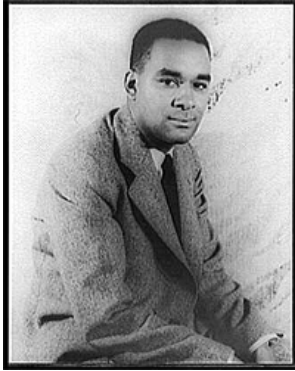


U of M Observance of Richard Wright Centennial Will Begin Oct. 2

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Richard Wright

Photographed in 1939 by Carl Van Vechten

September 4, 1908, was the birthday of Richard Wright, who became an internationally renowned author as the result of his boundary-breaking bestselling novel *Native Son*. Himself a native son of Mississippi, he came of age on Memphis' Beale Street, as he wrote in his critically acclaimed memoir *Black Boy*, a riveting and eloquent autobiography of his struggles to escape poverty, fear, and racism in the segregated American South. Wright later lived in Chicago and then in self-imposed exile in Paris. He reported on Pan-African and Third World struggles from their epicenters before his death on Nov. 28, 1960.

In this centennial year of Wright's birth, the University of Memphis Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities, in cooperation with the Hooks Institute for Social Change, the Department of African and African-American Studies, the Department of Theatre and Dance, and Student Event Allocations, will celebrate his life and legacy of this African-American writer and activist.

The events will include a talk by the author's daughter, a panel discussion by leading Wright scholars, and a play based on his writings. All events for the Wright Centennial Celebration will be held in the Fogelman Executive Center at the University of Memphis. They are all free and open to the public.

The celebration's keynote address by Julia Wright will be Thursday, Oct. 2, at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 3, from 10 to 11 a.m. she will participate in a question-and-answer session open to students and all interested readers of Wright's work. At 1:30 p.m. Friday, a panel of leading Wright scholars will discuss aspects of Wright's literary work. Tyler Stovall will discuss Wright's exile in Paris and how that experience influenced his views on racism, Abdul JanMohamed will address the violence depicted in Wright's work, and Joyce Ann Joyce will discuss Wright's place in the literary canon.

The celebration's finale, Friday at 6:30 p.m., will be a theatrical performance, "Performing Richard Wright," created by Reginald Brown and based on some of the late author's works.

The Wright centennial observance is part of a series of community conversations hosted by the Marcus W. Orr Center for the Humanities focused around this year's theme of "Strangers...Neighbors...Aliens." The series will examine what defines community, who is included and excluded, and what structural forces are at play in determining these processes.

The series will continue November 20 at 6 p.m. with Frederick Kaufman's discussion of his book *A Short History of the American Stomach*, the first of two related events that will focus on the culture of food and its impact on our communities. A sequel to Kaufman's talk will take place in spring 2009, when Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, will speak. Schlosser will be one of several internationally known writers who will be on campus in the spring.

More information about these events or any of the programs of the Marcus W. Orr Humanities Center is available from

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