

# The Island at the Center of the World

By Russell Shorto

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## The Island at the Center of the World By Russell Shorto

*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.

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## The Island at the Center of the World By Russell Shorto Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.

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From [Booklist](#)

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*

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Review

"Astonishing . . . A book that will permanently alter the way we regard our collective past." --*The New York Times*

"A tour de force. . . . The dramatic story of New York's origins is splendidly told. . . . A masterpiece of storytelling and first-rate intellectual history." --*The Wall Street Journal*

"As readable as a finely written novel. . . . social history in the Barbara Tuchman tradition." --*San Jose Mercury News*

"Literary alchemy. . . . Shorto's exhaustively researched and highly readable book is a stirring re-examination. . . . Brilliant and magisterial narrative history" —*Chicago Tribune*

"Masterly . . . A new foundation myth . . . Shorto writes at all times with passion, verve, nuance and considerable humor." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Rattlingly well told—a terrific popular history about a past that beautifully illuminates the present." —*The*

*Sunday Times* [London]

“A dramatic, kaleidoscopic and, on the whole, quite wonderful book. . . . This is one of those rare books in the picked-over field of colonial history, a whole new picture, a thrown-open window. . . . [A] full-blooded resurrection of an unfamiliar American patriot.” –*The New York Observer*

“Deserves to be a bestseller . . . narratively irresistible, intellectually provocative, historically invaluable”  
–*The Guardian*

“A spry, informative history. . . . Shorto supplies lucid, comprehensive contexts in which to see the colony’s promise and turmoil. . . . [D]elivers the goods with clarity, color and zest.” –*The Seattle Times*

“As Russell Shorto demonstrates in this mesmerizing volume, the story we don’t know is even more fascinating than the one we do . . . Historians must now seriously rethink ...

## **Users Review**

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As people who live in often the modest era should be update about what going on or data even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era that is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to a person is you don't know which one you should start with. This *The Island at the Center of the World* is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and need in this era.

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