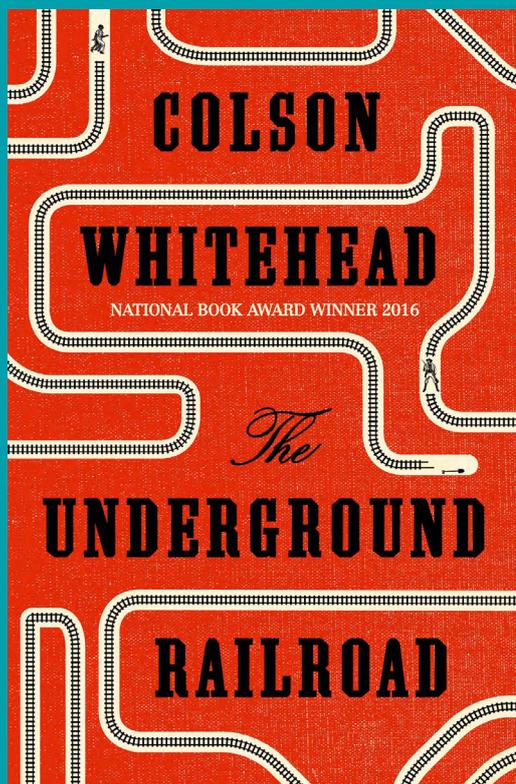


# Reader's Guide



Other novels by Colson Whitehead  
*The Intuitionist* (1999)  
*John Henry Days* (2001)  
*Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006)  
*Sag Harbor* (2009)  
*Zone One* (2011)

# The Underground Railroad Colson Whitehead

Fleet

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## About the author

Colson Whitehead was born in 1969, and is the New York Times bestselling author of *The Noble Hustle*, *Zone One*, *Sag Harbor*, *The Intuitionist*, *John Henry Days*, *Apex Hides the Hurt*, and one collection of essays, *The Colossus of New York*. He is a recipient of the MacArthur and Guggenheim fellowships. *The Underground Railroad* won the 2016 National Book Award for Fiction, the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and the 2017 Arthur C. Clarke Award. He lives in New York City.

## About the book

Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. All the slaves lead a hellish existence, but Cora has it worse than most; she is an outcast even among her fellow Africans and she is approaching womanhood, where it is clear even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a slave recently arrived from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they take the perilous decision to escape to the North.

In this razor-sharp imagining of the antebellum South, the Underground Railroad has assumed a physical form, picking up fugitives wherever it can. Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom.

At each stop on her journey, she encounters a different world. Recreating the unique terrors for black people in the pre-Civil War era, the narrative seamlessly weaves the saga of America, from the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day. This is at once the story of one woman's ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shatteringly powerful meditation on history....

## What the judges thought

A 'harshly dramatic and compulsive read' about a slave woman's flight from a plantation, *The Underground Railroad* was thought by the judges to be 'daring and disturbing'. In addressing a painful subject, it 'creates a dreamscape that is also realistic, and a deeply political statement as well'.

## Discussion points

There are many books and films that look at slavery in the US. How did this compare to other stories?

The scenes on Randall's plantation are particularly brutal – how did this affect you when you read the book?

Cora's mother Mabel abandoned her on the plantation – do you feel any sympathy for Mabel's plight, or is what she did unforgivable?

In the book, the Underground Railroad is real. Why do you think Whitehead chose to portray it in this way? Do you think this helps or hinders our understanding of its true history?

What did you think of the ending of the novel? Did it seem hopeful to you?

## Useful links

[www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/09/the-underground-railroad-by-colson-whitehead-review-american-slavery](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/09/the-underground-railroad-by-colson-whitehead-review-american-slavery)

[www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/the-underground-railroad-by-colson-whitehead-review-a3609376](http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/the-underground-railroad-by-colson-whitehead-review-a3609376)

[www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/oprahs-interview-with-colson-whitehead](http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/oprahs-interview-with-colson-whitehead)