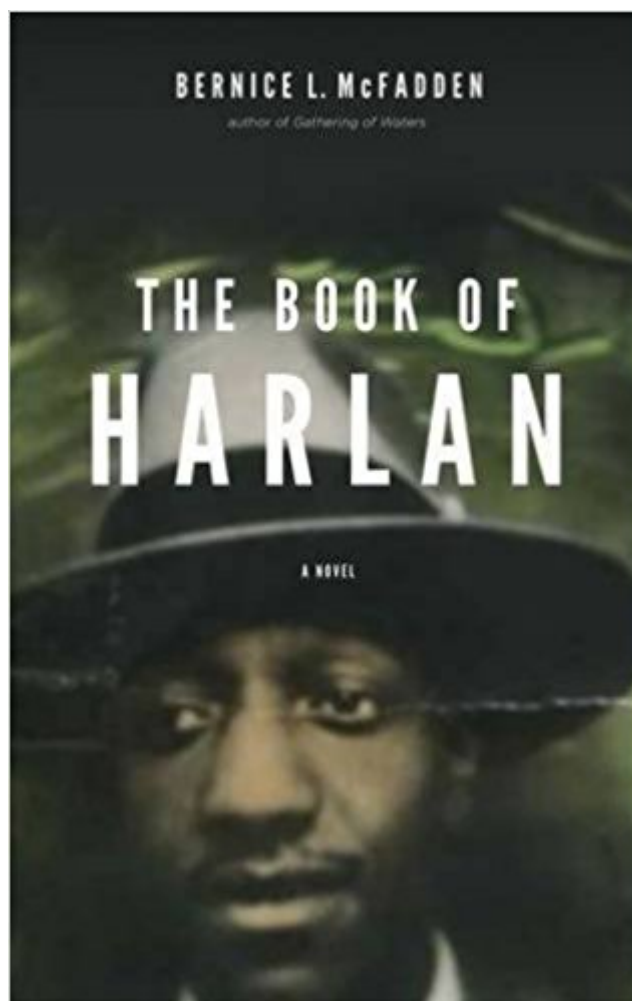


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# The Book Of Harlan



## Synopsis

One of the Washington Post's Best Books of 2016 So Far "Simply miraculous...As her saga becomes ever more spellbinding, so does the reader's astonishment at the magic she creates. This is a story about the triumph of the human spirit over bigotry, intolerance and cruelty, and at the center of *The Book of Harlan* is the restorative force that is music." --Washington Post "McFadden packs a powerful punch with tight prose and short chapters that bear witness to key events in early twentieth-century history: both World Wars, the Great Depression, and the Great Migration. Partly set in the Jim Crow South, the novel succeeds in showing the prevalence of racism all across the country--whether implemented through institutionalized mechanisms or otherwise. Playing with themes of divine justice and the suffering of the righteous, McFadden presents a remarkably crisp portrait of one average man's extraordinary bravery in the face of pure evil." --Booklist, Starred review "Through this character portrait of Harlan, McFadden has constructed a vivid, compelling narrative that makes historical fiction an accessible, literary window into the African-American past and some of the contemporary dilemmas of the present." --Publishers Weekly "During WWII, two African-American musicians are captured by the Nazis in Paris and imprisoned at the Buchenwald concentration camp, in the latest from the author of *Sugar and Loving Donovan*." --Publishers Weekly, Spring 2016 Announcements "McFadden's writing breaks the heart--and then heals it again. The perspective of a black man in a concentration camp is unique and harrowing and this is a riveting, worthwhile read." --Toronto Star "Included in Barbara Hoffert's ALA Buzz Books Roundup Sought-after books included Bernice McFadden's *The Book of Harlan*, about two African American musicians imprisoned at the Buchenwald concentration camp, so eye-opening that people came up hours before and days after the one-time giveaway begging for copies." --Library Journal "I've finally discovered a writer I should've been reading for years!...McFadden has a gift for placing her characters into the vivid history swirling around them, but keeping their emotional experience front and center in the story. There's a Zora Neale Hurston sensibility to the way she does that." --MPR News, Kerri Miller's Must-Read "A moving epic that follows the life of one man, Harlan Elliott, *The Book of Harlan* weaves real-life characters from McFadden's own life into a fictionalized story about the treatment of black people during the Holocaust." --Deep South Magazine "From Macon, Georgia, to Harlem, and from the City of Lights to Weimar, Germany, Bernice L. McFadden's latest novel follows Harlan and his friend Lizard, two black musicians who are captured by the Nazis during WWII and sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. *The Book of Harlan* blends family history and world history, fact and fiction, to revisit a haunting chapter from the past." --Hello Beautiful, #BlackWomenRead: 17 Books by Black Women You Need In Your Life

This Spring The Book of Harlan opens with the courtship of Harlan's parents and his 1917 birth in Macon, Georgia. After his prominent minister grandfather dies, Harlan and his parents move to Harlem, where he eventually becomes a professional musician. When Harlan and his best friend, trumpeter Lizard Robbins, are invited to perform at a popular cabaret in the Parisian enclave of Montmartre--affectionately referred to as "The Harlem of Paris" by black American musicians--Harlan jumps at the opportunity, convincing Lizard to join him. But after the City of Light falls under Nazi occupation, Harlan and Lizard are thrown into Buchenwald--the notorious concentration camp in Weimar, Germany--irreparably changing the course of Harlan's life. Based on exhaustive research and told in McFadden's mesmerizing prose, The Book of Harlan skillfully blends the stories of McFadden's familial ancestors with those of real and imagined characters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bernice L. McFadden weaves fact and fiction with such a delicate stroke of her pen that it's impossible to determine real from imagined; what actually occurred and what did not. Weaving a tale that stretches for decades, Ms. McFadden executes it with such style and skill, you barely feel the years go by. It's actual moments in history that remind you of the length of the story of a man named Harlan, born to parents who loved him, but life made that deep parental love nil. Like finding the perfect honeysuckle in summer, pinching off the tip, and slowly drawing down the stem, *The Book of Harlan* is rich with anticipation and sweet promise. And though you may think you know how perfect that drop of nectar (the book's ending) will be, it comes in a most surprising and unexpected way. You root for Harlan, chide him. Long to pop him upside his head.

You want to shake him, pray for him. Give him a much needed hug. At times you feel his life is a loop of hopelessness and you simply want to grab him by the hand and drag him towards his better day. You yearn for re-connections that never come and swallow the bitter cup that is often his life. But you never stop hoping, never stop wishing, never stop wanting that turn for the better. Why? Because Ms. McFadden created him in such a remarkable way, you have no choice but to care. With clean, purposeful prose, it is easy to settle back and enjoy the ride that is The Book of Harlan, witnessing the sultry summer days of Macon, Georgia, the energetic optimistic times of turn-of-the-Century Harlem and the horrific brutalizing winters of a Nazi death camp. It's all here, told with deftness and skill, leaving you wondering of Harlan's life after the last page has been read and definitely wanting to know more. Bernice L. McFadden proves once again that she is a master storyteller. Bravo Ms. McFadden. Bravo!

I received this ARC in exchange for an honest review. Journey into the extraordinary story of a man who was born December 24, 1917 and lived a vivid life through the dash. During the Roaring 20's, the Great Depression, World War II and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Harlan's life was like that of a rolling stone. This book takes place in sections, beginning with the conception of Harlan, with his young parents Emma Robinson and Sam Elliot. Emma is the daughter of a respected southern preacher and very musically inclined. Sam currently the jack of all trades, runs across Emma and is smitten. Soon after their meeting and dating, they are graced with the manchild, Harlan Elliot. Harlan's early years are spent with his grandparents while the young Sam and Emma set off to make a life in the world. After many, many years of trying to find an appropriate place where their talents fit in and failing, tragedy strikes and the young couple returns briefly to Macon. The summer of 1931, Harlem was the place to be. The family moved there after a visit with Emma's childhood friend, Lucille. Harlem was exciting and very cool. It was jam-packed with humanity and with music. People came in multitudes to listen and to dance to the jazz, blues and swing music. Harlan's parents were right in the midst of this having the famous likes of Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie as recurrent visitors. Harlan grows up with music in his heart and in his blood. The teenage years for Harlan were a trying time. Having a musical mother, who taught piano, Harlan took lessons yet didn't quite have a feel for the piano. After being introduced to the guitar in high school, he finds the thing that strums his heart like the piano does his mother. Harlan's life again takes a heady turn. After a short life on the road, as a guitarist with Lucille. Harlan finds himself back in Harlem contemplating his

next move in life. After one night of drinking his sorrows away, another one of his favorite pastimes, Harlan meets the man who would become his best friend, Leo (Lizard) Robbins. After doing sets with various bands all over Harlem, the duo forms their own band and life is exhilarating. Harlan often throws caution to the wind and lives through - drugs, alcohol, women and fast living. A major turning point in their life hits when their band is asked to go to Paris to play in a club there. The time is the early spring of 1940 and Paris is rebuilding its nightlife. After a few short months though the Nazis invade Paris and start their reign of terror in the City of Light. Neither Harlan nor Lizard got out of France in time and both are incarcerated in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Another turning point in Harlan's life. Harlan survives after 5 long years and arrives back home a broken man. Carrying around the hardships he endured in Buchenwald, Harlan struggles to come back to life. Another turning point. Through *The Book of Harlan*, McFadden tells a story not often heard of during that time. It's often talked about and studied, how the Jews were persecuted during Hitler's reign of terror, yet it very rarely mentions the lives of the others. McFadden sheds an ounce of light here. This book does an excellent duty in guiding you through the life of Harlan, the people he touched and those who touched him. This book was well written, with short chapters and long prose where needed. The character development was astounding and multifaceted. This was only my second book by this author but it most certainly won't be the last. History and music enthusiasts will adore this book.

I have said this before, but it bears repeating. The publishing of any Bernice McFadden book is an event, not simply another book being released. She has done it again with this excellent novel. *The Book of Harlan* can be described as a historical novel, but that description doesn't really do it justice, because it is much more than just historical. She uses very short chapters to great effect, it certainly helps the feel of the book as a fast paced page turner. Bernice's prose as usual is imperial and her storytelling skills remain on a superior level. The novel centers on Harlan and his coming of age, but there are a host of characters here including some actual persons. We follow Harlan from childhood to age of adult maturity and because the story crosses multiple decades it allows Bernice to riff on various historical incidents, including both world wars, Nazi occupation of France and the turbulent 60's. Bernice is at the top of her game with this one, with a heart warming ending that will leave a smile on your face.

This is a classic Bernice McFadden novel, packed with emotion in very few words. It's a trip through history & a history lesson that amazingly still has themes that we have seen in America the last few

years. The way she weaved historical facts throughout this novel made me probe deeper to find out who these people really were and what they really looked like. I finished this book about a month ago and I still think about several parts of the overlapping stories. The ending left me speechless with my mouth gaping open.

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