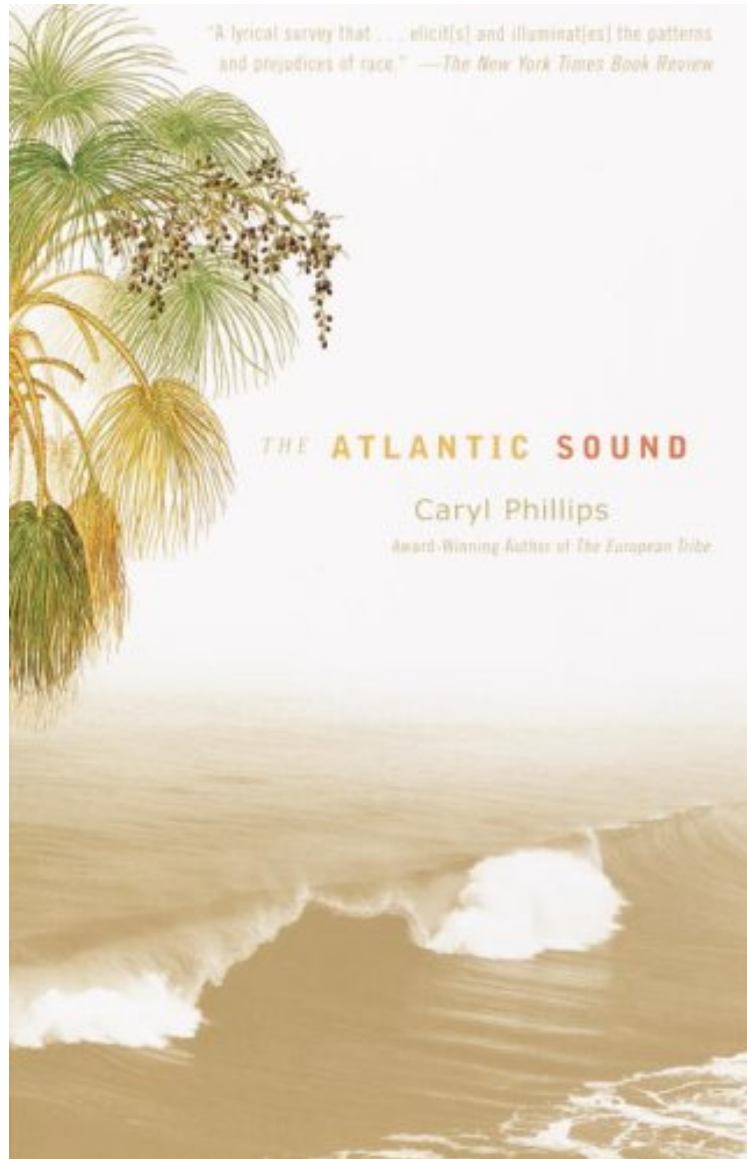


## The Atlantic Sound

Caryl Phillips

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**Caryl Phillips : The Atlantic Sound** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Atlantic Sound:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A RemembranceBy Darrell TurnerI became of aware of Caryl Phillips after reading 'A Distant Shore'. 'The Atlantic Sound' is part of a reading list I have concerning memoirs and autobiographies. I was more prepared for a travel book than a book dealing with history, culture and politics. Phillips

covers all these topics but in a way that leaves one with the feeling he is looking at these events from a nearby distance. The voice is there but never quite part of the action. His accounts of the Pan African movement, the Hebrew Israelites and others evokes strong feelings and memories for those who grew up during the 1960's and 1970's. This is a great read!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The damnable triangle...By John P. Jones III "Free trade" and "globalization", have at least one most unsavory antecedent: the "slave trade." It flourished for a couple hundred years, and was eventually outlawed in progressive stages in the 19th century. Adam Smith wrote his *The Wealth of Nations* in the middle of this period. It is relevant and appropriate to speak of "comparative advantage" when the product is Portuguese wine, or Javanese cloves. Many of us though grow a bit more squeamish when such economic concepts are rather harshly applied to humans, and, in particular, when that "Holy Grail" of all too many CEO's is achieved: driving the cost of labor to almost zero, thereby truly enhancing "shareholder value." Caryl Phillips is a product of the slave trade. He doesn't say, and perhaps does not know, all the steps that led him to become an Englishman. At the beginning of the book, he does identify one of the last steps, when he was carried to England, as "hand luggage," on a boat, from the Caribbean, after the Second World War. This was when England claimed it had a "labor shortage," at least for jobs that were determined to be "low-paying," and invited the "colonials" to fill the gap. So Phillips saw fit to commence his journey "around the triangle" by literally taking a banana boat from the Caribbean to England, which provides a suitable prologue for his rather insightful and sardonic view of many of his fellow humans, particularly those who find travel by a banana boat appealing, or necessary. Most of the book is composed of three chapters, one each for the vertices of the triangle: Liverpool, the "Gold Coast" (Ghana), and Charleston, SC. Liverpool, as Phillips remarks, has been in terminal decline since the end of the slave trade. It was once the most prosperous city in England, with numerous magnificent public buildings (that Phillips attempts to visit, with varying degrees of success), as well as stately Georgian mansions that have now been divided up into numerous flats for those aforementioned "colonials." Phillips notes that racism is more deeply rooted in Liverpool than elsewhere, with its soccer team being the last major English team to hire a black (and still, the bananas were thrown onto the pitch!) The "racism" even extends to the "old-line" black residents, who resent the newer arrivals. Phillips visits the old coastal forts in Ghana that were used to "store" the slaves, awaiting shipment to America. Throughout the book, Phillips presents biographies of individuals who were prominent during the slave trade period, or dealing with its aftermath. And thus, Phillips juxtaposes his present experiences with histories that were unknown, at least to me. In Liverpool, Phillips relates the experience of William Nath Ocansey, who was the son of a Gold Coast native, and trader, who found out that his Liverpool "partner" had cheated him out of his funds. In Ghana, it is Philip Quaque, who was the first black missionary "to his people." Also, in Ghana, the author relates the sad tale of Mohammed Mansour Nassirudeen, and his continual attempts to leave his native land, of "no opportunity," for the "First World," a tale which resonates so strongly with the ubiquitous desires to do the same, as related in Mark Weston's *The Ringtone and the Drum: Travels in the World's Poorest Countries*. Finally, Phillips' sardonic powers of observation culminate in his attendance at the in-gathering of "exiles" at the African Pan-fest. I would have criticized his observations as being too much like the patronizing ones of V.S. Naipaul, save for the fact that Phillips' are done on an "equal opportunity basis." Most of the "cargo" arrived at Charleston, SC, though, as Phillips notes from the Pan-fest, the ocean floor is covered in the bones of the slaves that did not make it. The author chose to highlight the effort of Federal Judge, J. Waties Waring, in the early '50's, to undo, in part, the legacy of slavery, by bringing to an end legal segregation, and the denial of rights to blacks. In one of the quirks and ironies of history, was one of the spurs to his efforts the rejection by Charleston "society" of his second wife, a Yankee divorcee? As an epilogue, Phillips relates how some Blacks converted to Judaism, and "return" to their "home" in the Negev desert. Although "home," they are literally stateless, since the State of Israel, while providing them rudimentary shelter, does not recognize their form of Judaism. Phillips is an excellent, knowledgeable writer, with strong insights into the human condition. This book deserves a wider readership. 5-stars, plus.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Unexpected tone, aim and even subject matter. It's excellent. By CodyforOrange I picked this book up in the library probably because of its alluring cover image and title, I'll admit it. And I was prepared to even enjoy what I thought was coming: an intellectual travel book of the Paul Theroux ilk, with perhaps the added sarcasm and chip on the shoulder due any returning British colonial. It was, however, immediately more interesting and engrossing than any of those books Mr. Theroux has written, and it had even more honesty than Maya Angelou's book about coming to Africa, "All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes." For a long time I was not sure if it was meant to be novel or not. It was certainly a novel idea, to make such trips, one after the other, in the time that one would need to see the places one was visiting (although I get the feeling that he might have strayed further afield in Africa than he did. There is an element of depression at times that was perhaps strongest in Africa, that kept some of his questions from being asked, so that he decided to move on and end any meandering reflection.) He was always interested in talking to people of the places he visited, but not to justify or romanticize about some book-learned image of the place. He aims more to appreciate what the possibilities of the places he visits are now, and then more importantly, what people there feel their history to be. It is almost as if he goes to visit a relative in each place, (although he never does this) and in the process was not recognised as a visitor or tourist (was not recognised as anything, perhaps, something that helped lend the novel air to the book, and an

interesting element of his reflection. I guess it is based upon the narrator's (and author's, I suppose) African heritage, colonial experience, and English mother tongue, despite his never having lived in America, Britain, or Africa.) I recommend this book as history and even as a novel. I guess it is a new sort of book for this age, frank and real and yet also curiously fictitious. It is hard to put down. I look forward to reading it again.

In this fascinating inquiry into the African Diaspora, Caryl Phillips embarks on a soul-wrenching journey to the three major ports of the transatlantic slave trade. Juxtaposing stories of the past with his own present-day experiences, Phillips combines his remarkable skills as a travel essayist with an astute understanding of history. From an West African businessman's interactions with white Methodists in nineteenth-century Liverpool to an eighteenth-century African minister's complicity in the selling of slaves to a fearless white judge's crusade for racial justice in 1940s Charleston, South Carolina, Phillips reveals the global the impact of being uprooted from one's home through resonant, powerful narratives.

Caryl Phillips has established himself as one of the supreme chroniclers of African dispossession and exile. In previous works such as *The European Tribe* and *Crossing the River*, he documents the ironies of post-colonial history. Phillips's latest book is perhaps best described as a "meditation," although it is also a fine and invigorating book. The subject of Phillips's broodings is that of displacement, diaspora, homelessness--all those things that ineluctably accompany any descendant of West African slaves. Phillips himself was born in St. Kitts, West Indies, in 1958, and so here he retraces the first transatlantic journey he made with his mother in the late 1950s, by banana boat from the Caribbean to the gray shores of the Mother Country. He visits three cities central to the slave trade: Liverpool, Elmina in Ghana, and Charleston. Finally in Israel, he finds a community of 2,000 African Americans who have lived in the Negev desert for 30 years. Wholly absorbing, always surprising, brilliantly observant, sensitive to human tragedy but never pessimistic, Phillips writes as beautifully as ever. "It is futile to walk into the face of history. As futile as trying to keep the dust from one's eyes in the desert." --Christopher Hart, [publishersweekly.com](http://www.publishersweekly.com) From *Publishers Weekly Journeys*, as forces of spiritual and cultural transformation, bind this trio of nonfiction narratives, which explores the legacy of slavery in each of the three major points of the transatlantic slave trade. Once again, Phillips demonstrates the great aptitude for characterization, and for evoking historical settings and evaluating the moral demands of history, that he has honed in his fiction (*The Final Passage*, etc.) and nonfiction (*The European Tribe*). In the opening narrative, John Emmanuel Ocfanse, the adopted son of a prominent African trader on the Gold Coast, travels to Liverpool, England, in 1881 to investigate the loss of a substantial amount of his father's money, clinging to his Christian faith as he enters the thicket of the British justice system and, clear-eyed, studies the ways of the English. Another powerful story of identity, culture and assimilation follows with Phillips's account of an African minister's dilemma in 18th-century Accra, in which the minister, afraid to speak out, turns a blind eye to the horrors of the slave trade around him. The concluding narrative, of Federal Judge J. Waties Waring's bold battle against Southern racism in South Carolina in 1950, emphasizes the stance of a man who is willing to risk everything for what he believes. Phillips strips away his own personal and cultural armor with meditations on race, traditional social rites, identity and nationalism, although his analysis occasionally eclipses the raw power of his material. While the last two narratives don't carry the impact of the first one, they all sparkle with keen intelligence, careful research and well-expressed truths. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* The author of such well-regarded novels as *Cambridge* (1992) and *Crossing the River* (1994) writes an especially poignant and uniquely personalized history of the Atlantic slave trade, a triangulated commercial route maintained in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries between Africa, Britain, and the eastern coast of the U.S. From Liverpool, England, to Accra, Ghana, to Charleston, South Carolina, slave ships plied their trade, and what makes this author's history of the horrible business so compelling and so original is that he visited these ports of call not only to understand as much as he possibly could about what the captured Africans who were sold into slavery went through but also to gauge the current conditions of blacks in these places. In each city, he compared what he experienced with the experiences of certain historical individuals whose lives he's read about and who help give an appreciation to the human side of the effects of the slave trade. The result is history and sociology at its most heartfelt. Brad Hooper Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved