

# Until All Are Free

David Tighe

2025

a review of

*“All Will Be Equalized”*: *Georgia’s Freedom Seekers of the Swamps, Backwoods, and Sea Islands 1526–1890* by Andrew Zonneveld. On Our Own Authority Publishing, 2024

Plans for a major celebration of the Columbian Quincentenary in 1992 led to an upswelling of radical resistance. Indigenous groups, Black radicals, the Chicano movement, anarchists and others fought hard to disrupt the glorification of the five-hundredth anniversary of genocide and settler colonialism.

Their efforts led to significant push back to the official narrative about Columbus and colonization among the general public. The exploration of other histories and other Americas was a big part of that. One important book that came out of that resistance was *Gone to Croatan: Origins of North American Dropout Culture* (edited by James Koehnline and Ron Sakolsky) in 1993.

The book provides examples of Maroon societies—autonomous enclaves of self-emancipated slaves—in Virginia’s Great Dismal Swamp, in Seminole Florida (some of whom migrated to Mexico), and elsewhere. It celebrates Indigenous resistance, and survival in places where Native Americans had supposedly been extinguished (like New Jersey or North Carolina). It gives examples of multi-ethnic communities, conspiracies, and insurrections against the American colonial regime, against slavery, and against Atlantic capitalism.

For the past three decades, there has been a slow accumulation of radical scholarship which reinforces the arguments presented in *Gone to Croatan*. The understanding of Maroon communities in North America has been completely turned on its head. Archaeologists in the field, and historians in the archives have provided more and more evidence for the widespread, persistent, and effective resistance to slavery in a multiplicity of forms, including long-term Maroon communities—something which academic consensus denied for decades.

*“All Will Be Equalized”* (AWBE) is in many ways the right book for the current moment. It is a book of popular history, a synthesis of academic sources for non-academics, written from an explicitly anarchist perspective. It is broad enough to be a great introduction, is relatively short, but well written and full of inspiring stories and historical detail. Evidence is presented that highlights Georgia as an important locale for Maroon communities and the resistance to slavery. Previous scholarship has tended to focus on the Great Dismal Swamp (in Virginia and North Carolina), Florida, and to a lesser extent South Carolina and Louisiana. AWBE adds Georgia to that list.

Zonneveld, an independent historian, journalist, and naturalist, describes the subject of the book as how “peripheral and clandestine communities in Georgia’s swamps and backwoods became places of refuge for displaced Indigenous peoples, Africans fleeing enslavement, and renegades of European descent who were fleeing oppressive lives of poverty and hard labor in colonial societies.” It examines the role that Maroons played in slave insurrections, and the less spectacular, but no less crucial day-to-day forms of resistance to slave society. It also tells the interrelated stories of Indigenous and Black resistance, and the role that some poor whites played in those struggles.

This book provides ample evidence that slavery was resisted from the very beginning, and consistently by enslaved people, and that they had Indigenous and white allies the whole time. It begins in 1526, when “the leader of

the Spanish colony succumbed to dysentery, a violent conflict erupted between two rival factions seeking to lead the colony. During the Spaniards' infighting, the enslaved Africans of San Miguel de Gualdape saw an opportunity for self-emancipation and the Guale likewise seized the moment to expel the Spanish invaders.

"The Africans set fire to a Spanish leaders' cabin and made their escape to a nearby Guale community while Guale warriors 'rose against the Spaniards' and destroyed the settlement. The African rebels, the first to be enslaved in North America, now became the first Africans in North America to rebel against slavery. The fact that their rebellion was successful, and was distinguished by militant Afro-Indigenous solidarity, makes their story even more compelling."

It is interesting to learn the prevalence of desertion and draft evasion during the Civil war. The Okefenokee Swamp became a favorite hideout for Southern anti-Confederate war resisters who refused to fight for slavery. Zonneveld details these white deserters meeting Seminoles as well as the increasing numbers of self-emancipated Africans and forming what he characterizes as "multi-racial resistance communities." He also points to similar groups throughout the state, including in the North Georgia mountains outside of Dahlonega. Bands such as these engaged in varying levels of confrontation with Confederate society.

Three African co-conspirators named Sam, Nelson, and George planned an insurrection alongside a white man named John Vickery, which sought to seize Confederate weapons and the town of Quitman, Georgia and from there raid the surrounding areas with the hopes of provoking a generalized slave uprising. They were discovered and hanged, but it was this kind of foment that makes Zonneveld argue that "as the war raged it took on the character of a genuine social revolution."

The refocusing of our attention on direct action, and more specifically on the direct action of enslaved Africans against the institution of slavery is crucial to an accurate understanding of history. Here Zonneveld echoes the celebrated historian Marcus Rediker who argues that the enslaved deserve the greatest credit for the resistance to and eventual abolition of slavery, not white abolitionists or governments.

AWBE discusses the defeat of Reconstruction following the Civil War and the bitter reimposition of white supremacy through Jim Crow. This is where the main text of the book ends. What follows is a conversation between author Andrew Zonneveld and his mentor, historian and activist Modibo Kadalie.

As a veteran of Civil Rights and Black Liberation struggles since the 1960s, Kadalie lends a longer view to the relationship between radical scholarship and activism. The discussion makes clear what was implicit in the book: that this history is expansive. Everywhere that slavery existed, it was resisted by defiant freedom seeking people, and the specific evidence that Zonneveld presents for Georgia is just one piece of the puzzle.

Scholars continue to turn up new evidence for Maroon communities all over the Americas, of slave rebellions, of multi-racial conspiracies against colonialism. There is also a strong continuity between antebellum American society and the contemporary United States. It makes perfect sense that radicals of all sorts are looking to these histories for inspiration and strategic insight.

As I write this, the US Government has opened "Alligator Alcatraz," a detention facility for people kidnapped by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) with all its allusions to historical white supremacist tropes about alligators eating African American children. It also evokes the fortress prison of Alcatraz, terrible and inescapable. But there were escapes from Alcatraz.

Even more poignant was the American Indian Movement's occupation of Alcatraz from 1969–1971. For hundreds of years, Maroon communities existed in the Great Dismal Swamp, in Okefenokee swamp, in the Florida everglades. The swamps were places of refuge and resistance where self-emancipated Africans lived in close proximity to alligators and crocodiles, but free from racial terror.

No doubt a few slave catchers provided a meal to the Maroon's neighbours. Multi-ethnic, popular resistance to the Trump administration's aggressive ICE raids have grown in part out of the Stop Cop City movement which started in Zonneveld's hometown of Atlanta. That Haitians, in the US and in Haiti, have been in the forefront of this uprising should come as no surprise. Haiti is the only country in the world founded by a successful slave rebellion and largely plotted by Maroons.

AWBE provides us with very resonant history that is directly relevant to the present day and our resistance as anarchists.

The past didn't go anywhere. The struggle continues.

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