# WHERE WE LIVE

EDITED BY DAVID HOPPE

# ESSAYS ABOUT INDIANA

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# ETHOS AND CREATIVITY

## The Impulse as Malleable

"BLACK IS my colour," says the poet Lebert Bethune. "Black is my colour . . . The gleaming song of ebony and blood that warms the rivers of the universe--belongs to me." Defines who I am in Indianapolis, shapes the nature of my creativity, influences whether I am creative, and in the final analysis determines how my creativity is received. Whether space is made. And whether I can draw from the atmosphere the nurturing I require to be the most of who I am.

"Black is my colour," says my brother, Bethune. And being Black in Indianapolis is very different from being White in Indianapolis. Each day I am thankful I need no encouragement to be proud of my Africanity, for "proudly Black" is not encouraged. It is, however, tolerated to some extent and people, Black as well as White, I think, attempt rather bravely to coexist with it. What is more acceptable, more comfortable, is a high level of acculturation. Definition: "to alter ... through a process of conditioning."

Don't make waves; don't be unpleasant; and if Truth is unpleasant, then avoid Truth. So I approached this essay with trepidation and much running from face to face to make inquiries, to see if I could nail down, without equivocation, the Truths that are part of my pulse. I often quote myself for somehow I feel (tongue in cheek, of course) that the source is flawless. So I am prone to remind audiences that "in this country we are programmed to disbelieve what we experience," and to suggest that since we are both segment and sum of all that is past it is prudent to be clear about the nature of that past experience as well as the continuing impact it has on how we view society and how we view ourselves.

Many years ago I hosted *The Black Experience*, a television show that aired each Sunday night on a local regional station. The show attempted to answer the question posed by some anonymous poet: "Who will show me myself?" And it is that nostalgic journey over a painful road that I will attempt here. It is a journey I trust will be useful as we search for direction and seriously consider the enormity of the role Ethos plays in the atrophying, or in the nurturing, of the creative spirit.

In a paper prepared to discuss the evolution of African letters, I stated, in regard to the significance of Ethos,

> ... Concern with the relationship of creativity to encounter is germane. I propose, by way of definition, that creativity is the reaction of the human spirit to the variety of its experiences; a reaction expressed through forms and structures (which may be tonal, verbal, written, visual or physical) .... Significantly the creative fruit is both determined by, and is as unique as, the intensity of the experiences and the quality of the response ..... In other words, Ethos is the environmental laboratory within which creativity, whether positive or negative, roots and is nurtured.

Many years ago I lived in a historic Black community in a section of Indianapolis so close to the heart of town I could walk there in less than fifteen minutes. That community no longer exists. And that is also part of what I need to say here.

Many years ago my father, who had briefly encountered Butler University, in what fashion I never knew, said quietly that he hated Butler. And said it with a passion I could not understand, for I had no notion that he "knew" Butler University.

"Why," I questioned.

"It's racist," he muttered fIatly.

"Oh," I said.

And that was that. We had a firm, if subliminal, understanding. I never learned the details, but I supposed it had to do with employment he had sought there. Years later I understood a little better.

My father was hardly verbose; he was succinct, and left little to the imagination. His most serious lapse into profanity was to spit out, "Confound it!" Deeply religious, he was an usher in an African Methodist Episcopal church for fifty years, and for him to say he "hated" anything, even Butler University, was extreme. So I believe his indictment of the university was, in fact, a loose denunciation of the city itself. For it was a place he visited, but one in which he could not be persuaded to stay. And early on, when I was very young, I learned why. At least, in part.

While spending part of a summer vacation here I eagerly joined my cousins in the game of saving milk bottle caps for a special free ride day at Riverside Amusement Park. The day came, perfect for an outing, and I suggested saving some of the caps for a later visit only to be informed that there was no other day. This was it. One day a year Black children could come to enjoy the rides. I gave the matter some thought, and, despite the anticipation I had shared, the jeers that I did not expect, made my own childish decision not to go. Langston Hughes speaks for all of us, then, when he says, "There ain't no back to a merry-go-round ...where's the horse for a kid who's Black?"

So I understand what **it** means, this knowing that one is "locked out" because of color. Whether it is a public facility such as a museum, or whether it is a public organization, an event, or a school to which a child has been bussed, the subtleties and strategies of "locked out" are easily read and the impact of them as psychologically harmful as they are physically limiting. Those most adept at "locked out" strategies are often those just inside what appears to be the "called-into-being" open door. "Locked out" crushes the spirit and re-channels what could be positive creativity into negative creative acts. "Locked out" is something that can be changed, something that must be changed, because for me, even at that early age, it produced an enormous rage, a rage that should not be dismissed as merely youthful and isolated.

W. E. B. DuBois understood the complexity of living Black in White America, and life for thoughtful, politically informed Black folk who see the society's contradictions clearly is not only complex but filled with the stress of double consciousness. Double consciousness requires keeping one's integrity and sense of his/her Africanity intact while trying to achieve, in the dominant culture--a Herculean task but one to be preferred to the dangers of single consciousness, or "leaving certain of his/her intellectual possessions in pawn" (Fanon, 1967) in order to achieve, or as the price for achieving, in the dominant culture.

Even though I could tell some tales, and sometimes do, about my innate political consciousness at the age of five, one has to experience the acid of psychological locking out that depends on color as the referent--not money, not manners, not clothing, not caste. Color.

When as a young adult I finally settled in Indianapolis, I discovered the marvelous summer nights at Butler's Starlight Musicals Theatre. There were seats way at the top in the back that sold for a dollar and my sons and I could spend an elegant evening under the stars hearing the same music the best seats heard, whenever I had the three dollars plus carfare, of course. The popcorn I made at home, and our thermos contained a fruit drink, sometimes hot to ward off the evening chill. We loved the music, the festive atmosphere, and we could admire the stylish clothing people wore to affairs such as this. We, of course, were appropriately neat and clean, and quite as well-behaved as anyone else in the audience, for that was the way we were, too. But we were still conspicuous, identifiable. Others. And it always seemed to me as if the value of the seats adjacent to ours fell a bit when we sat down. But we liked our seats. They were not only closer to the stars, they were close to the exits, and when the performance was over we could hurry out and escape the slow-moving crowd.

We were also regulars at the symphony. For the free concerts, that is. I remember feeling quite superior about attending the free concerts, as a matter of fact. That, I contended, set the real music lover apart from those who merely attended opening and subscription concerts because it was the thing to do, the place to be seen. We, I would whisper to the boys, in the words of a Gwendolyn Brooks poem, "are the real thing ...." We come because of the music since there certainly is no panache about being "seen" at a free concert.

Those were very special Sundays. We would hurry home from church, feel very provident and orderly over the casserole succulent and waiting in the oven, then rush to the corner to stand in whatever the weather, to wait for the bus to town. Since the symphony encompasses the entire winter season, it was often blustery, and freezing winds would whip around the three of us standing close together for warmth. But we were bundled well, and we stamped our feet constantly to keep the blood circulating.

There was, for me at least, a moment of absolute ecstasy when, wraps undone and deposited in a nearby empty seat, we could settle down in the midst of the Murat's faded red velvet and flaked gilt and escape into the cacophony of the orchestra's tuning. We preferred front row first balcony seats and tried to arrive early enough to insure that we had them.

There was one indelible moment when a tall Korean guest conductor, having distinguished himself during the first part of the scheduled program, swept through the velvet curtain at our left clad in a long black opera cape, and found a seat close by. We were enthralled.

Indianapolis, I tell friends in other places, is a city where the preservation of Euro-Armerican cultural traditions and the enhancement of those traditions has been consistent. Not only consistent, but increasingly an economic factor too significant to be ignored or dismissed. The arts are not only encouraged but subsidized. The City of Indianapolis has on occasion subsidized the arts, to the extent that federal money earmarked for the relief of concerns affecting the disadvantaged was, during one administration, diverted to the Ballet Theatre. From a Black perspective this was unconscionable and could not be rationalized away.

Mario Cuomo, governor of New York, while addressing the 1984 Democratic Convention, said in his now-historic speech: "This nation is more a *Tale of Two Cities* than it is a shining city on a hill." Cuomo was replying to statements of then-President Reagan whose "supply side" or "trickle down" theories had already set a new pace for the national government's response to the country's special and economic problems. Cuomo admitted that the country is "a shining city for those lucky enough to live in its good neighborhoods. But for the people who are excluded, locked out, all they can do is stare from a distance at that city's glimmering towers. It's an old story," he said, "as old as our history."

And so it is with Indianapolis. Looking back over almost four decades, everything has changed and nothing has changed. This, too, is a tale of two cities. For me, and close to 150,000 other persons of African descent living in this city, it has been--a Black experience.

Memory is capricious, eclectic. Certain names, captured moments. Today's recall of yesterday's incredible tenderness, its secret pain. Today's instant replay: Yesterday on parade, still fresh in the heart. A waft of perfume or the lingering odor of rage now decayed.

Late Sunday afternoons, the Mme. Walker tearoom stylishly packed, crisp gloves, the soft silks gleaming. The western sky awash with red-orange, vivid to pastel, stroked with delicate purples, sunset viewed with awe from a fourth floor project window.

Lockefield. Ah, yes. Lockefield ...

For the span of my memory this has been a city of opposing wills, two faces firmly set toward different directions-one covertly determined to maintain the status quo, to continually block any access to power, or to parity; one, advocating an active morality and its right to inclusion as an equal person rather than a

colonized one. This has been a city of perpetual confrontation, however cloaked, between the powerless and those who influence, control, and engineer the city's movement in its inexorable and often ruthless march toward "greatness," a word for which my definition will hardly suffice.

It is an American story, the leitmotif of a nation whose contradictions are all the more searing here, in a prospering highly visible "all-American City," than elsewhere.

In the beginning, in most of the Black enclaves throughout Indianapolis and even on "The Avenue" itself, there were dreams to go around, and the belief that attainment logically followed determined effort was contagious. Nearly everyone had plans, destinations, "goals," whether articulated or merely smoldering in some recess of the collective mind. Black folk were firmly convinced that with hard work and a "good" disposition the future was theirs for the taking. The group worked every bit as hard as it played, fed on its understanding of unlimited possibility, and gave off an enormous energy.

The Indiana Avenue area was what I knew best. At one time it stretched in a sprawling, random way (and always "approximately") from 16th and Illinois Street to the Avenue's matrix, to Senate Avenue, to Michigan, to Fall Creek, to Tenth and so on. It included the smart new Flanner House homes erected through sweat equity contracts, and the proud new Fall Creek YMCA. "The Avenue" began and ended in town, and "town" always seemed to be one's destination whenever one ventured outside the brotherhood, the sisterhood of the community; one only worked elsewhere.

Once while employed as a typist I was invited to my employer's home for dinner. Although I cannot remember what she served, I remember vividly how difficult it was to get there, how long my sons and I stood on street corners transferring from bus to meandering bus, and I remember wondering what her neighbors thought about her iconoclastic socializing. It was not, I understood, a usual gesture for that particular community. She lived, if I remember correctly, on Haverford near Kessler. At that time the only persons of color who frequented the area were Black domestics and yard men.

Indianapolis was not the city then that it is now. Downtown was simply "downtown." No malls, no glitz, no glitter. The outlying areas, the "bedroom communities," while connoting all that the phrase implies, were merely places that were geographically difficult and time consuming to reach by public transportation**.** Broad Ripple I knew by name only. Meridian Hills had a mystic quality, a sort of "golden" aura. They were places White folk of some substance lived and striving Black folks of little substance either worked or were invited by liberal Whites to visit. I rarely lost my sense of two cities.

Many Black folk thought of Indianapolis as urban, "up South." It was better than being “down South," but it retained many of the negative propositions of the deep South, and was not yet as enlightened or "progressive" as its West or East Coast counterparts. Conservatism and racism were alive and compatible.

To our discredit there is, even today, an amazing retention of that early sensibility. It is expressed, however, with much more class, much more elan, and many Black folk are so enthralled by the smiles they do not read the eyes nor understand psychological "locking out."

Then, if one had ambitions one knew that ultimately the only way to realize them fully would be to leave the comfort and the encouragement of one's neighborhood for some far city more responsive to one's skills.

The neighborhood was sustaining. Children were protected and insulated by classrooms manned by Black teachers who cared passionately about their charges' future, who saw promise in them, loved them, chastised them promptly, and encouraged them to be more than even they envisioned. School was not a place where teachers and staff feared Black students, not a war zone nor a place of controlled pain and anguish that manifested itself in student indifference and rebellion. Those schools were places where Black children understood that above all else they were loved, and being cared for with love.

Since busing, one can make no such blanket statement about the dynamics of education for Black children in the Indianapolis and township schools.

In the communities of which I was a part there were the athletes, legendary soon-to-be national figures remembered for their high school prowess and their alma mater no matter which professional team they might sign with or star for later. Today's athletes train, perform, and disappear into colleges across the nation. They are not hugged to the collective bosom; there is no "collective bosom," there is no "we."

When the city was ready to phase in its plans to appropriate the area for the economic convenience and pleasure of its dominant White population, bulldozers cut swaths through first one and then another of the Black communities. Small houses that stood in the way of such progress brought minuscule "market value" amounts to their protesting owners, amounts that in no way reflected the years of hard labor, of "scrimping" and "scraping," and love, that had been invested. Homes crumbled as insignificant Black home owners, many already elderly, watched powerlessly, their protests lost in the steel-on-steel of advancing heavy machinery. They had become that era's "new poor" through no fault of their own and with the help of the city's machinations many would soon see their names added to the welfare rolls.

Black people did not want the expressway to come through their neighborhoods, but it did, displacing them, their way of life, their cohesiveness, their sense of themselves as persons who have value, who matter.

If men and women cannot defend their land, their homes, their life's work, their accomplishments, against a determined government of people unlike themselves, they understand themselves only too clearly as "non people," and they understand that they are perceived as "non people" in the minds of their own government. Is geography, whether in North America or South Africa, a significant qualifier when bulldozers raze the homes of the poor, the Black, the powerless?

Black people did not want the schools in their neighborhoods emptied of their children and closed. Busing? For some, the answer was yes; for many more, the answer has always been "no!" But for all, the only acceptable solution would have been to apply the disruption of busing across the board to all children, not primarily and mainly to Black children. Across the board dislocation did not happen. No Decatur Central children are bused into my neighborhood, for the school in my neighborhood is closed.

When the realization set in that the Black community was expendable, that our homes, schools, churches, businesses, playgrounds were expendable--that we, in fact, were expendable--something changed. Something indefinable that ate away at the core of our togetherness, clawed away some of the dreams, and consumed many of those less able to survive.

Chaos and anger and hostility followed. We began, gradually, to hear more and more about "Black on Black crime" as the powerless began to fight among themselves, for the real opponent was too well entrenched, his control seemed almost absolute, and his “weaponry” much too sophisticated, too state of the art for the community to successfully engage. But oh, they did try. I found clippings and photographs, articles about confrontations, and snapshots of press conferences. And nothing has changed but the language. The community did try. But the dispersal, the fragmentation, the wanton obliteration left their legacy. It was a legacy of broken spirit, and it brought with it an insidious sense of hopelessness that would subliminally infect all levels of the Black community for several decades. This was hopelessness born of a new, more biting realization of Black powerlessness. It defined in ways much more powerful than words our involuntary sub-ordinance to a white city structure whose aims, plans, and desires were significantly different from our own, and it said our absolute vulnerability to that structure's caprice. Nevertheless, the Black community's leaders continued to strive and the common folk still struggled to overcome in the face of a disdainful system.

Somehow the line from the civil rights classic "We Shall Overcome," with its wistful "someday" as a sardonic tag, has always seemed extra-ordinarily cynical when sung in the midst of the structured dismemberment of a racial group. It is difficult to explain "destruction" in the midst of construction and plenty, or to "prove" a destroyed environment in the midst of modern renovation, elegance, and urban beauty that is almost sylvan in its perfection. Difficult to find the anger to rail at such beauty, except that the destruction, the "locking out," has also been psychological--and has left such apathy in its wake. The accommodations, the compromises have taken their toll.

One would have to have known the people, walked the streets. To understand the enormity of what transpired, one would have to have been there, somewhere in the beginning, during that time when hope boogalooed, time-stepped, and literally "ran wild" down the Avenue and throughout the flurry of neighborhoods that comprised the city's Black community.

The planned obsolescence of a thriving Black community near the heart of the city was eventually successful and resulted in the demolition of schools, private homes, churches, small Black businesses, private social facilities, public recreation areas, and most importantly the general destruction of a sense of community and a way of life that was in fact the matrix for many of today's Black "gentry." We are talking, still, of Ethos and how powerfully it impacts the spirit, for none of this could have happened without the blessing and the contrivance of the official city government:

1976

> I can assure you . . . I feel that the area occupied by the Lockefield Garden Apartments is critical to the expansion . . . we . . . feel that the Lockefield area should be demolished and made available as well as . . . (Excerpted from a local administrator's letter to the Indianapolis Department of Metropolitan Development, November 3, 1976)

1988

> LOCKEFIELD GARDENS
> DOWNTOWN LIVING AT ITS BEST
>
> A National Historic Landmark, built in 1936, Lockefield Gardens once again brings the tradition of urban living to life. Experience the exciting renaissance of downtown Indianapolis as a resident of this distinctive new apartment community, Lockefield Gardens--where the past embraces the future for the way you live today. (Excerpted from descriptive/promo for the newly designed and erected as well as renovated Lockefield Gardens, September, 1988)

The community is gone. Razed. Bulldozed. Its striving, hopeful population scattered to the fringes of nowhere. Removed in the name of progress, to make room for the new population waiting, figuratively, on the drafting board. A new area, smart, new people--very few of whom look anything like those dispossessed.

It was the replacement, the substitution of one kind of person for another just as desirous of a good life, that left a bitterness, created a deep psycho-logical rift--a lasting hurt beneath the trauma, from which Indianapolis will be slow to recover. Particularly since the wound has only been exacerbated, not healed by the city's subsequent insensitivity to many other issues of African-American concern.

There are still smiles, there are still handshakes, speeches about progress and revitalization made by a few Black and many White entrepreneurs from both the private and public sectors. Black and White heads nod sagely, and Blacks scurry for grants and pull and scrape in a more sophisticated manner than their forefathers, to curry favor, to "get along," and to "get over." But no one is fooled. Everything takes

place over the ever-present battered body of the victim. The fresh new buildings, the careful designer-tech landscaping are constant and bitter reminders of Black powerlessness. And White power.

All this is Ethos. And it is within this frame that the Black creative spirit comes to some resolute if battered fruition. Small wonder that our art is pulsed by political nuances. The real wonder is that in the hands, nationally, of our finest practitioners Black artistry remains aesthetically competitive enough to capture, over the years, Pulitzers in poetry, literature, and theatre.

There is, however, anger and a residual bitterness that is very much alive in the Black community. It is anger nurtured by the continuing history of police violence against the city's Black residents.

Although paralleled by police actions, shootings and brutality in other cities, it is certainly no more palatable. Indianapolis has a record of brutality and unconscionable mayhem that is historical, one that cannot be dismissed. Police racism is not accidental, nor is it merely the capricious acts of a few "bad apples." But, if it is capricious, then the horror escalates, for not once in the last twenty years has any policeman been convicted of the unjustified killing of a Black person. Each Black death has been steadfastedly justified, endorsed, and unqualifiedly supported by the hierarchy of city and police officials who have consistently found the officers involved blameless.

The most recent justification by the Indianapolis Police Department is that of the Michael Taylor death. Michael Taylor, a sixteen-year-old Black, clad only in a tank top, shorts, sneakers, and socks, allegedly shot himself in the temple while seated in the back of a police car, his wrists firmly handcuffed behind him. The case has been officially closed. This finding was supported by the Black community's independent investigation that had somehow been turned over to a retired Indianapolis deputy chief of police. After a lifetime of good and faithful service in the department, and after having carefully risen to such unheard-of heights, it hardly mattered that he was Black. Many citizens, Black and White, who still insist on justice in the Michael Taylor death understand all too well that it is the city's hierarchy, the powers behind the thrones, that they fight, not merely the police department.

Obviously the experience of Indianapolis' Black citizens with the city's police department is searing, brutal, and deadly in too many instances. The indelible message, one that cannot be misconstrued, is that Black life is expendable; Black people do not count as "people."

Again we raise the issue of Ethos and its impact on the human mind and spirit when the climate is one of trauma and almost unmitigated stress. For many of the city's Black citizens this is merely part of what living in Indianapolis is all about.

Of course there are other ways Black folk experience Indianapolis and I, too, as integral with the group, experience those with considerable pleasure.

I enjoy fine restaurants, I frequent the museums. A tennis hacker since I was twelve, I am a regular at the pro and exhibition matches. I am a sports buff, so Olympic trials, cross-country skiing, Pan Am Games, here I come. And I blessed Indianapolis when it named the Velodrome after Major Taylor without my assistance; confessing, now publicly, that if it had not been for the city I might never have known about Major Taylor. I've enjoyed the marvelous New Zoo, looked forward to the Circle City Classic at the domed stadium, and am sorry I missed the Colts game with the Bears.

As we've said, this is a lovely city, and with considerable ambivalence I admit: it engages one aesthetically in the most delightful way. And it is true--a lot has changed in Indianapolis over the last four decades. Certainly the city has prospered if a changing skyline is synonymous with prosperity. It is also true that a significant segment of the Black community has done well. There is a coterie of wealthy Black residents, and, scattered throughout the city, a community of affluent young Blacks. Upwardly mobile, some have been attracted to the city because of its new cosmopolitan reputation; some have chosen to settle here because of the availability of corporate slots for bright young Black folk convinced both of their own skill at "gamesmanship" and their capacity to "hang." While this is also

what living in Indianapolis means, it is such a minuscule part that I mention it merely to keep the record straight. Locked out is not total; it merely prevails.

Indianapolis is truly dichotomous, a city in which contradictions are the norm. It is easy to be deluded here, especially when one *prefers* delusion to clarity. It may be that, due to our high visibility, Black musicians seem to abound. This is, however only partially true and then of certain areas/places--not across the board. Indeed, a common complaint among many members of the Black music community in Indianapolis is that although appropriately skilled and available, they are, with few exceptions, discriminated against by local entrepreneurs or contractors who hire for the lucrative but--more importantly--emotionally gratifying sidemen jobs that occur when major artists perform in the Indianapolis area: Even when the artists happen to be African American the backup musicians hired will invariably be White. Moreover, with a few exceptions, African American musicians are almost frozen out of the more prestigious and better paying engagements despite the reservoir of excellent Black talent

The usual response to the charge of economic racism in music in Indianapolis is the institutionalized "We can't find a competent one." Because of its inaccuracy the allegation is insulting and demeaning to the city's Black musicians, whose rebuttal invariably has been, "You don't *want* a competent one; you don't want any."

Incredibly, and against the logic of the dollar, the manager of an elegant hotel lounge admitted that in his *hope* to attract more White customers he was changing the room's orientation from jazz to pop or country. His stated intent was to eliminate the burgeoning African American audience, however chic and well behaved, that had over the past months filled the room past capacity.

The litany of superior Black talent lost to Indianapolis because no opportunity to grow creatively and to prosper economically existed here reads like a page from some international *Who's Who:* Curry, Baker, J. J. Johnson, Ridley, Spaulding, Webster, et al. The problem for African Americans has always been political. It has never been a problem of talent, or a problem of competency as is often claimed. The problem has always been where to take an enormous potential or a superior talent. If there are not areas into which the artist can expand, and if the Ethos is hostile and non-receptive, how long will he or she push the creative urge to its periphery? Major Black talents decay and atrophy in Indianapolis because there is nowhere for them to "go"; no impetus toward an escalating creative explosion because there has been no forum, no platform, no arena in which to develop. There is a compulsion to grow that every creative artist feels if his spirit, nurtured by his reality, has any reason at all to sense for itself some future fulfillment. **It** has been about politics in Indianapolis; not about art, not about creativity. Other than Kevin Pugh, how many of Indianapolis' Black youth have come through the Indianapolis Ballet Theatre during the span of its existence? Is it because we can't dance?

Black creative artists are part of the fringe element the Reverend Jackson talks about when he speaks of "those locked out" of society's normal channels, society's usual, often subsidized, always-encouraged routes to maximization. It has been about politics, it has never been about talent.

We may be able to live with the fact that young Black adults have to leave Indiana to find the recognition, the inclusion, and the opportunity to grow their talent deserves. Although this is also true of many young Whites, I would argue that the similarity ends there. For, when Whites leave, whatever the reason, they know they have not been rejected or "locked out" because their skin is white. But can we live with the unconscionable waste of creative potential that is caused by Indiana's failure to find important the death of that potential in its Black citizens?

At a recent gathering I was struck by the sincerity of one speaker who encouraged a "system of freedom of expression." Struck, because the artistic community that I am on occasion invited to join seems to regard art and politics as separate and conflicting entities, all experience to the contrary. In such a climate, of course, creative expression is not freely extended to political viewpoints that are at

variance to what is considered the norm. In fact, a rather firm line is drawn, a line that can become far from subtle if occasion demands. My experience has shown that often even discourse becomes a matter of broken field running for all involved--Black/White liberals, Black/White conservatives. And there I sit--symbolic of all the social ills that creativity in Indiana is expected to transcend. There I sit.

What we find is that racism, in this up-South city at the end of the twentieth century, is like a steel strand encased in nylon then covered in some luxurious fabric. The intent is to avoid, if possible, blatant offenses, to soothe, mollify, if necessary dissemble--while racism, the steel strand, still effectively does the job.

All this is Ethos. We have been examining an Ethos that, in matters that are substantive, is limiting and restrictive. And Ethos is a shaping element, maybe the most influential of all the factors that impact on the ultimate empowering of, or destruction of, the Black creative spirit in Indiana, or elsewhere.

The creative urge to be, or to do, springs as directly from our Ethos as day and night from the earth's turnings. Impetus requires a matrix. Therefore, if Ethos is our shaping matrix, and if the arts community is concerned with exploring Indiana as Ethos, and if being Black in Indiana (or more specifically, Indianapolis) is measurably different from being White, then a different Black response to the challenge of, or lack of challenge from, the Ethos may well be expected.

A difference in focus and concern is a very natural requisite to what are contrived and unnatural situations. It is not so simple as whether one will or will not elect to respond to the circumstances of Ethos. Challenge elicits response and the response may just as easily be negative as positive.

In other words, the creative urge is called forth by what one experiences within one's Ethos. The creative spirit will respond fully and positively if the forum exists, if possibility stands plainly in view; this is the time when challenge has been received and understood.

If the creative urge, responding to what for the Black community is the ongoing stress and trauma of Ethos, is not empowered or enabled to produce positively because that possibility has not been disclosed, the creative fruit may either atrophy unexpressed, or it may find expression in ways that are negative and socially destructive. The first of these two options represents a tremendous human and cultural loss to society, the latter a tremendous waste of tax dollars in erecting and maintaining bases of short-range semi-control. And, in my experience, Indianapolis has issued very few clear creative challenges to its Black residents.

Moreover, if there is validity in my definition of creativity one can find some rationale for the exodus of Black talent from Indiana and the subsequent explosion of world-class creativity by Black Indiana natives in more hospitable places around the globe.

There are a few exceptions--musicians, writers, artists who retain Indiana as their base but look outside the state for fulfillment: notably, the late Wes Montgomery who deliberately subordinated his career to other priorities; Dr. David N. Baker, Chairman of the Jazz Department and distinguished Professor of Music on Indiana University's, Bloomington campus. A major composer, director, performer, and a figure of international renown, his creative genius receives greater exposure on the world's stage than in Indiana. Certainly none of his major works have been performed by the Indianapolis Symphony. Finally, and most recently, the exit of William Henry Curry from Indianapolis to a rural retreat. In a state known more for its open real estate market than for its open attitude toward the arts, Curry's experience as associate conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra rarely allowed him to demonstrate that he is considered by many of the national classical hierarchy the premier young conductor in the country. Curry, at thirty-three, now joins the ranks of Black expatriates whose enormous prestige in their fields quite paradoxically serves to enhance Indiana's out-of-state image. No matter how the state's arts communities, and arbiters, may choose to ignore the significance of this

explosion of Black talent that occurs outside Indiana's borders, the ironic dimensions of the pattern are not lost on most observers.

To the man in the street it appears that the arts in Indianapolis are supported by the city's elite. Top corporations, firms, businesses, and prestigious and wealthy individuals seem to give both their money and their time to participate in the cultural life of the city. And are not these same individuals, corporations, firms, and businesses--the city's movers and shakers--the back room designers of city policy? In ways that often appear inexplicable, blacks are tacitly excluded from the channels that access power.

Maybe the arts community, which is central to the city's effective development and necessary for its continued growth, can do something to rectify what appears to be tacit but in-place policy, not merely a capricious practice. If it decides it can or will, and a clear, cold intellectual decision is called for, then it will need to examine its own heart. It is there that change, the railing against its own hypocrisy, must begin. I know. It is about politics.

Engaged in the process of summation, at one conference, a participant admonished, "Don't bring me your ills" a statement reflective of Indiana's rather classic mindset. "Ills," however, are an integral part of the larger picture, part of Ethos, part of Indiana, and they must also become a concern of the arts before giant steps can be taken to maximize the uses of culture in order to enhance the quality of life for all of Indiana's citizens.

We began this essay with the loose premise that although many things do change in Indianapolis, many significant others, including the city's obvious disdain for its Black citizens, remain very much the same:

### City Requests "Delisting" of Avenue from Historical Register

"The last straw." That's what a number of the city's Black leaders are calling the city's latest episode in a long list of developments which have led to the downfall of Indiana Avenue…Removal from the Register (of Historic Places) would leave nine buildings on the Avenue vulnerable to the City's wrecking ball... " (*Indianapolis Recorder*, October 29, 1988)

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Black is my colour ...
The force that swarms the sky
At the apogee of a strange night
Engulfing the white moon
Belongs to me.
~ Lebert Bethune