



Savage Lands

Clare Clark

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It is 1704 and, while the Sun King Louis XIV rules France from the splendour of Versailles, Louisiana, the new and vast colony named in his honour, is home to fewer than two hundred souls. When a demand is sent requesting wives be dispatched for the struggling settlers, Elisabeth is among the twenty-three girls who set sail from France to be married to men of whom they know absolutely nothing. Educated and skeptical, Elisabeth has little hope for happiness in her new life. It is to her astonishment that she, alone among the brides, finds herself passionately in love with her new husband, Jean-Claude, a charismatic and ruthlessly ambitious soldier.

Auguste, a poor cabin boy from Rochefort, must also adjust to a startlingly unexpected future. Abandoned in a remote native village, he is charged by the colony's governor with mastering the tribe's strange language while reporting back on their activities. It is there that he is befriended by Elisabeth's husband as he begins the slow process of assimilation back into life among the French.

The love Elisabeth and Auguste share for Jean-Claude changes both of their lives irrevocably. When in time he betrays them both, they find themselves bound together in ways they never anticipated.

With the same compelling prose and vividly realized characters that won her widespread acclaim for THE GREAT STINK and THE NATURE OF MONSTERS, Clare Clark takes us deep into the heart of colonial French Louisiana.

Savage Lands Details

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Author : Clare Clark

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From Reader Review Savage Lands for online ebook

Candace says

This is a good book, provided you do not expect any romance, characters that are appealing, attractive, charming, or even nice, or expect early 19th century Louisiana to be anything but the worst frontier experience ever.

Elisabeth leaves France for Louisiana with a green silk featherbed, and books carefully tucked away. She is snapped up in marriage by a man with whom she falls in love to the point of madness, a madness that takes her to one ugly place after another. A boy named Auguste arrives on the same ship and is pressed into becoming a translator/spy for one of the local tribes. He, also, is drawn to the dark energy of Elisabeth's husband.

The Mississippi Company encouraged the settlement of Louisiana as part of an early investment bubble that eventually burst. In the first 20 years of colonization little progress was made. The horrible weather, flooding, disease made these settlements wretched. The enslavement of native Americans and the introduction of slaves from Africa simply added diversity to the misery.

Okay, so "Savage Lands" is a downer, but I actually enjoyed it. You will want to finish--could there be a bright star for somebody, right?

treva says

This really might be one of the worst books I've ever read. It was unbelievably dull, and not one of the characters was likable. Funny thing, apparently when girls lose their virginity, they also lose all personality and independent thought. Who knew? Clark has a way of searching arduously for an unusual description or piece of imagery that feels labored and often is just distracting ("lettuce-pale" sticks in my mind).

I dare you to find a single page in this novel that doesn't use the word "savage" in reference to American Indians. Go on, try it. Make it a drinking game. Take a shot every time you see the "s" word; you'll be dead of blood-alcohol poisoning within five pages. Fine, play the "historical accuracy" card if you want to, but I would like to point out that when the black slaves appear, they are referred to as Negroes, but not as the other "n" word. So what makes "savage" okay? You couldn't just call them natives? This simply strikes me as another example of the persistent sanctified racism against Native Americans.

Graham Crawford says

Clare Clack is one of my favorite historical fiction writers. She always picks places and time periods that are usually overlooked and her characters have odd and interesting psychological quirks. I loved this book - though perhaps not quite as much as her previous novels). I think it is a study of how the land changed people. Some become more themselves (not necessarily a good thing), some strive to better themselves and others unravel.

There are occasional passages in this novel like little jewels of truth and beauty that just stop you in your tracks that you just keep re-reading for their perfection.

I was also very glad of the solid afterward - I crave these in historical fictions - and this one cleanly sorted the fictions from the amalgams from the real.

Just wanted to add a little post script to my review after seeing so many Goodreads reviewers disliked this book, one reason being that they found all her characters unlikable. That's precisely why I love Clark's novels. She does sullen maids and neurotic ladies better than anyone. Her novels don't try to shoehorn 20th century values into the past. In this novel, the characters' attitudes to slavery are quite difficult to read - but they are authentic.

Barb says

I didn't care for this latest novel from Clare Clark. I picked this up right after finishing Clark's 'The Great Stink'.

While 'The Great Stink' is not going to be for everyone I thoroughly enjoyed it and was eagerly looking forward to reading another book by Clare Clark. Unfortunately the writing styles of the two books are very different. I found the writing in 'The Great Stink' very well thought out, focused and very detailed. In 'Savage Lands' I felt like there was a lack of focus and not enough details. I was never able to clearly picture the setting and I was a bit confused about the way certain events unfolded.

I read the author's note before starting the book and that was very intriguing and well thought out. Sadly this book was not for me. But I am planning to try her other novel 'The Nature of Monsters'. I hope that it is more in keeping with the style of 'The Great Stink' which I would recommend for anyone who appreciates filth, rats and lice in their Victorian fiction.

Misfit says

Savage Lands begin in 1704 when a group of French Women are sent to the Louisiana Territory to become brides to the settlers there. One of those women is Elisabeth and upon arrival weds Jean-Claude Babelon and for who-knows-what-reason she falls madly in love with him. Also in the story is Auguste who is a bit of a spy or something and after spending time further north with one of the Indian tribes (Savages) returns to Mobile and becomes close with Elizabeth and Jean-Claude.

I could go into greater detail, but 1) other Amazon reviewers have done it quite nicely and 2) I've already wasted the good part of my day to get to page 200 so I'll give that a pass and just say why I couldn't finish it. First was the prose and writing style - I can't put my finger on what it was but it was so like present tense (which I loathe) but it wasn't either - I just didn't feel like I was part of the story. As for this great love that Elisabeth had for her husband, I never got where it came from. The author takes the reader from beginning her voyage (I really would have liked to read more about that) until like magic they are married and she's flashing back on how it all happened and it was all quite disconcerting.

I found no chemistry between these two; it was all sex and not love and rather distasteful sex at that. While not going into spoilers, there is a time where Elisabeth does something that I find hard to believe of any devout catholic female of her time would resort to when she finds herself in an unwelcome situation - or at the very least wouldn't she have confessed to the priest or felt some guilt? And outside of a few references to the irritating mosquitoes I didn't find much about the real hardships the early settlers faced in this region (if you'd like something more realistic I would suggest Gwen Bristow's Deep Summer). Frankly, by page 200 I found myself not caring about anyone or anything and decided it was best to let it go and move on to a better book.

Erin says

I felt that this was absolutely fantastic book! Although I am familiar with the arrival of "Filles de Roi" in late 17th century Quebec, I had not realized the history that surrounded Louisiana's "casket girls." Claire is quite descriptive in terms of taste, smells, and how men and women lived in the early 1700's. Elisabeth Savaret is not the easiest character to like but since the characters in the book seem to have difficulty understanding her, it makes perfect sense.

nettebuecherkiste says

This book is well-researched, but told in a rather confusing style and the characters weren't really appealing to me. Also, I would have liked to read more about everyday life in the colony.

German review:

1704. Die junge Elisabeth Savaret soll nach Louisiana auswandern, um dort einen ihr unbekannten Mann zu heiraten. Die Kolonie braucht dringend Frauen für ihre Männer, und Louisiana wird als eine Art Paradies beschrieben. Die Realität sieht natürlich anders aus, die Einwanderer sind bald gezeichnet von Krankheit, Auseinandersetzungen mit den Ureinwohnern, harter Arbeit und anderen Entbehrungen. Dennoch ist Elisabeth zunächst glücklich, denn sie hat sich tatsächlich leidenschaftlich in ihren Mann verliebt. Wie wird sie in dem neuen Land weiterhin zurechtkommen?

Mit diesem Buch habe ich so meine Probleme. Ich habe die ganze Erzählweise als wirr empfunden. Ganz elementare Dinge, etwa, wie sich Elisabeth und ihr späterer Mann verliebt haben, bleiben außen vor und werden nur in lückenhaften Rückblicken angerissen. Der Leser kann gar nicht richtig nachvollziehen, wie es zu dieser Beziehung gekommen ist. Elisabeth ist sicherlich eine sehr interessante Figur aufgrund ihrer schieren Stärke, doch richtig warm werden konnte ich weder mit ihr noch mit der zweiten Hauptfigur Auguste, einem französischen Jungen, der zeitgleich mit Elisabeth in Louisiana ankommt und vom Kommandanten der kleinen französischen Armee bei einem Indianerstamm zurückgelassen wird, damit er ihre Sprache lernt, um später vermitteln zu können. Zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt verweben sich die Geschichten dieser beiden Personen.

Andererseits hat Clare Clark ganz eindeutig großartige Arbeit bei der Recherche geleistet, die politischen Konstellationen zwischen Franzosen, Engländern und den vielen verschiedenen Indianerstämmen werden

wirklich gut geschildert. Aber ich hätte gern mehr darüber erfahren, wie das tägliche Leben denn so aussah, Clark beschreibt zwar viele Probleme wie die hohe Kindersterblichkeit und die Überflutungen der kleinen Stadt Mobile in dem sumpfigen Siedlungsgebiet, der richtige Alltag wird jedoch kaum beschrieben. Sprachlich befindet sich das Buch auf durchaus hohem Niveau, dennoch kann ich das Buch nur mit 3 von 5 Sternen bewerten, während der Rahmen stimmt, konnte ich weder mit der Geschichte noch den zugehörigen Charakteren warm werden.

Sara says

I feel like this book has a great premise - 20 (or so) girls of marrying age are sent from France to the Louisiana area (the areas of land bought in the Louisiana Purchase) to marry the Frenchmen and/or Canadians that are living there since the settlements are mainly men. The problem is the execution and writing style. The paragraphs are long and could definitely be broken up more, and when they are broken up, they jump from one idea to the next, but just from one paragraph from another and not separated by a break or even a chapter. Ughhh. And there's a chapter about a boy who's left with natives and who knows how his story is supposed to play into the narrative, I couldn't bear to stick around to find out.

Ellen says

I am just not quite sure what to think about *Savage Lands*. My two stars is probably more like 2.5. The time period was interesting and the author certainly didn't whitewash anything about life in that place and time. A few characters were interesting and the descriptions were rich, but the plot just wasn't compelling enough to keep me engaged. All the action occurs off-stage, so to speak. It's referred to obliquely, and you have to pick up bits and pieces of what happened as you read on. This isn't necessarily a bad technique, but a little goes a long way.

Dawn says

Won this book on goodreads, and was really looking forward to reading it. The first chapter started out with the author being very descriptive, and I loved her writing style - looked forward to reading the rest of it. Right away in the second chapter, one of the two main characters appeared and was obsessed with the sensual things around him. I just can't bring myself to continue reading this book. I don't like to read around sex related stories, skipping around to get to the story line. Yes, that is a wonderful part of life, but something that is personal and sacred, not something to write into a storyline that could hold a story on its own. Sorry ...

Judy says

I enjoyed this book, a novel set in the early eighteenth century, mostly for what I learnt about the early days of colonial occupation of the southern states of America - a part of history I have been quite ignorant about. It provided a vivid account of the early European settlers and native Americans in particular. The practice of

sending expendable, vulnerable people to far off lands was repeated over and again. It is barely removed from slavery.

In this case, a young French woman is one of many from poor families sent by the French government as a pool from which wives are drawn by men already inhabiting the hostile land. As outrageous as it seems today, it was seen in a different light at the time and, I suppose, resulted in the new lands being populated by resourceful people with an instinct for survival.

it is a good read.

Carrie says

I got this from a Goodreads give away.

As a fan of historical fiction (possibly my favourite genre), I was quite excited when I received this book in the mail. However, that excitement quickly dissipated.

The real problem with this book for me were the characters. Everyone felt one-dimensional and frankly, not very likable. I couldn't bring myself to root for a single one of them - and I liked Elisabeth in chapter one. Even as new characters are introduced in the second half of the book, it didn't really help any characters grow in any way.

I also felt like we never really got the whole story. It moved so fast - like someone else said in a previous review, in the first chapter Elisabeth is on the boat to be wedded, and in the next chapter she's already madly in love with her husband. I wish we could have seen her fall in love with him, since maybe then both her and Babelon could have been a little more likable.

I did manage to make it through the whole book, though part of that was because I was hoping that there would be something to like about the book.

Brian says

Set in Louisiana in the early years of the eighteenth century, *Savage Lands* is the story of Elisabeth Savaret, a young girl despatched to the colony from Paris as one of a cargo of young women sent out to become wives for the colonists, and Auguste Guichard, a soldier who has grown up among the natives.

The life of the nascent French colony - little more than a huddle of wooden shacks built beside a swamp - is vividly evoked in Clare Clark's dense, exquisitely turned prose.

It's a style that makes considerable demands of the reader, forcing him to look beneath the surface of the narrative to interrogate the behaviour of the characters. But it's an effort that is richly rewarded for this is an emotionally powerful and deeply affecting moving novel

Tamara says

This author has not yet mastered the art of "show, don't tell." Throughout the story I would read how the characters were changing/feeling, but I couldn't see it. I think because of this, I never began to care about any of them. It also means I managed to miss what must have been some very important interaction between the characters because I don't understand how the relationship evolved between a few of them.

In all, I got less a picture of what life must have been like for the first French settlers in Louisiana than the love triangle/square between the main characters.

Lauren says

This book had a lot of promise. The plot sounded interesting, as it is premised on French women traveling to the New World to marry colonists. Unfortunately, only the premise was interesting. The execution was terrible and I could only bear to read about half of it before I decided to read something else. Life is too short to waste on a bad book!

The book centers on two main characters. Elisabeth is one of the girls who travels to France and falls in love - the author tells us this, but never shows us - despite her skepticism about her prospects in New France. It jumps from portraying Elisabeth as a reluctant participant in the venture to a snotty, love-sick wife. The book also deals with Auguste, a young French boy who travels to New France and ends up living with the Native Americans.

I just got so bored with Elisabeth's whining and dissatisfaction. She alienates everyone around her. I also could not enjoy her infatuation with her husband as it came out of nowhere. Auguste's parts were really boring and I just didn't care about him.

Thus, I did something I rarely do and abandoned the book.
