

Our author for 2006:

Timothy B. Tyson



Timothy B. Tyson, a native of eastern North Carolina, is the John Hope Franklin Senior Fellow at the National Humanities Center and professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This year he is visiting faculty at Duke University.

Tyson's latest book, ***Blood Done Sign My Name***, was published in May 2004 by Crown, a division of Random House. It recounts a racial murder committed in his hometown of Oxford, North Carolina in 1970 by the father of a childhood friend, and the African American uprising that followed in the wake of the murder. ***Blood Done Sign My Name*** represents his best effort at what South Africans have called "Truth and Reconciliation." His previous book, ***Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams And The Roots of Black Power*** won the 2000 James Rawley Prize and was co-winner of the 2000 Frederick Jackson Turner Prize.

Tyson worked with the Documentary Institute at the University of Florida to create "**Negroes with Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power**," a documentary film which premiered in March 2004 at Lincoln Center in New York City and will air on PBS in the spring of 2005. Tyson is co-editor with David S. Cecelski of ***Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 And Its Legacy***, which won the 1999 Outstanding Book Award from the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights.

His next book is called ***Deep River: African American Freedom Movements in the 20th Century South***, and he is also working on a historical novel tentatively entitled ***Fallen Angels Fly***.

Our book for 2006:

Blood Done Sign My Name

“Daddy and Roger and ‘em shot ‘em a nigger.”

Those words, whispered to ten-year-old Tim Tyson by his neighborhood friend Gerald Teel heralded an uproar that would literally set his small tobacco town of Oxford, North Carolina, ablaze in the summer of 1970. In ***Blood Done Sign My Name***, Timothy B. Tyson, a white professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, offers one of this year’s most highly anticipated books in nonfiction—a masterful rendering of a small town’s racially charged murder, the emotional riots and trial that would ensue, and Tyson’s candid examination of the African-American struggle for freedom in America.

On May 11, 1970, Henry “Dickie” Marrow, a 23-year-old black veteran, walked into a crossroads store owned by Robert Teel, a rough man with a criminal record and ties to the Ku Klux Klan, and came out running. Teel and two of his sons chased Marrow down, beat him unmercifully, and killed him in public as he pleaded for his life. An all-white jury would later acquit Teel and his two sons of all charges.

Like many small Southern towns, Oxford had remained almost untouched by the civil rights movement. Frustrated by this lack of change, Oxford’s African-American community exploded after the killing, going beyond their tipping point and into the streets—led by 22-year-old Ben Chavis, a future president of the NAACP. As mass protests destroyed storefronts and ultimately led to a march on Raleigh, returning Vietnam veterans organized what one called a “military operation,” burning down the town’s costly tobacco warehouses.

With large sections of the town destroyed, Tyson’s father, the pastor of an all-white Methodist church, pressed his congregation to reach across the breach and come to terms with its racial history. In the end, however, the Tyson family were regarded as traitors and forced to move away.

In ***Blood Done Sign My Name***, Tyson returns to Oxford thirty years later to make sense of what happened and how the events of May 11, 1970, changed his own life. He interviewed Teel, who told him “That nigger committed suicide, coming in here wanting to four-letter-word my daughter-in-law.” He also interviewed the black radicals, who instructed him in the bitter truths of local race politics: “We knew if we cost ‘em enough goddamn money they was gonna start changing some things.” As he weaves together childhood memories with the realities of present-day Oxford, he sheds new light on America’s struggle for racial justice.

In the tradition of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, ***Blood Done Sign My Name*** is a classic work of conscience, a defining portrait of a time and place that we will never forget. Tim Tyson’s riveting narrative of that fiery summer and one family’s struggle to build bridges in a time of destruction brings gritty blues truth, soaring gospel vision, and down-home humor to our complex history, where violence and faith, courage and evil, despair and hope all mingle to illuminate America’s enduring chasm of race.

Some Discussion Questions

Blood Done Sign My Name **by Timothy Tyson**

1. Tim Tyson says (page 319), “The future of our country depends upon an honest confrontation with our own history.” What do you think of this idea?
2. What steps, if any, do you think are needed for reconciliation in the community of Oxford? In North Carolina? In the United States?
3. How does Tyson’s story of North Carolina compare with what you know about the Civil Rights Movement? What else would you like to learn?
4. What is the relationship between social class and racial attitudes among white southerners? How did the histories and values of the Teel, Tyson, and Chavis families shape their views of the world and of each other?
5. Why is it important that the author points out that his family “was as Southern as fried okra and sweet tea?” What does being Southern mean to him, and to you? How does the fact that Tim Tyson is white affect your reaction to the story?
6. What impact did the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Vietnam War, and religion have on life and race relations in Oxford? What does the book tell us about the politics and culture of 1960s and 1970s?
7. Why did some of the persons in the book commit acts of political violence, such as the burning of the Oxford tobacco warehouses? Was it understandable? Is there any similarity between these people and the colonists who participated in the Boston Tea Party?
8. While the book centers on black/white tension, how does it apply to other kinds of racial and ethnic tensions in North Carolina and elsewhere?
9. Tyson challenges each of us to examine our own conscience. How do you decide when it is time to speak out or to stay silent? How do you decide that speaking out is worth the risk? How and when do you decide to act or not to act? What is your duty when you see injustice?
10. Although Tyson’s experiences center on the dynamics of race, *Blood Done Sign My Name* also tells the story of how a young person’s goals become shaped by life events. How do our experiences ultimately inform our future?

These discussion questions are from the [University of North Carolina Chapel Hill’s Summer Reading Program’s web site](#), and are reprinted here with permission.

Books exploring race relations and the African American experience, available as discussion sets for book clubs at the New Hanover County Public Library

Memoirs

The Color of Water, by James McBride, son of a white Jewish mother and an African American father

Having Our Say : the Delaney Sisters First 100 Years, a memoir by African American sisters Sarah and Annie Delaney

Slaves in the Family, a remarkable family history by Edward Ball, a descendant of a prominent South Carolina slave-holding family

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, a nonfiction study of culture clash by Anne Fadiman

The Water is Wide, a memoir of teaching the forgotten children of Daufuskie Island, South Carolina, by Pat Conroy

We Have Taken a City, a nonfiction account of Wilmington's 1898 riots by H. Leon Prather

When I was Puerto Rican, a memoir by Esmeralda Santiago

Novels

The Activist's Daughter, set in Chapel Hill during the Civil Rights movement by Wilmington's Ellyn Bache

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain

Beloved, Jazz, Paradise, and Song of Solomon, novels by Toni Morrison

Cape Fear Rising, a novel set in Wilmington in 1898 by Philip Gerard

One Thousand White Women, a novel of the American frontier by Jim Fergus

The Color Purple, the classic novel by Alice Walker

Cry, the Beloved Country, a novel of South Africa during apartheid by Alan Paton

The House on Mango Street, a novel about Chicana girlhood by Sandra Cisneros

I Been in Sorrow's Kitchen and Licked out All the Pots, a novel by Susan Straight

Invisible Man, the classic novel by Ralph Ellison

Kindred, a science fiction novel by Octavia Butler

A Lesson Before Dying, the classic by Ernest Gaines

Mama Day, a novel by Gloria Naylor

Sally Hemings, based on the story of Thomas Jefferson's mistress, by Barbara Chase-Riboud

Their Eyes Were Watching God, a classic novel of the Harlem Renaissance by Zora Neale Hurston

Things Fall Apart, a novel of colonial Africa by Chinua Achebe

The Wedding, a Harlem Renaissance novel by Dorothy West

Resources to Browse on the Web

Compiled and annotated by Rebecca Kemp, UNCW Randall Library

Interviews with Timothy Tyson

Wisconsin Magazine of History interview, for the v. 88 no. 2 (winter 2004-2005) issue

http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/pdf/tyson_interview.pdf

Timothy Tyson discusses issues ranging from his father's influence on his life and writings to African-American participation in WWII and Vietnam.

Article resulting from interview in Wisconsin Magazine of History (above), vol. 88 no. 2 (winter 2004-2005) pp. 52-53

http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/pdf/winter_04_editorschoice.pdf

National Public Radio [Morning Edition](#), November 10, 2004 segment on *Blood Done Sign My Name*, interview by Juan Williams <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4162533>

Juan Williams discusses the setting and themes of the book with Timothy Tyson and other residents of Oxford, NC. This segment gives a brief outline and analysis of the book's events.

WUNC Radio *The State of Things*, May 24, 2004 interview by Melinda Penkava

http://www.ibiblio.org/wunc_archives/sot/index.php?p=101

Melinda Penkava discusses with Timothy Tyson the social climate in Oxford, NC and the South at the time of the book, the central murder and its aftermath. Rev. Vernon Tyson joins his son for questions during this broadcast.

Interview transcript, UNC-TV's *Black Issues Forum*, 2004-2005 Broadcast Season, episode # 2006, interview by Natalie Bullock-Brown

<http://www.unctv.org/bif/transcripts/2004/transcript2006.html>

In addition to discussing the events and themes of *Blood Done Sign My Name*, Natalie Bullock-Brown and Timothy Tyson also discuss the importance of the Civil Rights movement and of African-American culture.

Press release for interview by D.G. Martin, encore episode of UNC-TV's *BookWatch*, season 8, Episode 807, Sunday, January 15, 2006, at 5:00 PM

<http://www.unctv.org/pressroom/ncbookwatch/tysonencore.html>

Articles and Other Resources

"Vernon Tyson's Ministry of Reconciliation," by Patrick O'Neill, in *Divinity* (Online Edition), newsletter of the Duke Divinity School, v. 4, no. 1 (Fall 2004).

<http://www.divinity.duke.edu/Publications/2004.09/features/tyson/02.htm>

This article describes the efforts and philosophy of Timothy Tyson's father, Reverend Vernon Tyson, who tried to usher racial equality into his parish during the Civil Rights movement.

Carolina Summer Reading Program Site, summer 2005

<http://www.unc.edu/srp/>

The Carolina Summer Reading Program is UNC-Chapel Hill's effort to give first-year students a common text to discuss before the school year begins. In 2005, the book chosen for discussion was *Blood Done Sign My Name*. The Summer Reading Program site includes information about the author and the book, a bibliography of Timothy Tyson's works, a list of related readings, and discussion questions.

Reviews

Reviews on Amazon.com

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0609610589/>

Reviews from the UNC-Chapel Hill Summer Reading Program Page

<http://www.unc.edu/srp/reviews.html>

Washington Post review by Jonathan Yardley, Sunday, May 23, 2004; Page BW02

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A42434-2004May20.html>

BookPage review by Michelle Jones

<http://www.bookpage.com/0406bp/nonfiction/blood.html>

BookReporter, Barbara Bamberger Scott

<http://www.bookreporter.com/reviews2/0609610589.asp>

Other Works by Timothy Tyson

Radio Free Dixie, Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0807849235/>

Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy, edited by David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0807824518/>

Bibliography on the Carolina Summer Reading Program Page

<http://www.unc.edu/srp/bib.html>

Timothy Tyson's webpage at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Dept. of Afro-American Studies

<http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/aas/tyson.html>

Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions used by the Carolina Summer Reading Program, summer 2005

<http://www.unc.edu/srp/questions.html>

Rocky Mount, North Carolina's Braswell Memorial Library "One Book, One Community" celebration (2005-2006) featuring *Blood Done Sign My Name*

<http://www.braswell-library.org/one%20book.htm>

Our mission is to promote literacy and a love for reading, celebrate diversity, and foster a community of readers by providing opportunities to explore and discuss a common text.

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Calendar of Events

*All events are free and open to the public.
Check the online calendar for changes and additions:
<http://library.uncwil.edu/oboc/calendar.html>*

Saturday, January 28, 2006

- 10–2pm | UNCW Randall Library | **Storytime and art activities** for area schoolchildren, featuring African folk tales. The session will be led by **Donzella Coleman Johnson**, New Hanover County Schools; **Keith Boyd**, storyteller; and **Joanna Catalfo** and **Amy Kirschke**, UNCW Art Department. Artwork created by the children will be mounted and hung in the **“African Folktales and Art: Black History Month @ Randall Library”** exhibit, which will open on February 11, 2006. Art materials and snacks will be provided.
- 2–5pm | UNCW King Hall Auditorium | **Official Kickoff Event: Film screening of 1989 Spike Lee film**, introduced and discussed by **Tim Palmer** (UNCW Film Studies Department). **Timothy Tyson** will give a reading and book signing. Book signing will start at 2pm, with the film program starting at 3pm. *NOTE: Film content may not be suitable for attendees under the age of seventeen.*
For more information about the film, including the title, please contact Liza Palmer, 910-962-4234.

Sunday, January 29, 2006

- 3–6pm | UNCW Randall Library Auditorium | **Star-News book club meeting**, featuring **Ben Steelman**, Wilmington *Star-News* book reviewer, interviewing **Timothy Tyson**.

Friday, February 10, 2006

- 2–4pm | Cape Fear Community College | **“Human Geographies: Building Communities, Past, Present, and Future”** panel discussion, featuring area scholars **Sue Cody** of Randall Library, **Liz Hines** of UNCW Earth Sciences Department, **Patricia Lerch** of UNCW Anthropology Department, **Thomas Massey** of CFCC History Department, **Jason McCoy** of CFCC Psychology Department, and **Robert Sutton** of CFCC Religion & Philosophy Department. **Timothy Tyson** will moderate the panel.
For more information including room number contact Marsha Proctor, 910-362-7456.

Saturday, February 11, 2006

- 2-4pm | New Hanover County Public Library Main Branch | **Reading by Tim Tyson**, followed by a **workshop with poet Phillip Shabazz** where participants may write about their own experiences and feelings related to race relations. The afternoon will conclude with an open mike reading for any participants who wish to read what they have written. For more information contact Dorothy Hodder, 910 798-6323.
- 4-6pm | UNCW Randall Library | **"African Folktales and Art: Black History Month @ Randall Library" exhibit opening** for area schoolchildren (and their parents) who had participated during the January 28th storytime event. This event features a talk by **Deborah Brunson** (Director of the UNCW Upperman Center). **Timothy Tyson** will be in attendance. Refreshments will be provided.

Sunday, February 12, 2006

- 3-5pm | New Hanover High School Lyceum Academy (Brogden Hall, Princess Street entrance) | **"Desegregation and New Hanover County Schools"** panel discussion, featuring **Timothy Tyson** with **Glen Harris** and **William Moore** of the UNCW History Department, **Robert Smith** of the UNCW Education Department, **Chris Furr**, Principal of New Hanover High School, and **Bertha Todd**, retired New Hanover County School Administrator.

Friday, March 3, 2006

- 2-4pm | UNCW Upperman Center | **Author readings and signings** by **Timothy Tyson** and **Gene Cheek**, author of *The Color of Love*, a memoir of a family divided by race.
- 6-8pm | St. Luke African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Wilmington, NC | **Author readings and signings** by **Timothy Tyson** and **Gene Cheek**, author *The Color of Love*.

Saturday, March 4, 2006

- 4-6pm | UNCW Morton Hall, Bryan Auditorium | **Finale** event featuring closing **lecture by Timothy Tyson**, performance by **gospel singer Mary Williams**, and other special responses to One Book One Community 2006.

For Human Relations Month events go to

<http://www.nhcgov.com/HRC/HRCmonth.asp>





Evaluation

Your feedback is valuable to us and will be instrumental in the planning of next year's "One Book, One Community" program! Please take a moment to fill this form out and return to any of the participating libraries:

- Cape Fear Community College Learning Resource Center (Attn: Marsha Proctor)
- New Hanover County Public Library (Attn: Dorothy Hodder)
- UNCW Randall Library (Attn: Liza Palmer)

1. How did you hear about the "One Book, One Community" program? Please check:

- Library (Please specify: _____)
- Bookstore (Please specify: _____)
- School or College (Please specify: _____)
- Teacher or Professor (Please specify: _____)
- Media (Please specify: _____)
- Other (Please specify: _____)

2. Did you read the entire book? Yes No

3. If no to Question 2, did you read a portion of the book? Yes No

4. What questions or issues did the book raise for you?

5. Did you participate in any of the "One Book, One Community" events? If so, please list.

7. If you could ask Timothy Tyson any question, what would it be?

8. Please rate the following statement: I think the “One Book, One Community” program is a valuable experience for New Hanover County. (circle one)

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

9. What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving the “One Book, One Community” program?

10. What suggestions, if any, do you have for the next “One Book, One Community” book?

11. Please feel free to share any other comments:

Thank you for your time and participation! It is appreciated!

