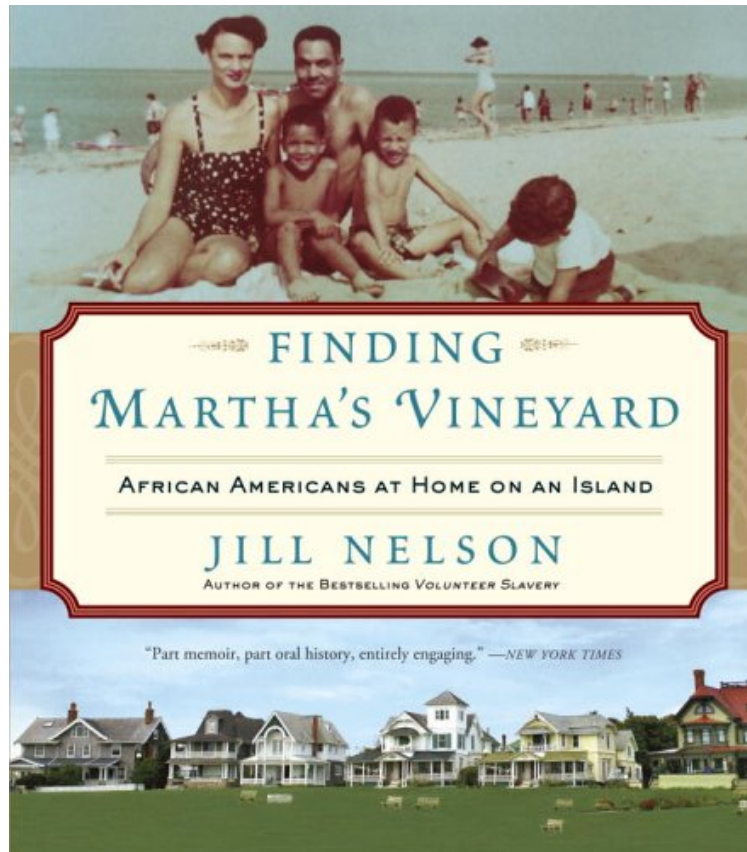


Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island

Jill Nelson

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Jill Nelson : Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Finding Martha's Vineyard: African Americans at Home on an Island:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. We had a wonderful vacation enjoying all the sightsBy Barbara JordanMy friend and I vacationed in Martha's Vineyard in June of this year. We had a wonderful vacation enjoying all the sights. He was very interested in the history of MV. I purchased this book for him as a gift and he was elated to receive it.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Have visited Martha's Vineyard many years ago. I knew ...By Juanda J StewartHave visited Martha's Vineyard many years ago. I knew of the African Americans residing there, but found that the book was so informative, and gave such an indepth picture of the families.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy History MakerLoved it!!! My favorite place in the world to be!!!

In this elegant book of photographs, personal narrative, memories, and fascinating historical detail, bestselling author Jill Nelson conveys the special magic of Marthas Vineyard and the African Americans who have summered or lived

there for generations. Jill Nelson has been a summer and occasional year-round resident of Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard for nearly fifty years. It was where she learned to swim and ride a bike, first kissed a boy, became a writer, and, during twenty-eight summers, raised her own daughter. In *Finding Martha's Vineyard*, Nelson offers a lively, intimate portrait of a place that has provided respite and rejuvenation, community and contemplation for generations of African Americans. Part memoir, part history, *Finding Martha's Vineyard* describes the various groups that settled on the Vineyard and in Oak Bluffs; slaves and their descendants; devout Methodists and Baptists; African Americans in service who accompanied their white employers to the island and over the years established a haven and a community; the black middle-class families who came each summer to escape the heat, hostility, and racial tension of their hometowns; and generations of African American professionals—doctors, presidential advisors, writers, academics and artists—who visit or live on the Vineyard today. Nelson interviews the Cottagers, the proud owners of Oak Bluffs' famous Gingerbread cottages; members of the Polar Bear Club, a die-hard group that swims together every summer morning at 7:30 A.M.; and such famous residents as Vernon Jordan, Bebe Moore Campbell, and Stephen Carter. *Finding Martha's Vineyard* is about the power of place in our lives. A rich treasury of reminiscences, excerpts from news articles and documents from the Martha's Vineyard Historical Society, recipes, and glorious photographs, it brings the sights, sounds, celebrations, and social importance of the island community brilliantly to life.

From Publishers Weekly: Nelson, author of a fierce, candid memoir (*Volunteer Slavery*) and a steamy, funny novel (*Sexual Healing*), offers an intimate look at Martha's Vineyard, where generations of African-Americans have lived, worked and played, year-round or for a summer. She provides a brief history of the African-American presence on the island, which dates back to the 1700s, and reflects on her own nearly five-decade love affair with the place. Oak Bluffs and other Vineyard resort communities, she says, became havens for African-Americans who felt "insulated from many of the racial assumptions and expectations... that at the least intruded upon and at the worst defined many of our lives off-island." Nelson lets island residents provide an oral history: Doris Pope Jackson recalls how, in 1903, her grandfather bought a summer house that soon turned into a thriving inn; Vernon Jordan reflects that for many years, "the Vineyard was the only [vacation] spot for successful black people." Others weighing in on what the Vineyard means to them include Yale law professor Stephen Carter (*The Emperor of Ocean Park*) and novelist Bebe Moore Campbell. Personal and celebratory, Nelson's book is a tribute to a picturesque little island and a reminder of the importance of "a community of similar souls." Photos. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist: For generations, the Oak Bluff community on Martha's Vineyard has offered the black middle class a summer escape from the heat and from the racial hostilities of their workaday lives. Nelson herself counts nearly 50 summers of rest and restoration, as she learned to swim, experienced her first kiss, became a writer, and raised her own daughter. Nelson offers a rich historical perspective on Oak Bluffs for African Americans, from the early presence of slaves and servants, to the wealthy, to vacationers and home owners. She recalls the churches, civic organizations, and clubs developed by domestics, professionals, and artists attracted to the island over the generations; their impact on the culture and history of the island; and the shifts in race relations. Nelson begins each chapter with a personal recollection of her family's experiences, then highlights others— island dwellers or longtime visitors—including Spike Lee, Vernon Jordan, Dorothy West, and Stephen Carter. This vibrant collection of memories, articles, recipes, and photographs evokes the social cohesion and significance of this island community. Vanessa Bush Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved

There is an easy loveliness to the rhythm of this narrative of black lives on Martha's Vineyard that feels remarkably close to the easy loveliness of the rhythm of days spent there on the beach and in the homes of family and friends. The best books transport us to other places, and this one transports me right back to the Vineyard. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Jill Nelson's lyrical love story about her place Martha's Vineyard captures what makes people like me and my family call the Vineyard our place, too. Like the Vineyard, her fine book is fuel for the soul. Charlayne Hunter-Gault, journalist and author of *In My Place* Part personal memoir, part island history, part exploration of class and privilege in a space that is increasingly defined by both, and all heart, *Finding Martha's Vineyard* sneaks up on you and weaves a spell. The small snippets of Nelson's own exuberant love of island life are enriched by a variety of oral histories by other African American islanders. Their proud, highly individual voices paint a rich portrait of a unique community. Pearl Cleage, author of *Some Things I Never Thought I'd Do*