

The River Niger

THE RIVER NIGER

I am the River Niger - hear my waters!
I wiggle and stream and run.
I am totally flexible.
I am the River Niger - hear my waters!
My waters are the first sperm of the world.
When the earth was but a faceless whistling embryo
Life burst from my liquid kernels like popcorn.
Hear my waters - rushing and popping in muffled finger drum
staccato.

It is life you hear, stretching its limbs in my waters -
I am the River Niger! Hear my waters!
When the Earth Mother cracked into continents
I was vomited from the cold belly of the Atlantic
To slip slyly into Africa
From the underside of her brow
I see no -
Hear no -
Speak no evil,
But I know,
I gossip with the crocodile
And rub elbows with the river horse
I have swapped morbid jokes with the Hyena
And heard his dry cackle at twilight.
I see no -
Hear no -
Speak no evil,
But I know.

I am the River Niger - hear my waters!
Hear, I say, hear my waters, man!
They is Mammy-tammys, baby.
I have lapped at the pugnacious hips of brown mamas.
Have tapped on the doors of their honeydews, yeah!
I have shimmered like sequins.

As they sucked me over the blueberry tongues,
As they sung me to sleep in the glittering afternoon, yeah!
I have washed the red wounds of lay-decorated warriors -
Bad, bad dudes who smirked at the leopard
I have cast witches from gabbling babies, Yeah!
Have known the warm piss from newly circumcised boys
Have purified the saliva from sun-drenched lions -
Do you hear me talking
I am the River Niger!

The River Niger, winner of the 1974 Tony Award for Best Play, flowed into the ECSU Moore Hall Auditorium on March 14, 1975 from a tremendously successful run on Broadway and on National tour. Written and directed by Joseph Walker, the drama is a passionate and intense story of intimate life among blacks. Hugging themselves with their problems and keeping their breast warm with love and affection.

Across the country screaming headlines have welcomed it and heralded it as one of the most engrossing productions yet written, presented or produced by blacks. It left Philadelphia with throngs of people pressing their way to

the box office to buy tickets. In Chicago the show broke all previous house records.

Originally, **The River Niger** played more than 100 performances at the St. Marks Playhouse in New York; an overwhelming demand for tickets prompted a move to the Brooks Atkinson on Broadway.

This penetrating drama co-opts one hectic week in the life of a Harlem family. The Characters include Johnny Williams, an alcoholic house painter and poet; his wife Mattie, who loves him passionately; his mother-in-law, and 83 year old frank woman who speaks her mind; his son, 25 year old Jeff, who is the favorite of the family and they all want to direct his life.

Torn between respect and love for his family, a career, the system, his militant friends in the movement, he has one gigantic struggle. In addition to all this, he is in love with Ann, a South African-born nurse. Other supporting characters outside the family circle include Dr. Dudley Stanton, a prudent and wise West Indian physician who is the close friend of the family; and five members of militant group fashioned after the Black Panthers.

The play was a dynamic presentation of reality. The actors, their performance, the language, and atmosphere added greatly to our enjoyment. The play was received well on campus leaving standing room only in Moore Hall Auditorium.

I came to the cloudy Mississippi
Over keels of incomprehensible woe.
I ran way to the Henry Hudson
Under the sails of ragged hope.
I am the River Niger,
Transplanted to Harlem
From the Harlem River Drive
Hear me my children - hear my waters!
I sleep in your veins.
I seen no -
Hear no -
Speak no evil.
But I know, and I know that you know.
I flow to the ends of your spirit.
Hold hands, my children, and I will flow
to the ends of the earth,
And the whole world will hear my waters.
I am the River Niger! Don't deny me!
Do you hear me? Don't deny me!

As-Salaam- Alai Kum May Peace Be Unto You

I take great pleasure in expressing the pure intimacy that manifested between the Brothers and Sisters of Elizabeth City State University and myself on March 14, 1975, during the lyceum feature "The River Niger." At the end of the play, my soul overflowed with love and pride for the ECSU Black Family.

All of my life I've desired to see the Black Family United! In my fight here, many times my love for you was stomped upon. But that night, that night I could feel your love in return; I could feel a solid unit; Black Solidarity. The **Honorable Elijah Muhammad** teaches us that the base of Black Solidarity is the love of the Blackman for his Black Brother. Jesus said "Love your neighbor as you love yourself". But if you don't love yourself, you cannot be trusted to love your neighbor. That night, March 14, 1975, I felt the love that flowed among us. Whether you wanted to share that love or not, your true nature was manifested. And after you became baptized in the love of your Blackness and in the love of yourself, and in the love of your Brother and Sister, what will you do to hurt what you love?

I thank **Almighty God, Allah** for blessing me to witness these moments. You my beloved Brothers and Sisters have added strength to my willingness to live for Black and die for Black. My beautiful Black Brothers and Sisters I love you. My Brothers and Sisters from Puerto Rico, Trinidad, China, Asia, Japan, India, the Phillipines, Korea, the Bahamas, South America, Mexico, the Virgin Islands, the West Indies, I love you all. We are a **NATION** of people. We are **ONE**. Let **US** not be divided.

AS-SALAAM-ALAIKUM
Brother Anthony X



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