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California Polytechnic State University

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Poet, Playwright, Activist Amiri Baraka To Speak at Cal Poly During Black History Month Feb. 18**

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- In celebration of Black History Month, award-winning playwright, beat poet and political activist Amiri Baraka will speak about reconciling community relationships at 7 p.m. Feb. 18 in Chumash Auditorium at Cal Poly.

Baraka figured prominently in the political and literary landscape of the black consciousness movement of the 1960s. Formerly known as LeRoi Jones, he changed his name when he converted to Islam in the late '60s.

Baraka's poetry often deals with the struggles and issues of the black community. His first volume of poetry, "Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note," was published in 1961.

In 1962 he wrote the first of many plays, "The Slave" and "The Toilet," both reflecting his mistrust of white society.

His play "Dutchman," which opened at New York's Cherry Lane Theatre in 1964, helped establish Baraka's reputation as a playwright. The production won an Obie Award for best off-Broadway play and was made into a film. The one-act play, considered controversial at the time, told the allegorical story of a black taunted by a Bohemian white woman. The main character's angry monologue became the cornerstone of the 1960s black activist movement.

Baraka has won numerous literary prizes and honors, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Rockefeller Foundation Award for Drama, the Langston Hughes Award from the City College of New York, and a lifetime achievement award from the Before Columbus Foundation.

Baraka has taught poetry at the New School for Social Research in New

York, literature at the University of Buffalo, and drama at Columbia University. He has also taught at San Francisco State University, Yale University and George Washington University. He has been a professor of African studies at SUNY at Stony Brook since 1979 and served four years as chair of the department.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1954. He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1953 until 1957.

The presentation is free and open to the public. It is sponsored by Cal Poly's Multicultural Center. For more information, contact Tiffani Hamilton, student event coordinator, at 756-8496 or [thamilto@calpoly.edu](mailto:thamilto@calpoly.edu).

- 30 -

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