



All Aunt Hagar's Children: Stories

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Edward P. Jones, a prodigy of the short story, returns to the form that first won him praise in this new collection of stories, All Aunt Hagar's Children. Here he turns an unflinching eye to the men, women, and children caught between the old ways of the South and the temptations that await them in the city, people who in Jones's masterful hands emerge as fully human and morally complex. With the legacy of slavery just a stone's throw behind them and the future uncertain, Jones's cornucopia of characters will haunt readers for years to come.

All Aunt Hagar's Children: Stories Details

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From Reader Review All Aunt Hagar's Children: Stories for online ebook

Roxane Beth Johnson says

These stories are perfect. That's all I can say. "The Devil Swims Across the Anacosta" blew my mind and rendered me helplessly amazed. Not kidding or exaggerating. I read it with lips ajar, in much the way I imagine all those boys out there read "Lolita" (hate that book, love everything else by Nabokov though and have read much of it. How come no one gets as excited by his book King, Queen, Knave? or Pnin? There's a masterpiece.). Didn't read every single story. I want to save something for later. What I read was, as I said, perfect.

Roger DeBlanck says

All Aunt Hagar's Children is a collection of blistering and mesmerizing stories. The settings range across Washington D.C. throughout the breadth of the 20th century. The stories are full of unsettling revelations that produce adversity and change in the lives of a plethora of unforgettable characters. These characters encounter complex and moral struggles that test their ability to overcome the destabilizing forces of sadness, emptiness, and loss. Jones covers territory as disturbing as the horrors of violence and as sublime as the inexplicability of miracles. Heartfelt and haunting, these beautifully envisioned tales do not blink in the face of insurmountable hardship. Jones conjures up immense emotional power through his signature use of a spare and simple style. He is masterful at unveiling disturbing truths hidden in the human psyche. *All Aunt Hagar's Children* is a harsh, uneasy, and stunning collection that takes hold of the human condition like a vise and uses a visionary compass to chart the tough road to haul towards healing and grace.

Nina says

As a writer, the things I enjoy most about reading Edward P. Jones are his specificity and the way he uses time and history. Specificity, as in he can add the most odd, unusual, or mundane detail to a character or a situation and bring it brings the story to life. Jones's work is more character-driven and plot is mostly built around an everydayness of the characters, so this specificity really does something for the reading experience.

As far as history and time are concerned, Jones uses flash-forward quite a bit and when he gives character backstory, it's often within the context of a larger black history (e.g., the Great Migration, etc.) so it truly feels that Jones's characters are moving through the everydayness of his stories with all of this history. In "Spanish in the Morning," there's a little girl starting school for the very first time. And as she prepares for this thing that is very new, not only to her but to her family, all of the men in her life (living and dead) start visiting her. It's a wonderful image and I suppose that's another thing I like about Jones's work. The images he creates, especially for his story endings.

Kasa Cotugno says

Such a rich tapestry of story telling, mostly about members of the generation of those of the great migration who settle in Washington DC. Beautifully written, some quite haunting. Took a while since each story should be savored.

Rick says

His third work of fiction and second short story collection, *All Aunt Hagar's Children* is every bit as good as its predecessors. Like his first collection, *Lost in the City*, the stories here are set mostly in Washington, D.C. Some, like the excellent "Root Worker," include southern starts or returns, even if just across the Potomac. They span a range of experiences and times from the late 19th century through to contemporary times. "Root Worker" tells the story of a smart, highly successful doctor who can't slow her mother's declining health until the mother's aide convinces the family to postpone a vacation to Massachusetts and instead take a trip south to North Carolina to a legendary root worker. Implicit in this story and in others, such as "In the Blink of God's Eye," is that power of home calls endlessly and not all places are home. The young wife in "In the Blink of God's Eye" doesn't fit in Washington as her husband moves her across the river. D.C. welcomes the husband but his wife and their found child (literally discovered wrapped in a bundle dangling from a tree in Virginia before they depart for the city) struggle with alienation and the wife makes excuses to return to Virginia and eventually stays put. D.C. is this complicated, beckoning city of opportunity for African Americans but it's an opportunity that comes with the high cost of dislocation.

Jones is a great writer, rendering complex relationships and histories in taut, economic stories that disturb and inspire.

Nascha says

I have been wanting to read this book for years. I purchased a copy and it sat on my bookshelf because I was waiting for the *right* time to read it. And because I had not read Jones' two previous works (I have a thing about reading an author's work in order of their publication), I had put it off.

But finally after reading excerpts of a few of the stories online, and despite not having read the other works, I plunged into this collection. From the beginning, I found the collection to be magical. There is an element of magical realism in many of the stories, history of African Americans both living in Washington DC and from the South interwoven into the stories that span many decades of life in Capitol.

I appreciated the complexity of the characters and the richness of the stories for they did not feel like short stories but felt like short novels because of the time spans and issues the characters experienced and addressed.

I highly recommend this collection. And I look forward to delving into Jones' other books.

Sarah says

You might not hate this book, so give it a chance. I read about half of it in November or so, returned it to the library, and checked it out again because I don't like leaving things unfinished. Maybe if I was familiar with DC, the way the Jones describes the surroundings by saying things like "K street between 13th and 14th" or whatever instead of telling us "there's a gas station on the corner, and the rest of the block is row houses" wouldn't bother me so much because I'd already have a mental picture of it. Really, most of the time I felt the book could have been written by Mapquest. At least, that's the overwhelming impression I'm left with.

Shek says

I thought I was going to love this, having read and much enjoyed one of the stories already. But it is really, really spotty. Jones tells a story in a way that includes hordes of tertiary characters and sometimes spans many years. Sometimes this works, and sometimes this is a mess. About a quarter of the stories are seriously engrossing, about a quarter are 30 to 40 page slogs, and the rest are pretty mediocre. Talking to other folks who've read it, some agree with me in principle, but have opposite opinions on which stories are good and which are just ok. Frustrating. It did give me an excuse to serve chili dogs to a book club, so there is that.

Pamela says

This is an extraordinary collection of stories about African-Americans in and around Washington D.C. from the time of early migrations from the South to roughly the 1980s. I read some of the stories before they were collected, in *The New Yorker*; others when the book first came out, still others only more recently, so that in piecemeal fashion I've now read a few of the pieces in the collection three or four times. I mention this because, though I was a wildly enthusiastic fan of Jones's previous books, *Lost in the City* and *The Known World*, I was initially disappointed by many of the tales here. I thought them diffuse and inconclusive. This was entirely due to the fact that they are in fact even richer and more complex than stories in *Lost in the City* and often can't be sufficiently appreciated on a first read. Jones often deals with such large swaths of time and so many characters that it can take a read or two just to absorb everything that's going on. It's on later reads that the delicacy and psychology and patterning of the stories begin to work their singular magic.

Jones is going to be read decades and decades from now, when many writers more comfortable with and willing to exploit (or be exploited by) the media have come to seem less relevant.

Chana says

I am not a fan of short stories in general but this book was worse than I expected it might be. Almost every story had no ending, most contained adultery, and many contained violence. I usually like books in dialect but this was annoying with all the "whas" and dropped "g"s. Every page shouted "I'm black!" "I'm the black experience!" "I'm black and this is Washington D.C., and did I mention? I'm black!"

As far as the endings of the stories, the endings were so random that I felt like he just stopped typing at any given point without reason and that was called the end of a story.

Only one story caught my interest and it had an ending. That was the story of the little boy who got

grandparents and a little sister. The title is something along those lines in case you decide to look for it. In my opinion that was the only decent piece of writing in the book. Some of the other stories had potential, in a way, but they never materialized into anything.

Michael Anson says

I don't read too many collections of short stories, but Edward Jones, winner of the Pulitzer for his novel, "The Known World," is a master storyteller. Hagar is a biblical figure. She was the slave of Sarah who was married to Abraham, and Sarah thought she was too old to have children so she sent Hagar to Abraham, and they had a child named Ishmael. Later, Sarah did have a child named Isaac, who was supposed to be the one sent to make Abraham the father of all nations. Ishmael was banished to the desert where it is believed he became the father of the Arabs.

Using the name Hagar, directly comments on the legacy of slavery, and the voice given to the voiceless. In the fourteen short stories, we learn about African-Americans and their culture in contemporary Washington, DC. He writes using a deft hand, writing about a sense of the magical, creating worlds few of us can imagine. That's the true strength of his work. It transports us to another time and place.

meeners says

i gave 4 stars for *lost in the city* but i think that, when taken together, this + *lost in the city* would be included in my list of the best english-language writing from the past decade. [and you really should read both books together. the first story in *lost in the city* gets linked to the first story in *all aunt hagar's children*, the second with the second, and so on. there are also complex links between stories within an individual volume.] edward p. jones combines the economy of the short story, where every word is given a precise and profound weight, with the wide enfolding sweep of the long novel. remarkable, and unforgettable.

jones' prose is quietly, unobtrusively beautiful. but it's hard to pick out a representative quote for a review. when a sentence catches you, when a passage takes your breath away, it isn't because it relies on a fine turn of words or an easy flash of insight. it's because, as i said before, it has been built upon and against the weight of everything that has come before. "craft" here is a good word for what jones is doing. his writing is a careful, patient, meticulous craft.

anyway, here's one example, the last lines of one of my favorite stories, just for a sense of the thing. *The bright road eventually came back again and went on a bit until it dipped swiftly and disappeared once more. Momentarily. She waited and she could see, with some relief, where many people were walking and riding all along it once it reappeared, sloping gently down as it wound a crooked way to what her guidebook had told her was "the Valley of Enormous Science Mysteries and Smallest Happenings." She could see the eternal road emerge almost miraculously from the valley, still crooked, still shimmering, still full of humanity, and she turned to her new husband to tell him what the path ahead would be like.*

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

I think I am done with this one, at least for now. I've read the first 5 out of 14 stories (132 pages) and am

finding it a drag, though I loved *The Known World* years ago and later on liked *Lost in the City*. The going felt slow, and the stories felt cluttered and sometimes confusing. Not all readers will share my short story preferences - I like them to be streamlined and to end with a bang - but that didn't really fit with these stories, which tend to meander along with two or three subplots that often don't reach any resolution or have much to do with the main plot. They're well-written and I'd hardly say they were objectively bad, but I'm not feeling it right now.

Some commentary on the individual stories, because I always want to see more of that in reviews of collections:

"In the Blink of God's Eye" - a young couple moves from Virginia to D.C. at the beginning of the 20th century, and begins to grow apart after she adopts a baby abandoned in their yard. I liked this one, though I felt it was a little padded out with the stories of secondary characters.

"Spanish in the Morning" - a young girl starts at Catholic school and skips ahead to first grade. The ending of this one baffled me. (view spoiler)

"Resurrecting Methuselah" - an American soldier in Korea is diagnosed with breast cancer, and his wife decides to leave him. In this one it was the motivations that confused me. We spend a lot of time with the wife, including a long sequence in Hawaii on the way to Korea in which she buys some candy she remembers from her childhood to find it completely different. (view spoiler)

"Old Boys, Old Girls" - a young man is imprisoned for the second of two murders he's committed, does his time, and once on the outside, has to figure out how his family and an old lover fit into his life. I liked this one, which is interesting and doesn't have room for random subplots.

"All Aunt Hagar's Children" - a Korean war vet wants to head out to Alaska to pan for gold, but the older women of his family ask him to look into the murder of one of their sons instead, and he does. This was interesting but the end unconvincing. (view spoiler) And this one too grew weeds: it spends a lot of time on a stranger who died in front of the narrator getting off a streetcar, which does nothing in the story other than to haunt him, and I didn't believe for a minute that he somehow memorized her last words when they were full sentences in a language he didn't speak. Strings of unfamiliar words are unmemorable gibberish to me, and I'm good at foreign languages.

At any rate, I'm certainly not denying that there's merit here, but this wasn't the right time for this book, so it's heading back to the library.

Jean says

I loved this book of short stories. Although there were fourteen stories, they were not cookie cutter stories. It definitely did not feel like you were reading the same story over and over as some short story compilations do. Not only were the main characters strong but the secondary characters were given meaningful roles also. A couple of these stories have stuck with me. I think this is the first of Jones' writing that I have tried and I will definitely try other of his works.

Libby says

I want to go ahead and review this so I can post it, even though I'm not done--and won't be for awhile.

I just don't like this collection of stories very much. I feel bad about this, because it has gotten rave reviews and won awards, but it just doesn't appeal to me.

I got through 5 and 1/2 of the 14 stories, and of those, the one I've only read half of is the one I liked the best (it was just so depressing that I didn't finish it). ALL of the stories have been depressing, and in most of them, I didn't like the characters very much. Finally, there is much more emphasis on characterization and description than on plot, and I still really like plot. I like characterization, but I have to like the characters to appreciate good characterization (what can I say, I have low brow tastes). Sigh.

I don't intend to give up on this book. It's still on my nightstand. However, I have found that pregnancy makes me even less tolerant of depressing books than I normally am, so I think I need to wait until the new baby arrives to try to finish.

Finally, one note about my use of the word "depressing." I don't necessarily mean books where bad things happen or that don't end happily (although I will admit to being partial to happy endings). I know that in real life, bad things happen and endings are not always happy, and it makes sense that literature often reflects this. However, that doesn't mean that people/characters can't and don't rise above the awful-ness that life often throws at them, and I just didn't feel like any of these characters did.

I'll revisit my opinion when I revisit the book.

Michelle says

I was really excited to read this book as All Aunt Hagar's Children was written by Pulitzer Prize winner Edward P. Jones (The Known World). Although I liked the premise behind this book of short stories which deals with the African-American experience in Washington DC throughout historical time, regrettably I just couldn't get into it.

The first, In the Blink of God's Eye is about newlyweds, Ruth and Aubrey Patterson as the set about starting their new life in Washington. Shortly after their arrival, Ruth discovers an infant tied into a tree. Although she is not keen on city life, she is enamored with the child. As the book progresses, the protagonists increase with age. This is the same formula that Jones uses in his other book of short stories, Lost in the City. As other reviewers found that these characters paralleled those in All Aunt Hagar's Children, I tried to get a hold of the other book so that I may read them in tandem and gain further insight. Try as I might the stories remained words on a page. I rarely found myself transported to some other time and space; breathing in the atmosphere of the characters. Although others may be able to empathize more with the characters and find the themes more relevant to their lives, it just didn't do it for me.

Carole says

Edward P. Jones was lionized with the publication of The Known World, but that book kind of left me cold. I

couldn't understand what all the excitement was about, unless it was the novelty of a black man writing about a black man who owned black slaves in nineteenth century America. The writing was stiff and the story was not gripping or even very memorable. But I changed my opinion about this author when I read his short stories. This is where his real talent lies, in writing about ordinary folks in Washington, DC, where Jones has dwelled all his life. He breathes life into his characters, who are three dimensional, flawed and complex. They are lovingly portrayed and dignified even at their worst. Jones displays an easy familiarity with a wide cast of characters, whom you feel he has probably grown up with. He brings us right down to street level, and in many of the stories he traces their steps by spelling out the streets and corners that they pass. It is an earlier Washington, D.C. that most readers are not familiar with, but you can almost picture the old neighborhoods, long gone, in sepia tones, that thousands of blacks called home. Or tried to call home, as many had come from the South and reminisced about the food and gentility of the southern ways. Jones finds the human streak in the most callous of persons. In Old Boys, Old Girls, the hardened ex-con finds it impossible to accept the help of his family, but seeks a seedier, solitary life on the fringes. When an old girlfriend, who has degenerated into a squalid existence and does not recognize him, passes away in his flop house, he meticulously and lovingly cleans up the room she died in and leaves the body washed, dressed and dignified. Then he moves on. It is a touching scene and typical of the tenderness with which Jones can evoke the human spirit.

Rosana says

I finished reading All Aunt's Hagar Children a few days ago and had to come back to write a little blurb about it because those stories are still lingering around me. Of course, as in any collection of stories, 3 or 4 make a bigger impact than the rest, however I was quite surprised of how even this selection is overall. Not a small task in a book with 14 stories.

Those are complex stories, with a multitude of secondary characters – neighbors, relatives, ancestors – showing up and furnishing the main story line with flavor and color and creating whole universes. The language is poetic. The prose is full of subtle – and not so subtle - magic realism: the devil shows up at a grocery store; a woman paints pictures of people dead in different countries and time; and yet another woman becomes blind while taking the bus home. But, most often, the stories are about people dealing with the tragedies of their lives, small and big disappointments and endless hope for whatever is to come.

I do love short stories, a genre I realize not every reader appreciates. And Edward P. Jones excels at the genre. I did love his novel "The Known World", but I crave for more of his short stories.

Andrea says

Really beautiful, carefully crafted stories about life in DC.

I liked The Known World a lot, but wasn't completely sold on Jones until this book. In All Aunt Hagar's Children, he weaves the fantastical together with the harsh realities of poverty, using rich prose and imagery.

Even if you are not a fan of short stories (or fiction for that matter), I would recommend trying this book. Jones is such a talented writer that I would find myself stuck on sentences and phrases unable to move on

(like when you find yourself playing a great new song on repeat).

Texbritreader says

The stories collected here offer a portrait of our nation's capital through the eyes and experiences of a varied group of African Americans who call it home. Jones offers up different types: doctors, retired civil servants, schoolchildren but also women-beaters, drug-users, and other ne'er-do-wells. He fleshes out the life of the city through the tales of these citizens creating a richly layered construction of reasonable verisimilitude, with a few dashes of the magical but for me something was still lacking.

Despite the precise details and careful plotting the collection often seemed artistically flat, leaving me with a sense of every bit of the working and reworking the author had employed to bring the stories to fruition. It is hard to find any specific failing, all the ingredients are there and Jones is a capable writer but somehow the stories lacked freshness. I found myself reading with the hope that something would spark at some point but alas that was not the case and I was left feeling like someone who had to settle for day old doughnuts.

I could not say these stories are bad but, in all honesty, having enjoyed the author's novel, *The Known World*, I was disappointed.
