENE ANA A SENA LENGO LA TUPELLO PERMITI DITLA IPAKELA QOSO KA HO ROBA MOLAO OA TULO-TSA-BATHO-BA-BATSO (URBAN AREA) CONSOLIDATION ACT, OA 1945, LE MELAO EA MAKEISHENE, MOTSE, MOHOLO OA JOHANNESBURG.

ISIXWAYISO.

LONGWAZO UNDLULA PHAKATHI KWAMA LOKISHI ABA NTSUNDU NOMA UBAMI ONGENA AMALOKISHI ENGENAWO INCVADI PERMITI YEHYUMELO UZIBANGELA URUMANGALELWA NGENXA YOKWAPHUKA IMITHETHO YENDIMO ZABANTSUNDU (URBAN AREA) CONSOLIDATION ACT 1945 FUTHI NEMITHETHO YAMA LOKISHI YO'AZI WASE JOHANNESBURG.