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Welcome to Braggsville: A Novel

By T. Geronimo Johnson



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LOONGLISTED FOR THE 2015 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF 2015 BY *THE WASHINGTON POST*, *TIME*, *MEN'S JOURNAL*, *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*, *KANSAS CITY STAR*, *BROOKLYN MAGAZINE*, *NPR*, *HUFFINGTON POST*, *THE DAILY BEAST*, AND *BUZZFEED*

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From the PEN/Faulkner finalist and critically acclaimed author of *Hold It 'Til It Hurts* comes a dark and socially provocative Southern-fried comedy about four UC Berkeley students who stage a dramatic protest during a Civil War reenactment—a fierce, funny, tragic work from a bold new writer.

Welcome to Braggsville. The City that Love Built in the Heart of Georgia.
Population 712

Born and raised in the heart of old Dixie, D'aron Davenport finds himself in unfamiliar territory his freshman year at UC Berkeley. Two thousand miles and a world away from his childhood, he is a small-town fish floundering in the depths of a large, hyper-liberal pond. Caught between the prosaic values of his rural hometown and the intellectualized multicultural cosmopolitanism of Berkeley, the nineteen-year-old white kid is uncertain about his place until one disastrous party brings him three idiosyncratic best friends: Louis, a “kung-fu comedian” from California; Candice, an earnest do-gooder claiming Native roots from Iowa; and Charlie, an introspective inner-city black teen from Chicago. They dub themselves the “4 Little Indians.”

But everything changes in the group’s alternative history class, when D’aron lets slip that his hometown hosts an annual Civil War reenactment, recently rebranded “Patriot Days.” His announcement is met with righteous indignation, and inspires Candice to suggest a “performative intervention” to protest the reenactment. Armed with youthful self-importance, makeshift slave costumes, righteous zeal, and their own misguided ideas about the South, the 4 Little Indians descend on Braggsville. Their journey through backwoods churches,

backroom politics, Waffle Houses, and drunken family barbecues is uproarious to start, but will have devastating consequences.

With the keen wit of *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk* and the deft argot of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, T. Geronimo Johnson has written an astonishing, razor-sharp satire. Using a panoply of styles and tones, from tragicomic to Southern Gothic, he skewers issues of class, race, intellectual and political chauvinism, Obamaism, social media, and much more.

A literary coming-of-age novel for a new generation, written with tremendous social insight and a unique, generous heart, *Welcome to Braggsville* reminds us of the promise and perils of youthful exuberance, while painting an indelible portrait of contemporary America.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Great American writers whose names came to mind as I was reading *Welcome to Braggsville*: Tom Wolfe, Mark Twain, Toni Morrison, H.L. Mencken, Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace, Norman Mailer and Ralph Ellison. Johnson’s timely novel is a tipsy social satire . . . a tour de force.” (**NPR’s Fresh Air**)

“A rollicking satire . . . Radical, hilarious, tragic, and all too relevant.” (***O Magazine***)

“Johnson’s writing is often brilliantly comic, and *Braggsville* is a welcome new kind of southern novel.” (***Time*, Top 10 Books of 2015**)

“A stunning achievement with no clear literary precedent. *Welcome to Braggsville* . . . is one of the most searing, shocking looks at racial issues and campus activism in a long time.” (***Men’s Journal*, Best Books of 2015**)

“The most dazzling, most unsettling, most oh-my-God-listen-up novel you’ll read this year. T. Geronimo Johnson plays cultural criticism like it’s acid jazz. His shockingly funny story pricks every nerve of the American body politic. *Welcome to Braggsville*. It’s about time.” (***The Washington Post***)

“Reading this novel is not unlike listening to an erudite satirist play the dozens in a marathon performance . . . Organic, plucky, smart, *Welcome to Braggsville* is the funniest sendup of identity politics, the academy and white racial anxiety to hit the scene in years.” (***New York Times Book Review***)

“Audacious, unpredictable, exuberant and even tragic, in the most classic meaning of the word . . . A heady mix of satire and hyperbole. At times, *Welcome to Braggsville* reads like a literary hybrid of David Foster Wallace and Colson Whitehead.” (***Los Angeles Times Book Review***)

“The unsettling racial satire America needs right now . . . *Welcome to Braggsville* doesn’t offer easy polemic or easier sentimentality, but a deep dive into the American race problem as muddled, terrifying, and absurd as the reality.” (***Huffington Post***)

“You must read T. Geronimo Johnson. He is awesome.” (**Sherman Alexie** via Twitter)

“Ghastly and funny and gloriously provocative . . . Johnson’s prose is by turns scathing dark humor, soaring lyricism, and a quietly devastating analysis of every species of injustice. The result is a kind of mind-melting poetry—a linguistic electroconvulsive therapy for the reader. This book will wake you up!” (**Karen Russell**, bestselling author of *Swamplandia!*, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize)

“Transcendence is what Geronimo Johnson achieves in this remarkable novel. Every racial assumption is both acknowledged and challenged in ways at times hilarious, at other times poignant. *Welcome to Braggsville* is ambitious, wise, and brave.” (**Ron Rash**, bestselling author of *Serena*)

“As daring a literary high-wire act as has come along in some time. . . . frequently and unabashedly funny . . . [A] volatile mix of stinging satire, linguistic pyrotechnics and heartbreaking narrative.” (***San Francisco Chronicle***)

“Full of virtuosic sentences and coruscating satire . . . a brilliant and necessary read.” (**Buzzfeed, Best Books of 2015**)

“Biting, clever . . . Following four Berkeley students bent on a bit of guerrilla theater at a Civil War re-enactment in Georgia, Geronimo Johnson never runs out of targets for his satirical pen, from Old South apologists to solipsistic students in the grip of self-righteous political correctness.” (**The Daily Beast, Best Fiction of 2015**)

Welcome to Braggsville is a comic, rollicking, and biting story about the cultural clash between the rural South and a bastion of contemporary politically sensitive liberalism.” (**Christian Science Monitor**)

“Both funny and frightful . . . But as 21st-century American culture crisscrosses with the nation’s history, Johnson’s story evokes more than satirical humor. A sense of conscience and moral purpose takes shape at the heart of the book.” (**Associated Press**)

“Stunning and poignant . . . Johnson’s novel may not have the answer to the problems he’s addressing, [but] it’s clear that he’s asking the right questions.” (**LA Review of Books**)

“Southern Gothic meets West Coast political correctness with hilarious results in Johnson’s new satirical novel. . . . An odyssey through Waffle Houses, evangelical churches and backyard barbecue’s ensues, with attitudes about everything from race to social media getting skewered.” (**New York Post**)

“Geronimo Johnson is a fearless and driven young writer of dazzling gifts. His books map American multiculturalism as a poignant and twisted human comedy in which nobody comes out clean. . . . surprising, heartbreaking, tragicomic, and deeply disturbing.” (**Jaimy Gordon**, National Book Award-winning author of *Lord of Misrule*)

“Combines Ben Fountain’s steely political eye, Junot Diaz’s pop-infused dogma, and Toni Morrison’s sense of social justice through historical reckoning. Big, shiny literary prizes were created for books like this one.” (**Wiley Cash**, bestselling author of *A Land More Kind Than Home*)

“One of the most invigorating and least predictable novels of the year.” (**Kevin Brockmeier**, award-winning author of *The Brief History of the Dead*)

“Combines the intellectual urgency of a satire with the emotional resonance of a tragedy. *Welcome to Braggsville* is as smart as it is subversive, and as bleakly hilarious as it is deeply necessary.” (**Jennifer duBois**, award-winning author of *A Partial History of Lost Causes*)

“DeLilloesque for its orgiastic pop-culture roiling. This is a virtuoso performance by one of our strongest new voices.” (**Richard Katrovas**, award-winning poet and author of *Scorpio Rising*)

“Madcap, satirical, sometimes profane and uncanny . . . *Welcome to Braggsville* is a deeply pleasurable read for the sheer wonder of Johnson’s prose, but a deeply disturbing read for the truth it reveals about us.” (**BookPage**)

“Brilliant, wildly satirical, and also deeply sobering. The story looms larger than life. At every turn, the impassioned Johnson shows us are our own.” (**Tess Taylor**, award-winning poet and author of *The Forage House*)

From the Back Cover

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About the Author

Born and raised in New Orleans, T. Geronimo Johnson is the bestselling author of *Welcome to Braggsville* and *Hold It 'Til It Hurts*, a finalist for the 2013 PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction. He received his M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and his M.A. in language, literacy, and culture from UC Berkeley. He has

taught writing and held fellowships—including a Stegner Fellowship and an Iowa Arts Fellowship—at Arizona State University, Iowa, Berkeley, Western Michigan University, and Stanford. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Margaret Burton:

Do you among people who can't read gratifying if the sentence chained within the straightway, hold on guys this kind of aren't like that. This Welcome to Braggsville: A Novel book is readable by simply you who hate those straight word style. You will find the information here are arrange for enjoyable examining experience without leaving also decrease the knowledge that want to offer to you. The writer involving Welcome to Braggsville: A Novel content conveys thinking easily to understand by many people. The printed and e-book are not different in the content but it just different in the form of it. So , do you continue to thinking Welcome to Braggsville: A Novel is not loveable to be your top record reading book?

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Ann Fout:

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Ophelia Ellis:

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