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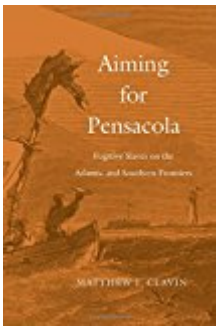
Matthew J. Clavin. *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. 252 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-08822-1.



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Commissioned by David M. Prior (University of New Mexico)

Our historical understanding of slavery has changed significantly over the past generation as scholars have delved deeper into the bondspeoples' lives by region, chronology, or method of resistance. One of the more common ways that enslaved individuals fought against slavery was to flee from their owner's farm, plantation, or business. This act of self-emancipation is often associated with the courageous acts of antebellum black and white conductors along the Underground Railroad, which has considerable symbolic value to many outside of academia. Matthew Clavin, in his *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers*, seeks to expand popular notions of self-emancipation by focusing on the city of Pensacola from the 1500s through the Civil War as a destination for fugitive slaves.

Clavin utilizes archival sources on two continents and in multiple languages in addition to local caches, including court records, company papers housed at the University of West Florida, and newspapers, to produce a work that centers on "the intersection of three historical conversations" (p. 4): the Atlantic world, the Southern frontier, and interracialism. Since this work covers centuries (although most of these are compressed into the first chapter), these themes work interdependently at times and separately at others. The first two themes are more chronological in their rendering, whereas the latter challenges preconceived ideas of boundaries in time, race, and land claims.

Therefore, the book can be divided into three parts, with the first two chapters centering on the Atlantic world. Clavin uses archival materials that shed light on the Spanish and British occupations of West Florida. Moreover, he treats Native Americans and people of African descent as key players in the New World. Sometimes, Native Americans aided in securing freedom for those absconding from slaveholders; at others they took them as their own property, and at still others they acted as tracking agents for whites. Slavery also blurred the boundaries between each country's land claims, as leaders in Pensacola and New Orleans willingly returned escapees with the sincere hope

of reciprocity, which typically materialized. Despite these efforts, even as Pensacola passed through empires, it developed as a destination for those enslaved in the deepest regions of the South because it offered freedom and opportunities to those who safely arrived with forged freedom papers.

The next three chapters (3-5) focus on the Southern frontier as Florida became part of the United States in 1821. These chapters differ in scope and content. Native Americans, for example, largely disappear from the analysis, with those who managed to escape and become Black Seminoles discussed in chapter 2. Likewise, most Europeans fade away as the drama of slave resistance becomes one mostly between Americans, white and black, except for British abolitionists who aided those jailed or ostracized because of their roles in liberating blacks. Such was the case for Northern-born Jonathan Walker, whose life, efforts at helping slaves escape, and ultimate punishment Clavin discusses in great detail in chapter 5. Clavin uses these three chapters to explore the relationships between slaves and owners. Slaves desired an escape, despite and perhaps because of slaveowners' threats and examples of excruciating punishments. He also examines the complications added by whites who defied fugitive slave acts by refusing to assist in the search for absconded refugees. Some Pensacola citizens sought to extinguish the idea that its city welcomed and harbored fugitive slaves by branding Walker's hand with the initials S.S., for "slave stealer" (p. 139), although it proved difficult for them to find locals willing to create something designed to sear the flesh of a white man.

The concluding chapters (6 and conclusion), on the Civil War, are different still. This section shifts away from detailing how Pensacola fits into the Atlantic world or the Southern frontier to a history of how former slaves made their way to the city in hopes of freedom and the chance to fight as Union soldiers. The final chapter details the chronology and escalation of blacks' roles once they landed among Union lines and encountered Northern soldiers, who occupied Pensacola's Fort Pickens for the duration of the war. Clavin asserts that witnessing these fugitives from slavery "taught Northern soldiers that the men and women of African descent who stood before them were not the racial caricatures they had been led to believe populated the South" (p. 161).

Aiming for Pensacola is more than an attempt to make the city matter. Clavin challenges the boundaries and chronological barriers that continue to divide scholars as to what, where, and when early America was. The book also, however, falls victim to this same conundrum. The Civil War presents itself as an unceremonial end to a book on generations of slaves who had risked lives, limbs, and fingertips (p. 110) for the idea of freedom. The three-page conclusion gestures towards the topic of emancipation's legacies during the postbellum years, but only very briefly. Although it remains doubtful that Pensacola will become a widespread topic in college classrooms when discussing the Underground Railroad, this book certainly lends itself to readers (especially general readers) with different interests, including early America, the Atlantic world, and Southern and African American history. As Clavin shows, preconceived notions of resistance and the Underground Railroad need to expand to include those who were aiming for Pensacola.

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