



# **Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650-1820 (American Beginnings, 1500-1900)**

*Trevor Burnard*

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As with any enterprise involving violence and lots of money, running a plantation in early British America was a serious and brutal enterprise. Beyond resources and weapons, a plantation required a significant force of cruel and rapacious men—men who, as Trevor Burnard sees it, lacked any better options for making money. In the contentious *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, Burnard argues that white men did not choose to develop and maintain the plantation system out of virulent racism or sadism, but rather out of economic logic because—to speak bluntly—it worked.

These economically successful and ethically monstrous plantations required racial divisions to exist, but their successes were always measured in gold, rather than skin or blood. Burnard argues that the best example of plantations functioning as intended is not those found in the fractious and poor North American colonies, but those in their booming and integrated commercial hub, Jamaica. Sure to be controversial, this book is a major intervention in the scholarship on slavery, economic development, and political power in early British America, mounting a powerful and original argument that boldly challenges historical orthodoxy.

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