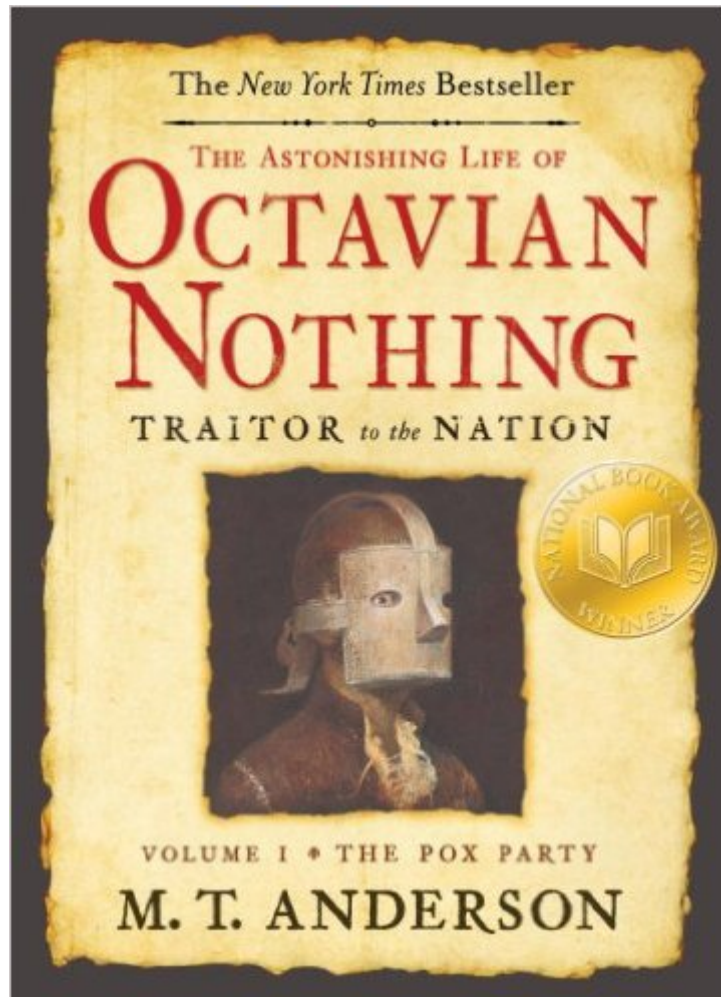


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The Astonishing Life Of Octavian Nothing, Traitor To The Nation, Volume I: The Pox Party



Synopsis

Now in paperback, this deeply provocative novel reimagines the past as an eerie place that has startling resonance for readers today. Young Octavian is being raised by a group of rational philosophers known only by numbers -- but it is only after he opens a forbidden door that learns the hideous nature of their experiments, and his own chilling role in them. Set in Revolutionary Boston, M. T. Anderson's mesmerizing novel takes place at a time when Patriots battled to win liberty while African slaves were entreated to risk their lives for a freedom they would never claim. The first of two parts, this deeply provocative novel reimagines past as an eerie place that has startling resonance for readers today. "Anderson's imaginative and highly intelligent exploration of . . . the ambiguous history of America's origins will leave readers impatient for the sequel." -- THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"I do not believe they ever meant unkindness." So Octavian says of those to whom he was an experiment, to those who claimed him as chattel, to those who weighed his excrement daily and compared it to his intake. It is perhaps this book's most frightening truth that he is correct. Octavian and his mother were sold into slavery in the 1760s, in Boston, to The Novanglian College of Lucidity. These men were rationalists, and sought to discover - once all of the niceties are removed - whether the Negro was inferior to the European. Octavian was taught "the arts and knowledge of

the physical world...the strictest instruction in ethics...kindness, filial duty, piety, obedience, and humility," Latin, Greek, the violin, and while learning these things, he was dressed in silk and lavished with luxuries. Yet we see the detached scientist immediately in his caretakers, as Octavian describes an experiment whereby they drowned a dog to time its drowning, and another where they dropped alley-cats from high places to "judge the height from which cats no longer shatter," and yet another where they tried to teach a girl "deprived of reason and speech" the usage of verbs, and when the girl could not master verbs, they beat her "to the point of gagging and swooning." And yet they never meant unkindness. While this is a book of fiction, it is useful to remember (as the author calls us to at the end) that while the College of Lucidity is a fictional entity, the kind of experiments they conducted indeed took place, and the question of inferiority was one that was much discussed. Octavian, with his mother, Mr. Gitney, and Dr. Trefusis, excelled. He became literate beyond their hopes, and could play the violin as a virtuoso.

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