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## Oxford Conference for the Book Brings Variety of Authors to UM

Poets, journalists, scholars and readers coming to campus March 2-4 for free event

FEBRUARY 25, 2016 BY REBECCA LAUCK CLEARY



Ed Larson

OXFORD, Miss. – **Pulitzer Prize**-winning authors, as well as first-time novelists, are part of the variety of legendary and debut writers hosted at the **Oxford Conference for the Book**, set for March 2-4. Poets, journalists, scholars and readers will visit the University of Mississippi for the 23rd conference.

The three-day event, which is free and open to the public, includes readings, panel discussions and lectures.

The conference is a great way for Oxford visitors and locals to explore the town and the university, said James G. Thomas Jr., conference director.

“We try to open doors with this conference, both literally and metaphorically,” said Thomas, associate director of publications at the **UM Center for the Study of Southern Culture**.

“By that I mean the sessions open up doors for thought and inquiry, and the venues we’re having them in are places that some Oxford residents, students, and visitors may not have had the opportunity to explore, such as the Lafayette County courthouse, the Barksdale-Isom House, the UM library’s Faulkner Room and even the University Museum.”

This year’s writers include novelists Rick Bass, Bobbie Ann Mason, Margaret McMullan, Robert Gipe, Taylor Brown and UM Grisham Writer in Residence Kiese Laymon; Mississippi historians Minion K.C. Morrison and Dennis Mitchell; historian and gender studies scholar LaKisha Michelle Simmons; poets Richard Katrovas, Rebecca Morgan Frank, Caki Wilkinson, Jericho Brown, Katie Peterson, Chiyuma Elliott and UM professors Beth Ann Fennelly and Derrick Harriell; historian Mark Essig; literary scholar Vereen Bell; and Pulitzer Prizewinners journalist Sheri Fink and historian Edward J. Larson.

Larson, professor of law at Pepperdine University, is the author of nine books, the most recent of which, “*The Return of George Washington*,” was on *The New York Times* bestseller list in 2015. He has lectured on all seven continents.

“I love Oxford, I have been for tailgating in the Grove since back when I was on the University of Georgia’s athletic board and the SEC was a 10-team conference,” Larson said. “Oxford has the best catfish anywhere. What I want to do next in Mississippi is to bike the Natchez Trace.”

Wednesday’s and Thursday’s events will take place in the auditorium of the **Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics**, and the conference will begin with a lecture and free luncheon, sponsored by the Friends of the Library, in the Faulkner Room in **Archives and Special Collections in the J.D. Williams Library**, also on the UM campus. Friday’s panels and readings will take place in the main courtroom of the historic Lafayette County courthouse on the Oxford Square.

Lyn Roberts, general manager at Square Books, calls the conference a celebration of books for everyone.

“The Oxford Conference for the Book has a history and tradition of bringing authors, both debut and established, to Oxford and the University of Mississippi, allowing everyone in the community and anyone who wants to travel the opportunity to hear them read from their works and discuss books,” Roberts said.

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### Campus Briefs

#### Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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#### Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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### Ole Miss In the News

#### Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith’s Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith’s 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school’s first African-American student.



Margaret McMullan

Conference panels will explore a wide range of topics, including Mississippi history; childhood in the South; memoir writing; youth, activism, and life in the Mountain South; poetic responses to Langston Hughes; Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "Go Set a Watchman"; the Hurricane Katrina crisis; America's continuing debate over science and religion; and a cultural and culinary history of the pig.

"I'm excited to introduce Mark Essig to the OCB audience," said Sara Camp Milam, who will moderate Friday's 10:30 a.m. panel, sponsored by the Southern Foodways Alliance. "His work is as engaging as it is educational. 'Lesser Beasts' was one of my favorite food studies books of 2015. For students thinking about how to make their academic work accessible to a general audience, I'd recommend attending this session."

A new event this year is a poetry session paired with an art exhibition by photographer Youngsuk Suh. At 4:30 p.m. Thursday, following the "Poetic Responses to Langston Hughes" session, the University Museum will host a free reception.

"**Thacker Mountain Radio**" will host a special Oxford Conference for the Book show at 6 p.m. Thursday at Off Square Books, 129 Courthouse Square, featuring conference authors and visiting musicians. The day's authors will be there to meet conference attendees and sign books. Each afternoon following the sessions, Square Books will host book signings for that day's authors.



Mark Essig

The Children's Book Festival will be held March 4 at the Ford Center for Performing Arts, with more than 1,200 first- and fifth-graders from area schools. Laurie Keller, author of "The Scrambled States of America," will present at 9 a.m. for first graders, and Holly Goldberg Sloan, author of "Counting by 7s," will present at 10:30 a.m. for fifth graders. The Lafayette County Literacy Council sponsors the first-grade program and the Junior Auxiliary of Oxford sponsors the fifth-grade program.

Four special social events are set on the Ole Miss campus and in town. On March 2, the Friends of the J.D. Williams Library will host an opening lunch beginning at 11 a.m. in Archives and Special Collections. The lunch is free, but reservations are appreciated. That evening is the gala opening-night cocktail reception-dinner at 6:30 p.m. in the historic Barksdale-Isom House, 1003 Jefferson Ave. A portion of the \$50 ticket proceeds is tax-deductible.

At noon March 4, the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library will host a poetry talk and lunch with poet Richard Katrovas. Both the lunch and talk are free, but reservations are appreciated.

The Oxford Conference for the Book is sponsored by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, Square Books, Southern Documentary Project, Southern Foodways Alliance, Living Blues magazine, University Museum, Lafayette County Literacy Council, UM Department of English, J.D. Williams Library, Overby Center for Southern Journalism and Politics, Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College, John and Renée Grisham Visiting Writers Fund, Junior Auxiliary of Oxford, Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library, Southern Literary Trail and the Pulitzer Centennial Campfires Initiative.

The conference is partially funded by the university, a contribution from the R&B Feder Foundation for the Beaux Arts, grants from the Mississippi Humanities Council and promotional support from Visit Oxford.

To see a full schedule of events, visit <http://oxfordconferenceforthebook.com/> or contact James G. Thomas Jr. at 662-915-3374 or [jgthomas@olemiss.edu](mailto:jgthomas@olemiss.edu).

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"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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