

# Ethiopian Gets a Lesson in Soul

BY CAMERON DUODO

BLOOMINGTON, Ind.—It is difficult for an African making his first trip to the United States not to become sentimental about the black men he sees over here. "Christ, there's an Ethiopian over there," I say to myself. But he is not, and he may never even know that there is a country called Ethiopia.

They look so much like us, yet they are total strangers to us. They don't speak any of our languages and they have no memory of ever being with us. We sold some, others were forcibly seized from our shores and transported in foul boats thousands of miles across the ocean to this part of the world.

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"You gotta have soul before you really understand," said lanky, long haired Carl, who looks remarkably like Malcolm X. "Soul is what moves us, makes us want to be different than we were before, makes us know that we are black and that is great and we ain't gonna be no whitey's boy no more. Dig?"

He unwrapped a packet of marijuana and in the coolest, most deadpan manner, invited me: "Do you get high, man?"

I said no, and he was worried for a moment as his superego took over. He fiddled with the packet, unable to decide whether to light or not. Meanwhile, he talked.

He didn't think there could be a "proper" revolution by the blacks in America. "We live in too many pockets too scattered over the country. Chicago, Washington, Newark—it's too easy for us to be surrounded. We gotta do it with soul."

I left him, determined to seek soul.

There was plenty of it at a performance in the vast auditorium of Indiana University by a militant group founded by the black poet-playwright, Leroi Jones. The group is called "The Spirit House Movers and Players" and they were to stage "Father" Jones' very short satire, "Home on the Range."

This is how the student newspaper described the play: "Whites in the audience received a live, living-color impression of how some blacks see them, their way of life and the future of their country. The communication gap is expressed as whites mouth lines of "deedee dodo! Laregrepe and tooble and noik." Only the blacks in "Home on the Range" speak English that can be understood by the audience.

Certainly, the power of the play was unmistakable. Even more than the shocks of the communication gap was

the shock of the four-letter words. Within 15 minutes the play had come to an end—robbing the audience of the final satisfaction, the satisfaction of fulfillment. There hadn't been enough punishment for the masochist, and not enough punishment had been perpetrated for the benefit of the sadist.

The whole miasmic feeling was accentuated with a *Deja-vu* atmosphere created by the inflection of the technique used by Jean Genet in "The Blacks": this time, it was blacks who wore white masks.

But the force of the play was bearable compared to the verse that was recited as a prelude to the main program of the evening. To a background of Black Muslim worshiping sounds alaaaaah, ilaaaaahi, aaaaaaaamen — came the fiercest words of poetry I have ever heard. The poets came onto the stage and began—no announcement as to title, author, or anything—they just let soul fly:

*A strange wind blows over America  
(Background: "You're so right,  
Baby; a-aaaaaaaaman")*

*And brings a frown to her serpentine brow;*

*It betokens frightful happenings in the coming times*

*("Oon lee, alham di-lüüülah;")*

*What is the price of our suffering?*

*How long must we endure*

*What hope have we?*

*We who are hungry,*

*We who are naked*

*We who are shadows*

*Falling against the great white wall?*

*("Answer that, Whitey")*

*We are tired, tired*

*of being sick and tired;*

*Lost.*

*Lost in the wilderness*

*of white America*

*("You're telling it like it is, baby")*

Suddenly, a real-life trauma is achieved. A young, white girl gets up from her seat, right up front, and begins to walk out. The apostles on the stage notice her and make a wisecrack which I don't quite hear. There is an uneasy titter throughout the auditorium and the young girl turns back and walks right up to the stage. It is hard to hear her—her voice is full of tremor.

She says: "I sympathize with you, but I don't think you should fight your cause with insults. Can't we try a little love?" She is cheered by some of the white members of the audience, who think she must have plenty of guts to do a thing like that.

But the blacks are not impressed. What guts are there in protesting against protesters? One black says, "Go tell that to Martin Luther King." The sarcasm is sad and overpowering.

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