



COLLECTION

# The Black Arts Movement

**An introduction showcasing one of the most influential cultural and aesthetic movements of the last 100 years.**

BY THE EDITORS

The Black Arts Movement began—symbolically, at least—the day after Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. The poet LeRoi Jones (soon to rename himself Amiri Baraka) announced he would leave his integrated life on New York City’s Lower East Side for Harlem. There he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre, home to workshops in poetry, playwriting, music, and painting.

The Black Arts, wrote poet Larry Neal, was “the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept.” As with that burgeoning political movement, the Black Arts Movement emphasized self-determination for Black people, a separate cultural existence for Black people on their own terms, and the beauty and goodness of being Black. Black Arts poets embodied these ideas in a defiantly Black poetic language that drew on Black musical forms, especially jazz; Black vernacular speech; African folklore; and radical experimentation with sound, spelling, and grammar. Black Arts Movement poet and publisher Haki Madhubuti wrote, “And the mission is how do we become a whole people, and how do we begin to essentially tell our narrative, while at the same time move toward a level of success in this country and in the world? And we can do that. I know we can do that.”

The Black Arts Movement was politically militant; Baraka described its goal as “to create an art, a literature that would fight for black people's liberation with as much intensity as Malcolm X our ‘Fire Prophet’ and the rest of the enraged masses who took to the streets.”

Drawing on chants, slogans, and rituals of call and response, Black Arts poetry was meant to be politically galvanizing. Because of its politics—as well as what some saw as its potentially homophobic, sexist, and anti-Semitic elements—the Black Arts Movement was one of the most controversial literary movements in US history.

The movement began to wane in the mid-1970s, in tandem with its political counterpart, the Black Power movement. Government surveillance and violence decimated Black Power organizations, but the Black Arts Movement fell prey to internal schism—notably over Baraka's shift from Black nationalism to Marxism-Leninism—and financial difficulties.

Mainstream theaters and publishing houses embraced a select number of Black Arts Movement poets seen as especially salable to white audiences. When these artists moved on from Black Arts presses and theaters, the revenue from their books and plays went with them. The independent economic support structure the movement had hoped to build for itself was decimated. “During the height of Black Arts activity, each community had a coterie of writers and there were publishing outlets for hundreds, but once the mainstream regained control, Black artists were tokenized,” wrote poet, filmmaker, and teacher Kalamu ya Salaam. Along with the economic recession of the 1970s and philanthropic foundations' unwillingness to fund arts organizations that advocated radical politics, the cooption of a few Black artists by a white establishment meant the movement was no longer financially viable.

Despite its brief official existence, the movement created enduring institutions dedicated to promoting the work of Black artists, such as Chicago's Third World Press and Detroit's Broadside Press, as well as community theaters. It also created space for the Black artists who came afterward, especially rappers, slam poets, and those who explicitly draw on the movement's legacy. Ishmael Reed, a sometimes opponent of the Black Arts Movement, still noted its importance in a 1995 interview: “I think what Black Arts did was inspire a whole lot of Black people to write. Moreover, there would be no multiculturalism movement without Black Arts. Latinos, Asian Americans, and others all say they began writing as a result of the example of the 1960s. Blacks gave the example that you don't have to assimilate.

You could do your own thing, get into your own background, your own history, your own tradition and your own culture.”

This collection brings together poems, podcasts, and essays by or about Black Arts Movement writers. Of course, we cannot pay tribute to every single poet's contribution and affiliation with this movement, so this collection is intended to be a beginning point, not the end point. To suggest additions to the collection, please contact us [here](#).

**AMIRI BARAKA**

**Legacy**

AMIRI BARAKA

**GWENDOLYN BROOKS**

**kitchenette building**

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

**Young Afrikans**

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

**Riot**

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

**JAY WRIGHT**

**Benjamin Banneker Helps to Build a City**

JAY WRIGHT

**The Healing Improvisation of Hair**

JAY WRIGHT

**MAYA ANGELOU**

**Still I Rise**

MAYA ANGELOU

**Awaking in New York**

MAYA ANGELOU

**NIKKI GIOVANNI**

**BLK History Month**

NIKKI GIOVANNI

**A Historical Footnote to Consider Only When All Else Fails**

NIKKI GIOVANNI

**The Great Pax Whitie**

NIKKI GIOVANNI

**ETHERIDGE KNIGHT**

**The Sun Came**

ETHERIDGE KNIGHT

**A Fable**

ETHERIDGE KNIGHT

**Last Words by "Slick"**

ETHERIDGE KNIGHT

**AUDRE LORDE**

**Power**

AUDRE LORDE

**A Litany for Survival**

AUDRE LORDE

**A Woman Speaks**

AUDRE LORDE

**JUNE JORDAN**

**Letter to the Local Police**

JUNE JORDAN

**A Poem about Intelligence for My Brothers and Sisters**

JUNE JORDAN

**Poem about My Rights**

JUNE JORDAN

**JAMES BALDWIN**

**Le sporting-club de Monte Carlo (for Lena Horne)**

JAMES BALDWIN

**Munich, Winter 1973 (for Y.S.)**

JAMES BALDWIN

**Staggerlee wonders**

JAMES BALDWIN

**NTOZAKE SHANGE**

**HAKI R. MADHUBUTI**

**Quality: Gwendolyn Brooks at 73**

HAKI R. MADHUBUTI

**For the Consideration of Poets**

HAKI R. MADHUBUTI

**Rwanda: Where Tears Have No Power**

HAKI R. MADHUBUTI

**LORENZO THOMAS**

**Inauguration**

LORENZO THOMAS

**MMDCCXIII 1/2**

LORENZO THOMAS

**My Office**

LORENZO THOMAS

**QUINCY TROUPE**

**Poem for My Father**

QUINCY TROUPE

**Up Sun South of Alaska: A Short African American History**

QUINCY TROUPE

**Words that Build Bridges Toward a New Tongue**

QUINCY TROUPE

**SONIA SANCHEZ**

**P Haiku and Tanka for Harriet Tubman**

SONIA SANCHEZ

**HENRY DUMAS**

**The Zebra Goes Wild Where the Sidewalk Ends**

HENRY DUMAS

**Son of Msippi**

HENRY DUMAS

**Kef 24**

HENRY DUMAS

**JAYNE CORTEZ**

**There It Is**

JAYNE CORTEZ

**Under the Edge of February**

JAYNE CORTEZ

**These New York City Pigeons**

JAYNE CORTEZ

**BELL HOOKS**

**Appalachian Elegy (Sections 1-6)**

BELL HOOKS

**AI**

**Killing Floor**

AI

**P Interview with a Policeman**

AI

**Woman to Man**

AI

**ANGELA JACKSON**

**Miz Rosa Rides the Bus**

ANGELA JACKSON

**Mules and Women**

ANGELA JACKSON

**P More Than Meat and Raiment**

ANGELA JACKSON

**THULANI DAVIS**

**the attack could not be seen by night**

THULANI DAVIS

**as i fly over this time**

THULANI DAVIS

**backstage drama**

THULANI DAVIS

**OTHER BLACK ARTS POETS OF NOTE**

**Alvin Aubert**

**Mari Evans**

**Tony Medina**

**Carolyn Marie Rodgers**

**ARTICLES & BLOG POSTS**

**Expressive Language**

AMIRI BARAKA

**Directed by Desire**

ADRIENNE RICH

**Soldier: A Poet's Childhood**

JUNE JORDAN

**The Poet's Table**

MAYUKH SEN

**No Square Poet's Job**

TONY REHAGEN

**Nikki Giovanni: Selections**

SARAH AHMAD & THE EDITORS

**P From “To Float in the Space Between”**

TERRANCE HAYES

**Renaissance Woman**

DANIELLE A. JACKSON

**Audre Lorde 101**

BENJAMIN VOIGT

**Maya Angelou: Selections**

THE EDITORS

**‘My Music Is Words’**

LAVELLE PORTER

**Mother of Black Studies**

KYLA MARSHALL

**For the Sake of People’s Poetry**

JUNE JORDAN

**The Fires Behind Him**

NICK STURM

**Dear Sister Outsider**

LAVELLE PORTER

**Gwendolyn Brooks at 100**

THE EDITORS

**The Last Black Radical: How Cuba Turned LeRoi Jones Into Amiri Baraka**

HARMONY HOLIDAY

**P From “A Surprised Queenhood in the New Black Sun”**

ANGELA JACKSON

**P The Eros in Democracy**

MEGHAN O'ROURKE

**P “Velvety Velour” and Other Sonnet Textures**



CHRISTINA PUGH

**P Brooks's Prosody: Three Sermons on the Warpland**

CARL PHILLIPS

**P Mundane and Plural**

DAVID BAKER

**Poetic Training**

RUTH GRAHAM

**AUDIO AND VIDEO**

**South Side Community Arts Center**

FROM CHICAGO POETRY TOUR PODCAST

**Hall Library**

FROM CHICAGO POETRY TOUR PODCAST

**Gwendolyn Brooks**

FROM POETRY LECTURES

**Gwendolyn Brooks: Essential American Poets**

FROM ESSENTIAL AMERICAN POETS

**Something in the Way: A discussion of Amiri Baraka's "Something in the Way of Things (In Town)"**

FROM POEM TALK

**After the Night Years: On "The Sun Came" by Etheridge Knight and "Truth" by Gwendolyn Brooks**

FROM POEM TALK

**Choice and Style: A Discussion of Amiri Baraka's "Kenyatta Listening to Mozart"**

FROM POEM TALK

**Not Detainable: A discussion of Gwendolyn Brooks's "Riot"**

FROM POEM TALK

**Poems from the Inside**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

**The Uses of Anger**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

## **Amiri Baraka is Back in the Building**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

## **The Poetry of Close Quarters**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

## **Recasting Gwendolyn**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

## **"What I Wanted Was Your Love, Not Pity"**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

## **June Jordan**

FROM POETRY OFF THE SHELF

## **We Real Cool**

FROM POEM VIDEOS

## **"The Children of the Poor" by Gwendolyn Brooks**

FROM FAVORITE POEM PROJECT

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