

BROOKLINE READS 2018 SELECTS *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD* BY COLSON WHITEHEAD

Brookline, MA, February 20, 2018

Oprah Winfrey called Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* "heart-stopping." President Obama put it on his summer reading list. To the *Globe* it is "a fully realized masterpiece." Part fantasy, part unflinchingly truthful, and filled with passages that resonate today, *The Underground Railroad* is the selection for this year's Brookline Reads, the Brookline Library's town-wide reading event.

In *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead transforms a metaphoric network of safe houses that helped slaves escape brutal plantation life into an actual train system, running underground through caves and tunnels in the South. Its hero, a teenaged slave named Cora, travels the railroad toward freedom, pursued not only by an evil slave-catcher but also by her horrific memories of slavery, witnessed and endured.

The Underground Railroad was named both the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction in 2017. Dealing with the foundational sins of America, it has been described in the *New York Times* as "a brave and necessary book"; elsewhere, it has been called "a novel against forgetting."

Colson Whitehead is an acclaimed novelist and essayist, and has won numerous awards and honors, including the MacArthur "genius" Grant and a Guggenheim Fellowship. This is his sixth novel. His writing, said John Updike, "refreshes our sense of the world."

On April 25, Whitehead will come to Brookline to talk about his book and his personal journey as a writer. "An Evening with Colson Whitehead," the culminating event of Brookline Reads, will take place in the auditorium of Brookline High School, 115 Greenough Street, beginning at 7 PM (doors open at 6:30) and all are welcome.

Several exciting Brookline Reads events lead up to Whitehead's presentation.

On April 4, the powerful and uplifting documentary *Our Mockingbird* will be shown at Hunneman Hall in the Brookline Village Library. This ground-breaking film relates the experiences of students in two high schools in Birmingham, Alabama, one predominantly black and the other white, as they come together to put on a play based on the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The filmmaker, Sandra Jaffe, will be on hand to introduce the film and lead a conversation afterward.

On April 7 (rain date April 8) Suzette Abbott of Hidden Brookline will lead a walking tour of local Underground Railroad sites and other landmarks of African-American history in Brookline. The tour, appropriate for ages 13 to 103, begins at Town Hall at 2 PM.

On April 12, Nancy Gertner, former United States District Judge of the U.S. District Court and Harvard Law School Professor, will moderate a panel discussion, "The Economic Realities of Racism." She will be joined by Barry Bluestone, Professor of Political Economy at Northeastern University; Margaret Burnham, Professor of Law and founder of the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project at Northeastern University; and Patricia Wen, noted journalist and editor of the Globe's recent Spotlight Series on racism in Boston. The discussion will begin at 7 PM in Hunneman Hall.

Brookline Booksmith will sell copies of *The Underground Railroad* at "An Evening with Colson Whitehead." Mr. Whitehead has graciously agreed to sign copies of his book after his talk.

Brookline Reads, a month-long, town-wide celebration of books, reading, and community, is sponsored by the Trustees of the Brookline Library. All events are free and open to the public. For more information, please see the Library's website

<http://www.brooklinelibrary.org>.

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