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National Museum of African American History and Culture

The Literary Corner: Eldred Jones on Chinua Achebe (side b)

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<i>Eldred Jones</i>: --African English drama came out of the African's people's traditions, you have in Africa, as you do throughout the world. Among it's people, you have rituals and customs.

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And as opposed to the situation that developed with African English prose and poetry, in which the prose and the poetry came out of African oral literature. In the case of African Drama, you have the drama coming out of the rituals and customs of the African people.

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Now, the rituals and customs serve as a form of entertainment for the Africans, and after colonization, the colonizers began to label what was exactly ritual in-- in custom, they labelled it "drama."

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Historically speaking, as early as 1880, there is an account of an African writer writing a play under the name Jerobuno. This account is printed in one of the newspapers published by British colonizers. And it appears that the African writer, Jerobuno, he wrote in the classical or European style.

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But I think I should also note that, uh, Jerobuno's play was not published. In terms of published plays, the first short African play was published in 1933, and the first African full-length play was published in 1943.

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However, up until 1957, just two decades ago, only three full-length and three short-length African English plays had been published.

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But because the Europeans are the English, had a tendency of carrying their culture with them wherever they went, including the theater.

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Africans had the opportunity to experience this genre, and in some cases, for the sake of the colonizers, they put on these various plays that the colonizers brought out of their culture from Europe.

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So, realistically speaking, it was not until the 1960s that English speaking Africans actually got under way in terms of writing short or--



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