

Tigerland Launch

Wednesday, September 19, 2018
Columbus, Ohio

Thank you, Suzan. Thank you for the opportunity to join in this celebration of *Tigerland* – and its author, Miami University’s own Wil Haygood. Most of all, thank you to the East High School students and alumni who are here tonight for sharing your stories with us.

The opportunity to debut *Tigerland* as the first-year read for our incoming students at Miami University was an incredible honor – a gift from Wil Haygood. Wil’s new book packs a powerful education and inspiration into one great story – a story of the human potential to rise above loss and disappointment to achieve excellence and inspire hope. Those lessons are at the heart of what I want students to experience at Miami – to instill purpose with positive impact far beyond the classroom and campus.

I remember the first time I read *Tigerland*. Wil sent me a manuscript with handwritten notes scribbled in the margins. I could feel the thrills of the Tiger triumphs on the basketball court and baseball field. Those students changed so many lives 50 years ago. The more I reflected on the story, the more it changed how I think about my own life – as a citizen, as a university president, and as a parent of two daughters.

As a citizen, I so badly want to say that events like those in *Tigerland* solved the race issue in America. I want to say that the civil rights movement finished the job – but today, we face the uncomfortable truth that we still have much to do to fulfill the promise of equality. We need to be women and men who stand up and overcome. We need to imitate what we admire about the Tigers.

As a university president, I know that our students need more than excellent academics. They should leave us with new perspectives on how they will lead positive change in our world. Higher education must become even more broad-spectrum and more broadly available – more inclusive in every sense. With our liberal arts emphasis at Miami for all majors – we instill in our students the human values of ethics, historical and cultural awareness, respectful discourse, and community building. Miami students and faculty from different nations and cultures and backgrounds bring diverse real-life experiences in the classroom and beyond. The graduates of East High School lived those experiences and went to college. People who encountered the East High Tigers felt the inspiration that still resonates today.

And as a parent, I am moved by the sacrificial love of the mothers of so many *Tigerland* students. They are proud women who worked with dignity and determination. They nurtured the dream that their children could go to college – and that is exactly what the Tigers did in record numbers. As a parent, I never really questioned the academic path my own two daughters would follow. Yet I know that barriers to success remain too high for many children growing up today – particularly in families without generations-long college legacies and without adequate finances. When I read *Tigerland*, I am energized to join others to make sure these opportunities are open for all children.

Tigerland's impact on me flows both from the story and from Wil – a great Miamian who enriches our campus with his teaching and his presence. Wil weaves compelling narratives of the African-American experience through real people – such as White House butler Eugene Allen, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and now the incredible students of East High.

The motto on our Miami seal is *Prodesse Quam Conspici*, Latin for “to achieve with humility.” That’s Wil, pointing us to the story, not to himself. And Miamians live by our Code of Love and Honor— calling us to respect the dignity of others and to welcome a diversity of people, ideas, and experiences. That’s Wil, who lives the values in his life and work.

Tonight, *Tigerland* hits the market. The world will soon read the inspiring stories of East High School in Columbus, Ohio!

On behalf of a grateful Miami University, we honor the Tigers of East High School tonight – for their courage, passion, and compassion that elevate the human spirit. We also celebrate Wil for his powerful words and storytelling – and for his example as a positive force for good in a world that needs to hear this story.

On August 24, Wil launched the “Miami U Debut” of *Tigerland* at our Convocation ceremony. We distributed 5,000 books to our incoming class – perhaps most impressively, Wil signed every single one of them! I’d like to share with you a brief highlight video of that magical day – I know you’ll enjoy it.