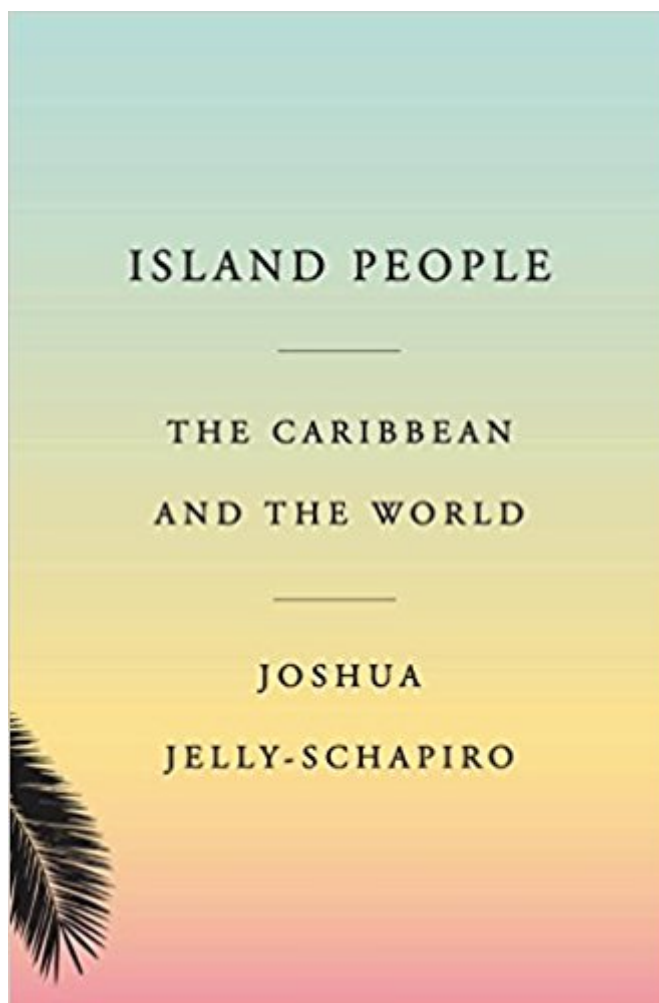


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# Island People: The Caribbean And The World



## Synopsis

A masterwork of travel literature and of history: voyaging from Cuba to Jamaica, Puerto Rico to Trinidad, Haiti to Barbados, and islands in between, *Joshua Jelly-Schapiro* offers a kaleidoscopic portrait of each society, its culture and politics, connecting this region's common heritage to its fierce grip on the world's imagination. From the moment Columbus gazed out from the *Santa María*'s deck in 1492 at what he mistook for an island off Asia, the Caribbean has been subjected to the misunderstandings and fantasies of outsiders. Running roughshod over the place, they have viewed these islands and their inhabitants as exotic allure to be consumed or conquered. The Caribbean stood at the center of the transatlantic slave trade for more than three hundred years, with societies shaped by mass migrations and forced labor. But its people, scattered across a vast archipelago and separated by the languages of their colonizers, have nonetheless together helped make the modern world its politics, religion, economics, music, and culture. Jelly-Schapiro gives a sweeping account of how these islands' inhabitants have searched and fought for better lives. With wit and erudition, he chronicles this "place where globalization began" and introduces us to its forty million people who continue to decisively shape our world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A travelogue of love and scholarship . . . does the region splendid justice." *The New York Times* "A creative hybrid of travel writing and in-depth reportage. . . . Its balance of skepticism and enthusiasm is driven by both wide knowledge and a bracing sympathy for the

oppressed. . . . Jelly-Schapiro's book [is] rich in its enthusiasms, but tempered by the author's own urbane intelligence. . . . He has a journalist's flair for interviews and is as deft with chance encounters as with pop idols. Above all he finds dignity as well as excitement in this beautiful archipelago.

•Colin Thubron, *The New York Review of Books* "Island People, written by a careful and compassionate author, is a worthy travel and history book, a fresh study of these economically hamstrung islands and their failing attempts at rebranding."

•The Guardian "Many have tried this before to get hold of, in its entirety, the volatile, beautiful, relentlessly shifting Caribbean. Nobody has succeeded as dazzlingly as Joshua Jelly-Schapiro."

•Marlon James, author of *A Brief History of Seven Killings* and winner of the 2015 Man Booker Prize "Joshua Jelly-Schapiro possesses both a humanist's irrepressible empathy and a journalist's necessary skepticism. He reports carefully, researches exhaustively, cares deeply, and writes beautifully."

•Dave Eggers, author of *Heroes of the Frontier* "The Caribbean the supposed American lake has always been the sea of stories and of dreams, a phantasmagorical realm of the beautiful, the fantastical, and the not-quite believable. Since Columbus and the Haitian Revolution these scattered lands of miracles and wonders have shaped the history of our world, and for decades they have cried out for a revived history by a chronicler in the wake of C.L.R. James and Naipaul and Wolcott equal to the task. And now here is *Island People*, precisely that marvel of a book, given to us by Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, a superb young writer who brings to this sea of dreams a scholar's authority, a novelist's way with character, and an ace reporter's talent for stumbling into exactly that tale, however improbable and fantastic, that most needs telling."

•Mark Danner, author of *Spiral: Trapped in the Forever War* "Joshua Jelly-Schapiro's grand book on the Caribbean is so striking in form and vision that it amounts to something new--a constant surprise. Even as Jelly-Schapiro combines reportage, cultural analysis, and history to superb effect, this important book filled with many truths defines and gives new meaning to that lovely phrase, *sui generis*."

•Hilton Als, author of *White Girls* "Joshua Jelly-Schapiro is one of those rare writers who bridges worlds between deep scholarship and lively and accessible writing, between islands and mainlands, between big ideas and precise details, between history and possibility."

•Rebecca Solnit, author of *Men Explain Things to Me* and *Other Essays* "Joshua Jelly-Schapiro's book illuminates, like no other I've read, the startling history and the complex present of the nations of the

Caribbean.Â Â Written with passion and joyful music in the prose, Island People will become an indispensable companion for anybody traveling to the CaribbeanÂÂ or dreaming of doing so.Â Â Accessible and well-informed, Island People is the best book about the Caribbean since V.S. NaipaulÂÂs The Middle PassageÂÂ and in significant ways, it is a better book.ÂÂ•Suketu Mehta, author of Maximum City:Â Â Bombay Lost and Found

Joshua Jelly-Schapiro is a geographer and writer whose work has appeared in The New York Review of Books, New York, HarperÂÂs, the Believer, Artforum, and The Nation, among many other publications. Educated at Yale and Berkeley, he is the co-editor, with Rebecca Solnit, of Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas, and a visiting scholar at New York UniversityÂÂs Institute for Public Knowledge. This is his first book.

A fantastic book. Informative, entertaining and insightful a wonderful read. Highly recommended.

This is a very fine book, among the best available about the Caribbean. It is not a travel guide, it is not a history but has aspects of both. Jelly-Schapiro loves the islands, and knows them well. The book is a sort of travelogue, with sizable chunks of history mixed in, and a good deal of what might be described as participant narration, about celebrations, conversations, trips and such that he and friends from the various places did together. The writing is excellent, opinionated, sometimes humorous, sometimes a bit preachy and sometimes passionate. He knows a great deal about music, and it got a bit technical in places when he describes the music and history of music in Cuba, Jamaica and elsewhere. The book has a useless map and no illustrations; more of both would strengthen it. There's also no index, making it hard to look for something you read. It starts in Jamaica, with a lot about Jamaican music and the Marley folks. I was amazed to learn that one small area produced Marcus Garvey, Harry Belafonte and Bob Marley. There's a good deal about politics. Then he moves on to Cuba, and these sections are wonderful. There's a lot about life in Cuba, Cuban music, the Castros, and politics, and explores the difficult subject of white and black Cubans. He plainly likes Cuba and Cubans. One thing I had not read of before; Cuba imported 800,000 slaves 1790-1867 but got 30,000 refugees from the Haitian revolution and embarked on a deliberate campaign to whiten Cuba by bringing over peasants from places like Andalusia and Galicia. The next section is on Puerto Rico, including a lot of history that will not be familiar to most Americans. The Spanish authorities also tried a campaign of whitening the populace, bringing in an amazing mix, not just Spanish peasants but also Catalans, French, Corsicans, Irish and Genoese.

His discussion of the island as an American possession is damning of American assumptions and government. Then on to the Dominican Republic and Haiti. He doesn't seem to like the Dominicans much, or at least their government, and much of the section is about Haitian folks in the DR, which recently decided to deport Haitians--only partly done, but the 1930s massacres of Haitians in the DR is in the background. His sections about Haiti are the best I have ever read about the island, mixing recent and longer-term history with politics--he likes the Haitians, really likes them. That's much of the book. The remainder is the smaller islands, including the Caymans, Grenada, Barbuda, Montserrat and Antigua. He discusses the politics of the revolution in Grenada in some detail, and again US policy and actions come across as ill-informed. The next section is on the French Guadeloupe and Martinique, one of the most interesting parts of the book. Much of it amounts to an analysis of the impact of two writers, Frantz Fanon and Aimée Césaire, which some readers may find tedious, although their influence on the left and on African intellectuals has been great (not so much influence in the English-speaking world). A chapter on Dominica likewise is largely a discussion of the life of Jean Rhys (who wrote "The Wide Sargasso Sea")--but it uses that discussion to consider Dominican history and culture. The book ends in Trinidad, a lively section, with carnival, music and complicated politics, perhaps the best I have read about the place. Aside from the weaknesses of no index, no illustrations and a lousy map, this is an exceptional book that I recommend highly.

In *ISLAND PEOPLE*, Joshua Jelly-Schapiro takes his readers along with him on extended visits to more than a dozen Caribbean islands, including multiple chapters each on Jamaica, Cuba, and Haiti. With an accessible style, he shares the islands' commonalities and differences through their varied histories and their music, literature, art, and politics. Much is revealed through personal exchanges and island-roaming with new-found local friends and acquaintances. Jelly-Schapiro's travels here span more than the past decade, and he sometimes revisits friends made in previous chapters, thus showing recent directions of change. This is not a tourists' guide to hotels, restaurants, and sights. Rather, this is travel writing at its finest, perhaps the best first-person narrative of experiences across the Caribbean since the classic *THE TRAVELLER'S TREE* by Patrick Leigh Fermor was published in 1950. I bought the hardback of *Island People* when it was released in November 2016, and read it slowly over three weeks, savoring each story/chapter. I very much enjoyed revisiting islands, music, and books I've had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with in person, and contemplating others I'd still like to visit and get to know better. (Now added to my

Bucket List thanks to this book are Montserrat, Martinique, and Dominica.) ISLAND PEOPLE is a big book. Literally. Wanting to re-read chapters while traveling myself, I also have bought the Kindle edition. It's that good.

very good indeed; the breadth of the author's knowledge and passion shine through. Unfortunately when it comes to the single thing he seems to care about the most, the music, his exegesis goes on and on and on, wayyyyyy beyond boring. He cannot be faulted for this love, but why his editor didn't rein him in is beyond me.

good read

Insightful, engaging "off-the-tourist-map" perspective of the people, culture, and history of the islands.

Really interesting read. Happened upon this by chance.

I picked this up expecting to get a first-hand account of Caribbean life. This is nothing more than a privileged American's account of travelling. He spends his entire Jamaica section talking about Bob Marley. The Cuban section was OK, but spent more time giving a history lesson of Cuba than actually talking about the people of Cuba. I expected more out of this. Disappointed.

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