



WELCOME TO BRAGGSVILLE

**T. GERONIMO
JOHNSON**

**“Chastly and funny and gloriously
provocative. This book will wake you up!”**

**—KAREN RUSSELL, *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Swamplandia!***

A NOVEL

More Outstanding Early Praise for
WELCOME TO BRAGGSVILLE

“*Welcome to Braggsville* is that rare book so highly charged with both comedy and tragedy, and so nimble in its storytelling, that it seems to understand the world of its characters down to the smallest particle. This is one of the most invigorating and least predictable novels of the year.”

—Kevin Brockmeier, award-winning
author of *The Brief History of the Dead*

“In exuberant prose, Johnson takes aim at a host of issues, gleefully satirizing political opportunists, social media, and cultural mores . . . a provocative exploration of contemporary America that is likely to be a hit with adventurous readers.”

—*Booklist*

“DeLillo-esque for its orgiastic pop-culture roiling, *Welcome to Braggsville* deconstructs race, class, and gender, leaving the human heart wholly intact. This is a virtuoso performance by one of our strongest new voices.”

—Richard Katrovas, award-winning
poet and author of *Scorpio Rising*

“Geronimo Johnson’s powerful second novel 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*

“In Geronimo Johnson’s brilliant, wildly satirical, and also deeply sobering book, we move between Berkeley, California, and Braggsville, Georgia, looking to decode no less than the deepest secrets of how race is lived in America. The story looms larger than life. At every turn, the impassive Johnson shows us are our own.”

—Tess Taylor, award-winning poet and author of *The Forage House*

“Inventive, provocative, troubling, hilarious: It’s hard to sum up *Welcome to Braggsville* in any other way but to add the word ‘wildly’ in front of each of these words.”

—Robin Hemley, author of *Do-Over!*

“A riotous tour de force.”

—Andrew Lam, award-winning author of *Birds of Paradise Lost*

“A stylish satire about the worst that can happen when four idealistic friends try to bring Berkeley activism back to Braggsville—a time warp of a small Southern town. A painful, funny novel.”

—Bennett Sims, author of *A Questionable Shape*

“The evidence you need that a reexamination of the past can be a prescient warning for all our future days is magnificently in your hands.”

—CAConrad, poet and author of *ECODEVIANCE*

**WELCOME
TO
BRAGGSVILLE**

Also by T. Geronimo Johnson

Hold It 'Til It Hurts

WELCOME TO BRAGGSVILLE

T. GERONIMO JOHNSON

wm

WILLIAM MORROW

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*For all the Louis Changs,
from my parents*

Meet the New World, same as the Old World.

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To be likened? The moon'll tell. Might not a listen, might not a like it, but it'll tell if you can. Give yourself in a jar. Cleave a tomato. Pick the seeds clean. With your mouth, now. Leave it sit for three days behind that rank of elfinwood yon. A palm of milk and enough honey to feel right and rub it back up in there real good. Sleep on your left side. The moon'll tell you, in sooth, but you might not like it, even if you be likened. You can bathe at the river, can't you? But dam it? Tell me, now, what good be a pond with no fish? You seen Bragg. Recollect.

—Nanny Tag

D'aron the Daring, Derring, Derring-do, stealing base, christened D'aron Little May Davenport, DD to Nana, initials smothered in Southern-fried kisses, dat Wigga D who like Jay Z aw-ite, who's down, Scots-Irish it is, D'aron because you're brave says Dad, No, D'aron because your daddy's daddy was David and then there was mines who was named Aaron, Doo-doo after cousin Quint blew thirty-six months in vo-tech on a straight-arm bid and they cruised out to Little Gorge glugging Green Grenades and read three years' worth of birthday cards, Little Mays when he hit those three homers in the Pee Wee playoff, Dookie according to his aunt Boo (spiteful she was, misery indeed loves company), Mr. Hanky when they discovered he TIVOed *Battlestar Galactica*, Faggot when he hugged John Meer in third grade, Faggot again when he drew hearts on everyone's Valentine's Day cards in fourth grade, Dim Ding-Dong when he undressed in the wrong dressing room because he daren't venture into the dark end of the gym, Philadelphia Freedom when he was caught clicking heels to that song (Tony thought he was clever with that one), Mr. Davenport when he won the school's debate contest in eighth grade, Faggot again when he won the school's debate contest in eighth grade, Faggot again more times than he cared to remember, especially the summer he returned from

Chicago sporting a new Midwest accent, harder on the vowels and consonants alike, but sociable, played well with others that accent did, Faggot again when he cried at the end of *WALL-E*, Donut Hole when he started to swell in ninth grade, Donut Black Hole when he continued to put on weight in tenth grade (Tony thought he was really clever with that one), Buttercup when they caught him gardening, Hippie when he stopped hunting, Faggot again when he became a vegetarian and started wearing a MEAT IS MURDER pin (Oh yeah, why you craving mine then?), Faggot again when he broke down in class over being called Faggot, Sissy after that, whispered, smothered in sniggers almost hidden, Ron-Ron by the high school debate team coach because he danced like a cross between Morrissey and some fat old black guy (WTF?) in some old-ass show called *What's Happening!!*, Brainiac when he aced the PSATs for his region, Turd Nerd when he hung with Jo-Jo and the Black Bruiser, D'ron Da'ron, D'aron, sweet simple Daron the first few minutes of the first class of the first day of college. Am I pronouncing that correctly? Yes, ma'am, Daron it is. What about this apostrophe, this light-headed comma? Feel free to correct me. Oh no, ma'am. Ignore that. It's all one word, ma'am. No need to call me ma'am. Yes, ma'am.

AS WAS EXPECTED OF VALEDICTORIANS, he had spoken of choices, though not his personal choices. His desk *was* stuffed tighter than a turducken with acceptance letters, but to list those would have been smug and boastful when most classmates were going to State or to stay. He instead pontificated on abstract opportunities to be grabbed, snatched out of the air like so many feathers, of the choices life extended to those who dared dream, of new worlds awaiting, of hopes to be fulfilled and expectations met, of how they would go forth and put B-ville, GA, squarely on the map. Never mind that it was ninety-two degrees, never mind that they could drink the

air, never mind that, as Nana used to say, it was so greatly humid a cat wouldn't stretch its neck to lick its own juniors, he carried on about wishing over dandelions, and their delicate floating spores, and how they multiplied, superstitions taking seed even without belief—where he had heard that he couldn't recall—and explained that our eyes move when we dream, and, lastly, with a smile, advised the audience to, Always use sunscreen. His parting blow: an open invitation to visit him at *My future alma mater*, until then unknown to his father. Teachers applauded vigorously; peers clapped listlessly, more with relief than appreciation, but they didn't understand, and that was why he was glad to be leaving. He stepped from the podium a free man, at long last deaf to their tongues, and later thanked with aplomb the classmate who sidled up to the smoking steel drum and congratulated him on his engagement.

Welcome to Braggsville

By T. Geronimo Johnson

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