



# Caribbean

*James A. Michener*

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In this acclaimed classic novel, James A. Michener sweeps readers off to the Caribbean, bringing to life the eternal allure and tumultuous history of this glittering string of islands. From the 1310 conquest of the Arawaks by cannibals to the decline of the Mayan empire, from Columbus's arrival to buccaneer Henry Morgan's notorious reign, from the bloody slave revolt on Haiti to the rise of Cuba's Fidel Castro, *Caribbean* packs seven hundred dramatic years into a tale teeming with revolution and romance, authentic characters and thunderous destinies. Through absorbing, magnificent prose, Michener captures the essence of the islands in all of their awe-inspiring scope and wonder.

## Praise for *Caribbean*

"Michener is a master."--*Boston Herald*

"A grand epic . . . [James A. Michener] sympathizes with the struggles of the region's most oppressed, and succeeds in presenting the Caribbean in its rich diversity."--*The Plain Dealer*

"Remarkable and praiseworthy . . . utterly engaging."--*The Washington Post Book World*

"Even American tourists familiar with some of the serene islands will find themselves enlightened. . . . In *Caribbean*, there appears to be a strong aura of truth behind the storytelling."--*The New York Times*

## Caribbean Details

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Author : James A. Michener

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# From Reader Review Caribbean for online ebook

## Wally says

The Caribbean is a great book spanning the centuries from 1300 to 1989. It starts off with the Arawak and Carib Indians and intertwines history and story throughout the early European exploration of the Caribbean, the Spanish dominance during the 1500's, the piracy of Henry Morgan, the struggle between the Spanish, French, and English. Through a well told tale you can learn about the sugar plantations, the importation of slaves from Africa (who mostly comprise the population of the Caribbean today) the rise of Rastafarian, Haitian voodoo, and even the Cuban Revolution. Over 600 pages but they turn quickly as you get engrossed in the book.

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## Julie says

James Michener is one of my favorite authors. I learned so many things about the Caribbean and its history. It's just not sandy beaches and palm trees, but about the slavery and piracy and the quest for power between the European nations. This book takes you from Cuba to Barbados to Panama and the Yucatan, the rum trade and sugar trade, Rastafarians and Hindu. So many things I never knew!

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## Daniel Garrison says

Another great Michener book. The guy is crazy good with fact and fiction.

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## Heather says

I quite enjoyed Michener's Caribbean. Michener certainly puts an amazing amount of research into his writing. The book is comprised of 14 chapters covering approximately 700 years of Caribbean history. Some are interconnected, in that the narrative may follow a descendant of a particular character earlier in the story. Naturally, I found some more interesting than others, but overall, a well-told history.

I knocked off one star because one of the islands where one (or more) chapters is set was fictional. Somehow, that just felt like cheating to me, as there were so many real islands that I would have liked to hear about than a fictional one. That being said, the fictional island is a compilation of others.

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## Gary says

In this novel, Michener takes us through the ages in the magnificent Caribbean. While it may be an exaggeration to refer to the Caribbean as a microcosm of the world, it is certainly a rich and diverse and fascinating region, its tropical beauty matched by its vibrant and interesting people. Beginning on the island of Dominica, where the Arawaks, a beautiful, gentle and cultured people where

displaced by the fierce and warlike Caribs , it continues through the adventures in the Caribbean of Christopher Columbus , the great pirate admirals like Francis Drake , the struggles of the Spanish , French , British , Dutch and English over these islands, the cruelty of slavery , and the equally savage slave uprisings , how the turbulence of the English Civil War and the French Revolutions reached these islands , right up to the challenges of the present day , including a chapter about the Rastafari movement , and about the tyranny on Cuba of Fidel Castro , and the Cuban exile community in Miami. The book also covers a fictional island called All Saints.

While slow in parts , it is overall a fascinating and entertaining read.

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### **David says**

This is the first Michener book I've read and I'll probably try another at some point. I enjoyed reading it and have a much better understanding of the Caribbean.

The dialogue seemed forced at times (trying to give background like soap operas do with two characters discussing details that people in real life would never get into) and some of the situations seem unlikely, especially a couple of romances and multi-generational sagas. But I did enjoy the characters and their stories do weave together to provide a thorough history of the region.

Michener lists which characters and events are factual and which are composites. I frequently turned to the inside cover map and marveled at my ignorance of many of these islands. The history covers natives to Columbus and then to the Spanish, English, French, Africans and others who created the colorful culture(I didn't know that East Indians have a large presence on some islands.), showing the differences between various colonial influences. Reading this during the earthquake tragedy in Haiti made the extensive Haitian history timely.

Read it if you want a wide-ranging Caribbean history through historical fiction.

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### **Lani says**

I absolutely ADORED Hawaii and have picked up some other Michener books for free since. None have lived up to Hawaii, but there are certainly some enjoyable bits in the 800 pages of Caribbean.

I understand that the Caribbean is not a confederation of islands and that each island has its own tumultuous history. Michener's narrative really suffers from trying to pull all of these together, particularly in the final chapter where people from each island all fall into place on a cruise. It seemed like a last ditch attempt to pull all of these unrelated threads together and make them seem like a book rather than a series of vignettes.

There certainly were sections that I found enjoyable, but I'm not sure those justified reading the whole book. If I were a teacher some of these might be chapters I would assign separately to give students a feel for the history of an island.

The region clearly has a very rich history and I enjoyed learning what I did from the reading. However it was so long-winded and scattershot that I can't say I felt the book was very good.

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## Peter Spence says

Michener is a master educator and he does not disappoint with *Caribbean*, immersing the reader in a web of historical intrigue. Who else but Michener can write the "complete" 500 year history of Western Europe and the North Atlantic in 1000 pages.

I love the way he can identify issues and present stories around the historical facts, leaving the reader feeling he is master of the relationships between the Western European naval powers in the 16th and 17th centuries. and the ethical and moral issues of slavery and national greed that created the modern Caribbean nations. Recommended along with other Michener books.

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## Alejandro Teruel says

I read some of James Michener's books decades ago, when the CVA (Centro Venezolano-Americana) and the IVB (Instituto Venezolano Británico) still had excellent lending libraries in Caracas -alas, both now long gone. I remember liking the books, but to be honest I don't even remember which ones I managed to get my hands on.

*Caribbean* (1989) is a historical novel in the sense found for example in Britannica:

A novel that has as its setting a period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity (which is in some cases only apparent fidelity) to historical fact. The work may [...] contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters.

Michener's book is ambitious, as it tries to span the social, political and economical history of the Caribbean from pre-Columbus times to the late 1980s; each chapter is a story set in a different period and, with a few exceptions, a different island. Sometimes descendants of a character pop up in later chapters, thus providing some desperately needed threads to stitch the succession of stories into the tapestry of the region.

At over 600 hundred pages, it is a long book and I suspect every reader will find some chapters better or more interesting than others. As a novel, I found it very unsatisfactory. As fictionalized history, it fares better and Michener must be thanked for his very helpful preface aptly entitled *Fact and fiction* -which I kept skipping back to- in which he succinctly points out what events and characters were real. I believe that Michener is successful in motivating the reader to read more about the region.

The book does not, however, cover the whole Caribbean, but rather focuses on (some of) the islands of the Caribbean, paying particular attention to Jamaica, Haiti, Barbados, Guadeloupe and Trinidad. Michener gallantly attempts to strike a balance between the influence and presence of England, Spain and France in the region, even if in the end the feeling is that the former British West Indies are covered in much more detail than the former French and Spanish colonies. Panama, Cartagena (Colombia), Maracaibo and the salt flats of Cumaná -actually Araya- (Venezuela) which are part of the Caribbean and of mainland South America are mentioned only as the target of pirates, buccaneers and privateers and Mexico is mentioned only as in connection to the decline of Mayan civilization. Even the ex-spanish colonies of Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico are given very small roles, and the only chapter on Cuba takes place in the 1980s and is loosely centered on the impact Cuban emigration was having on Miami and La Habana.

A historical novel is sometimes notable not only for what it includes, but also what it leaves out -Michener says nary a word on Costa Rica, Honduras, Belize or the Cayman Islands. It coyly steers clear of US involvements and interventions in the Caribbean; the Spanish-American war does not even merit a mention, neither do William Walker filibustering interventions in the Caribbean and his usurpation of the Nicaraguan presidency (1856-1857), the building of the Panama Canal, the so called Banana Wars culminating in the US military occupations of Haiti(1915-1934) and the Dominican Republic (1916-1924) or how the Danish Virgin Islands passed into US hands; the US invasion of Grenada(1983) is covered in a couple of sentences as does its funding Contras in Nicaragua, and its coverage of Puerto Rico and the Dutch Antilles is minuscule. There is no coverage of Caribbean contribution to the arts, literature or music -Michener's characters blithely and outrageously proclaim that "Hawaian" music has had more of an impact than caribbean music -Michener even false misrepresents the well-know colombian historian and intellectual Germán Arciniegas as spanish. As other Goodreads reviewers point out, Michener also invents the (inexistent) island of All Saints and I join the chorus of voices wondering why on earth Michener felt the need to do this.

The economic, social and political importance of sugar is well stressed, except in the last chapter where Michener repeatedly pushes through the mouths of several of his characters what appears to be his favoured but hopelessly naive solution to the economy of the Caribbean -that US pay a few cents a pound over the international price of sugar. Many of the stories attempt to develop stories that illustrate evolution of race relations in the Caribbean with rather mixed results. The last chapters have a very 1980s ring to them, replete with rastafarians, student emigration problems, Haiti's drawn out collapse and even the spectre of future Cuban hegemony in the Caribbean.

All in all, a very mixed bag of three star and four star chapters, but interesting enough if you either like Michener or use the book as a springboard to more serious books on the region leading up to UNESCO's massive six volume *The General History of the Caribbean*, which I hope to tackle some day.

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### **Susanne Bradley says**

As is typical of Michener's work, one of the main strong points of this book is that it's hugely informative. I learned a great deal about the turbulent, often tragic history of the Caribbean. I found it interesting, as I've been to the region several times -- I'm even getting married there in a few months -- but was never really aware of its history, aside from what I learned from visits to the typical historic tourism sites like Tulum, Chichen Itza, etc.

Rather than following the pattern of novels like *Chesapeake* and *Hawaii*, which follow a set of families more or less continuously over a certain time period, *Caribbean* tells the story in several discrete episodes: there's a story about a character in some region, then it moves on to something else, and we may see something about that character's great-great-great-grandchild in a couple of hundred pages. The episodes of this book are made even more separate by the fact that, in this novel, Michener chose not to restrict himself to any one Caribbean island, so the story jumps around in space as well as in time.

Some people might object to the somewhat discontinuous nature of the story, but I thought that it mostly worked quite well. As a natural consequence of the way the story was told, some of the chapters were quite strong while others were weaker. The very first chapter dealing with the Arawaks and the Carib was excellent -- I would have liked to have more chapters dealing with the indigenous population, but this story only included two (the other one dealing with the Maya), at which point the indigenous people more or less

disappeared from the story. The chapter about the Haitian slave revolt is outstanding: the book is almost worth purchasing just for that chapter alone. Personally, I felt that most of the chapters dealing with the Spanish domination of the Caribbean were a bit dry and overlong, and I thought that the chapter on the Maya could have been much more interesting than it was.

The other problem I had with this book was Michener's decision to include a fictional Caribbean island, All Saints. The chapters taking place on All Saints weren't particularly interesting, and I just didn't quite understand what purpose the island gave to the story. All Saints was portrayed as having two defining characteristics to the story, namely racial segregation and love of cricket. My thought was that, if these are characteristics common to the Caribbean, then they could have been dealt with using one of the real islands as a backdrop, and if they AREN'T typical of the Caribbean, then they really don't have a place in a book whose main goal is to give readers an understanding of the Caribbean islands.

Ultimately, though, this is a book I quite enjoyed. It had its flaws, but overall I thought it was very good.

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### **Beth says**

I love you James Michener! How can someone write a sweeping epic about an entire region that spans 700 years and yet still feels intimate? I loved reading about the ridiculous frivolity and also, glorious chivalry, of the battle of the Caribbean that raged for centuries between England, Spain and France. The tales of slavery and slave rebellion were heartbreaking, and I was relieved to enter modern times and the end of slavery. I learned about Rastafarianism, pirates, the ancient Mayans and so much more. James Michener is a literary genius. He lost the fifth star because the ending was a tad too cheesy when balanced with the rest of the book.

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### **David Earle says**

Finally finished reading "Caribbean" by James A. Michener! This is a book that I began reading when I was actually sailing the Caribbean Sea last October. But throughout this period I was busy with the publication of my own novel, "Life Is But A Dream" and the month spent down in Australia for the production of my play "Postnuptials" that didn't, to my surprise, allow me any time to read. This was also a huge book at 806 pages with teeny-tiny text....the definite definition of an epic. But I love epics! And I really enjoyed this book! Although I didn't plow through it as fast as I did with Michener's "Hawaii" – another epic – it was an enthralling education on the history of the Caribbean. I have to hand it to Michener for the enormous amount of research he did when writing this novel. It begins at the very beginning with the peaceful Arawak Indians and the warrior/cannibal Carib Indians (from which the name Caribbean is derived). From there it covers the Maya empire and their demise from greatness. Then enter the white man – Christopher Columbus – and all the other famous explorers, captains, pirates, buccaneers and slave ships that followed over the next several hundred years (and chapters in the book). The constant battles over these islands for colonial occupation by the Spanish, English, French and Dutch where these islands would fall into the hands of one or the other, some for short periods of time, others longer lasting, was forever ongoing. He tells in great depth the valuable economic trade commodity of sugar that would later replace that of the Spanish galleons laden with silver and gold that was brought over from Peru (and traversed by mule train from Panama City to Porto Bello on the Gulf side). The great sugar plantations and the brutality by which the slaves labored under for four hundred years is described in horrific detail. In fact, between the sickening treatment of slaves and

prisoners of sparing countries, and the indigenous Indians and citizens of the cities and towns overthrown in war and pirate raids, this is what I came away with most from the book.....the amount of blood from massacres, executions, battles and torture that prevailed over the West Indies. Having sailed the Caribbean many times and visiting nearly every island and the surrounding land masses, I have always been aware – as any tourist would – of the incredible beauty and wonderful hospitality that has greeted me at every port, but I was very unaware of the dark past of these places (and what civilization on earth doesn't have a dark past?). Michener brings his book along through the nineteenth and twentieth century's (right up to 1989 when his book was published) touching upon the histories of practically all the islands – even devoting full chapters to several, such as; Jamaica, Barbados, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Trinidad, Cuba, St. John and the powerful fortress city of Cartagena – so it was of some surprise and dismay that he found a need to invent a fictional island called All Saints. Although he fills his book with fictional characters that he intermingles with non-fictional historic characters that I can fully understand and appreciate for the telling of the many stories throughout the book, I cannot understand why with so many multifaceted islands and countries to choose from in the Caribbean, he would come up with a fictional island for one full chapter that is mentioned again and again afterward until the end. Nevertheless, this aside, I enjoyed the book, especially the final chapter, and LOVED the ending!

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### **Melissa says**

Another epic saga from Michener crossed off my list! I loved this one a little bit less than the others I've read, but enjoyed it all the same. I appreciated the in-depth focus on one island per chapter, some of them repeated as the book progressed towards modern times. There's so much about Caribbean history that I don't know! (for example, just about everything). By focusing on the extremely different backgrounds of the different countries, it helped bring them into sharper relief but also highlighted just how strongly their fates were tied to world events, especially in Europe (and eventually, America).

This book took me forever to read, in part because of lack of time but also because there were times when the writing felt really forced and cliched (especially as it got closer to modern day) and because I began to get annoyed that there were no female characters that were allowed to exist on their own without being tied to a romantic partner. Even (and especially) the final chapter! Ugh. I feel like this also probably happened a lot in his other books but it was less obvious, and there was at least one strong female character in each of the other books I've read by him.

Overall, a fascinating look at world history as played out in the Caribbean. I don't think I remembered much of it, but it at least helped me realize just how much I don't know--which is also important!

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### **Jeff says**

Less a novel than a term paper for a high school Caribbean history class. The successful "multi-generational saga" formula that Michener milked in other epics fails him completely here -- or, rather, he fails the formula. I'd say he phoned it in, but I've never experienced a phone call this mundane ... or this long.

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## **Juliet Doubleddee says**

Michener once again proves he is a master of mixing well-researched historical information with a strong fictional story line. Each prominent Caribbean location is covered in its' own chapter; seamlessly weaving historical fact, prominent personalities, and generations of fictional families together.

Beginning with an Arawak couple on Hispaniola (Haiti/Dominican Republic) in 1310, the book travels through time to Haiti just after the end of Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier's dictatorship in 1986. In between the reader learns of the Maya on Cozumel, the introduction of Europeans to the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus (along with his eventual down fall), and the ongoing battles between the Spanish, English, French and Dutch. Also, how sugar plantations were founded and the effects of importing african slave labor to the area. Towards the end of the book the Rastafarian movement, and Fidel Castro's Cuba are discussed.

This is the perfect book to read while relaxing my a pool, or laying on a beach -- especially if you have travelled to the Caribbean on vacation. My only criticism of the book is, why Michener felt he needed to created the fictitious island of "All Saints" when he had plenty of real history to squeeze into this 600+ page novel.

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## **Janice says**

I'm kind of surprised that I'm abandoning this book. I love Michener's books. But this is twice that I've put it down and not picked it back up to finish. It reads more like a textbook than a novel. Usually, he mixes his history in a novelized style. This one, not so much.

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## **Frank Theising says**

In "Caribbean," Michener follows the same formula used successfully in many of his other novels like Poland or Chesapeake: hopping from place to place, inventing fictional characters who interact with historical figures, and explaining historical events and their context through the lives of those characters. It worked masterfully in many of his other novels but unfortunately fell short in this novel. I think this is largely because "Caribbean" has no central characters or families that appear consistently throughout the book. The very diversity of the islands, each influenced differently by various Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and African cultures tends to undermine Michener's typical method of telling the history of a region by following a few key fictional families over time. The vast cultural mosaic of the region necessitates a constant introduction of new characters that have no relation to one another from chapter to chapter. Instead of a flowing history, we are left with a choppy patchwork of stories awkwardly forced together. Perhaps that in itself sheds some light on the turbulent history of the Caribbean Islands.

The novel covers almost 700 years of Caribbean History starting with the native Arawak Indians in the 1300s and ending in 1989 when the novel was published. Despite the book's flaws Michener, true to form, does not shy away from covering the disturbing history of mankind's interactions with one another including the conquests, slavery, and colonialism that once flourished in the Caribbean and continues to influence the region to this day. Its starts with the native Arawak Indians on the island of Dominica who would be overrun by the ferocious and cannibalistic Carib Indians.

The novel continues with the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the 400 year period of Spanish domination in the “Spanish Lake,” and the subsequent rivalry between Spain and England. This backdrop is used to recount the adventures of Sir Francis Drake, Henry Morgan, and Horatio Nelson. What I found particularly fascinating was the geo-strategic importance these islands played in European and world affairs. The wealth generated by the sugar plantations made many of these islands more valuable than most of the colonies on the mainland at the time. Likewise, the plantation owners on Jamaica and other British isles were able to acquire seats in Parliament enabling them to punch way above their weight in forcing political decisions of consequence to the entire British Empire. For instance, many of the onerous restrictions on the flow of trade for the colonies on the American mainland were initiated by MPs whose seats represented the West Indies. This was a slap in the face to American patriots popularizing the phrase “no taxation without representation” and no doubt directly contributed to the American Revolution.

Michener does help to explain the unique character of many of the islands. Oliver Cromwell and the English Civil War are used to recount the history of Barbados, commonly referred to as “Little England.” French verses English attitudes towards mixed-race (creole) relations and the export of the French Terror into the islands are used to paint a picture of life in Guadeloupe. The Haitian revolution is told through the story of fictional general Cesar Vaval. Communist Cuba is explored through the eyes of Cuban refugees who have made a prosperous new life for themselves in Miami. Michener explores, in excruciating detail, the meaning and influence of Rastafarianism in Jamaica and other islands. He explores the introduction of Indians (from India) from lower castes into the islands to do many of the menial jobs that former slave refuse to do after slavery is abolished.

While I have a much greater appreciation for the Caribbean, at over 800 pages the book turned into much more of a slog than his other books and I found myself struggling to get through the last third of the book. Thus far, this ranks as my least favorite Michener book.

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### **Chris says**

If you like historical novels ... James Michener is the author for you. I'm fascinated and in love with the Caribbean islands so I was quite interested in all the history and research he brought to his writing. HOWEVER, the hardest part is figuring out what is real and what is fiction. It's a long book. I read it on the beach of Nevis as I drank rum punch and enjoyed the beauty of the Caribbean. Downsides of this book: He writes about the history of the slave trade in the Caribbean islands and the gruesome details of how slaves were treated was extremely tough to read so if you are looking for "light" reading, don't go here ... I found Michener's writing to sometimes be pithy ... but I overall enjoyed the read.

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### **Bill Currie says**

Read on the cruise to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. A must for historical knowledge not told in a boring scholarly way.

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## **Heather says**

This was not the best Michener book I have read, but, as is typical for him, it was a very entertaining and informative romp through Caribbean history. One warning: if you are reading this in connection with a Caribbean vacation, I highly recommend getting at least halfway through this book before you get on the plane. It turns out the history of the Caribbean is very upsetting and makes for an unsettling beach read.

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