

More Than Skin-Deep: The Candaces, Autumn in New York, A Jury of Her Peers, Ebb Tide/Autumn Rain, Candace/1, Candace 2/A Profile

poetry
by

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Professor and poet Askia M. Touré was born on October 13, 1938, in Raleigh, North Carolina, to Clifford Roland Snellings, Jr. and Nannie Lynette Bullock. In 1952, Touré won a Motion Poetry Association Award while attending Roosevelt High School. Two years later, he participated in a successful sit-in at Roosevelt. Touré graduated from high school in 1956, and joined the United States Air Force. After being discharged in 1959, Touré took art classes at the Dayton Art Institute. He then moved to New York City and joined the Art Student League and the Umbra Poets. He and his associates Tom Feelings, Tom Dent, David Henderson, and Calvin Herndon were mentored by Langston Hughes. In 1961, Touré joined Max Roach, Abby Lincoln, Alex Prempe, May Mallory, and Maya Angelou at the United Nations to protest the assassination of Congo's Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In 1962, Touré became an illustrator for *Umbra* magazine, a staff member with *The Liberator* magazine, and a contributor to *Freedomways*. Touré was a part of the Atlanta staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and joined the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) in Mississippi in the spring of 1964. In 1965, Touré founded *Afro World* and organized the Harlem Uptown Youth Conference. Touré also participated in the rise of the Black Panther Party and co-wrote SNCC's 1966 "Black Power Position Paper."

In 1967, Touré joined the staff of Nathan Hare at San Francisco State University and taught African history in the first Africana Studies Program. Touré organized the 1984 Nile Valley Conference in Atlanta and co-founded the Atlanta chapter of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) in 1986. Touré authored multiple books and received the 1989 American Book Award for Literature (*From the Pyramids to the Projects*) and the 2000 Stephen E. Henderson Poetry Award (*Dawnsong*); other works include films and plays. In 1996, Touré was honored with the Gwendolyn Brooks Lifetime Achievement Award from the Gwendolyn Brooks Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

More Than Skin-Deep: The Candaces

(for Venus & Serena and the Sistas)

Beauty is sensitive, poetic, symbolic, metaphorical, necessary to any culture. In the symbolic Landscape of American Media, a pale goddess appears: tossing ash-blond hair, she pleads, "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful," with apparent innocence. And millions of dark women are "wiped out," scarred for life; for on American altars, blond is Goddess, Metaphor, Symbol, Archetype. Dark women so "Unfair" in a World of Anglo-Germanic standards. Millions scarred for life, labeled pariahs; *Black* in all Its implications, in a World where pale blonds plead, with apparent innocence, that we not "hate" them for being "beautiful." In T.V.-dominated America, millions of Africans: tall, willowy ebony women, curvaceous, full-bodied brown or sepia women-- African Venuses--despised by a racist aesthetic.

However, Venus & Serena Williams, Nubian queens of World Tennis, are *not* blonds, are *not* celebrated as beauties by America; are *Black* in all its implications: voluptuous, full-bodied, broad-nosed, full-lipped, woolly-haired, sexy Nubians, primordial and sublime. *Candaces* ruling the Court, leaping like regal panthers; slamming, serving, demolishing demoralized "Barbies"; flashy white beads clicking against Cornrows, as blond rivals are crushed. Venus & Serena are *Black* and uncompromising in all its implications; are *not* Tiya and Temira: they are Reality, not sanitized T.V. images; and millions of little girls, *Black*, in all Its implications--not "beautiful" as visualized by America and Its blondes & wannabes--feel lovely, graceful, precious, empowered, inspired by the Courty deeds of these Nubian goddesses! And I, wiping suddenly welling eyes, am delighted as Black Isis rises from Her glorious Egyptian shrine, smiles and winks a beautiful, cosmic Eye at Her lovely daughters--unbound in a vicious, malicious land of corrupt Nazis--kicking ass!

Autumn in New York

(for Gloretta Baynes)

Music fills the elegant room
of a sophisticated art gallery
where a hip jazz quartet plays
an old tune, "Autumn in New York."
A man and woman sit listening together,
as the saxophonist journeys down decades.
The bronze, bearded man is, again,
a young art student hypnotized by
a 'Sixties-youthful Coltrane blowing
lyrical combinations described by critics
as "sheets of sound." The chic, sepia woman
is soaring in a rain-bow world of vivid color,
as she dances with her Muse across
decades, generations, seeking an illusive
Africa in rhythmic, percussive harmonies
embracing night...They are artists, initiates,
come to worship at Music's primeval shrine.
They are wounded by brutalities known as
American Urban Life. They are battle-scarred
survivors, veterans in a campaign
to transform society, and make worthy
human beings emerge. They are visionaries
known as artists...The Music, the Music,
the Muse of this complex lyricism nourishes
their very depths..."Autumn in New York,"
moans the saxophone, as it recreates
a lost decade, resurrects both youth
and innocence, in a mythic time
when vision and possibility were one.

A Jury of Her Peers

(for Karima)

Ideally, she'd be gentle, sensitive,
romantic, with the generous
tenderness of the truly strong.
A loving person; a creative, energetic
woman with large, glowing eyes.
A sensual, athletic beauty, of sepia
complexion, with graying, braided hair.
Probably an administrator who also
teaches, and loves kids dearly.
A person of vision, of pioneering daring,
but graceful, sophisticated, witty:
hiding a delicate charm, whose
startling beauty catches one by surprise.
A tireless, optimistic believer--with
subtle, psychic strengths. But lonely,
because potential companions seem
vaguely threatened by her honesty
and gentle strength; so she waits. Alone,
in this alienating land of Silences.
Wondering, if she'll ever love again.
Wondering why excellence isolates.

Ebb Tide/Autumn Rain

(for TrINETTE)

Red

blush/autumn

gold: again I

hold your

lovely summer-form

& smile; I

sing warm

bass tones:

chocolate/honey your

sweetness

melting icebergs

floating in my seas.

Bare grey shadows

of trees gaunt against

my winter-heart

forever Spring

glows (where

You are

flower-laden dreams

soar among solos: Pharoah's

holy in green lands/trees

Black crowds gathered--

glowing rapture; mist

rising from dark

lakes bountiful

at dawn.

You *haunt me*

when red suns

singe bloody

landscapes

weeping autumn rain.

Candace/1

She was blue(s), a deep indigo;
her vital spirit vibrated
an enchantment of cool silver,
like a nightclub scenario:
the bloods blowing strong
in every mellow key, reaching
harmony on Duke's *Satin Doll*.
And the tonal/emotional nuances
vibrated through one's intimate
universe. All of this embodied
in her Solo: her Life Song, among
dreams & vibes of subtle karma.
She was cool vibes by Milt,
Ramsey's immaculate arpeggios
echoing a vital sensuality
of melanin realms "when dawns
were young." She was woman
and myth--primal, elegant,
splendid--reborn in puritan
climes, among pioneers and
corporate satraps, millenniums
from Napata; subtle regal cool.

Note. The Candaces were the ruling queens
of Kush (Nubia), who challenged Rome for the
liberation of Kmt (Egypt). Napata was their capitol.
They mounted elephants, which they used like
tanks, hundreds of years before Hannibal!

Candace 2/ A Profile

She was Sheba; dred-locked,
prognathous, pristine, lovely,
this unique, spring morning,
filling these moments with
sunlight. Primal rhythms sang
from swaying hips, counter-pointing
her sacredness: dusky sibyl
implying Amharic grandeur, unsung
for millennia upon our human
tongues. But time was upon us that
instance, and she its awakening
agent: prima dona nilotic, blessed
with brilliant smiles against
erotic bronze.