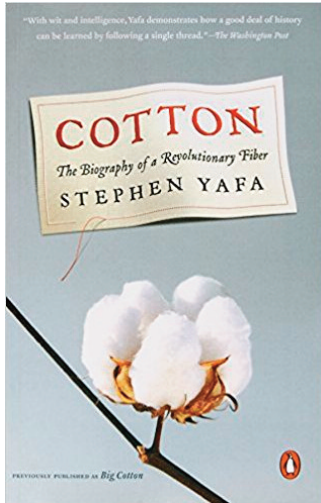


Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club Guide

May 2017



Reading Guide:

Cotton: The Biography of a Revolutionary Fiber by Stephen Yafa (2006)

1. What is the most important or memorable thing you will take away from having read this book? What surprised you most?
2. What do you think the author's goal was in writing this book? Did he succeed?
3. This book was originally titled: *Big Cotton: How a Humble Fiber Created Fortunes, Wrecked Civilizations, and Put America on the Map*. Which title do you think more effectively conveys the focus of the book, the original one or the new one?
4. Has reading this book changed the way you think about cotton? How?
5. We meet a lot of historical characters in this book. Who was the most interesting to you?
6. How might United States history have been changed if cotton never became an important commodity crop? Would it have been for the better or for the worse?
7. For those who have participated in earlier book group discussions, how does this reading connect to other books we have read?
8. Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend?

About Stephen Yafa

Author Stephen Yafa, who lives in Mill Valley, California, has written, produced, and directed in a wide range of formats. A wine producer of pinot noir in the Russian River region of West Sonoma, he writes on wine for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other publications. He created and edited the iPad wine magazine, *Uncorked*, for Nomad Publications. He has worked as a Hollywood screenwriter at MGM, Columbia, Paramount, and other major studios; published the novel *Paxton Quigley's Had the Course*; and his plays have been produced nationally at theaters including ACT in San Francisco, the Magic Theater, and on public television. As a journalist, he has been a frequent contributor to *Playboy*, *Rotarian*, and magazines that include *Details*, *American Heritage*, and *Rolling Stone*.

Related Texts

If you liked *Cotton*, you may enjoy these other books (descriptions courtesy of Amazon.com):

Empire of Cotton: A Global History by Sven Beckert (2015)

The empire of cotton was, from the beginning, a fulcrum of constant global struggle between slaves and planters, merchants and statesmen, workers and factory owners. In his Pulitzer-finalist history, which also won the prestigious Bancroft Prize, Sven Beckert makes clear how these forces ushered in the world of modern capitalism, including the vast wealth and disturbing inequalities that are with us today. The result is a book as unsettling as it is enlightening: a book that brilliantly weaves together the story of cotton with how the present global world came to exist.

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism by Edward E. Baptist (2016)

As historian Edward E. Baptist reveals in *The Half Has Never Been Told*, the expansion of slavery in the first eight decades after American independence drove the evolution and modernization of the United States. In the span of a single lifetime, the South grew from a narrow coastal strip of worn-out tobacco plantations to a continental cotton empire, and the United States grew into a modern, industrial, and capitalist economy. Told through intimate slave narratives, plantation records, newspapers, and the words of politicians, entrepreneurs, and escaped slaves, *The Half Has Never Been Told* offers a radical new interpretation of American history.

Tobacco: A Cultural History of How an Exotic Plant Seduced Civilization by Iain Gately (2002)

Tobacco was first cultivated and enjoyed by the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, who used it for medicinal, religious, and social purposes long before the arrival of Columbus. But when Europeans began to colonize the American continents, it became something else entirely—a cultural touchstone of pleasure and success, and a coveted commodity that would transform the world economy forever. Iain Gately's *Tobacco* tells the epic story of an unusual plant and its unique relationship with the history of humanity, from its obscure ancient beginnings, through its rise to global prominence, to its current embattled state today. Informed and erudite, *Tobacco* is a vivid and provocative look into the complex history of this precious plant.

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