

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832

Opinion

ONE-ON-ONE

# Emmett Till lives on...

"America is still killing Emmett Till," writes Duke professor Timothy Tyson in his new book, "The Blood of Emmett Till."

"Tyson revisits the 1955 kidnapping and brutal killing of Till."

D.G. MARTIN



Tyson revisits the 1955 kidnapping and brutal

killing of Till, a 14-year-old black youth from Chicago visiting relatives in Mississippi. At a country store, Till's encounter with an attractive white woman broke the "color code" and prompted her husband and brother-in-law to punish him.

Tyson's book gained immediate national attention because the woman changed her version of what Emmett Till had said and done to her in the encounter that led to Till's murder. Carolyn Bryant Donham told Tyson her earlier statements that Till had made sexually explicit statements to her and grabbed her were, as she told Tyson, "That part is not true."

While Donham's revised version of the 1955 events grabbed the headlines, it is only a part of the mosaic of racism and oppression Tyson lays out. His detailed description of her husband's family's instability and racism would fit the Appalachian families described in "Hillbilly Elegy," the recent bestseller by J.D. Vance.

On the other side of the racial divide, Tyson poignantly describes the indignities suffered by Till's mother's family in Mississippi. Never look a white person in the eye. Never say or do anything that could be viewed as disrespectful. Do not attempt to register to vote. Violating these or multiple other rules by a Mississippi black could lead to loss of employment, burnings, midnight gunshots into your house, brutal beatings, or death.

While the racism in Chicago, was not quite so brutal, the dehumanization and violence were so similar to the situation in Mississippi that parts of Chicago were known as "Little Mississippi."

Tyson revisits the horrible details of Till's kidnapping by Donham's husband, Roy Bryant, and her brother-in-law, J. W. Malam, the brutal beating and gunshot through Till's head that ended his life, and the attempt to hide his body by attaching a heavy fan to his body with barbed wire and tossing it into a nearby river.

A few days later, however, Till's bloated and mangled body was discovered and ultimately returned to Chicago, where his mother insisted on an open-casket funeral. The murders of other blacks who violated race codes in Mississippi and other southern states never captured the attention of the public as profoundly as the widely publicized images of Till's brutalized body.

Tyson writes that four days later a Montgomery city bus driver told her to move to the back. Thinking of Emmett Till, "Parks refused to do so. Her subsequent arrest provided the occasion for the Montgomery Bus Boycott."

More importantly, according to Tyson, "the impact of the Till lynching resonated across America for years, touching virtually everyone who heard."

Tyson says, for instance, that it motivated North Carolina A&T students who began a sit-in at Woolworth's in Greensboro on February 1, 1960. Within a few days students in other parts of North Carolina were sitting in at segregated lunch counters. He writes, "A new, mass-based phase of the civil rights movement, a distinctive radicalism rooted in nonviolent direct action, had begun."

Tyson writes that the recent national movement born of the killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and other similar killings, continues the tradition as "young protesters throughout the United States chanted, 'Say his name! Emmett Till!'"

Nevertheless, Tyson hopes that "difficult as it is to bear, his story can leave us reaching for our better angels and moving toward higher ground."

D.G. Martin hosts "North Carolina Bookwatch."



FARM LIFE WIFE

# Superheroes in our midst...

Marvel dominates the superhero and villain comic literary genre with aplomb. Each month it seems there is a new movie out about this hero or that hero fixing all the world's ills and dominating the villains.

Don't get me wrong - I love them - Iron Man, Captain America and Ant Man being among my favorites...movies, that is.

In doing my research last week, I realized we have superheroes in our midst that will never grace the silver screen.

They don't fly through space or swing from webbing attached to tall buildings but they do help those who cannot help themselves.

Rev. White, a pastor from Windsor, worked in the trenches of Baltimore, Md. among those addicted to drugs and alcohol pointing them where to get help when a test for AIDS gave them a wake-up call.

He tells story after story of turned-around lives because they came in contact with someone who cared and looked past the social ills straight to the heart.

White put aside his comfort

"These are the kind of superheroes the world really needs."

- DEBORAH GRIFFIN



zone to reach out to those society had given up on and threw away with the garbage.

Another superhero in our midst is Jamesville Mayor Pro Tempore and Commissioner Willis Williams.

He grew up in a racially heated time in rural Jamesville and could have easily become bitter from the injustices he witnessed firsthand.

He credits his parents for steering him down a different road.

They instilled in him the value of education and loving God and others. These are forces behind his superpowers to help those who cannot help themselves.

He has been confined to a wheelchair since 2008, directly related to injuries he received while serving in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

TODAY IN N.C.

# Both sides now...

These are busy times for "political pretzels," the contortionists who are party diehards.

If they stick with their party in Raleigh, they will contradict their party in Washington, and vice versa. Or, because administrations flipped in Raleigh, they may now disagree with a practice they supported before January 1.

In Raleigh, the state Senate will initiate confirmation hearings for Gov. Roy Cooper's cabinet secretaries. Sen. Bill Rabon, R-Brunswick, says he's looking for potential conflicts of interest. Democrats are suing.

Exploring for conflicts of interest is exactly what Democratic senators in Washington have done with President Trump's cabinet nominees, so angering Republican committee chairmen that they've been obstructing the reviews.

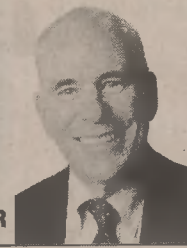
At one such hearing two years ago, Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions asked Sally Yates if she would defy, as deputy attorney general, an illegal order from then-President Barack Obama.

Yates gave Sessions the answer he wanted: Yes. Then, last month, she defied President Trump and immediately got fired. Now the table has been turned on Sessions and he is being asked his own question in his own confirmation hearings for attorney general: Will he stand up to Trump?

It's a question then-N.C. Attorney General Cooper answered several times in the last four years, refusing to defend Republi-

"Pretzels aren't good for you either."

- PAUL O'CONNOR



can legislative actions he considered unconstitutional. And every time, Republicans howled that he wasn't doing his job.

Former Secretary Donald van der Vaart liked working in Gov. Pat McCrory's Department of Environmental Quality so much that after Cooper beat McCrory he demoted himself, taking a protected civil service job to stay employed. Usually, cabinet secretaries leave with their governor.

Nice trick. But shouldn't Cooper still be able to fire van der Vaart and hire his own people?

If he does, he'll run into a case before the N.C. Supreme Court. John Ledford, a Democrat and former director of N.C. Alcohol Law Enforcement, is the plaintiff. He demoted himself four years ago just before McCrory replaced Gov. Bev Perdue. McCrory fired Ledford, and Ledford is suing to get his job and back pay. It's all very confusing.

Among the confused must be the N.C. Supreme Court justices; Democrats now hold a majority of seats. Their decision will make one Democrat happy and one sad. Their only recourse might be to put politics aside and follow the law, if anyone knows what that is.

Traveling home to North Carolina from California, after being honorably discharged in 1966, he was asked to move to the back of the bus because of the color of his skin.

Never mind that he was injured.

And never mind that he had just been serving his country for freedom of others.

Talk about adding insult to injury.

He is currently an advocate and a mediator for the poor and has changed laws that govern our county so that the scales of justice lean in a more balanced manner.

These are the kind of superheroes our world really needs. Sorry Marvel.

These men have quietly worked to change the world for the better, never asking for attention. They are the type of men I will point my two boys to - to look up to and pattern their lives after.

Deborah Griffin is Staff Writer for the Bertie Ledger-Advance. She can be reached via email at dgriffin@ncweeklies and at (252) 792-1181.

(An aside: Remember the Republican criticism of Obama's Supreme Court choices as all Ivy League elitists? Trump's nominee, Neil Gorsuch, has degrees from Columbia and Harvard, same resume as Obama. He also has a Ph.D. earned at Bill Clinton's old school, Oxford in England. Gorsuch is a real everyman.)

Cooper fired David Prickett, a Health and Human Services spokesperson. Prickett's suing to keep his job. In the first weeks of most new administrations, spokespersons, or "flacks" as reporters call them, are replaced. McCrory hired his own flacks in 2013.

Flacks mouth the boss's propaganda, and why anyone would want to first justify McCrory and then Cooper is a mystery to me. Maybe Prickett needs the job. I sympathize with him.

But, Republicans who cheer for him today had better understand that if he wins and sets legal precedent they'll be stuck with Democrats as mouthpieces for the next Republican governor.

Most of us either support confirmation hearings or not, support executive hiring decisions or not. Pretzels just contradict themselves and support whatever their party tells them to support.

Remember that old saying about what's good for the goose and the gander? Pretzels aren't good for you either.

Paul T. O'Connor has covered state government for 39 years.

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