

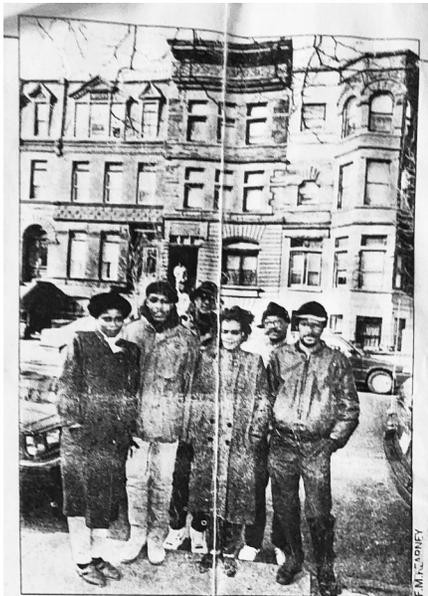
WE KEEP US SAFE: VOL 3: MARCH 2021

TENANTS HOLD UP THE SKY



And If I Had to Do It Again, I Would Do It Again: Interview with Ms. Joyce Webster

In early February, BED interviewed Ms. Joyce, a local tenant activist and longtime resident of Crown Heights. Over 35 years in her apartment, Ms. Joyce has experienced landlord abuse in the form of gas leaks, utility bill gouging, negligent landlords, and an aggressive police presence. We have been organizing with Ms. Joyce since last summer, when Crown Heights Tenant Union hosted a speakout on her front stoop to amplify her story and demand justice. Since then, Ms. Joyce has been ever-present at housing justice actions, on the front line to protect other tenants from harassment. In our interview, we discuss how Ms. Joyce got started with tenant organizing, the extreme trials and tribulations she's gone through to stay in her home, and why she is fully committed to the fight to make housing a human right.



Hit and Run: The Trolley Museum of New York's current and former tenants on Dean Street complain in court documents of harassment and neglect. From left to right: Joyce Webster, Clinton Grant, Johnny McCoy, Joyce Potts, Emsee Lewis, and Jimmie Thomas.

Interviewer: How long have you lived in this apartment?

Joyce: I have been a resident here [and in the building next door] from 1985 up to now, just about 35 years, I believe. A friend of mine that knew my family many years ago—Mr. Derek—he was telling me they had studios and kitchenettes around here. He would look out for me cause he was living somewhere closeby. He told me to come around here and check, and I got lucky and found my first place of my own.

Interviewer: When did you start protesting to protect your fellow tenants?

“Even though everybody was struggling, everybody was taking care.”

Joyce: [Around the time I moved in] I was protesting about a landlord who tried to blow up the building because he wanted a tenant out. We all stepped out and different landlords tried to evict us out of our apartments and we weren't having none of that. It's all the same old thing; landlords trying to force us out and we been here. Back then we all was like a family in a circle. We all took care of one another and always checked up on one another. If we don't hear from somebody we'll come to see them and to see how they doing. Even though everybody was struggling, everybody was taking care.

Interviewer: How did you link up with Crown Heights Tenant Union and BED?

Joyce: There was a lot of people across the street, on the other side from me [at another eviction defense in July 2020]. They was talking about how this landlord came in to try to force people out of their homes while they was sleeping—12 o'clock, 1 o'clock in the morning. I mean, it's like a nightmare if somebody is inside your place just because they got the keys and they standing over you. It's time for something, a wake up call, for somebody to do something about that. And that's how I got to know these people, cause they told me what happened and I was kind of shocked.

I said, “that could be me in my place and the landlord come in my place and break open my place, and he's standing over me.” And that's why I had to do something. This was the reason why I was so glad that I had a chance to get to know these guys and they looked out for me.

Interviewer: What kind of tenant organizing have you been involved in since then? Tell me about the protest in December—what brought you out there and what happened?

Joyce: In December we went, because we heard that this attorney was evicting people [despite the moratorium]. I knew we had to go out there and do something about it and try to let us be known for once. Let

the poor people be recognized for once! Let us get the opportunity to stand up for our rights!

Interviewer: And what happened while you were out there?

Joyce: Well we got locked up. I believe it was in December. We got locked up because we went into the attorney's building and he pressed charges against us, said we trespassed. We went there to let him know that he was evicting people out of their places and causing them to be homeless. It was the right thing for us to do, and if I had to do it again, I would do it again. Because, like I said, how many more people is gonna be evicted from their houses?

Interviewer: If you could put a call out to all your neighbors, what would you say?

“...don't let a landlord bully you just because he got property on the land that you living in.”

Joyce: Oh [I would say] I won't be bullied and I will not be moved. That means, in these times, don't let a landlord bully you just because he got property on the land that you living in. As long as we paying them money for their property and we coming out of our pocket.... Look at how much money they want!

What we going through today... What they don't realize is that people is not staying in a place for a year's time; they moving out. I see so many people moving out as fast as they are moving in because the rent is too damn high! Now how they expect for people to be living somewhere in a year time when they can afford it no more than 2-3 months then they got to go? I never seen so many people moving in my life because they cannot afford to live anywhere more than a year. Do they really think this rent they requested is gonna make a big difference?

People cannot afford it anymore so they must cancel rent!

A friend of mine talking bout "well Joyce you cannot speak for a lot of people because they're still working" how about the people that did

not retire, that got laid off.... Is they our concern? Do they mean anything to these [landlords]?

The land is just made for rich people, how are poor people [supposed] to survive? Where they gonna lay their heads at? Do anybody understand that? Do they really understand how a poor person may not be just like them? We not fortunate enough like them; we is not living the rich

life; we barely can make ends meet; **that's why I do the things I do: I give. I love to share and I love to give.**

Interviewer: And what would you say to the landlords?

Joyce: Landlords being too damn greedy. We're being evicted out of our places because greedy landlords don't have no kind of consideration for the poor; they want us to sleep in the streets and I say to myself, "it's so cold out there and colder days may get colder." And they laughing, drinking coffee, drinking wine, or whatever they doing and they don't give a damn that people are dying in the cold.

What they don't think lower class don't need a shelter? They think we don't need to rest in our place? In our home? If you're lucky enough to have one....

The landlords, they talking about they need they money, they need they rent.... Count. Your. Bank! Just count all the money that you've been getting many years ago before this crisis came up. Count your bank account and I guarantee your bank account could build houses, shelters. What have you been doing lately?

I want them to take the homeless from sleeping in their cars. Take the homeless sleeping in the streets and giving them a place that they could call their home.

Interviewer: What does your home—this building—mean to you?

Joyce: Every landlord wanna buy this building, but they don't want to keep it up. Do they know about what this building went through? They

just want me out and I ain't gonna do that. There would be no building if it wasn't cause of me.

I used to sweep throughout the building. I used to mop throughout the building, with asthma, having asthma. And I took out the garbage. Put plastic bags in the garbage can, bought plastic bags. And I usually keep the building up, mopping, sweeping. The yard, inside the building, outside the building. And took my own personal money, buy detergent or disinfect stuff to clean it, and plastic bags. All kinds of things I had to do.

Interviewer: And why do you keep coming back to this building that takes so much work?

Joyce: You know why? Cause I love my neighbors. I love my community and I love my rent [stabilized] status. If I do move, I would be paying twice as much if I move someplace else. I ain't got that kind of money.

Sometimes you have to fight your own predator when you step outside [just to keep your home].



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS! KNOW YOUR POWER!

GOOD NEWS: no one can be evicted before February 26th!

Previous warrants for eviction are no longer effective and the landlord will need to get a new warrant through another hearing, which won't happen until the 26th. It's okay if you don't have a lease—you're a tenant, even in the eyes of the city, if you have proof (utility bills, mail addressed in your name, etc) that you've been living in your apartment for at least 30 days.

BAD NEWS: housing court will resume with eviction cases on February 26th starting with cases that were scheduled in december, 60 days after the original court date.

WHAT YOU CAN DO is fill out the "hardship declaration" at www.evictionfreeny.org to have your eviction and legal proceedings postponed until May 1st. You don't have to prove hardship (we've all been affected by this global pandemic!)—if the landlord disagrees, they are required to provide documents to disprove your hardship.

If a landlord decides to file for an eviction warrant before May 1st, they will need to state that they served the tenant with the hardship declaration, and that the tenant chose not to submit it.

***The one exception to the May 1st extension is when the landlord files a *nuisance* case, meaning that the tenant "persistently behaves in a way that substantially infringes on the use or enjoyment of other tenants OR that causes substantial safety hazards to others." **The landlord would have to prove this in court.**

What if my landlord is threatening to evict me anyway?

Since landlords have a ton of money and property, they're used to cops letting them do whatever they want. They operate on the assumption that we don't know our rights and that we don't have each other, but they're wrong—contact Brooklyn Eviction Defense at brooklynevictiondefense.org or by calling us at **(917) 982-2265** and we'll be there to *gently* remind them that they legally can't kick someone out of their home without a warrant (and that there's a lot more of us than there are of them!).

What if my apartment needs repairs?

Housing court is still open for non-eviction related cases! If your landlord isn't responding to requests for repair or if they're not keeping the heat on in this cold winter, you can file a harassment petition at app.justfix.nyc/en/ehp/splash. You're sending them a large chunk of your income every month, it's their responsibility to make sure your home is safe and warm at the very minimum.

What happens after May 1?

No one knows, but we're gonna continue to fight together so that the eviction moratorium is extended until long after the pandemic is over (and then forever), rent is canceled so that no one is in debt to their landlord after the moratorium, and the state taxes the rich to provide housing for our houseless neighbors.

Join the fight!

Go talk to your neighbors—if your landlord is making your life miserable, chances are they're doing the same to other folks in your building. Build a tenant association (it is your right to organize with the people in the building and it is illegal for a landlord to interfere with this!), connect with your local housing justice organization and get involved. Together we could shut the whole system down.



NONPROFITS MAKE RICH PEOPLE RICHER (AND WILL NOT SAVE US)



IS A CENTRAL BROOKLYN-BASED NONPROFIT WHOSE MISSION IS "TO PRESERVE AND DEVELOP SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING" AND "TO FOSTER AN ETHIC THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY BEAR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GREATER GOOD."

THIS PROJECT OF THEIRS INCLUDES TENANT ORGANIZING (MY BUILDING HAS AN IMPACCT ORGANIZER; HE'S LOVELY) AND PROVIDING HOUSING FOR MARGINALIZED PEOPLES.

WHAT THIS MEANS THOUGH IS THAT BY PROVIDING HOUSING THEY BECOME, AND ARE, **LANDLORDS**.

IMPACCT BROOKLYN CURRENTLY HAS NINE (9!) ACTIVE AND OPEN EVICTION FILINGS AGAINST THEIR VULNERABLE TENANTS — DURING A FUCKING PANDEMIC!

WHO, WE ASK, IS BEARING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO THIS FLAGRANT VIOLATION OF THE COMMUNITY'S GREATER GOOD?

THIS IS DAVE HANZEL



CHAIR OF THE BOARD AT IMPACCT BROOKLYN. HE ALSO WORKS FOR **CAPITAL ONE**, A FUCKING BANK.

THIS IS HIS FACEBOOK PROFILE PICTURE; MAYBE WE SHOULD HOLD THIS DORK PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE?



IS AN NYC-BASED NONPROFIT FOCUSED ON PROVIDING HOUSING FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH HOUSELESSNESS.

THEY OWN OVER 25 BUILDINGS THROUGHOUT THE FIVE BOROUGHS. AS SUCH, AND YOU CAN SEE WHERE THIS IS GOING, THEY ARE A MASSIVE LANDLORD MANAGEMENT COMPANY, WHO REGULARLY EVICT THE TENANTS THEY ARE OSTENSIBLY HELPING.

WE WERE ABLE TO FIND THREE OPEN AND ACTIVE EVICTION FILINGS (AGAIN, DURING A FUCKING PANDEMIC); WE ASSUME THERE ARE MORE, AS THE BREAKING GROUND MANAGES THEIR BUILDINGS UNDER VARIOUS COMPANY NAMES.

BED HAS BEEN CONTACTED BY BREAKING GROUND TENANTS WHO HAVE RELAYED TO US STORIES OF HARRASMENT AND AUTHORITARIAN MANAGEMENT; TENANTS AT 160 SCHERMERHORN WERE TOLD THEY WOULD BE TAKEN OFF OF THEIR SUBSIDIZED RENT (SEE: EVICTED) IF THEY CONTINUED TO ORGANIZE INTO A TENANT ASSOCIATION.

THIS IS MICHAEL J. FRANCO



CHAIR OF BREAKING GROUND'S BOARD; HE IS THE PRESIDENT OF VORNADO REALTY TRUST, A FUCKING REAL ESTATE COMPANY. GUESS WHERE HE USED TO WORK? MORGAN FUCKING STANLEY



OR NYCHA IS A PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT COMPANY DEDICATED TO PROVIDING HOUSING FOR LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS



THIS IS GREGORY RUSS,

HEAD OF NYCHA, AS APPOINTED BY BILL DE BLASIO; RUSS' SALARY THIS PAST YEAR WAS \$402,000 IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC, AND IN THE MIDDLE OF A BRUTAL NEW YORK WINTER, GREGORY RUSS AND NYCHA CURRENTLY HAVE 85 (EIGHTY-FIVE!) OPEN EVICTION FILINGS AGAINST THEIR VULNERABLE TENANTS RECENTLY RUSS AND CO. HAVE INSTITUTED CLOSED-DOOR NYCHA WORKING GROUP MEETINGS, WHICH ARE BY NEW YORK LAW ILLEGAL; THIS IS IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE RAD PROGRAM, WHICH TURNS OVER MANAGEMENT OF NYCHA BUILDINGS TO PRIVATE COMPANIES. THEY ARE TRYING TO HIDE THE INCREASING PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING; THIS IS NEOLIBERALISM IN ACTION

WHAT DO THESE THREE CASE STUDIES TELL US?

NAMELY, THAT ALL ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITHIN THE VICIOUS SYSTEM OF RACIAL CAPITALISM ALWAYS (ALWAYS!) END UP REPRODUCING ITS VIOLENCES, EVEN (AND PARTICULARLY) IF THEY MIGHT OSTENSIBLY BE WORKING TO FIGHT AGAINST THEM.

THE STATE AND CAPITAL—EMBODIED NEATLY BY THIS NEOLIBERAL NYCHA BOSS AND THESE BOARD OF DIRECTOR BANKERS—WORK TOGETHER TO PRODUCE AND PROFIT OFF OF THE VIOLENT CONDITIONS OUR COMMUNITIES ARE FACING, AND HAVE FACED; WORK DONE WITHIN THEIR PURVIEW CANNOT AND WILL NOT SAVE US. AS SUCH AND AS ALWAYS: WE KEEP US SAFE.

RUTH WILSON GILMORE REMINDS US TO REMEMBER THAT THE STATE AND CAPITALIST INSTITUTIONS ARE ALWAYS (ALWAYS!) COMPOSED OF REAL PEOPLE. AS SUCH, IF A TENANT IN OUR COMMUNITY GETS EVICTED, IT IS NOT ONLY THE FAULT OF RACIAL CAPITALISM AND SETTLER COLONIALISM BUT ALSO ALWAYS THE FAULT OF GREEDY FUCKING BANKERS LIKE DAVE HANZEL AND MCHAEAL J. FRANCO AND NEOLIBERAL GHOULS LIKE GREGORY RUSS.

THIS IS WHY BROOKLYN EVICTION DEFENSE IS AN ABOLITIONIST ORGANIZATION. WE SEEK AND DEMAND THE ABOLITION OF NOT ONLY THESE SHITTY ASS COMPANIES AND THEIR SHITTY FUCKING BOARDS OF DIRECTORS BUT THE VERY CONDITIONS THAT ALLOW THEM—AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF HOUSING—TO EXIST WHATSOEVER. ABOLITION IS THE IMAGINING AND BUILDING OF A WORLD BEYOND RACIAL CAPITALISM, WHEREIN HOUSING AND HOME ARE INTERCHANGEABLE TERMS, WHEREIN EVICTIONS ARE ANTIQUATED NIGHTMARES, WHEREIN COMMUNITIES OPERATE WITH CARE AND AUTONOMY.

They Made It This Way

1. Housing is a non-negotiable material need. Without it, we will surely die.
2. Houselessness and housing insecurity are functions of capitalism, not aberrations of it.
3. Under capitalism, needs do not incentivize the state to fill in the gaps of social lack; they are opportunities for profit.
4. **One in every 106 New Yorkers is homeless.**
5. Instead of the capitalist state using its abundance of hoarded resources, we are forced as a community to come together and provide each other our own resources.
6. **One in five apartments in Manhattan lay vacant.**
7. The community provides showers to those who lack hot water because of a busted pipe rather than the landlord using their wealth to hire a repairman to fix the pipe.
8. Under capitalism, our needs are opportunities for the capitalist to create commodities — things to be bought and sold for a profit (See #3).
9. Under capitalism, housing will never be a right; only a commodity.
10. Commodification, inherent to capitalism, is a tool used to divide us into classes, alienate us from each other and the earth's precious resources, and ultimately, super-exploit and oppress us.
11. Under Amerikkkan capitalism, housing is not a right for the tenant; it is a right, or more accurately an opportunity, created by and for the ruling and owning class to get richer.
12. To quote the Amerikkkan declaration of interdependence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."
13. "Rights" under the tyranny of the racial capitalist state are not inalienable — they can never be. Our entire lives, from our access

to food, our access to health, our access to education, our access to each other, our movement, and our access to housing, among many other things, are legislated upon by the select few who have inherited power.

14. The ones denying us housing derive their power not through consent from the people, but through coercive channels and institutions engineered to keep profit and domination in their control.
15. Rights are a logical fallacy, a fabrication, a turn of phrase, something that cannot be true under a system that is founded upon the division of 'haves' and 'have-nots.'
16. The capitalist exists only because an exploitable/profitable work force of those who do not have capital exists.
17. The landlord class exists only because the masses have been dispossessed from their land and their wages. We can only hope to rent, to mortgage, or to squat in order to survive.
18. We don't work, we die. There is no negotiation with the capitalist machine. They will forcibly evict us from our homes into the street. We will starve with no money to afford food. Under the individualistic ideology imposed by capitalism, we are on our own, and we alone are responsible for not being murdered by the state and its socioeconomic imperatives.

19. Rent and Work are threats of violence.

20. Property is stolen land and the continued stealing of land. The hoarded land. The consistent caper of market conspiracy to make us individualized, dispossessed and reliant on the State.

21. Property is Theft.

22. Do we think we and our community are ingenious enough, capable enough, resourceful enough to collectively own and upkeep our own building?
23. Our incentives for this would be humanitarian. Our incentive would be, hell, we don't got to give our sweat-soaked money to some fucking landlord. Our incentive would be that we finally have control over our lives. Should we paint this place a nice Pantone eggshell and make this shit not look like a factory? The tenant association voted and it passed. The place looks wonderful.

24. The landlord's incentive is to get rich by maximizing profit and minimizing cost. They manage this by keeping our dwellings crumbling and roach-infested. Intentional neglect. Designed and deliberate dilapidation. The law declares it habitable; it's a luxury to not be without, like the "have-nots." Consider the constellation of social coin-flips and economic gymnastics those "have-nots" have to go through to decide if they live or die.
25. If we do not work we do not make a wage we do not make the rent we will be put out on the street and we will die – says the money machine with a mouth full of bones and a closed hand full of rights.
- 26. The Rich and the State have manufactured the housing crisis as a profit making scheme.**
- 27. Capitalism cannot solve the housing question or address poor living conditions. Capitalism requires the housing crisis.**
28. The endless cycle of displacing people from their homes, raising rents and forcing people out of their neighborhoods/communities, bringing in new types of markets/investors, is also a requirement.
- 16 29. Gentrification is the owning class displacing the working class to raise luxury condominiums and Whole-Foods the neighborhood. This creates a ghetto or slum or homelessness elsewhere.
30. Gentrification, displacement, the need for continued expansion in search for new markets/profit, are all intertwined into the campaign for dispossession, domination and control. It is the genocide of Black, brown, indigenous, and working class people that built and designs Racial Capitalism.
- 31. The genocide of housing under the Amerikkkan rule of capital cannot be reformed away.**
32. The system mandates a struggle for survival, whether directly or indirectly, with a soft touch or a strong arm.
33. All reform towards social safety nets or social services — scraps they toss us because their system is close to starving/killing us — are means-tested.
34. Means-tested means you must prove the system has you down bad. You must scrape together all your tax info, your pay stubs, your soul, and so forth.

35. NY State Senate Bill S2742, introduced Jan 2021, is an inadequate means-tested bill for inadequate rent relief proposed by Senator Brian Kavanagh. Fuck him.
36. Sex workers, undocumented workers, many gig workers, and nannies and caretakers being paid under the table cannot prove "hardship" and will be denied at the onset.
37. Landlords are heralding this bill as "the end of the cancel rent movement"
38. With the previous relief bill, NY State Senate Bill S8419, introduced Jun 2020, approved only 16% of those who applied and by in large they only received a fraction of what it would cost to pay back rent.
39. Reforms, half-measures, means-tested bullshit, do not and will not work (see #33 for example). Reforms keep us down begging for help from the one who put us down in this position in the first place.
40. The moratorium in New York will eventually expire and legal evictions will begin the States process of forcefully ejecting families into inhumanity.
41. It will be the masses who solidarity the families back into shelter, who convene warm bread into their mouths, who secure faith back into their idea of a home of community of cosmological care.
- 42. Every time a person loses their house the pig faced politician gets a pay raise.**
43. We cannot vote in politicians or legislation that will end the endless genocide that is intrinsic to the function of capitalism. We cannot abolish the incentive for profit without abolishing the system as a whole.
44. We must abolish the idea that the landlord is sent from on high to provide us with the right to live somewhere.
45. The landlord and the capitalist have stolen from us and continue to steal.
46. We must abolish this parasitic relationship, de-naturalize this notion that one person should "own" property, and that that property should be worth more than life itself.
47. We must abolish the rule of capital and the phenomenon of the individual.

48. "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." – Desmond Tutu
49. If we reverse this metaphor we get a more accurate picture of the material reality between the ruling class (minority) and the masses (majority): we are a horde of elephants wherein many remain neutral, reluctant to drive out the mouse who harasses us even though we are much larger and more powerful.
- 50. We must get together in collectives and organizations, like the Tenant Association, like the people's assembly (we can form our own city councils!), and decide for ourselves where power resides.**
51. We have the power to end the brutality and the genocide. It takes time and effort and an open heart and mind and creative resilience and communion, and conversation, and stoop watches, and political education, and propaganda, and saying FUCK YOU PIG, and making a lot of soup for your family (neighbors too), and taking naps, and reading Marx, and Walter Rodney, and Mao, and Nkrumah, and Davis, and Assata, and for fuck's sake it takes logging off sometimes, and learning from the ones in the streets and supermarkets and factories.
52. To close: all evictions, all the time, are violent.
53. Anytime someone loses their home, anytime they are forced into the street, forced to interface with the strong arm of the state, forced to compromise on their housing/health going forward, forced to negotiate with which need comes first — food or shelter — it is violent. It is now more visible because of the snow's stark canvas and the pandemic's grip on our collective psyche. Regardless, it is always violence.
- 54. The best form of eviction defense is socialism.**
- 55. Socialism is the freedom to define your reality. It is ownership over our own lives.**
- 56. We will define a reality without violence.**

LANGSTON HUGHES

Ballad of the Landlord

1940

Landlord, landlord,
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don't you 'member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?
Ten Bucks you say is due?
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on — till you get through.
You ain't gonna be able to say a word
If I land my fist on you.

*Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He's trying to ruin the government
And overturn the land!*

Copper's whistle!
Patrol bell!
Arrest.

Precinct Station.
Iron cell.
Headlines in press:

MAN THREATENS LANDLORD

TENANT HELD NO BAIL

JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS
IN COUNTY JAIL.



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