

## **A Spirit and Place Festival Event The Price of Progress: A Conversation with Mari Evans and David Baker**

David Baker, a distinguished professor and jazz musician and Mari Evans, a renowned poet, provide commentary an insight into the development of IUPUI and the controversial issue of urban renewal versus neighborhood displacement.

**Date:** November 25, 2009

**Duration:** 5:45

### **Transcript**

[First Man] IUPUI: who else? They were taking the land. They dislocated people. There was a five year plan and a twenty-five year plan, but there were people with forked tongues that lied to us; that told us that we were a part of the movement. They promised us one half of Indiana Avenue that we could develop it.

Then, there was the deterioration and benign and neglect of Lockefield. Lockefield was one of the proudest complex. You couldn't even walk across the grass until somebody would say, "Get off that grass." If you throw paper down, you better pick that paper up, boy. It was clean; it was elegant, but the city, with this demise plan, let it deteriorate until it became a drug infested place that they could justify taking it.

[First Woman] So, if we want to talk about what we lost when IUPUI came in, let's talk about what we had. My memories are from walking from Crispus Attucks High School downtown to catch the bus, and all of the things in my community; one of them I recall was the Indianapolis Recorder. It was right there on Indiana Avenue, one of the oldest black papers in the United States; skinny Alexander standing outside saying "hello" to everybody.

I wanted to hear about what made us "us". We were very special. I didn't feel oppressed. These were my people. These were special people. It was a rich community.

How many people have heard of Minnie the Mocher? We had a Minnie the Mocher. They even wrote about Minnie the Mocher right there, pushing her buggy down Indiana Avenue and having her sad and tragic death freezing to death on somebody's stoop. I mean we knew people, and we cared about people.

Where did I do my homework? Well, I hate to tell you, but my father, Charles Debow, who as you might know was in the first class for Tuskegee Airmen. One of his best friends was Jack Durham who owned the Ebony Lounge. Well, Jack had a daughter, Jackie, my age, and we did our homework in the back of the bar. I mean, those are memories that we have.

[Second Woman] Indiana Avenue was a pulse for the area. The area was like a feeder community, who turned to the Avenue itself for the things that they needed. People have a notion that projects are a

miserable place to live; that things are dire, and I'd like to share with you some of the memories that I have of Lockefield that are diametric to that notion.

The struggle is over the power to define. Now, when you can define, you are often assigning value, and so, there are people who are assigned, who are seen to have some value, and there are other people who are seen to be of no consequence, and I think the consensus normally is that if people are poor and if they live in crowded places, they have no value; they are people of no consequence, and maybe some of the things we will say tonight will suggest that maybe they are folk of great consequence.

Of all the people who are in power and who have been in power during the time that IUPUI, and of course, we mustn't lose track of the fact that this is part of the fortieth anniversary celebration of the establishment of this institution, and of all of the people connected with this institution, there have been a few, and I won't claim to name everybody, but there are a few that stand out. One was Dean Plater, who is here tonight. He is one of the administrators who gets it; who understands what Lockefield and this area meant before it was destroyed.

[Second Man] And the Black Student Union was very instrumental with John Lance, I saw him. He was director of the Fall Creek Y, and who was that--Reggie Jones, who was over our market. All of them were instrumental in trying to negotiate, to my understanding, what was going to be the University and how it was going to look, and we was trying to keep people to have their land.

I can remember a good friend of mine, Mickie, whose wife, for generations, two or three, owned a house over there where the administration building looks now. The people were telling her that she was going to have move. They were going to buy her house. They was talking about if you don't sell it, then we're going to take it because of eminent domain. She ended up committing suicide. Mickie, he started self-medicating. You all know what I mean when I say self-medicating? He ended up having a heart attack and dying, and they had three kids that he was trying to take care of, so when you start talking about how IUPUI expanded in this area, there were some tragedies, and we need to understand that there's some tragedies, and IUPUI needs to give back.

We can't change the past, and we're not going to move IUPUI out, but IUPUI needs to allow black people to get in that University and develop, and they should open them doors. That's what I'm saying.