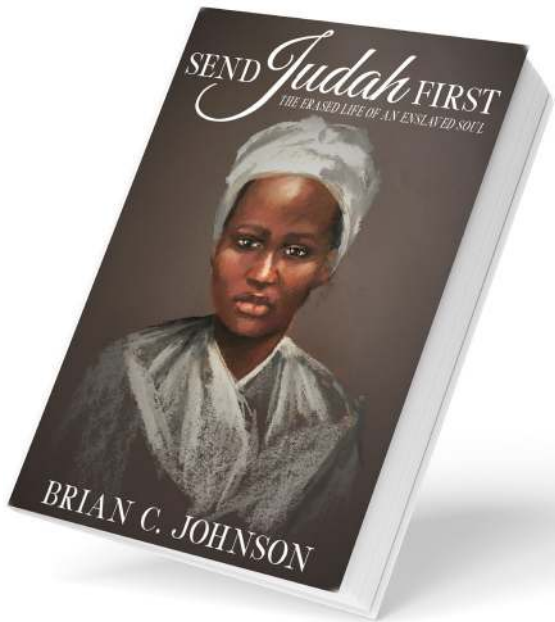


SEND *Judah* FIRST

The erased life of an enslaved soul

BY BRIAN C. JOHNSON



Through Judah, Brian C. Johnson honors the millions of nameless and faceless souls forced into slavery, who would be otherwise forgotten.

A young girl's life is shattered when she is stolen from her African village in a midnight raid. Ruthlessly torn from her family to be beaten, chained, degraded, and enslaved in a heartless world she can barely comprehend.

The slave ledger at Virginia's Belle Grove Plantation only reveals that Judah was purchased to be the cook, gave birth to 12 children, and died in April 1836. But, like the other 276 faceless names entered in that ledger, Judah lived. Brian C. Johnson's important work of historical fiction goes beyond what is recorded to portray the depth, humanity, and vulnerability of a beautiful soul all but erased by history.

For Judah, as Johnson notes, "did the ultimate—she survived. Not as a weakling, but resilient and determined."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian C. Johnson honors the struggles and accomplishments of the ordinary citizens who launched the Civil Rights Movement by committing himself personally and professionally to the advancement of multicultural and inclusive education.

He has served as a faculty member in the department of academic enrichment at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and was the director of the Frederick Douglass Institute for Academic Excellence. He is a founder of the Pennsylvania Association of Liaisons and Officers of Multicultural Affairs, a consortium that promotes best practices in higher education. He earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in English from California University of Pennsylvania and a PhD at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Communications Media and Instructional Technology. His research examines the role of mainstream film in the development of social dominance orientation.



Johnson serves on the ministry team at Revival Tabernacle in Watsonstown, PA where he is a church elder, youth minister, and leads the Kingdom Writers' guild. He is a film reviewer for Christian Spotlight on Entertainment. He and his wife, Darlene, have four children—Kasey, Thomas, Aubyn, and Analisa.

OTHER BOOKS BY BRIAN C. JOHNSON



The Room Downstairs
Brian C. Johnson



Reel Diversity: A Teacher's Sourcebook
Brian C. Johnson



We've Seen it All Before: Using Film Clips in Diversity Awareness Training
Brian C. Johnson

REVIEWS

Compelling, haunting, horrific and beautiful

"Compelling, haunting, horrific and beautiful. In *Send Judah First*, Brian C. Johnson has crafted a novel that brings vividly to life enslaved people – Judah, Aunt Sally, Truelove, Anthony... – that so many have tried to erase from American history. A heart-wrenching and essential story."

Thomas Norman DeWolf, author of *Inheriting the Trade*, and co-author of *Gather at the Table* and *The Little Book of Racial Healing*

A wonderful piece of historical fiction

"*Send Judah First* is a wonderful piece of historical fiction. Drawing on a small number of surviving historical records, Brian C. Johnson paints a beautiful portrait of a woman in slavery in nineteenth-century Virginia and provides great insight into their life and work. Johnson boldly exposes some of the very worst aspects of human bondage – sexual abuse, physical punishment, and the mental anguish of reconciling the Christianity of the southern masters with their own treatment as slaves."

Jennifer Oast, associate professor of history, Bloomsburg University, author of *Institutional Slavery: Slaveholding Churches, Schools, Colleges, and Businesses in Virginia, 1680-1860*

Brings Judah to life in a magical and powerful way

"As Belle Grove researches the lives on the men, women, and children who were enslaved here, the story of Judah seized our hearts. We are so pleased that it has inspired the heart, imagination, and talents of Brian C. Johnson too. Although we still have many questions about the lives of Judah and her children that we hope to answer, this story brings her to life in a magical and powerful way."

Kristen Laise, Executive Director at Belle Grove Plantation

EXCERPT

"I don't think it's a mistake that Belle Grove sits right on Cedar Creek. I think it's a sign from God.

I'm making disciples out of y'all today. Sukey, let's start with you first."

Stunned by his call, Sukey was hesitant to answer and hid behind the person next to her. She shook her head and bit her lip.

"What do you mean 'no'? Here is water, Sukey. 'What . . . doth . . . hinder?'"

She could tell by his tone she should get down in that water.

Immediately, as if on cue, several slaves on the banks started singing.

"Take me to de water;

Take me to de water.

Take me to de water to be baptized."

Master Hite rolled up his pantlegs above his knees and took his shoes off. The whiteness of his lower leg stood out against the darkness of his Sunday clothes. He slowly walked down into the deep creek and extended his arm to Sukey to help her down. She put a toe into the rush of water and quickly pulled back.

"Ssss . . . dat's cole!"

The onlookers started chuckling, including Master Hite. Sukey tried again, even slower. Was her reticence the water's temperature or uncertainty of this baptism thing?

"Sukey, do you believe in Jesus?"

"Yes, Mastah, suh." That was the only answer she could think of in the moment, but it seemed to make Master Hite happy.

Hite put his hand on Sukey's face, covering her nose and mouth.

"Well, then, upon confession of your faith and belief in the Lord Jesus, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

With his right hand on her face and his left hand around the small of her back, Master Hite bent her backwards and cold water rushed over her. When he stood her back up, Reverend Hite declared, "Sukey, you are now a citizen of heaven. Your soul belongs to God."

His grip tightened to a pinch on the fat on the back of her arm and he bent down to whisper in her ear.

"But everything else belongs to me."

If she had any positive feelings about this baptism ceremony, they were all wiped away in that second. She spit the water dripping away from her hair.

"There's a new name written down in glory," Reverend Hite proudly announced. "Praise the Lord! And let all who stand here today bear witness to that new name."

Reverend Hite looked up from the creek at his wife. Miss Ann scrunched her face and pointed at Sukey with her lips, like she was trying to get him to do something, like they had a secret. Isaac nodded and turned toward his young servant.

"You will no longer be known as Sukey. God has written down a new name in his Lamb's Book of Life. Henceforth, now and forevermore, we will call you Judah. Sukey has been buried in this baptism and Judah has been raised to new life!"

Praise de Lawd! I's Yuda agin!

Her hair wasn't even dry yet, but when Master Hite said his final "Amen," Yuda ran to the house.

Lawd Jesus, I gots to skedaddle. Please doan let dis man's food be burned up!

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local author releases book about Belle Grove Plantation enslaved cook

Send Judah First by Brian C. Johnson

Middletown, VIRGINIA, July 1, 2019 – *Send Judah First*, to be officially released on August 1, 2019, honors and illuminates the life of Judah, Belle Grove Plantation's lead cook from 1816 to 1836.

This powerful work of historical fiction brings to life many real people who were enslaved at Belle Grove Plantation in the early 1800s. Other than a few historical records, most of these names have otherwise been erased from history.

On August 3, 2019 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Belle Grove Plantation is hosting an event titled HONORING SOUL FOOD'S SHENANDOAH VALLEY HISTORY AND CHEFS. Author Brian C. Johnson will share a reading from *Send Judah First* and will be available for author questions, book signings, and more.

Send Judah First is published by Hidden Shelf Publishing House, an independent publishing company, and will be sold at Belle Grove Plantation, www.hiddenshelfpublishinghouse.com, and on Amazon.

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AUTHOR Q & A WITH BRIAN C. JOHNSON

How does *Send Judah First* differ from other books you have written?

I had never imagined writing historical fiction. Most of my writing and research, though, has centered around mitigating/overcoming the “tensions” of difference.

What was it about the historical figure, Judah, that captivated you?

In the opening pages of the story, you’ll read how I became acquainted with Judah. I live my life for significance. I want to be remembered—my life to matter to someone (other than my wife and children). I want to make an impact. It pains me to think there are so many millions of people who will go unnamed, unremembered, glossed over simply because someone decided to slap the label SLAVE on them.

What picture do you paint of Belle Grove Plantation in the early 1800s?

Simply put, Belle Grove was a farm. The Hites were “fortunate” enough (by 1800s standards) to own workers for that farm. The sad part of this history is that we don’t know much of how things operated daily at Belle Grove. I tried to create a storyline that imagined what could have been—a married couple raising children and creating a family. Similarly, I wanted people to see that same humanity in Judah, Anthony, and their children.

What challenges did you face it writing *Send Judah First*?

The first things were internal struggles. As an avid reader of narratives of the enslaved, I was intimidated by Alex Haley’s *Roots*. That book turned TV miniseries stands at the pinnacle of slave narrative literature and media. I wrestled with not wanting to compete with Haley. Similarly, *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup has captured contemporary thought about plantation life. Northup and Haley intimidated me so and as a neophyte writing historical fiction, I wondered if I had the mustard to be able to tell the story.

Externally, there has been a lot of discussion in the modern press and on Twitter about how audiences are tired of seeing “black people in pain” [poverty, slavery, drug addiction and crime]. Thinking of this, then, in telling a slave narrative, what could I offer that’s new? This is why I introduce a love story of sorts. Judah was forced to marry Anthony, perhaps for capitalistic reasons on the part of Master Hite, but, in time, she grows to love him and wanted to create a life with him (despite the circumstances). That is a side we never get to see.

There was yet one more challenge I want to acknowledge—that being Judah herself. This is going to sound weird, but I know writers will get this. In the process of writing this book, I became so close to these characters. I believe Judah spoke to me, willing me to tell her story. There were many nights where I could hear her telling me to get up and write as she downloaded her stories to me. My wife can tell you that there were occasions I awoke to tell Judah to “shut up so I can sleep.” On the days when I took breaks, I felt like I was letting her down.

(continued on next page)



AUTHOR QUESTION & ANSWER (CONTINUED)

What do you hope readers take away from Send Judah First?

During my first visit to Belle Grove, I learned that “slave” was not an identity; it was a title. Judah (and countless others) were ENSLAVED—a condition forced upon them. I hope readers can learn to affirm the dignity and humanity of these purchased/kidnapped souls and to welcome them back from obscurity.

How can readers honor the lives of enslaved people who seem to be erased from history?

The enslaved were people too. We live in an era where tracing our genealogy and family ancestry are popular. Genealogy is more than DNA percentages, names and dates. It's the stories, the medical histories, the traditions that can come alive—these are the things that make us who we are. When I started tracing my family ancestry, my mother told me to “let sleeping dogs lie” as she didn't necessarily want me to unearth sordid details. I explained, those details are our truth and we should not hide from nor run from the facts. My hope for readers is that this hidden side of American history has fruit for our benefit today.

What is your personal favorite recipe from the back of the book?

I am a BIG fan of the glazed apples. Just earlier this week, I made a similar dish using fresh peaches. My sweet potato pie has earned recognition at our church's annual pie baking contest, so I'd say that one is a favorite also.

ABOUT HIDDEN SHELF PUBLISHING HOUSE

HIDDEN SHELF PUBLISHING HOUSE

We are an independent publishing house delivering wonderful and creative works to an audience of passionate readers.

Several years ago, when Hidden Shelf founder Bob Gaines was fortunate to be signed by a literary agent, he told her about his novel, *The Brave Historian*. While she loved the concept, she only handled nonfiction.

"With fiction," she said, "the big publishing houses don't want to take a chance on unknowns. Of course, when somebody does manage to publish something different that finds success, all the other publishers then want to copy it."

Literary agents and editors were becoming extremely frustrated that the fate of great literature was now being decided in corporate board rooms based on accounting projections. "They will print Lady Gaga's autobiography," she added, "but snub the next Ernest Hemingway."

Based in a beautiful mountain town in Idaho, Hidden Shelf was founded in 2017 with the goal of providing wonderful and creative works to an audience of passionate readers.

Learn more at www.hiddenshefpublishinghouse.com

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