



# **The Underground Railroad (National Book Award Winner) (Oprah's Book Club): A Novel**

*Colson Whitehead*

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**The National Book Award Winner and #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 womanhood—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.

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