



# UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad community

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## Pulitzer Prize for Fiction Goes to Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*

For its "smart melding of realism and allegory that combines the violence of slavery and the drama of escape in a myth that speaks to contemporary America," the Board of Directors of the Pulitzer Prizes has awarded Colson Whitehead the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his novel, *The Underground Railroad*. The book also won the 2016 National Book Award for Fiction, and the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction.

Whitehead is the bestselling author of *The Noble Hustle*, *Zone One*, *Sag Harbor*, *The Intuitionist*, *John Henry Days*, *Apex Hides the Hurt*, and his collection of essays, *The Colossus of New York*. His *John Henry Days* was a finalist for the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. Whitehead has received a Guggenheim fellowship and a MacArthur "genius" grant.

The publisher provides this synopsis. "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 be-



Colson Whitehead

ing 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

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A major organization mobilizes more than a million people against child slavery.

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Want more credibility for your Underground Railroad site or the story handed in your family? Have *Free Press* validate it for you.

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Want to include a question in the upcoming *Free Press* survey? Email us soon at [info@urrfreepress.com](mailto:info@urrfreepress.com).

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## Moonlight Director Plans Underground Railroad Television Series

Barry Jenkins, who wrote and directed *Moonlight*, named best motion picture of 2016 at the 89<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, is planning a television series based on Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Underground Railroad*. Jenkins will write and direct the series, which will be jointly produced by his production company, Pastel, and by actor Brad Pitt's Plan B Entertainment, *Moonlight*'s two backers. The series will be distributed by Amazon.

*Moonlight*, Jenkins's semi-autobiographical film, about a young boy named Chiron who grows up black and gay, also won an Academy Award for adapted script, based on the play, *In Moonlight, Black Boys Look Blue*, by Tarell McCraney. The Best Supporting Actor Award went to the film's Mahershala Ali who played Juan, the neighborhood crack dealer who understands and befriends the young Chiron.

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Barry Jenkins and Brad Pitt

## Rare Earliest Photo of Harriet Tubman Auctioned for \$161,000

From childhood on, Emily Howland was in the thick of promoting women's suffrage, public education for blacks, abolitionism, the Underground Railroad and other social causes of her day. Growing up, she helped her Quaker parents shelter Underground Railroad freedom seekers at their farm near Auburn, New York. In the 1850s, Howland and Harriet Tubman, who had settled in Auburn, became lifelong friends, so it wasn't unusual when the two exchanged pictures of themselves for each other's photograph albums.

After Howland died at the age of 101 in 1929, her album passed through various hands and finally into the anonymity of a government-sponsored auction in New York several years ago when it was purchased for \$250. Its new owner recognized upon first inspection that the album contained a photograph of Harriet Tubman older than any other known. The album also contains the most often seen photograph of Tubman among the few known to exist, one taken some time in

### Harriet Tubman

Born enslaved in 1822, Harriet Tubman escaped slavery in 1849, travelling Underground Railroad routes through Maryland's Eastern Shore, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and finally reaching Auburn, New York where Governor William Seward and his wife Frances sheltered her and persuaded Tubman to make her home.

For the next ten years, Tubman went back to Maryland and conducted escapes of family members and friends. Estimates of the numbers she ushered to freedom run as high as 300. During the Civil War, she became the first woman to lead United States troops into battle when, in a single week, Tubman freed 756 slaves in raids on South Carolina plantations.

Until her passing in 1913, Tubman made her living as one of the nation's most sought-after lecturers. She also founded and operated a home in Auburn for indigent women, black and white alike, where she herself ended up cared for late in life. Her birthday unknown, March 10, the day she died at 91, is celebrated as Harriet Tubman Day in many states and locales. The federal government has announced that her image will replace that of Andrew Jackson on the twenty-dollar bill.



Harriet Tubman in her 40s



In her 50s



In her 80s

## Rotary International Launches Program Against Child Slavery

Of an estimated 46 million enslaved people in the world today, five million are children. Globally, though not legally slaves, an additional 160 million children are forced child laborers, more than half of them in hazardous work. The worst offenders are India with 14 million slaves, and Mauritania where one person in every 25 is enslaved. *The Washington Post* estimates that there are about 60,000 enslaved people in the United States today, mostly migrant laborers, immigrant Asian seamstresses, sex workers, migrant workers and domestic servants of foreign

diplomats.

By attention to the problem, worldwide slavery has been reduced over the past several decades, but there are still those 46 million. Now, one of the world's largest private organizations is turning its attention to child slavery. Rotary International with its more than one million members has launched Rotary Action Group Against Slavery, RAGAS, to expose and combat slavery, especially child slavery. The organization reminds us that those 46 million amount to four times the

number taken out of Africa during the 400 years of the Atlantic slave trade, that modern slaves are disposable, cheap, and hidden from plain sight with no human rights, and that very young children are now in greater danger than ever before as sex traffickers exploit natural disasters, deprivation, civil conflict and mass migration.

RAGAS has rapidly organized itself with an international board of directors, volunteer national coordinators, and "ambassadors" on five continents (with South America in progress). RAGAS's work emphasizes creating public awareness that people are held captive for illegal gain right in their own countries, and taking action by directly promoting global

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Rotarian Action  
Group Against  
Slavery



## Have Your Underground Railroad Site Validated by Free Press

Underground Railroad Free Press now offers **evaluation of Underground Railroad sites and oral traditions**. Visit the "Get your site or story validated" link at our website. See the Wellman Scale on page 4 here that we use in evaluations.

**Free Press Prizes-** Nominations are now open for the 2017 Free Press Prizes in leadership, preservation, and advancement of knowledge. To nominate yourself or someone else, download a nomination form at our website.

**The 2017 Survey-** Soon you'll be invited by email to take part in Free Press's annual survey of the Underground Railroad community.

**Free Press Books-** Looking for a publisher? Visit the Publish page at our website, then get in touch with us.



## Series

Said Jenkins, "Going back to *The Intuitionist*, Colson's writing has always defied convention, and *The Underground Railroad* is no different. It's a groundbreaking work that pays respect to our nation's history while using the form to explore it in a thoughtful and original way. Preserving the sweep and grandeur of a story like this requires bold, innovative thinking. In Amazon we've found a partner whose reverence for storytelling and freeness of form is wholly in line with our vision."

As Amazon's Joe Lewis states, "Colson Whitehead's book is a sweeping, character-driven, boundary-destroying epic. Having Barry bring it to life for Amazon Studios is thrilling. We couldn't be more excited to see what he creates."

Amazon solidly established its film *bona fides* in the 2017 Academy Awards when its production, *Manchester by the Sea*, won Kenneth Lonergan the award for Best Original Screenplay.

In the beginning stage of development, the series release date is not yet scheduled. *Free Press* will keep readers posted on when to expect the series to air.

## Photo

the 1870s when Tubman was in her fifties.

On March 30, the photograph was auctioned by New York auction house Swann Galleries to an unnamed buyer. Swann had estimated that the item would fetch \$20,000 to \$30,000 but the hammer finally came down at \$161,000.

Tubman's newly discovered photograph, taken in Auburn about 1866 to 1868, shows Tubman in her mid-forties, well groomed and characteristically self-assured. Aside from her looking like the Harriet Tubman of her other photographs, the picture's authenticity is confirmed by its penciled "Harriet Tubman" inscription in Emily Howland's hand.

"You see her as this beautiful, resilient and determined young woman. To find this photograph after all these years really [reveals] a different aspect of her life," said Robert Parker, superintendent of the federal government's new Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park at Church Creek, Maryland. The photograph's rediscovery came too late for it to be mentioned in exhibits of the grand opening of the park's Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Center on March 11. Mr. Parker hopes that the photograph's new owner will allow the Center to put it on display.

## RAGAS

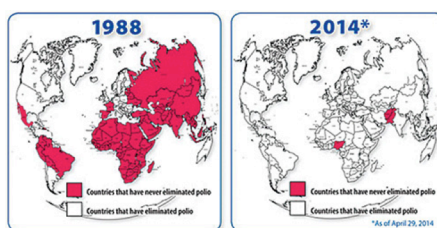
anti-slavery bodies and activities through Rotary Clubs, campaigns and projects.

You don't have to be a Rotarian to get involved; just visit <http://bit.ly/2q0dqqv>, a United Nations website that lists extensively both private and public organizations fighting slavery. Visit [ragas.online](http://ragas.online) if you are a Rotarian wanting to know more or become involved. With this issue, *Underground Railroad Free Press* has committed to RAGAS to partner with it in promoting RAGAS's work on an ongoing basis. We encourage interested *Free Press* readers do the same.

Rotary International, or just Rotary as it is usually known, is the world's oldest service club. Begun with a single chapter in Chicago in 1905, Rotary membership today comprises more than 1.2 million men and women in 33,000+ chapters in over 200 countries and territories on all seven continents. Yes, even Antarctica where scientists have established two chapters.

Though Rotary members include heads of state, royalty, Nobel Prize laureates, astronauts, inventors, authors, composers, publishers, jurists, athletes and other accomplished notables, the most typical Rotarian is your local shop owner, educator or nonprofit agency head.

The motto of Rotary—Service Above Self—says it all. Rotary operates by mobilizing its members as volunteers to engage in a long list of projects that improve their communities and the world community as a whole. Rotary's main emphases are peace and conflict resolution, disease prevention and treatment, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, literacy, and community development, all mostly in poor countries. Two notable achievements of Rotary International are the creation of the United Nations in 1945, and since 1988 Polio Plus whose goal is the eradication of polio worldwide. The two maps here show the program's progress. Rotary has been nominated several times for the Nobel Peace Prize and is predicted eventually to be awarded the prize for its work on polio.



Countries with Polio in 1988 and 2014

## Underground Railroad Free Press® Independent Reporting on Today's Underground Railroad

Peter H. Michael, Publisher  
info@urrfreepress.com  
301 | 874 | 0235

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## Pulitzer

well as space. As Whitehead brilliantly recreates 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."

In the works is a television series based on *The Underground Railroad*. See the article on page one.

# Have Free Press Validate Your Underground Railroad Site, Person or Story

## Getting Your Underground Railroad Site, Person or Story Validated

1. Email your site's, person's, or oral tradition's story and its corroboration in as much detail as you have to *Underground Railroad Free Press* at [info@urrfreepress.com](mailto:info@urrfreepress.com) for a formal evaluation. At the same time, mail your check for \$250 made to *Underground Railroad Free Press* to the address following. If you prefer, mail your information instead to *Underground Railroad Free Press*, 2455 Ballenger Creek Pike, Adamstown, Maryland, 21710. If you use mail, please include your email address.
2. We will evaluate your materials and provide you a frameable certificate of Wellman Scale rating with a detailed analysis of how the rating was reached.
3. Then use your *Free Press* Underground Railroad validation as you like for display, corroboration, publicity or other purposes.
4. With your permission, we will list your site at Lynx, the central international registry of Underground Railroad sites and programs, and on MapMuse.com's Underground Railroad site map.

## Use of the Wellman Scale in *Free Press* Underground Railroad Validations

The Wellman Scale is the definitive means for rating the corroboration of a site claiming Underground Railroad involvement, and may also be used in rating Underground Railroad stories, personages and groups. The Wellman Scale uses five ratings from "doubtful" to "conclusive" to evaluate the degree of a site's Underground Railroad corroboration. Below are definitions of the five Wellman Scale ratings. The ratings' frequency distribution (4.0%, 65.3%, etc.) shown was developed by Professor Wellman on 564 Underground Railroad sites in upstate New York and independently by *Underground Railroad Free Press* on 61 sites in Maryland. The resulting distributions of ratings were statistically indistinguishable and are combined in the distribution below.

For more on the Wellman Scale, visit <http://urrfreepress.com/#Scale>.

## The Five-Point Wellman Scale

**Note that the most likely rating by far is 2, "Story with no reason to doubt, but scant or no documentation," reflecting the mysteriousness of the Underground Railroad then and now. Nearly two-thirds of all Underground Railroad sites are in this category.**

<b>Level 1</b> 4.0%	<b>Story probably not true</b> Reason to doubt: a local oral tradition about the Underground Railroad with reason to believe that it is probably not true. Story assumed not true until shown otherwise.
<b>Level 2</b> 65.3%	<b>Story probably true</b> No reason to doubt but little or no evidence so far. Rating for sites and people linked to local stories about involvement with the Underground Railroad that sound reasonable yet lack corroborating evidence. Likely candidates include, for example, adult African-Americans born in northern states and known members of abolitionist churches.
<b>Level 3</b> 22.9%	<b>Good chance the story is true</b> Abolitionist sympathies, abolitionism or African-American background but no direct evidence of Underground Railroad activity. Potential Underground Railroad affiliation backed by oral tradition and/or some evidence of abolitionist activity, e.g., antislavery society membership, signatures on antislavery petitions, antislavery church membership. African-American birth in the South or Canada suggests involvement.
<b>Level 4</b> 4.3%	<b>Story almost certainly true, with considerable indication of involvement</b> Oral traditions related to specific sources or to groups known to be sympathetic to freedom seekers or evidence of direct involvement with the Underground Railroad. High probability of Underground Railroad involvement but lacking direct primary source evidence. Strong written evidence from others coupled with a strong oral tradition make a compelling case for Underground Railroad involvement.
<b>Level 5</b> 3.5%	<b>Story true, with conclusive evidence of involvement</b> Persons or sites identified through oral histories or written sources corroborated specifically by at least one reliable primary source. Strong primary source evidence of Underground Railroad activity: stories about the Underground Railroad that are supported by a primary source recorded by someone who was actually involved. An obituary written by someone who knew the person may qualify as compelling evidence.