

# Papers of Amiri Baraka: Poet Laureate of the Black Power Movement

[text composed by the Auburn Avenue Research Library staff]  
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This collection of Amiri Baraka materials was made available by Dr. Komozi Woodard. He collected these documents during his career as an activist in Newark, New Jersey. The collection consists of rare works of poetry, organizational records, print publications, over one hundred articles, poems, plays, and speeches by Baraka, a small amount of personal correspondence, and oral histories. The collection has been arranged into eighteen series. These series are: (1) Black Arts Movement; (2) Black Nationalism; (3) Correspondence; (4) Newark (New Jersey); (5) Congress of African People; (6) National Black Conferences and National Black Assembly; (7) Black Women's United Front; (8) Student Organization for Black Unity; (9) African Liberation Support Committee; (10) Revolutionary Communist League; (11) African Socialism; (12) Black Marxists; (13) National Black United Front; (14) Miscellaneous Materials, 1978-1988; (15) Serial Publications; (16) Oral Histories; (17) Woodard's Office Files. The dates range is between 1913-1998 with 9,297 images via the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System (Komozi Woodard Amiri Baraka Papers, Archives Division).

## **Detailed Description:**

The extensive documentation of this collection includes poetry, organizational records, print publications, articles, plays, speeches, personal correspondence, oral histories, as well as some personal records. The materials cover Baraka's involvement in the politics in Newark, N.J. and in Black Power movement organizations such as the Congress of African People, the National Black Conference movement, the Black Women's United Front. Later materials document Baraka's increasing involvement in Marxism.

### **Series I: Black Arts Movement, 1961-1998**

This series includes both rare and popular materials from Baraka's years as a leader of the Harlem-based Black Arts movement. Two articles by Baraka's associate Larry Neal, one discussing Baraka's literary career and the other discussing the importance of culture in the Black liberation struggle, serve as an introduction to this series. Several issues of the periodical *Black Theatre* include poems by Baraka; articles by Neal, Maulana Karenga, and Ed Bullins; and plays by Sonia Sanchez, Marvin X, Herbert Stokes, and Baraka. Other literary material can be found in two issues of *The Cricket*, a magazine edited by Baraka and Neal. This series also includes works of poetry by Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Mae Jackson, Sylvia Jones (Amina Baraka), Jewel C. Latimore (Johari Amini), Don L. Lee (Haki R. Madhubuti), Sonia Sanchez, and Marvin X. The Black Arts movement series documents the wellspring of artistic accomplishment among African Americans as well as a profound political consciousness and militancy among the artists.

### **Series II: Black Nationalism,, 1964-1977**

This series consists of several important theoretical writings on Black nationalism and suggests the important influence of Maulana Karenga on Baraka's development. Baraka's article "A Black Value System" explains the seven guiding principles of Maulana Karenga and the Us Organization. These principles are also defined in two articles by Karenga: "7 Principles of Us Maulana Karenga and the Need for a Black Value System" and "Kitabu: Beginning Concepts in Kawaida." This series concludes with a pamphlet by Muhammad Ahmad that discusses many aspects of Black nationalism including the roles of youth and women and the importance of literature and art.

### **Series III: Correspondence, 1967-1973**

This brief series includes a small amount of Baraka's personal correspondence. There are letters from Baraka to Maulana Karenga and Kenneth Gibson and letters to Baraka from Mfanasekaya P. Gqobose, Paul Bomani, and Walter Rodney. The correspondence indicates Baraka's interest in cultural nationalism and some of his efforts to establish ties between African people everywhere.

### **Series IV: Newark (New Jersey), 1913-1980**

This series documents Baraka's role in his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, during the riot of 1967 and his subsequent activism in Newark. In Newark, Baraka founded a number of community-based initiatives in attempts to deal with wretched housing conditions, failing schools, and obstructions to economic opportunities.

The majority of the documentation in this series pertains to Baraka's efforts to turn the city into a NewArk, particularly via the Kawaida Towers apartment building project and the related NJR-32 urban renewal project. There are also several folders of newspaper clippings on Newark politics, including the 1970 mayoral election and the victory of Kenneth Gibson, and the riot in Newark's Puerto Rican community in 1974. Researchers should note that Baraka's activism in Newark is also covered in issues of *Black NewArk* and *Unity and Struggle*.

### **Series V: Congress of African People, 1960-1976**

In 1970 Baraka founded the Congress of African People (CAP) in order to advance his own vision of African cultural nationalism. This vision was particularly influenced by African leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, and Ahmed Sékou Touré and by the African American cultural nationalist Maulana Karenga. This series contains a wealth of CAP documents and pamphlets, most written by Baraka, ranging from detailed policy and philosophical thoughts to statements at CAP political events and meetings. CAP's campaign against police brutality, the Boston school integration impasse, the Sixth Pan-African Congress, and the role of women in the Black freedom struggle are some of the topics covered in this series. In the mid-1970s Baraka transformed CAP into a more purely Marxist organization. This created conflict in CAP between the Marxists and the cultural nationalists and eventually caused the demise of CAP. Other material pertaining to CAP can be found in issues of *Unity and Struggle*, the official newspaper of CAP.

### **Series VI: National Black Conferences and National Black Assembly, 1968-1975**

In addition to his lifelong commitment to community-based political activism, Baraka also played a leading role in national Black Power organizations. The National Black Conference Movement began in 1966 and Baraka became involved starting with a convention in Newark in 1967. In 1972, Baraka, along with Gary, Indiana, Mayor Richard Hatcher and Michigan congressman Charles C. Diggs Jr., convened the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana, arguably the high point of the Black freedom movement in the 1960s and 1970s. During that convention, the delegates adopted the National Black Political Agenda, also known as the Gary declaration, a statement that was a major step toward creating an independent Black political party. The Gary declaration covered seven major areas: economic, human development, communications, rural development, environmental protection, political empowerment, and international policy. This series includes a copy of the Gary declaration. The National Black Political Assembly, typically referred to simply as the National Black Assembly (NBA), also formed at the Gary convention. This series contains several Baraka writings pertaining to the NBA, and there is a brief file on some of the ideological conflicts between socialists, communists, and Black nationalists that began to divide the NBA by the mid-1970s.

### **Series VII: Black Women's United Front, 1975-1976**

Amina Baraka, the wife of Amiri Baraka, founded the Black Women's United Front (BWUF) in 1974. The goal of the BWUF was to develop an independent political agenda for African American women. This series contains newspaper clippings from *Unity and Struggle* pertaining to the BWUF, an article by Amiri Baraka analyzing meetings of the BWUF and NBA, and two position papers on the role of women in the Black freedom struggle. Other articles on the role of women and writings by Amina Baraka can be found in other parts of this collection, particularly in issues of *Black NewArk*, where she had a regular column.

### **Series VIII: Student Organization for Black Unity, 1971**

The Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU) formed in May 1969 at a meeting at North Carolina A & T in Greensboro. SOBU held its first national convention in October 1969 at North Carolina Central University in Durham. This series begins with a brief background history of SOBU followed by a summary of its programs and a list of the organization's major officers. These included Nelson N. Johnson, Tim Thomas, Milton Coleman, John McClendon, Mark Smith, Alvin Evans, Victor Bond, and Jerry Walker. This document is followed by one issue of SOBU's newsletter. The newsletter clearly shows SOBU's Pan-African focus, covering topics such as African Solidarity Day, South Africa, the Pan-Africanism of Malcolm X, and a report on the United Nations. In August 1972, SOBU changed its name to Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU). Other material on SOBU/YOBU can be found in issues of *The African World*, the organization's official newspaper.

### **Series IX: African Liberation Support Committee, 1973-1976**

In 1971, Owusu Sadaukai (Howard Fuller) traveled to Africa where he observed the anti-colonial movements in Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola. Upon his return to the United States, he began to make plans for an African Liberation Day (ALD) demonstration that was designed to show worldwide support for the African liberation struggles. Amidst the planning for the first ALD in 1972, the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) was formed. This series of ALSC materials contains the ALSC statement of principles, an article on Tanzanian socialism by Walter Rodney, a CAP position paper on ALSC, and a handbook on African Liberation Month that includes a brief history of the ALSC. Several documents in this series provide evidence of a serious ideological struggle within the organization. These documents include a paper by ALSC international chairperson Dawolu Gene Locke, a paper by Abdul Hakim Ibn Alkalimat and Nelson Johnson discussing the ALSC statement of principles adopted at a 1973 meeting in Frogmore, South Carolina, and position papers from several ALSC branches about the future direction of the organization.

### **Series X: Revolutionary Communist League, 1974-1982**

When CAP disintegrated in conflict between the Marxists and the Black nationalists, Baraka founded the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL). This series reflects Baraka's move away from nationalism to a Marxist position, which is documented in drafts of several papers written by Baraka. These papers cover topics such as Chinese communism, the international communist movement, and the ideological position of the RCL. Other articles in this series include a position paper on organizing in factories, an RCL history of the Black freedom struggle, and two folders on the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization. This series also includes one issue of *Bolshevik*, the organ of the Revolutionary Workers League; one issue of *Class Struggle*; and one issue of the *Red Banner*, the journal of the August Twenty-Ninth Movement.

### **Series XI: African Socialism, 1973**

This brief series includes documents produced by two African socialists who had a strong influence on Baraka's development, Julius K. Nyerere and Ahmed Sékou Touré. Nyerere was the leader of the independence movement in East Africa. His paper in this series discusses the concept of Ujamaa or African socialism, a concept that influenced both Maulana Karenga and Baraka and was one of the seven parts of the Kawaida doctrine. Sékou Touré was the leader of the Democratic Party of Guinea, and in 1958 he became president of an independent Guinea. The papers by Touré in this series are "Revolution and Production," "Africa and Imperialism," and "The Role of Women in the Revolution." Materials on these two leaders can also be found in other parts of the collection.

### **Series XII: Black Marxists, 1969-1980**

This series includes materials on Black Marxists who were contemporaries of Baraka, as well as older Black Marxists such as Harry Haywood, C.L.R. James, and Odis Hyde. The majority of this series comprises essays by Harry Haywood. Haywood was born in 1898 and joined the Communist Party in the mid-1920s. He was expelled from the Communist Party in 1959, but he remained a critical observer of the Black freedom struggle and exerted a significant influence on Baraka and many other Black radicals. Titles of essays by Haywood in this series include: "For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question" (originally published in 1957); "Some Remarks on the National Question"; "Black Power and the Fight for Socialism"; and "The Struggle for the Leninist Position on the Negro Question in the U.S.A." One of the most unique and interesting documents in this collection is a typescript of the autobiography of Haywood protégé Odis Hyde. Hyde's autobiography is a moving, personal history of the Black freedom movement in the twentieth century.

Beginning with his childhood in Houston, Texas, Hyde tells the story of his migration to Chicago and his involvement in the labor movement and Black freedom movement. The series also includes files on the All African Revolutionary Party, the Black Workers Congress, and the Progressive Labor Party, and it also includes one issue of the periodical *Steel on the Move*.

### **Series XIII: National Black United Front, 1979-1981**

The National Black United Front (NBUF) was founded in June 1980. This series contains several of the NBUF founding documents, including the constitution and by-laws, amendments to the constitution, the founding convention program, and resolutions from the first convention. The resolutions provide an entry point to most of the main concerns of the NBUF. They cover social services, labor, international affairs, politics, prisons, youth, art and culture, health, community organizing, education, employment, police, women, and housing. Another important document in this series is a detailed report by NBUF chairman Herbert Daughtry on his activities from May to September 1981. Daughtry discusses the national and international program of the NBUF and major NBUF initiatives and demonstrations. There are also two interviews with Daughtry and a typescript of a speech he gave at a New York metropolitan branch meeting. An article by Komozi Woodard from a June 1980 issue of the *Call* and an article by NBUF national coordinator Jitu Weusi situate the NBUF within the history of Black united fronts in the United States.

### **Series XIV: Miscellaneous Materials, 1978-1988**

This series documents the activities of Baraka and other Black activists between 1978 and 1988. Baraka remained very productive as a writer during this period, and this series reproduces four of his articles: "Afro-American Literature and Class Struggle"; "Nationalism, Self-Determination and Socialist Revolution"; "If Goetz Goes Free Black People Should Arm Themselves"; and "Jesse 88" on Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign. A file on the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists assumes importance when used in connection with the other documents on Black workers and the labor movement that are scattered throughout this collection. Together these documents indicate the independent voice of Black workers, the relationship of the Black worker to the organized labor movement, and the stresses faced by workers in the 1970s and 1980s. One may consult the subject index for other items pertaining to labor and the labor movement. A pamphlet about independent Black political action includes articles on Newark, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, Carl Stokes, the Black Panther Party, and the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana.

## **Series XV: Serial Publications, 1968-1984**

This series consists of selected editions of serial publications. The publications represented are *The African World*, *Black Nation*, *Black NewArk*, *Unity and Struggle*, *Main Trend*, and *IFCO News*. The *African World* was originally published by SOBU/YOBU, and the topics covered in the newspaper reflect the organization's Pan-African focus. The *Black Nation* was edited by Baraka and published in Oakland, California by Getting Together Publications. The issues covered in *The Black Nation* reflect Baraka's interest in Marxism and working-class unity, as well as his belief in the importance of Black arts and culture to the Black freedom struggle. *The Black Nation* includes many articles by Baraka, plays, works of poetry, and interviews with artists and activists such as Margaret Walker, Alice Lovelace, Michael Smith, and Don Rojas. *Black NewArk*, "the voice of Newark's inner city," is the next periodical reproduced in this series. There is one issue of *Black NewArk* from 1968 and a complete run for 1972-1974. Baraka had a regular column entitled "Raise" in which he addressed issues of both local and national significance. There are also several columns by Amina Baraka. *Unity and Struggle* was the national edition of *Black NewArk* and the official newspaper of CAP. Baraka's column "Raise" was also featured in *Unity and Struggle*. The Anti-Imperialist Cultural Union began publishing *Main Trend* in 1978. According to a statement in its debut issue, *Main Trend* aimed to publish articles "focusing on the class struggle in popular culture." This series concludes with two issues of *IFCO News*, a publication of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. The October 1972 issue contains an article about the Committee for a Unified NewArk.

## **Series XVI: Oral Histories, 1984-1986**

This collection of Amiri Baraka materials concludes with transcripts from sixteen interviews conducted by Komozi Woodard and his assistants as part of an oral history project entitled, "The Making of Black NewArk: An Oral History of the Impact of the Freedom Movement on Newark Politics." Most of the people interviewed were primarily local Newark activists, although there are also interviews with Baraka, Maulana Karenga, and scholar John Henrik Clarke. Most of the interviewees were asked similar questions such as their first remembrances of racism, their involvement in the Black freedom movement, their experiences in Newark, and their thoughts about Baraka. Each interviewee was also asked more specific questions. For example, most of the interview with Clarke discusses Pan-Africanism and Clarke's assessment of Baraka. Vicki Garvin's oral history is actually a speech given by Garvin to one of Woodard's classes. In this speech, Garvin discusses her long career as an activist, from her involvement in the labor movement in the 1940s and 1950s to her travels to Africa and China in the 1960s, her return to the United States in the 1970s, and her subsequent activism in Newark. This series of oral histories is one of the most unique and valuable parts of this collection.

## **Series XVII: Komozi Woodard's Office Files, 1956-1986**

This series is a creator arranged miscellany of various materials. The materials found here include correspondence and miscellaneous for which Komozi Woodard created specific subject files. These materials sometimes correspond with other series in the collection.