

AMIRI BARAKA: A REMEMBRANCE
October 7, 1934 – January 9, 2014

I remember you, when you visited the Berkeley campus,
in the LeRoi days, in crumpled tweed jacket,
your shoulders slouching slightly under the weight
of ennui, alienation, and beat generation swagger.
For us African students in that White world,
you were the genius -- poet, writer, our intellectual hero,
the "cat" -- whose blaze ignited our reticent anger,
whose rage animated a stage
where for the first time we saw our authentic selves,
not pacified or pastel for the enemy's comfort,
but churning and spitting fire, desperate to be free.
"Twenty-Volume Suicide Note" and "Dutchman"
launched you into the fray of U.S. cultural warfare,
though a clear direction eluded you.
In the time before you believed
in revolution.

I remember *Home*,
essays of deep reflection and exploration.
You wrote about that revelation in Cuba: Revolution is possible.
It was happening just off the Florida coast.
You understood that ennui and alienation are entirely inappropriate responses
to the human condition and its immense promise of change.

You recovered your African roots and grounding.
You came home. You changed your name.
Change became the principle by which you lived:
Ready to step off into a churning field of cultural work, issues and institutions,
conceding there are no guarantees,
that one simply cannot foretell which strategy will meet a given challenge;
committed to your neighborhood, loyal to peoples' independence fights around the world;
engaging the enemy with all the resources at your command.
Will revolutionary Black Nationalism engender African rebirth?
Will Marxist-Leninism enlighten? Will Kawaïda guide?
You turned all the theories inside out, stretching them against
our turbulent, striving communities,
to see if they fit, to test their efficacy,
all the while facing critics, and moving on.

Your life testified: No single ideological scaffolding will save us --
only our celebration of our beautiful selves,
only our ceaseless, fearless and fierce insistence on freedom
by any means of logic, warfare, imagination, Spirit or magic.
I remember you.

From *Medicine: New and Selected Poems*, Broadside Lotus Press/University of Detroit Mercy Press, 2017.