

WEEK 6 INTRODUCTION TO READING

Michael Craton, *Searching for the Invisible Man. Slaves and Plantation Life in Jamaica* (1978)

The ledger books from Jamaica's Worthy Park estate are extraordinary sources of information about the demographics and daily life of a New World plantation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The following reading is from Michael Craton's study of these records. It must be emphasized, however, that Worthy Park is not a generic "plantation," but a particular one located in a particular place over a long period of time. Worthy Park began producing sugar for export after 1715, when Jamaican sugar production expanded following the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. By 1730, Worthy Park's enslaved work force of 250 persons produced as much as 187 tons of sugar a year. Set far inland, Worthy Park's transportation costs were unusually high. This encouraged expansion to obtain economies of scale. In the 1740s, the estate earned a profit of some £1500 a year, a return of between 10% and 15% on the estate's invested capital. In the 1790s, with the end of competition from revolutionary Saint Domingue, Jamaican sugar became more profitable. During that decade, Worthy Park expanded to become one of Jamaica's largest and most profitable estates. Under the management of its owner, a man named Rose Price, the slave population rose to 541 persons in 1793. The immediate result was an epidemic among the "unseasoned" newcomers. In 1795, Rose Price returned to England and thereafter Worthy Park was managed by salaried overseers. In 1830, about thirty years after the end of trade in slaves from Africa, Worthy Park purchased 100 slaves from other Jamaican plantations. This was the last major influx of slaves in Worthy Park's history. In 1838, slavery ended in Jamaica.

WEEK 6 QUESTIONS

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1-3. Imagine that you are able to have a discussion with the individuals profiled in the excerpts from Craton's work. For any three of these individuals, identify specific issues about their lives that you would wish to understand better.