

MIKE WILEY
PRODUCTIONS



BLOOD DONE SIGN MY NAME DISCUSSION GUIDE

Mike Wiley – The Playwright and Actor

Actor and playwright Mike Wiley has spent the last decade fulfilling his mission to bring educational theatre to young audiences. In the early days of his career, Wiley found few theatrical resources to shine light on key events and figures in black history. To bring these often ignored stories to life, Wiley started his own production company. Through his work, he has introduced countless students to the stories and legacies of Emmett Till, the Tuskegee Airmen, Henry “Box” Brown and more. Mike Wiley has a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Wiley has also appeared on the Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel and the National Geographic Channel and was recently profiled in *Our State* magazine.

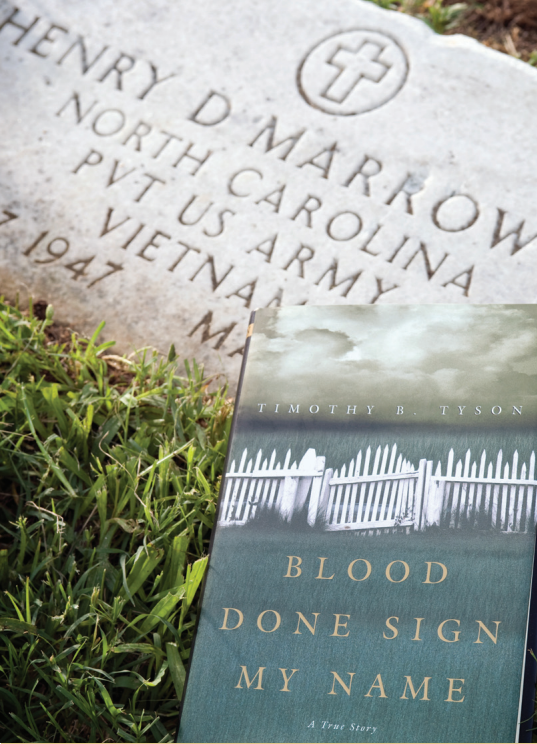


Timothy B. Tyson – The Author

Tim Tyson, noted author and historian, was born and raised in North Carolina. He received his Ph.D. from Duke University in 1994 and currently serves there as a Senior Research Scholar at the Center for Documentary Studies and also holds positions in the Duke Divinity School and the Department of History. His memoir *Blood Done Sign My Name* won the Southern Book Award, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Award and received the Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion from the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The book has also been selected for the reading programs of a number of communities and colleges (including The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Villanova University and The University of Iowa). A movie based on the book is scheduled for release in the coming months.

Synopsis

In *Blood Done Sign My Name*, Tim Tyson recounts the 1970 murder of Henry “Dickie” Marrow in Oxford, NC and the events that followed. Marrow, who was black, was chased from a local store by three white men after reportedly making a crude remark to one of the men’s wives. They brutally beat Marrow then killed him with a bullet to the head in view of multiple witnesses. Despite the eyewitness reports, an all-white jury acquitted the men. The town’s black community responded to the events with an uprising that destroyed downtown businesses and several tobacco warehouses holding at least a million dollars in harvested crops. Tyson, who was 10 at the time, recounts how the conflagration of events shaped his life and offers all of us an opportunity to examine our own roles in the complex and often confusing racial fabric of America.



The Setting

Oxford, North Carolina, 1970

Themes

Racism, religion, freedom, hope, dissent, peer pressure

Key Characters (race listed for clarity)

Tim Tyson (White) – Narrator

Vernon Tyson (White) – Tim's father and the pastor at Oxford United Methodist Church

Henry "Dickie" Marrow (Black) – Vietnam veteran, husband, father and murder victim

Eddie McCoy (Black) – Oxford resident and activist

Gerald Teel (White) – Tim's childhood friend

Robert Teel (White) – Oxford businessman

Thad Stem (White) – Poet and Tyson family friend

Benjamin Chavis (Black) – Oxford civil rights activist and eventual head of the NAACP

Golden Frinks (Black) – Civil rights activist

Vocabulary

Black Power

White Supremacy

Grab-all

Freedom Song

Black Panthers

Discussion Topics

- What is the relevance of the quote on the screen as the play opens? ("If moving through your life, you find yourself lost, go back to the last place where you knew who you were and what you were doing and start from there.") How does it relate to Tim's story?
- Why does the actor encourage audience participation as he sings "We Shall Overcome"?
- Why doesn't Wiley have Dickie Marrow tell his version of the events that lead up to his murder?
- According to Eddie McCoy, "Our people, the street people. We had different answers 'cause we knew Teel and 'em wont gon to go to jail in the first place." Discuss the varied responses of Oxford's black citizens to Dickie Marrow's murder. Why did Eddie and others believe the accused wouldn't go to jail and does it justify the violent actions after the shooting? Was the fear created within the white community effective in generating change?
- Tyson believes that we can only move forward by confronting our past. Is this true or should bygones be bygones?
- Discuss the life-changing power of the line, "Daddy and Roger and 'em shot 'em a nigger!" How did it set the path for Tim's life? The lives of Oxford's residents? The town of Oxford's future?
- Discuss the relevance of James Baldwin's quote: "a civilization is not destroyed by wicked people; it is not necessary that people be wicked but only that they be spineless." How does this relate to the treatment of blacks in U.S. history? In Oxford in 1970? Can you think of other examples in world history where complacency has lead to tragedy?
- Does the advancement of one group of people always have to come at the expense of another?
- Tim is exasperated that his father chose not to march with the other attendees at Dickie Marrow's funeral. ("You were right there. You could have gotten under the hood and really worked on the engine of the movement. But you were afraid to get your hands dirty....Was it all just happy liberal talk?") If you were in Vernon's shoes would you have chosen to march? How do you decide when to speak out against injustice and when to remain quiet?

Recommended Reading, Viewing & Listening

Blood Done Sign My Name by Timothy B. Tyson

Letter from Birmingham Jail by Dr. Martin Luther King

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin

The Laramie Project, a play by Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project about the 1998 murder of University of Wyoming gay student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming

Blood Done Sign My Name, a collection of gospel songs and spirituals sung by Mary D. Williams

Other Books By Timothy B. Tyson

Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power

Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy