



The Watsons Go to Birmingham--1963

By Christopher Paul Curtis

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The Newbery and Coretta Scott King Honoree about the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan—from Christopher Paul Curtis, author of *Bud, Not Buddy*, a Newbery Medal and Coretta Scott Award Winner.

Enter the hilarious world of ten-year-old Kenny and his family, the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan. There's Momma, Dad, little sister Joetta, and brother Byron, who's thirteen and an "official juvenile delinquent."

When Byron gets to be too much trouble, they head South to Birmingham to visit Grandma, the one person who can shape him up. And they happen to be in Birmingham when Grandma's church is blown up.

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NAMED TO MULTIPLE STATE AWARD LISTS

"Every so often a book becomes a modern classic almost as soon as it arrives on bookshelves. That happened in the mid-'90s when Christopher Paul Curtis released his first book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham — 1963*." —NPR

From the Hardcover edition.

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- Rank: #44748 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-08-06
- Released on: 2013-08-06
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The year is 1963, and self-important Byron Watson is the bane of his younger brother Kenny's existence. Constantly in trouble for one thing or another, from straightening his hair into a "conk" to lighting fires to freezing his lips to the mirror of the new family car, Byron finally pushes his family too far. Before this "official juvenile delinquent" can cut school or steal change one more time, Momma and Dad finally make good on their threat to send him to the deep south to spend the summer with his tiny, strict grandmother. Soon the whole family is packed up, ready to make the drive from Flint, Michigan, straight into one of the most chilling moments in America's history: the burning of the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church with four little girls inside.

Christopher Paul Curtis's alternately hilarious and deeply moving novel, winner of the Newbery Honor and the Coretta Scott King Honor, blends the fictional account of an African American family with the factual events of the violent summer of 1963. Fourth grader Kenny is an innocent and sincere narrator; his ingenuousness lends authenticity to the story and invites readers of all ages into his world, even as it changes before his eyes. Curtis is also the acclaimed author of *Bud, Not Buddy*, winner of the Newbery Medal. (Ages 9 to 12) --*Emilie Coulter*

From School Library Journal

Grade 6 Up?Kenny's family is known in Flint, Michigan, as the Weird Watsons, for lots of good reasons. Younger sister Joetta has been led to believe she has to be overdressed in the winter because Southern folks (their mother is from Alabama) freeze solid and have to be picked up by the city garbage trucks. Kenny, the narrator, does well in school and tries to meet his hard-working parents' expectations. After a string of misdeeds, Mr. and Mrs. Watson decide that tough guy, older brother Byron must be removed from the bad influences of the city and his gang. They feel that his maternal grandmother and a different way of life in Birmingham might make him appreciate what he has. Since the story is set in 1963, the family must make careful preparations for their trip, for they cannot count on food or housing being available on the road once they cross into the South. The slow, sultry pace of life has a beneficial effect on all of the children until the fateful day when a local church is bombed, and Kenny runs to look for his sister. Written in a full-throated, hearty voice, this is a perfectly described piece of past imperfect. Curtis's ability to switch from fun and funky to pinpoint-accurate psychological imagery works unusually well. Although the horrific Birmingham Sunday throws Kenny into temporary withdrawal, this story is really about the strength of family love and endurance. Ribald humor, sly sibling digs, and a totally believable child's view of the world will make this book an instant hit.?Cindy Darling Codell, Clark Middle School, Winchester, KY
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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 4⁺-8. In a voice that's both smart and naive, strong and scared, fourth-grader Kenny Watson tells about his African American family in Flint, Michigan, in 1963. We get to know his strict, loving parents and his tough older brother, who gets into so much trouble his parents decide to take him back "home" to Birmingham, Alabama, where maybe his strong grandmother will teach him some sense. Several of the family stories are a bit self-conscious (we keep being told we're going to laugh as Dad puts on a show and acts the fool), but the relationships aren't idealized. Racism and the civil rights movement are like a soft rumble in the background, especially as the Watsons drive south. Then Kenny's cute little sister is in a Birmingham church when a bomb goes off. She escapes (Curtis doesn't exploit the horror), but we're with Kenny as he dreads that she's part of the rubble. In this compelling first novel, form and content are one: in

the last few chapters, the affectionate situation comedy is suddenly transformed, and we see how racist terror can invade the shelter of home. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bobby Bagwell:

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Carmelita Ratliff:

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Hazel Gannon:

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