

An Interview with Harriet Cannon

Q. How did your life experience and career as psychotherapist influence the writing of “Exiled South”?

A. Fortunately, psychotherapy was a portable career that served my wanderlust. Living in diverse cultures, places, climates has colored my world perspective. I have lived and worked in large urban cities like Detroit, Los Angeles, Seattle and Santiago, Chile and in smaller rural communities in Missouri, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. Add in my training in systemic family therapy and the world is a smorgasbord of connected people and places. And, with my childhood experience in an extended family of storytellers, a story about identity and belonging comes naturally.

Q. What made you decide on a dual time-line format for Exiled South?

A. In our immigrant rich twenty-first century, culture, the tools to research where we come from and with whom we want to identify are easily accessible. A couple of hundred years ago, illiteracy was the norm. Native American had an oral history as did people from Great Britain and Europe who landed on the American continents. But once migration by choice or by land grabbing pressure, became the norm, people rarely had contact with their homeland and enslaved people had no contact at all. Even for the educated White minority, mail delivery was inconsistent at best. An example of culture loss and grieving are poignant ballads still sung today. In “Exiled South”, I wanted to create a story of not only how grief can last for generations but also how unexpected discoveries can heal. Present day Lizbeth Gordon experiences loss and betrayal but her life becomes a challenging international journey that ultimately brings her peace.

Q. Do you think the current Black Lives Matter movement may influence how people experience “Exiled South”?

A. “Exiled South” was in the editing process when George Floyd was murdered, and the 2020 Black Lives Matter demonstrations began. I invited Beta readers of various ethnicities and backgrounds to read and opine on the novel. Most reviewers said they appreciated Exiled South showed racism as the complex problem it is, a long-standing US issue that should not be oversimplified. That said, I am aware, going forward, readers will respond to a present day White southern woman’s reckoning with family antebellum slaveholding and White and Black present-day racism will depend on an individual’s life stage and experience in the wider world.

Q. You’ve stated “Exiled South” is an anti-war story.

A. I have. Exiled South is not a political statement, it’s a philosophical one about unintended consequences and civilian suffering during any war. My intention is to highlight the example of the American Civil War’s generations long consequences. I know from my clinical experience as a psychotherapist, civilians are vulnerable to residual trauma-PTSD- long after a war. War victors highlight their triumphs. Doing so often globally vilifies all citizens on the losing side. In Exiled South, I strove to portray shades of grey, hard decisions made by citizens and consequences at war’s end that affected them. In my novel, Robert Gordon, a decent, thoughtful

citizen, doesn't believe in slaveholding. He is conflicted about participating in the Civil War but under pressure, he becomes a blockade runner loyal to his home state of South Carolina and desperate to help his family in Charleston during the siege. In 1865, Robert's declared a traitor to the United States and can never return home.

Q. What was your Civil War era research strategy?

A. During several research focused trips to South Carolina, I returned to my favorite atmospheric places, sought out experts in libraries and museums, bought maps, and took loads of pictures to plaster the walls of my home office in Washington State. The internet was invaluable in hunting down obscure books like "Hoo Doo Medicine: Gullah Herbal Remedies" and "The Confederate Housewife". I consulted dozens of civil war diaries and collections of stories. This treasure trove was the basis for Laurette Gordon's character and lifestyle; how nineteenth century women lived, war substitutions for basics like sugar and coffee and medicines they used. I also had a few surprises. For example, during my internet research, I stumbled on "Girls of the Sixties", a series of interviews with elderly civil war survivors published in Columbia, South Carolina in 1917. By chance, one of the interviewees turned out to be an ancestor of mine!

Q. Why did you choose Glasgow, Scotland, and Nassau, in the Bahama Islands as locations in Exiled South?

A. Right. I knew Great Britain declared it's neutrality at the start of the American Civil War. However, sympathy for the Southern States prevailed subtly. Many in the British government considered the United States ambassadors a passel bullies and naïve upstarts. As I researched the shipbuilding industry, I learned the extent to which, by the mid nineteenth century, factory jobs in Glasgow and Liverpool were dependent upon a steady supply of raw cotton. In Glasgow and elsewhere, labor unions had been forming and striking over wages and slum tenements living conditions. To keep the supply of cotton arriving and the workers employed, a two tier system of fast ships carrying cargo from Glasgow and Liverpool evolved with the stop in the British colonies of Bermuda and Nassau necessary layovers. The Scottish/British cutting-edge science of steam engines and ship design became for me, an irresistible backdrop for Robert Gordon's character.

Q. How did you discover the Confederados?

A. When we lived in South America years ago, I visited Brazil and discovered the Confederado story when talking to a colleague about the multicultural population. I had no idea Dom Pedro, the forward-thinking King of Brazil in the mid nineteenth century admired democracy and North American farming expertise. I learned he offered a win-win relationship for thousands of former Confederates who had lost their land or citizenship or both. Free land for their knowledge and technology. The multiethnic descents of Confederados value their heritage, but not the institution of slavery. Annually, they celebrate with a descendant's festival. Confederado history is both largely unknown in the United States and compelling. I couldn't resist giving it a significant part in "Exiled South".

Q. Do you have another novel in the works?

A. I do. All I'm ready to reveal at this time is my next novel will be dual time line a mystery set in the Pacific Northwest.

Harriet Cannon www.harrietcannon.com info@harrietcannon.com
1240 W Sims Way #107, Port Townsend, WA 98368, cell 206 780 3843