

## Books

Excerpt from Interview with Eartha Kitt

From Incredibly Strange Music Vol. I



*RE/Search: When you were invited to a White House luncheon, didn't you cause a scandal?*

**EARTHA KITT:** In 1968, during the Vietnam War, I was invited by Lady Bird Johnson to give my opinion about the problems in the United States, specifically, "Why is there so much juvenile delinquency in the streets of America?" The First Lady seemed to be more interested in decorating the windows of the ghettos with flowerboxes. I mean—it's fine to put flowers in the ghettos, but let's take care of the necessities first: give people *jobs*, and find a way to get us out of poverty.

When it came my turn to speak, I said to the president's wife, "Vietnam is the main reason we are having trouble with the youth of America. It is a war without explanation or reason." I said that the young ghetto boys thought it *better* to have a legal stigma against them—then they would be considered "undesirable" and would not be sent to the war. In their opinion, in this society the good guys lost and the bad guys won.

I didn't say this ranting and raving, but we were in a large room, we didn't have microphones, and we had to speak loudly enough to be heard. That incident, reported in such a way as to deface me in the eyes of the American people, obviously had to have been given by someone from the White House—probably the press secretary: "Earth Kitt makes the First Lady cry..." There were no reporters present! So this was a *manufactured furor*.

*R/S: Didn't you suffer because of this?*

**EK:** Of course—within two hours I was out of work in America.