

Mississippi's Literary Lawn Party

Jackson celebrates the written word with the 2nd annual Mississippi Book Festival.

BY MAGGIE SMITH

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE MISSISSIPPI BOOK FESTIVAL



When Executive Director Holly Lange is asked what her favorite memory from the 2015 Mississippi Book Festival was, she responds, "Well, that's like picking a favorite child among quadruplets!" With 103 authors present, 22 panel discussions and 3700 attendees at last year's book festival, I suppose asking for one favorite memory is a bit of a tall order.

The Mississippi Book Festival had its initial founding as a nonprofit in 2013, when a group of book-loving Mississippi residents came together with the hope of founding Mississippi's first statewide book festival. Often described as a "literary lawn party," the Mississippi Book Festival is a daylong event held at the State Capitol meant to draw authors, publishers and book lovers to Mississippi. The festival grew out of a desire to honor Mississippi's rich literary past and present, given that Mississippi is not only the birthplace of literary

giants like William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Margaret Walker, John Grisham and Tennessee Williams, but also lays claim to some of the best independent bookstores in the nation.

"Mississippians love their books and authors. While there are book signings and readings throughout the year around the state, this was a unique opportunity to bring authors and their fans together in one fell swoop," says Holly.

Emily Gatlin, who serves as author coordinator for the book festival, says the festival also serves as an opportunity to highlight Mississippi and the writers it has to offer.

"Everyone else had a book festival – why didn't we? Mississippi has more writers per capita than anywhere else in the United States (except for New York City), and that's something to celebrate."

The event includes panel discussions, author signings, capitol tours, live music, food and vendors from all over



Jackson State University's Sonic Boom of the South performs during the 2015 festival.



Holly Lange

the state. The 2015 inaugural Mississippi Book Festival far outpaced expectations in terms of attendance, even in the heat of a Mississippi August, with an estimated economic impact of \$325,500 for Mississippi.

"It was magical," Holly says. "We had no idea how many people would attend the event on a hot Saturday in August. I secretly hoped 2500 would be there and over 3500 joined us!"

As magical as the 2015 Mississippi Book Festival turned out to be, volunteers and directors have even higher hopes for 2016.

"Even if it rains, we aren't going to skip a beat!" says Emily. The number of authors present and participating in panels

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Holly Lange

has expanded to over 150. Panels have also increased to over thirty, and the topics range from discussions on southern fiction to middle grade novels to William Faulkner and his work. Panels will take place at Galloway United Methodist Church in the sanctuary and in The Foundry as well as at the State Capitol, in order to accommodate the large crowds. There will be author interviews with much-loved children's author Kate DiCamillo, Pulitzer Prize winner and Mississippi-born Richard Ford, and Young People's Poet Laureate Jacqueline Woodson. Independent booksellers like Jackson's own Lemuria Books will be on site selling books by authors present at the festival. Food presence will be larger, with a variety of local vendors and food trucks. There will also be a children's area on the grounds of the State Capitol with special programming for younger attendees. When the day is done, festival-goers are invited to celebrate the close of the 2016 Mississippi Book Festival at the Willie Morris After Party with Thacker Mountain Radio. The event will take

place at Hal and Mal's and includes a cash bar. Tickets are ten dollars and can be purchased at the door.

This year, the author selection for the Mississippi Book Festival is wide and varied. There are Southern favorites like Ellen Gilchrist and Tom Piazza, but there are also authors like Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney, who resides in Los Angeles, and Jacqueline Woodson, who lives in Brooklyn.

As author coordinator, Emily Gatlin's job ranges from inviting authors to helping with their travel arrangements to making their stay in Jackson enjoyable. Therefore, she is afforded a unique and personal view of the authors participating in the Mississippi Book Festival. When asked why she thinks so many authors from so many different regions of the United States are willing to travel and participate in a book festival here in Mississippi, she says, "The one thing that has surprised me the most is the genuine excitement and enthusiasm of authors who are coming to the festival from outside the South. Every Southerner is a natural

"The one thing that has surprised me the most is the genuine excitement and enthusiasm of authors who are coming to the festival from outside the South. Every Southerner is a natural born storyteller, and most authors are aware of Mississippi's rich literary traditions."

Emily Gatlin



Author Joedda Gore meets with readers interested in her book, *Sugarman*.



Several panels ranging from poetry to mystery scheduled throughout the festival allow readers a more personal look at their favorite authors.





Galloway Church will once again be the main venue for several panels with famous authors.



Governor Winter and his wife, Elise attending the festival.



born storyteller, and most authors are aware of Mississippi's rich literary traditions. When they come to Jackson, they're breathing the same air and walking on the same ground that Eudora Welty, Richard Wright, Margaret Walker and Willie Morris did. There's a lot to be said about that, and it affords a very unique experience for them."

The Mississippi Book Festival is not only drawing authors from all over the country, but attendees as well. It is estimated from last year's surveys that approximately 20% of attendees at the festival were out-of-state visitors. The hope of directors, volunteers and book lovers alike is that as the Book Festival continues to grow, and that it will become a major source of tourism and revenue for Mississippi. However, the event is not meant to be merely a tourist attraction for the city of Jackson and the state of Mississippi. Directors and volunteers alike are hoping that the Mississippi Book Festival will be an event that not only honors our state's literary history, but an event that also inspires and ignites a love of reading in Mississippians. Most importantly, the festival is meant to foster a sense of pride in those who call Mississippi their home, says Holly.

"Personally, I believe in celebrating the best of where you live and encouraging others to do the same. We are all connected by books. There are thousands who share a love of an author, a genre, a character at every age. We get lost in the words and our minds travel to places we may never actually go. We are inspired by the written word. The festival celebrates all of this and gives us the opportunity to show the world one of the best sides of Mississippi." ○

The 2016 Mississippi Book Festival will be held on August 20th at the State Capitol in Jackson, beginning at 9:00 A.M. The event is free and open to the public. Visit www.msbookfestival.com for more information.



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COURT ROOM 216
C-SPAN

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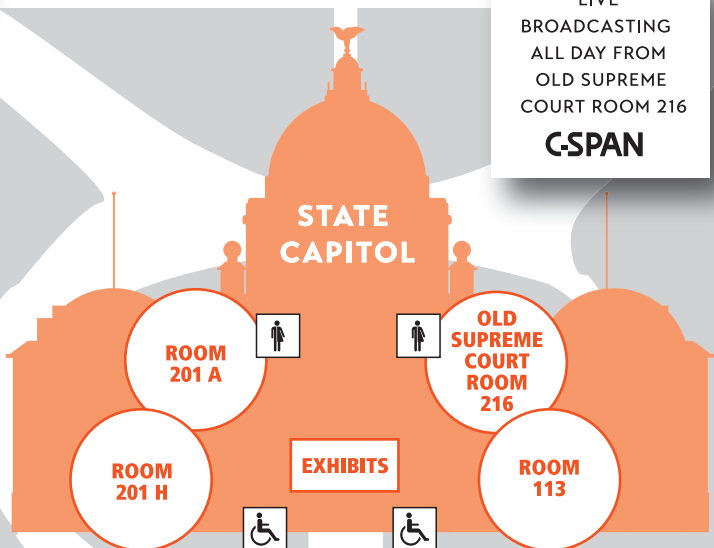
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AUTHORS ALLEY

MISSISSIPPI STREET

BOOK SELLERS



**#MSBOOKFEST
#LITLAWNPARTY**

N. WEST STREET

**THE
FOUNDERY**

**GALLOWAY
CHURCH**

SANCTUARY

N. CONGRESS STREET

N. PRESIDENT STREET

WHEN, WHO & WHERE

This year's Mississippi Book Festival Schedule

10:00 a.m.

A Conversation with Kate DiCamillo
GALLOWAY SANCTUARY

10:00 a.m.

Southern Cooking
THE FOUNDERY

10:00 a.m.

Comics and Cartoons
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 H

10:00 a.m.

Jesmyn Ward and *The Fire This Time*
OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM 216

10:00 a.m.

Historical Fiction
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113

10:00 a.m.

Mystery and Thriller
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 A

11:00 a.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

11:15 a.m.

Poetry
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 H

11:15 a.m.

Children's Illustrated
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113

11:15 a.m.

Schools in Change
OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM 216 (C-SPAN)

11:15 a.m.

Southern Fiction Today
THE FOUNDERY

11:15 a.m.

Art in Mississippi
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 A

11:30 a.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

12:00 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

12:30 p.m.

Middle Grade Readers
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113

12:30 p.m.

A Conversation with Anne Webster on *The Great War*
THE FOUNDERY

12:30 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

12:30 p.m.

Short Stories
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 H

12:30 p.m.

True Crime
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 A

12:30 p.m.

Civil Rights History I
OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM 216 (C-SPAN)

1:00 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

1:00 p.m.

Southern Culture
GALLOWAY SANCTUARY

1:30 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

1:45 p.m.

Memoir
THE FOUNDERY

1:45 p.m.

A Conversation with Richard Ford
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113

1:45 p.m.

William Faulkner: His Life and Writings
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 H

1:45 p.m.

Mississippi Noir
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 A

1:45 p.m.

Mississippi History
OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM 216 (C-SPAN)

2:00 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

2:30 p.m.

Willie Morris and His Books
GALLOWAY SANCTUARY

2:30 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

3:00 p.m.

Photography
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 H

3:00 p.m.

Civil Rights History II
OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM 216 (C-SPAN)

3:00 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

3:00 p.m.

A Conversation with Jacqueline Woodson
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113

3:00 p.m.

Book Club Picks
THE FOUNDERY

3:00 p.m.

Sports and Outdoors
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 201 A

3:30 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

4:00 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

4:00 p.m.

The National Page
GALLOWAY SANCTUARY

4:15 p.m.

Young Adult
STATE CAPITOL ROOM 113

4:15 p.m.

The Presidential Year
OLD SUPREME COURT ROOM 216 (C-SPAN)

4:30 p.m.

State Capitol Building Tour
DEPARTING FROM VISITOR'S DESK

5:30 p.m.

The Mississippi Experience / The Closing Chapter
GALLOWAY SANCTUARY