



S O S: Poems 1961-2013

By Amiri Baraka

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A *New York Times* Editors' Choice

Fusing the personal and the political in high-voltage verse, Amiri Baraka—"whose long illumination of the black experience in America was called incandescent in some quarters and incendiary in others" (*New York Times*)—was one of the preeminent literary innovators of the past century. Selected by Paul Vangelisti, this volume comprises the fullest spectrum of Baraka's rousing, revolutionary poems, from his first collection to previously unpublished pieces composed during his final years.

Throughout Baraka's career as a prolific writer (also published as LeRoi Jones), he was vehemently outspoken against oppression of African American citizens, and he radically altered the discourse surrounding racial inequality. The environments and social values that inspired his poetics changed during the course of his life, a trajectory that can be traced in this retrospective spanning more than five decades of profoundly evolving subjects and techniques. Praised for its lyricism and introspection, his early poetry emerged from the Beat generation, while his later writing is marked by intensely rebellious fervor and subversive ideology. All along, his primary focus was on how to live and love in the present moment despite the enduring difficulties of human history.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *S O S: Poems 1961-2013*

"The most complete representation of over a half-century of revolutionary and breathtaking work."
—**Claudia Rankine**, *New York Times Book Review*

"*S O S* provides readers with rich, vital views of the African American experience and of Baraka's own evolution as a poet-activist. . . . Baraka is as adept with spare, imagistic lines as with lyrical realism. Racist, provincial ideas earn his angry unmasking as he sings, shouts and shakes a fist at corruption and ignorance."
—*Washington Post*

"A big handsome book of Amiri Baraka's poetry [that gives] us word magic, wit, wild thoughts, discomfort, and pleasure." —**William J. Harris**, *Boston Review*

"Amiri Baraka's *S O S* sparks a living flame. Bodacious and tenacious, he remains a realist rooted sometimes in the political, sometimes in the avant-garde. His voice is made in America; his poetry is an action. Baraka's poems live on and off the page and demand that we feel language as music and meaning. This poet and his work are always slipping the yoke, determined to be free—yes, aesthetic freedom lives within *S O S*. The collection wails out from recent history through a masterful signifier whose fierce certainty holds grace notes with a backbeat." —**Yusef Komunyakaa**

"[*S O S* is] a signal of blunt urgency . . . this is undeniably the work of the kind of poet we will not see again; Amiri Baraka was one of the last of the 20th century's literary lions. This momentous collection exhibits his abiding resistance to almost everything, but subversiveness." —**Terrance Hayes**, *Publishers Weekly* (boxed review)

"One of those rarest of things: poetry that combines a rigorous intellect, high-voltage aesthetics, and a revolutionary's need to confront his subject. . . . Those who believe, as Baraka did, that art could surpass simple beauty and act as a force for social change will cherish this remarkable volume. . . . Highly recommended." —*Library Journal* (starred review)

"In a climate of renewed outrage over injustice, the voice of the recently departed Amiri Baraka is more relevant than ever, his volatile lyric poems ringing as true today as they did fifty years ago. A career retrospective that captures not just a man, but a movement." —*Barnes & Noble Review*

"What's best about Baraka's verse is that his historical sensibility and sense of historical dread bump elbows with anarchic comedy. . . . *S O S* is the best overall selection we have thus far of Baraka's work." —**Dwight Garner**, *New York Times*

"These poems cover the ebbs and flows of the modern African-American struggle for freedom and identity . . . There may be no better time than now to experience the lyrical, funny, dynamic, and provocative poetry of Amiri Baraka . . . *S O S* is the perfect place to hear the voice that influenced, if not defined, decades of black political struggle when few were listening—and even fewer were doing anything. Baraka did something.

Man, he did plenty." —**Shelf Awareness**

"Throughout his writing life, [Baraka] crafted some of the most potent, thoughtful, and even sublime lines of any poet of his generation and beyond." —**Gawker**

Praise for Amiri Baraka

"Baraka stands with Wheatley, Douglass, Dunbar, Hughes, Hurston, Wright and Ellison as one of the eight figures . . . who have significantly affected the course of African-American literary culture." —**Arnold Rampersad**

"His work works—in terms of efficiency, in terms of amazing manipulation of fire and music." —**Gwendolyn Brooks**

"Baraka was the people's poet." —**Maya Angelou**

"Always a nuance ahead of everybody else . . . [he was] our most original writer. Nobody else comes close." —**Ishmael Reed**

"Baraka was foundational for a generation of writers who emerged in his wake, a singular figure whose work laid down the terms of engagement for many, if not most, of us who came to the craft after him. . . . [He] achieved an absolute democracy of language—a poetry forged in the crucible of a collective experience, a musical fusion of history, irony, and art." —**Jelani Cobb, *New Yorker***

"He was a powerful voice on the printed page, a riveting orator in person and an enduring presence on the international literary scene." —**Margalit Fox, *New York Times***

"Baraka's writings are charged with a literary electricity that enlightens and energizes our minds, bodies, and souls." —**M. K. Asante Jr.**

"No American poet since Pound has come closer to making poetry and politics reciprocal forms of action." —**M.L. Rosenthal**

"[Baraka's] are the agonized poems of a man writing to save his skin, or at least to settle in it, and so urgent is their purpose." —**Richard Howard**

About the Author

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014) was an author of poetry, plays, essays, fiction, and music criticism, as well as a groundbreaking political activist who lectured in the United States, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe. He served as Poet Laureate of New Jersey from 2002-2003, and his numerous accolades include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Langston Hughes Medal from the City College of New York, the Rockefeller Foundation Award for Drama, a PEN Open Book Award, induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Before Columbus Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award.

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