

A Tribute to Amiri Baraka

by

Adilah Barnes

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Co-Founder of the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival

Adilah Barnes is an award-winning actor of stage, television and film. Her numerous television and film credits include five seasons on *Roseanne*, *Erin Brockovich* opposite Julia Roberts, *Iron-Jawed Angels* portraying Ida B. Wells, and the popular tv series, *The Middle*. Her one-woman play, *I Am That I Am: Woman, Black* has toured 40 states and three continents. Her book, *On My Own Terms: One Actor's Journey* was named #3 in June 2009 in *Essence Magazine* behind President Obama's two books. She is proprietor of The Writer's Well, an international literary retreat for women in Georgia and she has hosted the BlakeRadio internet show, *Adilah*. She co-founded the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Festival that is now celebrating their 24th Anniversary. Adilah is also an acting coach who has taught actors from youth to budding actors to celebrities that include Toni Braxton, Jada Pinkett, Kym Whitley, Florence LaRue, Freda Payne and many more. Her many awards include the 2016 Hall of Fame induction in her hometown of Oroville, California.

The tumultuous 60's
This was the era that rocked America off its axis
A time of national revolution
Watts
Burn, baby, burn
A call to social justice
Free Huey P. Newton
Seize the time
All power to the people
Black is beautiful

This volatile backdrop left its mark on the Black Theatre scene

It seems like it was only yesterday
When the Black Arts Movement was on fire
Sizzling with voices that could not be extinguished
LeRoi Jones
Later to liberate himself and become known as
Amiri Baraka

Amiri Baraka was at the helm of our
Black Arts Movement
With his unapologetic voice
Fearless/
In your face/
Thought-provoking/
Shocking/
Controversial/
That was him

Dutchman
Yes, Clay and Lula on that train
The Slave
Walker, Grace and Bradford
The Baptism
Boy and The Homosexual
The Toilet
A full cast of characters
And so many more

Baraka was joined by comrade playwrights of the day whose voices also demanded to be heard

Roll call
Askia Toure
Marvin X
Ed Bullins
Charles Fuller
Ben Caldwell
Sonia Sanchez
Douglas Turner Ward
Adrienne Kennedy
Charles Gordone
Paul Carter Harrison
Salimu

And spoken word artists like
Gil Scott Heron
The revolution will *not* be televised
and The Last Poets
Including Umar
and the list goes on
and on and on

They paved the way
For those who came later
Ntozake Shange
August Wilson
George C. Wolfe
Suzan-Lori Parks
and so many more

I pay homage to our literary elders of the 60's who stood on the shoulders of those who came before them

Each one, teach one

Langston Hughes
Alice Childress
Lorraine Hansberry
and so many more

What a proud legacy
for me

an actor
to inherit
to embrace

And what an honor to have breathed life into some of the unforgettable characters that I have been blessed to play

Joann Little
Evie
Beatrice
Mama Too Tight
and the list goes on