Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *The Slave Master of Trinidad: William Hardin Burnley and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018. xxi + 346 pp. (Paper US\$32.95)

A life-and-times study, this biographical account tells the story of late slavery, emancipation, apprenticeship, and indentured labor on the island of Trinidad through the life of a singular individual. William Hardin Burnley, American-born to loyalist English parents, lived most of his adult life (from 1802 to 1850) on Trinidad. He was a member of the Legislative Council for almost forty years. Historian Donald Wood has described him as “a founding father of British Trinidad,” deeply immersed in the island’s key events. Selwyn Cudjoe even likens Burnley to Eric Williams, the late prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, in that each dominated the island’s political life for about the same length of time—the first half of the nineteenth century for the former, the second half of the twentieth century for the latter.

Cudjoe has a keen personal interest in the story. He is a direct descendant of a community of people who occupied Burnley land. His great-great-grandfather was an enslaved African who squatted on Burnley’s primary estate, Orange Grove, after slavery ended. In 1833 his great-grandfather (like Cudjoe himself) was born in Tacarigua, a village, in Orange Grove. The book could have been a diatribe, but Cudjoe exercises considerable restraint, even though his subject is an unappealing character. Apparently, Burnley’s wealth derived in part from an office that allowed him to exploit widows and orphans. He was a racist and profoundly pro slavery. By all accounts, he was hot tempered and authoritarian. On the other hand, he was intellectually curious, and visited the United States, parts of Europe, and many Caribbean islands. He could count reformers such as radical MP Joseph Hume, his brother-in-law, John Quincy Adams, and Alexis de Tocqueville among his friends and acquaintances. Cudjoe minces no words, but is fair and balanced.

Burnley’s early life can be quickly told. Born in 1780 in New York City, but with Virginia connections, he moved to England with his parents six years later. In 1793 he attended Harrow School where he remained two and a half years. In 1798 he first went to Trinidad, apparently to reconnoiter the prospects; he moved there permanently four years later. He followed in his father’s occupational footsteps by becoming a merchant. In 1807 he married Charlotte Brown, the daughter of a Trinidadian merchant of Scottish descent, with whom he had two sons, born eleven years apart. She disliked Trinidad and lived mostly in London or Paris. Like many West Indians, he had a local mistress. Her name was Augusta Farquhar, and he seems to have had children with her.

One of Burnley's claims to recognition is simply the sheer magnitude of his wealth. In 1823 his father died and William came into a significant inheritance. He added to it, becoming "one of the largest *resident* slave owners in the Caribbean" (p. xiv), and the richest man on the island. He eventually owned or controlled fourteen sugar estates. Orange Grove was the largest at 2,600 acres, with over 200 slaves. In 1821 he built a mansion in Tacarigua. When colonial slavery was abolished in 1833, Burnley received almost £50,000 for the 980 people he owned, which made him the single largest recipient of compensation on the island. He was a living testament to Trinidad's continued economic vibrancy post-1807.

His other major achievement was to be an important voice for the planter class. He fought to maintain slavery, opposed the ending of apprenticeship, was "the first person to advocate the bringing of East Indians to the island" (p. 19), and served as the island's agent in London. Particularly toward the end of his life, he was an obstructionist, opposing the establishment of a railroad in 1847 and an internal postal system three years later.

Much as Burnley's life intersects with major events in Trinidad's history, the man himself is elusive. A prior biographer, Norman Lamont, drew on Burnley's letters, notebooks, and accounts, but they seem to have been unavailable to Cudjoe, who had to rely largely on printed tracts and pamphlets. Personal, intimate details are sparse. There is little individual texture to the story, which focuses on public matters. How Burnley made his money as a merchant is a mystery. What kind of slave master he was is unknown. His family life is opaque. This biography is disappointingly thin at key junctures. Its 47 chapters, averaging six pages each, move from one event to another in quick succession, giving a scattershot quality to the work. Still, telling the story of early Trinidad through the lens of an important actor has value.

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