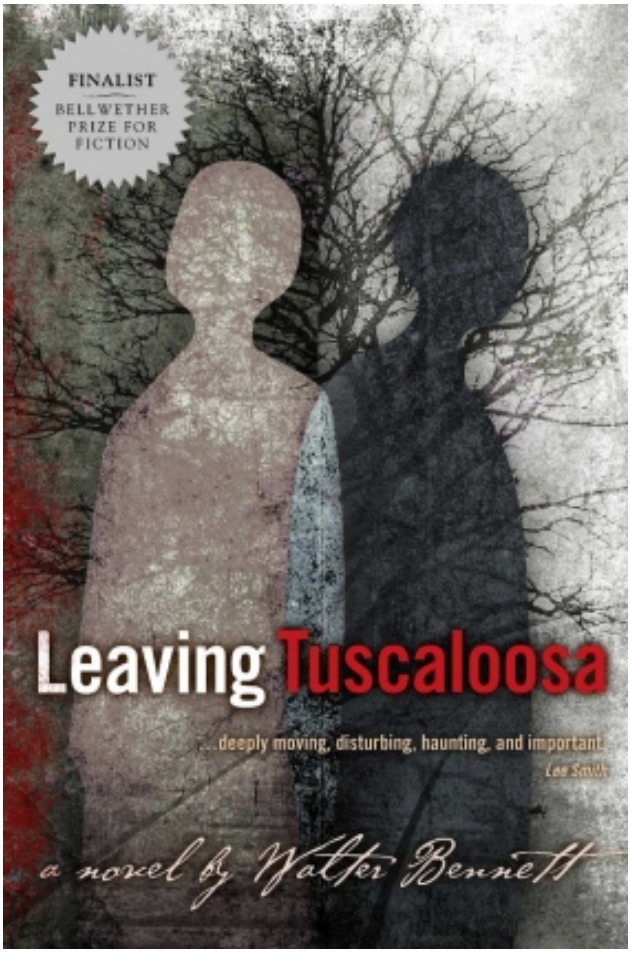
FINALIST
BELLWETHER PRIZE FOR FICTION
Leaving Tuscaloosa
...deeply moving, disturbing, haunting, and important
Lee Smith
a novel by Walter Bennett

Leaving Tuscaloosa by Walter Bennett

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Imagine Alabama, the sultry summer of 1962–the year before Bull Connor turned his fire hoses on civil rights protesters in Birmingham and the Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church. Two young men, one white, one black, stumble into their destinies as the world erupts beneath their feet.

Richeboux Branscomb's journey begins with a stupid mistake one night in a rattle-trap Ford on a dusty road. Acee Waites' begins with a missing brother and a ruthless sheriff's search party. Propelled along separate tracks through thirty-six hours of racial turmoil, these estranged boyhood friends encounter tenderness and cruelty, erotic passion and murderous rage. Then amid the spreading fires of racial violence, their paths converge in a terrible, riveting climax.

Leaving Tuscaloosa is a novel of conscience and hope. Set in the deep South in the heart of the Civil Rights era, it tracks the parallel journeys of two young men, one black and one white and former childhood friends, through 36 hours of intense racial turmoil that brings them face-to-face with their destinies,the truth about their communities, and the truth within their own hearts. They encounter tenderness and cruelty, erotic passion, and murderous rage. Then amid the spreading fires of racial violence, their paths converge in a moving, gripping climax. Lee Smith has said of the novel: "...deeply moving, disturbing, haunting, and important." Craig Nova: "... unstoppable, compelling, important." Elizabeth Spencer: "... skilfully reawakens those days when segregation/integration seemed the core problem of the world." Georgan Eubanks: "... should have a spot on college reading lists... a work of finely crafted fiction."

Walter Bennett is a former lawyer, judge, and law professor, who lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He has published short fiction in both print and online journals, including *Voices* and *The Courtland Review*
; essays (most recently–"Black Quill," in
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The Lawyer’s Myth: Reviving Ideals in the Legal Profession
(U. Chicago Press, 2001). He served as co-producer of a literary documentary film:
Landscapes of the Heart: The Elizabeth Spencer Story

. He is a native of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.