

Boxing on Paper: Ishmael Reed Interviewed

by

Don Starnes

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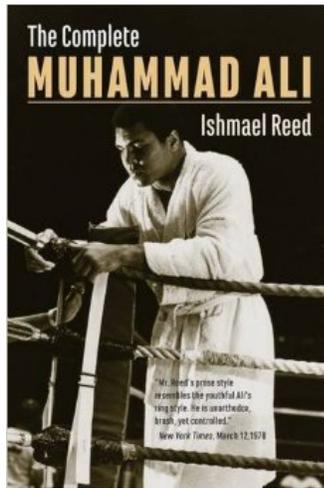
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Don Starnes is an award winning Director and Director of Photography with thirty years of experience shooting in amazing places with fascinating people. He has photographed a dozen features, innumerable documentaries, commercials, web series, TV shows, music and corporate videos. His work has been featured on National Geographic, Discovery Channel, Comedy Central, HBO, MTV, VH1, Speed Channel, Nerdist, and many theatrical and festival screens.



Ishmael Reed [in the white shirt] in New Orleans, Louisiana, September 2016 (photo by Tennessee Reed).

Editor's note: Here author (novelist, essayist, poet, songwriter, editor), social activist, publisher and professor emeritus Ishmael Reed were interviewed by filmmaker Don Starnes during the 2014 University of California at Merced Black Arts Movement conference as part of an ongoing film project documenting powerful leaders of the Black Arts and Black Power Movements. Since 2014, Reed's interview was expanded to take into account the presidency of Donald Trump. The title of this interview was supplied by this publication.

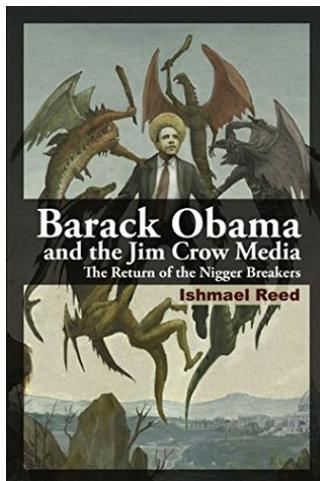


Ishmael Reed (b. 1938) is the winner of the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship (genius award), the renowned *L.A. Times* Robert Kirsch Lifetime Achievement Award, the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Rosenthal Family Foundation Award from the National Institute for Arts and Letters. He has been nominated for a Pulitzer and finalist for two National Book Awards and is Professor Emeritus at the University of California at Berkeley (a thirty-five year presence); he has also taught at Harvard, Yale and Dartmouth. He is currently a Visiting Scholar at the California College of the Arts. He is a member of Harvard's Signet Society and founder of the Before Columbus Foundation, which promotes multicultural American writing. The American Book Awards, sponsored by the foundation, has been called by *The Washington Post*, the American League to the National Book

Awards' National League. He also founded PEN Oakland, which issues the Josephine Miles Literary Awards. PEN Oakland has been called "The Blue Collar PEN" by *The New York Times*. He is the author of over twenty titles such as *The Freelance Pallbearers*; *The Terrible Threes*; *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*; *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*; *Reckless Eyeballing*; *Flight to Canada*; *Japanese By Spring*; *Going Too Far: Essays About America's Nervous Breakdown*; *Juice!*; *Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media: The Return of the Nigger Breakers*; and the acclaimed novel *Mumbo Jumbo*, as well as essays, plays and poetry. His *New and Collected Poetry, 1964-2007* (2007) which received a Gold Medal from the Commonwealth Club of California was praised by his patron, the late Gwendolyn Brooks, he was inducted into Chicago State University's National Literary Hall of Fame of Writers of African Descent, in 1995, he received an honorary Doctorate in Letters from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and in 1998 he received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Johnson C. Smith University at Charlotte, North Carolina. His 2015 book, *The Complete Muhammad Ali* (Montreal, QC: Baraka Books, 2015, pp.440, ISBN: 9781771860406) charts Muhammad Ali's evolution from Black Nationalism to universalism, and gives due credit to the Nation of Islam and Black Nationalism in its influence on Ali's intellectual development. Second, he casts his inquisitive eye on a man who came to represent the aspirations of so many people worldwide and so many causes as he brings to bear his own experience as an African American public figure, born in the South in the same period, as well as an encyclopedic grasp of American history.

And third, he places the Muhammad Ali phenomenon in the history of boxing and boxers from before the times of Jack Johnson, through Joe Louis and Archie Moore to Floyd Mayweather. Reed also interviewed Marvin X, Harry Belafonte, Hugh Masakela, Jack Newfield, Ed Hughes, Emmanuel Steward, Amiri Baraka, Agieb Bilal, Emil Guillermo, Khalilah Ali, Quincy Troupe, Rahaman Ali, Melvin Van Peebles, Ray Robinson, Jr., Ed Hughes, Jesse Jackson, Martin Wyatt, Bennett Johnson, Stanley Crouch, Bobby Seale, and many more to document the importance and significance of Muhammad Ali.

Macy Gray, Taj Mahal, Cassandra Wilson, and Bobby Womack have recorded his songs, and in 2008, he received the Blues songwriter of the year from the West Coast Blues Hall of Fame. He made his recording debut as a Jazz pianist on the CD “For All We Know,” which features David Murray. Reed lives in Oakland, California.



Don: Can you talk to me about what was happening in the mid-1960s with regards to your work and the promise of the Black Arts Movement?

Ishmael: I knew some of the people who founded Black Arts Repertory Theater, the New York branch of what Eugene Redmond has documented as a nation-wide movement. They were my roommates—before they left the East Village to go to Harlem. This was 1965. Askia Toure, William and Charles Patterson and I lived in an apartment on East 5th Street. Our neighbors were Puerto Ricans. I paid the rent, and so you could call me the first patron of the Black Arts Movement, New York. Though the Norton Anthology of African American Literature dismissed the Black Arts movement as “short-lived,” there still seems to be a big payroll in Black Arts products: conferences, academic chairs and courses, which involves costs for transportation, hotels, book sales, etc. not to mention profits gained from Kwanzaa and from vendors throughout the nation.

Though it's been co-opted by academics, I think that those who were in on the genesis of Black Arts, which, in New York, began downtown, lacked degrees. So, I think that's what happened to the Black Arts. It has become mainstream. In the sixties, people really believed there would be a transformation in the country and they used terms like “revolutionary,” but capitalism has a way of absorbing the people on the outs and inviting them into the establishment. When Baraka died, he was a member of the Academy of American Arts and Letters, which is the most exclusive establishment artist's club in the country.

Don: The Black Arts Movement is said to have begun in 1965 and ended around 1976.

Ishmael: That's not true. Some of those who were prominent during The Black Arts Movement like Sonia Sanchez, Askia Toure, Jayne Cortez, Quincy Troupe, Eugene Redmond, Curtis Lyle, Lorenzo Thomas, Tom Dent, David Henderson, Aishah Rahman, Carolyn Rodgers, Ed Bullins, and Nikki, Haki and Amiri produced excellent work after the 70s; plus, some members of the younger generation like Thulani Davis and Ntozake Shange were influenced by Black Arts. Black Arts is now so accepted that Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who has been appointed the Czar of the Black experience, provided Kim McMillon with thousands of dollars to stage the New Orleans conference. He's the one who said that Black Arts was "short-lived."

He's been saying that for decades. You know I wrote a piece for *The Wall Street Journal* about the passing of Amiri Baraka in 2014. I was in correspondence with him until November 16th of 2013. We had our last correspondence then. It was a very on-again, off-again relationship because we had disagreements. Baraka didn't receive the kind of favorable critical reception when he was alive because the establishment didn't like what he was saying, but now that he's dead, *The New York Times* that even blasted a revival of "Dutchman" calling it "deeply misogynistic" written by a *Village Voice* Black male-hater, Alexis Soloski, who was brought uptown to *The New York Times*, is recommending his book of poems *SOS* for a Christmas gift. They love you when you're dead. The Establishment praises assimilation that is required not only of Blacks, but White ethnics. In order to get over they must fit into something called "The Anglo mainstream."

The media and so called mainstream get their information about Black life from about a dozen people. MSNBC and CNN are able to find spokespersons who are way out on the outskirts of Black consensus opinion. MSNBC has all of the Black Republicans and Trump supporters on all day. Where do they find these people? A blogger recently called them "Negro Whisperers," whose job is telling Whites what Blacks are up to.

I'm reading the biography of Monroe Trotter, a real hell raiser who bawled out Woodrow Wilson and kept Calvin Coolidge waiting. He and others were bitterly opposed to Booker T. Washington, the most powerful Black man of the time. But Washington had to answer his critics in the days of print, had to answer critics like Monroe Trotter, but with television, the Black proxies for the left and right have immunity. They once were proxies of the left, but after Justice Powell, William Simon and D'Nesh D'Souza, an imported intellectual, called for a "counter intelligentsia," Black proxies on the right were created. Since they have better funding, John McWhorter was elevated from his position as an obscure linguistics professor to leap to the head of the line of Black opinion makers. He's backed by the Manhattan Institute, which is a Eugenics outfit, endowed by members of the Fortune 500. His first task was to take down me, Maxine Waters and others. He challenged my description of my unpleasant encounters with the police. He said for him, it wasn't a problem. Some of those on the left who reach millions as a result of their affiliation with big networks told the Black millennials not to vote, or vote for some nutty Green Party.

Unlike Booker T. Washington they, because of their powerful backers, can skirt debate. All of the ones who encouraged Black millennials to stay home or not vote, or vote Green or vote complicated should have to answer for the disaster that has happened. The election of a serial rapist and someone who hangs around for an opportunity to see little girls naked. Someone who has promised police suppression of Blacks, who wants to bring back stop-and-frisk and military actions in the Inner Cities. Someone who is using bogus voter fraud statistics so as to set up more ways to discriminate against Black voters. Some of these Negro Whisperers were assigned to take down Cosby and Clarence Thomas. Whether they are guilty or not and whatever the opinions both hold, there is certainly a double standard operating here. Why aren't the Negro Whisperers at *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, and *The Atlantic* taking down Trump as they did Coz and even reaching back to the last century to take down Booker T. Washington as a sexist. Where is Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who shoved Black male writers under the bus as sexists in that bizarre piece that he wrote for the *Times*. He said that Black women writers had eclipsed Black male writers. The old divide and conquer strategy that's been used by Colonialists all over the world. Where is he on Trump? His *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* casts Black males as the new oppressors. Not Trump whose policies will lead to the deaths of thousands of women in the United States and Africa, whether they be Black, Brown, White, Yellow and Red. What kind of feminism is this? One that casts those at the bottom as the true oppressors.

The *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* is also screwed up when it comes to The Black Arts Movement. The third edition places James Alan McPherson and Adrienne Kennedy in the Black Arts Movement. Adrienne Kennedy is one of our great playwrights, but won't receive a Pulitzer because she is not in on the Black Boogeyman racket. She wrote a play about police brutality. It's about her son, Adam, being beaten by the police *in his front yard!* Now, Amiri Baraka didn't accept James Alan McPherson as being part of the Black Arts Movement. There are so many others that are arbitrarily placed under the umbrella of "the Black Arts Movement," yet Gates omits important prime movers of the Black Arts Movement like Askia Toure. He omits John O. Killens, who was one of the mentors of The Black Arts Movement. They've given him more power than the major African American critics like Joyce A. Joyce, Bernard Bell, Jerry Ward, Reginald Martin, and Brenda Greene combined. In the old days, writers were provided with patronage that they awarded to young writers. Richard Wright was responsible for James Baldwin receiving a fellowship. Now Gates has millions of dollars in patronage. His colleagues at Harvard are more likely to receive the money than poets and novelists.

Now, I'm not saying the cooptation of the Black Arts Movement is a bad thing. I say that because the academics who now run it, at least acknowledge the founders. Unlike the LGBT and feminist movements. These are middle class movements that start out as integrated working class movements. LGBT-ers, the ones who actually fought the battles were working class Puerto Rican and Black transvestites and others. Stonewall's history has been whitewashed. It was Black and Puerto Rican LGBTers who fought the police. In 1976—these working class LGBTers fought the Vice squad in San Francisco; those were the battles that were fought.

The feminist movement was co-opted by the middle class. Harriet Fraad, who writes for *Tikkun*, says that the feminist movement started as a working class integrated movement, and then Gloria Steinem and corporate types took over. Since they are dependent upon the White patriarchy for sustaining their careers, Black men became the scapegoats for the charge of misogyny. Gloria Steinem said that Mr., the character in *The Color Purple*, represented all Black men and said that President Obama didn't have the qualifications to be president, which is why the White patriarchal media chose her to represent the feminist movement. Take the recent Women's march on Washington. Black, Muslim and a diverse group of women organized the march, but the media chose Gloria Steinem as spokesperson. Now a Jewish magazine, *The Tablet*, asked me to write an article about Alice Walker and her boycott of Israel. Instead I wrote an article challenging Steven Spielberg, who, like other men from other ethnic groups, is making all of the profits from the Black Boogeyman racket, to do a Jewish *The Color Purple*, which would feature the treatment of Jewish women in the United States and Israel. I never said that the brothers couldn't be gross with women; my position is that *they have been singled out!* The response I got from the magazine shows that. The male editors accepted it. The women on the staff rejected it.

While Ntozake, Gwen Carman, and J.J. Phillips, took down a Feminist that quoted Gates about my misogyny, Joyce A. Joyce and others have defended me from the charges made by women from other ethnic groups. I have a problem when I try to get these women to comment about the misogyny that's rife in their communities. Why should these women give away the secrets of their community spousal abuse and child abuse, when they can dump all of the crimes against women on the brothers? They're not the only ones. The position of women in India and Pakistan is horrible. A woman who criticized the misogyny that goes on in those places had to go into hiding for fear of her life. What does a filmmaker Pratibha Parmar, with Indian ancestry, do when provided with a grant from PBS? Does she use this as an opportunity to aim a spotlight on the horrible crimes committed against women in India? No, she blames misogyny on Black American men including myself. I think thousands of educated White women who give Black men a hard time go Stepford and become daughters of the patriarchy when it comes to White men. Donald Trump, the Pervert-In-Chief, received the majority of votes from educated White women. Lisa Bloom, who says that she gets flak from both men and women when she critiques misogyny among her ethnic group, is representing women who say that they were assaulted sexually by Trump. I ran an interview of her in my magazine, *Konch*. One of those who came forth got so many threats from Trump's degenerate and racist followers that she left the country. I've been waiting for newsperson April Ryan to ask about his victims at a news conference. He said that he was going to sue the eleven women who accused him for defamation. Why aren't the ones who followed the instructions of their patriarchal bosses to loop Ray Rice's ugly assault on his wife questioning Trump and his aides about these women? No such luck. April Ryan is the one who asked Barack Obama whether he was going to have Cosby give back an award.

That the majority of White educated women voted for a sick person makes you wonder what the Steinem faction of the feminist movement have been up to since they modeled themselves after SNCC. Of course, Clarence Thomas's politics are off the wall, but contrast his treatment by the corporate feminist movement and their attitude toward Trump.

Why haven't they educated these women who continue to support policies that will cause the deaths of thousands of women in the United States and abroad? Both the left and the middle have been trying to excuse the 60 million or so racists, anti-Muslims, and anti-Semites who voted for Trump by attributing it to the discontent over economic issues, when the net worth of the average White family is many times that of Blacks and Hispanics. I asked three of the most radical of commentators who coddle the White working class why White educated women chose race over gender? No response.

A lot of Black male bashing took place in the *Village Voice*. I was taken down almost weekly by surrogates who were working on behalf of women editors who are silent about how women of their ethnic background are treated by their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. They even called James Baldwin "a woman hater." James Baldwin. Baldwin's women characters make feminist speeches. In *Another Country*, they are Cass, Hella and Ida, who talks about how she's been mistreated by both White and Black men. Baldwin, a woman hater? Elizabeth, Florence, Deborah in *Go Tell It On The Mountain* get more sympathy than the male characters Gabriel, the two Royals, Frank, Richard, etc. To call Baldwin "a woman-hater," or placing "woman-hating" lines in the speeches of the character Clementine Rivers in *If Beale Street Could Talk*, is the kind of scorched-earth feminism that was aimed especially at Black men, which reached its heights in the mid-seventies, when this review was published. All the while the *Voice* and the feminist editors who are silent about the cruelty toward women in their ethnic group got into trouble with its *Backpages*, where services of prostitutes were advertised.

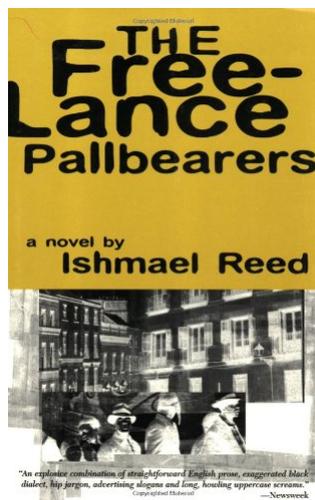
These pages were present while the women editors who were piling on Black men while participating in a cover-up of crimes against women in their community. A Black feminist writer told me that these women encouraged Black women to take down Black men. But I really should thank my feminist critics. My favorite image from the slavery period is that of the fugitive slave with his knapsack crossing the border. They were the catalyst for my crossing the border. My breakthrough occurred when I studied Japanese and wrote *Japanese By Spring*. It was when I was left for literary roadkill that I decided never again would I limit the critical reception to my work to American critics, who unlike the crude and base Donald Trump, are dinner party White nationalists. When they don't do you in, they hire their Black auxiliary to do it. The book was praised in Japan and was responsible for my being invited to Japan and to China twice, where my books are being translated and published. In April of last year, I received the Alberto Dubito Award for poetry and music in Venice. My very strong following among Black readers and theater goers led to the success of my play *The Final Version*, without a single mainstream review, which Black writers of previous decades would die for.

The play was promoted by the Black media and word of mouth in Brooklyn and elsewhere. My new novel, *Conjugating Hindi*, will be published by the Dalkey Archives. I'm one of the few non-Europeans on their list. Books of mine that were published forty to forty-four years ago are being published in Italy, Spain, England and China in new editions. This year is the 50th anniversary of the publication of my first novel, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*. PBS recently cited it as one of 8 books to read about the Trump era.

And though I have lived in California since 1967, it was from the Black cultural nationalists, and White counterculture artists that I learned to survive as an artist.

I coined the term "Neo Slave Narrative," which is my everlasting regret. I wrote it to describe my novel, *Flight to Canada*, in 1976. And there's been a boom in products about slavery—when the future's more important or there are more calamities ahead in the future than in slavery because of global warming.

Don: So outside of academia, outside of criticism, outside of maybe even commerce...there are Black Arts now. You yourself are doing Black Arts, you're writing and making plays and—



Ishmael: Of course, I had fundamental disagreements with some Black Arts members. I didn't believe that all White people were devils. I grew up in a provincial working class town where I saw both Blacks and Whites at their worst and at their best. Both Amiri and Elijah Muhammad abandoned this idea in the mid-seventies. Elijah Muhammad didn't really believe it. How could he? He was a pragmatic businessman. Black Arts poets and playwrights were writing about Whites as devils. He had White people at his dinner table. For my book, *The Complete Muhammad Ali*, I asked one of those who was a member of Wallace Muhammad's group why the Nation used what Wallace Muhammad called comic book stuff. He said, "We couldn't teach the masses of people the Koran, so we had to use comic book stuff. We had to use flying saucers and all that in order to attract people." When I heard my former roommates talk this

stuff, I said this was going to be a dead-end street. I was attracted to it for one hot moment, but then moved on. I knew Malcolm X, and we had some deep conversations. It was inevitable that he would abandon this stuff. The Malcolm I knew, had he survived, would probably be running a small university. He was obsessed with the origin of words. It was because of Malcolm that we have Ethnic Studies, a concept that was coined by Nathan Hare. I interviewed Bobby Seale. He and another guy started the Black Studies program at Merritt College in Oakland. He had a \$35 library card and went to use it at the University of California and got a reading list, and that became the curriculum.

He said, well, they couldn't have gotten it done if White students hadn't threatened to shut down the school if they didn't. So, I mean you have to have allies. In connection with the research for my book *The Complete Muhammad Ali*, I found that while Elijah Muhammad was preaching Yacubism, he hosted Whites at his dinner table. I've always credited The Black Arts for bringing art to the people on their own terms. Without Black Arts, there would be no multiculturalism which Al Young, Jessica Hagedorn, Ntozake Shange, Thulani Davis and others inaugurated in California. I have heard Native American, Chicano and Chicana, Puerto Rican, and Asian American writers acknowledge their indebtedness to Black Arts. I wasn't surprised that a Palestinian American writer acknowledged the influence upon her writings by Black writers upon receiving a 2016 American Book Awards. On the other hand, Black Arts had a nasty, violent and troublesome side. It's all there in Amiri's autobiography.

Don: But you were a leading African-American author at the time of the Black Arts Movement.

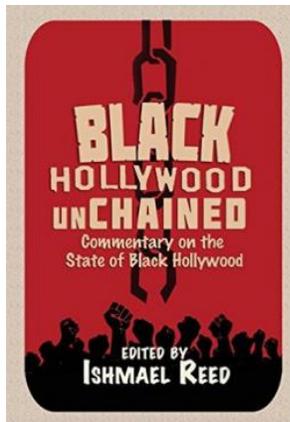
Ishmael: Well, I don't know. It's not like I'm writing a piece on the Black Arts Repertory Theater for a magazine. I think for some of these academics and professors, the way to keep information from them is to put it in a book, cause I'm just amazed at some of things I hear, but—Amiri's one of the worst critics of the Black Repertory Theater. He criticized them when he became a Marxist-Leninist. He called Black Nationalism "fascist." But he saw that the Black Arts idea began to spread. So it took them a long time to figure that out. In one of my correspondences with Amiri Baraka, we talked about how there was a lot of myth-making—he admits that—but out of this, I will give credit to the Black Arts for getting people to read and write who never thought about this or expanding leadership and literacy in the Black community. So powerful has been Black Arts' legacy, that the Establishment has sought to import middle and upper class African and subcontinent Indian writers to give the powerful Black vernacular used by the Black Arts writers a sort of quaint Victorian makeover. When you read about literary conferences in Brooklyn and Manhattan, you'll find African writers, but Black American writers are missing. Even the "Negro Whisperers," and those whose main gig is attacking Black men, what C. Innis calls the "Black Bogeyman genre."

Ishmael: I think that there was a serious idea that there would be an armed resistance to Southern terrorism but when that didn't happen...and if you look at 1972 at a piece that Baraka wrote for *Newsweek*--which I got from ebay--there are lots of threats in there about bullets because they were all following Malcolm X. We all thought Malcolm X would get engaged in a firefight with the Klan and they would beat him or something like that or—it's ridiculous because the Nation at this time was not violent. In connection to my book, *The Complete Ali*, I asked one of the ex-members of the Nation of Islam, "Why did you guys criticize King because you're non-confrontational and nonviolent?" That's why Elijah Muhammad reprimanded Malcolm X when he made this remark about JFK getting killed. They didn't want any confrontation with the government.

They criticized King who was probably more militant than the Nation of Islam. And the FBI spied on them too; in a book called *Race Matters*, they said these people aren't a threat--they're nonviolent and non-confrontational. But Malcolm was making these threats; Baraka ratcheted up these threats. That was not possible so, the revolutionaries turned on themselves. That's why Black Arts Repertory turned into a Black-on-Black crime scene.

Another version of why it crashed was told to me by ex-Berkeley Mayor, Gus Newport. He said that Baraka went to the Truth Coffee shop and told them to get rid of the White waitress who worked there. The coffee shop was co-owned by one Bumpy Johnson. Bumpy Johnson was Lucky Luciano's partner in Harlem. Bumpy dispatched Gus Newport to tell the Black Repertory Theater in Harlem to shut down. That's when like people went over the edge, and when Malcolm was killed. Baraka didn't screen those people he went uptown with—I lived with them. Askia was stable, though. His great poem, "Dawnsong," is as close as you're going to get to a Black Arts manifesto.

Don: So imagine you're in this movie I'm making called *The Black Arts Movement* and you wanted to say something to the people watching this movie. What would you say to them?



Ishmael: Amiri Baraka was the fundraiser, but the real philosopher of that movement was Askia Toure, and he doesn't get credit, but Amiri was connected to this big Allen Ginsberg machine. As a matter of fact, one time I called it the AT&T of American poetry. The Beats became an industry, and products are still being sold under that banner. White poets downtown felt encroached upon when a flood of Black male poets entered the scene. This culminated in a fist fight at a coffee shop called Les Metro, whose owner was one of these guys who goes psycho when Black males are in close proximity to White women. He hired some plainclothes thugs to keep order, and one of them attacked Tom Dent who was our leader. I came to Tom's aid and was punched. We left and then halfway home turned around and re-entered the club.

Walter Lowenfels, with whom I had collaborated with on an anthology *Poets of Today and Jazz Poets* produced by Folkways Records and *Where Is Vietnam*, which I got Doubleday to publish, was reading that night. I told Walter that if he continued reading I would never speak to him again. I went home. Paul Blackburn called the next day and said that after I left there was a walkout. We looked for another place to hold the readings and were given permission to hold the readings at St Mark's Poetry Project though few of the White nationalist critics will trace it to the attack on Tom Dent. St. Mark's Poetry Project, which has hosted people like Patti Smith, Lou Reed and others, is fifty years old as of last year. And so, Amiri was able to attract financial support because of Ginsberg's power. Which is why I called his network The AT&T of the Poetry World.

I ran into him in North Beach, and he invited me for lunch and bawled me out and voiced his resentment of an article where my charge appeared. It was called “American Poetry Is There A Center?”-which won a Pushcart Prize. But, I’ll tell you what. Ginsberg changed, and to this day under the leadership of Ann Waldman, Naropa, which is located in Boulder, Colorado, is a model of diversity.

By contrast, the guru of the mainstream poetry scene saw me in North Beach in San Francisco and invited me to lunch at Enrico’s. He balled me out, but I didn’t back down. I said that he was a manager of a network of poetry scenes that only allowed for a few tokens. So, I think Allen Ginsberg provided Amiri Baraka with a network of patrons and donors that enabled him to be the fundraiser for the New York Black Arts scene. But forget about all of the posturing, the publicity, the trash-talking and the romanticizing of the Black Arts Movement, etc. Baraka was one of the most original writers of anytime and anyplace. Yes, he went through a lot of changes, but his son Ras, in one of the most original funeral orations of my lifetime, buried his father as a mestizo. He was a great writer. If he had been a patriot like Ralph Ellison, he would have been accorded such status.