

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kalamu ya Salaam

PERSON

Salaam, Kalamu ya, 1947-

**Alternative Names:** Kalamu ya Salaam; Val Ferdinand;

**Life Dates:** March 24, 1947-

**Place of Birth:** New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

**Residence:** New Orleans, LA

**Occupations:** Poet

## Biographical Note

Poet, editor, music producer and arts administrator, Kalamu ya Salaam was born Val Ferdinand III in New Orleans on March 24, 1947. Inspired by the poetry of Langston Hughes and the civil rights movement in New Orleans, Salaam became interested in writing and organizing for social change. Graduating from high school in 1964, he joined the U.S. Army and served in Korea. After service, Salaam attended Carleton College but returned to New Orleans in 1968 to earn an associate's degree from Delgado College.

During the Black Arts Movement, Salaam was a member of John O'Neal's Free Southern Theater for five years and was a founder of BLACKARTSOUTH. Changing his name along the way to Kalamu Ya Salaam, which is Kiswahili for "pen of peace," he was a founder of Ahidiana Work Study Center. He also assumed the editorship of the Black Collegian magazine, a post he held from 1970 to 1983. Salaam published cultural and political essays in Black World, Black Scholar and Black Books Bulletin. In 1977, he was part of the first African American activist delegation to the People's Republic of China.

Today, he is senior partner of Bright Moments, a public relations firm. He is also the founder of WordBand, a poetry performance group; the NOMMO Literary Society, and Runagate Press. Salaam has written seven books of poetry. His play, "The Breath of Life", was honored by Louisiana State University, and "BLK Love Song #1" won a Best of Fringe Award from The Manchester Evening News in England. A respected music writer and critic, he is the arts and entertainment editor for The New Orleans Tribune and is a regular contributor to Wavelength, The Louisiana Weekly and The New Orleans Music Magazine. He was executive director of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival for many years, and produced "A NATION OF POETS" for the

## National Black Arts Festival. Selected Bibliography

Salaam, Kalamu ya. What is Life? Reclaiming the Black Blues Self. Third World Press: Chicago, 1994.

-----Tarzan Can - Not Return to Africa But I Can (1996)

-----He's The Prettiest: A Tribute to Big Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana's 50 Years of Mardi Gras Indian Suiting. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1997.

-----360° A Revolution Of Black Poets. Alexandria, Va.: Black Words; New Orleans: Runagate Press, 1998.

-----Magic of Juju: An Appreciation of the Black Arts Movement. Third World Press: Chicago, 1998.

## Related Entries

**Ahidiana Work Study Center** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from ? to ?]

**Founder**

**Bright Moments** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1978 to 1980]

**Senior Partner**

**Black Collegian** [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from 1970 to 1983]

**Editor**