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Review of Shorto's "The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America"

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dam is important in its own right and that the society created there contributed significantly to the broader development of America, particularly in its "tolerance, openness, and free trade" (p. 6). Despite several weaknesses in the volume, which should keep professional scholars from relying too heavily upon it, *The Island at the Center of the World* offers a lively account of New Amsterdam and brings greater (and justifiable) attention to the colony of New Netherland.

Shorto's volume has much to offer. In his animated narrative of New Amsterdam, Shorto tells the larger story of Dutch colonization in New Netherland through an intimate examination of many of the individuals who lived there and shaped its history. Taking his cues from much current colonial scholarship, he places the story of New Netherland's development in an Atlantic world context, following people and tracing developments back and forth between North America and Europe, New Netherland and the West Indies, England and the Netherlands. Shorto is a journalist, not professionally trained as a historian, but he does stand on the shoulders of many contemporary scholars whose aid he has enlisted, and he founds his interpretation on diverse primary sources. Although it was not his intention, he has provided us with an important case study of societal development clearly in contrast to the old declension model of the New England story. Readers will come away from this volume with a new appreciation of the vibrant human activity focused on Manhattan Island in the seventeenth century, its connection to broader historical developments, and the contribution of that society to the history that followed it.

But professional historians should beware, especially those not acquainted with the primary sources and scholarship of New Netherland. Shorto's wide reading of the sources is to be respected, but he often fails to discern significant biases and takes them at face value. As a result, while the author does much to dispel some old myths of New Netherland, he perpetuates others such as the classic stereotypes of rulers including Wouter van Twiller, Willem Kieft, and Peter Stuyvesant. While his attention to various individuals is engaging and

The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America. By Russell Shorto. (New York: Doubleday, 2004. xvi, 384 pp. \$27.50, ISBN 0-385-50349-0.)

Russell Shorto's engaging story of the founding and development of the Dutch colonial society on the southern tip of Manhattan Island provides a fresh look at a community and colony often neglected by historians. Shorto argues that the community of New Amster-

insightful, his preoccupation with Adriaen van der Donck, certainly an important and usually overlooked figure, is unwarranted. Shorto should be commended for highlighting the creation of civic government in New Amsterdam, but he mistakenly claims that no government existed before then; governance by West India Company officials may not have been democratic, but it was nonetheless a form of government. Finally, Shorto would have his readers look to Dutch colonial society as one of the wellsprings of the American liberal spirit. The freedom and liberality of seventeenth-century New Amsterdam is indeed striking, particularly in light of the continuity between it and the New York City of later centuries, but one should be careful about drawing connections too directly between the wild and woolly society of frontier New Amsterdam and American society as it developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Despite these drawbacks, this volume offers an exciting entrée into the history of the Dutch colony and will do much to introduce and popularize some of the recent scholarship on New Netherland, even if it fails fully to embrace those new interpretations.

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