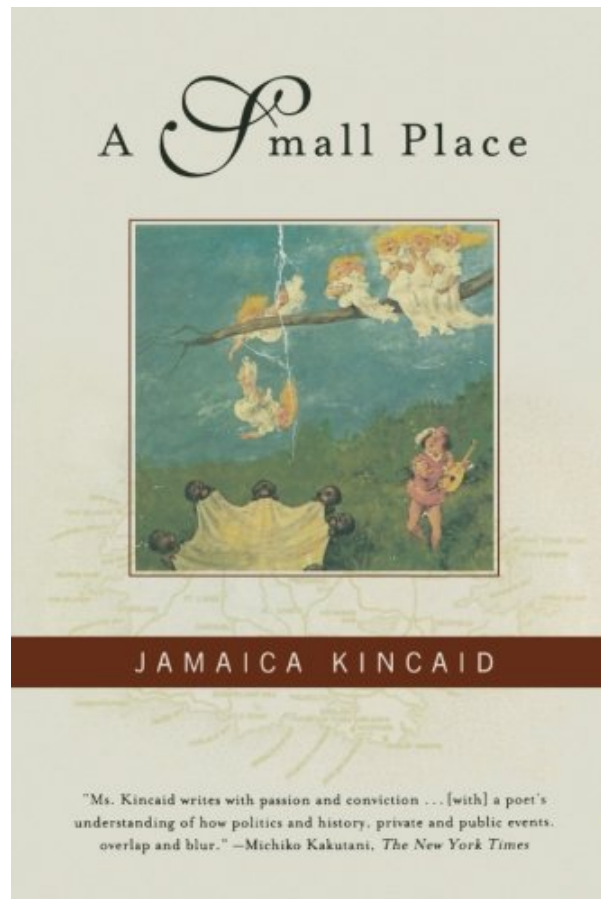


# A SMALL PLACE BY JAMAICA KINCAID



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"Ms. Kincaid writes with passion and conviction ... [with] a poet's understanding of how politics and history, private and public events, overlap and blur." —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

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From Library Journal

Kincaid here examines the geography and history of Antigua, where she was raised. We first see the island through the eyes of the typical North American tourist, who aims to exchange his or her own "everydayness" for that of someone without the same privilege. But rather than interpret Antiguan experience for outsiders, Kincaid lays bare the limits of her own understanding. She asks us to grasp the crime of empire in a new way, stressing that it can be understood only from a post-colonial point of view: surveying 20 years of a corrupt "free" government, she finds the inheritance of colonialism to be a commercial and governmental enterprise that serves individual interests. Antiguan, she effectively demonstrates, are ordinary people saddled with an unthinkable but unbreachable past. Mollie Brodsky, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J.  
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## About the Author

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A brilliant look at colonialism and its effects in Antigua--by the author of Annie John

"If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see. If you come by aeroplane, you will land at the V. C. Bird International Airport. Vere Cornwall (V. C.) Bird is the Prime Minister of Antigua. You may be the sort of tourist who would wonder why a Prime Minister would want an airport named after him--why not a school, why not a hospital, why not some great public monument. You are a tourist and you have not yet seen . . ."

So begins Jamaica Kincaid's expansive essay, which shows us what we have not yet seen of the ten-by-twelve-mile island in the British West Indies where she grew up.

Lyrical, sardonic, and forthright by turns, in a Swiftian mode, *A Small Place* cannot help but amplify our vision of one small place and all that it signifies.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

41 of 46 people found the following review helpful.

A Caribbean jeremiad

By Michael J. Mazza

"A Small Place," by Jamaica Kincaid, is a nonfiction prose piece about the Caribbean island of Antigua. The author bio at the beginning of the book notes that the author was born on Antigua. A lean 81 pages, this is nonetheless a powerful text.

Kincaid discusses British colonialism, the corruption of the Antiguan government, racism, and greed. It seems to me a key question raised by the book is whether post-colonial Antigua is worse than colonial Antigua. The book is very much haunted by the spectre of New World slavery.

This book is a dark, angry jeremiad. I think it works better when seen as an extended prose poem rather than as an essay. As the latter, it could be criticized as full of invalid generalizations and undocumented claims. But as a poetic/prophetic text, it is chillingly effective.

Ultimately, Kincaid's vision of the human condition is extremely negative. But her haunting, almost hypnotic prose really held me. I recommend the book to anyone planning a trip to a poor country for their own pleasure.

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Kincaid's *Mad as Hell*, and *She's Not Going to Take it Anymore*

By P. B. Coovert

Published in 1988 Kincaid's "A Small Place" is an unflinchingly angry portrayal of post-colonial, post-slavery life on the island of Antigua. To put it simply: Kincaid is as mad as hell, and she's not going to take it anymore. If you're white and can shelve your defensiveness for a moment this book is actually really enjoyable, it's written in first person and directed at "you," the British colonizer and/or the fat white tourist. Kincaid's sense of humor is wonderfully dark, and there are a lot of moments of humor if you keep an open mind. Still, at the heart of the matter is the story of Antigua's decay, left to rot by the British colonizers, with

a population that doesn't vote openly corrupt officials out of office. She openly points out the irony of the celebration of emancipation alongside the valorization of the Hotel Training School, which teaches the residents of the island to be servants. In the end Kincaid concludes that no one is to blame, that after slavery the masters are no longer evil and the slaves are no longer "noble," but that everyone is merely human. She problematizes the matter, but offers no solutions, which might irritate those concrete sequentials among us. Also, she refers to Columbus, and the explorers in general, so adored in American culture, as "human rubbish" on multiple occasions. You might not agree with Kincaid, but this is one topic someone should be angry about, and her unapologetic narrative is about as honest as you can get.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

A reality check for those visiting the Caribbean

By Michael Esposito

My son recently had to read Jamaica Kincaid's book "A Small Place" for a college course and was taken aback by the strong language and the repudiation of the tourist. I found it a fascinating read and finished it in one sitting - not difficult because it only has 81 pages. After reading it, I tried my best to explain to him the social and cultural context of the book, and told him that I didn't take the attacks on the tourist personally, nor did I feel that the majority of people in the Caribbean had that same attitude. However, there is certainly frustration among the population with the social and economic difficulties that many Caribbean people face.

I find the book, in its passionate expression of the point of view contrary to the tourist literature, useful as a reality check for reflecting on my motives for visiting the Caribbean, analyzing my expectations, and understanding how my behavior may be perceived.

It is important to note that the book was written in 1988, when the Bird family was still firmly entrenched in power in Kincaid's native Antigua. The politics of the Bird family in Antigua achieved, according to one source that I read, a level of corruption surpassing the corruption of many other Caribbean societies with the exception of Duvalier's Haiti. When I visited Antigua in 2005, the Bird era had ended with the election of Baldwin Spencer the year before.

An analogy that I find useful is that, while we who live in industrialized societies are collectively responsible for world hunger and the uneven distribution of wealth, it would be hard to argue, except in a few cases, that we are individually responsible. The best we can do is donate when we can, assist others in need as our means and circumstances permit, and examine our own motives for living our lives in a certain manner.

Most importantly for visitors to the Caribbean, I would advise them to conduct themselves in a way worthy of respect, treat people kindly and fairly, and control their frustration when confronted with unexpected circumstances.

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