

Blood Done Sign My Name

📺 Paladin | Starring Nate Parker, Rick Schroder, Michael Rooker, Lela Rochon, Omar Benson Miller | Rated PG-13

A film capturing the origins of civil rights resistance in a small North Carolina town is headed to the big screen.

Opening in select cities Friday, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, the latest offering by *Fugitive* and *Die Hard* writer-producer Jeb Stuart, centers around a little-known civil rights trial involving three white men accused of murdering a 23-year-old black man in 1970 Oxford, N.C.

Henry “Dickie” Marrow Jr. was beaten and shot at point-blank range after allegedly making a pass at a white woman. Two white men, Robert and Larry Teel, stood trial for his murder.

Based on the memoir *Blood Done Sign My Name* by Timothy Tyson, currently a visiting professor at Duke Divinity University, the film stars Rick Schroeder (*NYPD Blue*) as Tyson’s father, Vernon, a Methodist minister who tries to lead his congregation to embrace integration in the midst of the fevered case. Nate Parker (*The Great Debaters*, *Pride*) stars as Marrow’s young cousin, Benjamin Chavis, a community activist who later became head of the NAACP and now leads the Hip Hop Summit Action Network.

Although Marrow’s murder and the ensuing trial get the most screen time, the movie isn’t as much about those events as it is the civil rights stirrings they provoked. African-Americans held marches to a Confederate monument in downtown Oxford and later to the governor’s mansion to protest the injustice of the murder. Other blacks rioted and set fire to white-owned stores despite the presence of the Ku Klux Klan.

After the verdict, Chavis led a boycott of white-owned businesses, which after several months succeeded in

integrating the town.

The movie addresses the boycott in summary, with documentary-style flashbacks from Oxford residents who lived during that time. That approach seems to mute the victory, putting more attention on the injustice than on the stand African-Americans took to force change in Oxford. But fighting for justice doesn't always lead to happy endings, and perhaps that's the point.

Instead of inspiring viewers with upbeat resolutions, *Blood Done Sign My Name* seems to focus on beginnings—those moments when a person or a community decides to take a stand, no matter what the outcome.

This film is rated PG-13 for violence, thematic elements and language.