

NOTE: MARCH 16, WE MEET ONE HOUR EARLIER AT 1 PM TO NOMINATE BOOKS FOR NEXT SEASON. PLEASE NOMINATE ONLY BOOKS THAT YOU HAVE READ! INCLUDE THE YEAR OF PUBLICATION & NUMBER OF PAGES.

BOOK CLUB NEWS

FEBRUARY 16, 2018

Richard Bass, Co-ordinator

Cell: 323-533-3550

rbass9210@yahoo.com

***Underground Railway* by Colson Whitehead**



The Underground Railroad was a network of people working to take slaves from the southern United States to freedom in the Northern U. S. or Canada .

Map by the National Geographic Society



Discussion Leader: David Kelly

David began with a list of recommended books: *The Good Lord Bird* by James McBride, *The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* by Fergus M. Bordewich, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* by Eric Foner and *Harriet Tubman: Imagining a Life* by Beverly Lowry. This was followed with biographical notes about this award-winning author taken from [Wikipedia](#).



At left, the stairway underground at the [Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum](#) in Memphis, Tennessee.

Also: <http://www.whitneyplantation.com> is the website for the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana, dedicated to the voices of the slaves rather than the plantation owners, a powerful reminder of the horrors of slavery:

David's discussion guided us through powerful emotions and literary comparisons. Is this book truly historical fiction? Where is the intersection of history and fantasy? Discuss the underground railroad as a metaphor. What did you make of the skyscraper in the book? Was there a purpose to the anachronism? Why were the slaves treated with

such cruelty? Compare this book to *Gulliver's Travels* in which each state of the journey was a different world; compare Gulliver's odyssey with that of Cora. Explain the seven references to the Declaration of Independence in the book. What feelings are evoked in the reader? What is the author's purpose? What strikes you about the characters living in this totalitarian system?

This novel is a journey through space and time. What is freedom? What is your vision of freedom? What is the significance of the little plot of land that Cora inherits from her mother? Or of the almanac? Why did Whitehead focus on the mother/daughter relationship? Comment on the Museum of Natural Wonders; is this another metaphor? What is the significance of it having been written in 2016?



The go-around: Felt unfinished. What is the effect of it being unfinished? Written to stir the emotions. Painful. Powerful. Loved it. Historical -- and we're *still* dealing with the issues of freedom and equality. The author shows that each place you visit has its racism. It reminds us of the importance of reading, as exemplified by Malcom X and Nelson Mandela. Liked the last chapter. When can we put this behind us? Horrified. Angry because we're still dealing with the issues. A difficult read. Would have preferred the book written in the first person for deeper emotion and insight. Left with the horrifying human cost of slavery. Made me think about so many issues: civil war, the different policies of different states at the time. Listening to the discussion, I gained a deeper understanding. I wanted Cora and Mable to reunite. Another example of man's inhumanity to man. Too painful to finish. This is one book that is unforgettable.

Thank you, David, for your deft leadership of another discussion that could take up an entire semester. Join us **March 16, 2018 – an hour earlier at 1 pm** -- when we will nominate the books for next season and then discuss *Still Life* by Louise Penny, led by Teri King.

Happy reading!