

# **A Small Place Study Guide**

## **A Small Place by Jamaica Kincaid**

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# Plot Summary

A Small Place by Jamaica Kincaid is an opinionated essay cleverly disguised as a novel. There are no acting characters, nor is there a plot. The narrator's voice gives her opinions of the many events and difficulties that have happened to the natives of the island of Antigua. A Small Place is a subjective description of the of government corruption and the lack of concern that the people of one nation has for the people of another. A Small Place also investigates the effects of slavery when the emancipated slaves are never taught how to be ordinary people.

Tourists arrive in Antigua and hail a taxi to get to their resort. They consider the expensive cars that are prevalent in Antigua but do not consider the poor homes that the natives live in. They pass the school and hospital but do not concern themselves with the shabby condition of the buildings or the reflection that the appearance projects on the employees therein. In passing three beautiful mansions, they do not hesitate to wonder if the owners obtained their homes by immoral means. The tourists are unaware that there is no sewage disposal system and their waste floats next to them in the beautiful water they admire so much. The narrator condemns the tourists' lack of concern for the welfare of Antiguan. She expresses her dislike of tourists, who become ugly people when they are on vacation.

The narrator laments that Antigua is not the same as it was in her youth. The library was destroyed in 1974, and has not yet been rebuilt. She condemns the racism prevalent in many organizations in Antigua. She also seems concerned that Antiguan view the way they are treated by white people as bad manners as opposed to racism. She mocks the English's love for England, since they try to recreate it in every land they encounter, ruining the lands and the people. The narrator believes that the English are criminals, and they teach Antiguan crime. She regrets that Antiguan have no language of their own and can only verbally express themselves in the language of the criminal. The narrator defends Antiguan's opposition to capitalism as the result of being considered capital themselves for so long.

The narrator worries that Antigua is in worse shape as a self-ruled nation than when they were ruled by England. The temporary library is in a run-down building and does not have room for all the books, many of which are being ruined. The narrator laments the stupidity of the youth in Antigua. She is very concerned with restoring the library.

The narrator considers the great deal of corruption in Antigua. She reflects on the monopoly that government-owned utility companies have in Antigua and the general corruption of the government officials in procuring wealth for themselves at the expense of the natives' welfare. The narrator reflects on the condition of Antiguan as the result of emancipation. They were released from slavery but never taught how to be ordinary people, especially on the surreal, beautiful island they call home.

# Section 1

## Section 1 Summary

A Small Place by Jamaica Kincaid is an opinionated essay cleverly disguised as a novel. There are no acting characters nor is there a plot. The narrator's voice gives her opinions of the many events and difficulties that have happened to the natives of the island of Antigua. A Small Place is a subjective description of the of government corruption and the lack of concern that the people of one nation has for the people of another. A Small Place also investigates the effects of slavery when the emancipated slaves are not taught how to be ordinary people.

Tourists arrive in the small island of Antigua by the V. C. Bird International Airport. They admire the beauty of the island, finding the nearby islands too green in comparison. The lush vegetation of neighboring islands indicates the likelihood of rain, which would ruin their vacation. These tourists never consider that Antigua's drier climate is the result of drought or the effects of that drought on the natives. They consider only their own immediate comfort. The tourists easily and quickly pass through customs, while the natives returning to their home are detained by searches through their belongings.

When the tourists hail a taxicab for transportation to their resort, the taxi driver tries to overcharge but is prevented when the tourists ask to see the fee sheet. The driver is careless and dangerous, which may either frighten or thrill the tourists. The tourists enjoy the sights of the island and notice the expensive Japanese cars. They wonder if the drivers of these cars own houses that are equally extravagant but remain ignorant that the government owns the car dealerships and has made it easier for Antiguan to get car loans than house loans.

As the tourists pass what they believe to be public latrines, they notice a sign that indicates that the building is actually a school. They do not dwell on the condition of the hospital as they are driven past it. The narrator condemns their lack of concern, pointing out how very important the hospital would suddenly become if their reckless taxi driver ran into another reckless taxi driver. The narrator expresses her hatred of Europeans and their supposed superiority.

The tourists pass three mansions that arouse their curiosity, and the taxi driver explains to them that one belongs to a Middle Eastern family that arrived in Antigua twenty years ago. They now own much of Antigua and Antiguan hate them. The second mansion belongs to an infamous drug smuggler, who has a second mansion on another island that he paid for with cash. The third mansion belongs to a notorious woman that natives call Evita. She is the girlfriend of someone high up in the government and has reaped many benefits from her association with that person.

The tourists finally arrive at their resort and admire the beauty of Antigua. When they take a dip in the ocean, they never consider the lack of a sewage disposal system in

Antigua. They do not consider that they are swimming with the contents of their flushed toilet, emptied bath or sink remains after brushing their teeth.

The narrator condemns the ugliness of tourists. Although they are normal people at home who question and are reassured of their attractiveness, in Antigua they are tourists, and all tourists are ugly. They wonder at the natives and consider themselves and their ancestors superior to the natives and their ancestors. They are uneasy around the natives but do not suspect that the natives dislike and mock them. They dislike the natives as well and are exhausted by the time they return to their homes. The natives would also like to travel but are unable to escape the place they live, which is why they are jealous of the tourists. Every native is a potential tourist and every tourist is native to some land.

## Section 1 Analysis

The visual imagery used in this section provides the reader with the sight that Antigua gives to the tourist landing in this island. It also often compares the beauty they see with the corruption that Antiguanians see while looking at the same thing with the knowledge they have of the surrounding circumstances. Antigua is compared to the other island nearby and found to be less green, less lush, but this is considered a pleasing attribute by the tourists who consider that the lush vegetation is the result of plentiful rain, and they do not want rain to ruin their vacation. Their selfishness is displayed through their lack of concern about the effects that the drought of Antigua has on the local inhabitants.

Antiguan natives and tourists are compared and contrasted. They are physical, cultural and educational opposites. They have had very different histories and experiences. The only thing that seems to bring them together in this section is the fact that every tourist is a native somewhere and every native is a tourist in another land; their classification depends entirely on the setting. In this section, tourists are the antagonists, while the natives are the protagonists.

The narrator employs explicit and implicit judgment throughout this section to render her disapproval of many aspects of Antiguan living, particularly the governmental corruption that is so predominant in this tiny island. She often employs sarcasm to express her judgments to the reader. The tone of the section is very sarcastic and ironic.

The conflict in the first section is the tourists' antipathy toward the natives, and the natives' antipathy toward the tourists. This conflict is resolved by the narrator's statement that all tourists are natives somewhere, and paradoxically, all natives are tourists somewhere, if they are ever able to travel off the island.

The imagery of the beautiful Caribbean island is repetitious throughout this section and the rest of the book. In this section, the tourists' drive is repetitious as they pass three beautiful mansions, but each is described as the result of the corruption of the owners. This idea lays the foundation for the idea throughout the rest of the book—that wealth in

Antigua is only accumulated through corruption. Anyone in Antigua who attempts honesty and hard work is likely to be poor.

The irony of the Antiguan driving expensive cars is emphasized by the statement that there is no unleaded gas in Antigua, so the cars run shoddily because of having the wrong gas used in them. It is also ironic that these people, who own beautiful, expensive cars, live in homes that are very cheap in comparison. The beautiful water's contamination is ironic because the beauty is corrupted. This parallels the government corruption that the narrator claims. The beautiful island of Antigua is corrupted by greed and selfishness. It also parallels the natives' origins. The noble, beautiful African slaves have been corrupted by English rule and slavery into the poor creatures the Antiguan are today.

The selfishness of the tourists is demonstrated by their lack of concern about anything that does not directly affect them. They do not care about the hospital, but they would if they were injured. They do not care that the library is ruined because they have brought their own books. They praise their ancestors for being more ruthless than the Antiguan's ancestors. The positions of the tourists and natives are juxtaposed throughout this section. Their dislike and mockery of each other parallels the other's dislike and mockery. The jealousy of the natives is paradoxical to the discomfort of the tourists.

## Section 2

### Section 2 Summary

Antigua is no longer the same as it was in the narrator's youth. She pities the English and their ruined empire, though they do not realize the horribleness of their actions concerning slavery. She reminisces about the streets she grew up on that were named after English maritime criminals. She expresses her awe as a child of the Government House and its clean, white walls. She remembers seeing the putty-faced Princess, who disappeared quickly behind a wall.

The library in Antigua was open then but has been closed since The Earthquake of 1974, with a sign declaring that repairs are pending. She remembers the laws that were passed to prevent abusive language and the difficulty the English had in their attempts to determine what language was abusive.

The Barclay Brothers, who earned their wealth as slave traders, open Barclay Bank after slavery is abolished, but it is a long time before a black person works for them. The exclusive Mill Reef Club is founded by North Americans that love Antigua but dislike Antiguan, except as servants. A Czechoslovakian refugee trained as a dentist, who has a practice to treat children in Antigua is so appalled by the natives that he requires his wife to inspect his patients before their appointment to ensure that the only offense he receives is the color of their skin.

The headmistress of the girls' school constantly rebukes her students for behaving like monkeys in the trees, but the natives never consider that these comments are racist. The Antiguan are surprised at the bad manners these people exhibit when they are so far from their home and their families' protection. The Antiguan feel superior because of their better breeding and manners.

Antiguan celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday as a holiday as though she were still alive, while, in England, the school that she attended celebrates her death. The narrator comments that no one in Antigua seems to realize she has died. Americans love England so much that they leave their homeland and never return, although they constantly complain about how much they miss it. The school is named after an English Princess, and, before her visit, the streets and buildings she will see are repaired so she will have a favorable impression of Antigua.

The narrator laments that Antiguan have no language. They only speak English, which is the language of the criminals who have injured them; the resentment of a crime expressed in the criminals' language is less effective and more degrading. The English teach Antiguan crime. They arrive and steal the land and do not ask, even for appearances' sake. When the English are murdered, they leave and, looking back, condemn the Antiguan's barbarity while praising their own efforts toward Enlightenment. The English believe that the natives are stupid, partly because of the natives' antipathy

to capitalism. The natives' opposition to capitalism is primarily due to the fact that not long ago, they were slaves and were considered capital.

## Section 2 Analysis

This section focuses primarily on comparing and contrasting the Antigua of the past with the Antigua of the present. This section is also full of exposition. While the physical imagery of the island is static, the culture and lifestyles are dynamic. The people are no longer slaves and they are now poor. They have been corrupted by British influence so that the Antiguanians are now corrupt as well.

The Antiguanians and the English serve as a hyperbolic paradox for one another. Their characteristics are exaggerated to present the English as the antagonist, while the Antiguanians, formerly slaves, are the protagonists. Also, the English who enslaved the Africans can be seen as a parallel to the tourists in section one who turn the Antiguanians' sufferings into a tourist attraction. The Antiguanians are still being extorted for pecuniary gains.

The fascination and preoccupation in Antigua with the English is demonstrated in several ways. Not only are the streets named after the English, but English criminals. The Princess who disappears behind the wall of Government House is symbolic of the way the English are always in sight but just out of reach.

The library is symbolic of the ruin of Antigua, particularly the ruin of academia in the island after emancipation. Although the library was ruined in 1974, the narrator declares that over a decade later, a sign still stands stating that repairs are pending.

The Barclay Brothers earned their wealth through slavery but do not employ the same people they have extorted in order to gain their wealth. Likewise, the Mill Reef Club is founded by whites, who love Antigua but not Antiguanians. These two examples serve as parallel examples of the degradation of the Antiguan natives. They are not seen as equal people, even after emancipation from slavery. These forms of corruption foreshadow the corruption that is presented in the Antiguan government.

The Czechoslovakian dentist is dishonest. He is trained as a dentist, but practices as a children's doctor in Antigua. Moreover, he serves as an ironic character because he fled to Antigua as a refugee to escape Hitler's racist persecution; however, in Antigua, he is offended by the color of the natives' skin and insists that his wife inspect his patients before he sees them to ensure that there is nothing (other than the color of their skin) that is offensive to him. This man essentially flees his home to escape racism, seeks and receives shelter in another land, but is racist against the natives therein. The paradoxical nature of his character provides much room for the general characterization of many people who are offended at being singled out because of their race, religion, nationality, etc. but will often express their own form of bigotry toward others.

The innocence of the Antiguanians is displayed through their lack of believing that racism underlies all the above mentioned cases, as well in the case of the headmistress who



condemns her students for acting like monkeys in trees. The Antiguan simply see these white people and foreigners as bad-mannered individuals, not racists. The many racists that are mentioned in this book parallel one another in their actions, thoughts and the results that are caused by their racism.

Antigua celebrates Queen Victoria's birthday as a holiday every year. Ironically, her kingdom does not celebrate her birthday. The school she attended celebrates her death annually. The juxtaposition of this proves the narrator's later statement that small places dwell upon small events. She also states that it seems as though Antiguan are not aware that Queen Victoria is now dead because they celebrate her birth instead of commemorating her death, as her own people do.

The English are an ironic people. They leave their home, but try to make every land they encounter another England, and the people of other lands into English. Unfortunately, this is impossible, and nowhere and no one can satisfy them. This has been documented in many cases of exploration. The English made it quite a habit to conform lands to their idea of what a country should be without considering the nature of the place or the nature of the people. They ruined many places and many cultures through this means. The narrator's observation in this case is very astute and unique.

The English's character is shown through the narrator's eye in their stealing Antiguan lands without having the common courtesy to ask, even as a matter of form. They also refuse to accept responsibility for the ruin and the corruption they have brought to Antigua. Ironically, they view themselves as the bringers of educational enlightenment, yet the library closes and they do nothing to help rebuild or restore it. The narrator's description of the natives' antipathy to capitalism is also ironic and very intuitive. Having recently been capital that was bought and sold like so many animals, the Antiguan, formerly slaves, are opposed to the idea of being considered capitalists. This would make them part of their own problem.

## Section 3

### Section 3 Summary

The narrator worries that Antigua is in worse condition as a self-ruled nation because of the corrupt government that is in power. The library is now situated in the upstairs of a run-down building, above a dry-goods store. The books are chaotically boxed and possibly becoming ruined. The library hosts a Teenage Pageant and the narrator is disgusted by the lack of education exhibited by the Antiguan youths. The librarian searches for people with the influence and money to help restore the library. The Mill Reef Club may relent and assist in building a new library.

The narrator remembers the head librarian's suspicions when she was a child. She admits that the suspicions were justified because she used to sneak extra books under her dress and often did not return books because she could not bear to part with them after reading them. The old library building is now used as the headquarters for a carnival troupe, and the shelves that previously held beloved books now contain costumes.

The narrator decides to speak to a lady whose family helped to establish the Mill Reef Club about restoring the library. The lady informs her that the restoration plans are inhibited by discussions of setting up boutiques for tourists near the old library. The lady approves of restoring the library and declares that she encourages her girls to go to the library. The narrator is slightly offended, since the lady's "girls" are actually grown Antiguan women.

When the narrator considers talking to the Minister of Education, Culture and Sport, she is prevented from doing so by recalling that he is out of town for a sporting event. She mocks the island's need for a Minister of Culture by stating that only places without culture have such a position. She reflects that he would not likely enjoy talking to her if he were available because of a confrontation her mother had with him years before.

The narrator's mother is notorious for voicing her opinions and supports the second successful political party that Antigua has. She campaigns outside the Minister of Education, Culture and Sport's house, causing chaos. When the Minister refers to her as "that woman," she demands to know what happened with the Redonda stamps. The narrator explains that stamps were made for Redonda, which raised a lot of money but no one knows where the money or the stamps went. Redonda is a rocky island nearer to Montserrat and Nevis, but is part of "The Nation." "The Nation" is composed of Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda, which were combined to constitute one country.

The narrator laments the small events that happen in small places and the lack of an exact account that Antiguanians can provide for themselves. The ambiguity of events is more exaggerated in a small place such as Antigua. Slavery and emancipation are just events, and the events and the everyday often get confused in such small places. The

importance of a quarrel seems to overwhelm the important of corruption in the government because of the size of a place.

The narrator sees the Antiguan as innocent and naïve. She provides examples of the way that Antiguan are taken advantage of because of their innocence and naiveté. There are hotels in Antigua that are used as havens for drug smuggling, and the public beach access is blocked for use as drug ports. This is permitted because ministers in the government are benefiting from the profits. The two car dealerships in Antigua are owned, at least in part, by Antiguan ministers, and car loans are easier for Antiguan to obtain than home loans. The utility poles that support the cable, telephone and electric wires are old and rotten. They are often owned by members of government, and the government replaces the poles when they break at no cost to the companies. These companies are set up as a monopoly; only one company is allowed to offer each utility.

The narrator's friend visits Switzerland and praises the superior life that the Swiss lead, but the narrator condemns their superior life because their wealth is the result of secret Swiss bank accounts. The Swiss help corrupt governments and corrupt people launder money, and that is how they manage to lead a superior life. The narrator comments on the corruption that occurs in Antigua all the time. Special ammunition is tested in Antigua. Food that has been exposed to radiation is distributed to Antiguan.

A government official from Montserrat has a radio appearance where he condones the building of casinos and condemns the religious activists who are trying to prevent gambling from being such a large part of their society. He insists that the casinos will bring in more money for the poor. The narrator knows the extra money will not go to the poor; it will go to the rich to make them richer.

The Syrians and Lebanese own much land in Antigua and Antiguan hate them. They build condos for Americans to buy and own many of the business. They are suspected of murders but never convicted. A calypso singer's sister is murdered, and then a European woman. The government official who investigates the murders is electrocuted by his refrigerator, as is his son who tries to save him. Antiguan believe that he was assassinated because they cannot understand how a refrigerator could electrocute someone unless it was set up to do so.

In the months before Antigua's carnival, the Governor General and his wife go to Europe because the carnival grounds are across the street from the Governor House. In the Governor General's absence, the Prime Minister appoints an acting Governor General. One year, the first Governor General swims in his Syrian friends' pool and drowns because the electric fence around the pool was not shut off. The second acting Governor General becomes ill at the funeral and is taken to the hospital. He gets better but dies suddenly of what is termed a heart condition. Everyone suspects that he is poisoned. The third acting Governor General is being very careful.

The narrator provides more examples of the Antiguan government's corruption. She mentions the \$11,000,000 that the French government sends Antigua for help in development that mysteriously disappears. The government spends much time on the

radio denouncing any opposition parties, but the opposition parties are not permitted radio time to defend themselves or condemn the current government.

The swindler from the Far East helps with plans for the West Indies Oil Refinery, which is built but something goes wrong. Now, it rusts. The swindler does not rust. He is rich and travels the world on a diplomatic passport from Antigua. He plans to build a museum and a library for Antiguan. He outbids the Antiguan government on the slave records that are auctioned off and makes them a gift to the Antiguan people. One enemy buys the records of another enemy and makes the records a gift to their mutual victims. Antiguan's degradation has become a tourist attraction.

The ministers of government all have green cards for the United States, so that they can flee there if it is ever necessary. The narrator admits that there have been honest ministers, but they tend to suffer poverty after their term is finished and that encourages other ministers to be corrupt. One of the honest ministers helped to establish the Antiguan Trades and Labor Union to promote better wages, better working conditions and a better life for Antiguan, but without much success.

The Premier was the Queen's stand-in in Antigua until Antigua became self-governing, at which point the Premier became the Prime Minister. In thirty years, Antigua has only had two Prime Ministers. One, Vere Cornwall Bird, has served for twenty-five of those years. His reign was interrupted for only five years by a man that Antiguan hoped would bring honesty and prosperity to Antigua, but the sugar industry went bankrupt and tourism ceased during his term. When V. C. Bird resumed his station, he had the other Prime Minister jailed for eight months under the charge of using his office for personal profit.

V. C. Bird's two sons are in charge of the Treasury, Tourism and Public Works. Antiguan worry that the Prime Minister and his sons will not be willing to give up political power after controlling Antigua for such a long time. Their concerns are reasonably lessened by the fact that the ruthless and fearless son, the one that natives refer to as "Papa Doc," is dying of a blood disease, while his brother is too opulent to be a true leader.

## **Section 3 Analysis**

The librarian's suspicions of the narrator are very ironic because the narrator confesses to sneaking extra books out of the library. The narrator also admits that she often unintentionally stole books from the library because she could not bring herself to return them after she had read them. The lady whose family helped to found the Mill Reef Club shows herself to be extremely racist by referring to her "girls." The narrator clarifies that the girls she refers to are Antiguan women, fully grown and with children of their own.

The majority of this section is written through exposition. There is very little dialogue and most of the dialogue that does appear is not exact but paraphrased. The narrator describes the Antiguan natives in this section somewhat disdainfully. She seems to look

down on them as people but justifies the aspects of their personalities that she holds in contempt by blaming the oppression that their ancestors were subjected to for their current faults.

There are many symbols in this section to verify the narrator's claims that the Antiguan government is corrupt. The comparison to Switzerland is used to prove that the Swiss are wealthy by virtue of their corrupt banking system that allows many people from all around the world to open secret banking accounts that provides the opportunity to steal funds from countries or businesses. This seems to parallel the narrator's suspicion that the rich people in Antigua, primarily the officials and ministers of government, are corrupt. This idea is emphasized by her earlier descriptions in the first section detailing the corruption of the owners of the three mansions that the tourists pass on their way to their resort.

Another symbol of the corruption is the utility poles, which are used to symbolize the utility industries which set up in a monopoly system since they are owned by the government. By preventing other utility organizations to open in Antigua, there is no competition for commodities such as electric, phone and cable, which secures the wealth of the owners of the companies. The ammunition that was tested in Antigua was known to be a purchase from South Africans, thereby aiding in wars and assisting in a form of terrorism. The Syrians and the Lebanese are set up as corrupt by the description of them as wealthy and the insinuation that they are involved in the murder of several women and the government official who investigates the initial crimes.

Another sign of corruption is the disappearance of \$11,000,000 that the French government sent to Antigua to assist with development. The green cards to the United States of America are also symbolic of the corruption of the government. Each member of the government has a green card; it seems as though they are preparing their exit if their corruption should be discovered.

The swindler from the Far East displays corruption in all his interactions, beginning with his first appearance in Antigua as a man who has run away from his home because of charges brought against him. It is also very ironic that he, an enemy of the Antiguan people, buys the slave records and presents them as a gift to the Antiguan people. The records are the records of oppression against Antiguan by their oppressors, bought by another enemy and given as a gift. The irony of the situation seems very uncomfortable for the Antiguan people.

Many believe the Syrians and Lebanese are responsible for the deaths of the two acting Governor Generals and the murders of the calypso singer's sister and the European woman. The weakening of opposition parties through the control of the media reinforces the Antiguan's fears that the Prime Minister and his sons will not relinquish political power. It is extremely ironic that the fearful brother, the one that Antiguan refer to as another "Papa Doc," is dying of a blood disease. Papa Doc was the pseudo-dictator of Haiti and was involved in widespread graft and corruption in that country.

## Section 4

### Section 4 Summary

Antigua is so beautiful that it almost seems unreal. The sea, the sky, everything adds to the surrealism of the island. Not only is the beauty of Antigua unreal, though; unfortunately, so is the pain. The rain falls with an unreal force that tears up the earth; the "beautiful: poorness of the villages are unreal. The beauty is locked in a prison with everything and everybody locked inside. Yet, Antiguan are ordinary people. They are real people submerged in the unreality of Antigua. The narrator considers what this must do to the people of Antigua. The beauty of Antigua is the same now as it was when the Antiguan were slaves. There has been no historical moment to separate then from now. It was a surreal beauty then, and it now in exactly the same way.

Antigua was discovered in 1493, by Christopher Columbus, and not long after, Africans were brought by the English to Antigua to be slaves. The slaves were "noble and exalted" and the slaveholders were "rubbish," a "selfish and miserable disease." Then, the slaveholders left and Antiguan were freed—n a way. Now, the Antiguan have ceased being noble, exalted slaves and are only ordinary people, as the slaveholders are now just ordinary people. The slaveholders have returned to their lands, but the ordinary Antiguan still live in the surreal island of Antigua.

### Section 4 Analysis

This section begins as a panegyric to the narrator's homeland but then becomes a sarcastic mock panegyric. She begins by praising the beauty and the many wonders of the island but then begins criticizing the island for the grass that is browner than anywhere else and the cows that are hungrier than anywhere else. Her tone becomes very sarcastic and her praise actually becomes ironic criticism. The praises and the criticisms are very repetitious in this section.

The surrealism of the scene and the ordinariness of the people is a paradoxical contradiction that serves to illustrate another fault of the island. It is so beautiful that it is unreal for ordinary people to live there. It becomes a defense for the surreal existence that the native Antiguan live because they are in such a surreal environment.

The descriptions of the slaves and slave-owners are paradoxical and ironic. They contradict one another, one being the oppressed, the other the oppressor. They are compared and contrasted. The two groups of people are opposites before the emancipation but are supposedly equal after the emancipation.

Ironically, both groups of people are dynamic characters whose changes are parallel. The slaves are no longer noble, exalted people after emancipation. The slave-owners are no longer selfish rubbish after emancipation. Both groups become ordinary people

and must learn to exist as such. Meanwhile, the island remains a static character. Its beauty is unchanging before and after emancipation.

This section has some exposition describing the discovery of Antigua by Christopher Columbus and the nearly immediate use of the island for prosperity by the use of slaves.



# Characters

## Narrator

The narrator is a black, Antiguan woman. She is the descendant of African slaves. She loves Antigua and the people of the island. The narrator is better educated than most Antiguan appear to be. The novel is told through her point of view; everything that is introduced is seen subjectively through her many opinions. The narrator is very ironic and sarcastic. She is quite angry at North Americans and Europeans, possibly to the point of being prejudiced against them.

The narrator hates the English because she blames them for the corruption Antiguan face. The narrator believes that the English have destroyed Antigua and the Antiguan, and she mourns for her home, her family, her friends and herself. She laments that Antiguan do not have their own language and are forced to use the language of the criminal who has degraded them so. She admits that, unfortunately, she met the world through England and claims that the world must meet her through England as well.

When her friend revels in the lifestyle of the Swiss, the narrator condemns Switzerland for their pecuniary gains through immoral methods. She scorns the government and the rich for their accumulated wealth, since it was obtained through corrupt means. The narrator expresses great cynicism towards the corruption that she sees in the island. The narrator condemns the tourists because they are not concerned with the degradation and retrograded development that Antigua is privy to; they are only concerned with themselves and their pleasure.

The narrator loves to read, which is evidenced by her borrowing her mother's library card as a child in order to read adult books, since she had read all of the children's books. She admits that the head librarian was just in her suspicions against the narrator because she stole many books from the library—she could not bear to part with them after she read them. The narrator is devastated by the library not being restored and attempts to gain assistance through a lady whose family helped to found the Mill Reef Club and through the Minister of Education, Culture and Sports.

## Tourist

The tourists are generally European or North American white people. The narrator sees the Europeans as worse than the North Americans. They arrive in Antigua and wonder why the Prime Minister had the airport named after him instead of a school or hospital. They are eased through customs. They admire the beauty of Antigua and feel cleansed, free and blessed in the hot air. To get to their resort, they hail a taxi, the driver of which is reckless causing them either great fear or a great thrill. They look at the beautiful scenery and glory in the bad roads that are so unlike the roads in their countries. The tourists grow tired of looking before they reach their resorts and yearn to relax. They are



excited to be on vacation and look forward to meeting new people, who the narrator condemns as not new because the tourists are all alike.

The tourists do not consider the hardships that Antiguan face daily as a result of living in this beautiful island, burdened with drought. They see the run-down school and hospital but do not consider that education and health care are equally run-down. They do not worry about the library being closed because they brought their own books. They envy the Antiguan for the nice Japanese cars they drive but never see the homes the natives live in. They bask in the luxury Antigua offers but do not consider the sewage that they are swimming in, seeing only the beautiful ocean.

They do not let oppression and exploitation bother them because they do not feel responsible for the poor condition of life to which Antiguan are subjected. They do not attribute the wealth of Europe or North American to the efforts of slaves, the ancestors of these people. The tourists feel that their ancestors were simply wiser. If their ancestors had not been wise, they would be the ones who are in such harmony with nature, an attribute of the Antiguan at which they marvel. They feel they did the slaves a favor by bringing them to this beautiful island where they can live without the pressures that other societies have. They do not worry about these things very much because they do not want to ruin their vacation.

The tourists believe that they are normal, whole people. At their homes, they are normal people, dismayed and unnoticed but able to please others and gain affection. As tourists, they are ugly because they are different. The Antiguan think they are strange and have bad manners. Their accents are weird and they look silly when they eat. The tourists do not realize that the natives do not like them, but they are uneasy around the quaint natives and do not like them. The tourists vacation to escape the banality of their lives, and the Antiguan envy that ability to escape their lives and to turn the Antiguan's boredom into a source of pleasure for themselves.

## English

The English bring slaves to Antigua but are a pitiful lot after the fall of their slave empire. They leave England but attempt to turn every place into England and every people into the English. Unfortunately, no where is England and no one is English, and they manage to destroy other lands and other people. They feel superior to the slaves and believe Antiguan are stupid. They take Antiguan's lands and language and leave them violence and corruption.

## Native Antiguan

Native Antiguan are black descendants of slaves. They are oppressed and poor. They are uneducated or poorly educated. They laugh at tourists but tourists hold them in contempt as well. They envy tourists because the Antiguan are too poor to escape the reality of their lives. They are also too poor to live properly in their home. Since the glory of being slaves is no longer applicable since emancipation, they are now simply



ordinary human beings, and they do not know how to cope with the surrealism of the beautiful island of Antigua.

## **Taxi driver**

The taxi driver is not a specific person but any number of taxi drivers in Antigua who attempts to overcharges tourists and drives recklessly.

## **Doctors**

The three doctors that staff Holberton Hospital are known as "the three men," and no Antiguan trusts them.

## **Minister of Health**

The Minister of Health does not trust Antiguan doctors or Holberton Hospital, and he travels to New York whenever he needs to be treated.

## **Evita**

Evita is a notorious, beautiful, young woman. The best paved road in Antigua leads to her mansion. She is the girlfriend of someone high up in the government, which affords her many privileges.

## **Drug smuggler**

The drug smuggler owns a mansion that tourists pass on their way to their resort. He is so rich that he buys each car that he purchases in groups of ten. He also owns a mansion near Five Island that he purchased with \$350,000 cash.

## **Middle Eastern family**

The rich Middle Eastern family whose mansion tourists pass came to Antigua as merchants less than twenty years ago and sold dry goods door to door. They now own a lot of the land on Antigua. They are rich and lend money to the government. Antiguan hate them.

## **Barclay Brothers**

The Barclay Brothers initially earned their wealth as slave-traders and open a bank.



## **Children's doctor**

The children's doctor is actually a Czechoslovakian refugee running away from Hitler, who has been trained as a dentist. He is offended by the Antiguan's black skin.

## **Headmistress**

The girls' school headmistress is a twenty-six-year old, recent college graduate from North Ireland, who tells the girls not to behave like monkeys but is never suspected of racism.

## **Head Librarian**

The head librarian is stuck-up, imperious and suspicious. She kept a close eye on the narrator during the narrator's childhood. She puts on the pageant and spends her times apologizing and searching for someone with money and influence to help the library.

## **Woman whose family helped establish Mill Reef Club**

This unnamed woman is active in library restoration efforts. She is notorious for liking Antiguan, but only as servants. She claims that she encourages "her girls," grown women, to use the library.

## **Middle Eastern swindler**

The Middle Eastern swindler is wanted in the Far East for swindling his government out of oil profits. He uses an Antiguan passport to travel the world. He is very rich and outbids the Antiguan government for slave records and makes them a gift to the Antiguan people. He is involved with the West Indies Oil Refinery and plans to develop the area around the old library building.

## **Mother**

The narrator's mother is painfully frank and notorious for her political opinions. She supports the second successful political party. She accuses the Minister of Education, Culture and Sport of profiting from the sale of the Rodonda stamps.

## **Minister of Education, Culture & Sport**

The Minister of Education, Culture and Sport is the man that the narrator wants to appeal to in order to rebuild the library. He once had a tiff with the narrator's mother

when she campaigned outside his house and accused him of having something to do with the Redonda stamp catastrophe.

## **Friend**

The narrator's friend travels to Switzerland and returns to Antigua in a rhapsodic state of praise about the superior life the Swiss lead. The narrator associates their superior life with the neutrality Switzerland claims, and the secret banking accounts and the corruption associated with those accounts.

## **Syrians & Lebanese**

The Syrians and Lebanese are seen as foreigners even though most are Antiguan citizens. They are rich and lend the government money. They own large amounts of land that they use to build condominiums for Americans.

## **Governor General**

The Governor General is the stand-in for the Queen in Antigua. He is stuck-up and travels to England in the months preceding the carnival because his house is across the street from the carnival grounds.

## **Vere Cornwall Bird**

V. C. Bird is the Prime Minister of Antigua for twenty-five of the thirty years that Antigua is self-governed. The airport is named after him. The Antiguan natives sometimes view him as a great liberator of the people and, at other times, see only the misappropriation of funds that occur during his reign. His two sons are in charge of the Treasury, Tourism and Public works.

## **Prime Minister's sons**

The Prime Minister's sons are placed in charge of Treasury, Tourism and Public Works. One, who natives refer to as "Baby Doc," is opulent, enjoys fun and is not a leader. The other, i.e. "Papa Doc," is ruthless and fearless, but is dying of a blood disease.

## **Second Prime Minister**

Only one other man served as Prime Minister of Antigua. He served for five years and is not reelected. The first Prime Minister has him jailed for eight months for using his office for personal profit. The people of Antigua hope that he will replace corruption with

honesty and prosperity but the sugar industry goes bankrupt while he is in office, and tourism stops.

## **Honest ministers**

One honest minister is the leader of the Trade and Labor Union and dies a pauper, while the other honest minister becomes a taxi driver when his party loses power.



# Objects/Places

## Antigua

Antigua is an island in the West Indies that is nine miles wide by twelve miles long. It was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1493. It is part of "The Nation." The natives are descendants of slaves.

## V.C. Bird International Airport

V.C. Bird International Airport is the airport in Antigua that is named after the Prime Minister.

## Caribbean Sea

Caribbean Sea is a body of water that borders Antigua.

## Atlantic Ocean

Atlantic Ocean is a body of water that borders Antigua.

## Cars

The cars in Antigua are all Japanese made. No American made cars that were manufactured in the last ten years are seen. The expensive cars make an awful sound because they are made to run on unleaded gas but there is no unleaded gas in Antigua. The car dealerships are owned by ministers of the government.

## Holberton Hospital

Holberton Hospital is Antigua's hospital, which is staffed with three doctors that no Antiguan trusts. It is dirty and run-down.

## Old Library

The library was damaged in The Earthquake of 1974. Since then, a sign promising that repairs are pending has hung from the door. It is an old building from colonial times that now serves as the headquarters for a carnival troupe.



## **New Library**

The new library is located in an old, run-down concrete building, above a dry-goods store. It is too small to hold all the books, so many books are boxed and becoming ruined.

## **Sewage-disposal system**

The sewage-disposal system of Antigua is non-existent. The toilet, sink and tub contents are emptied into the ocean.

## **Pigot's School**

Pigot's School is often mistaken by tourists as a public restroom.

## **The Earthquake**

The Earthquake, as commonly called by Antiguan, occurs in 1974, and ruins the library.

## **England**

England is where the English come from and who the Antiguan, try to mimic.

## **Horatio Nelson Street**

Horatio Nelson Street is the street the author grew up on and is named after an English maritime criminal.

## **Governor House**

Governor House is located on East Street and surrounded by a high, white wall. This is where the Governor General lives.

## **Mill Reef Club**

Mill Reef Club is a private club owned by North Americans who love Antigua but hate Antiguan. Antiguan are only permitted to be servants.



## **Library Books**

The library books are boxed and gathering mildew, dust and ruin because the new library is too small for all the books. The narrator used to steal books from the library.

## **Redonda**

Redonda is a barren rock in the Caribbean, closer to Montserrat and Nevis than Antigua. It is part of "The Nation." Only booby birds dwell on Redonda. Redonda was the source of the stamp scandal.

## **Barbuda**

Barbuda is a part of "The Nation" and was settled by the Condringtons, an English family that bred slaves for sale.

## **Stamps**

The stamps were issued for Redonda and lots of money was made but no one knows where the money or the stamps ended up.

## **West Indies Oil Refinery**

West Indies Oil Refinery was built by the government with the swindler's involvement, but something went wrong and it is now rusting.

## **Green Cards**

All ministers of Antigua have green cards, meaning that they are able to immigrate to the United States.

## **Antigua Trades and Labor Union**

Antigua Trades and Labor Union was founded in 1939, to obtain better wages, working conditions and life in general.

## **The Nation**

The Nation consists of Barbuda, Antigua and Redonda, which are all lumped together as one country.



## Utility Poles

The utility poles in Antigua hold the electric, telephone and cable wires. They are old, rotten and sag under the weight. The government replaces them when they break.

## Slave Records

The Condringtons auction their slave records. The Antiguan government is outbid by the Middle Eastern swindler, who makes them a gift for the Antiguan people. The narrator comments on the irony of the records of one enemy being bought by another enemy and presented as a gift to their mutual victims.

# Themes

## Development

A common theme throughout the novel, primarily the second and third sections, is the need for development in Antigua. The narrator begins with condemnation of the hospital and school and then expands her repertoire. She mentions that Antigua has no sewage disposal system, and therefore, wastes are released into the ocean surrounding Antigua. The main commercial enterprise of Antigua appears to be tourism, which makes the natives miserable because they envy tourists' ability to escape their lives, even if it is only temporary.

The library is destroyed in The Earthquake of 1974, and fourteen years later when the novel is written, the library still has not been restored. The library is now housed in the upstairs part of a run-down building, atop a dry goods store. Meanwhile, since the new space is not large enough to contain all the books the library formerly contained, many of the books have been boxed and are becoming ruined. A Teenage Pageant is held where the youths display a lack of education that shames the narrator. This is an event used to solicit assistance for the restoration of the library. The delay is caused by a petition to build boutiques for tourists near the old library building, and the government does not want the natives to have so much interaction with the tourists.

The government's knowledge for this developmental need of Antigua is evidenced by their repaving the streets that the Queen will travel before her visit and repairing the buildings the Princess will enter before she arrives to dedicate the school. The English feel that they bring Enlightenment to Antigua but the narrator condemns them for only bringing crime. The French government gives the Antiguan government \$11,000,000 for developmental purposes, but the money mysteriously disappears. The need for development and reform is also evidenced by the founding of the Antigua Trade and Labor Union whose purpose is to improve wages and life in general.

## Corruption

Corruption is a recurring theme throughout A Small Place. There are many instances that the narrator uses to support her conclusion that the government of Antigua is corrupt. She also insinuates that several people that live in Antigua are corrupt. The author tends to associate wealth with corruption as evidenced by the examples she chooses to substantiate her claims.

The primary focus of the corruption in Antigua is against the government. The narrator provides many examples of governmental corruption. She mentions that Antiguan drive expensive cars as a result of only two car dealerships on the island, which are both owned by government officials. This seems to suggest that the government chose these particular brands of cars to increase their own wealth without regarding the effect it



would have on the people of the island, notwithstanding the fact that the government does not import the correct gas that is required for these cars which makes these new cars rumble horribly. Paralleling this fact is the monopoly of utility services, such as cable and electric because they are owned, at least in part, by government ministers.

Another instance of the corruption of the government is seen by their knowingly allowing contaminated meat to be sold to Antiguan. They also permitted ammunition to be tested in Antigua for the purpose of selling it to South Africa. The government does not appear to be concerned with the welfare of the citizenship as long as they personally are satisfied financially. Yet another example of the corruption in the government is the instance of the Redonda stamps, which no one knows to where the money or the stamps have disappeared.

Other portrayals of corruption shown in this novel are represented by the mansions of the Middle Eastern family, who the narrator insinuates earned their money by illegal or immoral means, a known drug smuggler and Evita, a government official's girlfriend. Likewise, the Syrians and the Lebanese citizens are suspected of involvement in murders that occur in Antigua. Finally, the refugee from the Far East is presented as having a hand in the West Indies Oil Refinery, which appears to no advantage and many other commercial ventures that make him, and the government, rich while burying the native Antiguan in poverty.

## Slavery/Racism

Slavery and racism are a conjoined theme throughout this novel. Many of the problems of the Antiguan people are attributed to the effects of slavery and racism throughout their history. The narrator's description of Antiguan as naive and innocent is demonstrated through their inability to conceive of some of the many racist remarks mentioned in the book as actually being racist.

The narrator complains that tourists, who are primarily white European or North American, believe that the Antiguan's ancestors were not as clever as their own ancestors. Ironically, she appears to have some preconceived notions of her own. While not exactly racist, her remarks about the Swiss, English and Americans could be construed as strongly prejudiced. Whether she has a right to her prejudice as a response to the treatment she has received is a debatable matter.

The English are seen as racist because of their lack of penitence for the enslavement of Africans. The Barclay brothers, formerly slave owners, open a bank but do not employ native Antiguan. The Mill Reef Club only allows black Antiguan to enter as servants. Ironically, the Czechoslovakian dentist, who poses as a doctor in Antigua, is offended with the color of his patients' skin. This is ironic because he fled Europe to escape Hitler's persecution. The headmistress from North Ireland makes references to her students concerning their affinity to monkeys in trees. The narrator laments the Antiguan's inclination to regard these comments as ill-mannered instead of racist.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is presented with a first person point of view. The novel is very subjective, solely expressing the opinions of the narrator. This is very important to note because the opinions are provided as fact and are intended to appear as such; however, the point of view of the novel indicates that the subjective nature of the information should perhaps cause the validity of some of the statements made therein to be questioned.

The characters in the novel have very little to say or do for themselves. The narrator provides the circumstances through which the reader views each character. The characters are nominal and undeveloped. There is no character, save the narrator, whose personality is displayed through any considerable amount of action or dialogue. Each character is presented in one or two circumstances through the eyes of the narrator.

The narrator is an Antiguan, but she seems to view herself as more educated than the average Antiguan. She appears to be somewhat politically progressive, and in that view, the novel reads as a demand for reform. The novel is written primarily through exposition. The minimal dialogue that appears is paraphrased much later than its original occurrence in the history of the text.

## Setting

The novel is set in Antigua, which is an island in the West Indies. It is 9 miles wide and 14 miles long. It is one of the three islands that comprise "The Nation," the other two islands being Barbuda and Redonda. The three islands were combined to create one country. Christopher Columbus discovered Antigua in 1493, and slaves were shortly thereafter brought to the island.

The natives of the island are descended from slaves brought to the island from Africa. Native Antiguan speak English and do not have their own language. Natives are generally poor. Tourists see them as being in touch with nature, but natives hate the tourists because of the natives' jealousy. Natives want to escape the poverty of their lives. The island is surreally beautiful but is inhabited by ordinary people.

The only specific locations discussed in the novel are the Mill Reef Club, the old library building and the new library building. The Mill Reef Club is never described. The old library building is a colonial building that the narrator finds beautiful. Contrastingly, the new library is the upstairs portion of a run-down building.

## Language and Meaning

The language in this novel is very natural and modern, which can be attributed to the novel being published in 1988. The language of the text is English and the irony of the narrator being forced to write in her only language, the language of the criminals against her people, serves to heighten the force of her suggestion of the level of degradation Antiguans have experienced from the English. It is also paradoxical that the narrator uses English to condemn the English people and their actions.

The tone used in the novel is heavily sarcastic, which is emphasized by the word choice throughout the novel. The narrator expresses her criticism, anger and resentment of the lifestyle that many Antiguans are condemned to live. She often uses words with several different connotations, which gives the work the possibility of being less critical than it appears upon a closer reading. The narrator often uses reflections upon the past, present and ideal state of affairs in Antigua, which presents the reader with a very subjective view of the troubles present in the country.

Because the only dialogue in the novel is paraphrased and not quoted precisely, the novel provides a very subjective view of Antigua. The novel is written using exposition, mainly describing the island in its current state and comparing it to the past. Since the novel jumps between the past and the present, the tenses of verbs tend to change frequently to reflect the time period that the narrator is reflecting on at any given point in the novel.

## Structure

This novel is separated into four sections, which comprise eighty-one pages. The sections are not named or numbered but are notated by a picture on the page preceding the beginning of a new section as well as enlarged font at the beginning of the new section.

The first section is nineteen pages long and is addressed to tourists to Antigua. The second section is fourteen pages long and describes Antigua in the past. The third section is thirty-four pages long and describes and condemns the corruption that Antigua is faced with as a self-ruling nation. The fourth and final section is only five pages long and describes the beauty of Antigua, juxtaposed to the ordinariness of the people living in Antigua.

There is no plot to this novel. It is more of a finely-composed essay detailing the horrors that the native Antiguans face. There is little action and the action that appears is mostly an opinion of what the narrator believes occurred. The narration expresses the narrator's condemning opinion of the treatment that African slaves encountered and the connection between that and the lives that Antiguans currently live. There are many flashbacks throughout the novel between the past and the present as the narrator compares what was to what is.

## Quotes

"What a beautiful island Antigua is-more beautiful than any of the other islands you have seen, and they were very beautiful, in their way, but they were much too green, much too lush with vegetation, ...and since you are a tourist, the thought of what it might be like for someone who had to live day in, day out in a place that suffers constantly from drought...must never cross your mind." p. 3-4

"How do they afford such a car? And do they live in a luxurious house to match such a car? Well, no. You will be surprised, then, to see that most likely the person driving this brand-new car filled with the wrong gas lives in a house that, in comparison, is far beneath the status of the car." p. 7

"You pass the hospital, the Holberton Hospital, and how wrong you are not to think about this, for though you are a tourist on your holiday, what if your heart should miss a few beats? What if a blood vessel in your neck should break?" p. 7-8

"Antigua used to have a splendid library, but in The Earthquake...the library building was damaged. This was in 1974, and soon after that a sign was placed on the front of the building saying 'This building was damaged in the earthquake of 1974. Repairs are pending'. The sign hangs there, and hangs there more than a decade later." p. 8-9

"Isn't that the last straw; for not only did we have to suffer the unspeakableness of slavery, but the satisfaction to be had from 'We made you bastards rich' is taken away, too." p. 10

"In this mansion lives a woman sophisticated people in Antigua call Evita... Evita is notorious because her relationship with [a] high government official has made her the owner of boutiques and property and given her a say in cabinet meetings, and all sorts of other privileges such a relationship would bring a beautiful young woman." p. 12

"You must not wonder what exactly happened to the contents of your lavatory when you flushed it. You must not wonder where your bathwater went when you pulled out the stopper. You must not wonder what happened when you brushed your teeth. Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in; the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua, there is no property sewage-disposal system." p. 13-14

"A tourist is an ugly human being." p. 14

"Since you are being an ugly person this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you: their ancestors were not clever in the way yours were and not ruthless in the way yours were, for then would it not be you who would be in harmony with nature and backwards in that charming way?" p. 17



"Every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere." p. 18

"When the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself." p. 19

"[The English] don't seem to know that this empire business was all wrong and they should, at least, be wearing sackcloth and ashes in token penance of the wrongs committed, the irrevocableness of their bad deeds, for no natural disaster imaginable could equal the harm they did." p. 23-24

"[The English] should never have left their home, their precious England, a place they loved so much, a place they had to leave but could never forget. And so everywhere they went they turned it into England; and everybody they met they turned English. But no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly like them would ever be English, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that." p. 24

"Heaven is not enough of a reward for one or hell enough of a punishment for the other. People who think about these things believe that every bad deed, even every bad thought, carries with it its own retribution." p. 26-27

"[The headmistress] told these girls over and over again to stop behaving as if they were monkeys just out of trees. No one ever dreamed that the word for any of this was racism." p. 29

"We felt superior, for we were so much better behaved and we were full of grace, and these people were so badly behaved and they were so completely empty of grace." p. 30

"Isn't it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal's deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal's point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me." p. 31-32

"Have I given you the impression that the Antigua I grew up in revolved almost completely around England? Well, that was so. I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to meet me it would have to do so through England." p. 33

"You came. You took things that were not yours, and you did not even, for appearance's sake, ask first. You have said, 'May I have this, please?' and even though it would have been clear to everybody that a yes or no from us would have been of no consequence you might have looked so much better." p. 35





"You leave, and from afar you watch as we do to ourselves the very things you used to do to us. And you feel that there was more to you than that, you might feel that you had understood the meaning of the Age of Enlightenment." p. 36

"Do you know why people like me are shy about being Capitalists? Well, it's because we, for as long as we have known you, were capital, like bales of cotton and sacks of sugar, and you were the commanding, cruel capitalists, and the memory of this is so strong, the experience so recent that we can't quite bring ourselves to embrace this idea that you think so much of." p. 35-36

"Is the Antigua I see before me, self-ruled, a worse place that it was when it was dominated by the bad-minded English and all the bad-minded things they brought with them?" p. 41

"Why is she so undone at what has become of the library, why does she think that is a good example of corruption, of things gone bad? But if you saw the old library, situated as it was, in a big, old wooden building painted a shade of yellow that is beautiful to people like me, with its wide veranda, its big, always open windows, its row and rows of shelves filled with books, its beautiful wooden tables and chairs for sitting and reading, if you could hear the sound of its quietness (for the quiet in this library was a sound in itself), the smell of the sea (which was a stone's throw away), the heat of the sun (no building could protect us from that), the beauty of us sitting there like communicants at an altar, taking in, again and again, the fairy tale of how we met you, your right to do the things you did, how beautiful you were, are, and always will be; if you could see all of that in just one glimpse, you would see why my heart would break at the dung heap that now passes for a library in Antigua." P. 42-43

"The people at the Mill Reef Club love the old Antigua. I love the old Antigua. Without question, we don't have the same old Antigua in mind." p. 44

"I stole many books from this library. I didn't mean to steal the books really; it's just that once I had read a book I couldn't bear to part with it." P. 45

"An event that occurred one hundred years ago might be as vivid to them as if it were happening at this very moment. And then, an event that is occurring at this very moment might pass before them with such dimness that it is as if it had happened one hundred years ago. No action in the present is an action planned with a view of its effect on the future." P. 54

"I look at this place (Antigua), I look at these people (Antiguans), and I cannot tell whether I was brought up by, and so come from, children, eternal innocents, or artists who have not yet found eminence in a world too stupid to understand, or lunatics who have made their own lunatic asylum, or an exquisite combination of all three." P. 57

"And it is in that strange voice, then-the voice that suggests innocence, art, lunacy-that they say these things, pausing to take breath before this monument to rottenness, that monument to rottenness, as if they were tour guides; as if, having observed the event of



tourism, they have absorbed it so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own tourist attraction." p. 69

"It occurs to them that a family that has been wielding political power for so many years might not give it up easily, might not give it up if they find themselves defeated at the polls, might not let themselves be defeated at the polls, might not even allow any polls." P. 72

"Antigua is beautiful. Antigua is too beautiful. Sometimes the beauty of it seems unreal. Sometimes the beauty of it seems as if it were stage sets for a play." P. 77

"The unreal way in which it is beautiful now is the unreal way in which it was always beautiful. The unreal way in which it is beautiful now that they are a free people is the unreal way in which it was beautiful when they were slaves." P. 80

"The whole thing is, once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slave, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings." P. 81

# Topics for Discussion

Explain what Jamaica Kincaid means when she says "all natives are tourists."

How are the people of Antigua still enslaved?

Who is more corrupt, the English or the Antiguan? Defend your position.

What is the significance of the library not being restored?

Why does the author seem to have so much contempt for tourists?

Explain the significance of the preparations for the princess' arrival.

Explain the detrimental effects to citizens by each government-owned business being occupied by only one organization (i.e. monopoly).