

Mansfield named Literary Landmark

Former first lady Laura Bush set to attend dedication honoring author, city.

By Amanda Rogers
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Fifty years after "Black Like Me" was published, Mansfield has been chosen to receive only the fifth Na-

tional Literary Landmark in Texas, thanks to Mansfield resident and author John Howard Griffin.

"John Howard Griffin was a very important contributor to civil rights," said City Librarian Steve Standefer. "'Black Like Me' has never been out of print and social studies classes are still assigned to

read it."

In 1959, Griffin darkened his skin and traveled through the South to experience life as a black man. He returned home and wrote about his experiences for *Sepia*, an African-American magazine, then compiled his work into the book, *Black Like Me*.
More on LANDMARK, 5A

Landmark

Continued from 1A

"Black Like Me," which has sold 10 million copies and been translated into 14 languages since being published in 1961.

The Literary Landmark, presented by the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF), a division of the American Library Association, has only been awarded 115 times since 1986, said Jillian Kalonick, marketing/public relations specialist for ALTAFF. Other Literary Landmarks honor Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Robert Frost, Mark Twain and Willa Cather.

Honored authors must be deceased and must have significant ties to the landmark, Kalonick said. The other Texas landmarks include the O. Henry House and Museum in Austin, the Menger Hotel in San Antonio (which honors O. Henry, Theodore Roosevelt and Oscar Wilde), Katherine Ann Porter's home in Kyle and the Lorenzo D. Zavala State Archives and Library Building in Austin. Former first lady Laura Bush spoke at the dedication of the Za-

"Uncommon Vision: The Life and Times of John Howard Griffin"

1 p.m. Feb. 27

Farr Best Theater, 109 N. Main St.

Literary Landmark Dedication
3 p.m. Feb. 27

Mansfield Public Library, 104 S. Wisteria St.

Free

p.m. Feb. 27. All events are free.

The Friends of the Mansfield Public Library applied for the landmark last fall and were notified in early January that they had received the award. They considered putting the bronze plaque on Griffin's writing workshop or former home, but both have been torn down, according to his family. The Friends are sponsoring the landmark, which costs \$750 for the application and plaque, Highfill said.

"The Friends are always looking for ways to get the library in front of the public," Highfill said. "Since Mr. Griffin is probably the most famous person to come out of Mansfield, we wanted to bring some attention to the work that he did."

The application was based on all of Griffin's writings, which include 13

vala State Archives in 2009 and will also be a special guest at the Griffin dedication Feb. 27, said Paula Highfill, president of the Friends of the Mansfield Public Library.

The dedication will include a showing of "Uncommon Vision: The Life and Times of John Howard Griffin," a documentary about Griffin's life by filmmaker Morgan Atkinson, who will speak before the 1 p.m. showing of the film at the Farr Best Theater. At 3 p.m., the library will unveil the Literary Landmark plaque, which will be permanently affixed to the library. Featured speaker will be Robert Bonazzi, who wrote Griffin's biography and married his widow, Elizabeth. The Mansfield Historical Museum will also be open from 2-3

books, but Highfill admits that "Black Like Me" was probably the reason the landmark was awarded.

"I think that one book had more impact than his others," she said. "To me, that one book is the perfect example of how powerful one book can be. It changed his life. It changed his family's life. In the long run, I'm sure it changed a lot of people's lives because it drew attention to what was actually happening in the South."

Griffin died in 1980 and his wife passed away in 2000. His four children, who all live in the Metroplex, said it's ironic that the town that turned against their father is being honored because of him.

"I think they're both chuckling," said daughter Susan Campbell.



The Griffin family at Thanksgiving dinner in 1957.

Courtesy of Special Collections Division University of Texas at Arlington