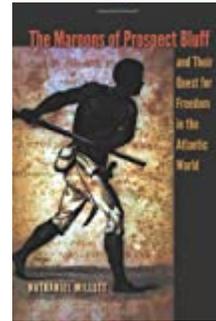


Nathaniel Millett. *The Maroons of Prospect Bluff and Their Quest for Freedom in the Atlantic World.* Contested Boundaries Series. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013. 361 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-6086-6; \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-4454-5.



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Antislavery in the Atlantic Borderlands

With *The Maroons of Prospect Bluff and Their Quest for Freedom in the Atlantic World*, Nathaniel Millet refreshes our understanding of the historical impact of maroon settlements by recreating the ways that former slaves claimed and constructed the “most complete version of freedom possible” through their association with British Colonel Edward “Fighting” Nicolls at the site then known as Negro Fort on Florida’s Apalachicola River (p. 11). Prospect Bluff was a maroon community created at the conclusion of the War of 1812. Armed with British weapons and supplies and inhabited by former slaves and free blacks from around the Southeast, it was destroyed by the United States Navy in 1816. When Nicolls was ordered to leave Prospect Bluff in 1815, he provided each soldier or head of family with papers acknowledging their service to the British Crown and granting them the full privileges of British citizenship. He also left weapons for the Seminoles and Red Sticks to help them resist further American expansion. Both the new black citizens of the fort and their allied Indians realized that their alliance provided them with their best hope of mutual survival.

The ways in which these maroons succeeded in claiming these privileges at Prospect Bluff and attempted to assert them elsewhere in the Atlantic World are what Millet describes as the fullest measure of freedom.

With this monograph, Millet seeks to rectify a decline in focus on the events at Prospect Bluff in the historiography of slavery. In doing so, he also makes a significant contribution to how we understand the ways that former slaves both understood and acted upon antislavery rhetoric during the early years of the cotton boom. Believing that the story of this particular maroon community is crucial to our understanding of the ethnic diversity of the Southeast, the War of 1812, and the expansion of southern slave society into Florida through its annexation in 1821, Millett meticulously traces how antislavery ideals were created and perfected in what he describes as an Atlantic borderland environment. His purpose is to depict Prospect Bluff as an exceptional maroon community by “analyzing the inhabitants’s demographics, backgrounds, culture, economy, military structure, military system, and, more broadly, their society”

(p. 5). Rather than situating this story amid more familiar North American maroon-type settlements, like North Carolina's Great Dismal Swamp or Fort Mose in Spanish Florida to which he intentionally does not compare Prospect Bluff, Millet instead places Negro Fort within the broader maroon events of the entire Western Hemisphere. Millet navigates through seemingly disparate interactions between white southerners, U.S. allied Creeks, British allied Seminole and Red Sticks, Spanish colonists, and both former slaves and free blacks to show how the ideological and geopolitical trends of the Atlantic World influenced the violent development of, and response to, antislavery rhetoric in the geographic spaces from New Orleans to Alabama, Georgia, and the Spanish Floridas from 1812 to 1816. The three overarching threads of wartime Atlantic borderland alliances, the deployment of Nicoll's antislavery experiment, and the impact of a successfully governed community of former slaves on the inhabitants of the southern United States combine to illustrate the rise and fall of the fort at Prospect Bluff.

The book is divided into two distinct sections. Millet first explains the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the alliances and beliefs that made Prospect Bluff possible before providing a much more nuanced and detailed comparative discussion supporting his assertion that Prospect Bluff was a unique and successful maroon settlement in the Western Hemisphere. The most important geopolitical issue was the fact that thousands of American slaves fled to British forces during the War of 1812, which shocked an American master class who did not think their property was privy to the possibilities for freedom demonstrated by international events like the Haitian Revolution, or at the very least, even capable of long-distance flight to British lines. By recruiting these former slaves, British military forces were merely continuing a trend of arming slaves, who, ironically, were used by the British against maroons in Jamaica, Grenada, and St. Vincent in the 1790s. The British also recruited Indian soldiers in order to capitalize on their possible resentment against Americans and their desire for Native land. These black and Indian soldiers were led by the uniquely qualified Nicolls. His experience leading black regiments in the Caribbean; his Irish upbringing, which made him sympathetic to the difficulties of the clans fighting against an occupying power; his Ulster Protestant faith; and his membership in the Hibernian Temperance Society made him a leader of distinguished conviction. Millet asserts that Nicoll's Atlantic World experience drew him to the radical idea of radical egalitarianism and the belief that slavery was an evil

institution to be destroyed at any means. Nicoll's war-hardened internalization of aversions of both empire and anti-slavery that diverged from more mainstream tendencies by combining activism and firsthand violent action was manifested in his creation of the settlement at Prospect Bluff through the ideological recruitment of both enslaved and free blacks living in East and West Florida as well as in the United States (p. 22). The British occupation of Pensacola during the War of 1812 allowed black people from all walks of life to view the disciplined behavior of the Second West India Regiment, which consisted of former slaves from the Caribbean. Millet argues that not only did this show of force contribute to a breakdown of racial order in the city, but it also drew American ire because of the implications of this news during the Age of Revolutions and demonstrated how, for Blacks and Whites, the Florida Peninsula appeared to be a geographical and intellectual bridge between the revolutionary Caribbean and the post-revolutionary United States that was grappling with the expansion of slavery (p. 33). Andrew Jackson's unsanctioned invasion of Pensacola caused some members of the black population there to flee with British forces to Prospect Bluff, thus beginning a trend of eastern exodus that eventually raised the population of the fort to three hundred or four hundred at the time of British withdraw from the region in 1815.

Millet addresses the role of Native Americans in this freedom struggle by highlighting Nicoll's role in influencing Seminole and Red Stick resistance to the United States in a manner that created allies for the maroons at Prospect Bluff. He argues that Nicoll's support exacerbated generational divides within these two Indian groups because younger members shared a similar cause with the maroons due to their dual inexperience as slave owners and their dislike for slavery as an American and accommodations institution (p. 83). Furthermore, not only did Nicoll encourage resistance to American encroachment, but his anti-slavery ideals also were introduced to the Atlantic borderlands at a time when Creek racial consciousness was increasingly based on the ever more prevalent opinion that different groups of humans were innately or, in modern parlance, biologically different (p. 78). Therefore, U.S. allied Creeks were not just simply bothered by the fact that Nicoll was encouraging their slaves to flee, but they were also wary of the implication that these slaves were capable of large-scale violence and that Red Stick and Seminole resistance threatened the perceived notions of progress made by Creeks' accommodation to American ideals. Millet concludes that by both physically and ideologically supple-

menting the determination of Red Stick and Seminole resistance, Nicolls inspired years of fear and violence across the Southeast.

In the second section, Prospect Bluff is compared with quilumbo of Palmares, palenques in Cuba, Suriname maroons, and both Windward and Leeward maroons in Jamaica to elucidate the many ways in which the black settlement above the Apalachicola was indeed exceptional in terms of geography, economy, demographics, religion, politics, culture, and interactions with outsiders to reveal striking similarities and differences. Most maroon settlements in Suriname and Jamaica entered into treaties with their respective colonial governments, which limited their travel and prohibited the enticement of further slaves to the settlements in a manner that acknowledged the maroons as defeated people and second-class citizens. However, Prospect Bluff maroonsâ written agreement with Nicolls granted them equal status as British subjects. Where other maroon communities were forced to carve out an existence in isolated and hostile landscapes, Prospect Bluff was a well-built fort on a highly navigable waterway. Perhaps the greatest similarities were the maroonsâ leadership and governance. As at Palmares, the leaders at Prospect Bluff were selected for their military prowess and exercised power through a shared structure. While Milletâs detailed juxtapositions of Prospect Bluff and broader trends in marronage can at times be repetitive, the repetition is necessary for Milletâs assertion that the freedom achieved at Prospect Bluff was the fullest or most cutting edge, especially for a settlement that existed on its own for less than two years.

The biggest contribution that Millet makes to the study of maroon societies stems from how Prospect Bluff differed from the others in terms of purpose. Maroon so-

cieties in South America contained former slaves of various African origins and, at times, sought to create communities based on a variety of the constituent African traditions. At Prospect Bluff, however, most of the inhabitants were Atlantic Creoles, who spoke English or Spanish as a first language, had lived among Indians or in the Caribbean, and were well acclimated to the diverse lifestyles of the Atlantic World. Millet argues that their common thread was a belief that Nicollsâs antislavery message provided them with the best possible outcome after a successful escape from slave societies. With this observation of a shared belief among people of such diverse circumstances, Millet provides valuable insight into slave consciousness by addressing a major historical question surrounding what slaves expected to find or create upon their successful escape from captivity and what the overall goals of slave rebellion could have been.

Weaving together sources from contemporary newspapers to the Georgia state archives and the multilingual resources of the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida history, Millet makes a valuable contribution to a variety of fields as diverse as the individuals who appear in this study. The story of the lives of those at Prospect Bluff provides insight on the dynamics of the Southeast during the expansion of slavery and adds the dimension of how antislavery rhetoric transcended any notion of African or American nationalism and was received and acted upon by those who were directly affected by it. The interactions of Indians and Africans in Spanish Florida expose developing notions of Native racial consciousness, while the rumors of such interactions demonstrate the vast web of American political and communication networks that governed the minds of southern planters and influenced both domestic and foreign policy in the early American Republic.

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