

JACOB RESTAURANT - FOOD WITH A SMILE *By Theresa Racine*

There is something about the 'curry crab' that will bring you back to Jacob Restaurant again and again. "This is my third time here this week," said a satisfied customer clenching his take out bag. A signature favorite at this new Harlem eatery, if the food does not cast a spell on you, the owner will. Young, gifted and Black, Rachid Niang, a native of Senegal, has a secret ingredient. A smile as big as his country and a delightful ego to go with it. At 33, the handsome Rachid has been working in the food/restaurant business nearly half of his young mature life. Learning the business from the ground up, Rachid's restaurant is borne out of 12 years of hard labor and a dream of opening his own business in the United States.

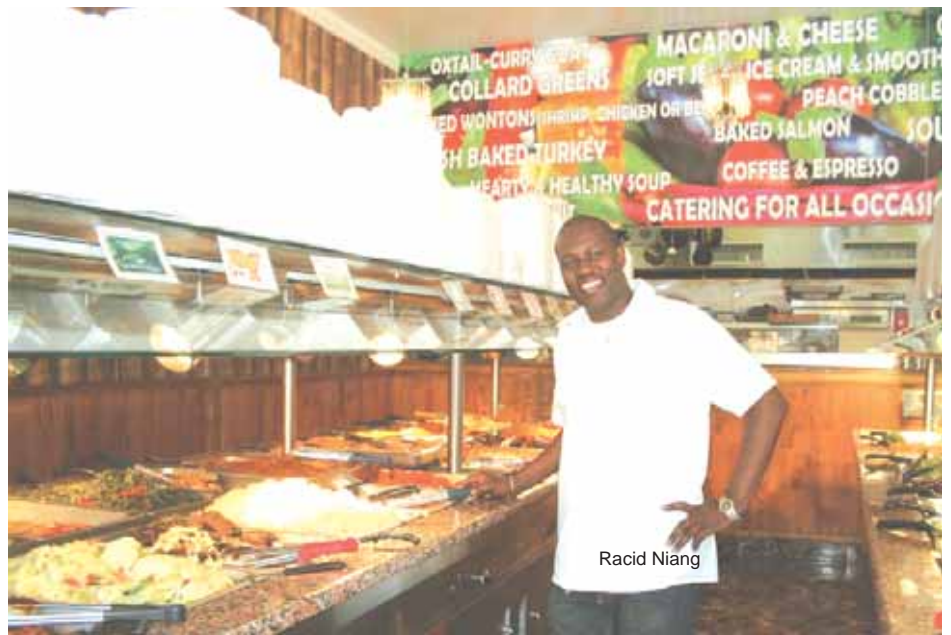
"I have been working in this field for over 10 years," boost Rachid. "One day I decided that I could do it better than the rest. Look at this place," he beams with that wonderful smile. "Isn't it nice? There are many family style restaurants in Harlem, but mine is the best. Why? Because I have lived in the community for over 10 years. I know the people and they know me. I know most of these people by their first name."

In an area where soul food reigns and numerous eateries serve up self-serve traditional Black and Caribbean dishes on almost every block, Rachid claims his restaurant is different because it attracts others seeking healthy alternatives to eating. Jacob offers a large salad and fresh fruit bar for those not familiar with rich soul food. The fact that Rachid speaks another language (French) may also be an asset in attracting international customers to his

restaurant who normally shy away from heavy soul food dishes. With more and more International people moving uptown, eateries offering the best of both worlds - soul food and fresh healthy veggies and traditional - will become popular. "I have a large following because I offer fresh food. They can feel at home here. I have an open kitchen so my customers can watch my staff prepare their meals in a clean environment. It's important, especially these days, to find quality, quantity, variety and affordable food that is also good to eat," says Rachid. "This place is unique. Everything is top of the line."

Giving me a tour of his restaurant as he continues beaming that trademark smile to his friends and soon to be friends enjoying one of this mouth watering dishes, Rachid explains how he hand selected the décor to compliment his food. Named after his father, Jacob, the young entrepreneur runs his business as a family affair. "I know everybody and everybody knows me," says Rachid. "They support me, and I support them by hiring from within the community. They are my family. We all look after one another."

The ambitious owner hopes to add entertainment to his weekly menu soon. Catering is also a big part of his business. Since the doors opened some months ago, his catering business has been booming. Located blocks from the over crowded infamous 125th Street, Jacob sits on Lenox Avenue between 128th & 127th Street. Jacob is worth the trip for the food and the owners smile.



Rachid Niang



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