

## IN MEMORIAM: DR. HAMODE “SAM” HAMOD



Dr. Hamode “Sam” Hamod  
1936 - 2021

*“Sam Hamod is one of us, a man of the South.”*  
— Jorge Luis Borges, a recipient of the Nobel Prize.

Dr. Hamode “Sam” Hamod, one of America’s most respected poets of Arab descent, died of congestive heart failure on June 22, 2021. Nominated twice for the Nobel Prize – once in Literature and once in Poetry – he was 85 years old when he passed away in suburban Washington, DC.

Born in Gary, Indiana in 1936, Dr. Hamod led a remarkable life that took him all over the world. As a young professional, following studies at the University of Chicago Law School, he served as a bridge between America’s Black Muslims and mainstream Muslims in the United States and across the Arab world. In that capacity and as a scholar, he visited such important centers of learning as Al-Azhar in Egypt, Baghdad and Najaf in Iraq, Al Andalus in the Maghreb, and the American University of Beirut in Lebanon.

In the 1980s, Dr. Hamod was well known as an Arab-American community leader, based in Washington, DC. More than any other community leader in the nation’s capital, he helped to bring together Muslims and peoples of other faiths in remarkable ways, drawing upon his years of experience and knowledge as a Muslim born in the United States.



Dr. Hamode “Sam” Hamod with his son David Hamod (left), and his grandson Evan.

During that period, he founded and served as Editor-in-Chief of Third World News, the first international weekly of its kind to bring a developing world perspective to policymakers in the nation's capital. In addition, at the invitation of the Arab Ambassadors Council, he served as Director of the Islamic Center of Washington, DC, where he ensured that Muslims from all walks of life could pray peaceably in that center of worship. When he retired from that position in 1986, he returned to his academic roots, initially serving as educational advisor to young Qataris studying in the United States.



As a poet and professor of creative writing, Dr. Hamod was dedicated to his students throughout his academic career. Over the years, he taught at such universities as Princeton, Northwestern, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Valparaiso, and Howard. In his seven years at Howard University, for example, he played an instrumental role in creating or strengthening creative writing programs and literary magazines that helped to build bridges among ethnic communities.



Dr. Hamod received his M.A. and B.S. degrees from Northwestern University in rhetorical theory and mass communications, respectively. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, where he was part of the renowned U.I. Writers Workshop. Other award-winning figures in the program during that period included such literary notables as Kurt Vonnegut, James Alan McPherson, Jack Marshall, Anselm Hollo, Galway Kinnell, Ted Berrigan, and Richard Yates. The stature of the program, unrivalled in the United States, enjoyed the support of such luminaries as Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren, John Berryman, Dylan Thomas, and Robert Lowell.

A recipient of numerous awards for his poetry, Dr. Hamod was a fearless commentator and prolific writer, with hundreds of articles and more than a dozen books of poetry to his name. He wrote many powerful poems about the Arab-American experience, such as: "[Lines to My Father](#)," "[After the Funeral of Hamad Assam](#)," and "[Dying With the Wrong Name](#)." His book of the same name (*Dying With the Wrong Name*) won the Ethnic Heritage Award in 1980 and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Dr. Hamod's poetry was not limited to the Arab-American experience. He was renowned for his love poems, which were well received by the literary community. Ishmael Reed, a celebrated poet, put it this way: "Sam Hamod is a brilliant poet in the ancient sense of the word. He can write as though his pen were a sword, as well as write as though his pen were the stem of a rose."





Dr. Hamod's poetry circled the globe. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature by the acclaimed Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, who said: "Sam Hamod is a great poet, a man who has a unique voice, understanding and vision, a poet who speaks for his people, for himself and for others — something that a great poet must do." Pablo Neruda once noted, "There are few poets who combine emotion, rhythm, clarity, and language in the way of the American poet, Sam Hamod." And Jorge Luis Borges, himself a recipient of the Nobel Prize, said simply, "Sam Hamod is one of us, a man of the South."



Dr. Hamod's writings will become part of Special Collections at the University of Iowa Libraries, where they will be available to scholars and researchers in the years to come.

In addition, the University of Iowa Center for Advancement has just established a new scholarship to honor Dr. Hamod, the [Hamode Samuel Hamod Memorial Scholarship](#). The purpose of this annual award will be to provide a "second chance" to those who have taken unconventional paths to poetry, especially individuals who have overcome challenges and disadvantages along the way.



Dr. Hamod was laid to rest in the Muslim National Cemetery in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He is survived by his son (David) and daughter-in-law (Jean), grandson (Evan), daughter (Laura), and son-in-law (Larry). He is also survived by his three brothers: Bud, Oscar, and Sammy.

## Sorrow

When you leave,  
even the stars  
lose their luster

- Sam Hamod

