



Author of Pulitzer Prize-winning history is Flint native and MSU grad

Frankenmuth is loaded with people who love reading first class histories as the library is well aware. Now we have the extra fun of having a local connection to David W. Blight, the historian recently awarded the Pulitzer Prize for History for his 2018 publication, **Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom**.

Before examining who Blight is and why this book is a winner, let's stop for a moment to consider the two most well-known types of literary prizes, the Pulitzer and the Nobel. Most of us haven't given much thought to the differences in these prizes, but they are distinct.

On-line sources accurately tell us that "the Nobel Prize for Literature is given to an author for a body of work over a number of years. By contrast, the Pulitzer Prize is awarded to a particular work published in the qualifying year by an American author, preferably dealing with American life." (That quote is mushed together a bit for concision.)

In other words, the Pulitzer is an award for an outstanding particular work while the Nobel is a sort of life-time achievement award. Also, the Pulitzer has maintained its American status in that only an American writer can win it and the winner's work has to have been published in the preceding year. Thus, the 2019 awards are given for work published in 2018.

The Nobel Prize is more of a world-view award. Writers from anywhere on the globe publishing in any language and genre are eligible. While a writer can apply him or herself for a Pulitzer, one cannot nominate oneself for a Nobel.

Both prizes are as prestigious as it gets. Here are the writers who have achieved both: Saul Bellow, Toni Morrison, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Pearl Buck, Eugene O'Neill (three Pulitzers and one Nobel), and Sinclair Lewis (who declined the Pulitzer so I assume didn't apply for it himself).

All of that is to say that David Blight is in fast company. Blight was raised in Flint and received both his Bachelors and Masters degrees at Michigan State University. He went on to teach high school for a few years, then received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Considering that he spent his entire childhood within half an hour of Frankenmuth and went to MSU for two degrees, I think it's safe to claim him as a native son.

Of course, instead of all that, what we hear about is that he's a Professor of History at Yale and prior to that, he was a Professor of History at Amherst College for thirteen years. His professional life has been dedicated to the history of the American Civil War and its aftermath

and in particular to the resistance of slaves. He has published extensively about Frederick Douglass before publishing what is being called the definitive biography of Douglass for which he won the Pulitzer. It's safe to say he's one of our more distinguished native sons.

All definitive biographies are fascinating. I'm still waiting for Caro to finish up his multi-volume one on Lyndon Johnson. Some, however, are more readable than others. (I'm still trying to finish the one on Emily Dickenson but not trying very hard for the last 25 years). I cannot speak to the Douglass one yet. But for it to receive the Pulitzer, it has to be more than informative and scholarly. It needs to be exceptionally well-written. I think it's a safe bet that this is a very good read.

The library's second floor has an impressive collection of biographies of historical figures, political figures, entertainers, and other notable people. When it comes to biographies, we have you covered.

See you at the Library!

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