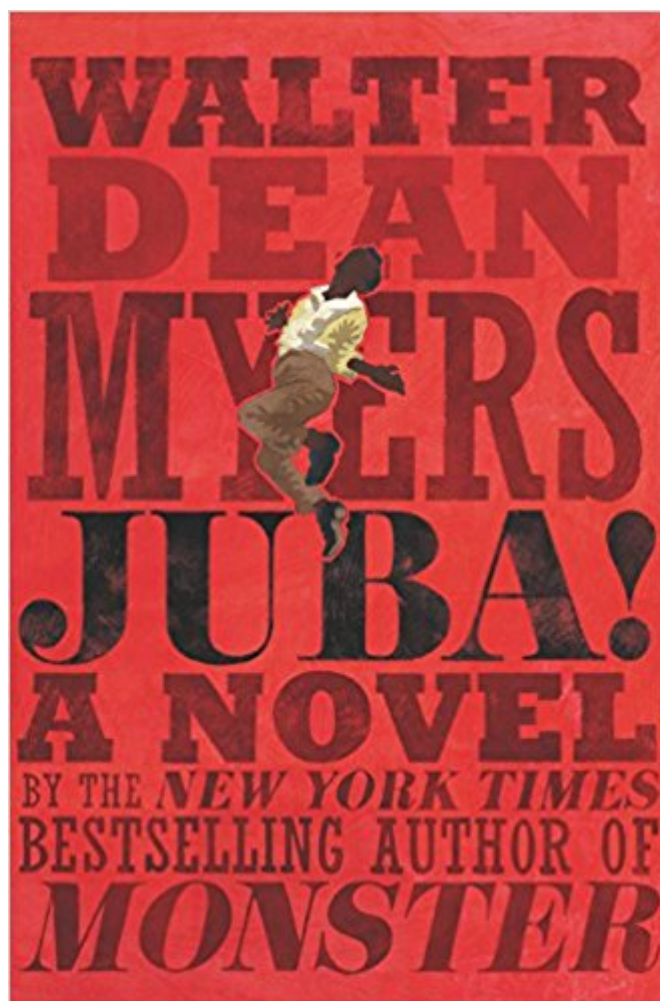


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## Juba!: A Novel



## 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

Publisher: Amistad (October 13, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062112716

ISBN-13: 978-0062112712

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 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,071,555 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #67 in [Books > Teens >](#)

[Historical Fiction > Biographical > United States](#) #71 in [Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction >](#)

[Performing Arts > Dance](#) #73 in [Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > Civil War Period](#)

## Customer Reviews

Gr 6 Up—William Henry Lane, also known as Master Juba, was a famous dancer in America and England in the 1840s. Myers's final novel uses historical sources to piece together a picture of what his life might have been like. Juba grew up a free black man in the Five Points neighborhood of New York City, and his dancing was influenced by the Irish style. He encountered Charles Dickens after an early performance, who subsequently reviewed the dance in his *American Notes*. Historical images are provided throughout. Unfortunately, the author's choice to make this a first-person narrative makes some aspects of the exposition problematic. Young readers may not understand what minstrel shows were, and the context of the narrative is inadequate to convey why Juba would have been adamant about staying away from this form but ultimately began to participate in it. Richer back matter would have enhanced the overall quality of the book. VERDICT

This will have appeal to readers who are interested in the history of dance or the antebellum period of American history. — Kristin Anderson, Columbus Metropolitan Library System, OH

— “Myers’s moving prose captures the dizzying speed with which the immensely talented Juba’s star eventually rises. Poignant, revealing period fiction about race and art in pre-Civil War America.” (Kirkus Reviews) — “An intriguing glimpse into America’s past.” (Booklist) — “[A] rich story.” (Publishers Weekly)

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?” “And in what walk of life, or dance of life, does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound!” Walter Dean Myers, in his last book before his death, told the story of William Henry Lane (*Juba*’s real name) using just a few resources: Dickens’ writings, a smattering of newspaper articles and images, and *Juba*’s death certificate. Here are a few of my favorite quotes. Initially *Juba* seeks dance instruction from an Irish teacher named Margaret. (This particular passage reminded me of a comment my current dance partner--my husband’s 85-year-old uncle--made. “When you see old people dancing, they’re imagining themselves as teenagers.”) “If

you weren't so thickheaded, you'd know they [the audience] were watching you because they want to enjoy themselves, not marvel at you. You ever go to an Irish dance and see the young people swinging themselves around and kicking up their heels and the old people watching them? The old people are thinking back on a time when they were young and they could do the same thing the young people are doing. But you have to give them something they can do, if only on the floor between their ears, if you get my drift." (p. 44)The reader hears Juba's despondency and realism in the following line. He has just auditioned as a dancer and thinks he won't get the job."My dancing didn't mean a thing. The only thing they see in a black man is a clown or a slave. "(p. 55)Juba finally gets a few gigs as a dancer but when Mr. Charles Dickens comes to New York and watches him, he dances as he never has before. This quote begins with Mr. Dickens speaking."...There's a freedom about the way you move that makes me wish I could dance. Have you ever had a difficult time in your life?" "At times, everything seems hard," I said. "I'm not sure what tomorrow is going to be like. I'm just hoping it's something good." "I imagined--and I know I'm talking too much--that you must have had some difficult times along the way. I think that's the mystery of greatness and of people who achieve wonderful things," Mr. Dickens said. "That somewhere in their lives they have felt the cold winds of despair, but have kept their hearts warm themselves." (p. 104)In order to make a small living Juba is forced to make compromises.Jack [his "fair minded" white landlord] knew how black people were treated in New York. We were second-class people every day and third-class performers when we tried to exercise our talents outside of the black community. What he did was to needle me so I wouldn't give up all together, and in a way, I appreciated it. In a way, I didn't, though, because sometimes he made me feel that when I accepted a job with a minstrel band or put on blackface I was betraying my people. To me, putting on blackface was the strangest thing in the world. I was born black, and yet the promoters wanted me to dress up like some kind of strange image of a black person that really wasn't a true Negro. It was as if a lot of white people had a place in their heads for black people and you had to fit in that place in a certain manner or they didn't want you. They wanted black performers to talk bad, say stupid things, and be like pets. Jack said a lot of white people were afraid of real black people. (pp. 123-4)Even after Juba was well received by Londoners who had read accounts of him by Charles Dickens, he still encounters this same prejudice from fellow performers.Huff [another performer] walked across the room and put his nose an inch from Gil's. "What I see with my own two eyes is that I'm not going to make no kind of steady living working for a [Negro]. And that's what I'm doing over here, working behind Boz's Juba or whatever it is he's calling himself. In America you make a living working with white men, and for white men. And I aim to go back to America, back to Mableton, Georgia and make a living. And if I

want any coloreds around me, I'll buy a few!" (p. 157)Walter Dean Myers did an excellent job of bringing this forgotten, yet important, performer to life. Juba's life was full of sorrow, yet it also held love and accomplishment. I hope whoever wins my gently read ARC, will pass it along to a young person who can be encouraged by an inspirational story of a man who, despite many obstacles, followed his dreams.

very good . This product is sleek, light, and extremely sharp! For what I paid, I thought this was going to be a Walt-Mart knock off quality bread product, but this thing has sliced through every bread I've thrown at it like butter! The handle is also really well designed and easy to get a good grip on, so getting nice, even, straight slices is really easy. it's no delayed. good . my neighbor love it,

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