



A Melvin Dixon Critical Reader

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Over the course of his brief career, Melvin Dixon (1950-1992) became an important critical voice for African American scholarship as well as a widely read chronicler of the African American gay experience. His novels *Trouble the Water* and *Vanishing Rooms* still receive considerable attention, as do his collections of poetry and his major work of criticism, *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature*.

In *A Melvin Dixon Critical Reader*, scholars Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride have collected, for the first time in a single volume, the eight critical essays Dixon published during his lifetime. The volume divides Dixon's critical output into three categories—"Writing Black Diaspora Theory," "Writing African American Cultural Theory," and "Writing African American Literary Criticism"—and closes with a speech Dixon gave to the queer writers' conference, OutWrite, in 1992, just months before he succumbed to an AIDS-related illness.

What emerges from the essays collected here is the voice of a confident, engaging scholar, who tackles a wide range of literary and cultural topics. Dixon examines the trickster characters of Charles W. Chesnutt, the friendship between the Haitian novelist Jacques Roumain and Langston Hughes, and the aesthetic importance of black speech in the novels of Gayl Jones. His address to OutWrite serves as a poignant record of Dixon's knack to wax elegiac and poetic and to synthesize criticism, activism, and art. The introduction places Dixon in the contexts of African American cultural history and gay/lesbian critical discourse.

Justin A. Joyce is a doctoral candidate in the department of English at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Dwight A. McBride is Leon Forrest Professor and Chair of African American Studies at Northwestern University and the author of *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality in America* and *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony*.

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