



Contemporary Black Men's Fiction and Drama

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Demonstrating the extraordinary versatility of African-American men's writing since the 1970s, this forceful collection illustrates how African-American male novelists and playwrights have absorbed, challenged, and expanded the conventions of black American writing and, with it, black male identity. From the "John Henry Syndrome" - a definition of black masculinity based on brute strength or violence - to the submersion of black gay identity under equations of gay with white and black with straight, the African-American male in literature and drama has traditionally been characterized in ways that confine and silence him.

"Contemporary Black Men's Fiction and Drama" identifies the forces that limit black male discourse, including traditions established by iconic African-American male authors such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. This thoughtful volume also shows how contemporary black male authors use their narratives to put forward new ways of being and knowing that foster a more complete sense of self and more humane and open ways of communicating with and relating to others. In the work of Charles Johnson, Ernest Gaines, and August Wilson, contributors find paths toward broader, less rigid ideas of what black literature can be, what the connections among individual and communal resistance can be, and how black men can transcend the imprisoning models of hypermasculinity promoted by American culture. Seeking greater spiritual connection with the past, John Edgar Wideman returns to the folk rituals of his family, while Melvin Dixon and Brent Wade reclaim African roots and traditions. Ishmael Reed struggles with a contemporary cultural oppression that he sees as an insidious echo of slavery, while Clarence Major's experimental writing suggests how black men might reclaim their own voices in a culture that silences them. Taking in a wide range of critical, theoretical, cultural, gender, and sexual concerns, "Contemporary Black Men's Fiction and Drama" provides provocative new readings of a broad range of contemporary writers.

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