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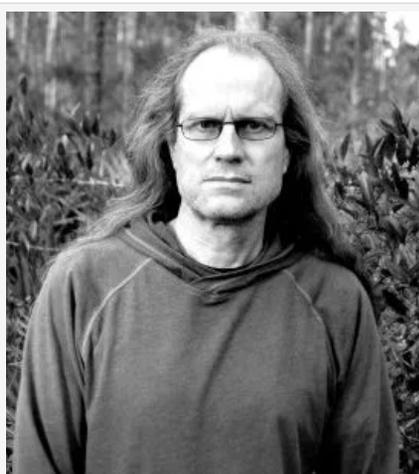
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ALLEN MENDENHALL INTERVIEWS DOUGLAS DELL, AUTHOR OF "DEEP AND DIRTY"

 JANUARY 15, 2020 BY [ALLEN MENDENHALL](#)  [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)



Douglas Dell

AM: "The funny thing about *The South*," says the narrator in the prologue to your debut novel, *Deep and Dirty*, "is that it's pretty, an odd choice of word but highly practical, take away the disasters sitting on almost every other corner and you'll notice nature has this way of battling human influence by blotting out those ghastly sore spots." Wow. What a line. Is it true?

DD: If you look at the socio-economic issues, the exaggerated gap between rich and poor or even that muddy area once referred to as the middle-class, then yes. The prologue illustrates how Robert Winchester viewed The South he discovered. It was close to stubbing your toe on an otherwise perfect day, million dollar homes on the riverfront and five hundred yards away broken-

down trailers lacking fresh running water, kids without shoes and their parents on welfare escaping it all with alcohol and unbridled drug use. There appears to be a great excuse for that: "*it's their way of life.*" I find that statement blinkered; like plow horses we simply accept what we think we can't change and yet education and the provision of simple safety nets could do away with many of these issues, predominantly when it comes to basic needs, especially when we are talking about children not just adults; still this is often a national, particularly rural issue, not merely a Southern one.

AM: Am I correct that this novel is based in part on your research into actual crime, murder, poverty, corruption, and drug rings in Florida?

DD: Much was gleaned from close personal experience, actually living in the midst of it all; to a great extent the core story is based on true events.

AM: The tone of *Deep and Dirty*—which is appropriately titled, by the way—is established right away as a student on the school bus discovers a dead body. Readers are then taken along in investigatory fashion to discover unsavory figures, backwoods secrets, drug dealers, guns, and more as the dots get connected and facts come to light. You don't happen to have a law enforcement background, do you?

DD: Only a close alliance with law enforcement at a grass roots level.

AM: You intend this book to be the first in a series, right? A series involving the character Robert Winchester.

DD: Yes, that is correct. The second book called *Deep Within*, recently completed, takes Robert Winchester into the dangerous and objectionable heart of one of the largest drug syndicates; the third

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book is in the works.

AM: We hear a lot about the opioid crisis these days. Something like 130 people per day die because of opioids in the United States. What do you think the solution is?

DD: The opioid crisis is something America didn't see coming. There was and is so much pressure on so-called illegal drugs when the true menace was sitting there in the medicine cabinet. It makes mockery of the decriminalization of illegal substances argument too, particularly when considering most pain medicine is at some point prescribed legally. I think most of us live with the "it won't happen to me" kind of logic; it's up there with the warnings on cigarette packets. The need to escape reality or the lack of it seems to be the focus, the irresponsibility of handing out addictive drugs like candy another. In an age of self-entitlement, perhaps there is no real solution. Criminalizing the users or prescribers is a risky approach; having a "Nanny State" viewpoint never works either and any kind of prohibition is doomed to failure. It is impossible to police private homes and with the Dark Web even the street level no longer needs to be an option; the gun and run style of drug dealing is on the way out. I know there is considerable research into decidedly less addictive alternative medicine to fight chronic pain; in the meantime perhaps other options exist for regular pain sufferers. Yet from my experience even some of the over-the-counter medicines form the basis of much larger evils.

AM: Do you think the South remains a distinct region of the country? I'm thinking of this line from your novel: "Despite the influx of big-box retailers, in common with the rest of the nation, the south grips its past like a vice with everything it has, there's uniqueness, loyalty to a storied history and an irresponsible call to hand it off to the next generation no matter what the odds."

DD: I do. Obviously there are the big cities and conurbations brimming with new culture, the dreams and optimistic hopes of educators and the educated; however, en masse the population still holds fast to many of those old, albeit outdated loyalties; surely tearing down statues and attempting to blot out history only allows us to make the same mistakes again. Then paradoxically some of the poorest people in the nation vote in the richest. Yet for me some of those genuinely Southern ideals have been sadly lost elsewhere and those particular values are uniquely American and not just Southern peculiarities.

AM: Some of your characters speak in dialect. Were you ever concerned about readers' response to that?

DD: Naturally dialect is always an issue, yet I think so much is obscured by forcing it away from the underlying story; in many ways the dialect alone illustrates the divide Robert Winchester discovers as a transplant to the backwoods existence.

AM: What do you do when you're not writing?

DD: I have my own modest piece of the beautiful South where I have established a conservation island with an emphasis on protecting endangered wildlife and focusing on many of the traditional uniquely Southern tree species away from the overwhelming slash pine population.

AM: Behind every book is the story of how it got published. What's the story behind *Deep and Dirty*?

DD: I turned to my lawyer, one of the top entertainment lawyers in the U.S., and he gave me some wonderful news: *The publishing industry is dead; don't bother self-publishing; agents are only interested in big names, and if you do get a deal they'll slam you in a 360 deal where they'll take everything including movie and TV rights!*

I am cynical too some days, yet fortunately not easily discouraged. I found a great agent. She put me with a publisher who understands these strange folks called writers and so far all is well.

AM: Thanks for the interview. Have a great 2020!

DD: Thank you for the opportunity.

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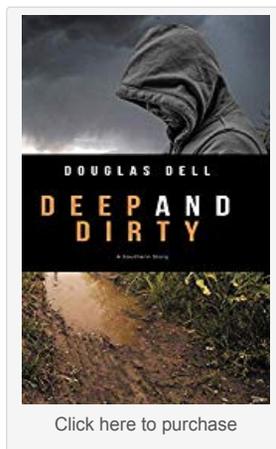
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About Allen Mendenhall

Allen Mendenhall is associate dean at Thomas Goode Jones School of Law and executive director of the Blackstone & Burke Center. His books include *Literature and Liberty* (2014), *Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Pragmatism, and the Jurisprudence of Agon* (2017), *The Southern Philosopher: Collected Essays of John William Corrington* (2017) (editor), and *Lines from a Southern Lawyer* (2017). Visit his website at [AllenMendenhall.com](#).

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