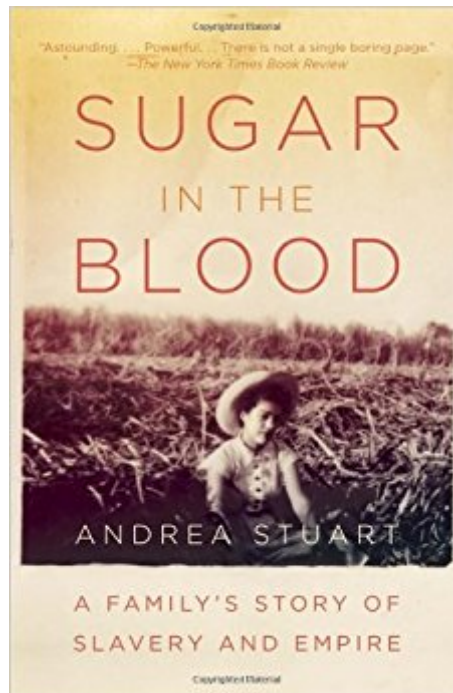




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Sugar In The Blood: A Family's Story Of Slavery And Empire



Synopsis

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. Stuart uses her own family story "from the seventeenth century through the present" as the pivot for this epic tale of migration, settlement, survival, slavery and the making of the Americas. As it grew, the sugar trade enriched Europe as never before, financing the Industrial Revolution and fuelling the Enlightenment. And, as well, it became the basis of many economies in South America, played an important part in the evolution of the United States as a world power and transformed the Caribbean into an archipelago of riches. But this sweet and hugely profitable trade "the white gold," as it was known "had profoundly less palatable consequences in its precipitation of the enslavement of Africans to work the fields on the islands and, ultimately, throughout the American continents. Interspersing the tectonic shifts of colonial history with her family's experience, Stuart explores the interconnected themes of settlement, sugar and slavery with extraordinary subtlety and sensitivity. In examining how these forces shaped her own family "its genealogy, intimate relationships, circumstances of birth, varying hues of skin" she illuminates how her family, among millions of others like it, in turn transformed the society in which they lived, and how that interchange continues to this day. Shifting between personal and global history, Stuart gives us a deepened understanding of the connections between continents, between black and white, between men and women, between the free and the enslaved. It is a story brought to life with riveting and unparalleled immediacy, a story of fundamental importance to the making of our world.

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Customer Reviews

I heard an NPR interview of Ms Stuart and was intrigued so I bought the book -- and I'm so glad I did. The history she has researched is important in how the entire Western society as we know it today came into being -- through the confluence of Europe and Africa through the slave trade. While there is great scholarly detail which is amazingly helpful in helping us to learn more about the times, Ms Stuart also attempts -- successfully, I think -- to provide an internal experience of what life must have been like for the people of the 1600's who were part of this historical pageant. Also being from the West Indies myself -- and also living abroad-- my heart ached with recognition of the recent times in Barbados that Ms Stuart draws attention to. The book is illuminating and sweet at the same time. Strongly recommend to those interested in the African diaspora in the West, students of history of the West Indies -- and the US and Britain -- and those who want to learn about an amazing tapestry of historical confluence of people.

...without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck. - Frederick Douglass

Of all the things about this well-written and researched book, the meaning of this quote is what has stuck with me the most. The author does an incredible job of explaining what life must have been like (horrors unimaginable- but horrifying because in fact they did spring from the minds of actual human beings!) as a slave in the Caribbean sugar industry. But just as importantly, she shows how absolute absolute power corrupts. I was reminded throughout the book that these were human beings- both the victims of suffering and their all-powerful torturers (occasionally even, as the author notes, amongst the slaves themselves- completely constricted as they were under an oppressive regime). How easy is it to slip into such inhumane habits? Are we all potentially capable of such things?

I had a lot more I was going to write in this review about how this book opened my eyes once again to the blight on history that was slavery, but my words don't seem adequate. The author's unflinching look at slavery is a must read for anyone trying to understand. To me, this book seemed to be giving voice to the many thousands of voiceless people who've now passed into oblivion. To say- they lived, they suffered, they deserved justice, they mattered.

This is an incredible history of family, colonisation, slavery, the development of international trade and personal anecdotes rolled into one riveting read. Andrea Stuart captures all in a serious but entertaining fashion. Highly recommended.

Sugar in the Blood is a meticulously researched and fact-filled book! Andrea Stuart traces her ancestry back to the 1600's and then through slave times in the Caribbean. Much of the book is focused on her most distant relative, his transport from England (by choice!), and his lifestyle in the Colonial Caribbean. Considering how well-educated and accomplished Ms. Stuart and her parents are, I would have preferred that she give them equal attention. There is one serious omission--religion. There is only brief reference to the Church of England's indifference toward indoctrinating the slaves because of the fear that the teachings might encourage revolt. This is a fascinating concept, and along with more detailed discussion about religious practices and songs that grew out of the slave culture, religion should have been a far greater part of the book. Ms. Stuart has a tendency to say, "I can imagine their conversation. . . ." or "I can just imagine what she was thinking when" This stylistic device does a disservice to her research and undercuts the nonfiction she is attempting to create. Rather than second-guessing happenings, the author should have quoted directly from one of her many first-person sources, or left her speculation out.

At this late date after the book's release, the only explanation for lack of reviews is denial, a lack of curiosity in studies of comparative slavery and freedom issues, and a certain lethargy among the literate public. This is a profound book, an easy read, well footnoted, and with many insights which Americans, Caribbeans, and Europeans, all, would be blessed to read.

excellent account of the times - very well researched and written. Some of the more brutal scenes are horrifying, but necessary to show. I like Ms. Stuart's thorough research and her willingness to look at as many angles as she can. As an ex-pat myself, I too have reached the stage where 'Home' is wherever I am, but certain places have a strong pull. Great book, thanks so much. I may suggest this for our bookclub...

This book was a really interesting history of Barbados, but more importantly it is a history of how life was in Britain before the Caribbean was settled, how and why the slave trade began, how that affected the indigenous population, how the Caribbean islands were initially settled and tamed by the

Europeans (for example I for the first time really thought about how these people landed on a completely primitive overgrown island and had to both physically and politically create a functioning society with goods, services, rules, etc. and what it takes to do that), how the relationship between slaveholders, slaves and all those in between developed over the centuries into their current societies. Having visited Barbados, it was cool to relate the history to what I had seen with my own eyes. All of this is related through a history of the author's family, which appears meticulously researched. This book didn't need to be about sugar or Barbados to relate its story, as similar events took place throughout the western hemisphere, and I think the book relates a more universal story. I also appreciated the few digressions to events occurring in Haiti, Jamaica, Brazil and the American colonies as well. The book was written in a fast paced plain english manner which made for a quick and easy read. I agree with a few of the others that the book felt a bit flat once emancipation occurred (more emphasis on family history and less on the cultural change and what drove it). Bottom line is that I really thought about or understood all the steps involved in how the new world was settled and the author clearly and in a very interesting/personal way shows you how that happened. Most importantly, this book is stunning in its depiction of the horrors of slavery and sugar can work, and the lives of those that suffered such a terrible and unjustifiable cost along the way.

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