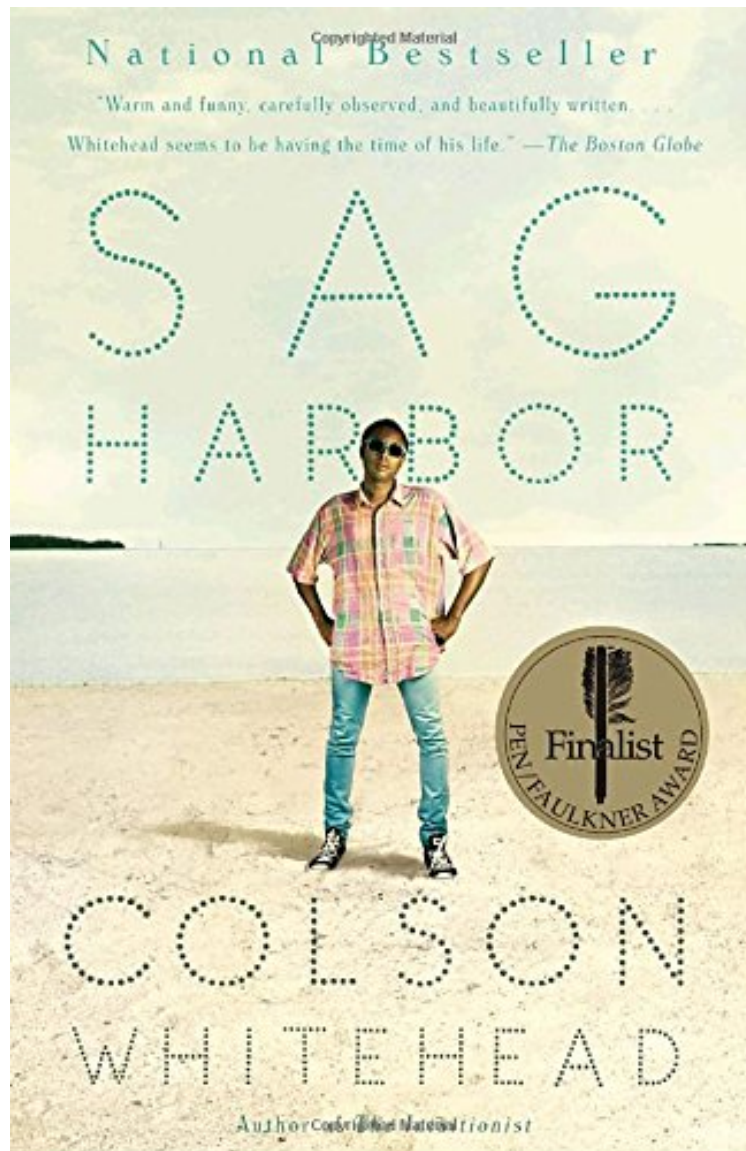


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Sag Harbor

Colson Whitehead

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Colson Whitehead : Sag Harbor before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sag Harbor:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Coming of Age By Sabine Required reading in a AL class and reminded me of my own childhood in the 80s. You soon forget that all this is fiction and get in the car with the boys to the beach, and as a reader, you can almost smell the waffles and taste the ice-cream. The story drifts along as one might through a long summer vacation from school without much drama or pivotal events (discounting the 'gangster'

chapter), yet at the end, the characters and the reader mature. Great story telling. 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Slow Moving But Interesting Look at NY Summers on the Beach By Joseph Landes I picked up this Colson Whitehead book after hearing much about him but never reading any of his works. (I also read *Apex Hides the Hurt* right before this). Overall I am impressed with his writing but had two issues with this book. The first is that it reads super slowly. It is not a long book but it is not easy to get through either. The second which really isn't a problem per se but annoyed me is that he writes in an angry way--as if the whole world is out to get his characters. That is ironically what makes the book interesting but sometimes I felt it to be kind of annoying. The book is narrated by Benji who along with his family spends each summer at the NY beach in Sag Harbor. He and his brother are basically left alone by their parents who are not "down" very much. So they inevitably get into a lot of trouble and have to make their way through the hot summers scraping by with not a lot of money and trying to keep their wits intact. Probably the best parts of the book were when Whitehead describes Benji and his friends working at the local waffle ice cream shop. How Benji had no money so he basically ate all his meals there. References to calling shotgun, New Coke, boom boxes, and many other things rang familiar in my ears as I read this book. I can recommend Sag Harbor to anyone who wants to understand Colson Whitehead's writing in a deeper way and to anyone who enjoys novels with an African-American theme to them. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Didn't keep me interested By Lynne Newbauer I'm a senior citizen. While it is well-written, I got bored reading what was in the head of teens?

From the Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *The Underground Railroad*: a tender, hilarious, and supremely original novel about coming-of-age in the 80s. Benji Cooper is one of the few black students at an elite prep school in Manhattan. But every summer, Benji escapes to the Hamptons, to Sag Harbor, where a small community of African American professionals have built a world of their own. The summer of '85 won't be without its usual trials and tribulations, of course. There will be complicated new handshakes to fumble through and state-of-the-art profanity to master. Benji will be tested by contests big and small, by his misshapen haircut (which seems to have a will of its own), by the New Coke Tragedy, and by his secret Lite FM addiction. But maybe, just maybe, this summer might be one for the ages.

.com Best of the Month, May 2009: Like his fellow New Yorker Jonathan Lethem, Colson Whitehead weaves gracefully through genres with each of his books, but *Sag Harbor*, billed as his "autobiographical fourth novel," seems positioned to be his breakout book--which is a funny thing for a writer who has already received so many major literary awards, including a MacArthur "Genius" grant and being short-listed for the Pulitzer. The year is 1985 and 15-year-old Benji Cooper, one of the only black students at his elite Manhattan private school, leaves the city to spend three largely unsupervised months living with his younger brother Reggie in an enclave of Long Island's Sag Harbor, the summer home to many African American urban professionals. Benji's a Converse-wearing, Smiths-loving, Dungeons Dragons-playing nerd whose favorite Star Wars character is the hapless bounty hunter Greedo (rather than the double-crossing Lando Calrissian). But *Sag Harbor* is a coming-of-age novel whose plot side-steps life-changing events writ large. The book's leisurely eight chapters mostly concern Benji's first kiss, the removal of braces, BB gun battles, slinging insults (largely unprintable "grammatical acrobatics") with his friends, and working his first summer job. And Whitehead crafts a wonderful set piece describing Benji's days at Jonni Waffle Ice Cream, where he is shrouded in "waffle musk" and a dirty T-shirt that's "soiled, covered with batter and befudged from a sundae mishap." Whitehead pushes his love of pop culture into hyper-drive. Nearly every page is swimming with references to the 1980s--from New Coke and *The Cosby Show* to late nights trying to decipher flickering glimpses of naked women on scrambled Cinemax. And music courses through the book, capturing that period when early hip hop mixed with New Wave. Lisa Lisa and U.T.F.O make a memorable cameo at Jonni Waffle, and McFadden Whitehead's "Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now"--heard throughout the book in passing cars and boom boxes--gets tagged as "the black national anthem." Like that ubiquitous song, the soulful, celebratory, and painfully funny *Sag Harbor* and its chronicle of those lazy, sun-soaked days sandwiched between Memorial Day and Labor Day, will stick with you long after closing its covers. --Brad Thomas Parsons Exclusive: Jonathan Lethem's *Sag Harbor* Jonathan Lethem's new novel, *Chronic City*, will be published in October 2009, and is his first to be set in Manhattan. He is the author of seven novels including the New York Times bestseller *The Fortress of Solitude*, which was also a New York Times Book Editors Choice for 2003, and *Motherless Brooklyn*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1999. A recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, his stories and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, and the New York Times among others. He lives in Brooklyn, New York, and Maine. First, an immodest disclaimer: I knew Colson Whitehead was really, really good before you did. That's because we share a publisher, and an editor, and I was sent a copy of his first novel, *The Intuitionist*, and asked to give advance comment--"a pufferoon," as insiders affectionately call the things--which I gladly did. In fact, I not only admired *The Intuitionist*, but it was a book that made me immediately feel less lonely. I'd published four novels at that point, and Colson's helped me to feel my particular approach, the sorts of things I was trying to pull off in my novels, wasn't absolutely misconceived. In fact, I wanted to hitch my wagon to Colson's obvious rising star; his first novel was more flawless, more accomplished, than

my own first--it might have been more accomplished than my fourth, I wasn't sure. I immediately sought Colson out as a friend, and he's been one of my own most crucial peers ever since. Colson's books are all quite different from one another in milieu, strategy, and their ultimate effect on the reader, though united by the signal laconic meter in his voice, by their keen sense of form and proportion, by their brilliance. In *Sag Harbor* he's "gone personal," though I wouldn't want to have to place bets on what is and isn't his own life-material here, or someone else's, or completely confabulated. This is one of my favorite kinds of books, where memory's kinesthetic floodgates open up to illuminate a lost world. It's like a meticulous diorama of the recent past, with the sharp edges of an exhibit in a museum, one where we learn just how strange and specific the universal experience of "coming of age" really can be. The mundane stuff of a Long Island summer here has the power both of a time capsule, and of an allegorical journey into what every human heart endures just trying to vault out of one's family and into the world of art, sex, and kinship that's so near, and so far off. All this, plus the greatest barbecued chicken wing in the history of literature past, present, or future. That's a pufferoon I'd guarantee with my life. --Jonathan Lethem

More from Colson Whitehead

Set over the summer of 1985, *Sag Harbor*, the fourth book from award-winning writer Colson Whitehead, is steeped in 1980s pop culture. Music plays a vital role in the novel, and in this exclusive annotated playlist Whitehead compiles a lineup of nine essential tracks of the early MTV era, including highlights from The Smiths, Run DMC, Bauhaus, and Doug E Fresh and Slick Rick. And read our interview with Colson Whitehead as we talk about *Sag Harbor* and discuss some pop culture hits and misses from the 1980s, grilling tips, McFadden Whitehead, 12-sided die, and the allure of Twitter.

From Publishers Weekly

Starred . In what Whitehead describes as his Autobiographical Fourth Novel (as opposed to the more usual autobiographical first novel), the author of the Pulitzer Prize finalist *John Henry Days* explores the in-between space of adolescence through one boy's summer in a predominantly black Long Island neighborhood. Benji and Reggie, brothers so closely knit that many mistake them for twins, have been coming out to *Sag Harbor* for as long as they can remember. For Benji, each three-month stay at *Sag* is a chance to catch up with friends he doesn't see the rest of the year, and to escape the social awkwardness that comes with a bad afro, reading Fangoria, and being the rare African-American student at an exclusive Manhattan prep school. As he and Reggie develop separate identities and confront new factors like girls, part-time jobs and car-ownership, Benji struggles to adapt to circumstances that could see him joining the ranks of Those Who Don't Come Out Anymore. Benji's funny and touching story progresses leisurely toward Labor Day, but his reflections on what's gone before provide a roadmap to what comes later, resolving social conflicts that, at least this year, have yet to explode. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Bookmarks Magazine

Critics have been waiting to get truly excited about a Colson Whitehead novel. Most have decided that *Sag Harbor* is the one—even though it operates on a smaller scale. The Dallas Morning News described the novel as “a love letter not only to the Long Island town and African-American summer enclave but to ‘80s culture and ... adolescence and brotherhood.” On the surface, this autobiographical novel contains more pastiche than substance; reviewers expecting a strong plot were disappointed. However, the substance lies in the details: the nuanced portrayals of teen life; the attempt to navigate between black and white society; the undercurrents of family, racial, and class tensions; and “the intricate dynamics of friendship and group identity at a particular time and place” (Boston Globe). Benji’s clever, sarcastic voice carries the show. In the end, *Sag Harbor* may feel like a nostalgic memoir, but critics agreed that’s a good thing.

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