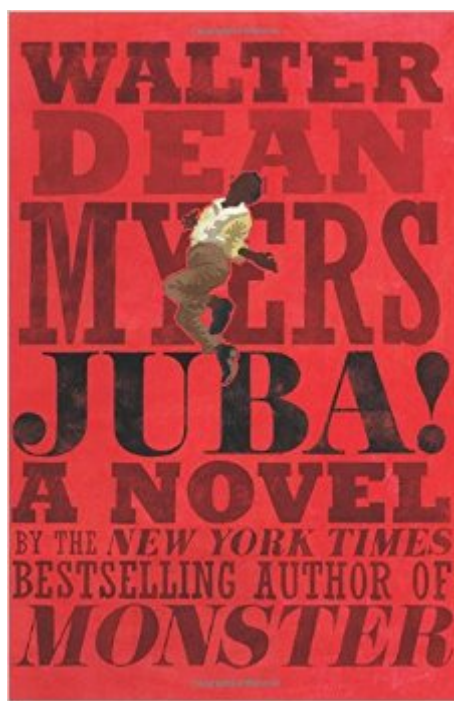


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Juba!: A Novel



Synopsis

In New York Times bestselling author Walter Dean Myers's last novel, he delivers a gripping story based on the life of a real dancer known as Master Juba, who lived in the nineteenth century. This engaging historical novel is based on the true story of the meteoric rise of an immensely talented young black dancer, William Henry Lane, who influenced today's tap, jazz, and step dancing. With meticulous and intensive research, Walter Dean Myers has brought to life Juba's story. The novel includes photographs, maps, and other images from Juba's time and an afterword from Walter Dean Myers's wife about the writing process of Juba!

Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

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Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #431,540 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) [#33 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > Biographical > United States](#) [#33 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Performing Arts > Dance](#) [#33 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > Civil War Period](#)

Customer Reviews

Billed as the "final novel" from the now-deceased Walter Dean Myers, "Juba" is an engaging and important look at the racial stereotypes and practices of 1840s America, told via the real-life story of William Henry Lane—Master Juba—when dancing on the stage. For a basic plot summary, this book is set in the 1840s and focuses on Juba, a young man who has an incredible skill for dancing. He could fill concert halls from top to bottom with his unique and frenetic dancing style that, even to this day, cannot quite be quantified. Juba is a black man, however, and that alone relegates him to the likes of minstrel shows, blackface routines, and being labeled a "general oddity". As Juba himself notes on more than one occasion, it is strange for a man to be performing to applause in a country where he could be legally bought/sold as a slave. Juba wants to be taken seriously as a dance/performer, however, so with continued perseverance he travels the world trying to legitimize both his craft and, by extension, his race. Cutting right to the point, what makes

this novel so insightful and interesting is that it delves into such controversial topics as minstrel shows and blackface. In hindsight, society as a whole is quite embarrassed by those proceedings, wondering how we could have stooped to such levels to mock one section of the population. As such, those topics are rarely talked about or examined due to the climate of anger/fear they produce. Luckily, Myers has no such qualms about "getting his hands dirty", so to speak, and not shying away from the hard material. Time and time again in this story, Juba faces moral choices regarding the representation of his black race. Should he showcase himself in shows primarily crafted to mock black people?

Title: Juba! Writing historical fiction is hard. You read shelves full of books, study documents, interview experts, ponder maps, photographs, and data. You work really hard to insert authentic details (what color dress would she have worn to the dance? What did he eat for lunch? What bus would she have taken to work?) and then plunge forward to create as authentic a character as possible. But when you're writing a story about a young man who lived over a hundred and fifty years ago to whom you want to pay tribute, but yet there is little "real" data, your task becomes even more difficult. You have a few bones to build your story around-- perhaps a death certificate and a few photographs. If you're lucky, maybe you'll find a few newspaper articles you can dig up to authenticate your story. Such was Walter Dean Myers' challenge when he wrote Juba! (Harper Collins, 2015) This book for middle grade or young adult readers, is based on the true story of a talented young black dancer considered to be the inventor of tap dancing. While performing in New York City, he was noticed by Charles Dickens who wrote about him in American Notes: "Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs - all sorts of legs and no legs - what is this to him?"

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