



The Loss of El Dorado: A Colonial History

V.S. Naipaul

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The history of Trinidad begins with a delusion: the belief that somewhere nearby on the South American mainland lay El Dorado, the mythical kingdom of gold. In this extraordinary and often gripping book, V. S. Naipaul—himself a native of Trinidad—shows how that delusion drew a small island into the vortex of world events, making it the object of Spanish and English colonial designs and a mecca for treasure-seekers, slave-traders, and revolutionaries.

Amid massacres and poisonings, plunder and multinational intrigue, two themes emerge: the grinding down of the Aborigines during the long rivalries of the El Dorado quest and, two hundred years later, the man-made horror of slavery. An accumulation of casual, awful detail takes us as close as we can get to day-to-day life in the slave colony, where, in spite of various titles of nobility, only an opportunistic, near-lawless community exists, always fearful of slave suicide or poison, of African sorcery and revolt. Naipaul tells this labyrinthine story with assurance, withering irony, and lively sympathy. The result is historical writing at its highest level.

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