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## Tyson's 'Blood' to be filmed in N.C.

### Memoir of racial killing attracts Hollywood A-list

**J. PEDER ZANE, Staff Writer**

At first take, they seem the oddest of couples. One is a ruffled Duke scholar who has devoted his life to racial healing. The other is a Hollywood heavyweight who wrote "Die Hard," "The Fugitive" and "Another 48 Hrs."

But Timothy B. Tyson and Jeb Stuart will join forces to make a movie based on "Blood Done Sign My Name," Tyson's history of a 1970 racial murder in Oxford.

Stuart has completed the script and will direct the independent film using North Carolina locations. Casting is set to begin in three to six weeks, and production could start as early as May.

Although Stuart hopes to keep costs below \$10 million, "Blood" promises to be the biggest film made from a North Carolina book since Tim Burton adapted Daniel Wallace's novel "Big Fish" in 2004 and Anthony Minghella brought Charles Frazier's "Cold Mountain" to the screen in 2003.

"I am very excited about returning to North Carolina to tell this very important story," said Stuart, who grew up in Charlotte and Gastonia and graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill.

"Blood Done Sign My Name" has become a publishing phenomenon. Since 2004, it has sold 140,000 copies and earned a slew of awards, including the University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion, which carries a \$200,000 prize. UNC-CH selected the book for its 2005 summer reading program.

Part history, part memoir, "Blood" begins on May 11, 1970, when three white men killed 23-year-old African-American Henry Marrow in broad daylight because, they claimed, he "said something" to a white woman. Marches, violence and boycotts ensued, continuing after an all-white jury acquitted the men.

Those events are a springboard for Tyson's larger exploration of the meaning and history of race in North Carolina and the United States. The book is also deeply personal. Tyson was a 10-year-old living in Oxford when the murder occurred. His father, Vernon, was a Methodist minister who tried to speak up for racial justice without alienating his congregants.

Tyson was wary when Stuart approached him two years ago.

"Hollywood doesn't have a great record on these complicated kind of stories," he said. "And I wondered why a guy who made all those big action movies was interested in my book."

Turns out, Stuart is also a minister's son. His father led Presbyterian congregations in North Carolina as the civil rights movements transformed the state and the nation.

"This is not the kind of story that I'm associated with in my professional life," Stuart said. "But it hit very close to home in my personal life. It's the type of story I've always wanted to tell, and



Tyson and director Jeb Stuart are both sons of preachers.

I've reached a point in my career where I can do it."

No roles have been cast, but Robert Duvall, Don Cheadle, Eddie Murphy and Patrick Swayze are in the mix. Tyson said he has had "great fun" imagining who will play his parents.

At first, he suggested older actors, forgetting that the action takes place four decades ago, when his parents were younger than his 48 years.

"I thought Matthew McConaughey would be perfect for my dad, but he's not available," Tyson said. "For my mom, Jeb and I have talked about Gwyneth Paltrow, Ashley Judd and Ally Sheedy -- she's got the right eyes, those soulful brown eyes."

Tyson and Stuart have scouted locations, from Wilmington, Henderson and Hillsborough, to Reidsville, Mocksville and Shelby. Oxford is Tyson's first choice.

"The beautiful old buildings are still there," he said. "All we'd have to do is move the Confederate monument back to the center of town."

Tyson's book reopened some old wounds, but Oxford Mayor Al Woodlief said his community would welcome a film crew.

"It can be painful to revisit the past, but I have talked to the leadership of the black community, and they assured me there would be no problems," he said. "Oxford has changed very much during the last 30 years."

Tyson sees the film as a chance to further spread his message.

"The idea of teaching history to an audience of millions is a dream come true," Tyson said. "I consider myself a public educator, and this is a pretty good classroom.

"And besides, maybe I'll get to hang out with Gwyneth Paltrow."

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