



THE POLIS
CENTER

RELIGION & COMMUNITY

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A Newsletter of the Project on Religion and Urban Culture

Place and Identity

We all come from some place. What is authentic about us—our very identity—is inextricably bound up with the places we claim. One reason for this, suggests writer Eudora Welty, is that “place has a more lasting identity than we have, and we unswervingly attach ourselves to identity.”

Artists often experience the connection with place most keenly. Writers and photographers especially help us remember places and keep their meaning alive. The words of the psalmist, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning,” are the promise of an exile who recognizes the vital connections between place, memory, and identity.

As part of the Project on Religion and Urban Culture, local artists spent much of the past year observing religion in Indianapolis and reflecting on its meaning. In 1998, Indiana University Press will publish *Falling Toward Grace: Images of Faith and Culture in Indianapolis*, a collection of their essays and photographs. You will find excerpts inside this page. The book merits a wide audience.

Most projects of The Polis Center revolve around place—specifically, Indianapolis and its environs. Art offers a valuable perspective in understanding our city, especially its religious identity, because place and the human spirit are of central concern to the artist. “The art that speaks most clearly, explicitly, directly and passionately from its place of origin,” Welty reminds us, “will remain the longest understood.”

If you are interested in our efforts to use the creative arts to enrich our understanding of religion and community, call us at 274-2455.

—David J. Bodenhamer, Director

SPIRIT & PLACE FESTIVAL RETURNS, NOV. 8-10

The writers Thomas Keneally (*Schindler's List*), Clifton L. Taulbert (*When We Were Colored*), and Joy Harjo (*The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*) will come together at Clowes Hall in Indianapolis for a public conversation on the themes of spirituality, place, and creativity. They will discuss the tensions among staying, leaving, and returning to the place one considers home.

This conversation will be the keynote event of the second annual three-day civic festival, Spirit & Place: A Gathering of Voices, which will take place in Indianapolis on November 8, 9 & 10, 1997. The Spirit and Place festival is sponsored by The Polis Center, in collaboration with other universi-

ties and cultural institutions in the city.

The festival includes a variety of free performances, exhibits and lectures. (See the back page for

a schedule of events.) Tickets are required only for the Sunday, November 9 keynote discussion at Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University. Free tickets are available at the Clowes Hall box office. Limit of four per person.

What are the connections among spirituality, place, and creativity?

FALLING TOWARD GRACE

The text and photographs on these two pages are excerpted from *Falling Toward Grace: Images of Faith and Culture in Indianapolis*, edited by Susan Neville, J. Kent Calder, and Kim Charles Ferrill for The Polis Center. The book will be published in 1998 by Indiana University Press. Concurrent with publication, a selection of the photographs taken for the project will be on exhibit at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Susan Neville

An Introduction

I've been thinking a lot about Eden. Perhaps because I've been reading the essays you're about to read, and thinking about them in the context of Indiana literature. The story of the Fall is one that Midwestern writers tell again and again. But perhaps I've been thinking about Eden because the story is an end-of-an-era story, a story for the turn of a millennium. The Golden Age in Indiana literature, in itself a lost Eden about lost Edens, was a turn-of-the-century age, with one predictable concern: an ambivalence about the future expressed as the nostalgia for a more perfect past, an idealization of a perfect future, or an at times explicit wish for the new world to explode into this



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The Polis Center
IU-PUI
425 University Boulevard, CA 301
Indianapolis, IN 46202-5140

phone: (317) 274-2455
fax: (317) 274-1830
e-mail: polis@iupui.edu
home page: <http://www.polis.iupui.edu/>

one. A revival or a rapture. Or, depending on your taste, maybe an angel or flying saucer that will usher us safely across to the new world we sense is waiting on the other side of the year 2000.

Dan Carpenter

Still Catholic

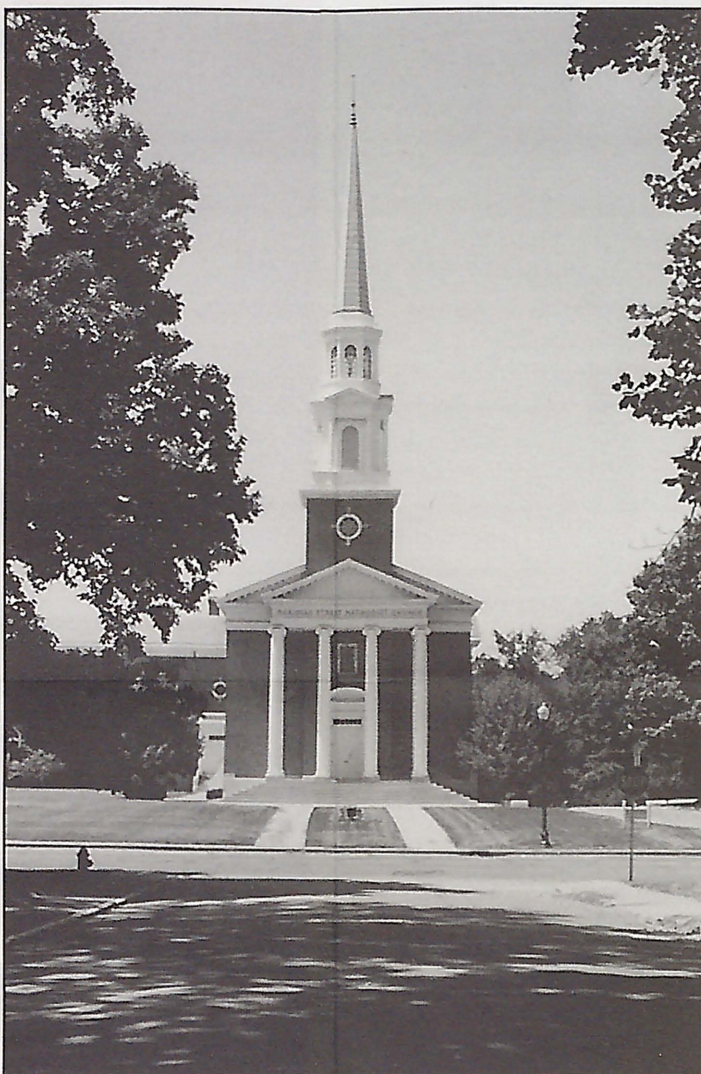
The Sisters of Providence were not looked to for advocacy or even empathy, but for rigor. There were sweet temperaments among them, and there were persimmons; but I don't remember a single hug against those black folds, heavy as stage curtains. In fact, it was pretty much taboo to touch their person. In my early years of school, the Sisters of Providence wore cardboard cowls around their faces that eliminated peripheral vision and allowed your buddies to make faces right alongside a teacher who was

lecturing you, while you fought desperately to suppress that fatal smile. Later, they shrank those to visor size in the evolution toward laymen's dress. Sister Thomas, the principal, was bareheaded and wearing a business suit when I met her a quarter century after graduation, in St. Francis Hospital, where she was working as a chaplain and my father was dying. Impulsively, I framed her face with my hands as I joked about the old days, a stage of our lives that she seemed to have relegated far more neatly than I.

Andrew Levy

Crossed Roads

In Indianapolis, I discovered the diaspora, and a sense of exile. But I also discovered a sense of tradition, which is to say that I met my



ancestors for the first time. I am the country peddler come West on horseback. Or that cabinetmaker relocated to the Midwest in 1912 because the cosmopolitan cities of the East had all

the cabinetmakers they needed. I can see them, or an exemplary one of them, satchel in hand, waiting for a friend of a friend of a relative, squinting upward at the front of Union Station, then turning to look at the uncomplicated and overwhelming Indiana sky, and the spiritual monochromacity of the life that bustled serenely underneath it, along Meridian, Washington, and Market. A Protestant sky, my exemplary cabinetmaker says to himself. How did they make the sky Protestant?

Jeanette Vanausdall

Seasons of the Spirit

I know no truly happy people when winter comes to this city. Our spiritual selves curl up like green leaves with the first real frost. We kick into the survival mode and survivors, by and large, have little energy for spiritual reflection, for praise or thanksgiving. In the Midwest we don't have a landscape that inspires spiritual contemplation. We don't have a desert landscape of solitude and renunciation here. We don't have a mountain landscape that inspires ascent and aspiration. We don't experience the primal tug of vast bodies of water. The spirituality of the woodlands, if there was one, has all but disappeared and Indianapolis, for all its wonderful attributes as a safe and clean city in which to



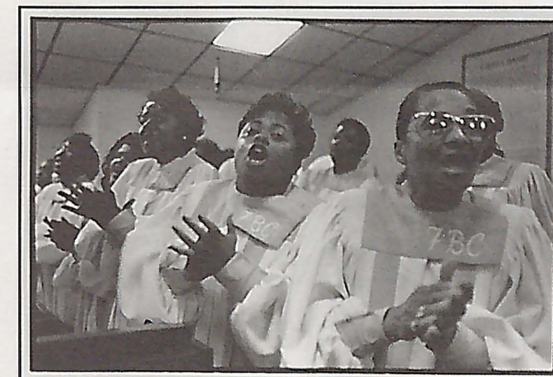
raise a family etc., etc., is indistinguishable from most other urban centers. Let's face it.

Scott Russell Sanders

Silence

I could have gone to a Friends' Church in Indianapolis that Sunday morning, but I was in no mood to sit through anybody's program, no matter

how artful or uplifting it might be. What I craved was silence—not absolute silence, for I welcomed the ruckus of doves and finches, but rather the absence of human noise. I spend nearly all of my waking hours immersed in language, bound to machines, following streets, obeying schedules, seeing and hearing and touching only what my



clever species has made. I often yearn, as I did that morning, to withdraw from all our schemes and formulas, to escape from the obsessive human story, to slip out of my own small self and meet the great Self, the nameless mystery at the core of being. I had a better chance of doing that here among the silent Quakers, I felt, than anywhere else I might have gone.

Photographs

Left: Bride and groom, Islamic wedding, by Carl Pope.

Center: Meridian Street United Methodist Church, by Kim Charles Ferrill.

Top right: Religious icon vendors at the Celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, at St. Patrick's Church in Fountain Square, by Kim Charles Ferrill.

Bottom right: Sunday morning services at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on the Near Westside, by Tyagan Miller.

SPIRIT & PLACE: A GATHERING OF VOICES

A civic festival on spirituality and the sense of place, in Indianapolis, November 8, 9, & 10, 1997

Schedule of Events

Saturday,

November 8

"Sacred Spaces: A Dance Pilgrimage." Performed by Susurrus at the following locations: 11:00 a.m.-noon, Christian Theological Seminary, Sweeney Chapel, 1000 W. 42nd Street; 2:00-3:00 p.m., Crown Hill Cemetery at "The Crown," 700 W. 38th Street; 8:00-9:00 p.m., Susurrus Studio, 429 E. Vermont Street.

2:00-3:00 p.m. "Ruth," an original drama by Rita Kohn. Martin University Performing Arts Building, 2171 Avondale.

Sunday,

November 9

Noon-3:00 p.m. *Exhibit:* "Indiana Sukkot Project: New Designs for An Ancient Tradition." Indianapolis Art Center, 820 E. 67th Street. (Exhibit is also open Monday, 9:00 a.m.-10:00 p.m.)

1:00-2:30 p.m. "Moral Conventions in Unconventional Climates: A Conversation with Thomas Keneally." University of Indianapolis, Ruth Lilly Performance Hall, Christel DeHaan Fine Arts Center, 1400 E. Hanna Ave.

2:00-3:00 p.m. "Sarah & Hagar: A Story of Separation and Reconciliation." An original drama by Rita Kohn. Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 10202 N. Meridian St.

2:30-4:00 p.m. "Spirit and History: Family and Tribe." Poets Joy Harjo and Brigit Kelly read and discuss their work. Marian College, Allison Mansion's Aviary, 3200 Cold Spring Rd.

3:30-5:00 p.m. Panel discussion: "Voices of Thanksgiving: An Interfaith Celebration." Indianapolis Art Center, 820 E. 67th St.

6:30-8:00 p.m. Keynote Event "Leaving and Returning": A Public Conversation with Thomas Keneally, Clifton L. Taulbert, and Joy Harjo. Moderator: Rabbi Sandy Sasso. Butler University, Clowes Memorial Hall, 4600 Sunset Ave.

Monday,

November 10

10:00-11:30 a.m. "An Outbreak of Goodness: The Emergence of Moral Courage." Thomas Keneally, author of

Schindler's List. Christian Theological Seminary, Shelton Auditorium, 1000 W. 42nd St.

10:00-11:30 a.m. "Community Building: A Day-to-Day Opportunity." Clifton L. Taulbert, author of *Eight Habits of the Heart*. Madame Walker Theatre Center, Walker Ballroom, 617 Indiana Ave.

2:00-3:00 p.m. "The Strength of African-American Communities." Clifton Taulbert discusses his new book. Ruth Lilly Auditorium, University Library, IUPUI.

5:00-6:30 p.m. "The Midwest: Leaving and Returning." Authors Alice Friman, Patricia Henley, and Andrew Levy. Central Library, Cropsey Auditorium, 40 East St. Clair.



Clockwise from above: Joy Harjo, Thomas Keneally, Clifton L. Taulbert.

The Polis Center
Cavanaugh Hall 301
425 University Boulevard
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202-5140

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