

FBI Plans to Have Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver Expelled from Algiers (1971)

Source reference:

Letter from San Francisco FBI office to Director of FBI Cointelpro, March 1st 1971, located in: File: Black Extremist, 100-448006, Section 25, 70-71, in FBI Records: The Vault. (Accessible at [https://vault.fbi.gov/.](https://vault.fbi.gov/))

Source:

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION COMMUNICATIONS SECTION

3:14 PM URGENT 3/1/71 MCC
TO DIRECTOR (100-448006)
FROM SAN FRANCISCO (157-601) 3P

COINTELPRO – BLACK EXTREMISTS, RM.
RACIAL MATTER

IN AN EFFORT TO UNDERCUT CLEAVER'S POSITION IN ALGIERS AND TO POSSIBLY CAUSE THE EXPULSION FROM THAT COUNTRY OF BLACK PANTHER BUREAU FUGITIVES, BUREAU PERMISSION IS REQUESTED TO FORWARD THE FOLLOWING LETTER OSTENSIBLY FROM HUEY P. NEWTON TO THE PRESIDENT OF ALGERIA:

“HIS EXCELLENCY HOUARI BOUMEDIENNE
PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
ALGIERS, ALGERIA

“YOUR EXCELLENCY:

“PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT ELDRIDGE CLEAVER IS NO LONGER
ASSOCIATED WITH THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND CAN NO LONGER
END PAGE ONE

PAGE TWO

REPRESENT OUR REVOLUTIONARY PARTY AS AMBASSADOR TO YOUR
COUNTRY.

FOR OUR INFORMATION, CLEAVER AND HIS ASSOCIATES IN ALGERIA,
BY DIVISIVE TACTICS, HAVE BETRAYED THE PARTY AND THE
REVOLUTION AND ARE ADHERING TO THE CULT OF PERSONALITY.

“YOU WILL BE ADVISED LATER OF A SUCCESSOR FOR MR. CLEAVER

“I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR MANY PAST FAVORS AND INTEREST IN
OUR CAUSE.

“VERY RESPECTFULLY YOURS,

HUEY P. NEWTON
MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND SUPREME COMMANDER
BLACK PANTHER PARTY
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA”

SAN FRANCISCO RECOMMENDS THIS SINCE IT WILL GIVE OSTENSIBLE, OFFICIAL WRITTEN BPP NOTIFICATION TO ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT OF CLEAVER’S EXPULSION FROM BPP. NEWTON NOTIFIED CLEAVER TELEPHONICALLY AND PLANS TO PRINT A NOTICE IN THE BPP PAPER
END PAGE TWO

PAGE THREE

BUT IT IS NECESSARY THAT ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT RECEIVE SOME WRITTEN NOTICE AND FOR THIS REASON LETTER WILL BE SENT ON BPP LETTERHEAD STATIONERY WHICH IS IN POSSESSION OF THE OFFICE AND SIGNED WITH EXACT FACSIMILE OF NEWTON’S SIGNATURE.

SUCH WRITTEN NOTICE SHOULD CAUSE THE ALGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO DECLARE CLEAVER AND OTHER FUGITIVE ASSOCIATES PERSONA NON GRATA IN ALGIERS, AND MAY LEAD TO APPREHENSION IF EXPELLED FROM ALGIERS.
END

AND HOLD

Blurb:

For many people across the world, July 20th, 1969, was a memorable day. Young and old huddled around their TV sets to watch U.S. astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin take a few small steps on the cratered surface of the moon. The next day, July 21st, 1969, was perhaps a date of little significance to many of those Americans who had watched the moon landing. But on the North African coast, men, women, and children were crowding the streets of Algiers, hundreds having travelled from halfway across the world, to inaugurate the First Pan-African Festival (PANAF). State officials, writers, and artists representing nearly every African country gathered at in the streets of Algiers to celebrate the creation of a Pan-African revolutionary culture in the postcolonial era.

Both the moon landing and the Pan-African Festival took place against the backdrop of the Cold War, in which two major world powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, competed for military, scientific, and cultural superiority, forcing much of the world to side with one or the other. Algeria, to many American observers, had clearly sided with the Eastern bloc; in fact, the Soviets performed a ballet at the PANAF.¹ While the gazes of the American people may have been turned to the moon, the American government was closely eyeing the events at the PANAF, through a fleet of “informed observers,” worried that the PANAF was yet one more illustration of the Soviet’s influence over recently decolonized nations

Amongst the militant-artists who flocked to Algiers for the Pan-African Festival of Algiers were members of the American Black Panther Party, most notably Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, who were being tracked by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Counterintelligence

Program.ⁱⁱ One FBI agent reported that during the festival there was “strong evidence of Soviet influence, concerted anti-Israeli efforts on the part of the Algerians, and a definite impact on the festival by the BPP [Black Panther Party].”ⁱⁱⁱ The Cleavers had fled the United States a few months earlier, fearful of arrest, and had spent a few months looking for asylum. They ended up in Algeria just in time for the Pan-African Festival. The Algerian government housed them at the elegant Hotel Aletti and gave them a storefront office on the bustling rue Didouche Mourad where they exhibited prints by Black Panther artist Emory Douglas and held rallies. Eldridge Cleaver reportedly told an American journalist that, inspired by his encounters in Algiers, he and his Black Panther peers were developing an “indigenous Marxism. It’s not Chinese Marxism or Russian Marxism. It’s American Marxism.”^{iv}

To the FBI’s dismay the Cleavers stayed in Algiers for two years after the end of the Festival. Throughout the duration of their stay, FBI agents closely followed the Cleavers’ movements and sent copious telegrams, secret notes, and letters about the Cleavers comings and goings, their speeches, and their relationship to the Algerian press and government. Worried about the power and influence the Black Panther Party could have internationally, FBI agents desperately sought ways of getting the Cleavers out of Algeria. The problem, as the FBI saw it, was that there was no extradition agreement between Algeria and the US. So, as this source, a letter dated March 1st, 1971, demonstrates, American agents resorted to writing a fake letter from Huey P. Newton and the US-based Panther leadership, to the Algerian president, Houari Boumedienne. The letter stated that Cleaver and his associates had betrayed the Black Panther Party and the revolution and that they had fallen prey to a cult of personality. The American agents hoped that by sending this letter on Black Panther Party stationery with an exact facsimile of Huey Newton’s signature, the Algerian government would declare the Cleavers and their associates *persona non grata* in Algeria and thus expulse them to a country with which the US did have an extradition agreement.^v It is unclear if the letter was ever sent but it was not long after that the International Branch of the Black Panther Party’s relationship with both the Algerian government and the American Panthers soured, and in 1972 the Cleavers and most of their associates left Algiers for France.

Bibliography:

Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Elaine Mokhtefi, *Algiers: Third World Capital, Black Panthers, Freedom Fighters, Revolutionaries* (New York: Verso: 2018).

Paraska Tolan-Szkilnik, *Maghreb Noir: The Militant-Artists of North Africa and the Struggle for a Pan-African, Postcolonial Future* (Stanford University Press, 2023).

Source selected and annotated by Paraska Tolan-Szkilnik.

ⁱ While technically Algeria was part of non-aligned nations, the Algerian leadership’s relationship to the Soviet Union dated back to the Algerian struggle for independence. Both China and the Soviet Union had delivered armaments to Algeria during its long and drawn-out battle against French colonialism (Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 94-95). The special relationship continued after Algerian independence, in fact over the course of 1969 the presidents of the USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, and the premier of Bulgaria all visited Algeria. The Soviets had a cultural center in Algiers where Algerians could take Russian classes. To the US in the Sino-Soviet conflict, Algeria had sided with the Soviets.

(Propaganda activities of the Soviet Union, Communist China, and Cuba, 1969” U.S. Information Agency, September 1970, See pages 108, 111, and 131).

ⁱⁱ For more on the Cleavers’ time in Algiers see Kathleen Cleaver, “Back to Africa: The Evolution of the International Section of the Black Panther Party (1969-1972)”, in *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]*, (ed). Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998) ; Paraska Tolan-Szkilnik, *Maghreb Noir: The Militant-Artists of North Africa and the Struggle for a Pan-African, Postcolonial Future* (Stanford University Press, 2023); Elaine Mokhtefi, *Algiers: Third World Capital, Black Panthers, Freedom Fighters, Revolutionaries*, (New York: Verso: 2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ Eldridge Cleaver Cover Sheet, FBI, 100-HQ-447251, 45

^{iv} Eldridge Cleaver cited in Don A. Schanche, “Eldridge Cleaver Speaks from Exile,” *True for Today’s Man*, January 1970, 101, in Eldridge Cleaver FBI File #100-HQ-447251.

^v FBI Cointelpro, Black Extremist, 100-448006, Section 25, March 1st 1971, p70-71