

Perspectives

Writers Trail builds on success of book festival



Your Turn
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Guest Columnist

If it weren't for a Mississippi Freedom Trail marker, you might not know that a section of Jackson's Capitol Street was once the scene of a significant civil rights protest, Woolworth's sit-in. If it weren't for a Mississippi Blues Trail marker, you might not know that Club Ebony in Indianola was once owned by

B.B. King and showcased legendary acts such as Ray Charles, Little Milton and B.B. King himself. These trail markers help our state tell its story, adding depth and richness to places of note.

It's only fitting that we now begin to honor our greatest storytellers through the Mississippi Writers Trail. Our state's newest trail will build upon the success of other cultural trails, drawing visitors from out-of-state and even out-of-country, serving as a source of civic pride.

The Mississippi Writers Trail officially launched with the unveiling of two historical marker prototypes, honoring Eudora Welty and Jesmyn Ward, as part of the Mississippi Book Festival opening on Aug. 18. C-SPAN broadcasted the unveilings in the State Capitol Building before a live national audience.

There's no better time to highlight Mississippi's writers, literary heritage and bright future. The Mississippi Book

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Writers Trail

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Festival, only in its fourth year, has already grown to attract 7,600 attendees, 240 authors and such speakers and panelists as Salman Rushdie, John Meacham as well as Mississippi natives Jesmyn Ward, John Grisham, Julia Reed and Richard Ford. The festival's success signals that Mississippians are proud of their literary heritage and embracing a growing set of distinguished contemporary writers hailing from the state.

On Monday, the first permanent Mississippi Writers Trail marker honoring Eudora Welty will be placed at the Eudora Welty House and Garden in Jackson. The Welty marker will pave the way for many more, which will be placed in

the coming years as funding allows. Writers honored with a trail marker and the order in which they will be placed will be determined based on scholar recommendations.

The Mississippi Writers Trail is an initiative of the Mississippi Arts Commission, in partnership with the Community Foundation for Mississippi, Mississippi Book Festival, Mississippi Humanities Council, Mississippi Development Authority, Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Mississippi Library Commission.

It is our vision that, eventually, these markers, resembling an open book, will span the entirety of the state, adding a few more lines to Mississippi's story with each one.

Malcolm White is the executive director of the Mississippi Arts Commission.



Author Jesmyn Ward and her family look at a Mississippi Writers Trail markers honoring her during the Mississippi Book Festival in Jackson Aug. 18. AP