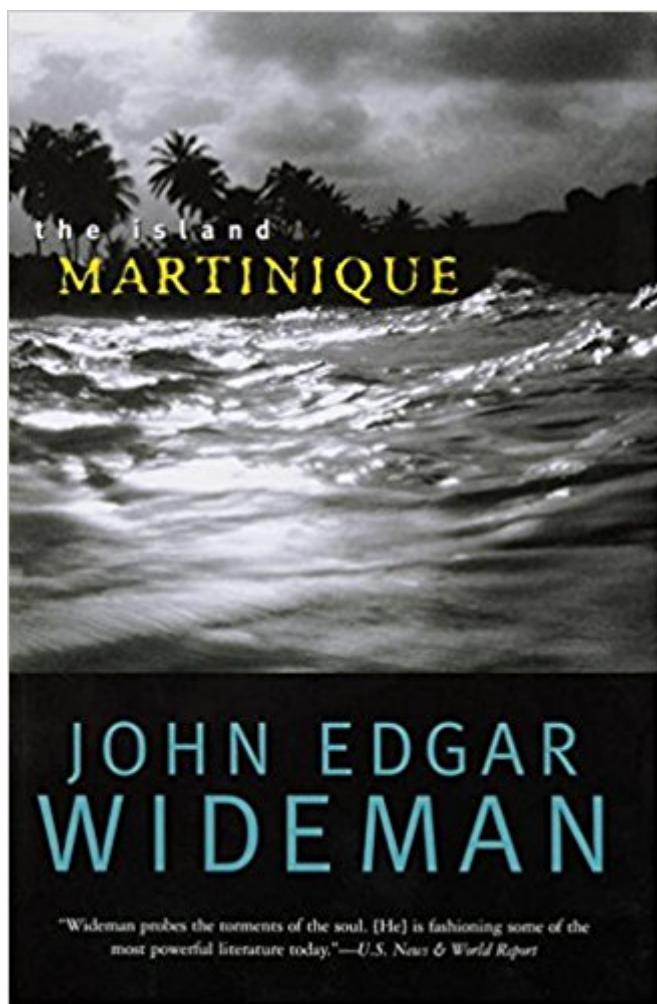


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# The Island Martinique (National Geographic Directions)



## Synopsis

In this compelling travel memoir, two-time PEN/Faulkner Award winner John Edgar Wideman explores Martinique's seductive natural beauty and culture, as well as its vexed history of colonial violence and racism. Attempting to decipher the strange, alluring mixture of African and European that is Creole, he and his French traveling companion develop a powerful attraction to one another which they find at once threatened and elevated by a third party—the island itself. A rich intersection of place, history, and the intricacies of human relations, Wideman's story gets deep into the Caribbean and close to the heart of the Creole experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Given "the opportunity to go anywhere in the world and write about it," the distinguished and prolific novelist, autobiographer, story writer and essayist Wideman chose to spend three winter weeks on Martinique. He offers this prose poem, at times lyrical, at times streetwise, as "the record of a visit." Personal diary merges with meditations provoked by the shadow of slavery and the consequent Creolization in the New World. Wideman explores, as a stream-of-consciousness novelist or a jazz musician might, writing, clothing, language, hair, Thomas Jefferson, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the guided tour. He juxtaposes the real-life, real-time interracial love affair in the book's first half with a storyteller's less joyful alternate-universe invention in the second half. A semimonologue offers readers "a brief foray" into the mind of Père Labat, priest and plantation manager, as an example of "the seduction of unfettered license, the extremes of violence and compulsion we perpetrate on one another." In a 10-page tour-de-force sentence set simultaneously in 1902 and the

present, Wideman re-creates and reimagines the catastrophic eruption of Mount Pelée, in which 30,000 died. While there is a map and a time line, this book won't help visitors with where to go and what to eat. Still, Wideman delivers "improvisation, spontaneity, play, breaking rules," always the literate and impassioned sojourner. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

John Edgar Wideman is the only author to have won the PEN/Faulkner Award twice— for the novel *Sent for You Yesterday* in 1984, and for *Philadelphia Fire* in 1990. He is the recipient of numerous other awards, including the American Book Award, the MacArthur Award, and a Lannan Literary Fellowship. His latest book, the acclaimed memoir, *Hoop Roots*, was published in 2001.

Liked the other travel books by Nat Geo Directions. Couldn't tell what this one was about. Interesting subject to look up in a different book.

Disgusting. Pornography in disguise. I read a few pages and throw the book in the trash can. This book deserves O star definitely.

John Edgar Wideman plainly considers himself "an island entire unto himself". Foolish me, I interpreted the title of this book to mean that The Island in question was Martinique, and on that basis I bought the book to read on a flight to Fort de France. Even with nothing else to read but the in-flight shopping mag, I couldn't get past page 37 of this pretentious, self-indulgent, narcissistic tour of the hotel bedrooms of the Caribbean. I'll put myself at risk by confessing that I thought seriously about sky-jacking the plane to the nearest news stand. Sample: "Silence as a counterpoint, counterweight to the fugue of many voices, many languages buzzing imperiously, incomprehensibly around you. Silence as an answer. A rejoinder to chaos." A hundred sixty-five pages of such bombast! Think of it! Without even an in-flight Adam Sandler movie to take refuge in!

I was given this book by my daughter in law who was fooled as I was by the cover and the title, and the reference to National Geo. I have a home in the caribbean and so the subject is of great interest to me. It took me 25 or so pages to find that the book was anything but useful to anyone wanting to know about Martinique. In a word its "awful" a farce a sham, poorly written and I agree completely with the other 2 reviews. Do not waste your money. Had my well meaning daughter in law read these reviews she would never have purchased the book. Austin

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