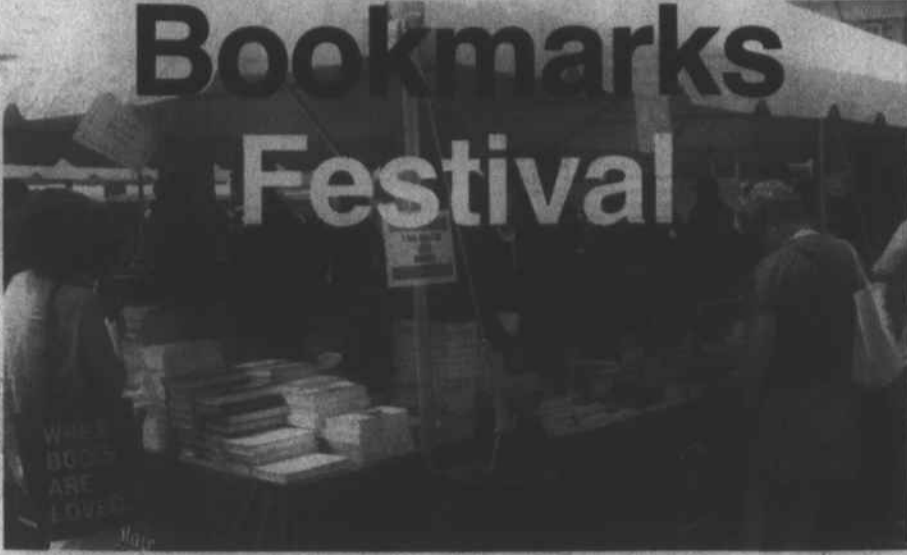


# Black authors draw large crowd during Bookmarks Festival



People browse through the selection of books for sale during the 12th Annual Bookmarks Festival of Books and Authors on Saturday, Sept. 10. According to event organizers more than 15,000 people attended the four-day festival.

BY TEVIN STINSON  
THE CHRONICLE

Last week well-known African-American authors from across the country converged on the city for the 12th Annual Bookmarks Festival of Books and Authors.

The four-day festival is the largest annual book festival in the Carolinas. Since its creation in 2004, Bookmarks has brought more than 600 authors, illustrators, and storytellers to Winston-Salem, including winners of the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, National Book Critics Circle Award and countless others.

This where, *The Chronicle* highlights the African-American authors who visited the Twin City during the festival: Bridgette Lacy, Jacqueline Woodson, Terry McMillan and Colson Whitehead.

Lacy, whose food column "Sunday Dinner" has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Washington Post* and *Southern Living*, discussed the cuisine of the South during the Southern Flavors Forum on Saturday, Sept. 10.

Jacqueline Woodson, author of numerous award winning children's books, attended the festival to discuss writing for children and young adults, and her first novel for adults titled, "Another Brooklyn."

During an open discussion for teenagers at Reynolds Place, inside the Milton Rhodes Center for the Arts,

Woodson and young-adult fiction author Gayle Forman talked about the importance writing books and novels that appeal to a younger crowd. Surrounded by dozens of young people, Woodson said, "Growing up I didn't know exactly what I wanted to be but, writing is what made me happiest."

"I loved writing and I still have that same passion today," she said. "I loved watching words flower into sentences and sentences blossom into stories."

Before leaving the stage, Woodson said although she has written numerous books and received countless awards, she is still surprised when she walks into a bookstore and her name is on a book.

McMillan, who is most known as the mastermind behind, novels "Waiting to Exhale" and "How Stella Got Her Groove Back," both of which were made into box office films, connected with hundreds of festival goers during her visit to the city. First, she dined with fans at Sweet Potatoes restaurant during an eat and greet, during which she read excerpts from her new novel, "I Almost Forgot About You." Then, she took pictures and signed books during two separate events at the Hanes Brand Theatre and outside Milton Rhodes.

After getting her copy of "I Almost Forgot About You" signed, High Point native Savannah Lloyd said "Waiting to Exhale" was her favorite novel by McMillan. She mentioned she couldn't wait to read the author's latest work.



Photos by Tevin Stinson  
Author Bridgette Lacy takes a question from a festiva goer during the Southern Flavor Forum on Saturday, Sept. 10. Lacy's food columns have been published in *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post* and *Southern Living*.



Author Colson Whitehead reads an excerpt from his novel "The Underground Railroad" during an open forum style event during the Bookmarks Festival of Books and Authors. Colson's novel made President Barack Obama's summer reading list, and Oprah's Book Club 2.0.

"If this book ["I Almost Forgot About You"] is anything like other books I have read by McMillan, I'm sure it will be one I can't put down," she smiled. "I know it will be a classic."

One of the most popular events during the festival was the open discussion with award winning, New York-based novelist Colson Whitehead. Hundreds of people filled the seats and lined the walls inside Mountcastle Forum on the second floor of Milton Rhodes to hear Whitehead discuss his novel, "The Underground Railroad."

The novel, which tells the story of Cora and Caesar, two slaves seeking freedom by following the Underground Railroad. On their journey through the slave states to freedom, the main characters encounter several people who don't agree with slavery and are willing to help.

While discussing the novel that made President Barack Obama's summer reading list, and Oprah's Book Club 2.0, Whitehead said he wanted to show readers what could have happened in American history. He said, after working on the book for a few years, his editor finally signed off on the project earlier this year.

After reading an excerpt from the novel, Whitehead took questions from the audience. When asked about some historical references mentioned in the book, Whitehead said, "As the story progresses it provides a sort of alternative history."

"It's not a historical novel," he continued. "Once I made the decision to write

this novel, I was freed up to play with history in a number of ways. My motto was I'm not sticking to the facts but I'm sticking to the truth."

Whitehead noted, the majority of his research for the novel came from narratives from the government collected in the 1930s by former slaves.

"The slave narratives from former slaves who were 80 and 90 years old gave me a variety of different opinions on what slave-life was like," he said. "That's what freed me up to make my own plantation: the real life experiences of former slaves."

After the event, Whitehead signed copies of the book and took dozens of pictures with fans, and other festival goers. City native James Andrews said although he has already finished the novel, he is looking forward to reading it again.

"After receiving background from Whitehead and getting to know his motivation for writing the novel, I'm excited to go back re-read the book," said Andrews. "I'm sure there are some things that I looked over that will stand out the second time around."

According to festival organizers, more than 15,000 people attended the four-day festival. While carrying a stack of books to her car, Allyson Little from Greensboro said, "I will definitely be back next year."

"This is an amazing event. I can't wait to see what authors will be here next year."



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