

ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN SOUTHERN HISTORICAL FICTION

A Long Way from Home (1999)

Connie Briscoe

This three generation family saga of African-American life before, during, and after the Civil War, is based on the author's family history, and begins in the household of former president James Monroe at Montpelier, Virginia. Susie is a woman of some status among the slaves of the Madisons' Montpelier, Virginia plantation. She is Miss Dolley's maid, and she and her daughter Clara enjoy certain privileges. Clara grows up longing for freedom, but Susie urges her to be content with what she has instead of dreaming about what can never be. Life becomes harder when Madison dies, Dolley leaves Montpelier, and the plantation is taken over by her drunken son, Todd. Soon Clara bears two light-skinned daughters, Ellen and Susan (named for her grandmother). Her worst fear comes to pass: the family is separated when her daughter Susan is sold. Susan (a character based on the author's great-great grandmother) has been sold to a rich banker in Richmond, and she falls in love with and marries a freed slave, Oliver Armistead, when the Civil War begins. They are separated, and Susan's only hope is for a Northern victory.

Beulah Land (1973)

Lonnie Coleman

In this first volume of the author's trilogy, the Kendrick family is introduced. They are Georgia plantation owners with 150 slaves. Their intertwined lives characterize Southern plantation life in the Antebellum period.

Family (1991)

J. California Cooper

Clora, "dead-but-not-gone," narrates the tale of her life being born into slavery of African American parents. Her mother killed her slave owner and then committed suicide when Clora was twelve. Clora was taken by the slave owner's son with whom she had six children. Eventually committing suicide herself, Clora continues to tell the story of what happens in the lives of her four surviving children and in the lives of her grandchildren. With events spanning years before and after the Civil War, Clora weaves a tale showing the interconnectedness of the human family beyond racial distinctions.

Walk through Darkness (2002)

David Anthony Durham

Set before the Civil War, Durham's powerful story of slavery follows the efforts of fugitive slave William to be reunited with his pregnant wife, Dover, in Pennsylvania after fleeing from tidewater Maryland. To reach his destination, William swims the Chesapeake, is betrayed, recaptured, escapes for a second time, and endures a near execution. He is pursued by the Scottish immigrant, Andrew Morrison, who is on his own redemptive quest.

Days of the Dead (2003)

Barbara Hambly

Benjamin January and his new bride, Rose, travel from New Orleans to Mexico City in 1835 in this installment of Hambly's popular and accomplished period mystery series. They come to the aid of fellow musician Hannibal Sefton who has been accused of murdering the only son of a prominent landowner. The search for the truth leads the couple into the heart of Mexico's haunted past and dangerous present.

Die upon a Kiss (2001)

Barbara Hambly

It is Carnival, 1835, in ante-bellum New Orleans in this installment of Hambly's historical mystery series featuring former slave, Paris-educated surgeon, working musician, and sleuth Benjamin January. Opera impresario Lorenzo Belaggio has been invited to mount a production of *Othello*, and its interracial love story could be the reason behind a series of attacks on Belaggio's troupe. Suspicion, however, falls on a rival theatrical producer, January's friend John Davis, and January investigates in order to clear him. His search uncovers a large international conspiracy involving the slave trade.

Graveyard Dust (1999)

Barbara Hambly

In the third outing for Hambly's period sleuth, Benjamin January is a freed black in slave-owning antebellum New Orleans. The former surgeon and present piano man comes to the aid of his sister, Olympe, who is charged with supplying the poison that took the life of a newly-married woman's husband. As a black woman and a voodoo practitioner, although of the benign kind, Olympe is unlikely to get a fair trial in the racially-prejudiced city, and January takes up the investigation, even though he knows his own life is in danger when he finds graveyard dust in his bed, a sure sign that someone wants the secrets he is uncovering to stay buried.

Sold Down the River (2000)

Barbara Hambly

In the fourth Benjamin January mystery, the former slave reluctantly agrees to go undercover to investigate murder and mayhem at the plantation of his former owner, Simon Fourchet. January takes up the investigation to prevent unjust violent reprisals against the present slave population of the Mon Triomphe plantation. Disguised as a field hand, January must determine what is behind a sabotaged sugar-cane harvest, a wrecked mill, and a poisoned butler. Voodoo messages further complicate matters, as does a land dispute between Fourchet and his neighbor. Is this an incipient slave rebellion or something more personal? Hambly provides an authentic and graphic look at slave life in the antebellum South in this vivid and compelling period mystery. (Pamlico Branch)

Wet Grave (2002)

Barbara Hambly

Benjamin January is a former slave who was freed by his mother's benefactor and educated in Paris, where he studied music and medicine, becoming a surgeon and a pianist. A widower, he's fallen in love with Rose Vitac, a woman with a troubled past about which he knows very little and which renders her unable to return his love. Despite his accomplishments, he is still black and therefore still at the bottom of New Orleans' complex social order. When a prostitute is murdered, January is the only one who seems to care, and then when another murder occurs, much closer to January, he undertakes a methodical investigation that takes him downriver into the bayous and an island on Barataria Bay, off the Gulf of Mexico.

The Known World (2003)

Edward P. Jones

When Henry Townsend dies at age 31 in July, 1855, he leaves behind a house, 33 slaves, 50 acres of land--and a wife who has trouble handling this legacy. Caldonia Townsend, like her husband, is black, but, unlike him, harbors a few doubts about the practice of slaveholding. Henry had successfully adopted the attitudes of a white master, albeit an "enlightened" one, with advice from his former owner, William Robbins. Robbins regarded the talented young man as a protege and Townsend's plantation as socially convenient for his own mulatto children by a black mistress. But Caldonia's doubts, compounded by her grief over Henry's death, lead her family, friends, and neighbors in Manchester County, Virginia, to fear that she will lose control of the plantation. The Townsends' black overseer Moses tries to fill this power vacuum by taking advantage of Caldonia's emotional vulnerability and arranges his own family's escape so that he can marry Henry's widow if she frees him. This escape and others in the vicinity result in "patrollers" chasing runaways and bounty hunters running amok. With the county's landowners on edge and social conventions breaking down, the "known world" in Manchester County begins to disappear. To show this pre-Civil War

world in all its social complexity, the author uses many believable characters--from slaves and slaveholders to law enforcement personnel, a black mistress, a mixed-race teacher, and latter-day researchers--whose arresting individual stories move back and forth in time and nearly overshadow the plot until the end of the book.

Property (2003)

Valerie Martin

Manon Gaudet, who narrates this historical novel, rues the day she left New Orleans to marry the owner of a struggling sugar plantation. According to social customs in 1820s Louisiana, Manon's husband through this arranged marriage has full rights to her money, her body, and her slave, Sarah. He forces himself upon both women, fathering two illegitimate children by Sarah. Though the plantation mistress depends on her slave's housekeeping and hairdressing abilities, she comes to resent the woman almost as much as she hates her husband (and fantasizes about a relationship with neighboring plantation owner Joel Borden). Summer of 1828 brings epidemics in New Orleans and slave revolts in the countryside, along with worsening relations between Manon and Sarah. After fugitive slaves attack the plantation, giving Sarah a chance at freedom, Manon seeks to have her "property" returned. Author Valerie Martin uses Manon's inability to see the parallels between her slave's life and her own unhappy existence to examine the effects of slaveholding on Southern society.

The Love Charm (1996)

Pamela Morsi

When young Aida Gaudet impulsively, almost accidentally, gives Armand Sonnier a love charm, neither has any idea that it will affect their lives far in the future. But it does, and despite their apparent incompatibility (she's forgetful, flighty, and incredibly beautiful; he's short, plain, and highly intelligent), they end up just where they ought to be--together and in love. Humor and warmth are Morsi's trademarks and the well-done Cajun historical details add to this engrossing love story. (Carteret Branch)

The Wind Done Gone (2001)

Alice Randall

Randall's imaginative, controversial repossession of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* looks at the events at Tara before, during, and after the Civil War from the perspective of Scarlett's half-sister, Cynara, the child of Captain O'Hara and Mammy, Scarlett's nurse. Cynara resentfully records the different treatment she receives compared to Other, her name for Scarlett. Eventually Cynara is sold, and she ends up in a brothel frequented by Rhett Butler, becoming a rival in love with her half-sister before heading off to Washington for a view of the capitol during Reconstruction. Randall's

giving voice to the voiceless in Mitchell's classic depiction of the antebellum South is invigorating, although redressing the balance leads the author to some counter-idealized portraits.

Always and Forever (1992)

Gina Robins

Lost at sea as a child, for the past eleven years Candel has been blissfully happy as priestess to a female-dominated remote island culture. The last thing she needs is to be "rescued" and returned to "civilization." However, when privateer Nicolas Tiger ends up on her island, that is exactly what happens. Her subsequent return results in culture shock in both directions as she and Nicolas battle for both dominance and love. Action-filled, passionate, and funny.

Yellow Jack (1999)

Josh Russell

Claude Marchand is the apprentice of Louis Daguerre, the inventor of the photograph, but the two men have a falling out and Marchand leaves Daguerre and France, settling in New Orleans. He begins to make a living as a daguerrotypist using equipment stolen from Daguerre's studio. This novel follows Marchand's adventures in 19th-century New Orleans, a city saturated with both tradition and sex, and plagued by yellow fever every summer. Marchand makes a name for himself by making memorial portraits of fever victims. He finds himself torn between two women, a mixed-race prostitute and voodoo practitioner, Millicent, and sexually precocious Vivian Marnu, the young daughter of a prominent merchant family. As he tries to make a decision between the two, he is also slowly going mad due to exposure to the mercury he uses as part of the photographic development process.

Abe: A Novel of the Young Lincoln (2000)

Richard Slotkin

Slotkin imagines the first 23 years in the life of Abraham Lincoln. Although based on impressive familiarity with Lincoln's biography and the time period, the novel freely invents dialogue and situations to offer a possible explanation for the formation of Lincoln's principles and temperament. The novel shows the important relationship young Abe had with his beloved mother and the difficult relationship he had with his demanding, disappointed father, as the family moves from Kentucky to Illinois and Indiana to improve themselves. The core of the novel is Lincoln's trip down the Mississippi (based on two such actual trips) in which Abe meets the slave Sephus, the father of his future assassin (thespian Junius Brutus Booth), and the brother of Jefferson Davis. The novel ends with Lincoln's first political campaign, and the reader

gains a fuller sense of the man, his values, and his era.

Hunting Midnight (2003)

Richard Zimler

Zimler's novel details the experiences of John Zarco Stewart, the son of a Scotsman and a descendant of the converted Jews called Marranos who have kept their religion a secret. Stewart becomes aware of his heritage and the dark legacy of his family past against the backdrop of Napoleon's invasion of Portugal and plantation life in the American South.