



# Sag Harbor

By Colson Whitehead

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**Sag Harbor** By Colson Whitehead

**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.

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## Sag Harbor By Colson Whitehead Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #253217 in Books
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- Released on: 2010-06-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
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- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

**Amazon 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

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### Amazon Exclusive: Jonathan Lethem Reviews *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 Review* 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

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## 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.

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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. 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.)

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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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## Users Review

### From reader reviews:

#### Dora Vazquez:

This Sag Harbor book is simply not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book is actually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper you read a lot of information you will get. This Sag Harbor without we comprehend teach the one who studying it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't possibly be worry Sag Harbor can bring if you are and not make your carrier space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This Sag Harbor having excellent arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not experience uninterested in reading.

#### Kerry Giles:

This book untitled Sag Harbor to be one of several books this best seller in this year, this is because when you read this e-book you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy this specific book in the book retailer or you can order it by way of online. The publisher of the book sells the e-book too. It makes you

quickly to read this book, as you can read this book in your Smart phone. So there is no reason to your account to past this reserve from your list.

**John Cotton:**

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not experience tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition details. Even you love Sag Harbor, it is possible to enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still need to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh occur its mind hangout folks. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

**Rayford Alexander:**

Beside this kind of Sag Harbor in your phone, it might give you a way to get more close to the new knowledge or details. The information and the knowledge you can got here is fresh through the oven so don't be worry if you feel like an outdated people live in narrow commune. It is good thing to have Sag Harbor because this book offers for you readable information. Do you occasionally have book but you don't get what it's interesting features of. Oh come on, that won't happen if you have this in the hand. The Enjoyable arrangement here cannot be questionable, like treasuring beautiful island. Use you still want to miss the item? Find this book and read it from today!

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