“PRIDE IN OUR FREEDOM”
THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE
SEMINOLE MAROONS AND SEMINOLE INDIANS OF FLOIRDA,
FROM THE 1700S TO REMOVAL

A THESIS
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University
2007

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ABSTRACT

From the seventeenth century until 1821, European and U.S. imperial rivalry shaped the geopolitics of the North American Southeast. Within this competitive environment, marginalized Native Americans and Africans and their descendants, attempted to create a space of their own in the buffer zones of the Southeast. The mid-eighteenth century marks a critical turning point, when segments of the Lower Creek started to move away from the Upper Creek and relocate in the northern region of Florida. At a certain point from 1783-1821, the Seminole Indians, enslaved Africans, and their descendants forged political and cultural relationships.

Understanding the connections between these groups is vitally important because the Seminoles and their black counterparts, referred to as Black Seminoles, faced escalating conflict with the U.S. during the first half of the nineteenth century until their removal to Indian Territory in the 1830s and 1840s. While both groups found benefit in an alliance with one another, internal conflict developed. A question which arises is why do scholars often conflate the two groups into a single identity? By analyzing the political and cultural interaction of the Seminole Indians and African-descended slaves this thesis will demonstrate
why the Black Seminoles are more accurately referred to as the Seminole Maroons. This analysis will also further interrogate the relationship between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons in order to more fully understand Seminole Maroon identity.
Dedicated to my Mother
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to take a moment and acknowledge those individuals who were important to the success of this project. First, I want to thank Dr. Walter Rucker for his support as my thesis advisor. I especially would like to thank him for his continual patience as I worked through draft after draft for this thesis. His comments and suggestions were insightful and greatly enhanced the final product.

I would also like to thank Dr. Leslie Alexander for always taking the time to provide me with constructive criticism on how to improve my writing skills. She also offered valuable comments and ideas. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Kenneth Goings for taking the time to be on my thesis committee, and for the suggestions that he offered.

I want to give my gratitude to Ryan, who was my comrade in books as we trudged our way through graduate school. He took hours of his time to proof read and re-read my many papers, when he had his own work to complete.

Finally, without the support of my family, I would not be where I am today. I want to thank my mother, who always pushed me to do my best and
never give up. I also want to acknowledge the rest of my numerous family
members, who supported me, even when they could not understand why I choose
graduate school over getting a “real job.”
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INTRODUCTION

In 1826 at Camp Brooke, near Tampa Bay, Florida, a young child named John wanted to sell some “gophers” or land turtles to Lieutenant Colonel George M. Brooke. Brooke bought two gophers for the agreed price of “about two bits.” John also agreed to return with more land turtles in order to supply Brooke with enough “gophers” for a feast for his men. Upon their last transaction, Brooke ordered his chef to count the number of “gophers” purchased from John for the upcoming festivities. It would not take long for Brooke to realize that John sold him the same two animals repeatedly. From this incident, John received the nickname of Gopher John.¹

Likely born of a mother of African and Indian heritage and from a father of Indian and Spanish blood, Gopher John became the prominent leader of the black population who resided among the Seminole Indians. John Horse, also known as John Cavallo, acted as an interpreter for the Seminole Indians and aided

in his peoples' search for freedom. During the Second Seminole War, John Horse also represented prominent Seminole Indian leaders such as Micanopy and Jumper. The visible power that John Horse wielded along with other African descended leaders, such as Abraham and John Cesar, led General Thomas Jessup to declare that, “This...is a negro, not an Indian war; and if it not speedily put down, the south will feel the effects of it on their slave population before the end of next season.” However, the basis of Jessup’s assertions remains to be evaluated thoroughly in scholarly projects that analyze the black presence among the Seminole Indians, which the present study intends to do.

The emergence of this African descended population and their experiences remains obscure as works focusing on them tend to highlight prominent figures like John Horse or Abraham. While the this group, often referred to as the Black Seminoles, forged their identity in Florida, most scholarly research—as demonstrated by Daniel Littlefield, Kevin Mulroy, and Kenneth Porter—focus on the removal of the Black Seminoles to Indian Territory and their later migration to Mexico and Texas. A social history on the Black Seminoles experiences in colonial and territorial Florida still needs to be written. The Black Seminoles

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encounters with both the institution of racial slavery and Native Americans while in Florida requires further interrogation in order to advance an analysis of the development of their identity.

The ethnic construction of the Black Seminoles resulted from clashes between imperial powers, racial slavery, and interactions with Native Americans in what presently constitutes the Southeastern United States. Bruce Twyman’s 1999 account details the theories of the Black Seminoles’ ethnogenesis. In one hypothesis, polygenesis, scholars including James Covington and Kevin Mulroy postulate that runaway slaves from South Carolina fled to Florida with Creek Indians who were seeking independence from the Creek Confederation. Another theory, known as monogenesis, alleges that slaves ran away to Florida before they aligned with the Seminole Indians. Since enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry ran to native settlements as early as the late seventeenth century, it seems likely that Indians and Africans simultaneously sought refuge in northern Florida.4

The historical experience of the Black Seminoles rests on multi-faceted and complex dimensions that transcend the boundaries of numerous historiographies. Until the mid-twentieth century, the narrative of U.S. history failed to provide substantial space to the Black Seminoles. Their inclusion in this narrative is important because the Black Seminoles greatly influenced race relations in Florida. As a result of their forced removal from Florida, the Black Seminoles continued to effect race relations in Indian Territory between Creek,

Seminole Indians, African-descendants, and white settlers. To accurately examine the Black Seminoles, scholars need to incorporate Borderland, African American, and Native American frameworks into their studies.

**Historiography of Borderland Studies**

The traditional narrative of colonial American history overwhelmingly presents an Anglocentric perspective that focuses almost exclusively upon the experiences of the original thirteen colonies. One of the prominent themes within the colonial historiography relates to the contestation of space between imperial rivals. The Spanish, French, Dutch, and English developed settlements and relationships in the New World that profoundly influenced the course of colonial American history. The Spanish presence within the North American continent covered expansive territory along the southern region of the present-day United States ranging from Florida westward to California. The border regions between the Spanish and English territories developed into highly contested spaces as specifically demonstrated in the imperial relations in the Southeast within areas like Florida, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Upon Spanish surrender of Florida to the United States in 1821--a requirement of the Adams-Onís Treaty--the Spanish left behind a legacy that would greatly affect U.S. policies on slavery and Native Americans in the Southeast in the years preceding the American Civil War.

By the early twentieth century, historians initiated research that countered the pervasive Anglocentrism found in American colonial history. As with many fields, the first works that emerged during the 1920s constituted broad generalized
studies that provided minimal attention to variations found at the local level. As the historiography pertaining to the Spanish colonial possessions in North America progressed, authors such as Jane Landers in the 1990s transformed these approaches by demonstrating complex international and multi-faceted dimensions in the New World. From these vantage points, studies emerged that analyzed relationships and interactions that developed among the peoples residing within the colonies, specifically the colonists (and later the U.S. citizens after 1776), Native Americans, and African and their descendents.

In 1921, Herbert E. Bolton became one of the first historians to promote the study of the Spanish presence in the area that he termed the “Spanish Borderlands.” Bolton’s formulation of the Borderland studies emerged from Frederick Jackson Turner’s concept of the frontier as found in his seminal work, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*. As a pioneer of Western or frontier history, Turner asserted that the Western experience greatly shaped the character of the U.S. Bolton extended Turner’s purely American frontier and demonstrates the international significance of the frontier in his project, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest*. Unlike Turner, Bolton’s work included numerous Spanish primary sources housed in Mexico that pertain to the Spanish exploration and settlement within the present-day United States.⁵

John Francis Bannon became one of Bolton’s most prominent students, particularly with his 1974 study entitled, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821*. Bolton’s work included the topics of Spanish exploration, politics, military, and missionary activities. While Bannon’s study builds upon Bolton’s research, Bannon still produced a very general and broad based work. A fault that permeates throughout both Bolton and Bannon’s studies relates to their romanticism of the Spanish conquistadors and missionary activities within the New World, while ignoring the detrimental effects of Spanish exploration and colonialism upon Native Americans.\(^6\) Bannon’s work highlights his affinity toward the Spanish in the New World, and his perceptions of the moral superiority of the Spanish as compared to the English. Although the Spanish experienced tensions with Native Americans, according to Bannon, it was nothing compared to Anglo-Native American relations:

The mission Indians were exposed to the Spaniard’s Christianity and to Spaniard’s ways. Sometimes the Spanish way of life ‘took’ and again it did not. In all events, the native became part of the Spanish society, even though often only a junior member. The Anglo-American, with vastly different attitude and outlook toward the American native, found it difficult to accommodate to this other approach, when he took over the Borderlands. This contributed in no small way to later friction.\(^7\)

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\(^7\)Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands*, 235.
A more recent work that contributes to the historiography of Borderland studies is David J. Weber’s 1992 synthesis entitled *The Spanish Frontier in North America*. In his introduction, Weber credits the field for expanding beyond Bolton and Bannon’s coverage of exploration and biography. Weber notes that contemporary scholars present their works from various approaches, including social history, ethnohistory, ecology, historical archeology, historical geography, demography, and disease studies. Unlike Bolton and Bannon, Weber attempts to incorporate the region of the Southeast more fully into his discussion of the Spanish Frontier.⁸

While Bolton, Bannon, and Weber provide the general foundation for the historical presence of the Spanish in the New World, the works of Jane Landers and Larry Rivers present the field with insights into the black experience in Spanish and territorial Florida. The presence of English-and American-owned bondspeople near the Spanish border proves to be a significant development in the construction of the group referred to as the Black Seminoles and their communities in Florida.

*Historiography of African American Experiences in the Spanish Borderlands*

Jane Landers’s 1990 article entitled “*Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mosé*: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida” analyzes the experiences of the runaway slaves from the bordering English colonies as they reached sanctuary in colonial Florida. Landers contends that the Spanish highly valued

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runaway slaves for their knowledge and skills that aided in the defense of the Spanish outpost. She asserts that by understanding the black experience in Spanish Florida, scholars can develop a more comprehensive analysis of the variety of experiences that slaves encountered. Furthermore, Landers contends that researchers can compare and contrast the various slave codes that developed in the New World. Through the examination of black inhabitants in the free black town of Mosé, future historians can gain an increased knowledge regarding the development of Creole culture, slave family structures, the impact of religion on black life, and most importantly, the influences that Africans and African Americans had on colonialism.

Landers expands beyond the black experience of Mosé to analyze the black presence in Florida during the Spanish tenure in her 1999 project, *Black Slavery in Spanish Florida*. This work utilizes numerous Spanish sources, which greatly enhances Lander’s arguments. In her analysis, Landers provides insight into black life by examining topics such as religion, gender, ethnicity, and political activity.⁹ Landers contends that by the mid-eighteenth century, Lower Creek groups migrated into Florida and filled the space left by the exodus or extinction of Florida’s own Native Americans. According to Landers, the new arrivals adorned crucifixes and possibly spoke Spanish, while still constituting a formidable foe to the Spanish at this time. As runaway slaves joined the

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Seminole Indians during the last decades of the eighteenth century, and as a vassal relationship formed, this group became enemies of the English, who desired the return of these runaways.\textsuperscript{10}

Throughout the eighteenth century, the colonists and U.S. citizens residing in the frontier regions of the Southeast continually suffered from the paranoia of possible slave conspiracies and rebellions, the presence of maroon settlements, and Native American uprisings. The existence of the maroons in the buffer zone between Florida and the Lowcountry greatly increased the tension of apprehensive slave owners. Landers asserts that the Spanish capitalized on the fears of the slave owners and attempted to forge collaborations with the Seminole Indians and the black inhabitants in order to maintain its possession of Florida. Ultimately, according to Landers, this collaboration resulted in the hostile U.S. acquisition of Florida.\textsuperscript{11}

While Landers focuses her research on the Spanish period in Florida, Larry Rivers gears his study to the period following the U.S. take over in his 2000 project entitled, \textit{Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation}. While the author asserts that his purpose is to “explain and offer a comprehensive and well-documented portrait of how enslaved blacks fared under the peculiar institution

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., 67-68.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 72-81.
in antebellum Florida,” he falls short of meeting his objective. Rivers tends to oversimplify various elements within his work and fails to incorporate recent and updated research that could enrich his study.\footnote{Larry Rivers \textit{Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).}

One prominent shortcoming of Rivers’s work is his failure to grant agency to the Africans who helped to shape the region. The author claims that the presence of the task system in East Florida was a residual effect of the Spanish tradition without acknowledging the scholarly works of Peter Wood or Daniel Littlefield. Wood and Littlefield both suggest that West Africans who cultivated rice transported the task system as a method of labor to the Lowcountry.\footnote{Ibid., 68; Daniel Littlefield \textit{Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Peter Wood, \textit{Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 to the Stono Rebellion} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974). Littlefield and Wood contend that the task system developed primarily from the skills that the African slaves had already acquired for crops such as rice, which Europeans were not as familiar with.} While the author delves into the circumstances surrounding family and slavery, Rivers does not adequately incorporate Florida’s Works Projects Administration’s slave narratives (WPAs), which he openly asserts to be useful primary sources.

In addition, the author portrays the idea of religious fusion to be unique to Florida, claiming that African indigenous beliefs meshed well with the religious doctrines of Baptists and Methodists. However, previous works demonstrate that this religious process was not unique to Florida.\footnote{George Rawick, \textit{From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community}, vol. 1 series 1, \textit{The American Slave a Composite Autobiography} (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972); Mechal Sobel, \textit{The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia} (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987);} Rivers’s study also claims that
the lasting presence of Spanish Catholicism hindered slave conversion to
Methodism. Other historians have clearly demonstrated that numerous Africans
from West Central Africa already practiced Catholicism prior to the Middle
Passage. While not the last of Rivers shortcomings, he does not differentiate
between West Africans and West Central Africans, which complicates the history
of African influences in the region. In numerous sections throughout the work,
the author refers to the Kongo of West Central Africa while simultaneously
referring to West Africa.\textsuperscript{15}

Rivers reiterates Cantor Brown's contentious but interesting claim that the
Second Seminole War was also the largest slave revolt in the United States.
Rivers did not provide any significant insight to push Brown's assertions further.
Neither Rivers or Brown articulate what makes the activities of black Floridians
during the 1830s a revolt as opposed to a war.

\ldots what probably constituted the largest slave uprising in the annals of
North American history ravaged Florida from 1835 to 1838 during the
Second Seminole War. That armed resistance, unlike other rebellions, had
no religious overtones. It simply represented a fight to the death for
freedom and a direct challenge to the institution of slavery perhaps by one
thousand or more individuals.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}John K. Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion," \textit{The American
Historical Review}, vol. 96, no. 4 (October 1991); Mark M. Smith, "Remembering Mary, Shaping
Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion," \textit{The Journal of Southern History}, vol. LXVII, no. 3
(August 2001); Linda M. Heywood, \textit{Central Africans and Cultural Transformation in the

Rivers dedicates an entire chapter to slave resistance, in which he chooses to analyze the typical forms of resistance rather than expand upon the implications of the Second Seminole War and how it affected Floridian slavery.¹⁷

Historiography of the Black Seminoles

While scholars tend to examine the Black Seminoles from the early nineteenth century forward, understanding plantation slavery in the Southeast in the colonial era is essential to those who helped form this unique identity. John Mahon and Littlefield focus primarily on the period following U.S. acquisition of Florida, the Second Seminole War, and removal to Indian Territory. These works tend to analyze the Black Seminoles in an institutional and political perspective, which often neglects the significance of regular interaction with slaves in the regions.

Mahon’s influential 1967 work, The History of the Second Seminole War 1835 to 1842, provides a comprehensive analysis of the events surrounding the Second Seminole War in Florida. Prior to this book, the only major work focusing strictly on the Seminole Wars was John T. Sprague’s 1848 book entitled Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War. Mahon contends that the Indian wars east of the Mississippi failed to rise above the allure and romanticism of the Native American conflicts on the Great Plains, even though the episodes in Florida consist of one of the most expensive wars in American history.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., 219. Rivers credits historian Cantor Brown with initiating the argument that the Second Seminole War was the largest slave revolt in American history.
Mahon organizes his analysis of the Florida campaigns according to military leadership. Mahon uses for his chapter titles the names of the numerous U.S. military officials who led the command in the Second Seminole War. *The History of the Second Seminole War* fails to incorporate any substantial scholarship pertaining to the experiences of the Seminole Indians and Black Seminoles with the exception of the more prominent figures such as John Horse and Wild Cat.

Following Mahon’s study by a decade, Daniel Littlefield’s 1977 work, entitled *Africans and Seminoles From Removal to Emancipation*, analyzes the relationship between the Seminole Indians and Africans that was often found absent in other works in the historiography.¹⁹ Littlefield’s analysis narrowly focuses on time span from the forced removal of Indians from Florida territory to the emancipation of enslaved African Americans following the conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865. Littlefield provides more insight into the Black Seminole experience during the Second Seminole war than Mahon’s work.

Littlefield attests that although the exact dates of the creation of the Black Seminoles remains unknown, as late as 1774 no accounts of black residence among the Seminole Indians existed. However, by the conclusion of the eighteenth century, the Seminole Indians began to adopt a form of slavery. According to Littlefield, the Seminole Natives did not institute the racial slavery

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that developed among other Native American groups as demonstrated by the Creek and Cherokee. Littlefield postulates that as a result of imperial contestation between Spain and the U.S., Indian-black political and military alliances developed, which became apparent by the onset of the Patriot War of 1812. Yet, despite the strengths of Littlefield’s study, he leaves some issues unaddressed that this thesis seeks to explore. Since Littlefield’s work focuses on the period from the 1830s to 1865, he does not provide substantial analysis of Seminole Indian and African contact prior to the 1820s, which was the foundation for their relationship in the 1830s.\textsuperscript{20}

The 1993 publication of Kevin Mulroy’s foundational study, \textit{Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas}, employs an African Diasporic perspective in order to analyze the identity construction of the Black Seminoles. Mulroy confronts a key issue that persists throughout the literature on Black Seminoles—the existence of multiple nomenclatures for this group. Since the early nineteenth century, the Black Seminoles have been referred to by various names such as, Seminole Negroes, Indian Negroes, Seminole Blacks, Seminole Freedmen, Afro-Seminole, Negro Indians, Black Indians, Black Muscogules, and Black Seminoles. In tracing the history of the Black Seminoles in the U.S., Mulroy contends that though the Black

\textsuperscript{20}ibid., 5-8.
Seminoles and Seminole Indians forged political alliances, they tried to keep a social distance. It seems more plausible that cultural exchange would have occurred due to the constant interactions between the two groups.\textsuperscript{21}

Mulroy asserts that the Black Seminoles shared multiple commonalities with other maroons societies found in the New World, such as those found in Jamaica, Surinam, and Haiti. The Black Seminoles resided in inaccessible environments, and utilized guerrilla warfare. While analyzing the Black Seminoles’ struggles for freedom from Florida to Texas, Mulroy emphasizes that the Seminole “maroons” did not integrate into Seminole Indian culture while in Florida. Upon removal, the Seminole Indians tried to enforce a form of racial slavery in order to refute Creek claims to the Black Seminoles, who Mulroy refers to as Seminole Maroons. Seminole Maroons will be the terminology used throughout this analysis, for, it balances their African past and relationship to slavery with their connection to Seminole Indian culture.\textsuperscript{22}

Unlike previous studies, \textit{Freedom on the Border} provides an innovative approach that analyzes the subject matter from a social rather than structural or institutional framework. From the limited sources available, Mulroy concludes that the Seminole Maroons primarily spoke a creole language referred to as Afro-Seminole, which shared similarities with Gullah.\textsuperscript{23} The Seminole Maroon identity

\textsuperscript{21}Mulroy, 1.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 1-4, 50-53.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 22. Joseph Opala, \textit{The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone Connection} (Freetown, Sierra Leone: USIS, 1987); Joseph Opala asserts that Gullah has direct connections
developed as fusion of Native American, Spanish, white Americans, and African influences. Mulroy concludes by demonstrating how the descendents of the Seminole Maroons in Texas today, known as the Seminoles, continue to incorporate African-based traditions into their culture such as their cosmology, the Afro-Seminole language, and the use of West African day names. Mulroy adequately sums up the Seminole culture of Texas by stating:

Seminole black culture also reflected the resilience of Africanisms within maroon societies and included elements from the group's plantation past, as well as from their experience since separating from the Seminoles. Their history, their mores, and their lifestyle were truly their own, and theirs alone.

Kenneth Porter's 1996 work *Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* strives to provide readers with an account of the continual struggle for the Black Seminoles to find freedom. The project commences with a telling quote from a Miss Charles Emily Wilson of Texas, which demonstrates her strong cultural pride in her Black Seminole heritage:

Our people lived in Texas for over one hundred years. Before that we were in Mexico, where some of us still live, and before that we were in Oklahoma, and even earlier than that in Florida. And before that, we came from Africa... In all our travels we have never lost awareness of our identity and a pride in our freedom, because it is our freedom that makes us different.

...with the West African coast, specifically Sierra Leone. The slaves that ran away to Florida from the southern United States brought their Gullah language with them.

24 Ibid., 22-25.

25 Ibid., 176-177.

Porter provides substantial insight into the plight of the Black Seminoles upon removal, and their quest for freedom.

According to Porter, the Indian Removal Act trumped the previous Treaties of Moultrie Creek and Payne's Landing as the most devastating event for the Seminole Indians. Porter contends that the U.S. forced the Seminole Indians to relocate West because of their extensive relationship with the Black Seminoles, not for fertile land. The Black Seminoles fiercely resisted removal, which contributed to the many factors that led to the Second Seminole War. The Black Seminoles feared the return to racial slavery upon removal resulting in their intense fight for freedom.\(^{27}\)

Porter often refers to the relationship between the Black Seminoles and the Seminole Indians as a type of feudalism, since the terminology associated with slavery, especially in the context of American Southern racial slavery, failed to adequately describe this complex relationship between these two groups. According to Porter, Black Seminoles provided yearly tributes to the Seminole Indians. The Black Seminoles provided Seminole Indians with crops and animals from their herds, in return the Seminole Indians provided the Black Seminoles some protection against the slave South. The mutual nature of this vassalage relationship fits into the world view of many of the Southeastern Native Americans, which was based strongly on the notion of reciprocity.\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 31-33.

Bruce Twyman’s 1999 political history, *The Black Seminole Legacy and North American Politics, 1692-1845*, attempts to address several shortcomings of Porter’s narrative. A strength in Twyman’s study is his emphasis on the changing political relationships concerning Native Americans, bondpeople, Spain, England, and the U.S. Enslaved blacks and Native Americans often resided in the terrain that separated contesting imperial powers. The Black Seminoles and Seminole Indians wielded agency when interacting with the Spanish, English, or the U.S. as a result of residing in the contested buffer zone between rival imperial powers.²⁹

Unlike Porter’s work, Twyman delves into the ramifications of the Second Seminole War and the implications that the conflict had on the Black Seminoles. According to the author, President Andrew Jackson, who was motivated by the political power of Southern slavery, wanted to separate the Black Seminoles from the Seminole Indians in order to return the Black Seminoles to slavery. As stated in the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie, the federal government officially recognized the Seminole Indians as an independent nation from the Creeks. However, the Black Seminoles officially remained property according to the conditions of the treaty. Twyman contends that this treaty created the conditions under which the Second Seminole War developed.³⁰

²⁹ Twyman, 11.

³⁰Ibid., 116.
Although numerous scholars have written a considerable amount of research on the Black Seminoles, various issues regarding this subject matter remain unanswered. The experience of the Black Seminoles, or Seminole Maroons, transcends narrowly focused historiographies of the Southeast Borderlands, Native American, African American, Southern, Western history, colonial, and even U.S. history. A thorough investigation requires one to incorporate diverse perspectives in order to analyze the Black Seminoles.

This analysis examines the experiences of the Seminole Maroons specifically from the late eighteenth century to their forced removal to Indian Territory in the mid-1830s to early 1840s. This study demonstrates that the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons shared experiences that enabled them to forge cultural and political relationship based on their “Seminole” identity. However, their divergent ethnic backgrounds and histories prevented them from being conflated as a single monolithic group. This study also specifically analyzes the social and political relationships that were forged between the Seminole Indians and Africans and African-descended slaves. Employing cultural and political history in this analysis expands the current understanding of how the Seminole Maroons created an identity. The purpose of this project is to provide the field with a study that investigates how the Seminole Maroons regularly interacted with bondspeople, Native Americans, colonists, and white Southerners and how this contact aided in the formation of their identity. As a result, this project attempts to provide a perspective on General Jessup’s
contention that the Second Seminole War was a “negro, and not an Indian war.” While the Second Seminole War definitely had elements of an Indian war, Jessup understood the conflict was multi-dimensional and complex.

By utilizing soldier’s accounts, folklore, territorial documents, and colonial records, this work demonstrates how the relationship between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons formed and changed from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century. Observations made by travelers and soldiers, along with the use of folklore, provide insight into the cultural interactions and exchange among the Seminole Maroons and Seminole Indians. The Territorial Papers of Florida reveals the mentality of U.S. officials and settlers toward this black-Indian relationship, which settlers and officials believed would endanger the institution of slavery in Florida.

The first chapter provides an overview of the Native American presence in Florida. The composition of indigenous groups changed from initial contact with Spanish explorers, to Spanish settlement, to the English period from 1763 to 1783, and finally to American takeover. In these different periods political and social forces converged that created an environment that facilitated the formation of the Seminole Indians. In this chapter, the analysis also includes a discussion about the ethnogenesis of the Seminole Indians and the etymology of the term “Seminole.”

The second chapter focuses on a general history of Africans and their descendents beginning with Spanish Florida. This chapter provides an overview
of African and African American experiences in Florida starting from Spanish settlement through the U.S. territorial period. The presence of slaves in the Southeast greatly affected how imperial powers, Native Americans, and settlers interacted. Chapter two also includes an analysis of the slave experience in early colonial South Carolina and how those experiences helped to shape Floridian society.

The final chapter interrogates numerous issues that plague the historiography of the Seminole Maroons, including an analysis of the vassal relationship between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons. It also offers an explanation of which nomenclature is appropriate for the group often referred to in the historiography as the Black Seminoles. This section also examines how the Indian-black relationship changed in the years between the First Seminole War and the Second Seminole War. The Seminole Maroons not only built relationships with the Seminole Indians, but they also maintained constant interaction with enslaved Africans and their descendents in Florida. Prior to U.S. acquisition of Florida, the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons borrowed cultural elements from one another and lived relatively peacefully in Florida. However, as the nineteenth century advanced and the U.S. increased its aggression toward these two groups by implementing divide-and-rule tactics, the Indian-black relationship began to change in response to outside forces. The work concludes with the Second Seminole War and the removal of many of the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons to Indian Territory in the 1840s.
CHAPTER 1

THE SEMINOLE INDIANS IN FLORIDA

"Discovery" of Florida and Spanish Settlement

Upon Spain’s “discovery” of la Florida, the Spanish made numerous attempts to establish the first permanent European settlement in North America. In the early stages of exploration and colonization during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spain considered the territory of la Florida to encompass the areas of the Florida Keys north to Newfoundland and west to Mexico. Competing imperial rivalries, which included England and France, contested Spain’s claim to North America, insisting that any territory needed to be effectively occupied.¹

Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón in 1526 led the first contingent of 600 men, women, children, and enslaved Africans to settle present-day Sapelo Sound, Georgia. Ayllón’s settlement known as San Miguel de Guadalupe soon succumbed to the ravages of starvation and disease, culminating with Ayllón’s death. Following his death, the residents of San Miguel de Guadalupe bickered

¹Landers, Black Society in Spanish Florida, 12.
over the succession of leadership. During this period of uncertainty, the residents of San Miguel also endured resistance from enslaved Africans and local Guale Indians. Upon the Spaniards’ return to Hispaniola, some African slaves escaped from their European masters and remained with the Native Americans. Landers contends that these Africans were among the first maroons in the present-day United States. ²

Following the failure of San Miguel de Guadalupe, the Spanish again tried to establish a settlement. In 1528, a contingency of 400 to 600 men with an unspecified number of Africans led by Pánfilo de Narváez attempted settlement in present-day Tampa Bay. Narváez’s travels entailed two objectives—exploration and settlement. Upon landing in Florida, Narváez separated his contingency into two groups, one of which stayed on the ship with the supplies while the other group explored the terrain. According to Narváez’s plan, he intended for the two groups to rendezvous near present-day Tampa Bay, however, the land crew never reached the rallying point. In 1534, after enduring sickness and inclement weather, a member of Narváez’s expedition wandered into Mexico City. Cabeza de Vaca’s recorded account of the Narváez expedition remains one of the first descriptions of the interior of the southeast.³

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Finally in 1565, Spain established the first successful permanent settlement in Florida. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, the Captain General of the fleet of New Spain, provided the leadership for the founding of St. Augustine. Menéndez established a presence in the Southeast that Spain needed in order to effectively lay claim to the vast territory. Menéndez also led military attacks against the Huguenots who attempted to thwart Spanish claims and settle near the mouth of St. John’s River. Menéndez founded St. Augustine and established the site as a mission settlement and a military fortification. Although Menéndez provided Spain with the needed occupation of the crown’s claimed territory, the hold remained tenuous throughout the colonial era. Florida remained a strategic military outpost that guarded the Spanish ships filled with valuables that maneuvered in the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea.\(^4\)

The absence of any lucrative resources such as gold or silver and the presence of what the Spanish perceived as “hostile” Native Americans deterred the development of Florida beyond a strategic military post. However, the possibility of losing valuable Caribbean colonies forced the Spanish to invest in Florida. Most likely, the Spaniards first encountered the Calusa, who resided in southern Florida. The Calusa gained a reputation as hunters and fishers. To the north dwelled the Timucuans who practiced some agriculture and to the west lived the agricultural-based Apalachee. According to John Scarry, the first Native Americans that the Spanish converted were the Timucuans who also endured

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great hardships from colonial and missionary agendas. Scarry further contends that the population of Timucuans suffered near extinction as a result of Carolina slave raiders, disease, imperial wars, and Native American migration into Florida. The Apalachee, similar to the Timucuans, also succumbed to the devastating effects of European colonialism.⁵

Patricia Wickman counters Scarry’s approach to understanding the Native American-European relations and the effects of this contact in the Southeast. First Wickman places into perspective the effects of Old World pathogens on native populations. While countless people lost their lives as disease spread across the Southeast, Native American cultures did not die. Rather they responded by adapting to change as any culture would. Wickman also takes a more likely approach in explaining the supposed extinction of some American Indians in Florida. Since many of the Native populations in the Southeast shared similar worldviews, largely based on the notion of reciprocity, groups such as the Timucuans and Apalachee merged with other regional Native Americans.⁶

As Spain attempted to solidify its presence in Florida, the Native American populations had to respond to new outside forces. Many native populations experienced destructive encounters with Europeans settlers. During Queen Anne’s War the Apalachee experienced a significant loss of their

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⁶Patricia Wickman, The Tree That Bends, 59-60, 154-156.
population from death and enslavement at the hands of their enemies, thus they responded by relocating from their northern Florida settlements. Upon the Apalachee's relocation, the Spanish felt vulnerable without a large native population occupying northern Florida. During this time other American Indian groups began to migrate southward toward the vacated region.\(^7\)

Shortly after the conclusion of Queen Anne's War, the Yamasssee War (1715-1717) erupted. The Carolinians' increasing reliance upon rice production, and the waning reliance upon Yamasssee trade in animal skins and slaves, created an environment conducive to war. As a cash crop economy emerged, colonists greatly desired Yamasssee land, which proved fruitful for rice cultivation. The waning deer population also hindered the ability of Yamasssee natives to repay debts to white traders, thus adding stress to an already tenuous relationship. The Indians resented the debt they continuously incurred with aggressive colonial traders. In addition to land encroachment, the increasing margin of wealth between the Native Americans and the colonists also contributed to the onset of war.\(^8\)

A major outcome of the Yamasssee War was the vast depopulation of the Native Americans who resided in the Carolina region. While the Yamasssee relocated to the area around St. Augustine, other groups residing in the Carolina


region migrated to just above the forks of the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers. An influx of Native Americans would continue to flow into Florida throughout the eighteenth century with the onset of the War of Jenkin’s Ear, King George’s War, and the Seven Years War.  

*Etymology of the Word “Seminole”*

The competition between European rivalries for Native American alliances and cooperation throughout the North American southeast led to the ethnogenesis of the Seminole Indians. According to Littlefield and Mahon, Seminole is part of the Muskogee language and translates as “runaway” or “wanderer.” Covington and Twyman further asserts that the Muskogee-speaking Native Americans derived Seminole from the Spanish word *cimmarón*, which translates in simple terms as “runaway.” While scholars tend to agree upon an elementary definition of “Seminole,” very few take to task a full analysis of the term, to include how the Spanish applied *cimmarón* to native populations. Few scholars address how the “Seminole” Indians understood and embraced the concept of “Seminole” themselves. The emergence of the Seminole identity evolved around complex and multifaceted circumstances.

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While today, "Seminole" defines a people, the Spanish initially used the word *cimmarón* as an adjective that described people or things that moved beyond the boundaries of Spanish influence and power. The original usage of *cimmarón* applied to domesticated animals including pigs and cows which escaped to the untamed natural world. The Spanish used *cimmarón* to describe those Native Americans who lived outside the immediate control of the Spanish in the New World. Historically, the Spanish first employed *cimmarón* in its Caribbean colonies, and Patricia Wickman argues that the term *cimmarón* may have originated from Arawak. While the usage of *cimmarón* can clearly be traced back to Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, there lacks clear evidence of a Native American origin of the term.\(^\text{12}\)

Throughout the sixteenth-century Caribbean world, the Spanish applied *cimmarón* to African slaves who evaded Spanish control by forming isolated communities of runaway slaves. The word "maroon," often used to refer to runaway slaves and to these isolated communities, is another corruption of the term "*cimmarón."" By mid-seventeenth century, the Spanish further applied *cimmarón* to Native Americans in Florida. Natives of Florida identified with the notion of *cimmarón* and incorporated the concept into their own language, for example Hitchiti and Mikisuuki languages both have terms derived from *cimmarón*. The Hitchiti speakers use *yati siminoli* and Mikisuuki speakers use *isti*

*siminoli.* The natives embraced the concept and internalized it to mean “an indomitable people who choose not to permit themselves to be controlled or domesticated by any others.”

By the time of the English take over of Florida in 1763, the Spanish already started to use *cimmarón* to specifically describe groups of Native Americans moving into Alachua country. Only after the English takeover of Florida does “Seminole” come into wide usage as a term to specify Native Americans residing in Florida. The rather nonchalant usage of “Seminole” by the English obscures the cultural identity of those who fall under the label “Seminole.”

Kline and Fairbanks both assert that by the early 1800s the Seminole Indians “coalesced into a single Indian group.” It seems that at this point in the history of the Seminole Indians, if and when they referred to themselves as Seminole, it was in a political sense. The Seminole moniker became a way for these Native Americans to differentiate themselves from the Creek Indians when it came to negotiating with the U.S. Not until after the Second Seminole War and removal, did the Seminole Indians start to internalize the reference as a cultural marker.

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13 Wickman, *The Tree that Bends*, 194.

14 Ibid., 194-198.

15 Kline, 31.
Ethnogenesis of the Seminole Indians

Mahon argues that one of the first major migrations of the Muskogean-speaking Indians into the boundaries of northern Florida occurred during the first years of the eighteenth century. These Native Americans represented a segment of what the English referred to as the Creek Confederacy. Following the demise of Florida’s Native American populations during Queen Anne’s War, groups of Lower Creek migrated into western Florida. Alarm ed by the depopulation of the buffer zone, Spanish colonists grew concerned about the colony’s security on the northern border. As a result of the Yamassee War, a group known as the Oconee led by “Cowkeeper” moved from the Oconee River in Georgia to the Chattahoochee River and, by the 1750s, settled in the Alachua regions of Florida. The Oconee would become the main Seminole Natives after the 1760s. Throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, groups of Yuchis, along with Hitchiti-speaking and more Muskogean-speaking Indians continued to move and resettle in Florida. Howard Kline refers to all of these groups as the “Proto-Seminoles.”

Mahon utilizes the term “Seminole” to refer to all the Native Americans in Florida after the year 1810. However, Seminole as a designation for a people seems to often connote a monolithic identity, which counters Mahon’s assertion that the Seminole Indians continued to remain fragmented, especially politically, even into the Second Seminole War. Mahon groups these aggregates together based on the notion of shared cultural and linguistic experiences:

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But, whether Muskogee- or Hitchiti-speaking, whether Upper or Lower Creek, whether Apalachicola, Apalachee, Chiala, Eufaula, Tallahassee, Tamathli, Ocone, or something else in origin, all but the Yuchi were of the Muskogean family, all shared the Creek culture, and all had earned the designation of Seminole because they had broken away from the settled northern towns and migrated southward.17

While Mahon's conception of Seminole appears accurate, he does not fully engage in a discussion explaining how all Native Americans in Florida can be Seminole and fragmented simultaneously. Few historians delve into the issues of ethnic formation that resulted from the founding, settling, and exploitation of the New World. To comprehend what it means to be Seminole, one must understand the process of how various groups who have an identity imposed upon them internalize that identity.

A fruitful approach to analyzing the genesis of Seminole Indian identity may be to incorporate the work of Douglas Chambers. In his analysis, Chambers discusses the development of particular sets of Atlantic World ethnic identities. He demonstrates how enslaved Africans of diverse backgrounds took rather meaningless identities that Europeans imposed upon them and turn them into ethnic identities. Upon settlement and expansion in the Southeast, Europeans imposed identifiers on the numerous Native Americans in the region. For example, the English in the Lowcountry named the Indians who lived near creeks, the Creek, regardless of how the natives viewed themselves. As noted previously in this work, the Spanish and English imposed Seminole on various Native

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17bid, 8.
Americans in Florida. While these identities initially lacked any internal meaning for the Native Americans, they eventually internalized and gave meaning to these identities.\textsuperscript{18}

Scholars including Howard Cline and Charles Fairbanks assert that many of the Native American groups that forged a Seminole identity in Florida were originally comprised of the Creek. However, English attempted to influence the power arrangement of the Creek Confederacy in hopes of forcing the Native Americans in the Carolina region into a hierarchical power structure. This would permit the English to negotiate with a small group of politically empowered natives rather than with each individual village or group. Prior to the Creek Confederacy, these southeastern natives shared cultural commonalities rather than any formal or informal political agreements. The notion of the Creek Confederacy tends to dominate the history of these Native Americans.\textsuperscript{19}

Patricia Wickman asserts that a cultural continuity existed in the Southeast among most of the native populations. In her analysis, Wickman avoids any use of European-constructed terminology including Creek, Muskogee, and Seminole. Rather, she understands the native groups of the Southeast to be descendants of common ancestors and followers of Mississippianism. According to Wickman, Mississippianism was a widespread "ideological phenomenon" dating back to 800-1000 C.E. that shaped many Native American worldviews. As this concept


\textsuperscript{19} Wickman, The Tree that Bends," 184-186.
spread so did the practice of sedentary agriculture. Wickman argues that natives of the Southeast, who she terms as Maskókí peoples, were one of the largest contingents of people to accept Mississipianism. The shared experiences of Mississipianism created continuity among the numerous Maskókí Peoples. Following European contact, many of the “extinct” Native Americans of Florida intermingled and adapted into the other groups of American Indians who migrated into northern Florida during the eighteenth century.\(^{20}\)

To apply the term “Seminole” to the groups of Native Americans that settled in northern Florida during to the eighteenth century suggests these Indians acted deliberately as a single entity. Various groups of southeastern Native Americans migrated into Florida following initial encounters with the Spanish and English in the region. Some Hitchiti-speaking Native American populations settled in Western Florida. Those who settled in eastern Florida were generally Muskogee-speaking natives. By the nineteenth century, Europeans and Euro-Americans widely imposed the generic term “Seminole” upon these diverse and rather independent groups.\(^{21}\)

Works continue to view the Seminoles in simplistic and monolithic terms. In his 1993 analysis, Covington still relied on the same defined of Seminole as Mahon did thirty years earlier. Covington perceived a Seminole Indian to be “any Alabama or Georgia Creek who made a permanent move to Florida.”\(^{22}\) Yet this

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 25-35.

raises an important question: how can one base one constructed identity as the foundation for another constructed identity? Creek only became an Indian “Nation” upon English settlement in the Lowcountry during the seventeenth and eighteen centuries. Europeans started to use Seminole as early as the eighteenth century. It seems unlikely that all the Native Americans who moved into Florida had time to internalize and give meaning to what it meant to be Creek. If they did not see themselves as Creek, then how can the Seminole be based on Creek identity? The Red Stick “Creek” might possibly be the only group who adapted into the Seminole identity who may have viewed themselves as Creek.23

_Cultural Elements of the Seminoles:

Many of the works that focus on the Seminole Indians prior to removal tend to detail the political environment that facilitated the genesis of Seminole Indian identity as demonstrated above; however, few works detail the cultural and social workings of the Seminole Natives. Minnie More-Wilson’s study provides insight on the Florida Seminole Indians of the late nineteenth century, yet, the account is riddled with racial bias. James Howard’s study, _Oklahoma Seminoles_, focuses almost exclusively the Seminoles of Oklahoma. Much of Howard’s work is the result of his observations of the Oklahoma Seminole Indians, thus not fully incorporating historical accounts on Seminole Indian identity formation in

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23Patricia Wickman, _Osceola’s Legacy: Revised Edition_ (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 5-11. In 1813, a large contingency of Native Americans known as Red Sticks migrated into Florida following their defeat to Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. By the Second Seminole War, a former Red Stick, Osceola rose to prominence as a Seminole warrior.
colonial Florida. Brent Weisman’s *Like Beads on a String* relies on an archeological approach in order to examine Seminole Native culture. Weisman views the Seminole Indians as an extension of the Creek, which is problematic due to the arbitrary construction of Creek identity.

While these works contribute to further understanding the Seminole Indians, they tend to be short sighted. These studies are solely based in a Native American framework. The Seminole experiences have yet to be placed in an Atlantic World framework. Scholars who only examine the Seminole Indians often neglect or overlook the significance of the Seminole Maroons. The Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons forged a unique relationship, unlike most of the relationships that formed between Native Americans and enslaved Africans. This relationship is central to the understanding of the Seminole Indians, and will be further investigated in chapter three.

Weisman, Howard, and Moore do provide important information on the Seminole Indians and their connection of other Southeastern Native Americans. Seminole Indians social patterns resemble those of other Maskókí Peoples of the Southeast, including natives referred to by the English as Creek. The Seminoles Natives’ basic social unit was the clan. Seminole children received their clan identity through their mothers. While Seminole males married into their wives’ clans, the husbands never fully dissociated with their birth clans. Each member of the clan believed they originated from the same ancestral female
as other clan members. Until the 1770s, Seminole Indians separated each clan into the red and white settlements, the red represented the war clan and white represented the peace clan.  

Archeological evidence indicates that by the 1820s, some Seminole Indians choose to live with their nuclear families independent from the clan-based settlements. Archeological digs conducted on the reservation created in 1823 provides evidence that some Native American families started to live in familial groups similar to Euro-American practices rather than in the communal style described by Bartram during his visits to Alachua. Prior to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, Horatio S. Dexter, an Indian trader and diplomat, recorded the existence of a plantation-style residence owned by the deceased Native American named Opauney.

According to Weisman, Seminole Native men did the hunting and trading, while women generally worked the fields. They typically consumed potatoes, corn, squash, melons, and rice, and they also utilized honey as a sweetener and to make jellies. Native Americans in the Southeast likely learned how to grow rice

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26 Horatio Dexter’s Report on South Florida as found in David James Glunt, “Plantations of Frontier Records of East and Middle Florida 1789-1868” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1930), 289-291.
from enslaved Africans who sought refuge among them. As early as the
eighteenth century enslaved African men and women of the Lowcountry ran to
native settlements and adapted into those communities.²⁷

According to Bartram’s eighteenth-century account of the Seminole
Indians, they developed agropastoral practices which included the herding cattle
and raising hogs. The practice of farming and cattle herding ultimately led to the
formation of large farms among the Seminole Indians. Weisman defines these
ventures as “an agricultural enterprise focused on crops or animals grown or
raised for export to national or international markets.” Wiesman argues that rice
also developed into a very valuable trade commodity for the Seminole Natives.²⁸

Groups of southeastern Native Americans forged a Seminole identity as a
result of their abilities to change and adapt in response to internal issues and
external forces including European encroachment. Just as the Native Americans
learned to maneuver within the environment of imperialism, Africans, freed and
enslaved, also learned to maneuver within the same constraints. By the end of the
eighteenth century, these two groups converged and often aligned in mutual
opposition to colonial and U.S. forces.

²⁷Weisman, “The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole,” 144; Brent R. Weisman,
Like Beads on a String: A Culture History of the Seminole Indians in Northern Peninsular Florida
(Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1989), 46-47; Weisman, Unconquered People,
110; Barbara Krauthamer, “Kinship and Freedom: Fugitive Slave Women’s Incorporation into
Creek Society,” in New Studies in the History of American Slavery, eds. Edward E. Baptist and

Upon the conclusion of the Seven Years War in 1763, Spain ceded Florida to the British in the Treaty of Paris. The British period lasted for twenty years before the Spanish regained control of Florida. During the British tenure and into the early decades of the nineteenth century, Cline contends that Seminole Indian identity “emerged as a distinct, recognizable native group.” However, even into the nineteenth century, the U.S. government and Spain recognized the Seminole Indians as part of the Creek Confederacy. The imperial powers felt a need to apply a recognizable power structure upon the Natives of Florida for negotiation purposes. While the Seminole Indians have a social and cultural history that connects them to other southeastern Native Americans, the historical accounts tend to emphasize their constructed political identity at the expense of their cultural identity.  

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Native Americans of Florida, especially near the Georgia border, acquired the reputation as a nuisance to white southerners. During the American Revolution, the Seminole Indians raided and attacked Southern plantations. During the war, numerous enslaved Africans and their descendents ran away to Indian settlements in search of liberation. The enraged slave owners sought aid from the newly formed federal government for the return of runaway and or stolen slaves who resided among Native Americans. The planters found that the Spanish presence in Florida proved to be an obstacle.

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when they tried to retrieve their lost property. The white Southerners near the Florida line formed the initial group of supporters who wanted to annex Florida from Spain.30

The tensions between the U.S. and the Seminole Indians remained throughout much of the nineteenth century and escalated into three wars. The issue of runaway slaves among the Seminole Indians continued to exacerbate the strain between the slave owners of Georgia and South Carolina and the Seminole Natives of Florida. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Native Americans of Florida were a safe haven for runaway slaves. As a result of the desire to exterminate the threat that the Seminole Indians posed to the slave South, the U.S., led by Georgian planters, organized a preemptive strike. Through the Patriot Rebellion, slave owners and government officials also sought to enlarge the slave-holding South. Congress initiated the Patriot Rebellion when President James Madison covertly received approval from Congress to take over Florida and rid the region of Spain influences.31

Within the same period of the Patriot Rebellion, an internal conflict ensued among those referred to as the Creek. The Upper and Lower Creek fought each other in a civil conflict. In the Red Stick War of 1813-1814, the Upper Creek of Alabama, also known as the Red Sticks, felt threatened by white encroachment upon their land. In the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, future president

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Andrew Jackson, with the aid of Lower Creek, defeated the Red Sticks, who fled to Florida. The migration of the Red Sticks constituted the last major movement into Florida of Native Americans who joined the Seminole Indians. The Red Sticks also dissolved their ties with the Creek Confederacy.32

The migration of the Red Sticks into Florida caused more tension in the border region. The continual threat that Seminole Indians posed toward slave owners and the outcomes of the Red Stick War resulted in the First Seminole War. Fairbanks asserts that this war resulted from the inability of the Spanish to invest adequately in sustaining Florida. Eager U.S. citizens who sought to expand their territorial boundaries compounded Spain’s financial inadequacies. The attack on Fort Prospect Bluff exacerbated the conflict between the Native Americans of Florida and white southerners. In July of 1816 forces led by Colonel Duncan L. Clinch encountered a group of Native Americans who harbored runaway slaves. As conflict ensued, a shot fired by U.S. forces hit a powder magazine housed in the fort. This action instantly killed and wounded many Native American and black forces that resided in Fort Prospect Bluff. In Black Society in Spanish Florida, Landers provides Colonel Clinch’s account of the event, which not only reveals the devastation of the fort, but also reveals his sentiment toward those housed inside the black fort at Prospect Bluff.

The explosion was awful, and the scene horrible beyond description. Our first care, on arriving at the scene of the destruction, was to rescue and relieve the unfortunate beings who survived the explosion. The war yells of the Indians, the cries and lamentations of the wounded, compelled the

soldier to pause in the midst of victory, to drop a tear for the sufferings of his fellow beings, and to acknowledge that the great Ruler of the Universe must have used us as his instruments in chastising the blood-thirsty and murderous wretches that defended the fort.\textsuperscript{33}

Andrew Jackson, by 1818, entered Florida to rid the border region of the Native American presence. As a result of the First Seminole War, the Seminole Native population relocated further south into Florida’s peninsula. Although Jackson led punitive expeditions against the various Indian settlements in Northern Florida, the U.S. government ultimately desired to claim the colony for itself. Upon signing the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, Spain agreed to relinquish Florida to the U.S. in 1821.\textsuperscript{34}

With U.S. acquisition of Florida, the Seminole Indians and the U.S. entered into the Treaty of Moultrie Creek in 1823. James Gadsden, who led the negotiations for the U.S., wanted to force the Seminole Indians into a designated area which would facilitate the future removal of the Native population from Florida.\textsuperscript{35} Before the negotiations occurred, Neamantha, leader of the Mikasuki, was chosen as the unofficial spokesperson for Seminole Native interests. At the conclusion of the treaty negotiations, the United States agreed to be protector of the Native Americans in Florida and to provide annuities for twenty years. The Seminole Indians agreed to relocate to a reservation and to surrender all runaway

\textsuperscript{33}Cited in Landers, \textit{Black Society in Spanish Florida}, 234.

\textsuperscript{34}Fairbanks, \textit{The Florida Seminole People}, 18-22; Mahon, \textit{The History of the Second Seminole War}, 25-28.

\textsuperscript{35}Mulroy, \textit{Freedom on the Border}, 80-81; John K. Mahon, “The Treaty of Moultrie Creek, 1823” \textit{Florida Historica Quarterly} vol. 40 no. 4 (April 1962) 360. Gadsden will become the future United States Minister to Mexico and he also was the negotiator sent by President Pierce to purchase a strip of land from Mexico known as the Gadsden Purchase.
slaves in order to be returned to their masters. Since many Seminole Indians failed to comply and return absconding slaves, the issue of runaway slaves in Native territory continued to plague Indian-white relations. Some groups of Seminole Indians refused to relocate and those that did often wandered off the reservation for it proved inadequate to sustain the Seminole Native population.\textsuperscript{36}

Throughout the 1820s, tensions between the white population and Native Americans continually deteriorated. However, not all Native Americans moved to the assigned reservation, and those who did suffered continually from hunger. White residents in Alachua continually complained of Seminole Indians taking cattle and damaging property. In addition, while the Treaty of Moultrie Creek supposedly resolved the issue of runaways among the Seminole Indians, the problem continued to persist throughout the 1820s.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{The Second Seminole War}

By May of 1830, the official Native American policy of the United States took a clear and decisive path with the passage of President Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act. Jackson’s infamous policy called for an “exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west to the river Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{38} This action resulted in two important treaties between the Seminole Indians of Florida and the United States government. In

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 43-50.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 57-67; Littlefield, \textit{Africans and Seminoles}, 9.

1832 the U.S. and the Seminole Indians negotiated the Treaty of Payne’s Landing. In accordance with the Treaty of Payne’s Landing, a delegation of Seminole Natives traveled to Creek lands in the Indian Territory, and upon their approval the Seminole Indians of Florida would move west and reunite with the Creek.” The Seminole Indians rejected any notion of reuniting with the Creek, and refused resettlement because they would be subjugated to Creek authority. In part this refusal among some Seminole Indians to rejoin the Creek led to the onset of the Second Seminole War.39

During the delegation’s travels to the Indian Territory, U.S. officials forced the group to sign another treaty that stated that the Seminole delegation found no faults with removal to Creek land. Upon the signing of the Treaty of Fort Gibson the representative group assured the U.S government officials that all Seminole Indians would relocate to the West. Conflict among the Seminole Indians ensued over the issue of relocation, as Covington notes “of all the tribes living east of the Mississippi River, the Seminoles put up the most determined resistance to removal to the West.” The Seminole Natives refusal to relocate and the dubious actions of the U.S. exacerbated already tenuous relations and resulted in the Second Seminole War.40

Numerous factors contributed to the escalation of the Second Seminole War. Despite many attempts, regional slave owners could not stop Seminole Indians from harboring runaway slaves in their territory. The African and

39Littlefield, African and Seminoles, 10.

40Covington, The Seminoles of Florida, 72.
African-descended population who associated with the Seminole Indians feared re-enslavement by the Creeks and whites. The remnants of the Red Sticks still remembered the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and still felt bitterness toward the Creek. The Second Seminole War started with two acts initiated by the Seminoles and their allies, which they executed simultaneously. One group under the leadership of Osceola carried out the murder of Seminole Agent Wiley Thompson. As Osceola led the group that murdered Thompson, another cohort of Native Americans and their black compatriots under the guidance of Micanopy, Alligator, and Jumper carried out the other act by annihilating Major Francis L. Dade and his men.41

The Second Seminole War, which concluded in 1842, cost the U.S. government between $30 and 40 million and the lives of nearly 1,500 U.S. soldiers. According to Mahon and Twyman, the circumstances surrounding the Second Seminole War were imbedded in the issue of slavery, and as Mahon contends, the war exacerbated the contentious issue of slavery at the national level:

41Littlefield, African and Seminoles, 11; Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 28-29; Wickman, Osceola’s Legacy, 5-11. Osceola, also known as Billy Powell, was born in the Maskoki or Creek town near present-day Tuskegee Alabama. He migrated with the Red Sticks into Florida. While never recognized as an official chief by any Seminoles, he strongly committed himself to the cause of Seminole resistance to removal the West. Porter, The Black Seminoles, 35-36. According to Porter, Alligator resided with the Alachua band and was the principal war leader under the leadership of Micanopy. Jumper was part of the migrating Red Sticks.
Obviously the Second Seminole War was connected intimately with the nation's number one problem of slavery. At the start the connection was not generally apparent, but as the war progressed, and the slavery issue grew year by year the end of the war did a good deal to add to the bad feelings of both sides of the question.\textsuperscript{42}

The following chapters will examine further the experiences of African and African-descended slaves in Florida and how they interacted with the Seminoles Indians.

\textsuperscript{42}Mahon, The History of the Second Seminole War, 326.
CHAPTER 2

AFRICANS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS
IN COLONIAL AND TERRITORIAL FLORIDA

Imperial rivalry, geopolitics, and colonialism created mechanisms that influenced how the numerous Native Americans in the Southeast interacted with one another and forged their own space as a reaction to foreign encroachment. These same forces also affected the African- and American-born slaves and freed people in the region. As a result of the competitive nature of the relationship between Spain and England in their North American colonies, those enslaved often found space to negotiate their status and living conditions.

Contrary to early slave studies, no single monolithic narrative exists that explains the experience of slavery in North America.\(^1\) Geography, staple crops, and demographics shaped the institution of slavery in each specific colony. Ira Berlin attempts to simplify North American slavery by categorizing the institution

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into three different systems of the Lowcountry, the Middle Colonies, and New England.\(^2\) This chapter will specifically focus on the region that Berlin classified as the Lowcountry. By examining slavery and race relations in the Lowcountry of the British colonies and in Spanish Florida, this chapter will demonstrate how Africans and their descendants lived diverse experiences within the constraints of European imperialism and, especially, in the boundaries of Florida.

1619 represents a pinnacle event for British North American colonies, for this was the year that Jamestown received its first black residents. Although the Jamestown settlers did not merely reduce the Africans to racial slavery, 1619 does represent a turning point in the colony’s racial policies which eventually developed into racial slavery.\(^3\) In North America, the Spanish practiced slavery long before 1619. The first Spanish settlements included African slaves. Even with the first attempts at colonization on the North American mainland, the Spanish intended to utilize slavery, for Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón in 1526 included slaves in his cohort of settlers for the founding of San Miguel de Guadalupe.\(^4\)

From 1565, with the founding of the first permanent European settlement at St. Augustine, to 1865 African slavery existed in North America. Plantation slavery as typified by the grandeur of the “Old South” did not begin to take hold


in Florida until the English period which lasted from 1763 to 1783. Prior to the English tenure, slaves absconded to Florida for refuge from the British colonies. The Spanish utilized the presence of fugitive slaves as an additional force against the English. Florida provided a haven for numerous runaways, who settled in various maroon communities and St. Augustine in order to avoid recapture from their English masters.

**Slavery and Race Relations in the Carolina Lowcountry**

During the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century, numerous slaves from the Carolinas absconded to Florida for refuge. This makes the slave experience in the British colony directly relevant to Africans and their descendants’ experiences in Florida. Florida constitutes an important aspect of Lowcountry slavery, for British masters continually remained aware of the danger that Florida posed as a refuge for runaway slaves.

Britain’s first successful settlement in what is present-day South Carolina occurred in 1670. Unlike other British settlements in North America, the Lowcountry developed as a result of the overpopulation of other colonies, in this instance Barbados. According to Peter Wood, the Barbadian background of the settlers directly influenced race relations and slavery in the Carolinas. Initially, in the formative years, the Carolinas operated as a “colony of a colony.”
The new mainland settlement provided Barbados with much needed resources including food and timber due to the fact that Barbados developed large plantations and lacked the space to provide sustenance for itself.⁵

During the early stages of South Carolina’s development, the colonists relied upon African slaves and their knowledge, which afforded bondspeople a degree of autonomy not normally associated with slavery. The settlers used cattle herding as a means of survival prior to the solidification of a cash crop economy in the 1720s. The colonists greatly valued slaves who originated from the Senegambia, for these Africans had extensive knowledge of cattle herding. While Carolinians preferred Gambia and Gold Coast slaves, they settled for Windward Coast and West Central African slaves. John Thornton contends that those slaves from West Central Africa, usually recognized as “Angolan,” most likely did not originate from the Portuguese colony of Angola. Rather, these imported Africans originated from the area of modern Angola where the Kongo Kingdom thrived.⁶ During the seventeenth century, most slaves imported into the Lowcountry came from West Central Africa, and during the eighteenth century the region shifted to the area of the Senegambia and Sierra Leone.⁷

As rice developed and became the cash crop of the colony by the 1720s, the African population drastically increased, and in 1708 the black population

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⁵Wood, Black Majority, 6-9 and 13-34.


⁷Littlefield, Rice and Slaves, 8-14; Wood, Black Minority, 29-30.
surpassed the white population in the colony. As the eighteenth century progressed, social relations in the colony noticeably changed as a result of South Carolina's economic transformation from an outpost settlement to a cash crop colony. As the African population continued to rise, the colonists attempted to address the racial imbalance by promoting the immigration of lower class whites.\(^8\)

With the rise of the cash crop economy, the black population of South Carolina lost much of the relative freedom they had when the colony was still a frontier. During the middle of the eighteenth century, colonists enforced mechanisms to control the slave population. White colonists increased the patrol systems that they used to attempt to regulate the activities of enslaved Africans. Colonists also enforced a pass system, in which slaves had to carry passes with them when traveling throughout the colony. As the slave codes grew harsher and the constraints placed upon the black population tightened, the instances of slaves running away greatly increased. According to Wood, slaves ran in all directions. Those who absconded and headed north usually did so because they were just sold from that region. Bondspeople who started east usually headed to Charleston hoping to re-cross the Atlantic, while those who went west generally found respite among Native Americans. Finally, slaves who headed south found refuge in St. Augustine and the maroon societies of Florida.\(^9\)


\(^9\)Ibid., 257-268.
For the slaves who fled south, some may have deliberately chosen that direction due to their knowledge of Spanish sanctuary. By 1693 the Spanish crown issued an edict declaring sanctuary for any slaves fleeing the British as long as they accepted Catholicism. This policy emerged in order to promote Spanish interests in the Southeast and to undermine the British. Enslaved Africans took advantage of sanctuary in order to obtain their own freedom at the expense of competing European powers.¹⁰

The Stono Rebellion of 1739 represents a watershed in the history of slavery and the slave trade in the South Carolina. On the morning of Sunday, September 9, 1739 a group of nearly twenty “Angolan” slaves under the leadership of Jemmy gathered about twenty miles outside Charleston. The rebels attacked and killed two shopkeepers, Tom Gibbs and Robert Bathurst, while also acquiring guns and ammunition. The rebel force killed most white colonists they came into contact with including women and children. Jemmy’s men spared an inn keeper named Wallace, for he had a reputation of being kind to slaves. Contemporary accounts estimate that the rebellious slaves destroyed about seven houses and left nearly thirty white colonists dead. By chance, Lieutenant Governor Bull came across the marching slaves on his way to Charleston. Without Bull’s encounter with the rebelling slaves, they might have succeeded in reaching Spanish Florida. By that evening colonists sounded the alarm and

colonial forces hunted down Jemmy’s men and the additional slaves that joined the movement as it progressed across the countryside. It took a week to gather all of the suspected rebels.11

The participants and events surrounding the Stono rebellion reveal interesting implications pertaining to English-Spanish relations in the region. As previously mentioned, John Thornton demonstrates in his research that the slaves who the Carolinians perceived as Angolan probably originated from the Kongo Kingdom. Since the fifteenth century, this African kingdom actively practiced Catholicism, albeit in a distinctly African form.12

Based upon Thornton’s argument, it does not seem unreasonable that while the enslaved were escaping the harsh realities of a slave society, they also sought religious refuge in Spanish Florida. While scholars debate the extent to which Spain actively sought to disrupt the slave system in South Carolina, evidence suggests possible Spanish collusion in the Stono Rebellion. A Colonel William Stephens recorded the capture of a Spanish man passing through British territory just weeks before the outbreak of the Stono Rebellion.13 Many British contemporaries believed that Spain helped to initiate the rebellion. Thornton states that:


Many English residents of South Carolina including the anonymous author of the best account believed that the revolt was somehow precipitated by Spanish propaganda and was part of the larger tensions that led to war between England and Spain in 1740.¹⁴

Due to imperial rivalry between Spain and England, the Spanish very likely wanted to incite slave resistance in the Lowcountry. The Spanish really did not even have to physically incite slaves, for their presence and fugitive slave policies caused enough fear in an already paranoid English settlement in South Carolina.

*Slavery in Florida during the First Spanish Period*

As mentioned previously, the Spanish introduced slavery into North America nearly a century prior to the first Africans landing in Jamestown in 1619. Frank Tannenbaum and Jane Landers demonstrate throughout their works the differences found in the institutions of slavery as found in the English and Spanish colonies. The conclusions these works draw tend to over emphasize the humanity of the Spanish toward their slaves and, in contrast, the inhumanity of the English toward theirs.¹⁵ Tannenbaum rests his assertions on the supposed presence of the Las Siete Partidas in the Spanish domains of the New World. The Las Siete Partidas represents a body of codified slave laws developed on the Iberian Peninsula by the thirteenth century. In practice, this code never really governed the numerous institutions of slavery throughout the Spanish New


World. Landers contends that the nature of slavery in Spanish Florida emerged more as a result of the frontier military outpost status of the colony than from any specific set of laws.\textsuperscript{16}

In the borderlands of southeastern North America, Spanish Florida gained the reputation as a refuge for fleeing slaves from the northern British colonies. In November of 1693, the Spanish crown issued an edict officially solidifying Florida’s policy of asylum for absconding slaves. Due to the precarious nature of the geopolitics in southeastern North America, Florida’s slave policy likely rested upon the dire need for increased labor and defenses rather than upon the principles based in Las Siete Partidas.\textsuperscript{17} In her dissertation, “An African Centered Historical Analysis of Self-Emancipated Africans of Florida 1738-1838,” Yvonne Tolagbe Ogunleye contends that Spanish motives toward slaves lacked the supposed humanity of Las Siete Partidas, for she argues that this code never really transferred to the New World. Tannenbaum’s thesis does not adequately address the formation of many of the slave systems in the Spanish New World. When assessing the various practices of slavery, such as in colonial Florida, one must examine issues including politics, economics, and demographics.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16}Landers, \textit{Black Society}, 7-9.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 24-24; Landers, “Gracia Reai de Santa Teresa de Mosé,” 12-17.

During the first Spanish period in Florida, the colonists relied upon the presence of runaway slaves to aid in the sustainability of the military outpost. In 1738, the governor of Florida, Manuel de Montiano approved the founding of a settlement known as Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mosé, commonly referred to as Mosé, which was the first free black settlement in North America. Mosé was located strategically just north of St. Augustine. This location forced the black free town to provide St. Augustine with a buffer against any imperial rivals.19

Although the Spanish had political motives to support a fortified black settlement just outside St. Augustine, the residents of Mosé embraced the fortification and made it a community. Africans in the Southeast knew how to manipulate imperial rivalries to their own advantage as illustrated by the formation of Mosé. Mosé also developed into a haven for Lowcountry slaves evading their masters, thus making Mosé a maroon community. Although the presence of absconding Lowcountry slaves made Mosé a maroon settlement, the official endorsement of the site complicates Mosé’s standing as a classic maroon settlement.20

20Ibid., 10-12.
The settlers of Mosé were composed of many West Central and West Africans. These free blacks married and created familial ties. Archeological findings, such as a St. Christopher metal which had an imprint that likely represented the Kongo Cosmogram, provide evidence that some of Mosé residents followed Catholicism as practiced by West Central Africans.\textsuperscript{21}

Due to English attacks during the War of Jenkin’s Ear 1739-1742, the British under the leadership of James Oglethorpe destroyed the original Mosé establishment. In the 1750s, Spanish authorities worked at repopulating Mosé, however the settlement never fully regenerated from Oglethorpe’s destruction. Ultimately, the black settlement subsisted until the British take over in 1763, when many of the residents relocated to Cuba with the Spanish exodus from Florida.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Forging of Plantation Culture in Florida during British Tenure (1763-1783)}

Prior to the Treaty of Paris, which transferred Florida from Spanish to English control, the colonists of Georgia and South Carolina coveted the land along St. John’s River for possible rice cultivation. British colonists also realized the productiveness of the land between the Apalacheeola and Suwannee Rivers,


\textsuperscript{22}Landers, “Gracia Real de Teresa de Mosé,” 19-29.
commonly referred to as Middle Florida, for cotton production. The presence of Seminole Indians settlements initially inhibited the development of a plantation culture in some areas.\textsuperscript{23}

Prior to British acquisition, the Spanish colonists did not develop a viable economic plantation system in Florida. According to Daniel Schafer, James Grant, the newly appointed English governor of East Florida, sought to create a plantation society in the region that closely replicated the systems found in Georgia and South Carolina. Officials in Florida actively tried to persuade planters of the newly gained territory to utilize the skills of “country born” slaves from the Lowcountry who already had a familiarity with cash crops and the plantation system. Until the end of the 1760s, the Carolina- and Georgia-born slaves rose as the majority of the black population in Florida. However, in the 1770s, the majority of the black population shifted to African-born slaves. According to Schafer, the Africans imported came from the interior of Senegambia and Sierra Leone. A smaller portion of imports originated from the Niger Delta and West Central Africa.\textsuperscript{24}

During the British tenure in Florida, the demography of the territory drastically changed. Landers asserts that during the British period of 1763-1783 the black-white ratio significantly increased. Coincidentally, the relative freedom


that Florida’s black population experienced under Spanish rule, greatly dwindled under British leadership. The colonists imported a vast number of slaves to labor on the rice, indigo, sea-island cotton, and sugar plantations. During the American Revolution, the British loyalists congregated in East Florida where the black-white ratio was roughly three to one.25

The problem of absconding slaves continually plagued the British colonists even as they moved into Florida. A prominent resident of the territory, John Moultrie mentioned the tendency of slaves to collaborate with Native Americas, for in 1771 he complained that, “it has been a practice for Negroes to runaway from their masters and get into Indian towns, from whence it proved very difficult and troublesome to get them back.”26 With the retrocession of Florida to Spain in 1783, Ogunleye contends that, as a result of the transfer of power, many slaves took the opportunity to gain their freedom by fleeing toward the interior of Florida or toward American Indian settlements.27

*Spain’s Struggle to Hold Florida (1784-1821)*

Spain continually struggled to retain control of its Florida territory during the second Spanish period of 1783 to 1821. During this period, Spain annulled the sanctuary policy that had been in place since 1693 in response to pressures that the newly formed United States exerted. However, since the era of English


26Schafer, “‘Yellow Silk Ferret Tied Round Their Wrists,’” 93.

rule, Native American and black settlements relocated to isolated areas rather than remain in the buffer zones. This made any attempt by the Spanish to regulate the activities of these settlements insufficient. Even prior to 1763, the Spanish found it challenging to assert any control over native settlements and leaders located outside the immediate boundaries of St. Augustine.  

To help revive the territory, Spain actively sought to lure Southern U.S. citizens to immigrate to Florida. The Spanish hoped that filling the plantations left vacant by the English exodus would provide additional monetary funds for the ailing colony. Spain’s inability to adequately support the colony financially, forced the Spanish to transfer the colony to the U.S. by 1821.

As demonstrated throughout the first chapter, Spain and the United States had conflicting notions over the future of Florida, resulting in the tense relationship between these two political powers until the transfer of Florida in 1821. Spain attempted to capitalize on the fears that the Seminole Indians and black population harbored toward their northern foe, in order to evade U.S. encroachment. According to Landers, the black-Native American alliance exacerbated by the panic of a possible British takeover of Florida during the War of 1812, and the existence of armed black forces, prompted the U.S. to aggressively seek control of the contested territory. As in the eighteenth century, the black population of the Southeast, especially in Florida, worked within the

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imperial systems as a way to promote self-preservation. U.S forces responded to this threat by destroying Fort Prospect Bluff in July of 1816 and initiating the First Seminole War.\textsuperscript{30}

The U.S. attack on the black fort at Prospect Bluff, greatly disrupted the lives of those who resided in the settlements surrounding the structure. Immediately following the destruction of the fort, many of the area residents fled south to a settlement known as Angola, which rested at the junction of the Braden and Manatee Rivers. Canter Brown claims that Angola was probably a location that black and Native American hunters occupied during seasonal tracking. By 1818, the United States grew aware of the settlement, and during the First Seminole War the U.S. Army destroyed it. Brown estimates that following the destruction of Angola, as many as 250 of the black habitants fled to Andros Island in the Bahamas.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{United States Acquisition of Florida}

Following U.S. acquisition of Florida from Spain, numerous Southern slave owners flocked to the new territory for its “virgin land” and actively acculturated the new territory to the customs of the Old South. Middle Florida developed in the manner of the Old South more so than did the regions of eastern and western Florida, for it became the main cotton growing region with the

\\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Landers, Black Society}, 72-81, 229.

highest concentration of slaves. Rivers contends that the task system found in
Florida upon its transfer to the U.S. resulted from a legacy of the former Spanish
presence. However, he ignored the fact that slaves who sought refuge in Florida
usually originated from South Carolina plantations, which utilized the task
system. Absconding slaves, who resided on rice plantations, would have carried
the skills, knowledge, and labor techniques of rice production with them into
Florida.\textsuperscript{32}

Generally, bondspeople who worked on Lowcountry rice plantations
labored under the task system. Under this system, slaves were ranked according
to their abilities and assigned appropriate tasks. A typical task might include a
quarter of an acre worth of labor. Unlike the gang system where slaves labored
from sunrise to sunset, the task system provided bondspeople with time to work to
meet their own needs. Both Peter Wood and Judith Carney contend that the task
system originated in West Africa, for enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry
employed similar planting techniques utilized in West Africa. Carney asserts that
enslaved Africans implemented the task system in the Lowcountry as a means to
negotiate the labor demands placed upon them by slave owners and overseers.\textsuperscript{33}

Although many white Southerners did migrate to Florida, a few slave
holders remained apprehensive about the possibility of absconding slaves. In

\textsuperscript{32}Rivers, \textit{Slavery in Florida}, xii; 68-75.

Cultivation in the Americas} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 70. 98-101. For more
information on the task system see Philip D. Morgan, “Work and Culture: The Task System and
the World of Lowcountry Blacks 1700-1888,” \textit{William and Mary Quarterly} (October, 1982);
Morgan, \textit{The Slave Counterpoint}; Littlefield, \textit{Rice and Slaves}.
1824, an editor commented in a St. Augustine newspaper that, “it is said that many decline settling in the territory because they are liable to the loss of their Negroes by elopement.” A decade later, a Tallahassee newspaper reported that, “there are few things which have been subjects of greater complaints for the last two or three years than runaway Negroes, who are permitted to go at large, and plunder the public.”

To alleviate the fears of these planters, slave owners demanded the relocation of Native Americans and their allies to reservations or to the West and to enforce strict slave codes. While the close proximity between the Seminole Indians and plantation slaves likely resulted in an increase of runaway slaves to Indian settlements, plantation owners could effectively use the excuse of absconding slaves as a means to gain access to valuable Indian lands.

Race relations became so contentious in Florida between slave owners, absconding slaves, and Native Americans that by the 1830s war erupted. According to Brown, the Second Seminole War was the largest slave rebellion in U.S. history. Brown’s notion has merit, but one needs to put these rebellious activities into context. Slave owners in Florida did fear the distinct possibility of their bondspeople uprising and slave owners in bordering states feared it would spread to their slaves. John Caesar and Abraham, interpreters for the Seminole Indians, both instigated slave uprisings on plantations in the St. Johns region and near St. Augustine. Men in the Florida Militias felt apprehensive about leaving

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35Rivers, Slavery in Florida, 9.
the relative vicinity of their homes due to the high probability of slave
insurrections. These insurrections occurred directly as a result of the Second
Seminole War and thus could be seen as part of the war.36

While Brown attempted to complicate the Second Seminole War, he did
not fully develop his contention that the war represented the largest slave
rebellion in U.S. history. Brown also leaves one to wonder how he conceptualizes
rebellion in relation to warfare. The massive attacks on plantations, the
annihilation of U.S. forces such as in Dade’s Massacre, the duration of U.S.
military action against the black-native efforts indicates that the Second Seminole
War was more than a slave rebellion. The Second Seminole War represents a war
in which U.S. forces confronted Indians and black forces who often had
competing agendas.37

Since the seventeenth century, slaves in the Southeast viewed Florida as a
place of refuge. As previously illustrated, the black-Native American alliances
worried the English and U.S. slave owners. Unfortunately the historical
circumstances of how these two groups aligned remains speculative. Littlefield
contends that, even by 1774, no records exist of black residents living among the
Seminole Indians, but by the 1780s the Seminole Indians of Florida gradually

and Free Negroes in the Seminole War, 1835-1842,” The Journal of Negro History vol. 28 no. 4
(Oct., 1943), 404.

adapted to a system of African slavery. While black-Indian relations continued to develop during this period, it was not until the First Seminole War that the scope of this relationship became known. The black population that formed around the Seminole Indians became known as the black Indians or Indian Negroes by contemporary white Americans.

The cultural background of the Seminole Maroons has been a topic of great interest for scholars. Anthropologist Joseph Opala contends that refugee Gullah slaves formed their own independent settlements in the environs of Florida, which consisted of thatched roof houses and corn and rice fields. Over a period of time these settlements along with Native Americans in the region began to associate in a loosely organized manner. Opala asserts that a cultural exchange occurred between the two entities, for these slaves utilized Native American clothing, while the Native Americans developed a taste for rice, Gullah music, and folklore. If Opala’s interpretation is accurate, then it would suggest that any shared identity that they forged emanated from their identity as cimarons.

Gullah culture developed on the Sea Island region in colonial South Carolina and Georgia. The early imports of West Central Africans made up the slave population on the Sea Island. Following the Stono Rebellion, the colonists shifted from importing largely West Central Africans to West Africans, including Senegambians and Gold Coast Africans. These numerous African ethnic groups

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39 Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 1, 10-12.

contributed elements to the formation of Gullah Culture. The term “Gullah” has connections to various African ethnicities. Besides referencing the people of Angola, scholars linked the term to the Gola who resided in present-day Liberia. Opala also argues that Gullah contains a strong Sierra Leonean influence. Due to the interactions among these cultures in South Carolina and the continual interaction of newly imported Africans and Lowcountry born slaves, Gullah emerged as a distinctive slave culture.\footnote{Michael Gomez, \textit{Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 102-105; Margaret Washington Creel, \textit{“A Peculiar People” Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullah} (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 16-18, 34-34.}

The primary language of the Seminole Maroons has been called Afro-Seminole, and is similar to the Gullah language spoken on the Sea Islands. The black population among the Seminole Indians also spoke at least one European language and often learned Native American languages. The linguistic talents of the Seminole Maroons provided them with the opportunity to act as trusted advisors and interpreters for the Seminole Indians.\footnote{Mulroy, \textit{Freedom on the Border}, 4, 22-25.}

During the second decade of the nineteenth century, relations between the Seminole Indians and their black cohorts grew strained. Some Native Americans viewed the Seminole Maroons as the underlying cause of the First Seminole War. Some Seminole Indians believed that their reputation as a refuge for absconding slaves resulted in aggression from the U.S. During this era the U.S. actively
sought to enforce a divide-and-rule policy between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons. The U.S. tried to implement the divide-and-rule tactic in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek.43

According to Article Seven of the treaty, the Seminole Indians agreed to inhibit future fugitive slaves from residing on their land, and to return current black fugitive slaves already living within their settlements. While a few Seminole Indians complied with this demand, many plantation owners complained about the noncompliance of the Indians. This article attempted to weaken the relationship that developed between absconding slaves, maroons, and the Seminole Indians since at least the eighteenth century. While some Seminole Indians complied with Article Seven, the problem of fugitive slaves on the Seminole Indian reservation continued to plague white-Indian relations.44

The black population that lived among the Seminole Indians always lived with the knowledge that they could be captured by slave owners and catchers and forced into bondage. This fear heightened with the Second Seminole War. For, if the Seminole Indians moved West, the Africans and their descendants who lived among the Seminole Indians would become even more susceptible to enslavement. The Second Seminole War has been traditionally viewed as an Indian war. However, the political sentiments regarding racial issues in the federal government directly led to the outbreak of the wars with the Seminole

43Ibid., 26-28.
Indians. Thus further complicating the notion of the Second Seminole War as just another Indian war. Those who helped to form federal policy in relation to the Seminole Indians often held pro-slavery sentiments, for in the first half of the nineteenth century the slave holders of the South dominated the federal government.  

Since the colonial era, slave holders, especially near Georgia and South Carolina, constantly incurred monetary losses from their slaves running away. For the slaves that ran to Florida settlements, Spanish rule provided a barrier against re-enslavement by slave catchers. Maroonage grew into a significant problem for slave owners in the South following the conclusion of the American Revolution. During the chaos of the Revolutionary War in the South, many of the enslaved took the opportunity to flee their plantations for the freedom of the swamps. These activities occurred during the time that scholars contend a black-Indian relationship started to form between the Seminole Indians and their black counterparts. This alliance eventually propelled American forces to preemptively invade Spanish Florida and remove the imperial opposition that hindered U.S. ability to effectively respond to this biracial threat.  

As mentioned in the introduction, Seminole Maroons often acted as interpreters and councilors to Seminole Indians. One of the most prominent interpreters was Abraham. By the onset of the Second Seminole War, Abraham

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earned the confidence of Seminole Indian leader Micanopy, which enabled Abraham to rise as Micanopy’s chief interpreter. Abraham and others held pivotal positions of power among the Seminole Indians, thus giving them the ability to influence the Seminole Indians’ resistance to removal. The Seminole Maroons opposed removal for they feared it would result in re-enslavement.\textsuperscript{47}

While the historical records provide strong evidence of interaction between the Seminoles and the black maroons of Florida, the nature of that relationship continues to be debated. Historians including Mulroy assert that these two groups only united out of political necessity and were separate and independent entities. These two groups did interact on a cultural level. Politically, both groups shared common experiences with Patriot’s Rebellion, the First Seminole War, the destruction of the fort at Prospect Bluff, and the change of authorities. While not completely successful in dissolving the relationship, the U.S. was able to cause internal conflict.\textsuperscript{48}

As the 1820s progressed some Seminole Indians began to view the Seminole Maroons as the source of their problems with U.S. settlers of Florida. While the Seminole Maroons and Seminole Indians needed each others corporation in order to fend off white encroachment, the cultural relationship between these two entities began to deteriorate. Chapter three further analyzes the cultural and social interaction between the Seminole Indians and Seminole


\textsuperscript{48}Mulroy, \textit{Freedom on the Border}, 2-4.

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Maroons and how the U.S. government and Southern whites influenced that relationship. Understanding the relationship between the Seminole Indians, Seminole Maroons, and Southern whites during the decade preceding the Second Seminole War is essential to examining this Indian-black interaction. These same years also shed light on why some factions among the Seminole Indians started to rely more on race to shape Indian-black relations during and following the period of removal.
CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

BETWEEN SEMINOLE MAROONS AND SEMINOLE INDIANS

For now, the historical record does not permit one to detail the exact moment of initial contact and interaction between the Seminole Indians of Florida and the African and African-descended slaves of southeastern North America. Since Florida became a haven for runaway slaves, it does not seem unreasonable to propose that Native Americans who became Seminole Indians and runaway slaves forged contacts in the early stages of Seminole settlement in Florida as conjectured by the polygenesis theory discussed in the introduction. By the nineteenth century, residents of the South grew increasingly wary of obvious Seminole Indian-black relationships.¹

Regardless of the nature of contact between enslaved Africans and their descendants and Seminole Indians, these two groups forged extensive contact with one another that resulted in cultural borrowing. By the turn of the century, the foundation of this Indian-black relationship rested upon a mutual distrust

toward the U.S. Following the American Revolution and Spain's repossession of
Florida, Southern planters and the U.S. government actively sought to dislodge
Spain from the North American mainland.

Porter employed the term Black Seminole to describe the people who
established the African settlements and who developed ties with the Seminole
Indians. Many of the fugitive slaves who absconded to these settlements had
minimal bonds with the Seminole Indians. Just as "Proto-Seminole" may best
describe the early stages of Seminole identity, Mulroy's term--Seminole Maroon--
may best describe the phase of identity development as it occurred in Florida.

From the late eighteenth century to the 1830s, numerous slaves escaped to the
black settlements of the Seminole Indians. The number of fugitive slaves running
to these black settlements further supports the usage of Seminole Maroon, since
these settlements seem more representative of maroon settlements than Indian
settlements, however, one must not overlook the significant relationship that
developed between these two groups.²

This chapter will first demonstrate that cultural borrowing did occur
between the Seminole Indians and Southern slaves, thus indicating that these two
groups interacted with one another beyond the formation of simple political
alliances. Although their mutual feelings toward the U.S. fostered some group
cohesion, as the nineteenth-century progressed tensions developed between the
two. U.S actions in the Southeast since the onset of the nineteenth century
inevitably led to the very destructive Second Seminole War. The expansionist

²Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 3; Rivers, Slavery in Florida, 197.
agenda of the U.S. and slave owners greatly impacted the social and political relationships between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons resulting in a heightened disparity between both groups upon removal.

*Cultural Borrowing Between Indians and People of African-descent*

As runaway slaves established settlements in the relative isolation of Florida, Opala asserts that these maroons and local Indians started to view each other as part of the same “loosely organized tribe.” Opala unconvincingly contends that the Gullah had a greater knowledge of tropical agriculture than the “Proto-Seminoles.” Thus the Gullah taught the Native Americans how to survive in their new surroundings. Indians of the Southeast have long used Florida for hunting grounds, and it does not seem unreasonable that they possessed the needed skills required to adapt and survive in this environment.³

Scholars continually debate the nature of the relationship between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons. Mahon claims that the maroons adapted to “Creek” culture, but that no miscegenation occurred between these two groups. Porter, an authority on Africans and their descendants associated with the Seminoles, supports Mahon’s notions that separate settlements created a situation not conducive to widespread cultural exchange; however, instances of “intermarriage inevitably occurred.” Mulroy contends that the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons forged a relationship grounded in politics and diplomacy. Although scholars question the degree of cultural and social interaction, it seems

logical to contend that these groups greatly influenced one another’s cultures. Regardless of the initial reasons for contact, continual group interactions facilitated an exchange of cultural practices and ideas.\(^4\)

Osceola, the Seminole Indian warrior, migrated into Florida as a young child following Jackson’s defeat of the Red Sticks at Horseshoe Bend and later rose as a prominent Seminole Indian leader during the Second Seminole War. Osceola married a woman of partial African descent; she was born to a father who was a Seminole leader and a mother who was a former slave. Osceola fathered only one daughter with his wife. In 1835, slave catchers seized Osceola’s wife as he and their child watched. Outraged by his wife’s abduction, Osceola “swore vengeance upon (Wiley) Thompson.”\(^5\)

While scholars including Porter and Wickman speculate that Osceola married an American Indian wife, the Federal Writers Project (WPA) narrative given by Frank Berry supports the claim that Osceola had at least one wife who was of partial African-descent. Berry stated in his interview that he was the grandson of the famed Seminole Indian fighter. Berry contends that during the “war between Indians and settlers”\(^6\) Indians captured his grandmother where she

\(^{4}\) Mahon, The History of the Second Seminole War, 20; Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 4; Porter, A Freedom Seeking People, 6.

\(^{5}\) Joshua Giddings, The Exiles of Florida or, The Crimes Committed by Our Government Against the Maroons, Who Fled From South Carolina and Other Slave States, Seeking Protection Under Spanish Law (1858; reprint Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964), 98-99. While visiting Indian Agent, Wiley Thompson, to conduct trade, Osceola’s wife was abducted. Osceola attempted to save his wife, but Thompson put the frantic husband in irons. This incident fueled Osceola’s hatred for Thompson; Wickman, Osceola’s Legacy, 58.

\(^{6}\) The Second Seminole War.
became the “squaw of the chief.” Eventually the owners of his grandmother recaptured her. Berry’s narrative also reveals that Native Americans often attended “frolics” or dances on plantations. Sometimes Indians captured enslaved women or aided in their escape. According to Berry, enslaved women and Native Americans intermarried quite often. Berry’s account provides significant insight into how Indians and plantation slaves interacted. If Berry’s narrative is representative of other plantation slaves and Indians in Florida, contact and intermarriage occurred more often than scholarly studies indicate.7

The African and African-descended settlers residing near Indian settlements in Florida also brought cultural practices with them from the slave South. These Africans followed religious practices that fused Indian, Spanish, and African rituals. They consumed a tea at communion that might be representative of the black drink that the Seminole Indians drank during their own ceremonies and rituals. Horatio Dexter partook in the black drink with Micanopy during his tour of Seminole lands prior to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek in 1823.8 The Seminole Indians consumed the black drink prior to war and important councils because they believed it would reportedly cleanse one’s body and mind.


8Horatio Dexter’s Report on South Florida as found in Glunt, “Plantations of Frontier Records of East and Middle Florida,” 294.
The Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons upon contact possibly already shared cultural commonalities. In general Native American men in the Southeast tended to hunt, while women tended to grow crops and raise food. Many runaway slaves would been familiar with this practice. Also as Barbara Krauthamer states in her work, southeastern Native Americans and Africans practiced similar forms of adopting outsiders into their groups. Thus it would be easy for contemporary records and accounts to overlook how Africans and their descendent influenced Native American culture.  

*Seminole Vassalage vs. Slavery and the Seminole Maroons*

During the 1770s, William Bartram, a son of a botanist, traveled the Southeast to draw and collect flora and fauna specimens. While on his biological expedition, William Bartram recorded his observations of Cowkeeper and Cuscowilla on the Alachua prairie. While he noted the presence of Yamasee "slaves," Bartram failed to comment on the presence of any enslaved Africans. Due to the pro-British tendencies of Cowkeeper, he unlikely would have harbored or protected any slaves fleeing from the British colonies. Bartram did comment on the nature of slavery as it related to the Yamasee. Unlike slavery practiced in the South at this time, these "Proto-Seminoles" did not consider children born

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from Yamassee parents as slaves. Bartram recorded that "their children (Yamassee) are born free, and considered in every aspect equal to themselves, but the parents continue to stay in a state of slavery as long as they live."\textsuperscript{10}

Following Cowkeeper's death, King Payne led the Alachua Seminole Indians. King Payne forged relations with the Spanish in Florida, resulting in the Alachua Seminole Indians embracing similar policies toward runaway slaves as the Spanish. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, the Seminole Indians likely started the practice of fabricating ownership of slaves sought after by disgruntled U.S. owners.\textsuperscript{11}

Understanding social hierarchy among Native American groups remains a persistent problem, for many of the available sources haphazardly uses the term "slavery" to describe many forms of social inequality. What Bartram observed during his travels may very well have been the absorption of the Yamassee into the Alachua native settlement. Native Americans often adopted women of other Indian groups into their own, especially during warfare. The outside people who Southeastern natives adopted into their own groups often did not receive the same liberties and freedoms as those from within the group did. This inequality did not


\textsuperscript{11}Porter, \textit{A Freedom Seeking People}, 6.
relegate the outsiders to slaves as understood in the context of the U.S. slavery. As a result of residing in the Southeast, the Seminole Indians most likely knew that chattel slavery existed; however, they did not embrace the concept.\textsuperscript{12}

As stated in the introduction, the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons forged a relationship that Porter described as vassalage. The foundation of this relationship rested on the notion of reciprocity, which dictated much of the Seminole Indians' world view. In general, the Seminole Indians did not refuse the influx of runaway slaves into their territory. Rather, the Seminole Maroons settled in their own towns and provided yearly tribute. In return the Seminole Indians provided some protection against the slave South.\textsuperscript{13}

On the African-based settlements, the Seminole Maroon vassals cultivated common fields and owned significant sized herds of livestock. Due to the relative freedom of these vassal settlements, absconding slaves throughout Georgia and South Carolina could easily blend into these establishments. While the Seminole Maroons continually interacted with the Seminole Indians, and often provided invaluable services as demonstrated by their famed interpreters, the Seminole Indians never viewed the Seminole Maroons as equals.\textsuperscript{14}

Throughout the Southeast, Native Americans adopted a form of slavery reminiscent of southern racial slavery. The Seminole Indians, on the other hand, never incorporated chattel slavery into their cultural practices. Why did some

\textsuperscript{12}Krauthamer, "Kinship and Freedom," 154.
\textsuperscript{13}Wickman, \textit{The Tree That Bends}, 50-51; Littlefield, \textit{African and Seminoles}, 5-9.
\textsuperscript{14}Littlefield, \textit{Africans and Seminoles}, 5-9; Mulroy, \textit{Freedom on the Border}, 19-20.
Native Americans accept slavery and others did not? One reason why the Seminole Indians did not embrace slavery may relate to their struggle to create and maintain a separate identity from the Creek. Relying on the Seminole Maroons provided the Seminole Indians with needed food and manpower that aided in their struggle against the Creek.¹⁵

Upon the influx of Southern slave owners into Florida territory following the transfer of power to the U.S. from Spain, the Seminole Indians and the Seminole Maroons felt the effects of further encroachment upon their valuable and fertile lands. The primary cause of white-Indian distress rested upon their divergent racial ideologies. The Southern planters wanted to expand the plantation economy into Florida. The Seminoles, African descended and Native American, posed a great threat to the planters’ designs, for the Seminole Indians already provided refuge for absconding slaves from Georgia and South Carolina. The presence of the Seminole Indians caused anxiety among white slave owners as they settled in Florida. U.S. planters accused the Seminole Indians of interfering with their bondspeople, thus forcing Florida slave owners to advocate strongly for the removal of the Seminole Indians. During the 1820s, relations between the Seminole Indians and the Seminole Maroons grew increasingly tenuous, as some Seminole Indians blamed the presence of Africans and people of African-descent for their treatment they received as the hands of white Floridians.¹⁶

Florida from the 1810s to the Signing of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek

From the turn of the nineteenth century to the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty, the border regions between Spanish Florida and the U.S. South became a site of continual violent confrontations between Native Americans, slaves, English, Spanish, and U.S. forces. Territorial expansion fueled U.S. aggression toward these groups. Ridding Florida of Spanish control provided further security for U.S. slave owners, for Spanish removal gave U.S. owners the ability to readily enter Florida and seek out runaway slaves.17 As discussed in previous chapters, the preemptive Patriot’s War, the destruction of the black fort at Prospect Bluff, and Andrew Jackson’s 1818 invasion of Florida were the major events that shaped this period and future relations between Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons. As a result of Jackson’s invasion, numerous Native Americans and black residing in northern Florida removed further into the interior. The Alachua Seminoles migrated roughly 120 miles south into the peninsula. Okihamki rose as the primary Indian village among the Alachua Seminoles Indians, replacing Cuscowilla. The Seminole Maroons that moved with the Seminoles Indians resettled at Pilaklikaha. Not all of the Africans and their descendants who followed Seminole migration further into the peninsula had any mentionable ties with the Native Americans, some were recent fugitives from slave states.18

16Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 26; Porter, A Freedom Seeking People, 31.

17Kenneth W. Porter, “Negroes and the Seminole War, 1817-1818” Journal of Negro History vol. 36, no. 3 (July 1951), 254.

18Ibid., 277-278.
Following the First Seminole War and the U.S. takeover of Florida, Southern planters continually attempted to reclaim their fugitive slaves and rid Indian settlements of any black presence. Due to U.S. aggression in apprehending slaves among Native Americans, the Seminole Indians became the target of increased hostility among Southern planters. U.S. government officials forcefully removed any remaining Florida Indians from fertile lands to the relatively barren swamplands in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. Across the nation, U.S. and Native American relations continued to worsen. The presence of the Seminole Maroons and newly arrived fugitive slaves among the Seminole Indians continued to plague U.S.-Indians relations in Florida.

The Treaty of Moultrie Creek sought to remove Indians from the fertile lands of Florida in order to provide the space for planters to expand plantation slavery into the region of Alachua. Upon removal into the interior, the U.S. attempted to isolate the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons from any access to foreign assistance and trade goods from the Caribbean. Slave owners feared that coastal access and trade with foreign powers could stimulate resistance. Article Two of the treaty stipulates that the boundaries for the designated reservation “not approach nearer than fifteen miles [of] the sea coast of the Gulf of Mexico.” Aside from removing the Seminole Indians for the expansion of the slave South, the U.S. also used this treaty as a way to hinder Indian-black relations.¹⁹

¹⁹The Treaty of Moultrie Creek as found in John T. Sprague, The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War, 20-21.
Slave owners desperately wanted to limit the ability of the enslaved to abscond to Indian settlements in the attempt to seek permanent removal from plantations. Article Seven of the Treaty sought to forge a divide-and-rule policy between the Seminole Indians and people of African-descent, especially runaway slaves.\textsuperscript{20} Article Seven stated that:

\begin{quote}
The chiefs and warriors aforesaid, for themselves and tribes, stipulate to be active and vigilant in the preventing the retreating to, or passing through, the district of country assigned them, of any absconding slaves, or fugitives from justice; and further agree, to use all necessary exertions to apprehend and deliver the same to the agent, who shall receive orders to compensate them agreeably to the trouble and expense incurred.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

The requirements of Article Seven caused extreme tension between the Seminole Indians and slave owners of Florida. It also contributed to the increased strain between the Seminole Indians and the Seminole Maroons.

The creation of the origins myth as revealed in the 1820s provides insight into the existence of some internal conflict between the Seminole Indians and the Seminole Maroons. According to Alan Dundes, around 1823, Neamathla, the unofficial spokesperson for the Seminoles at the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, shared the following origins myth. No first hand account of Neamathla’s speech exists. Governor Duvall, who had his own agenda toward the Seminoles, recounted the episode, which was not written on paper until years following the signing of the treaty.

\textsuperscript{20} Morgan, *The Slave Counterpoint*, 477-480. Morgan demonstrates that European colonists in South Carolina devised in the early stages of colonization a divide-and-rule policy toward African and Native American interaction. On page 477 Morgan states that “whites recruited blacks to fend off Indian attacks and employed Indians to catch runaway slaves and to deter maroons.”

\textsuperscript{21} The Treaty of Moultrie Creek as found in Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, 21.
Treaty of Moultrie Creek. Neamathla supposedly quoted this myth during a speech in which he let the governor of Florida know that the Seminole Indians did not want their young to be educated by white men. The governor claimed that Neamathla learned this origins story from his forefathers.\textsuperscript{22}

Then the Master of Life said, we will make man. Man was made, but when he stood up before his maker, he was \textit{white}! The Great Spirit was sorry: he was that the being he had made was pale and weak; he took pity on him, and therefore did not unmake him, but let him live. He tried again, for he was determined to make a perfect man, but in his endeavor to avoid making another white man, he went into the opposite extreme, and when the second being rose up, and stood before him he was \textit{black}! The Great Spirit liked the black man less than the white, and he shoved him aside to make room for another trial. Then it was that he made the \textit{red man}; and the red man pleased him.\textsuperscript{23}

A Seminole Indian leader who resided near the Santa Fe River provided the following origins myth to a writer who published it in 1825:

The chief informed us that according to Indian traditions, the world was created by the Great Spirit; that he informed three, an Indian, a white, and a black man; the Indian was the most perfect: they were called into his presence, and directed to select their employments; the Indian chose a bow and arrow, the white man a book, and the negro a spade.\textsuperscript{24}

Even into the later years of the nineteenth century after the massive Seminole removal from Florida into Indian Territory, the myth still continued.

\textsuperscript{22}William G. McLoughlin, “A Note on African Sources of American Indian Racial Myths” \textit{The Journal of American Folklore} vol. 89 no. 353 (July-September 1976), 332; Sprague, \textit{The Origins, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War}, 21. Article Six of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek stipulated that the U.S. government would establish a school at the Seminole Indian Agency.


among the small groups of Seminole Indians still residing in the isolated
Everglades of Florida. Minnie More-Wilson included the following version
within her study of the Seminoles:

Long time ago, E-shock-e-tom-isee (God) took seeds and scattered them
all around in a rich valley bordering a river. By and by, God was fingers
coming out of the ground and great people- heap too many came up from
out of the sand. Some went to the river and washed, washed, washed too
much; it made them weak and pale; this was the es-ta-chat-tee (white
race). Others went to the river and washed not too much, they returned
full of courage, strong, heap; this was the es-ta-had-kee (red race). The
remainder no wash, lazy too much, es-ta-lus-tee (black man). 25

While these myths, in their various forms, obviously do not represent
original creation stories among the Indians of the Southeast, they provide insight
into the psyche of the Seminole Indians during the nineteenth century. Scholar
William McLoughlin argues that these origins myth helped the Seminole Indians
to protect themselves against white Southerners who would willingly impart
destruction upon the Seminoles for not maintaining “proper” race relations with
the Black Seminoles. In a highly racialized society, these origin myths solidified
a racial hierarchy among the Seminole Indians. Seminole Indians reinforced the
notion that Africans and their descendents were racially inferior. 26

The nature in which these myths were recorded leads one to question the
accuracy of these “origins” myths. All of these stories were either recorded or
published by whites, who very well could have been reinforcing their own
prejudices. The fact these three myths were told at different times over a large

25Minnie More-Wilson, The Seminoles of Florida (New York: Moffat Yard and
Company, 1910), 163.

span of years, indicates that the basis of the myths were part of an oral-tradition. There are two possible explanations regarding why Seminole Indians created these “origin” stories. First, the Seminoles repeated these myths to an audience that held specific racial ideologies as representative in these “origin” stories as a way to manipulate their relationship with whites at the expense of the Seminole Maroons. The Seminole Indians may have also created these stories as a spoof or satire of the rampant racism among white U.S. citizens.

*The Path to War: 1820s to the Second Seminole War*

As slave owners from bordering Southern states migrated into the fertile regions of Middle Florida and replicated the plantation-style social patterns associated with the *Old South*, conflict ensued between Native Americans and slave owners. Slaves from Florida and the surrounding states continued to flee to Indian lands in order to evade the Southern slave system. Although Article Seven in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek held the Seminole Indians accountable for the return of absconding slaves, the slaves did not always find their way back to their owners.²⁷

Slave owners continued to view the Seminole Indians as obstacles when attempting to reclaim slaves who sought refuge among the natives. In 1823, slave owners wrote a petition in the hopes of receiving aid in obtaining their absent slaves:

The Territory of Florida, whilst it was a possession of foreign nations, was a refuge, for fugitive slaves from, the United States, and particularly from

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the States of South Carolina and Georgia. That the property of this description, has at various times and to great amounts been allured from the possession of its rightful owners; or escaping voluntarily, has been protected and defended not only by the Indians, but by the Constituted authorities of the province; so that from the date of the Revolution up to the Change of Flags, it has been utterly impossible for your petitioners, and other Sufferers, to reclaim their property.  

Even after the transfer to U.S. ownership, it remained a challenge for slave owners to reclaim their runaways.

Days following the signing of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, Governor Duval wrote the Secretary of War requesting presidential permission to send forces into the southern reaches of the Peninsula to apprehend “fugitive slaves running at large.” According to Duval, Indians informed him that some fugitive slaves, “established themselves on Pine Island at the mouth of the Charlotte River, and are well armed with Spanish Muskets....” According to the information Duval acquired through unnamed Indians, the addition of a Spanish element to the Seminole Indian-black relationship compounded the paranoia of local slave owners. Slave owners viewed the Spanish in the Caribbean, especially Cuba, as a substantial threat. Southern whites did not want Spain to supply fugitive slaves with goods, such as arms.  

As the decade progressed, the Indian-black relationships in Florida continued to agitate Governor Duval. He believed that “the Slaves belonging to the Indians are a Serious nuisance, they have by their art and Cunning the entire Controll Over their Master.” Duval continues by stating, “the negros are a

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28 Ibid., 762-763.

29 Ibid., 744-745.
hostile to the white people and are Constantly Counteracting the advice and talks
given to the Indians.” Duval advocated for the Indians to sell their “slaves” for
the supposed betterment of their own lives.\textsuperscript{30}

A Memorial presented to the President of the United States in 1826 by
some residents near St. John’s River complained of Indians near the Alachua
region, “doing serious mischief to the Inhabitants by killing their cattle & hogs,
robbing their plantations, and enticing away their slaves.” Plantation owners
already worried about keeping their slaves from running away without direct
Seminole Indian assistance. Slave owners also had to worry about Indians
actively enticing their bondspeople to abscond.\textsuperscript{31}

White planters continued to criticize the inability of the government to
enforce Article Seven of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. A 1828 Report of
Legislative Council Committee on Indian Affairs provides another account of
settlers complaining about Indians harboring their slaves. According to the
report, “much complaint exists in the country, on account of the reluctance with
which runaway slaves among the Indian tribes have been surrendered by the
proper authorities to their lawful owners.” Article Seven remained an
unenforceable component of the 1823 treaty.\textsuperscript{32}

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\textsuperscript{30} Carter, \textit{The Territorial Papers}, vol. 23, 454.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 462-463.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 1003.
Throughout the 1820s, the presence of absconding slaves among the Seminole Indians remained a central issue in the Florida Territory. Undoubtedly, the Seminole Indians realized that slavery dictated their relationships with U.S. government officials and local citizens. Many disputes between slave owners and Indians went unresolved for the Seminole Indians often relied on former slaves as interpreters. Upon President Jackson’s passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, the slave owners of Florida had the justification they needed to remove the Seminole Indians. Porter claims that the Indian Removal Act devastated the Seminole Indians more so than the Treaty of Moultrie Creek or other previous acts of U.S. aggression. Unlike other Native Americans east of the Mississippi, the Seminole Indians were not forced to relocate due to their fertile lands, but due to their relationship with fugitive slaves and Seminole Maroons.

*The Second Seminole War as an African and Indian influenced conflict*

In 1832, the U.S. negotiated another treaty with the Seminole Indians. The Treaty of Payne’s Landing attempted to force the Seminole Indians to relocate to the Indian Territory within three years despite the fact that the Treaty of Moultrie Creek had a life span of twenty years. In this new treaty, the U.S. again attempted to sever ties between the Seminole Indians and the Seminole Maroons. A stipulation of Payne’s Landing states that a delegation of Seminole Indians would visit the Indian Territory and the Creek lands for inspection before relocation. If this delegation approved of the land choice, the Treaty of Payne’s

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Landing would be officially binding. Before their return to Florida, the delegation signed a supplementary treaty at Fort Gibson, thereby further ensuring the removal of the Seminole Indians from Florida. Upon their return to Florida, not all of the Seminole Indians recognized the power and authority of the delegation, and thus war erupted.\textsuperscript{35}

War ensued for various reasons including the opposition of many Seminole Indians who did not want to rejoin the Creek in Indian Territory and pressure from the Seminole Maroons. The Seminole Maroons played a central role in the war efforts, therefore leading some scholars, including Canter Brown, to refer to the Second Seminole War as the largest slave rebellion in the United States.\textsuperscript{36} Although the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons both fought against removal, the actions of the Seminole Maroons during the Second Seminole War drove a wedge between them and their Indian allies.

While the Second Seminole War did have elements of an Indian war, it also contained strong elements of a war against the Seminole Maroons and black resistance. Abraham, possibly once a runaway slave himself, acted as one of the leading black figures in the Second Seminole War. Once a “slave” of Micanopy, he received his freedom after accompanying a delegation of Seminole Indians to Washington, D.C. in 1826. Abraham also rose as one of Micanopy’s most trusted advisors. Mahon claims Abraham also worked with U.S. forces by supposedly

\textsuperscript{35}The Treaty of Payne’s Landing as found in Sprague, The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War, 72-76.

\textsuperscript{36}Brown, “Race Relations in Territorial Florida,” 304.
advocating removal among the Seminole Indians. However, just prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Abraham visited local plantations near the St. John’s River to persuade slaves to join the Seminole Maroon cause.\textsuperscript{37}

John Caesar and John Horse also became leading Seminole Maroons during the Second Seminole War. Just as Abraham gained the confidence of Micanopy, Caesar had the attention of the Seminole Indian leader, King Philip. Prior to the outbreak of war, Caesar worked with Abraham and the famed Seminole Indian fighter, Osceola, to prepare for resistance. Abraham and Caesar traveled to Florida plantations in order to entice more bondspeople to their cause. Seminole Maroons also had strong family ties with plantation slaves. Caesar had a wife and family still enslaved on several plantations. At the time of the outbreak of war, during Dade’s Massacre, a cohort of Indians and Seminole Maroons sacked plantations in eastern Florida, resulting in the addition of nearly 300 plantation slaves to the Seminole Maroon war effort.\textsuperscript{38}

The ambush of Dade’s troops, which resulted in the infamous massacre, officially started the Second Seminole War. A black interpreter named Luis Pacheco led Dade’s forces into the planned ambush near the Wahoo Swamp. As some thirty to fifty Seminole Maroons aided in the attack on Dade’s


forces, others sacked plantations. Pacheco’s actions provided further proof in the minds of the white settlers that they needed to be concerned about the ever present possibility of outright rebellion among all of Florida’s slaves.  

According to Alligator, a Seminole Indian war leader, the Seminole indians and Seminole Maroons planned and prepared for an attack for more than a year. The incident at Fort King in which Wiley Thompson restrained Osceola, possibly as a result of his wife’s abduction by slave catchers, spurred the Indians and Seminole Maroons to act immediately. Alligator asserted that Micanopy “fired the first rifle, the signal agreed upon, when every Indian arose and fired.” While Micanopy led the attack on Dade’s forces traveling from Fort Brooke to Fort King, Osceola led the attack that killed Indian Agent Thompson.  

Unlike the Seminole Maroons and slaves of Florida, when hostilities broke out approximately 500 Seminole Indians, out of an estimated population of 5,000, turned themselves into U.S. authorities rather than join the hostilities. The Seminole Maroons did not capitulate nearly in the same proportion as their Native American counterparts. Instead, the Seminole Maroons maintained the necessary momentum needed to resist removal. The Seminole Maroons not only risked the

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39Cohen, Notices of Florida, 71; Porter, Negroes and the Seminole War, 1835-1842

40Alligator’s account of Dade’s Massacre as found in Sprague, The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War, 90-91.
loss of property, but also the loss of their freedom. The opposing views of the Seminole Indians in relation to removal have further implications upon resettlement in Indian Territory.41

The Seminole Maroons also relied on the cooperation of free blacks for their cause, however the free blacks had much to lose. Due to the environment created by the Second Seminole War, lawmakers attempted to curb free black involvement in the hostilities via legislation. Usually, the Seminole Maroons depended on the free blacks as vital sources for information and ammunition. Unlike the Seminole Maroons, free blacks lived among or relatively close to white settlers. A number of free blacks in Florida received their freedom under Spanish rule and decided to remain in Florida following U.S. occupation. Free blacks may have been willing to aid the Seminole Maroon cause in this fashion due to their recent loss of rights. According to legislation, any free blacks assisting the war effort for the Seminole Maroons could be sold into slavery.42

In 1837, John Caesar led raids against plantations near St. John’s river. He organized his raiders into small groups of mostly runaway slaves who knew the terrain quite well. During one of these raiding expeditions, U.S. forces attacked the plunderers and killed John Caesar. As a result of the ambush, settlers


realized how involved their slaves were in the hostilities. A number of fugitive slaves joined Caesar’s raids and outnumbered the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons.  

Although the Seminole Indians also provided leadership as illustrated by Osceola and Wild Cat, the slave element remained a significant factor in the hostilities. By 1836, Major Benjamin A. Putnam, a commander in the Florida Militia, came to the same realization as Jessup when he wrote that:

Many have escaped to and joined the Indians, and furnished them with much important information and if strong measures were not taken to restrain our slaves, there is but little doubt that we should soon be assailed with a servile as well as Indian War.

Indian removal definitely constituted an aspect of the Second Seminole War, but military figures, such as Putnam and Jessup, also realized the threat this war had on the stability of the institution of slavery. Jessup attempted to end the hostilities by enforcing a total destruction policy. Under this policy Jessup ordered seek, destroy, and capture missions aimed at any Seminole Indians, Seminole Maroons, and absconding slaves found obstructing the removal process.

By 1837, General Jessup and the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons negotiated the Fort Dade Capitulation. According to this agreement, the Seminole Indians agreed to move west. Article Five ensured the Seminole Indians that the U.S. would secure the passage of the Seminole Indians and their “their negroes,

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43Porter, A Freedom Seeking People, 73-74.


their bona fide property.” Upon this agreement, Jessup believed the hostilities came to a close, however not everyone agreed to the capitulation. The negotiations at Fort Dade caused further rifts between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons, for the capitulation called for the return of runaway slaves.46

Slave owners contested the removal of the Seminole Maroons and slaves who participated in the war. Forcing Seminole Maroons or any slave accomplices into the plantation system imposed a threatening element upon the “stability” of slavery in Florida. The Seminole Maroons, if enslaved by white owners, posed a possible threat to the perceived security of the plantation slave system, for they knew relative freedom and had experience in warfare. However, some slave owners chose a cheap supply of slaves despite the dangers that it posed to the institution of slavery. In 1828, Duval already complained about the slave owners sending the worst elements of bondspeople south to Florida. Jessup ordered the removal of the black forces to Indian Territory with the Indians in order to bring closure to the war.47

The U.S. attempts to implement divide-and-rule policies failed to completely break the relationship between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons. However, the tactics the U.S. employed did cause strain and internal conflict within the Seminole Indian-Maroon relationship. The tension in Seminole Indian-black relations that commenced during the 1820s continued to

46The Fort Dade Capitulation as found in Sprague, The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War, 177-178; Porter, A Freedom Seeking People, 81.

deteriorate following the Second Seminole War. Some Seminole Indians felt that the Seminole Maroons caused the turmoil of the Second Seminole War and removal. Some Indians even believed that the interpreters used them to meet specific Seminole Maroon objectives. In the process of settling in Indian Territory, the Seminole Indians separated into roughly two groups, those who wanted to enforce slavery and those who wanted to rebuild the Indian-black relations that started in Florida. This schism initiated another chapter of Seminole-black relations, with many Seminole Maroons relocating to Mexico and Texas, where they became the famous Indian Scouts.\footnote{Mulroy, \textit{A Freedom Seeking People}, 52, 58-60.}
CONCLUSION

European encroachment and colonization of the New World dramatically influenced the lives of the Native Americans who resided in the Americas and the Africans imported as slaves. In the North American Southeast, Spain and Britain competed for the control of the region. Fierce imperial rivalry coupled with the presence of settler colonies forced numerous Native American settlements to align with foreign powers. Both Native Americans and African learned how to maneuver within this environment in order to create a space of their own to control. Southeastern Native Americans moved to the vacant buffer zone in Northern Florida, while slaves fled to establish maroon settlements or live under Spanish sanctuary.

By the onset of the nineteenth century, as colonialism came to an end in the present-day United States, the Seminole Indians and African/African-descended slaves forged social and political relationships to help preserve their cultures and societies. The presence of this interaction between the Seminole Indians and bondspeople, mostly from Georgia and South Carolina plantations,
resulted in numerous violent outbursts including the Patriot Rebellion/War, the
destruction of the black fort at Prospect Bluff, the First Seminole War, and the
Second Seminole War.

A hybrid culture formed when absconding slaves sought refuge among the
Seminole Indians of Florida. Some scholars including Kenneth Porter, refer to
those who embodied this new culture as Black Seminole. However, Seminole
Maroon better describes the phase of contact and interaction between the Africans
and Seminole Indians from the late eighteenth century to removal to Indian
Territory in the 1830s and 1840s. To emphasize the maroon nature of these black
settlements reinforces the contention that they were not slaves to Seminole
Indians. As demonstrated throughout this analysis, both groups relied on each
other and created a reciprocal relationship based on survival and protection
against U.S. aggression. The rate of incoming fugitive slaves to the Seminole
Maroon settlements kept the Black Seminoles grounded in their enslaved and
African past. Continually referring to this group as Black Seminoles largely
ignores the significance of the Seminoles Maroons’ African-based heritage.
While these two entities participated in a cultural exchange, they can not be
conflated as a single people. Inequalities did exist in this relationship, which
provided the foundation for their relationship following removal from Florida.¹

¹Chambers “Ethnicity in the Diaspora,” 27-28; Michael Gomez, Exchanging Our
Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South
(Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 165-174. Gomez argues that survival of
the Middle Passage constituted on of the foundational elements in the forging of an African and
then African American identity. The conflict that ensued in Florida prior to removal west acted in
a similar fashion in the forging of a Black Seminole Identity from a Seminole Maroon identity.
The Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons needed to rely upon one another in order to fend off U.S. encroachment upon Seminole land and culture, and to ensure the freedom of the Seminole Maroons. As U.S. planters in Florida continually used the slave presence among the Seminole Indians as reason to enforce removal, relationships between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons grew tenuous. As the nineteenth century progressed, factions among the Seminole Indians started to blame the presence of the Seminole Maroons for their declining living conditions and the continual encroachment upon their lands. These feelings manifested into a schism following removal.\(^2\)

Upon removal, some Seminole Indians felt pressured to conform to Creek standards regarding race relations. The Creek unlike the Seminole Indians practiced racialized slavery. In Indian Territory, some Seminole Indians feared the Creek, for they attempted to force some of the Seminole Maroons into a state of slavery. In order to avoid hostility from the Creek, some factions among the Seminole Indians chose to accept racial slavery and enforce it upon the Seminole Maroons. The Seminole Indians just endured the consequences of one aggressor, the U.S., not to replace it with another, the Creek. Those who did not embrace racial slavery, but preferred to rebuild former relationships with the Seminole Maroons broke away from the Indian Territory and relocated to Mexico and Texas.\(^3\)

\(^{2}\)Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 57-60; Porter, *A Freedom Seeking People*, 111-136; Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles*, 98-119. In each of these works, the authors focus much of their attention on post removal to Indian Territory rather than on the years in Florida.
The Seminole Maroon experiences created a lasting legacy in U.S. history. Descendants of the Florida Maroons currently reside in Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and even Florida. Even in 1936, Frank Berry’s connection to the history of the Seminole Maroons constituted a significant part of his WPA account. Frank Berry’s family legacy demonstrates how interwoven Seminole Indian-Black Maroon relationship is. Despite the schism that developed between the Seminole Indians and Seminole Maroons, to fully understand their histories scholars need to evaluate both groups in tandem.4

3Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 61-70; Porter, A Freedom Seeking People, 137-159. Both works provide detailed accounts of the migration to Mexico and Texas where the Black Seminoles became renowned Indian scouts.

4Mulroy, Freedom on the Border, 1-6; Rawick, Florida narratives, 27-31
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