Robin Kelley, an award-winning author and the William B. Ransford Professor of Cultural and Historical Studies at Columbia University, engages in research over a wide spectrum of African-American studies from the history of jazz to the influence of Marxist political theory. The overarching question that drives his research is how definitions and strategies of liberation have shaped African-American history.

While an undergraduate student at California State University – Long Beach, Kelley became actively involved in student political organizations that inspired him to pursue the study of history, particularly that of movements for self-determination. After graduating, Kelley continued his academic interests with an M.A. in African history and a Ph.D. in United States history from UCLA. By age 32, he was one of the youngest full professors in the country and author of two books: *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* and *Race Rebels: Culture Politics and the Black Working Class*.

Kelley’s research focuses on the nature of grassroots protests. Expanding from his research on the history of black radical movements, Kelley’s work also delves into historical and cultural studies of popular culture, music, visual culture, constructions of race, and nationalism, to name a few, as they are related to the concept of liberation. Believing in the importance of accessibility to his scholarly research, Kelley receives feedback to ensure that the people about whom he writes are able to understand his work.

Formerly the chair of New York University’s history department, Kelley was appointed to Columbia’s faculty to help shape programs for the Institute for Research in African-American Studies. Kelley teaches courses in the departments of both anthropology and African-American Studies. His most recent book, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, developed out of a series of lectures on social movements, and he is currently compiling a biography of Thelonious Monk entitled *Thelonious: A Life* and co-authoring a general survey of African-American history.