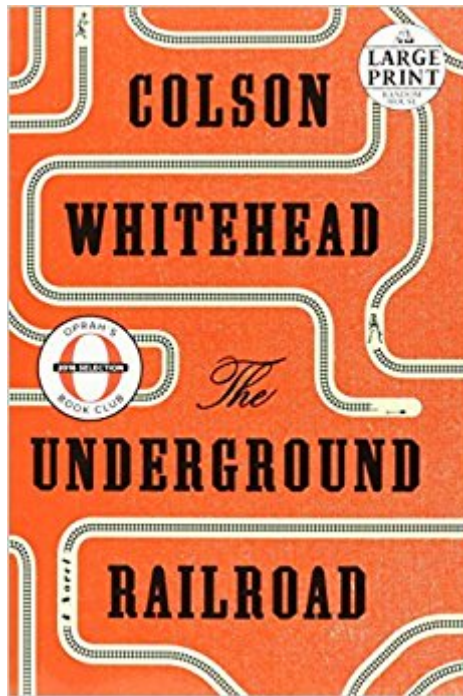


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# The Underground Railroad (Oprah's Book Club): A Novel (Large Print) (Random House Large Print)



## Synopsis

Oprah's Book Club 2016 Selection #1 New York Times Bestseller • From prize-winning, bestselling author 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 womanhood—a "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 planned—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. • • • In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor—engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora and Caesar's first stop is South Carolina, in a city that initially seems like a haven. But the city'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. • • • Like the protagonist of *Gulliver's Travels*, Cora encounters different worlds at each stage of her journey—hers is an odyssey through time as well as space. As Whitehead brilliantly re-creates the unique terrors for black people in the pre-Civil War era, his narrative seamlessly weaves the saga of America from the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day. • The Underground Railroad • is at once a kinetic adventure tale of one woman's ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shattering, powerful meditation on the history we all share. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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 involved in the underground railroad for purely altruistic reasons. Some actually used the newly "freed" slaves 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!

Colson Whitehead is no stranger to many readers as he has authored several widely acclaimed books since he made his debut with *The Intuitionist* in 1999. His latest work, *The Underground Railroad* which is sharp and ingenious, follows the harrowing plight of Cora who was a young slave on the Randall estate in Georgia. Set around the year 1812, Cora's story is all the more heart-wrenching as her mother fled the cotton plantation leaving her behind, to fend for herself. What could have prompted Cora's mother to leave her behind is in the realm of speculation. She was never found and successfully dodged the tracker who was assigned to track her down. While it is easy to jump to conclusions and label her as someone shorn of love and affection for Cora, reading about the immense difficulties faced by the slaves on the plantation tempered one's judgemental attitude. It was beyond brutal – the ugly face of inhumanity laid bare. The slaves are subjected to all kinds of cruel and inhumane treatment – they are whipped, thrashed and raped at the slightest pretext and excuse. And in some instances, just for

pure enjoyment and amusement. Public execution was reserved as the harshest punishment, but to many living without dignity and honor was far worse than public execution. The arrival of a new slave, Caesar, brought hope for Cora but it was a daunting one. Author Colson Whitehead masterfully narrated their story and painted a horrific picture of slavery during the period. The character of Cora was well fleshed, and would be hard to forget. The story was well conceived and the secondary characters, especially Caesar, helped to make a solid read. All in all, this is a compelling book which will enable many readers to revisit the past though the manner in which Cora escaped was a bit farfetched. But *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead is a book that will haunt many readers for a long time to come.

I am so grateful to Colson Whitehead writing this book. It was absolutely brilliant. The prose was haunting and the characters leave impressions that stay long after you've progressed to the next chapter and even longer after you've concluded the story. The way his concepts weave together they create an atmosphere where you not only see slavery but taste it; reminiscent of Toni Morrison and Richard Wright in the ability to make one feel the tightness of black skin in America. I don't know why I have never read any of his novels before but Oprah's recommendation brought me here and I'm never going to leave. Keep up the good work!

I am so glad to have a chance to read a book of this power and importance. Whitehead is an amazing writer. The story of Cora, the young runaway slave from Georgia, is really a lot like *Gulliver's Travels*, which he references in the story. It is a tale of constantly reinventing yourself and adapting to ever changing realities as you move further and further away from your beginnings and what was an essential truth once, often morphs into something new, different, sometimes good but sometimes bad, too. It is all about change and those willing to do anything to accomplish those goals. It is also the story of those willing to help create the opportunities for change by doing anything in their power to help others no matter the personal cost. I think there is a lot to think about after reading the tale of Cora. In many ways it is an allegory for our world today where prejudice unfortunately still exists and a world like *Valentine* can only be dreamed about. Violence, racism, prejudice, chaos, evil all still abound, often hidden and disguised but are still there. Every time an event like Newtown or Columbine or even 9/11 happens, we can see what this book is trying to say about trying to find a better way to live. It is a very powerful message. We still have slavery all around the world: sexual slavery, forced labor, child labor to name a few. Sometimes we give it different names or a different spin but still human beings are forced to work and live in a manner

that they would not choose at someone else's insistence. For some of those in power, their riches will never be enough and the ends justify whatever the cost in human lives, suffering and dignity. Slavery didn't end with the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War; it just changed its name. It is just as cruel, barbaric and inhuman and people still turn their eyes away and pretend it doesn't exist. This book forces you to look again and see how it was, how it might have been and what it could be.

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