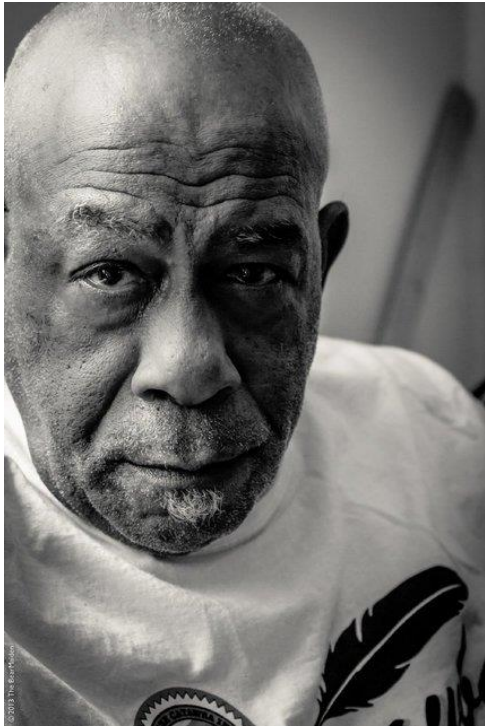


WILLIAM MELVIN KELLEY JR.



William Melvin Kelley was born in New York City on November 1, 1937 and grew up in the Bronx. Kelley died in Manhattan on February 1, 2017, due to complications from kidney failure. He was 79.

Kelley was educated at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in New York and at Harvard College (Class of 1960), where he studied under John Hawkes and Archibald MacLeish. While a student at Harvard, he was awarded the Dana Reed Prize for creative writing. Included in his many awards over the course of

his career are the Bread Loaf Writers Conference grant, 1962; the Whitney Foundation award, 1963; the Rosenthal Foundation award, 1963; the *Transatlantic Review* award, 1964; the Black Academy of Arts and Letters award, 1970 and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Lifetime Achievement, 2008.

From the beginning of his career in 1962, William Melvin Kelley employed his distinctive form of African American comedy to examine the absurdities surrounding American racial attitudes. His first novel, *A Different Drummer*, published in 1962, showed the influence of William Faulkner by creating a microcosm in a mythical southern state; and a collection of short stories, *Dancers on the Shore* (1964), pays tribute to James Joyce's stylistic innovations. Like Faulkner's, his works are connected by a cast of common characters. Kelley published four novels and a volume of short stories. In a 2012 interview he claimed to have completed two more novels that have thus far remained unpublished.

In 1988 Kelley starred in *Excavating Harlem in 2290*, which he also wrote and produced, collaborating with Steve Bull to bring it to the screen. He also contributed to *The Beauty That I Saw*, a film assembled from Kelley's video diaries of Harlem. Edited by Benjamin Oren Abrams, it was featured at the Harlem International Film Festival in 2015.

He taught literature and was a writer-in-residence at State University College, Geneseo, New York, in the spring of 1965; teacher at the New School for Social Research, New York, 1965-67, at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, 1969-70, and at Sarah Lawrence College from 1989 until his death. Kelley lived in Paris and Jamaica, where he and his family converted to Judaism.

For greater insight into the special contributions William Melvin Kelley made to our society, see the following articles:

<http://amsterdamnews.com/news/2017/feb/10/author-william-melvin-kelley-passes-79/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/books/william-melvin-kelley-who-explored-race-in-experimental-novels-is-dead-at-79.html>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/29/the-lost-giant-of-american-literature>

<https://mosaicmagazine.org/william-melvin-kelley-interview/#.WqGjWudG2Um>