

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Battle of Negro Fort: The Rise and Fall of a Fugitive Slave Community. By Matthew J. Clavin.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2x74k8q7>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 44(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2020-03-01

DOI

10.17953/aicrj.44.2.reviews

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REVIEWS



The Battle of Negro Fort: The Rise and Fall of a Fugitive Slave Community. By Matthew J. Clavin. New York: New York University Press, 2019. 272 pages. \$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

In 1815, a fort abandoned by the British after the War of 1812 became a refuge and a site of resistance for enslaved people, who ran there looking for freedom, and Choctaw allies fighting against white American encroachment. For southern slave-owners like Andrew Jackson, it was an eyesore and an obsession that, for more than a year, stood as an affront to white American settler expansion. Instigated by Jackson, in July 1816 US federal troops launched cannon and obliterated the fort, killing many of the inhabitants. Compared to other episodes in the Florida borderlands, such as the First and Second Seminole wars, this site, called “Negro Fort” in newspapers of the day, has been given short shrift by historians of the antebellum period. Yet in *The Battle of Negro Fort: The Rise and Fall of a Fugitive Slave Community*, examining the circumstances leading up to and surrounding these events, Matthew J. Clavin contends that destruction of this military stronghold was a catalyst in these two conflicts as well as other clashes between self-liberated enslaved people, Native nations such as the Creek, Choctaw, and Seminole, white southern enslavers, and the US government.

The destruction of “a fugitive slave community in a foreign territory for the first and only time in its history,” Clavin argues, marks a turning point in how the institution of slavery shaped the formation of the United States because “it accelerated its transformation into a white republic, which served both the interests and ideology of an emerging Slave Power” (14). At the same time, the demise of the fort also revealed how the United States used the issue of chattel slavery in its strategies to dispossess Indigenous nations of their land and undermine Native sovereignty.

The monograph’s most compelling theme reveals how white settlers viewed both enslaved people of African descent and Indigenous Peoples as threats to dreams of national expansion, border security, and wealth. Clavin emphasizes that in particular, the prospect that terrified white southern enslavers like Andrew Jackson was facing a combined army of British soldiers, Black individuals in revolt against enslavement, and Indians defending their lands. In an effort to undermine these threatening alliances, white American politicians resorted to sowing divisions between Black and Native peoples. Accordingly, the United States enlisted federal Indian agents like Benjamin Hawkins at the Creek Agency to recruit Indigenous allies to defend the southern border of the United States. In exchange, Hawkins promised that Creeks could take as their own “property” any person of African descent not claimed by anyone, and a fifty-dollar reward for any self-liberated enslaved person they captured—four times the usual amount paid for fugitive slaves (28). Clavin illuminates how the new American

republic made chattel slavery an institution and issue that Indigenous Americans in the cotton-rich lands of the Deep South could not ignore, whether or not they were enslaved people of African descent. That Creeks like William McIntosh, an enslaver himself, fought on the side of the United States to defeat Creeks and Choctaws who sided with the British and escaped slaves, demonstrates how slavery served as an intractable obstacle in effective alliance-building between Black and Native peoples in the nineteenth century.

An additional strength is Clavin's clear demonstration of how the issues of slavery and Native sovereignty intersected in antebellum politics when discussing the conflicts that surrounded the negotiations that ended the War of 1812. When Hawkins negotiated with the British general in charge of the fort, Edward Nicolls, he became infuriated that the general, an ardent abolitionist, balked at returning the enslaved people who absconded to the British, and that Nicolls insisted that the United States return any land taken from Native peoples during the war back to those respective nations. Thus, for white settlers "blinded by their racist ideology and insatiable quest for land" (71), the "Negro Fort" that drew approximately seven hundred self-liberated people and Choctaws who decided to continue to fight against the United States even after the war was over was increasingly viewed as "a symbol that frontier officials felt compelled to eradicate" (76). Nonetheless, even after anti-Black and anti-Native rhetoric fanned by newspapers and white American leaders led to the annihilation of the fort, its legacy of resistance lived on in events like the Seminole wars and as a rallying cry for radical abolitionists like John Brown, who opposed the expansionist fantasies of white Southern enslavers and their political and economic allies in the North.

Although Clavin's book is effective on a conceptual level, the antiquated language used to describe the primary historical subjects is a major flaw. In one instance Clavin uses the term "enslaved employees" to describe the enslaved individuals who labored at a trading post and several times he refers to Native people who defended their land against white settler expansion as "Indian warriors" (23). Another problematic expression appears after Clavin summarizes the racist ideology that newspapers employed to demonize the resistance of enslaved people and the Seminoles. To put it mildly, these phrases are jarring. Clavin writes, "United by a thirst for the blood of American settlers, these enslaved and savage people were the avowed enemies of white Floridians, whose lives were consequently in grave danger" (151). This kind of language not only downplays the racism and violence perpetrated against these groups, but inadvertently feeds into stereotypes as well. With the abundance of commentary in both Native and slavery studies on the importance of avoiding language that reifies violence, more appropriate terminology could easily have been selected.

Overall, *The Battle of Negro Fort* is a welcome addition to the history of the Native South, slavery during the antebellum era, Indian expulsion, and Black Indian history. Similar to the work of Nathaniel Millett (who discusses this same event), as well as the works of Walter Johnson, Adam Rothman, and Claudio Saunt, which highlight the connections between the expansion of slavery in the Deep South and Native land dispossession, Clavin's monograph demonstrates that enslaved people

of African descent and American Indians resisted white nation-state building and expansion, consequently shaping the political, economic, and social policies of the new nation that set the stage for conflicts and divisions that continue to affect the relations of African Americans and Native people with the federal government in the present.

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Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's. By Tiffany Midge. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. 192 pages. \$29.95 cloth; \$19.95 paper; \$29.95 electronic.

With this collection of nonfiction essays, Tiffany Midge (Standing Rock Sioux) diverges from the poetry monographs for which she's been known. *Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's* showcases a mix of memoir and pop culture op-eds that offer a humorous take on life and the woes of early twenty-first-century culture and politics from a Native American perspective. A collection of several previously published articles from the last five years that have appeared in various outlets, including *McSweeney's*, *The Rumpus*, *Waxwing*, and others, but primarily drawn from her regular humor column in *Indian Country Today*, Midge also delivers a number of new essays that convey a more personal, self-reflective sense of memoir next to the many pieces that serve as outward-facing cultural and political critique. Multiple short essays hang loosely together by theme to comprise ten parts. Throughout, the author exhibits the satire, wit, and pointed critique that readers have come to expect from her writing. While many of the individual essays in the book are previously published and remain accessible online, the new and more personal additions are among the strongest. Although the collection is uneven in some respects, it feels fresh, distinctive, and timely and it holds together through the power of Midge's cutting humor. *Bury My Heart* joins a recent surge in Indigenous nonfiction and memoir, yet this collection of essays is unique in its mix of styles and emphasis on humor.

Indigenous writers have long written in essay form, and the recent spike in Native-authored nonfiction monographs signals a resurgence in this tradition—as does the anthology *Shapes of Native Nonfiction: Collected Essays by Contemporary Writers*. Essay collections and memoirs that make the weight of historical and political injustice on the personal lives of contemporary Native people manifest are the most popular of these recent publications. A growing collection of Native nonfiction writing reveals the intimacy of violence and injustice wrought by the settler-colonial projects of the United States and Canada, including memoirs such as Teresa Mailhot's *Heart Berries* (2019), Elissa Washuta's *My Body is a Book of Rules* (2014), Deborah A. Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013), Ernestine Hayes' *Tao of the Raven: An Alaska Native Memoir* (2017), and many more. Midge's *Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's* does the same work, particularly the new essays, but offers broader pop-culture observations with fewer moments of personal critique. Midge's