

Being “proudly artistic” in Indianapolis: A tale of 2 cities

“It has been about politics, it has never been about talent.” ~ Mari Evans

The June conversation at The Build was visited by Mr. Rashaad Trapp, aka Black Eddie, who passes through town here and there from Columbus, OH. As the community forum returned to what has been a common concern: the challenges of being an artist in Indy...and with it, the possibility of being more successful and appreciated elsewhere, Rashadd broke into the conversation. Almost like a therapist, or old friend from high school, he basically said, and with love mind you: Let me be honest, “Indianapolis doesn’t have an identity.” There was a moment of silence followed by some homage to his point. We all knew what he meant; yet, we all did not.

Personally I agree with Black E’s sentiment and it’s why I wrote “The Babyface Syndrome” which was published in the *Star* and *NUVO* in 2005: “Since those with good ideas leave Indy to seek their fortune, if you have an idea and you’re still here, the idea must not be any good or you’d be gone. Thus, local talent/ideas are either rejected outright or discouraged. The problem is Indy’s stuck in a late-adolescent period. Like a teenager, it’s constantly seeking its own identity. Instead of being comfortable with who we are, we doubt, hesitate, or apologize.” See p.10 of *Indilemmapolis, IN* at <http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Indilemmapolis-IN.pdf>

“The most frightening thing about Indianapolis is Indianapolis, the fact that it continues to undermine itself by being someone other than what it is or who it is.”

~ Transcript from Callers #43-#47, *The Manufactured History of Indianapolis*

As The Build* continues exploring being an artist in the music community of our Indianapolis, let’s consider the views of local and nationally acclaimed poet, writer and activist Mari Evans (1919-2017). vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Mari-Evans-Ethos-Creativity-in-Indianapolis.pdf

“For a 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; the other advocating an active morality and its right to inclusion as an equal entity 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 the inexorable and often ruthless march toward ‘greatness’...” ~ Mari Evans

For Mari Evans, life here for conscientious, thus politically informed Indianapolis musicians, is to exist in 2 Indys. The resulting complex contradiction is filled with the stress of living with conditions close to Du Bois “double consciousness” which “...requires keeping one's integrity and sense of his/her Africinity intact while trying to achieve, in the dominant culture.” Thus, the challenge for local musicians is keeping a sense of their creativity/art (i.e., one's integrity) intact while being an artist.

“Indianapolis is truly dichotomous; a city in which contradictions is truly the norm. It is easy to be deluded here, especially when one prefers delusion to clarity.” ~ Mari Evans, *Clarity as Concept*

In her essay “Ethos and Creativity in Indianapolis” Mari compares the dangers of single consciousness, or leaving certain of intellectual\creative talents “in pawn” in order to “achieve,” or as the price for achieving in Indy’s mainstream.

Mari notes to be “proudly artistic” is not encouraged here. It is, however, “...tolerated to some extent and people, black as well as white attempt rather bravely to coexist with it—though what is more acceptable, more comfortable, is a high level of acculturation” defined as “to alter ... through a process of conditioning.”

“[Here in Indianapolis,] we are programmed to disbelieve what we experience, this impacts how we view society and how we view ourselves.” ~ Mari Evans

I see Mari’s above point as this: Our city intentionally discredits and dismantles any sense of authenticity marginalized persons/groups have. She re-states her contention that this accepted level

of “acculturation” becomes the new normal because we are “conditioned”/defined by the pervasive and powerful hegemony** and epistemology*** of Indy’s European American-based reality matrix.

“Indianapolis, I tell friends in other places, is a city where the preservation of Euro-American 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.” ~ Mari Evans

Altho as a result of this acculturation/conditioning to “fit in,” The Build members and those the forum is trying to reach may not have the clearest self-definition and thus a genuine view/sense of who we/they are. Past similar situations she experienced drew out from her this question and challenge:

“Who will show me myself?” ~ Mari Evans

How have artists responded over the years to Naptown’s inherent contradictions, conformity, and economic realities? Mari says, “They left town...”

“If one had ambitions as an artist, 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 ~ Mari Evans

“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.” ~ Mari Evans

“...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.” ~ Mari Evans

And, if those involved in all the arts did not leave, Mari warned, there was a price to pay: Staying here in Indy and accommodating and compromising one’s expression, one’s affirmation of their existence, which is the very purpose of their art, could take their toll and lead to apathy.

“Who will show me myself?”

Let’s get back to Mari’s plea: “Who will show me myself?” Hey! There’s good news! We now have an answer to her skeptical question: Who will show me myself? *The Build will.*

The Build must take on the challenge to produce art that reflects and shows us ourselves and so who we are.

“The final aim is not to know, but to be. Yes, it’s important to ‘Know thyself’ but this is so you can at least be who you are. ‘Be yourself’ is the last motto.”

~ Paraphrased from D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*

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Indy’s *status quo* sustains predominance by its “traditions.” A major way is through the arts--hiding their political purposes behind an ideology that the arts are purely about aesthetics and “taste.” To the contrary, *the arts must be discussed in political science class not just philosophy class.*

“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*: [sax/Jason] Curry, [cello/composer/David] Baker, [trombone] J. J. Johnson, [bass/Larry] Ridley, [sax/James] Spaulding, [sax/composer/Russell] 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.” ~ Mari Evans

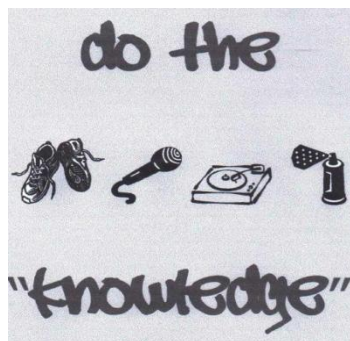
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*<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=the%20build%3A%20a%20music%20community%20forum>

hegemony [hi-jem**-uh-nee, **hej**-uh-moh-nee]: predominance, supremacy

***epistemology [ih-pis-tuh-**mol**-uh-jee]: the study of how knowledge is created--especially the critical study of its validity, methods, and scope

Hip hop’s epistemology is represented by the “do the ‘knowledge’” concept



Here are samples of a variety of ways of knowing/creating knowledge/naming things.

3. Western epistemologies are not the only epistemologies in the world

Non-linear epistemologies	Other epistemologies	
	<p>~African~ “The inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies in higher education in south Africa” by Dr. Soul Shava</p>	<p>~Female~ Stand Point Theory ~Deaf~</p>
	<p>Decolonizing Epistemologies</p>	<p>~Hip Hop~ do the knowledge”</p>