



Reading Guide: *The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, and War in the West Indies* by Matthew Parker (2011)

1. In Chapter 5, Parker discusses the presupposition that the English were not as cruel as the Spanish, and that the notion of them as a more civilized, fair people is completely overturned by their use and abuse of slaves in the Caribbean. Why do you think the English chose this path?
2. In Chapter 19, Parker notes that between 1708 and 1735 Barbados imported 85,000 slaves to raise the slave population by 4,000. What do you think of this statistic? What does it tell us about the human toll of sugar production?
3. Throughout the text there are references to the “modern commercial spirit.” Do you think Parker is correct in identifying sugar production, and the other commodities that surrounded it, as a precursor to the advent of modern English capitalism?
4. What do you think of the status that many Sugar Barons gave themselves? In particular, the Drax, Codrington, and Beckford families?
5. What did you think of the paradox presented in Chapter 8, dealing with the dislike of the uncivilized natives, while many of the English who were in the West Indies were not refined themselves?
6. What kinds of implications did the sugar trade have? Are they long lasting?

About Matthew Parker

Matthew Parker was born in Central America and spent part of his childhood in the West Indies, acquiring a lifelong fascination with the history of the region. He is the author of *Panama Fever*, the story of the building of the Panama Canal, and *Monte Cassino: The Hardest-Fought Battle of World War II*.

Other Books by Matthew Parker

- *Panama Fever: The Epic Story of the Building of the Panama Canal*, Matthew Parker (2009)
The Panama Canal was the costliest undertaking in history; its completion in 1914 marked the beginning of the “American Century.” *Panama Fever* draws on contemporary accounts, bringing the experience of those who built the canal vividly to life.
- *Monte Cassino: The Hardest-Fought Battle of World War II*, Matthew Parker (2005)
Monte Cassino is the true story of one of the bitterest and bloodiest of the Allied struggles against the Nazi army. Long neglected by historians, the horrific conflict saw more than 350,000 casualties, while the worst winter in Italian memory and official incompetence and backbiting only worsened the carnage and turmoil.

Other Related Texts

- *Merchant Kings: When Companies Ruled the World, 1600–1900*, Stephen R. Bown (2009)
It was an era when monopoly trading companies were the unofficial agents of European expansion, controlling vast numbers of people and huge tracts of land, and taking on governmental and military functions. They managed their territories as business interests, treating their subjects as employees, customers, or competitors. The leaders of these trading enterprises exercised virtually unaccountable, dictatorial political power over millions of people.
- *Sugar in the Blood: A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire*, Andrea Stuart (2013)
In the late 1630s, lured by the promise of the New World, Andrea Stuart's earliest known maternal ancestor, George Ashby, set sail from England to settle in Barbados. He fell into the life of a sugar plantation owner by mere chance, but by the time he harvested his first crop, a revolution was fully under way: the farming of sugar cane, and the swiftly increasing demands for sugar worldwide, would not only lift George Ashby from abject poverty and shape the lives of his descendants, but it would also bind together ambitious white entrepreneurs and enslaved black workers in a strangling embrace.
- *When America First Met China: An Exotic History of Tea, Drugs, and Money in the Age of Sail*, Eric Jay Dolin (2012)
Ancient China collides with newfangled America in this epic tale of opium smugglers, sea pirates, and dueling clipper ships.
- *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Sidney W. Mintz (1986)
This text shows how the intelligent analysis of the history of a single commodity can be used to pry open the history of an entire world of social relationships and human behavior.

Education programs at Rienzi receive generous funding from the Sterling-Turner Foundation; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; the Carroll Sterling and Harris Masterson III Endowment; and the Caroline Wiess Law Endowment for Rienzi.

Education programs at Bayou Bend receive generous funding from Mr. William J. Hill; Occidental Petroleum Corporation; Susanne M. and Melbern G. Glasscock; The Americana Foundation; The Crain Foundation; Houston Junior Woman's Club; The Susan Vaughan Foundation; Ralph H. and Ruth J. McCullough Foundation; Sheila and Steve Miller; and Denise Monteleone.