Amiri Baraka
- Born as Everett Leroy Jones in Newark, New Jersey in 1934
- After taking courses at Rutgers, Columbia, and Howard, and changing his first name to LeRoi, he joined Air Force
- Dishonorably discharged when “disloyal” writings were reported
- Moved to Greenwich Village and became involved with Beat poets
- Married Hettie Cohen in 1958
- Became radicalized by a 1960 trip to Cuba
- Published *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* (1961); *Blues People* (1963)
- *Dutchman* (1964) won Obie Award as the best off Broadway play.
After 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, he left his wife and two children, moved to Harlem, founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater, and declared himself a black cultural nationalist.

Changed his name to Amiri Baraka, Bantu name meaning Blessed One or Prince
Moved back to Newark and after being convicted of incitement to riot on the basis of his poetry he worked to elect Kenneth Gibson as the first African-American mayor of Newark in 1970.
Baraka moved away from black nationalism in the 1970s, emphasizing third-world anti-imperialism instead. He held various academic posts, including teaching in the Africana Studies Department of SUNY--Stony Brook. He continued to publish poetry and essays on jazz, social issues.
His work, however, has continued to be controversial, and he is often accused of being racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Baraka published *Somebody Blew Up America*, a collection of poems that includes the title poem “Somebody Blew Up America,” in which he seems to imply that Israelis and President Bush were partially responsible. This led the Governor of New Jersey to have legislation passed that allowed him to remove Baraka as poet laureate of New Jersey. You can read “Somebody Blew Up America” at

http://www.amiribaraka.com/blew.html

You can listen to Baraka performing “Somebody Blew Up America” at

http://www.amiribaraka.com/media.html