

The Underground Railroad

Charles L. Blockson

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Charles L. Blockson : The Underground Railroad before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Underground Railroad:

926 of 1012 people found the following review helpful. Things we were never taught in school By Sherry Thorn 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! 135 of 146 people found the following review helpful. A powerful, astonishing novel that finds more truth in its magical realism than a literal story ever could have allowed By

Josh Mauthe If all Colson Whitehead's remarkable *The Underground Railroad* had to offer was its central conceit – in which the “Underground Railroad,” a covert, loose organization that worked to help slaves in the Confederacy get to freedom, becomes a literal subterranean rail network – 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 – the efforts of a runaway slave to escape – 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. It'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, America'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 wouldn'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 Whitehead'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 people's smiles. In other words, it's not just the slave catchers we need to fear; it'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 heroine's plantation is known for its cruelty, that doesn't mean that it's any more cruel than half of what she sees in her journeys. Whitehead doesn't allow us the luxury of “this place is the worst”; it'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 we're invested in our heroine'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 – and feel it all the more when some of them don't. In other words, *The Underground Railroad* is something remarkable – 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? That's what makes it such an incredible novel, and worthy of its reputation.⁷⁴ of 78 people found the following review helpful. LOVED THIS. So in full transparency By gmcmamus 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.

Shares the stories of Black men and women who escaped from slavery and fled to freedom in the North.

.com A fascinating collection of letters, diaries and narratives of slaves who risked death to find freedom, including Henry "Box" Brown, who nailed himself into a box and had it shipped to Philadelphia; William and Ellen Craft, who posed as master and slave and traveled openly out of the South; and an anonymous young woman who escaped with the help of Union soldiers by dressing as one of them. Organized geographically, with accompanying historical notes and sixteen pages of photographs. From *Library Journal* The grandson of an escaped slave, historian Blockson has compiled and edited 47 first-person accounts of blacks who stole their way to freedom via the harrowing stratagems and hidden routes generically called the underground railroad. Few of the accounts will be new to students of the rich lode of ex-slaves' narratives; but Blockson brings to bear years of work as the curator of Temple University's Afro-American Collection and his earlier mapping of routes in a *National Geographic* article. His focus on the emotion and uncertainty of escape makes this work a handy primer on the pain, daring, and drama of the slaves' flight. For Afro-American and antebellum collections. Thomas J. Davis, SUNY at Buffalo Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information,

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