



Wil Haygood

Acclaimed Biographer, Pulitzer Finalist, Award-Winning Author & Reporter

Best-selling author, prize-winning journalist, acclaimed biographer and cultural historian Wil Haygood tells the story of America through the lens of history, politics, sports, race and the lives of change-making African-Americans. Best known as the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Butler* and *Showdown*, his work has chronicled America's civil rights journey through acclaimed biographies of Thurgood Marshall, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Sammy Davis, Jr., Sugar Ray Robinson and Eugene Allen, the real-life inspiration for Lee Daniels' award-winning film, *The Butler*. Haygood's latest book, *Tigerland: 1968-1969: A City Divided, a Nation Torn Apart, and a Magical Season of Healing* tells the uplifting story of teams from a poor, black segregated high school that won two state championships in the same year, uniting a racially charged community in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King. *The Wall Street Journal*, praised Haygood's juxtapositions of race and class against the historic backdrop of the events of 1968-69, declaring *Tigerland* "a haunting, unforgettable book."

A storyteller for our times, Haygood has earned high praise for connecting the civil rights movement and its iconic heroes with current events and enduring struggles. Above all, he brings the powerful perspective that this is the history of all Americans, shaping our national identity and common values.

Haygood's talent for looking at events from multiple points of view comes from his background as a journalist. For thirty years, he was a national and foreign correspondent for the *Washington Post* and *Boston Globe*, covering events such as Nelson Mandela's release from prison after 27 years, the ascent of President Obama, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and his own experience as the hostage of Somali rebels. While at the *Globe*, he was honored as a Pulitzer Prize finalist for feature writing. The author of eight books, Haygood continues to capture the attention of the media and some of the leading entertainment figures of our time. *The Butler* (for which he also served as associate producer) drew Academy Award winners Forest Whitaker, Cuba Gooding, Jr., Robin Williams, Vanessa Redgrave, Jane Fonda and Oprah Winfrey and won numerous awards and nominations. His biography of Sugar Ray Robinson, *Sweet Thunder*, is being adapted for the screen by Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Productions with Golden Globe winner David Oyelowo (*Selma*) as Robinson. *In Black and White*, his biography of Sammy Davis, Jr. is under option to director Lee Daniels. Haygood was also called



upon as the go-to biographer of Thurgood Marshall when the biopic *MARSHALL* drew renewed interest in the life and career of the first African-American Supreme Court Justice.

Born to a poor single mother and raised in the projects, Haygood's path to Pulitzer recognition, the *New York Times* bestseller list, Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships, and the upper echelons of Hollywood has defied the odds. He became the first in his family to attend college, studying urban studies and English literature while playing on the junior varsity basketball team at Miami University (Ohio). In 2013, he returned to his alma mater as a Boadway Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence in the Department of Media, Journalism & Film. In the fall of 2018, Haygood debuted his book, *Tigerland* to the Miami University community at their convocation. For his contributions to the university and society, he was presented with the Miami University President's medal, the highest honor the university awards. Eight other colleges and universities have also honored Haygood with honorary degrees.

As a speaker, Haygood has been described as "a powerful presence," "out of this world," and "hitting exactly the right heart and message." Not unaccustomed to standing ovations, he leaves audiences inspired, moved and with a deeper, richer understanding of our shared American story.

Topics:

- Healing America: From *Tigerland* to Today
- Taking a Knee & Standing Tall for our Constitutional Rights
- Martin Luther King, Jr. & Why He Endures
- *Showdown*: Honoring the Lessons of Thurgood Marshall
- *MARSHALL*: The Enduring Legacy