



Community reading focuses on Lewis Nordan's *Wolf Whistle*

♣ **What if you realized that the lynching of a 14-year-old might be partly your fault? Not your fault because of any overt act, but your fault nonetheless because of the way you think and behave every day, or because of the things you turn your back on or pretend not to see?**

This question lies at the heart of Lewis Nordan's *Wolf Whistle*, the selection for this year's Randolph Reads community reading program. Throughout August and September, area residents from all walks of life will take the award-winning novel to heart, and come together to explore the issues it raises.

Wolf Whistle, is a fictional account of the shockwaves experienced by a Deep South community in the wake of a crime similar to the lynching of Emmett Till. Till, a 14-year-old African American, was tortured and murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman in 1955 Mississippi.

Although the killers were acquitted, reaction to the murder drew international attention to the plight of blacks in the South and helped spark the Civil Rights movement (read more about Till at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmett_Till).

Nordan grew up in the area in which the lynching of Till occurred. He was 15 at the time, and the murder forced him to face attitudes about race that he had been raised to take for granted.

"*Wolf Whistle* is in some ways an angry book," he says in an interview reprinted in the book's first

paperback edition. "I still have a hard time talking about my upbringing in the south without a certain anger rising up in me.

"I feel angry sometimes that I was limited in these ways—although it's nobody else's fault—that I was put in the position of treating a whole race of people like peasants, like animals. And the story I wanted to tell was what happened to the people in a community where a murder was committed and they suddenly realized it might be their fault."

Wolf Whistle focuses on idealistic, lovelorn white school teacher Alice Conroy in *Arrow Catcher*, Mississippi. When Bobo (Till's real nickname), an African American youth from Chicago visiting his aunt and uncle, is murdered, Alice must confront the white community's culpability.

Despite the situation's tragic core, Nordan weaves in elements of Southern Gothic often associated with Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner. Some of the characters are eccentric or even grotesque, and there's humor and a touch of the fantastic—drawn from the literary genre of magical realism—in the tale.

Publisher's Weekly called Nordan's handling of these elements "astonishing" in the context of a subject that "would seem to demand almost religious gravity." *Kirkus Reviews* said Nordan pulls off "a high-wire act—of surprising tenderness."

Wolf Whistle, published by Algonquin Books in 1993, won the Southern Book Critics Circle Award and received an American Library Association Notable Book Award.

PBS Documentary *The Murder of Emmett Till*

6:30 p.m. Thursday, September 29

...see reverse for details

Panel featuring Betty Foust & Martha Judge

6:30 p.m. Thursday, September 22

...see reverse for details



Delta blues with 'Bump & Logie'

7 p.m. Thursday, September 8

...see reverse for details

Get the blues

Delta music inspires Nordan; Randolph Reads to host Bump & Logie

♣ Three celebrated area musicians will bring the blues — a major influence on Lewis Nordan's writing — home to Randolph Reads.

"I heard a rhythm and a song long before I had the words, and I've just been waiting all these years to fill in the words," Nordan once said.

To explore this aspect of Nordan's work — and to hear some good music — Randolph Reads will present *Bump & Logie* at 7 p.m., Thursday, September 8, at the Asheboro Public Library. The show, sponsored by the Friends of the Library, is free and the public is invited.

Bump & Logie features Lorenzo (Logie) Meachum on vocals, guitar and washboard; Bubba (Bump) Klinefelter on vocals, guitar and harmonica; and Terry VunCannon on lap steel and guitar.

Meachum, also an educator and storyteller, performed at the library in 1995. Both Klinefelter and Meachum are winners of the Keeping the Blues Alive award from the Piedmont Blues Preservation Society.



Bump & Logie — Bubba (Bump) Klinefelter, Lorenzo (Logie) Meachum and Terry VunCannon, will play the Blues at 7 p.m. Thursday, September 8, at the Asheboro Public Library.

VunCannon has played with two bands that have won the society's talent competition, most recently in 2004. VunCannon says *Bump & Logie* will "take you back to the days when Blues was all about guitars and harmonica."

A major influence on almost all types of American music, the blues originated in African American communities in the Mississippi Delta in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Learn more about the blues at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blues>.

Discussion, screening to bring novel into focus

♣ A panel discussion and the screening of a documentary about the lynching of Emmett Till will offer the community a chance to consider issues raised by *Wolf Whistle*.

The panel discussion, led by Betty Foust and Martha Judge, will take place at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, September 22 at the Asheboro Public Library. It's free and the public is invited.

Randolph Reads will screen the 2003 documentary *The Murder of Emmett Till* at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, September 29. The screening is free and the public is invited.

For more information about the film, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>.

More on *Wolf Whistle* and Randolph Reads at <http://www.randolphlibrary.org/wolfwhistle.html>

Nordan's Delta roots inform his writing

♣ Born in Jackson, Mississippi, Lewis Nordan grew up in the Mississippi Delta in a family of storytellers.

Currently, he's a professor of creative writing at the University of Pittsburgh, and author of seven works of fiction and one memoir.

After years teaching at the high school and college levels, he began his literary career at age 35 with stories published in *Greensboro Review*, *Harpers* and *The Southern Review*, among others. His first story collection, *Welcome to the Arrow-Catcher Club*, sets the stage for novels such as *Wolf Whistle*.

"Writers will find a little postage-stamp size plot of land, their spiritual geography and a handful of people that live there, and they will write those people's stories over and over again..." he said.

Learn more about Nordan at http://www.randolphlibrary.org/wolfwhistle_author.html.