

Sugar in the Blood: A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire

Written by Kam Williams



"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 plantation sugar owner by chance...

The swiftly increasing demands for sugar worldwide would not only lift [him] from abject poverty... 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 17th C. through the present—as the pivot for this epic tale of migration, settlement, survival, slavery and the making of the Americas."

-- Excerpted from the Book Jacket

Although Andrea Stuart was born and raised in the Caribbean, she never knew much about her ethnic heritage growing up. As a curious adult, she started digging around in library archives and was able to trace part of her ancestry as far back as the 17th C. to a white plantation owner of a sugar plantation on Barbados.

Being mixed, Stuart also tried to find her African roots, but that search proved far more challenging, given how her earliest black Bajan ancestors had been brought to the island as slaves. That meant they'd been considered property, and there weren't as many records to be found about chattel.

Nevertheless, the bilingual (English and French) writer approached the project like an investigative journalist, eventually unearthing a cornucopia of fascinating factoids about her gnarly family tree. And the upshot of that tireless effort is *Sugar in the Blood*, a book that is as much the intimate tale of one incestuous clan as it is a universal one shared by many folks from the region who have both European and African blood running through their veins.

The gifted author evidences quite a way with words here, employing her vivid imagination to spin historical tidbits into a compelling page-turner guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat, ala a best-selling suspense novel. Yes, she takes poet license periodically, but merely to

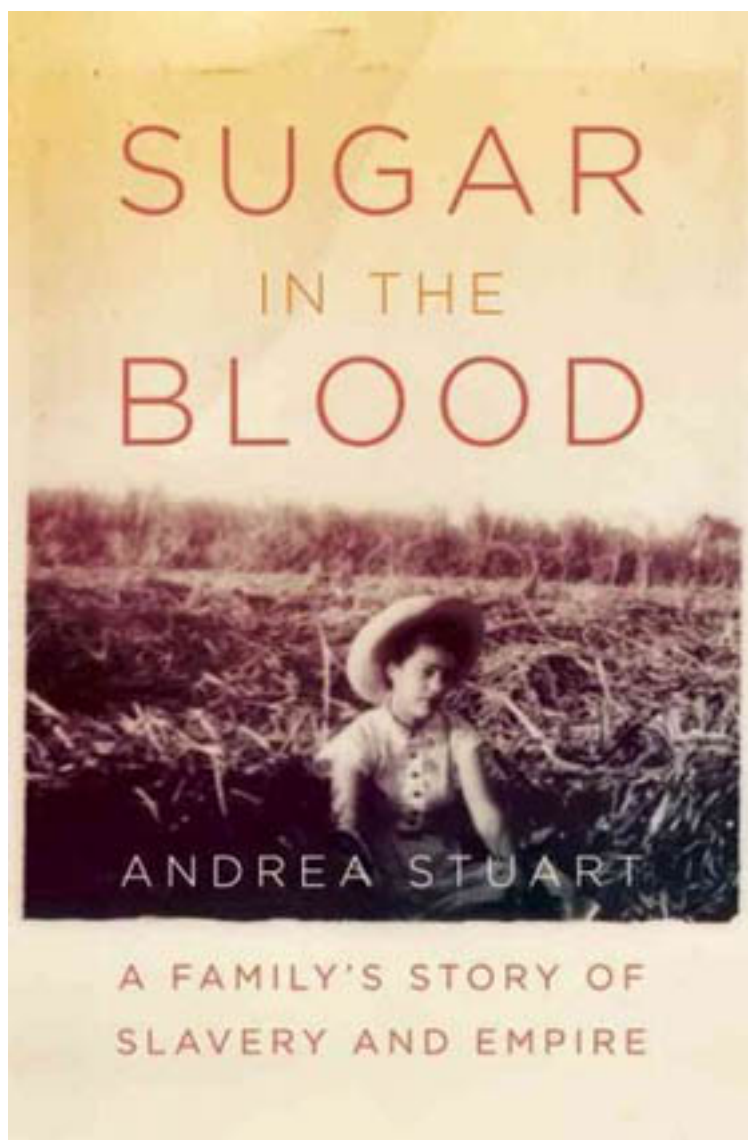
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extrapolate and plausibly fill the penumbras lying betwixt and between solid kernels of truth.

Over the course of this centuries-spanning opus, we're treated to a host of colorful characters passing time in and around the author's ancestral plantation, with whites generally enjoying easy sexual access to enslaved females as well as the fruits of black labor. Curiously, Ms. Stuart treats both sides with an almost affectionate understanding, even addressing the enduring skin color issue which has left her homeland hopelessly stratified after generations of race mixing.

A credible, cross-cultural examination chronicling the unresolved master-slave relationship still reflected in today's Barbados where, as Faulkner sagely surmised about America's Deep South, "The past is never dead. It isn't even past."



Sugar in the Blood
A Family's Story of Slavery and Empire
by Andrea Stuart
Knopf Books

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