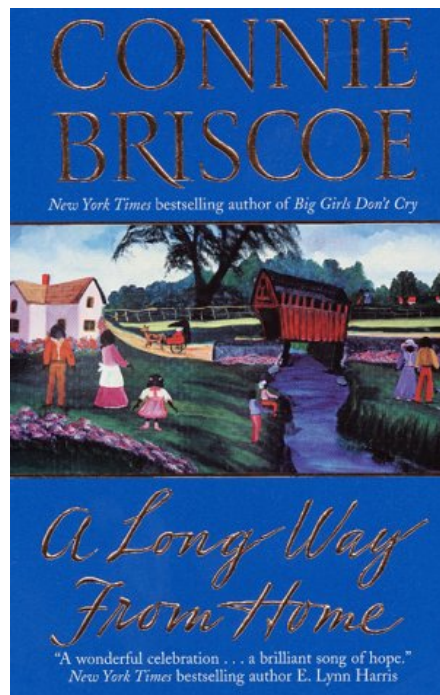




A Long Way from Home

Connie Briscoe

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In *Connie Briscoe's* third novel, the connotations of home are anything but heartwarming. For an enslaved mother, daughter, and grandmother, Montpelier plantation in Virginia is a living hell- and the proprietor, at least initially, is none other than President James Madison.

A Long Way from Home opens during Madison's lifetime, when Susie and her daughter Clara serve the First Couple as house slaves. Yet even this regime seems civilized compared to the havoc unleashed by Madison's brutal stepson. As Clara fends off (and ultimately succumbs to) the sexual advances of one master after another, the author conjures up the entire world of the "peculiar institution."

It is Susie's granddaughter and namesake, Susan, who first leaves Montpelier. Not, of course, voluntarily: she is sold to a family living in Richmond. Chained in the back of a departing wagon, she "clenched her teeth and stared at the sky. How dare the day be so clear, so beautiful, on this, the worst day of her life." But as the Civil War erupts, Susan ponders the possibility of a more joyous liberation. As Briscoe makes clear, the prospect elicited a complex blend of emotions from many slaves- Susan, for example, has been lulled into considering herself a part (if a diminished part) of her white master's family.

A Long Way from Home does occasionally fall back on the pat formulas of the television miniseries, and Briscoe doesn't manage to quite ignite Susan's conflicted feelings about bondage and freedom. But Susan's postwar travails do convey the reality that Reconstruction was not only a political process but also a painfully personal one. --*Katherine Anderson*

A Long Way from Home Details

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From Reader Review A Long Way from Home for online ebook

Patsy says

A Long Way From Home - This is based on a true story the author Connie Briscoe lives in Virginia . She is a descendant of the slaves on the James Madison family plantation, Montpelier. There are both blacks and whites in her family tree.

A multi-generation story of slavery, freedom, indestructible love in the lives of the family. There is heartache, hope and joy in the three generations of women in slavery. Susie her daughter, Clara was her granddaughter; and Susan, were all born and reared as house slaves in Montpelier the plantation of James Madison and Dolly Madison with a growing devotion for each other and their slaves at the end of the Civil War. Susie is sold and goes to a fine family in Richmond, Virginia as a nurse maid, this Susie married and had two children of her own.

The Madison's were good to all their slaves. Susie tells her daughter 'You can't just get up and leave 'cause you don't know nothing about freedom. 'Cause I don't know nothing about being free. It takes money and know how to live free. You can't just up and leave'.

This is one of the best books I have read in a long time. I could not put it down.

Linda says

The author of this novel is descended from the slaves who lived on President James Madison's plantation, and she uses these ancestors to tell the story of three generations of house slaves, Susie, Clara, and Susan/Suzanne. Madison was good to his slaves, and although they lived a hard life, they knew that they were well cared for. Susie and Clara were on Madison's land as long as they lived, but Susan was sold to a family in Richmond, where she eventually met and married a free black man and, after the Civil War, became free herself. The story is nothing real special, but I enjoyed it. I did not enjoy, however, the modern slangy expressions used in conversation in the book. "What the heck," "couldn't care less" and such phrases really intruded.

Roger DeBlanck says

Connie Briscoe uses her family's past as a compass to track three generations of slave women owned by former President James Madison on his Montpelier plantation in Virginia. She traces her genealogy back to her great-great grandmother, Mama Susie, a loyal slave to the Madisons, referred to as "Massa" Jimmy and Miss Dolley throughout the novel. Susie's daughter, Clara, is less subservient. Her defiant personality and yearning for freedom put her in opposition to Mama's resigned beliefs that thinking of independence is a waste of time. After the death of Massa Jimmy, the slaves realize Madison had no plans to release them. In the years leading towards the war, ownership of the plantation changes hands regularly. When Clara becomes pregnant, she refuses to disclose the father, although indications point to the master at that time, Willard Montgomery. Clara's two daughters, Ellen and Susan, grow up on Montpelier until tough times force the current owner, Mr. Shaw, to sell Susan to an aristocrat in Richmond, who turns out to be Montgomery. The strength of this compelling multigenerational epic is Briscoe's portrayal of family devotion. Her ability to capture the psychological insight of the relations between whites and coloreds is

exceptional. She generates great compassion for the grieving families pulled apart by the institution of slavery and she shows how unimaginably dependent whites were on their slaves for even the smallest tasks in their lives. She ultimately confronts history through her own family's unforgettable past and locates a genuine belief in the unbreakable power of love.

Marjie says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this novel, and a pleasant surprise that I found later was the fact that the author is a descendant of the family. For a change the story was based on the emotions and personalities of the characters, and the fact that they too have the same thoughts and fears that white people experience. How cruel that 'upstairs and downstairs' ever existed!

Lynda says

Excellent book! I discovered this one through a fellow Goodreader's review. It is a fictionalized account of the author's family from slavery times ranging from living in the James Madison plantation to the aftermath of the Civil War. The book details the humiliations of being a slave, the heartbreak of families being torn apart and finding one's way through suffering and endurance.

Martine says

I totally loved this book and felt that it was more a history lesson than any work of fiction! It felt real!

Maya B says

a nice semi fictional story of the author's descendants.

Dyana says

At the end of this book we learn that the author, Connie Briscoe, is a descendant of generations of slaves that are portrayed in this partially fictionalized account of three women (Susie, Clara, and Susan/Suzanne) who were owned by former President James Madison. The first two grew up as house slaves on his Montpelier plantation in Virginia. After Madison dies the plantation passes thru several owners and Susan, at the age of seventeen, is dragged away from her family and sold to a family in Richmond to be their children's nanny. They changed her name to Suzanne because the white family already had a daughter named Susan. This story spans more than sixty years and ends after the Civil War when slaves became free. This is a moving story that describes in vivid detail the lives of these slave women (mother, daughter, and granddaughter), Southern life, the ambivalent relationships between blacks and whites, and the cruelty and insidious benevolence of white owners to the emotions and personalities of the slaves. The author researched her family history, but many personal records were destroyed by the Madisons or lost in the Civil War so some of the story is her imagination. No real plot but a compelling depiction of history.

Sharon says

I wouldn't say this book was particularly well written but it was not poorly written either. I loved the story and now having a yearning to visit Monticello again and the neighboring Madison plantation since reading this book. I appreciated the perspective and could very well envision the happenings. I love this area of Virginia so the setting for the book came alive for me. I like the personal side of the story in that this happened to the ancestors of the author. I would recommend to anyone who likes historical fiction and/or the stories of Virginia.

Emiline says

This book was wonderful. All of the character' voices felt so distinct. The settings described here are locations I'm familiar with in real life, but I also credit Briscoe's clear and concise writing with immersing me into the Virginia these women call home. I was incredibly invested in the characters' stories, wishing them well and, at points, feared for their safety so much that I almost couldn't stand to pick the book up. The nuances of race and interracial dynamics of pre-Civil War South are explored here with aplomb facilitated all the more by these varied and interesting women characters, producing an engaging and thought-provoking read. I would highly recommend this to anyone who was interested in picking it up, and plan to read more works by Briscoe in the future.

Donna Zigmont says

I enjoyed the book, but really wanted to like it more than I did. I was hoping for more details about the lives of Clara, Susie, Susan, Ellen and Oliver. I read the author's note in the back of the book that most of the records had been destroyed and she got the story mainly from her family members. So I can understand why there wasn't more. I was happy that Susan and Oliver ended up having the life they set out to have. And I was glad that she was able to find Ellen after all those years of not knowing where she was or how she was doing.

Brittany Cole says

This book...starts slow. I started reading it because I was bored and it really wasn't interesting at all until the third generation was born (SPOILER) and one of the then main character's daughter was sold off. I don't particularly enjoy reading books about slavery, I couldn't even finish "Kindred" - super interesting take, left a bad taste in my mouth - but this gets past it.

It's heartbreaking, of course, and also a bit a mystery, if you want it to be, but all in all, I'm glad I read it. Especially since there was a happy ending. I'm a sucker for those.

Elaine says

I found *A Long Way From Home* in our complex's free library! A big thank you goes out to the person who donated it. I loved it!!

A Long Way From Home is an historical fiction that takes place in Orange County, Virginia. The home of slave owner and former president, James Madison.

The year is 1836 and James Madison is quite ill. If he dies, what will become of his home and his possessions? Among those possessions are Susie and Clara, the Madison Family's house slaves. And so our story begins...

Connie Briscoe takes us on a journey through time that follows the Madison plantation's many changes of ownership. With each change, the mansion's slaves struggle with the challenges of readjusting to new masters and a different way of life.

Briscoe uses her own family history, plus her vivid imagination to create this endearing story of three generations of strong and inspiring women. I totally enjoyed this novel and I'm happy to give it five stars!!

Jennifer Alexander Reynolds says

I was pleasantly surprised in regards to this book. Although it deals with slavery it is the characters, their personalities, emotions, and thoughts that we consumed me. Valerie Briscoe takes us back to the 1860's and gives us a personal family account of the slaves on former President James Madison's plantation. This book was very well written and I couldn't put it down. I read this off and on for 12 hours straight so needless to say it was an easy read. I found myself liking these characters and internalizing their emotions more and more with every turn of the page. Im glad I didn't judge this book by its cover.

Lourdes Rivera says

This book was given to my daughter to read about a week ago by my sister in law. I picked it up and could not put it down. I loved how Conni Briscoe shows the struggles of three generations of slave women. Connie made me feel everything these women went through. I love the way showed the indestructible love of family in this book. I can't wait to pick up one of her other books. A must-read for everyone.
