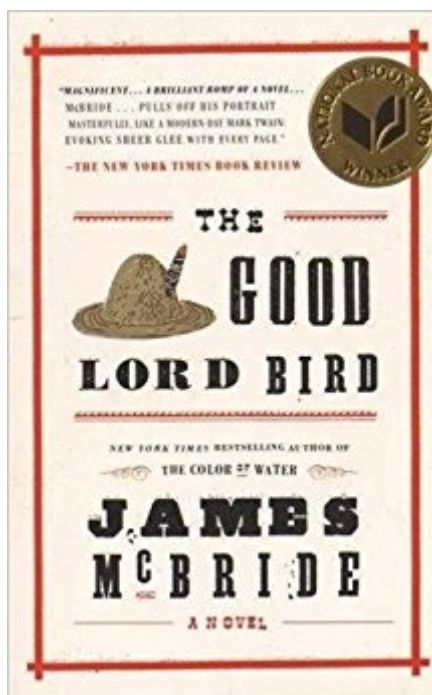


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The Good Lord Bird



Synopsis

Winner of the 2013 National Book Award for Fiction Soon to be a major motion picture starring Liev Schreiber and Jaden Smith A Washington Post, Publishers Weekly, Oprah Magazine Top 10 Book of the Year “A magnificent new novel by the best-selling author James McBride.” “Outrageously entertaining.” “USA Today” “James McBride delivers another tour de force” “Essence” “So imaginative, you’ll race to the finish.” “NPR.org” “Wildly entertaining.” “4-star People lead review” “A boisterous, highly entertaining, altogether original novel.” “Washington Post” “Look out for McBride’s new book, Five-Charat Soul From the bestselling author of The Color of Water, Song Yet Sung, and Kill ’Em and Leave, a James Brown biography, comes the story of a young boy born a slave who joins John Brown’s antislavery crusade and who must pass as a girl to survive. Henry Shackleford is a young slave living in the Kansas Territory in 1857, when the region is a battleground between anti- and pro-slavery forces. When John Brown, the legendary abolitionist, arrives in the area, an argument between Brown and Henry’s master quickly turns violent. Henry is forced to leave town with Brown, who believes he’s a girl. Over the ensuing months, Henry whom Brown nicknames Little Onion conceals his true identity as he struggles to stay alive. Eventually Little Onion finds himself with Brown at the historic raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859—one of the great catalysts for the Civil War. An absorbing mixture of history and imagination, and told with McBride’s meticulous eye for detail and character, The Good Lord Bird is both a rousing adventure and a moving exploration of identity and survival.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Abolitionist John Brown calls her *“Little Onion,”* but her real name is Henry. A slave in Kansas mistaken for a girl due to the sackcloth smock he was wearing when Brown shot his master, the light-skinned, curly-haired 12-year-old ends up living as a young woman, most often encamped with Brown’s renegade band of freedom warriors as they traverse the country, raising arms and ammunition for their battle against slavery. Though they travel to Rochester, New York, to meet with Frederick Douglass and Canada to enlist the help of Harriet Tubman, Brown and his ragtag army fail to muster sufficient support for their mission to liberate African Americans, heading inexorably to the infamously bloody and pathetic raid on Harpers Ferry. Dramatizing Brown’s pursuit of racial freedom and insane belief in his own divine infallibility through the eyes of a child fearful of becoming a man, best-selling McBride (*Song Yet Sung*, 2008) presents a sizzling historical novel that is an evocative escapade and a provocative pastiche of Larry McMurtry’s salty western satires and William Styron’s seminal insurrection masterpiece, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967). McBride works *Little Onion*’s low-down patois to great effect, using the savvy but scared innocent to bring a fresh immediacy to this sobering chapter in American history. --Carol Haggas --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Winner of the 2013 National Book Award for Fiction Winner of the Morning News Tournament of Books "A magnificent new novel by the best-selling author James McBride | a brilliant romp of a novel | McBride with the same flair for historical mining, musicality of voice and outsize characterization that made his memoir, *The Color of Water*, an instant classic pulls off his portrait masterfully, like a modern-day Mark Twain: evoking sheer glee with every page." The New York Times Book Review "You may know the story of John Brown’s unsuccessful raid on Harpers Ferry, but author James McBride’s retelling of the events leading up to it is so imaginative, you’ll race to the finish." NPR "A boisterous, highly entertaining, altogether original novel by James McBride... There is something deeply humane in this [story], something akin to the work of Homer or Mark Twain. McBride’s *Little Onion* a sparkling narrator who is sure to win new life on the silver screen leads us through history’s dark corridors, suggesting that “truths may actually lie elsewhere.” The

Washington Post "Wildly entertaining" | From the author of *The Color of Water*, a rollicking saga about one of America's earliest abolitionists. **People** (4 star review; "People Pick") "McBride delivers another tour de force...A fascinating mix of history and mystery." **Essence** "A story that's difficult to put down." **Ebony** "Outrageously entertaining" | *The Good Lord Bird* rockets toward its inevitable and, yes, knee-slapping conclusion. Never has mayhem been this much of a humdinger. **USA Today** "An impressively deep comedy...It's a view of the antebellum world refreshingly free of pieties, and full of questions about the capacity of human beings to act on their sense of right and wrong, about why the world is the way it is, and what any one of us can do to make it better. It's the rare comic novel that delves so deep." **Salon** "Both breezy and sharp, a rare combination outside of Twain. You should absolutely read it." **Kathryn Schulz, New York Magazine** "A superbly written novel...McBride...transcends history and makes it come alive." **The Chicago Tribune** "Absorbing and darkly funny." **The San Francisco Chronicle** "An irrepressibly fun read." **The Seattle Times** "As in *Huck Finn*, this novel comes in through the back door of history, telling you something you might not know by putting you in the heat of the action. It is a compelling story and an important one, told in a voice that is fresh and apolitical." **Minneapolis Star Tribune** "Exhilarating" | McBride makes what could be a confusing tale clear and creates suspense even in a story whose end is well-known. Beneath the humor lies sympathy for Brown and all those whose lives were caught up with his. **Columbus Dispatch** "Outrageously funny, sad... McBride puts a human face on a nation at its most divided." **Publishers Weekly** (starred review) "A sizzling historical novel that is an evocative escapade and a provocative pastiche of Larry McMurtry's salty western satires and William Styron's seminal insurrection masterpiece, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*." **Booklist** (starred review) "[*The Good Lord Bird*] recalls the broad humor and irony of Mark Twain." **Bloomberg News** "The *Good Lord Bird* is just so brilliant. It had everything I want in a novel and left me feeling both transported and transformed...the last book I remember loving so thoroughly was *The Orphan Master's Son*." **John Green** (in judging the Morning News Tournament of Books) "[McBride's] effervescent young narrator is pitch-perfect and wholly original." **Geraldine Brooks** (in judging the Morning News Tournament of Books) "For years we have waited for a response to William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. So long, in fact, that we forgot we were waiting. *The Good Lord Bird* sings like a bird set

free, with a voice that ought to join Huck Finn, the narrators of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, and Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao* as a voice which is here to tell us who we are in music so lovely we almost forget it was born in terrible pain. It's an alarmingly beautiful book." •John Freeman (in judging the Morning News Tournament of Books)

While, this author has made the Best Seller's list, he has not made my best list. This is a good author and while it is interesting that the story of John Brown is told from this perspective is certainly different but it has its flaws. I would describe this as a history lesson peppered with the author's flair for excitement. The book sounds a lot like a story about cowboys and Indians and if you like that type of genre, I suppose it works for you but for me it was too long and unforgettable. I wanted just the meat without all the gravy. I think it was a little far fetched when they have "onion" getting drunk with Frederick Douglas to spur away the sexual advances is a bit much. After all, I am sure that Mr. Douglas might have had his one sexual exploits that I am not interested in. This book is too long . I was very upset with the way that "onion" was treated and I felt sorry for "Onion that he grew up with no parenting. .

I loved this book but here's why it didn't get 5 stars! The first 100 pages seemed directionless. I read them 2ce and still couldn't tell you what they said. But, beginning in Part 2, when it was written in the voice of the young Negro boy, it became riveting and I soon got so I hated to put it down. I don't think everyone would love it as much as I did but, if you've read any of my other reviews, you know how important the "voice" is to me. It's what makes the story feel authentic and come alive. The book may have its shortcomings to others but, to me, it was a poignant story of courage and ingenuity in a 12 year old black boy (who had to pretend to be a girl) in the time of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Wonderful history. It is all fiction but you could have fooled me! There is a reason it got the National Book Award! I too give it an award.

Normally I wouldn't pick up a history book about John Brown and Harpers' Ferry. However, since this was written by James McBride whose book *The Color of Water* I had enjoyed years ago it was worth a try. It's hard for me to separate the fact from the fiction in the telling of this story by a boy, named Onion. It's written in the dialect and language of the time period which could be offensive but is richly creative and colorful. It also has some profound truths. A few examples I marked while reading: "Some things in this world just ain't meant to be, not in the times we want'em to, and the heart has to hold it in this world as a remembrance, a promise for the world that's to come."

p332"Nobody sees the real you. Nobody knows who you are inside. You just judged on what you are on the outside whatever your color." p313"I knowed I weren't the only person in the world who knowed the Old Man's cheese had slid off his biscuit. p263"They didn't no more notice me of being a boy under that dress and bonnet than they would notice a speck of dust in a room full of cash."p234"That fool was ugly enough to make you think the Lord put him together with His eyes closed,"p156

I loved this book and would recommend it to anyone who enjoys seeing historical figures as they've never seen them before. I would also recommend it to anyone who loves a good reading adventure. The narrator of this story of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry is a little, prepubescent, light-skinned negro who joins up (unwillingly) with Brown, his many sons and followers dressed as a girl. Onion - as Brown calls him/her - has the most incredible point of view on everything that he sees. Trying to save his own skin, he gets more deeply involved in the stages leading up to the raid. His is one of the sharpest, funniest voices since Huck Finn. The reader will also meet other historical figures and see them as they've never seen them before. If I have any criticism, and it's not really criticism, it's that there are so many characters who are named and identified, but whom you never really get to know. I highly recommend this book. I loved James McBride's *The Color of Water*. This book is very different and even better.

I would recommend this book for those who want to read a nuanced portrayal of John Brown and his role in helping prepare the way for the Civil War, told from the fresh perspective of a young man freed from slavery by Brown. It is about greatness and failure embodied in one man's quest for righteousness and the yearning of an entire race of people for justice. And it is a very interesting tale as well.

I read this book with a book group I belong to and most people's thoughts on it were about the same as mine. Some parts were funny and fun to read, I made a comment that one specific part of the book where they are talking about the Underground Railroad was a bit like *Who's On First* by Abbott & Costello. (Here's a link if you don't know what that is <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTcRRaXV-fg>) But overall it felt as if the book just didn't really go anywhere. It read like you were just waiting for something to happen and not much ever did until the end. I feel the book would have been better overall if the climax had been reached a little sooner and if the author had given us a few chapters after to delve a little deeper into the outcome of that

big event that turned out to be a jumping off point for the civil war. I did like that the author brought in real life people and made them characters in the book, I didn't like some of the liberties that the author took with actual facts. Most of the time this did not really add to the story so I felt it was a bit pointless to make things up when using the actual historical facts would have served the same purposes. Anyways I felt overall it was a bit lackluster, I didn't miss it when I wasn't reading it and I never felt like I was at a point that I couldn't put it down. It was an okay read, I wouldn't recommend it to personally to anyone I know or if anyone asked for recommendations this would not be on the top of my list for sure. But if you're really into pre-civil war historical fiction it might be for you.

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