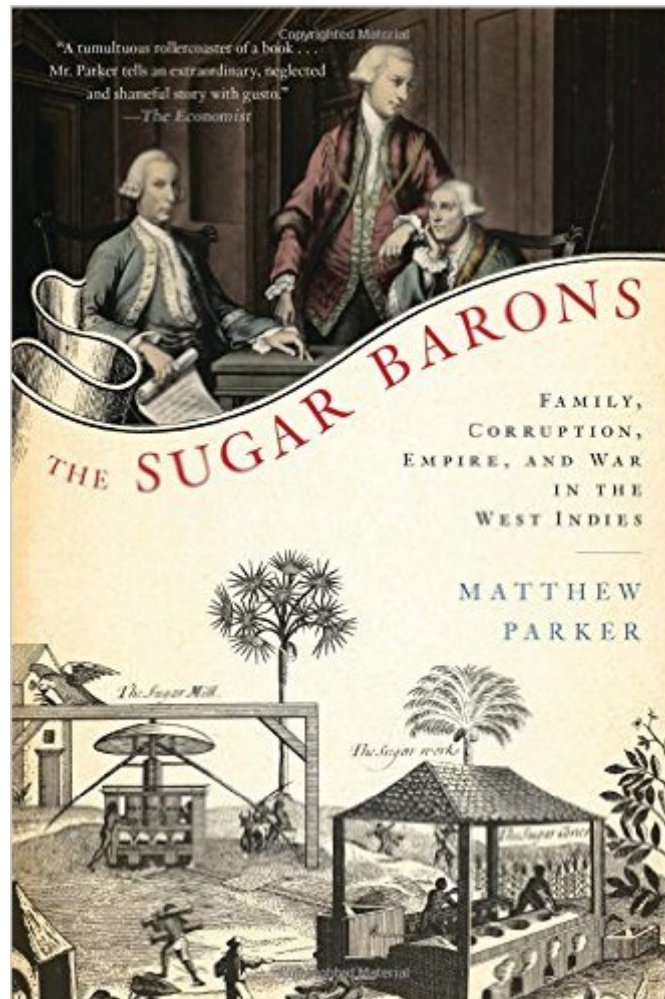


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The Sugar Barons: Family, Corruption, Empire, And War In The West Indies



Synopsis

To those who travel there today, the West Indies are unspoiled paradise islands. Yet that image conceals a turbulent and shocking history. For some two hundred years after 1650, the West Indies were the strategic center of the Western world's greatest power struggles as Europeans made and lost immense fortunes growing and trading in sugar—a commodity so lucrative it became known as "white gold." Matthew Parker vividly chronicles how the wealth of her island colonies became the foundation and focus of England's commercial and imperial greatness, underpinning the British economy and ultimately fueling the Industrial Revolution. Yet with the incredible wealth came untold misery: the horror endured by slaves, on whose backs the sugar empire was brutally built; the rampant disease that claimed the lives of one-third of all whites within three years of arrival in the Caribbean; the cruelty, corruption, and decadence of the plantation culture. Broad in scope, rich in detail, *The Sugar Barons* freshly links the histories of Europe, the West Indies, and North America and reveals the full impact of the sugar revolution, the resonance of which is still felt today.

Book Information

Paperback: 464 pages

Publisher: Walker Books; Reprint edition (November 13, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802777988

ISBN-13: 978-0802777980

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 1.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (35 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #198,953 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #119 in [Books > Business & Money > Industries > Agriculture](#) #144 in [Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies](#) #559 in [Books > Business & Money > Biography & History > Economic History](#)

Customer Reviews

Parker's history of the West Indies sugar industry is one of the most valuable reads of the year for students of industrial and imperial history. He outlines the origins of the industry which originated on the Caribbean island of Barbados and reached its peak with the cultivation of Jamaica. The final chapters look at eventual decline and collapse. However, this is much more than a narrative. Its value is in how it draws in key strands of Britain's early imperial history showing how they all worked together - but reading between the lines it also makes clear modes of behaviour that still exist

amongst the descendants of the sugar barons today - the bankers of the city. The 17th century saw the cultivation of sugar following ideas first used in Brazil by the Dutch and Portuguese. Other islands soon followed as the price for sugar rocketed in Europe and fortunes were made by the estate owners. Sugar became an essential luxury and demand forced more and more land into cultivation. More was being made in profit than could be spent on the islands- the growing surplus was being spent and invested in England - providing funds for other commercial and early industrial ventures. So far so good, but it is in exploring other aspects of this growth that the book excels:* the early years coincided with Spain's domination of the area. London encouraged the settlers to help defend and expand their investments. Privateering - the use of ships to attack and loot Spanish treasure ships was encouraged. This would become little more than blatant piracy, especially as it happened consistently, not just during war due to the odd concept that the West Indies were "beyond the line" of normal diplomatic niceties. By the late 17th century this was real "Pirates of the Caribbean territory.

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