

Bill Ferris, Ph.D.

Joel R. Williamson Eminent Professor of History, Senior Associate Director of CSAS & Adjunct Professor in the Curriculum in Folklore, College of Arts and Sciences at UNC-Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill, NC, US

William R. Ferris is a widely recognized leader in Southern studies, African American music, and folklore.

Description

William R. Ferris, a widely recognized leader in Southern studies, African American music and folklore, is the Joel R. Williamson Eminent Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the senior associate director of UNC's Center for the Study of the American South. He is also an adjunct professor in the curriculum on folklore.

The former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Ferris has conducted thousands of interviews with musicians ranging from the famous (B.B. King) to the unrecognized (Parchman Penitentiary inmates working in the fields).

He has written or edited 10 books and created 15 documentary films. His more recent books include "The Storied South: Voices of the Writers and Artists" (2013), and "Give My Poor Heart Ease: Voices of the Mississippi Blues" (2009). He co-edited the massive "Encyclopedia of Southern Culture" (UNC Press, 1989), which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. His other books include: "Mule Trader: Ray Lum's Tales of Horses, Mules and Men" (1992), "Local Color" (1982, 1992), "Images of the South: Visits with Eudora Welty and Walker Evans" (1978), "Mississippi Black Folklore: A Research Bibliography and Discography" (1971), "Blues from the Delta" (1970, 1978, 1988).

Bill Ferris's films include "Mississippi Blues" (1983), which was featured at the Cannes Film Festival. He has produced numerous sound recordings and hosted "Highway 61," a weekly blues program on Mississippi Public Radio for nearly a decade. He also has published his own poetry and short stories.

A native of Vicksburg, Miss., Ferris was the founding director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi.

Industry Expertise

Motion Pictures and Film, Recording

Topics

Folk Music, Folklore, Southern History, African American Culture, Documentary Films, Recording Arts, Southern Literature and Culture, Black History

Affiliations

American Folklore Society

Education

University of Pennsylvania
Ph.D. Folklore

University of Pennsylvania
M.A. Folklore

Northwestern University
M.A. English

Davidson College
B.A. English

Accomplishments

Joel R. Williamson Distinguished Professorship

The Joel R. Williamson Distinguished Professorship was established by John A. and Paula R. Powell of Palo Alto, California. John Powell is a 1977 UNC alumnus. The Williamson professorship was the largest single endowed chair established by an individual in the College of Arts and Sciences during the university's Carolina First fundraising campaign. Bill Ferris is the inaugural holder of the professorship.

Charles Frankel Prize in the Humanities 1995

Awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to recognize persons for outstanding contributions to the public's understanding of the humanities.

Dartmouth Medal 1990

Awarded by the American Library Association, this medal honors the creation of a reference work of outstanding quality and significance.

Lifetime Achievement Award 1990

Awarded by the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters.

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