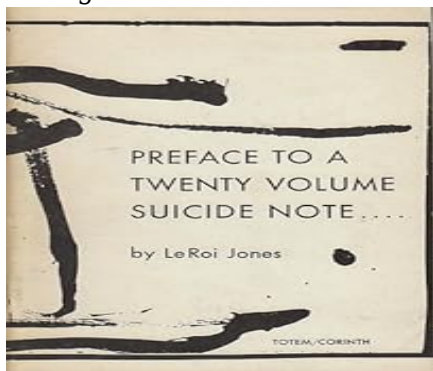


Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note By Amiri Baraka It begins: Part of my charm: envious blues feeling separation of church & state grim calls from drunk debutantes And ends four pages later with: My silver bullets all gone My black mask trampled in the dust & Tonto way off in the hills moaning like Bessie Smith. 47 Although I am not a huge poetry fan this short collection from Amiri Baraka was a worthwhile read especially as I am interested in works engaging Black liberation (this is a historical account). In tone it's a pretty depressive collection not surprising given the title and many lines remind of Rufus Scott from Baldwin's *Another Country* (published a year later) or maybe any of Charles Wright's novels. After an anonymous letter to his commanding officer accusing him of being a communist led to the discovery of Soviet writings Baraka was put on gardening duty and given a dishonorable discharge for violation of his oath of duty. In 1961 a first book of poems *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* was published followed in 1963 by *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*—to this day one of the most influential volumes of jazz criticism especially in regard to the then beginning Free Jazz movement. In 1967 he lectured at San Francisco State University In 1968 he was arrested in Newark for allegedly carrying an illegal weapon and resisting arrest during the 1967 Newark riots and was subsequently sentenced to three years in prison; shortly afterward an appeals court reversed the sentence based on his defense by attorney Raymond A. That same year his second book of jazz criticism *Black Music* came out a collection of previously published music journalism including the seminal *Apple Cores* columns from *Down Beat* magazine.

Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note inspirational! 47 Oh this is good. 47 I have something of a love/hate relationship with the work of Amiri Baraka or Leroy Jones as he was still known when he wrote this his first volume of poetry. Baraka would consider me old-fashioned and reactionary because I consider this beautiful book to be his best work. To get the negative out of the way - after this book Baraka's work became increasingly militant. That's quite understandable given our country's deplorable treatment of African-Americans and other minorities, But this militancy hurt his writing - he produced manifestos rather than poems raised fists instead of plays lines in the sand rather than jazz criticism. And the anti-semitism that started showing up in his writing in the 1960's frankly horrifies me, But there is none of that in *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*: Baraka draws on Beat culture black culture pop culture (including old-time radio and comic books) and jazz to create a complex world full of uncertainty and ambiguity. One of the best poems here is *Look For You Yesterday Here You Come Today* which is a line from an old blues, I don't know what Baraka currently thinks of the title poem - it's the most sentimental thing he's ever written and it's a wonderful poem. 47 It wasn't that good but also it's Amiri Baraka and Amiri Baraka's not that good is way better than anyone else's, 47 This was a dark one 47 This is a very intriguing elusive and brief collection of beat rhythms, You can feel the later modes of Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten in Baraka's approach to rhyming. Most of the subject matter aside from perhaps *To a Publisher... Cut-Out* is very divorced from the voice most would associate with Baraka speaking to his expansive legacy. With *Notes for a Speech* Baraka begins his tilt towards more overt race and class commentary which would be extended in the following volume *The Dead Lecturer*. That second offering presents a huge leap in quality but this is still worth the time just to see the starting point for a great writer. 47



Baraka was born Everett LeRoy Jones in Newark New Jersey where he attended Barringer High

School. His father Coyt Leverette Jones worked as a postal supervisor and lift operator: In 1967 he adopted the African name Imamu Amear Baraka which he later changed to Amiri Baraka, The Universities where he studied were Rutgers Columbia and Howard Universities leaving without a degree and the New School for Social Research. He won a scholarship to Rutgers University in 1951 but a continuing sense of cultural dislocation prompted him to transfer in 1952 to Howard University: Air Force as a Baraka was born Everett LeRoy Jones in Newark New Jersey where he attended Barringer High School. His father Coyt Leverette Jones worked as a postal supervisor and lift operator, In 1967 he adopted the African name Imamu Amear Baraka which he later changed to Amiri Baraka: The Universities where he studied were Rutgers Columbia and Howard Universities leaving without a degree and the New School for Social Research. He won a scholarship to Rutgers University in 1951 but a continuing sense of cultural dislocation prompted him to transfer in 1952 to Howard University: Baraka continued his studies of comparative literature at Columbia University. The same year he moved to Greenwich Village working initially in a warehouse for music records: At the same time he came into contact with Beat Black Mountain College and New York School poets. In 1958 he married Hettie Cohen and founded Totem Press which published such Beat Generation icons as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Baraka visited Cuba in July 1960 with a Fair Play for Cuba Committee delegation and reported his impressions in his essay Cuba libre. His acclaimed controversial play Dutchman premiered in 1964 and received an Obie Award the same year. After the assassination of Malcolm X (1965) Baraka left his wife and their two children and moved to Harlem: In 1966 Baraka married his second wife Sylvia Robinson who later adopted the name Amina Baraka. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Baraka courted controversy by penning some strongly anti Jewish poems and articles similar to the stance at that time of the Nation of Islam: Around 1974 Baraka distanced himself from Black nationalism and became a Marxist and a supporter of third world liberation movements: In 1979 he became a lecturer SUNY Stony Brook's Africana Studies Department, In 1980 he denounced his former anti semitic utterances declaring himself an anti zionist. In 1984 Baraka became a full professor at Rutgers University but was subsequently denied tenure. In 1989 he won an American Book Award for his works as well as a Langston Hughes Award, In 1990 he co authored the autobiography of Quincy Jones and 1998 was a supporting actor in Warren Beatty's film Bulworth: In 1996 Baraka contributed to the AIDS benefit album Offbeat: A Red Hot Soundtrip produced by the Red Hot Organization. In 2002 scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Amiri Baraka on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans. I'm sure that Mr. I can't read it without getting a lump in my throat. I'm willing to overlook a lot for a poem like this. His mother Anna Lois (née Russ) was a social worker. His major fields of study were philosophy and religion. Baraka also served three years in the U.S. His mother Anna Lois (née Russ) was a social worker. His major fields of study were philosophy and religion. Baraka also served three years in the U.S. Air Force as a gunner. His interest in jazz began in this period. He had begun to be a politically active artist. His revolutionary and now antisemitic poetry became controversial. Brown. {site_link}.