

Thirtieth Mary Frances Hobson Prize for Distinguished Achievement in Arts and Letters

Chowan University is pleased to announce that De'Shawn Charles Winslow is the



Photo by Julie R. Keresztes

recipient of the 2024 Mary Frances Hobson Prize for Distinguished Achievement in Arts and Letters. His novels, *In West Mills* and *Decent People*, are explorations of a small African American community in northeastern North Carolina. In making the announcement, the Hobson Prize Selection Committee noted, “Winslow is known for a distinctive and engaging writing style that captivates readers with its narrative depth. Rooted in his own experiences growing up in northeastern North Carolina, Winslow infuses his novels with a sense of cultural authenticity. The dialogue, customs, and setting in his work reflect the unique aspects of the African American community he portrays.”

Initiated in 1995 by the Hobson Family Foundation of San Francisco, the award serves as a memorial to Mary Frances Hobson (1912-1993), a journalist and poet, who was the first woman to receive the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award in journalism from the University of North Carolina. Previously honored recipients are Kaye Gibbons (1995), Mark Richard (1996), Jill McCorkle (1997), Randall Kenan (1998), G.D. Gearino (1999), Amy Hempel (2000), Allan Gurganus (2001), Padgett Powell (2002), Sheri Reynolds (2003), Chuck Sullivan (2004), Sheila Moses (2005), Michael Parker (2006), Josephine Humphreys (2007), Judy Goldman (2008), Darnell Arnoult (2009), Lee Smith (2010), Robert Morgan (2011), Silas House (2012), Joseph Bathanti (2013), Sharyn McCrumb (2014), Dorothy Allison (2015), Edward P. Jones (2016), Kevin Wilson (2017), Jim Grimsley (2018), Wiley Cash (2019), Crystal Wilkinson (2020), Michel Stone (2021), Daniel Wallace (2022), and David Sanchez (2023).

The annual event brings the university and community together each spring to celebrate the accomplishments of an author of the South or who writes about the South. The 30th prize will be conferred on Monday, April 1, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at a dinner in the Chowan Room in Thomas Dining Hall. Following the dinner and conferral, Winslow will deliver the Hobson Lecture at 7:30 in Vaughan Auditorium in Robert Marks Hall.

Born and raised in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, De'Shawn Charles Winslow holds an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and a B.F.A. in creative writing and an M.A. in English literature from Brooklyn College. He has received scholarships from the Napa Valley Writers' Conference and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Featured as a "Writer to Watch" in the *New York Times*, Winslow currently resides in Newark, New Jersey.

In West Mills (2019), his debut novel about a family's struggles and secrets, spans several decades, from the 1940s to the 1980s. The recipient of the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize, the Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction, an American Book Award, and a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, it received critical acclaim for its compelling narrative and well-drawn characters.

Decent People (2023) is a small-town (West Mills) murder mystery set in 1976 that draws readers into the community's racial history. In his review of *Decent People* in the *Washington Post*, Ron Charles wrote, "The larger social context that Winslow explores is what moves this story beyond one crime into a reflection on the myriad unacknowledged crimes committed across decades."

The public is invited to attend the Hobson Prize Lecture. To make reservations, contact the Office of the Provost at 252-398-6211 or cuprovost@chowhan.edu.