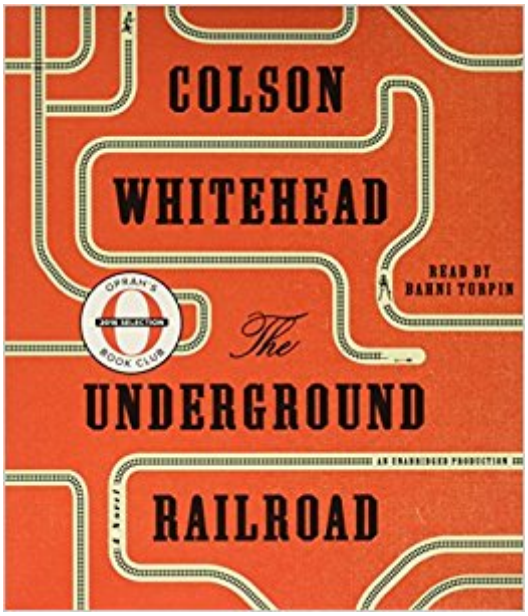
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The Underground Railroad (Oprah's Book Club): A Novel



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Synopsis

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, the #1 New York Times bestseller from Colson Whitehead, a magnificent tour de force chronicling a young slave's adventures as she makes a desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhoodÃ¢â ¬â •where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. Matters do not go as plannedÃ¢â ¬â •Cora kills a young white boy who tries to capture her. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â In WhiteheadÃ¢â ¬â„¢s ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphorÃ¢â ¬â •engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora and CaesarÃ¢â ¬â„¢s first stop is South Carolina, in a city that initially seems like a haven. But the cityÃ¢â ¬â„¢s placid surface masks an insidious scheme designed for its black denizens. And even worse: Ridgeway, the relentless slave catcher, is close on their heels. Forced to flee again, Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom. Ã Â Ã Â Ã Â Like the protagonist ofÃ Â GulliverÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Travels,Ã Â Cora encounters different worlds at each stage of her journeyÃ¢â ¬â •hers is an odyssey through time as well as space. As Whitehead brilliantly re-creates the unique terrors for black people in the preÃ¢â ¬â œCivil War era, his narrative seamlessly weaves the saga of America from the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day.Ã Â The Underground RailroadÃ Â is at once a kinetic adventure tale of one womanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shattering, powerful meditation on the history we all share.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE, THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD AND THE ALA ANDREW CARNEGIE MEDAL ** NAMED A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR BY NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, WALL STREET JOURNAL, WASHINGTON POST, TIME, PEOPLE, NPRÃ Â AND MORE ** #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLERÃ¢â ¬Å“Get it, then get another copy for someone you know because you are definitely going to want to talk about it once you read that heart-stopping last page.Ã¢â ¬Â• --Oprah Winfrey (Oprah's Book Club 2016 Selection)Ã¢â ¬Å“[A] potent, almost hallucinatory novel... It possesses the chilling matter-of-fact power of the slave narratives collected by the Federal WritersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ Project in the 1930s, with echoes of Toni MorrisonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Beloved, Victor HugoÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Les MisÃƒÂ©rables, Ralph EllisonÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Invisible Man, and brush strokes borrowed from Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka and Jonathan SwiftÃ¢â ¬Â¦He has told a story essential to our understanding of the American past and the American present.Ã¢â ¬Â• --Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“ThinkÃ Â Toni MorrisonÃ Â (Beloved),Ã Â Alex HaleyÃ Â (Roots); thinkÃ Â 12 Years a SlaveÃ¢â ¬Â¦An electrifying novelÃ¢â ¬Â¦a great adventure tale, teeming with memorable charactersÃ¢â ¬Â¦Tense, graphic, uplifting and informed, this is a story to share and remember.Ã¢â ¬Â• --People, (Book of the Week) Ã Â "With this novel, Colson Whitehead proves that he belongs on any short list of America's greatest authors--his talent and range are beyond impressive and impossible to ignore. The Underground RailroadÃ Â is an American masterpiece, as much a searing document of a cruel history as a uniquely brilliant work of fiction."--Michael Schaub, NPRÃ¢â ¬Å“Far and away the most anticipated literary novel of the year, The Underground Railroad marks a new triumph for WhiteheadÃ¢â ¬Â¦[A] book that resonates with deep emotional timbre. The Underground Railroad reanimates the slave narrative, disrupts our settled sense of the past and stretches the ligaments of history right into our own era...The canon of essential novels about America's peculiar institution just grew by one.Ã¢â ¬Â• --Ron Charles, Washington Post

Colson Whitehead is theÃ Â #1 New York TimesÃ Â bestselling author ofÃ Â The Underground Railroad, winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, the 2016 National Book Award, and named one of the Ten Best Books of the Year by the New York Times Book Review, as well as The Noble Hustle,Ã Â Zone One,Ã Â Sag Harbor,Ã Â The Intuitionist,Ã Â John Henry Days,Ã Â Apex Hides

the Hurt, and The Colossus of New York. He is also a Pulitzer Prize finalist and a recipient of the MacArthur and Guggenheim fellowships. He lives in New York City.

I chose this book, frankly, because Oprah chose it for her book club. As a lower middle class white child, educated in the ’60’s, I was well aware of the segregated south, but I had no idea the depth of the degradation and depravity of what people of color had endured in this country. The land of the free, home of the brave.....unless you were a person of color. Kidnapped from your village in Africa, sold into bondage.....IF you had survived the arduous journey from the Dark Continent to the Americas. Seeing your heritage stripped from you, as surely as your dignity and humanity as you stood on the auctioneers’ block.Bearing children, only to see them torn from you to satisfy your master’s debts. I am sure that these atrocities were part of my education, but this novel brings them more to the forefront than any textbook ever did. Even my college textbooks were circumspect in their description of man’s inhumanity to man. For example, I did not know that all abolitionists were not involver in the underground railroad for purely altruistic reasons. Some actually used the newly "freed" slaved for medical research, delivering them from one sort of subhuman bondage to another. This book is a real Eye-opener for anyone educated in the public school system . Our textbooks did NOT tell the whole story. This novel gives a glimpse into the hardships and injustices we really never grasped in our American History class. An easy, if unsettling, read for this white girl!

If all Colson WhiteheadÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s remarkable The Underground Railroad had to offer was its central conceit ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ in which the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Underground Railroad,ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• a covert, loose organization that worked to help slaves in the Confederacy get to freedom, becomes a literal subterranean rail network ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ that might almost be enough to capture the imagination and make the book great. Because, in short, what this allows Whitehead to do is tell an age-old story ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ the efforts of a runaway slave to escape ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ in a way that feels like little else out there, bringing new life to a story that none of us can ever afford to forget. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s a minor tweak to reality, but it gives the story a unique, odd feel, making literal the astonishing work that went into saving these people.So, yeah, that might be enough. But luckily for us all, Whitehead has more on his mind than just that one conceit. Instead, Whitehead turns this flight for freedom into a modern day Odyssey, letting each stop along the way become an entirely different narrative in the life of slavery, AmericaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s race relations, prejudice, and fear. And the result is a sprawling, strange, haunting novel, one whose separate episodes combine to make something far more

fascinating and complex than any one story might have been able to do on its own.For instance, a more traditional slave escape narrative could never contain the subtly wrong paradise that feels at first like heaven on Earth, only to have Whitehead slowly turn that world on its head. You wouldnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t have the nightmarishly violent community that has purged itself of African-Americans in the most horrific way possible; nor would you have the beauty of acts of kindness that come when least expected. In WhiteheadÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s capable hands, the journey becomes a more complex one, echoing back and forth through time as he takes on racism not just as an explicit force of slavery, but as a much more insidious, subtle evil that can hide behind peopleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s smiles. In other words, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not just the slave catchers we need to fear; itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s those for whom help means condescension and manipulation.Make no mistake, though; this is undeniably a book about slavery, and one that deals with the horrors of the institution without blinking or flinching. Violence is casual and brutal, with torture being commonplace and almost barely worthy of mention. And while our heroineÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s plantation is known for its cruelty, that doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t mean that itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s any more cruel than half of what she sees in her journeys. Whitehead doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t allow us the luxury of ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“this place is the worstÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•; itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s just a particularly bad one, but nothing special. And even if it were somehow worse, it barely compares to some of the psychological and emotional horrors to come, and the wanton cruelty and disregard that we see on display throughout the book.And yet, for all of that, The Underground Railroad is still a slave escape narrative, one in which weÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re invested in our heroineÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s success, and one that keeps us reading in the face of all of the potential horrors, hoping for something good. Whitehead never lets The Underground Railroad become crushing or so bleak as to be unpalatable; he tempers it, mixing the good and the bad, and investing us in the characters so that we need them to succeed ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ and feel it all the more when some of them donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t.In other words, The Underground Railroad is something remarkable ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ a look at history that finds its truth through fiction, a dose of magical realism that serves to emphasize hard facts, a novel that explores ideas that many of us wish we had left in history. That it does all this is no small feat; that it does so in such a complex, powerful way without ever becoming didactic or simplistic, even less of one. But the fact that it manages to do all of that while still telling a gripping, exciting story? ThatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœs what makes it such an incredible novel, and worthy of its reputation.

LOVED THIS. So in full transparency, I was skeptical about it, because as a U.S. history major, I

have read so many books about slavery, I just wasn't sure what Whitehead could possibly do that would be fresh, enthralling, unique to the genre and subject matter. Let me tell you something. I was up late, gripping this book, white knuckling it if you will. There were times when I was terribly afraid for the protagonist and my heart was pounding wildly as she faced any number of situations. I would have to put it down, and think, this isn't even real! The thing is, though the premise is imaginary, clearly slavery was not. Being a young black woman, this hit close to home. What if this was me? Would I have been strong enough to stay focused and calculating. Would I have been picked as an ideal partner to escape with? The end is strong, though absolutely infuriating in some aspects. I realize this was done intentionally, as ultimately this isn't Disney so you're not supposed to close with the happily ever after. I'd strongly suggest this novel if you're looking for a powerful read.

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