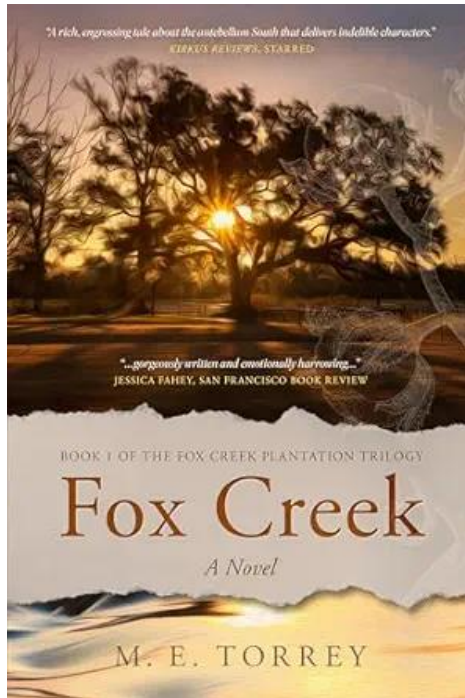


White Woman Pens an Award-Winning, Critically-Acclaimed Historical Novel That Poignantly Shows the Human Toll of Black Slavery on Society



"A rich, engrossing tale about the antebellum South that delivers indelible characters."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred

"Riveting."

—*Foreword Clarion Reviews*

"Some moments nearly puncture the reader so deeply that they're the entire balance of the text...vividly humanizes the self-destructive cruelty of the Southern plantation system."

—*IndieReader*

***Winner, American Book Festival**

***Winner, San Francisco Book Fest**

***Winner, Pacific NW Writers Association
Literary Contest**

***Finalist, Page Turner Awards**

***Silver Winner, Readers' Choice Book Awards**

Fox Creek: In 1843 Louisiana, the beloved, biracial daughter of a wealthy planter is sold into slavery and must survive while caught between the world of the white elite and the brutality of slavery. Sold along with her is Cyrus, a boy big for his age, torn from his mother without a chance to say goodbye. Together they are purchased by the Jensey family, where soon, their destinies will collide. *Fox Creek* is a story of race, privilege, and destiny. But most of all, it is a story of love, a love that transcends all that threatens to tear it apart.

M. E. Torrey's *Fox Creek*, a riveting work of literary fiction, delivers a haunting new look at the Antebellum South. The acclaimed children's book author makes her debut in adult fiction with *Fox Creek*, a sweeping and unflinching historical novel that confronts a brutal and fraught era in our nation's violent history.

Fox Creek follows a cast of unforgettable characters, enslaved and enslaver alike, whose intertwined fates reveal the staggering contradictions of life in the 19th-century South. Torrey, who has spent years researching plantation records, slave narratives, and diaries of both the oppressed and the oppressors, renders a narrative that is at once harrowing, compassionate, and morally urgent. By portraying slave owners not as caricatures but as ordinary people who

justified extraordinary harm, she forces readers to ask: How do ordinary people blind themselves to cruelty?

For Torrey, the novel was 30 years in the making. A chance trip to Louisiana decades ago, followed by visits to plantations and countless hours of archival study, shifted her trajectory as a writer. What began as a ghost story set in New Orleans transformed into an epic novel about slavery, race, and the stories America tells—and refuses to tell—about itself.

Alongside her writing, Torrey has lived a life of service and global perspective. She holds a master's in religion with a focus on eco-justice, co-founded Orphans Africa, which builds schools for orphaned children in Tanzania, and has written a dozen books for young readers. With *Fox Creek*, she turns her storytelling gifts toward adult audiences, offering a narrative as morally challenging as it is emotionally resonant.

Torrey is available, in an interview, to discuss the following:

- How a White woman writing about Black slaves adds important perspective to how we view history.
- Why she believes ordinary people can blind themselves to extra-ordinary cruelty.
- Why it took her three decades to bring this story to light.
- What she discovered to be so shocking in the course of her research.
- What her award-winning historical novel adds to the collection of books and films on the subject matter as we commence the 160th anniversary of the Civil War's end.
- How her novel uniquely dramatizes the points of view of both slaves and their owners.

"Stories are blueprints for memory," Torrey says. "When we erase, we forget. When we forget, we excuse. And when we excuse, we perpetuate the very injustices we claim to abhor."

Fox Creek is not a story of nostalgia, but of reckoning—a call for readers to face the past with honesty and courage.

More About the Book

Fox Creek is a powerful novel set during one of the most turbulent times in American history. The year is 1843 when six-year-old Monette, the pampered and beloved daughter of a French Creole sugar planter, is taken to New Orleans and sold into slavery. Sold along with her is Cyrus, a boy big for his age, torn from his mother without a chance to say goodbye. Together they go to Fox Creek Plantation in "English" Louisiana, home to the Jensey family. While Cyrus is sent to the fields, Monette becomes the childhood playmate of Kate, the planter's daughter, and catches the eye of Breck, the planter's son. It's easier and safer for Monette to pretend life is normal. That she belongs. To forget her past, even to forget Cyrus, whom she'd loved. But as the years pass, it becomes clear that children of color do not belong in the world of the white elite—at least, not as equals. The brutality and powerlessness of slavery begin to take a toll upon Monette.

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M. E. Torrey

Biography



M. E. Torrey is the author of a dozen children's books and an award-winning, critically-acclaimed debut historical novel about slavery, *Fox Creek*.

She is also a co-founder of the charity, Orphans Africa. The charity works in Tanzania, building boarding schools for children orphaned by disease and poverty. Her organization has educated thousands of children, empowering them to step into their giftedness. Over the years, the students have become doctors, bankers and financiers, nurses, teachers, business entrepreneurs, secretaries, drivers, mechanics, tailors, electricians (including solar & automotive), and more. The schools are now owned and operated by Tanzanians and continue to aim toward complete self-sustainability. (www.orphansafrica.org)

Torrey, also known as Michele Torrey, is the author of 12 books for children (Knopf; Penguin; Union Square & Co). Those books are available at www.micheletorrey.com. She is a two-time Thurber House Residency in Children's Literature nominee, plus a two-time winner of the Pacific Northwest Writers Association (PNWA) Zola Award. Among other honors, her books have received starred reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*, been chosen by the Junior Library Guild, and has been nominated for numerous state medals. She is also an active member of Historical Novel Society and Author's Guild.

She holds a B.S. in Microbiology and Immunology and an M.A. in Religion.

She has lived and traveled extensively throughout the world. She spent many years of her childhood in France, England, and Germany. She resides with her husband in the Puget Sound region in Washington. They boat each year to the San Juan Islands and Canadian Gulf Islands. For updated information on her novel, please see: www.meteorrey.com.

M. E. Torrey
Q & A
Fox Creek



1. What is your book, *Fox Creek*, about?

In 1843 Louisiana, Monette, the beloved biracial daughter of a French Creole sugar planter, is sold into slavery along with a boy named Cyrus. Together they are purchased by the Jensey family of Fox Creek Plantation. While Cyrus is sent to the fields, Monette becomes the playmate of Kate, the planter's daughter, and catches the eye of Breck, the planter's son. As the years pass, Monette is haunted by memories of her traumatic past, a past she had suppressed. Cyrus, still in the fields, has never forgotten Monette and loves her still. *Fox Creek* is a story of race, privilege, and destiny. But most of all, it is a story of love, a love that transcends all that threatens to tear it apart.

2. What inspired you to write it?

Decades ago, I set out to write a ghost story for young adults set in New Orleans. Instead, I found myself haunted by history. When I first visited Louisiana, I expected the plantations to be preserved as honest reckonings with the past. What I found were hoop-skirted docents and manicured gardens that told only half the story—a whitewashed version of the South that erased the lives of the enslaved people who made those estates possible. That disconnect changed me. The slave cabins I wandered through were silent witnesses, holding memories that the “official” tours refused to acknowledge. In that silence, I realized how deeply our culture has sanitized history— not only in travel

brochures, but in novels, in classrooms, and in the stories we tell ourselves to escape responsibility.

3. You took three decades to get this historical novel out. What type of research did you undertake and why had it taken so long to get it released?

I spent years conducting research, including multiple trips to Louisiana, plus a week in the LSU archives in Baton Rouge. I read hundreds of memoirs, diaries, letters, and interviews with slaves, as well as slaveowners. I only began to write when their voices would no longer be still. Then life intervened. During that same time, I was contracted by both Random House and Penguin to write eight books for middle-grade and young adult audiences, some of them quite complex. Somewhere in there, I also graduated from seminary and cofounded an organization, Orphans Africa, which builds boarding schools for orphans in Tanzania. We're still building schools. We're still working hard. So, for my novel *Fox Creek*, it's been a long haul.

4. What do you say to anyone who criticizes a white woman for writing about Black slavery?

It is not, nor was it ever, my intention to drown out or talk over Black voices. It *is* my intention, however, to add to the dialogue. Yes, I'm White. Yes, I've never lived in the South. I can never *truly* know what it means to be Black in America today and to live under that hereditary trauma. By the same token, no one alive today can understand what it was like to be a slave. But by immersing myself in the writings of those times, by *listening*, I come close to understanding the lives of the enslaved as well as the enslavers. Certainly, writing this book opened my eyes to our shared history and how that history is still playing out.

5. What lasting message do you hope readers will take away?

For all readers, especially White Americans, when we name former slaveowners as "other" than ourselves, we create a distance between us and them, thereby escaping the burden of our history. It's an easy out. But in order for us to grow as a nation, we must see ourselves reflected in their lives—not in the sense of condoning their actions or beliefs, but in the sense of understanding how the perpetration of such atrocities could have occurred in the first place by seemingly normal human beings. This is especially important as atrocities and injustices are still occurring and are even being mainstreamed in the United States today. We must ask ourselves, in what ways are we blind or numb today to the oppression of others?

6. Your book has received awards recognition and critical acclaim from many major book reviews. Are you surprised at how well-received it is?

I had certainly hoped that it would be well-received, but, of course, you never know. All along I felt I was creating something of profound social and literary merit—something that moved me to the center of my being. Honestly, I felt that *Fox Creek* was my life's masterpiece, whether anyone else appreciated it or not. So, when I was finally ready to give it to the world, I did so with a sense of letting go—the critical response would be whatever it would be. I had done all I could, and it was enough. Now, after seeing the overwhelmingly positive, critical response to *Fox Creek*, I am gratified beyond belief. It affirms what I had felt all along.

7. Many books and movies depicting slavery have been made. What makes your book unique or special?

I think modern depictions of slavery mostly focus on the extreme. An example would be Edwin Epps, the slaveowner in the movie, “12 Years a Slave.” Epps seemed to delight in perpetrating cruelty after cruelty upon his slaves. We’ve come to expect that this was the norm, and unless a novel or a movie depicts this, we dismiss it as *too* kind, or “whitewashed.” But I think characters such as Edwin Epps, or another example, Simon Legree from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, can mislead us as to the reality of who slaveholders were as people in general. While psychopaths like Epps and Legree certainly existed, I felt it vital to present the slaveowners as everyday people, even as they were blind to, and helped perpetuate, the suffering around them. I find this infinitely more chilling.

8. How would you describe your writing style?

I love reading books that are completely immersive, in other words, books that make me feel like I’m right there along with the characters, eating, breathing, and speaking through them. My writing style is likewise immersive. I like to pull readers in and never let them go. This writing style served me well when I was writing seafaring adventures for young adults. While *Fox Creek* is likewise immersive, it is also expansive in that historical and sensory details are woven throughout, providing a rich, layered tapestry. I also present my characters in shades of gray—no one purely evil nor purely good. Everyone has a blind spot. By portraying my characters as regular people, I force the reader to ask uncomfortable questions.

9. What impact did your research and historical discoveries have on your perspective of America’s history - -and of who we are today as a people?

For the first time, I became aware of how deeply racial discrimination had infiltrated our social systems such that, if you're not paying close attention, it's hardly discernible because it's the "way it's always been." We don't question it unless we are, ourselves, struggling under the weight of its oppression. Usually, it's through a brutal act, such as the slaying of George Floyd, that we see the system more clearly and demand change. Like it or not, we are, as a nation, in a blistering-hot season of reckoning—reckoning with our past, with who we are right now, and with who we want to be in the future. Hopefully, *Fox Creek* can be a part of the discussion during this painful time of reckoning.

10. You said that you came to see the blindness of ordinary people, who considered themselves to be good folk, while perpetuating cruelty to be so shocking and unnerving. Why?

During my research, I read journals of slaveowners who literally declared themselves "good," believing they'd never harmed another soul in their life. What really shocked me, was I actually *liked* some of them. I didn't expect to like them, I didn't *want* to like them, but I did. So, when I wrote my slave-owning characters, I wanted to achieve this tricky balance: likeable, everyday people who nonetheless perpetuated slavery because it served them and because it was normalized. Aren't we all products of our society? We go with the flow because that's what's normal. Few of us are willing to cry out against society if we see something wrong. Complacency is the decision to do nothing, which can have real-world consequences. It was true back then, just as it is today.

11. Why do you feel today's white Americans should stop distancing themselves from history?

[Is this question necessary, considering I've already answered it?]

12. What would heal the damning history of this nation's violent race relations?

We need to listen to each other. Really listen. We need to hear one another's stories and share the weight of them. When well-meaning White Americans responded to the Black Lives Matter movement with, "All Lives Matter," although that is true in essence, once again, it negated the Black story, it negated Black lives. It was, again, an attempt to silence voices and erase an ugly history. There's a lot of guilt in this country. Guilt over slavery. Over our treatment of Native Americans. And, as anyone who's been to therapy knows, you cannot get past guilt by suppressing its root. You must break down the walls you've built up and instead stop and listen. Absorb. Heal. Only when we do this, with a sense of love and forgiveness for one another, can we leave behind our fear and distrust and build a nation that is truly *united*.

Additional Professional Book Reviews

"... gorgeously written and emotionally harrowing."

—***San Francisco Book Review***

"Torrey gives voice to the silenced, and she does it with compassion, skill, and a clear sense of moral responsibility."

—***Chicago Book Review***

"Exceptional."

—***Los Angeles Book Review***

"Torrey reconstructs the antebellum South with both archival precision and literary elegance."

—***Seattle Book Review***

"A searing portrait of Antebellum life . . . "

—***San Diego Book Review***

"... a sprawling novel . . . with moving humanity and depth."

—***Blue Ink Review***

"Torrey is a powerful writer . . . "

—***Tulsa Book Review***

"... I loved the deep lore in *Fox Creek*. The dialogue is catchy, the atmosphere thick with a sense of impending doom, and the characters unforgettable. You'll turn the last page wanting more, despairing that it finished. Highly recommended."

—***Book Nerdection, A "Nerdection Must Read" Selection***

"I turned the last page with a lump in my throat and a renewed sense of reverence for the power of historical fiction to awaken both the heart and mind."

—***Manhattan Book Review***

"An unforgettable book that will linger with the reader well after its conclusion."

—***Portland Book Review***

"This is one of the novels that I would gladly place on the same shelf with *Roots* by Alex Haley and *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead."

—***Readers' Favorite***

A Message from Author M. E. Torrey

Over the course of my research, I read dozens of slave narratives written by those few who had escaped and could tell their stories. I read narratives from the Louisiana Writers' Project (1934-1943)—oral accounts told by Black people who could still remember being enslaved. I also read dozens of diaries, letters, and logs written by elite Southern Whites and plantation owners—both men and women—to help me understand their view of the world.

In particular, I ran across three diaries of slaveowners that influenced me greatly in the writing of *Fox Creek*. The first account is the diary of Louisiana Creole sugar planter, Valcour Aime. The second account was the diaries written by James Henry Hammond, governor of South Carolina from 1842-44. The third account, and one I relied on heavily in forming William Jensey's character, was *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846: As Reflected in the Diary of Bennet Hilliard Barrow*.

For all readers, especially White Americans, when we name former slaveowners as "other" than ourselves, un-relatable, we create a distance between us and them, thereby escaping the burden of our history. It's an easy out. But in order for us to grow as a nation, we must see ourselves reflected in their lives—not in the sense of condoning their actions or beliefs, but in the sense of understanding how the perpetration of such atrocities could have occurred in the first place by seemingly normal human beings.

This is especially important as atrocities and injustices are still occurring and are even being mainstreamed in the United States today. These acts are committed and explained away by (mostly) well-meaning people who find themselves compromising their integrity for one reason or another—power, position, family, "religion," opportunity, security, or simply because everyone else is doing it—the list is long. We must ask ourselves, in what ways are we blind or numb today to the degradation or oppression of others? For, I believe, that only in asking this question, framed alongside our shared history, can we truly start the task of healing the chasms that divide our great nation.

I pray that, together, we have the courage to stand in the muck and ugliness of one another's pain, as well as in the beauty, freedom, and creative expression of our diversity and our differences. I pray that we connect with one another so deeply that we forge a bond that extends beyond any lived experience or action. For it is in this collective understanding that we are enlightened by a love for one another that transcends all.

Top Amazon Book Reviews

“Torrey writes about slavery with honesty and care. The violence and injustice are not exaggerated but shown for what they were, systemic, cruel, and deeply human in their impact. The emotional weight of the story comes from this quiet truthfulness.... The Fox is beautifully written, emotionally rich, and thoughtful about race, identity, and power. It does not give easy comfort, but it offers something better: a story that matters. I recommend it highly to readers of historical and literary fiction and to anyone who wants a book that stays on your mind long after you finish.”

“Beautifully Written, Heartbreaking, and Unforgettable From the very first page of *Fox Creek*, M.E. Torrey transports the reader into a world that feels both distant and achingly close — a landscape of hardship, resilience, and haunting beauty. This work of historical fiction doesn’t just recount a story from the past; it breathes life into it, wrapping you in the struggles and quiet triumphs of characters who feel entirely real.... If you love historical fiction that faces history’s truths with honesty and compassion, *Fox Creek* is a story that will stay with you long after the final page — a testament to endurance, loss, and the fierce will to survive.”

“Powerful Historical Fiction. What an entrancing read about the antebellum south.”

“Fox Creek is a plantation on the outskirts of New Orleans. The book is set in the mid-1800s. It begins as 6-year-old Monette, a mulatto, is sold by her brother into slavery. At this point, the story introduces the Jensey family with the stereotypical spoiled daughter, Kate, and son, Breck. Monette grows up thinking of Kate and Breck as playmates but is eventually rudely awakened to the reality of slaves and plantation owners in the South.... The storytelling is so well done as to make the reader feel like she/he is actually there. But I suspect the skilled narrative is due to the laborious, long research of the author. In the author's note, she discusses the 30-year process to writing Fox Creek.”

“I can’t even begin to describe how beautifully written this book was and how well it puts the reader at that place back in time as if we are standing in the characters’ shoes. I was aghast at some parts, downcast at others, and felt my heart throbbing at the love story. This was unputdownable! A very moving love story that doesn’t paint over even the ugliest parts of slavery.”

“Captivating. Enthralling. I’m amazed by the level of detail in this riveting, honest story about a young black slave on a southern plantation, beginning in 1843. Adventure, love, harsh reality mesh together in this poignant page turner.”