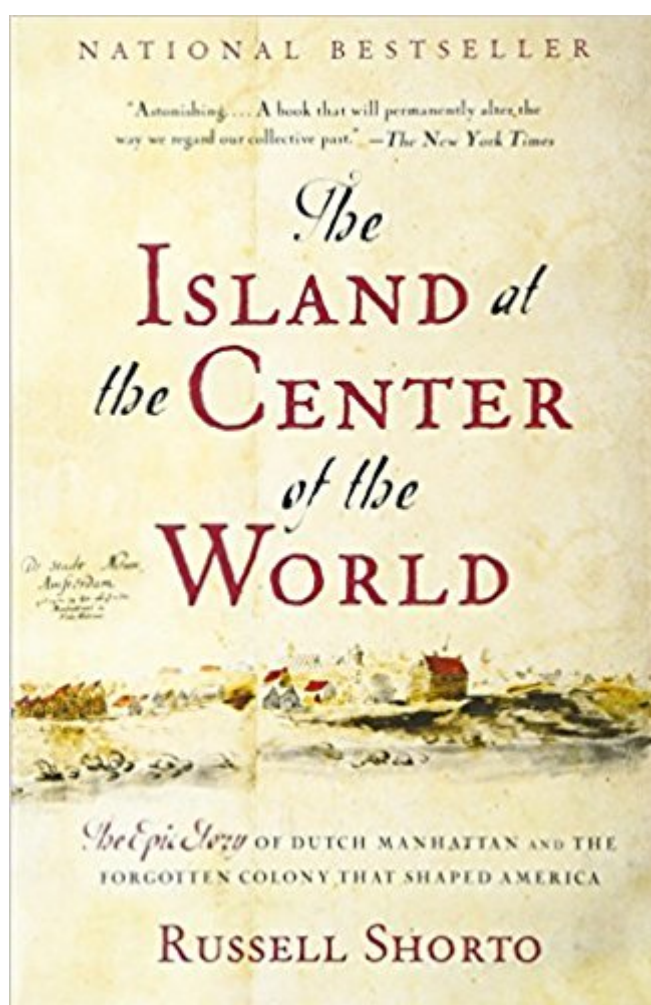


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# The Island At The Center Of The World: The Epic Story Of Dutch Manhattan And The Forgotten Colony That Shaped America



## Synopsis

A gripping narrative of New Netherland—a story of global sweep centered on a wilderness called Manhattan—that transforms our understanding of early America. When the British wrested New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1664, the truth about its thriving, polyglot society began to disappear into myths about an island purchased for 24 dollars and a cartoonish peg-legged governor. But the story of the Dutch colony of New Netherland was merely lost, not destroyed: 12,000 pages of its records—recently declared a national treasure—are now being translated. Russell Shorto draws on this remarkable archive in *The Island at the Center of the World*, which has been hailed by *The New York Times* as “a book that will permanently alter the way we regard our collective past.” The Dutch colony pre-dated the original thirteen colonies, yet it seems strikingly familiar. Its capital was cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic, and its citizens valued free trade, individual rights, and religious freedom. Their champion was a progressive, young lawyer named Adriaen van der Donck, who emerges in these pages as a forgotten American patriot and whose political vision brought him into conflict with Peter Stuyvesant, the autocratic director of the Dutch colony. The struggle between these two strong-willed men laid the foundation for New York City and helped shape American culture. *The Island at the Center of the World* uncovers a lost world and offers a surprising new perspective on our own.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mining a trove of recently translated 17th-century records of New Netherland, Shorto reconstructs, in fascinating detail, the little-told story behind the Dutch settlement and its capital, Manhattan. In it,

listeners meet a wide cast of characters, from early governors Peter Minuit and Peter Stuyvesant to princes, explorers, smugglers, settlers, Indians, Puritans, prostitutes and slaves. It's hard to imagine any narrator's voice remaining fresh and compelling through 15 hours of sweeping historical narrative, but Ganser comes close. In a voice imbued with robustness, Ganser juggles the delivery not only of characters, but of cultures, eras, lexicons and the occasionally intrusive persona of the author. These various layers are rendered, for the most part, in authentic fashion. Shorto's prose, however, can be overwrought and, because the narrative is built on volumes of oft-arcane legal documents, he is partial to listing, which overwhelms the ear. In addition, with so dense a narrative terrain, many listeners will lament the audiobook's lack of maps and other illustrations. But these are mostly minor quibbles when measured against the grand scope of Shorto's fascinating history and Ganser's admirable performance. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As the song goes, "Even Old New York was once New Amsterdam." Unfortunately, for many Americans, that is the limit of their knowledge about the Dutch colony that was seized by the English in 1664. Shorto, author of two previous books and articles published in the New Yorker and the New York Times Magazine, presents an outstanding and revealing chronicle of the Dutch presence on Manhattan Island. Much of his research is based on recently translated Dutch primary sources that have languished in archives in Albany. Written in elegant prose, this enthralling story provides original perspectives on several historical figures, including Henry Hudson, Peter Minuit, and Peter Stuyvesant. Shorto also highlights the contributions of Andriaen van der Donck, an energetic, charismatic man who played an integral part in creating a dynamic, diverse, and tolerant society that appears refreshing when compared to the neighboring Puritan-dominated colony in Massachusetts. This is an important work. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Oh, wonderful. This book is so beautiful written. His description of Henry Hudson's family's participation in the investment house that funded his trips, the transition to describing London, the bridge, its environs, then this: "Beyond it stood the rounded wooden structure of the Globe Theater in its original incarnation." Wow. That was so Cool. And so unexpected. I felt like I was watching some Hollywood film where you start your view from above the world and slowly you descend, London comes in view, here's where the rich people live, here's where the whores live, and oh yeah, that's where Shakespeare entertained them both. Besides the writing style, I really enjoy the

structure of the book. I've read quite a lot about the Thirty Years War, the enlightenment, the English civil war, the early settling of our nation - but never in a way that allows me to integrate the effects these events visited, collectively, on the settlement and character development of this country. Shorto ties it all together in one neat little package. Admittedly, unless you have read about each of these events separately, it's truly hard, for example, to appreciate just how devastating the Thirty Years War was for Europe. One interesting insight Shorto offers, however, that struck a chord in me, is that Western European civilization viewed war, in and of itself, as the natural state of being; that is, before the treaty of Westphalia and the loss of 40-45% of its population during the Thirty Years War. What a horror. A loss even greater than during WWII as a percentage of the population. After that "peace" became the natural state. With war becoming the last act. Hence, Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of politics by other means". Additionally, one can talk about the inspiration that enlightenment figures had on our founding fathers and our founding documents, but I, for one, would not have tied the Thirty Years War and the English civil war together, inextricably linked, to the birth of this nation through the Dutch or the English settlement, thereof, or for that matter the French settlement in the new world. And surprise, surprise. Who the heck would have known about the Swedes? Never had a clue. Shorto completely surprised me with their imperial foray into the new world. Because I read history as a sequence of events, a continuum in time and space, but not in chronological order, e.g., I read about ancient Rome then jump to the history of Manhattan, I end up rendering history as linear and sequential. I rarely have the benefit of seeing it as a survey of a given time "like one experiences when in college, through discussion and careful planning on the part of a professor - I tend to lose sight of the fact that history is more like the collision of atoms in a fixed space, each crash and bang moving other objects, unpredictably, in new directions. Well, sorry for going off the deep end. I like this guy so much that I'm going to read his "Descartes' Bones: A Skeletal History of the Conflict between Faith and Reason".

Omgosh! This book is amazing (I'm 3/4 of the way through it)! If you are the least bit interested in colonial history, or the history of Manhattan or the history of Dutch dominance prior to the English taking over, this book will enthrall you as if you were reading fiction. Very well researched and a joy to read. I teach Advanced Placement US History and I will be incorporating into my class what I have learned from this book. Thank you Mr. Shorto for writing a book that you may have thought would be too esoteric for some, but is actually a book that any reader would find fascinating.

I loved this study so much that I went onto read Shorto's latest book, "Amsterdam". I also purchased a copy for my grandson, a bright HS history student, and both he and his parents, who also read the book, praised it highly. Shorto's research is deep, and he has thoroughly mastered the material and written, in the best historical narrative style, a fascinating study exploring the Dutch roots for the unique economic, social and culture aspects of New York, and subsequently, the US. It can be argued that the best in the American concepts of equality, individualism, capitalism, religious tolerance, self governance are Dutch, even more so than English. It's a must read.

Early warning: I'm very interested in the history of the Dutch in America, as I am currently an American expat living in the Netherlands. That said, this is still a fascinating book, full of cultural insights that impacted the early settlement of Manhattan and the greater NY area, as well as the history that was recorded of that time (to the victor-- English-- goes historical interpretation). It's now clear why place names are what they are and why NYC is such a multi-cultural brewing pot. This is a dense but rich and compelling read for those interested in the topic.

A great follow-on read to Simon Schama's "The Embarrassment of Riches". And a genuine eye-opener re. the Dutch on Manhattan Island. Shorto has done his homework and the result is delightful. If readers believe the British were the motivating force behind New York City they are in for a drastic discovery. But if you like unexpected twists to your historical perspectives, Shorto delivers the goods with humor, authority and reams of newly discovered...and surprising...facts. And he has dig around to provide a variety of pictures, maps and illustrations to make for an easy, enlightened read...rather than provide a pompous treatise. I have passed this book around to a number of my friends and they all say the same thing: "What a great read"!

This is an excellent book. Mr. Shorto took a considerable amount of time researching his subject in the old Dutch documents that have recently been translated. I might debate him about Manhattan being the "center of the world", but he certainly has presented a cogent argument for considering it such. I was much interested in the information he had about Van Tienhoven, who happens to be related to a friend of mine and whom I included in my book, Heart of the Pines. About the only thing he failed to include was Van Tienhoven's mother-in-law urging him to kick the severed head of an Indian around the streets of New Amsterdam and his penchant for "running naked with the Indians." He also missed the Dutch commission sent over to examine Van Tienhoven right before he disappeared. Oh well.... In any case, this is the best work I've read of the early Dutch history of New

Amsterdam. His writing makes for very easy reading, even for those who have absolutely no contact with New York colonial history.

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