



STORE FRONT CHURCHES • Buffalo, N. Y.

PHOTOGRAPHS

MILTON ROGOVIN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conrad Forbes / Cover Photograph
editorial / BEYOND ART
exhibition review / THE ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Grace Mayer
Hyatt Mayor
Barbara Morgan
Henry Holmes Smith
Editor
Milton Rogovin / STORE FRONT CHURCHES Photo Essay

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*I have been looking over the photographs
of Negro church-goers in Buffalo taken by Milton Rogovin.
They are astonishingly human and appealing
and they take my mind back to what I wrote in Chapter Ten
of Souls of Black Folk fifty-eight years ago.*

*"Those who have not thus witnessed the frenzy
of a Negro revival in the untouched backwoods of the South
can but dimly realize the religious feeling of the slave;
as described, such scenes appear grotesque and funny,
but as seen they are awful.*

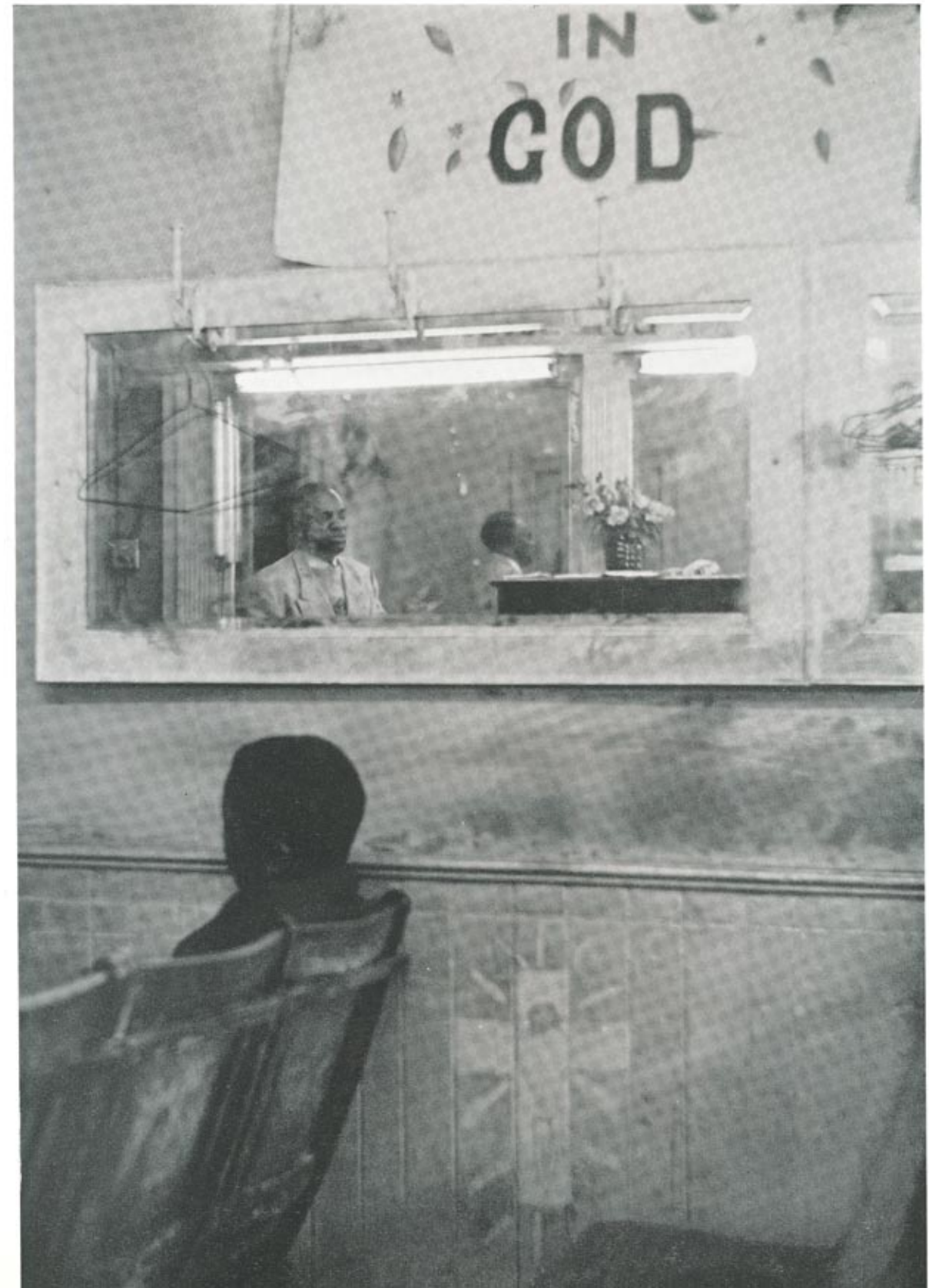
*Three things characterize this religion of the slave,
the Preacher, the Music and the Frenzy.*

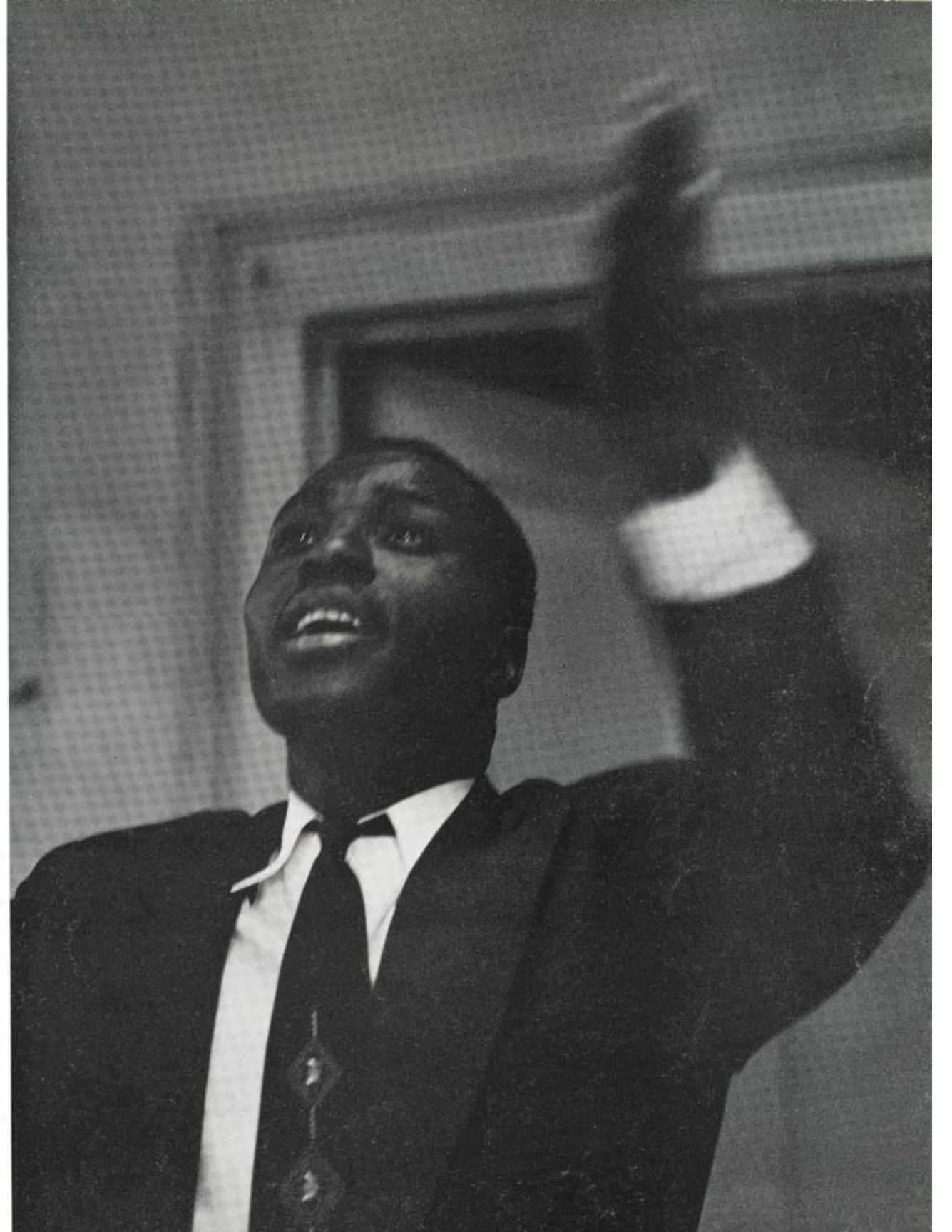
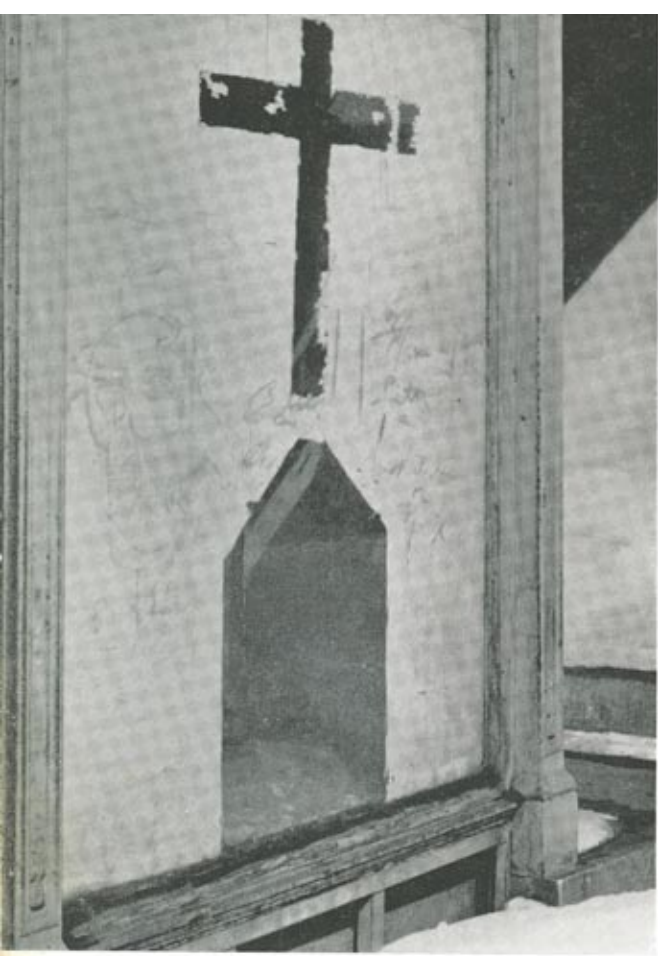
*The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro
on American soil.*

*A leader, a politician, an orator,
a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist—
all these he is, and ever too, the center of a group of men,
now twenty, now a thousand in number.*

*The combination of a certain adroitness with deep-seated earnestness,
of tact with consummate ability,
gave him his pre-eminence
and helps him maintain it.*

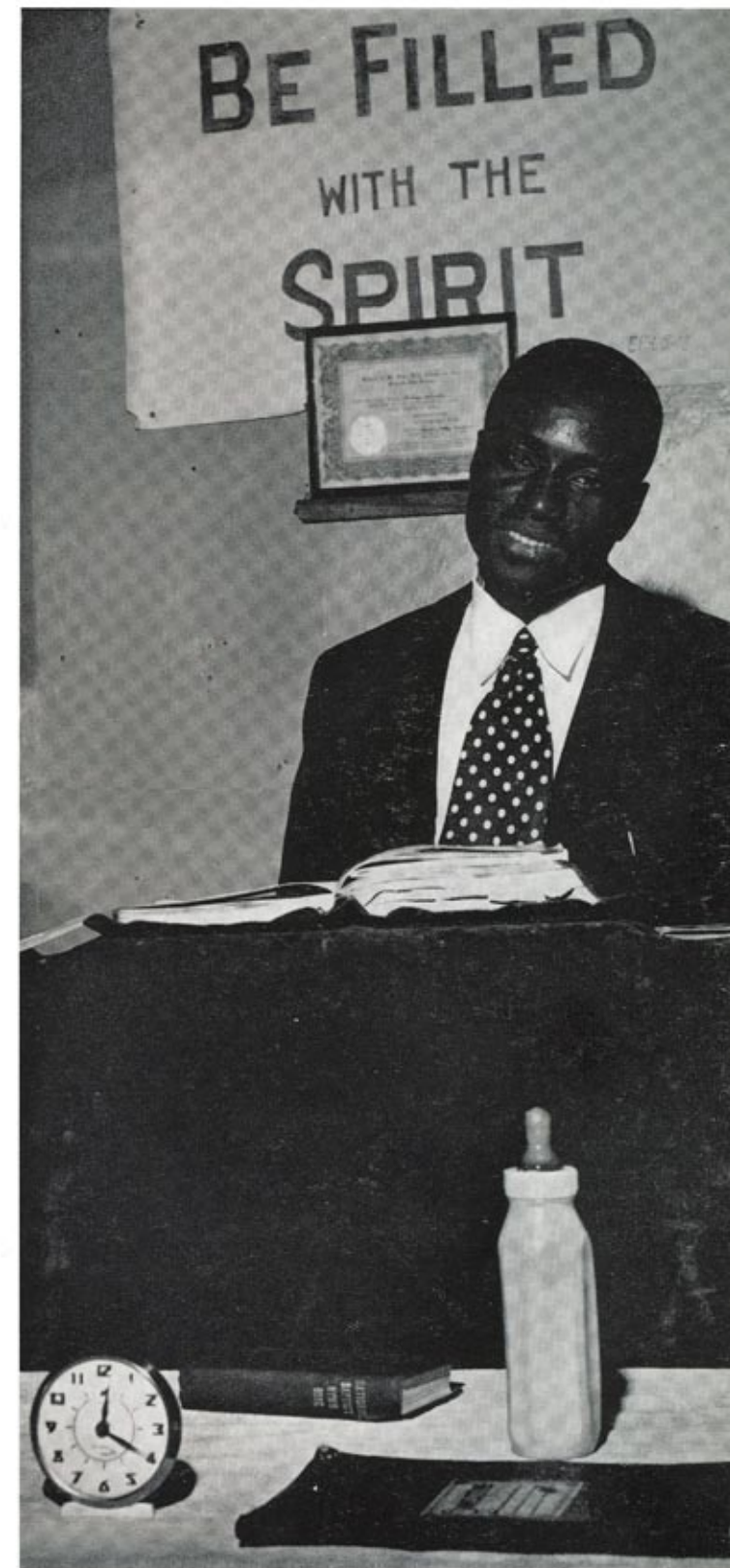
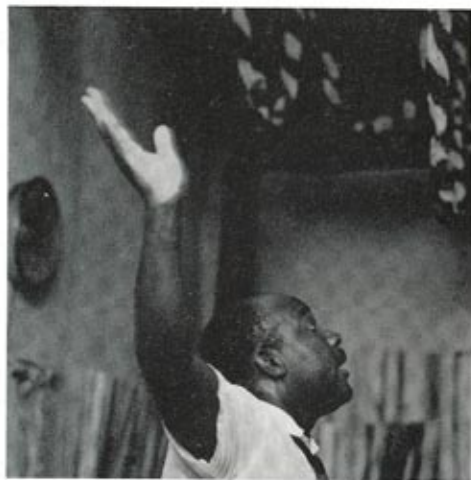
*The type, of course, varies according to time and place,
from the West Indies in the sixteenth century
to New England in the nineteenth,
and from the Mississippi bottoms to cities
like New Orleans or New York.*

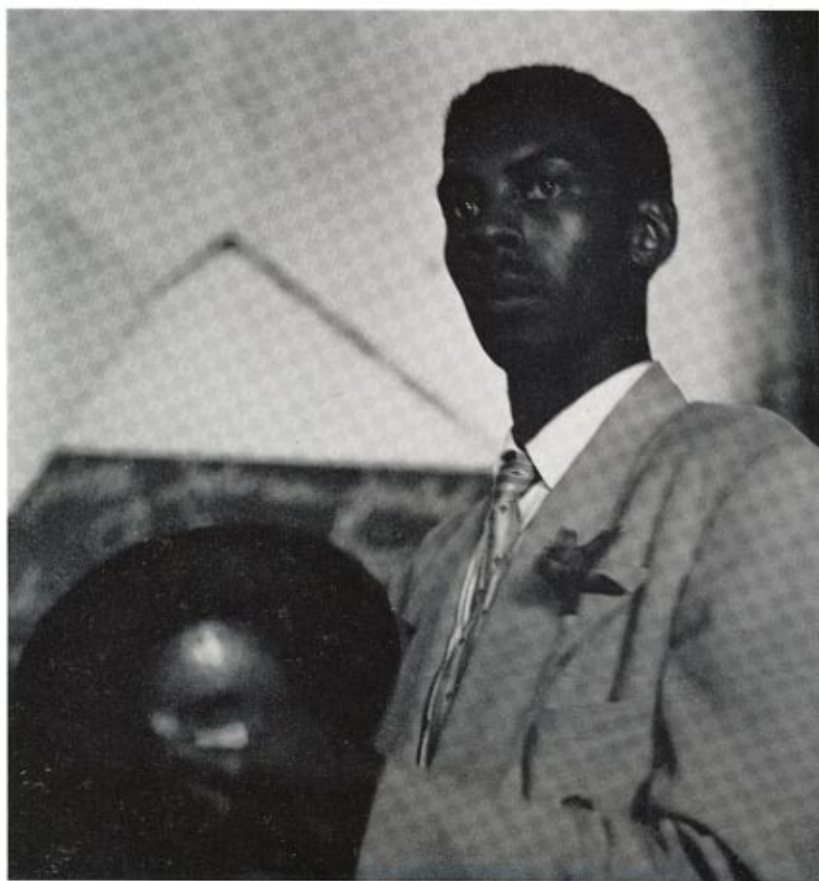


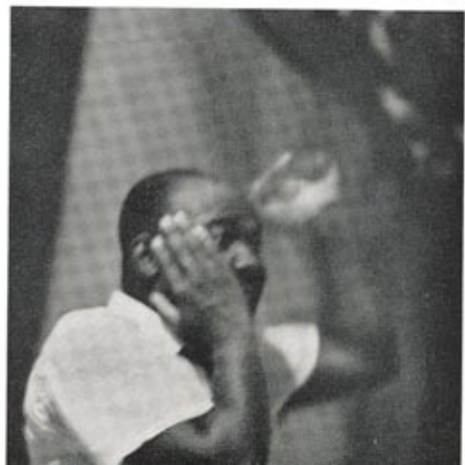
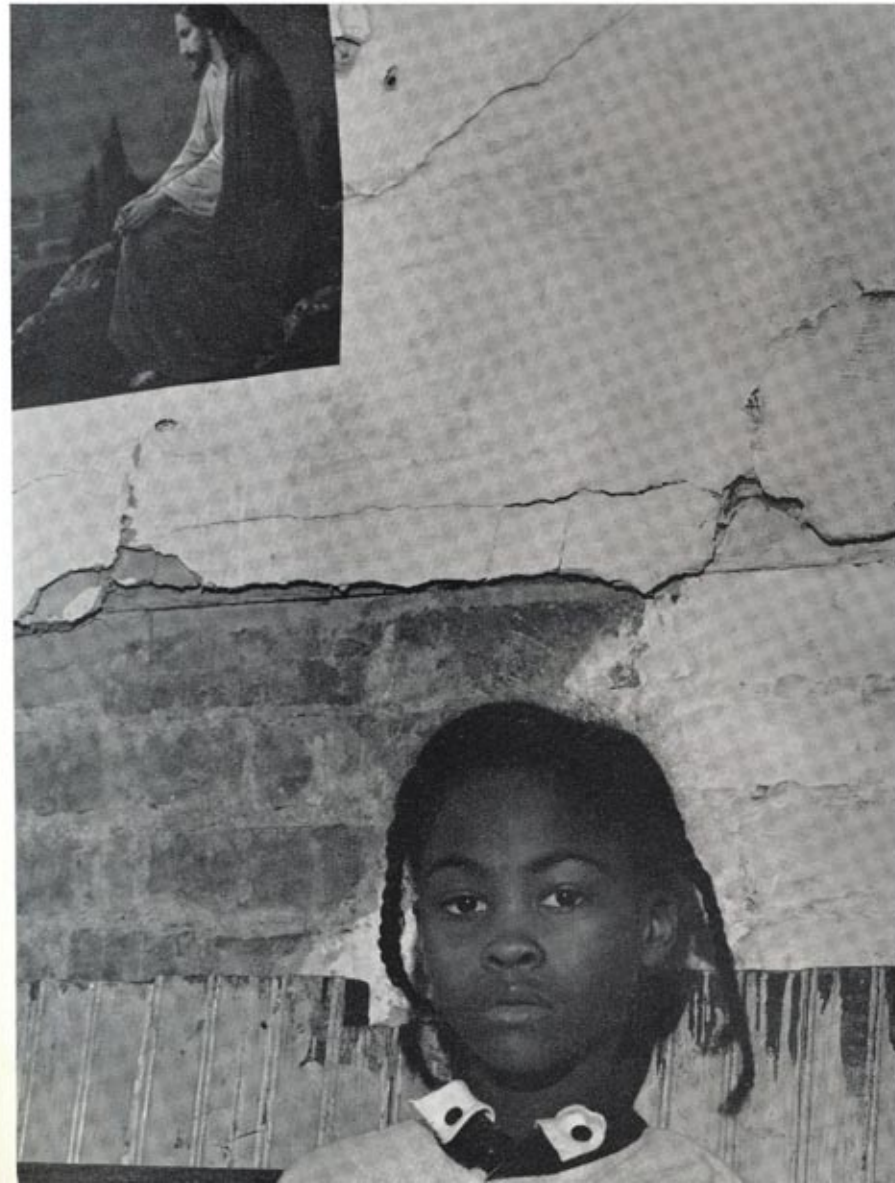


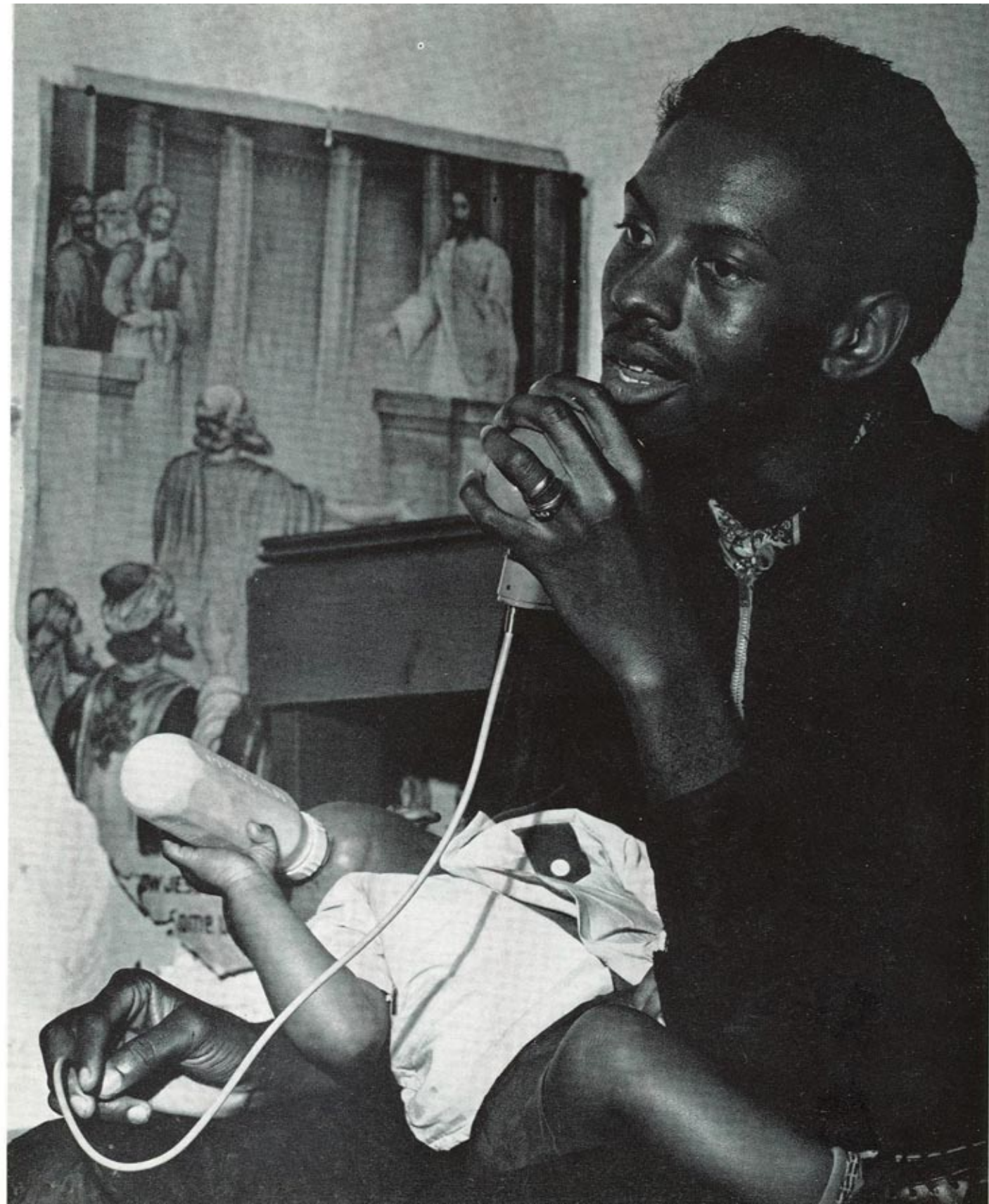
*The Music of Negro religion
is that plaintive rhythmic melody, with its touching minor cadences,
which, despite caricature
and defilement,
still remains the most original and beautiful expression
of human life and longing
yet born on American soil.
Sprung from the African forests, where its counterpart
can still be heard,
it was adapted, changed, intensified by the tragic
soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip,
it became the one true expression
of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope.*





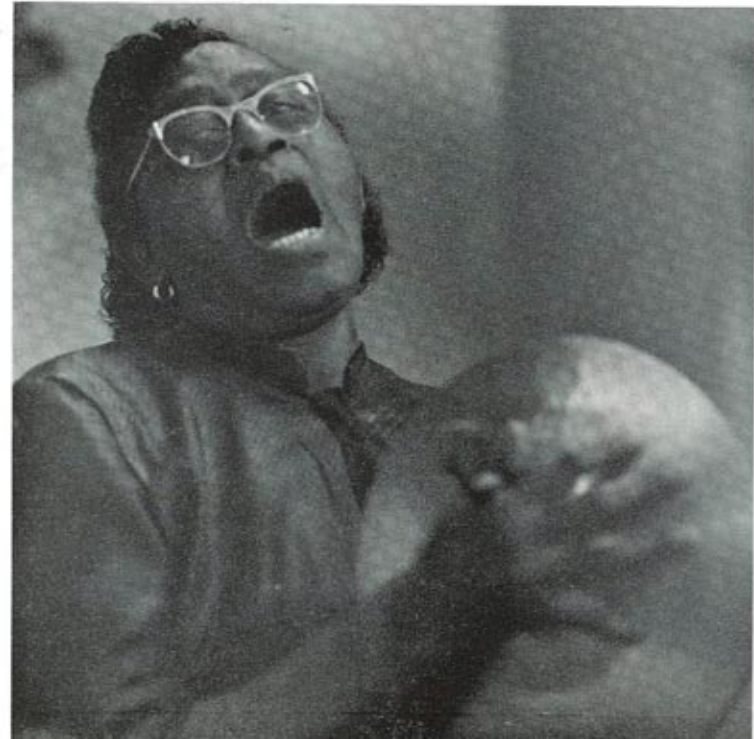
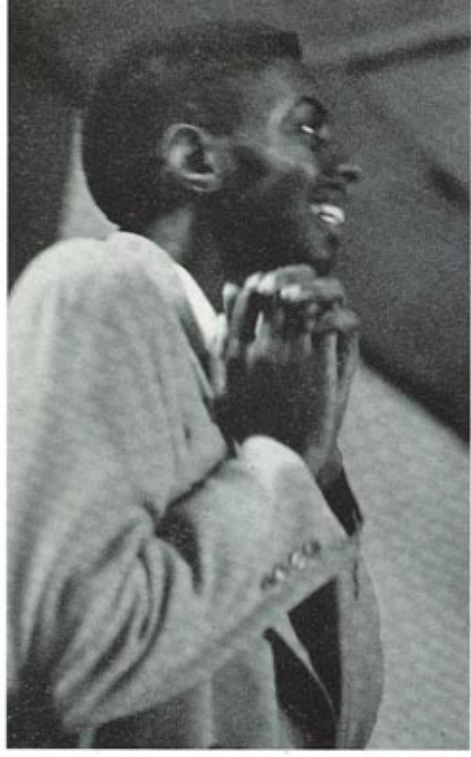


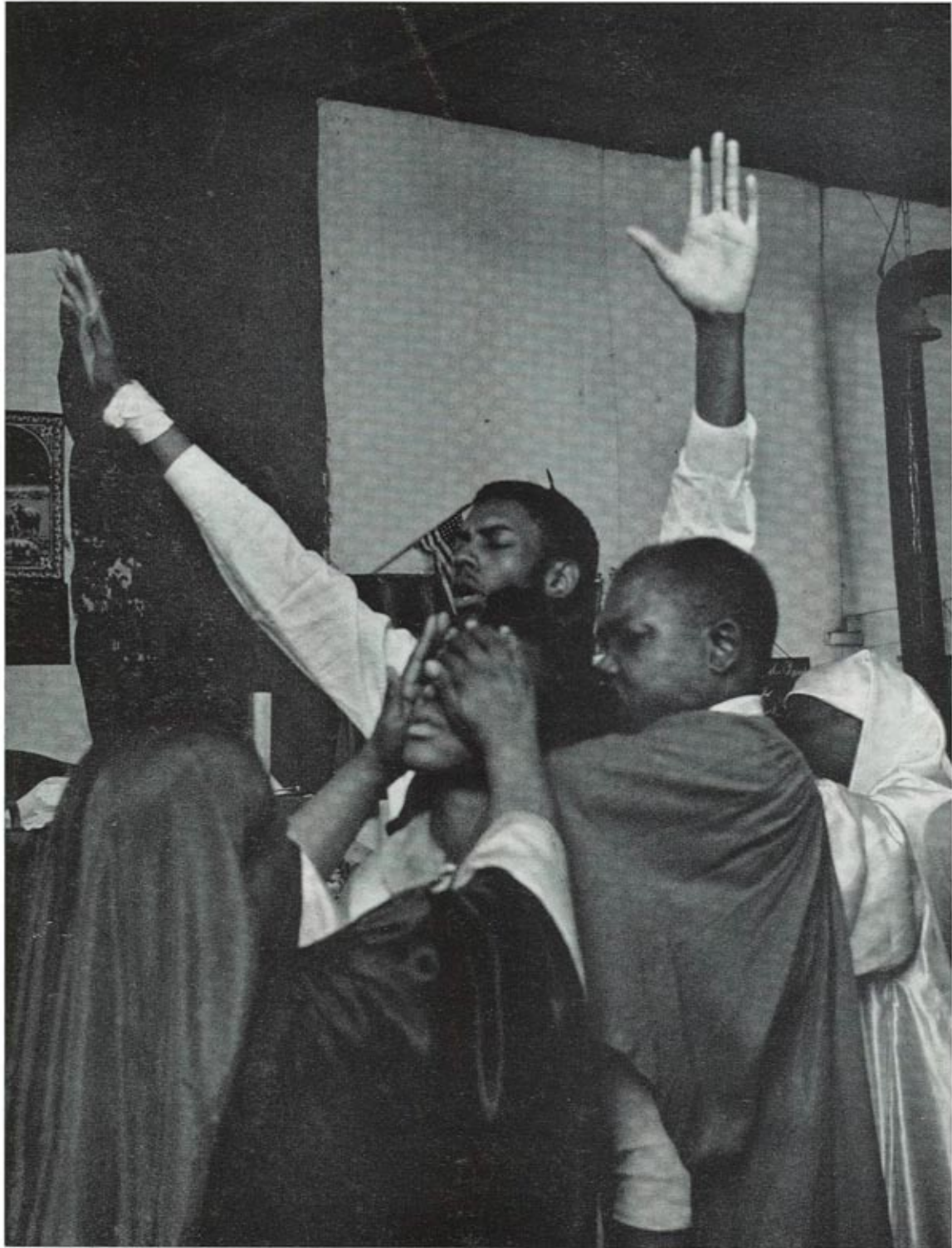




Finally the Frenzy or 'Shouting,' when the Spirit of the Lord passed by, and, seizing the devotee, made him mad with supernatural joy, was the last essential of Negro religion and the one more devoutly believed in than all the rest. It varied in expression from the silent rapt countenance or the low murmur and moan to the mad abandon of physical fervor,—the stamping, the shrieking, and shouting, the rushing to and fro and wild waving of arms, the weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance.







*All this is nothing new in the world,
but old as religion, as Delphi and Endor.
And so firm a hold did it have on the Negro,
that many generations firmly believed that without this visible
manifestation of the God
there could be no true communion
with the Invisible."*

*It is astonishing
and yet easily understandable,
that this description of the religion of the slaves
still fits the practice of present conditions
among the poor, black workers recently come to cities
like Buffalo.
It shows how little the church of America
and the other institutions of our culture
have reached these people,
and yet how alone
and segregated they live and worship.*

W. E. B. DuBois

April 5, 1961 Brooklyn, N. Y.

