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Kevin Kokomoor



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A Re-assessment of Seminoles, Africans, and Slavery on the Florida Frontier

by Kevin Kokomoor

Recently, the focus on slavery within native societies has benefited from a great deal of scholarly attention, and several influential volumes have examined slavery as it existed within a number of southern tribes, including Cherokees, Chickasaws and Choctaws, Creeks, and particularly Seminoles.¹ In other studies, historians have focused on the phenomenon of “marronage,” experiences that “can be seen to hold a special significance for the

Kevin Kokomoor is a Ph.D. student at Florida State University studying early American history. The author wishes to thank Dr. John M. Belohlavek at the University of South Florida and Dr. Andrew K. Frank at Florida State University for their support and assistance in completing this manuscript.

1. For a general appraisal, see William G. McLoughlin, “Red Indians, Black Slavery and White Racism: America’s Slaveholding Indians.” *American Quarterly*, 26 (October 1974). Excepting Seminoles, the most influential examples of scholarship dealing with slavery and native societies consider the Cherokee and Creek nations. These include: Fay A. Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Patrick N. Mingos, *Slavery in the Cherokee Nation: The Keetoowah Society and the Defining of a People, 1855-1867* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003); R. Halliburton, Jr., *Red Over Black: Black Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Katja May, *African Americans and Native Americans in the Creek and Cherokee Nations, 1830s to 1920s: Collision and Collusion* Studies in African American History and Culture (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996); Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Esteluvste and the Creek Nation Race and Culture in the American West Series*, vol. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007)

study of slave societies.”² Eugene Genovese, for instance, suggested that some Indian communities were “utterly transformed by the entrance of large numbers of blacks,” a phenomenon that although not widespread, resonated deeply in the Florida territory.³ Experts in the colonial Spanish era have remarked with interest not only on the ways in which the Spanish treated Africans, but also the ways Africans and Seminoles came together in common defense when protecting what was essentially a Spanish buffer zone in north Florida. Historians of slavery have contended that Florida’s harsh experiences with the institution came in response to the threat posed by their combined presence. And lastly, those focusing on Seminole history have contended that the First and Second Seminole Wars—the second a remarkably costly affair—were actually a direct result.⁴

2. Richard Price loosely defined marronage as runaway slave communities that “dotted the fringes of plantation America, from Brazil to the Southeastern United States, from Peru to the American Southwest.” They were societies that “ranged from tiny bands that survived less than a year to powerful states encompassing thousands of members and surviving for generations or centuries.” Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1-2. See also: David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, eds., *Neither Slave nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 1; Melville J. Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1958, [1941]), xix.
3. Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 75.
4. For scholarship on the Colonial Spanish period, see Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas*, Studies in African American History and Culture (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). For Black Seminoles in relation to slavery in Florida: Kevin Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007) and *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People*, revised and edited by Alcione M. Amos and Thomas P. Senter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996) and *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York: Arno Press, 1971); Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), and Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973). For arguments that deal specifically with the connection between runaways, Seminoles, and slave codes, see Canter Brown, Jr., “Race Relations in Territorial Florida, 1821-1845,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (January 1995): 287-307. For studies of Seminole culture and of the Seminole Wars: Brent Weisman, *Unconquered*

In all of these historians' exposition, however, the most contested efforts are still those that have attempted to illustrate to what length Africans, claimed as slaves, actually represented bondsmen in Seminole country. On the one hand, various scholars from across the profession have contributed to an increasingly clearer understanding of this dynamic and many times hazy relationship. On the other, as this paper suggests, the majority of the most vigorous studies have come from specialists of the African American experience, or of slavery generally.⁵ Their evaluations of blacks in the territory stress maroon identities, cultural autonomy, and an African tradition. As a result, however, they minimize cultural interaction with Natives, eschewing what one scholar has considered Africans' remarkable ability to "adapt effectively to uncertain environments" by blending with Seminoles culturally, politically, and militarily.⁶ An extreme example of this trend in scholarship is Kevin Mulroy's recently published *The Seminole Freedmen*, where the author maintains that those we now consider Black Seminoles are in fact "not today and never were Seminole Indian."⁷ Instead, they developed as independent maroon communities who occasionally allied with, but for the most part lived in parallel to, Seminoles in colonial and territorial Florida. While this interpretation was developed early and briefly as the foundation for Mulroy's larger treatment of Seminole Freedmen in the post removal West, his assessment of Africans in early colonial and territorial Florida shares a great deal with the analytical conclusions of other historians, choosing to focus on Africans independent of Natives, rather than telling their story in Florida as one component of a larger Seminole one.

People: Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999) and *Like Beads on a String: A Culture History of the Seminole Indians in Northern Peninsular Florida* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989); J. Leitch Wright, *The Only Land They Knew: The Tragic Story of the American Indians in the Old South* (New York: Free Press, 1981), and *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Edwin McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957); John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict*, The Florida History and Culture Series (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1985, [1967]).

5. For an example of these types of historians, see Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, Mulroy, *Seminole Freedmen*, and Porter, *Negro on the American Frontier*.
6. Melinda Beth Micco, "Freedmen and Seminoles: Forging a Seminole Nation," (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1995), 22.
7. Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen*, xxv.

According to this methodology, maroons, escaped slaves, and other Africans lived in proximity to Seminoles, but sought to remain culturally and politically autonomous. This paper argues that while such a thesis may be an enticing alternative to others that place considerable weight on cultural adoption by Africans of Seminole traditions, it reconstructs the historical account of Native-black interaction by overemphasizing a handful of culturally African retentions while ignoring the multitude of Indigenous influences—to say nothing of the ways African traditions influenced Seminole ones. Culturally African or maroon traditions are maximized, and Seminole ones are marginalized. Once entrenched assumptions concerning intermarriage and adoption are questioned or reversed, while military alliances are denied long-term societal consequences. While such an argument places unprecedented agency in the hands of Africans, to deny the inextricably close connections bridging two groups, and to attempt to tell the larger Seminole story without “both strands of its culture,” one scholar has agreed, “amounts to obscuring reality.”⁸

A number of specific examples evince this methodology, and many clearly draw upon Creek and Seminole cultural traditions. First, agriculture and tribute must be reexamined using a Native model, not one based on the institution of southern plantation slavery. The observations that many historians have relied on must be examined outside their authors’ prejudices and placed in a more explanatory, Seminole context. Similarly, Native traditions of bondage, captivity, clan and community ownership must replace charges of slavery that conflate Seminole customs with European ones. Next, cultural, societal, and physical similarities between Seminoles and maroons, including religion and dress but particularly intermarriage, also need to be reevaluated using Creek precedents. And finally, political and military alliances—historically the most self-evident connections between the two groups—must be re-examined and reasserted. In short, by examining the sources with an eye on Native traditions, rather than European or even Caribbean ones, we can glean an even more accurate account of Africans in Seminole country.

One of the countless commentators in Seminole country during the Second Seminole War, John Sprague, noted that culturally, Seminoles treated the blacks under their control strikingly

8. Micco, “Freedmen and Seminoles,” 20.

different than did whites in the territory. "Sometimes they became free allies," he wrote, "sometimes slaves...but if they were slaves, the bondage was much lighter than that enforced by white men."⁹ Decades later Ohio abolitionist Joshua Giddings advocated likewise, noticing of the Seminoles that "they held their slaves in a state between that of servitude and freedom; the slave usually living with his own family and occupying his time as he pleased."¹⁰ Insight into the exact place these blacks shared seems widespread in observations throughout the nation and through decades of travel; examples can be found in journals, correspondences, and memoirs. In one of the more general and informative accounts, for instance, Seminole Indian Agent Wiley Thompson explained in 1835 that:

"They live in villages separate, and, in many cases, remote from their owners, and enjoying equal liberty with their owners, with the single exception that the slave supplies his owner, annually, from the product of his little field, with corn, in proportion to the amount of the crop; and in no instance, that has come to my knowledge, exceeding ten bushels; the residence is considered the property of the slave. Many of these slaves have stocks of horses, cows, and hogs, with which the Indian owner never assumes the right to intermeddle."¹¹

General George McCall recalled similar examples almost a decade earlier while on his own tour of Seminole country in 1826. He visited one of the territory's sizable black settlements, Peliklikaha, and described its inhabitants as a group of "runaway slaves from Georgia, who have put themselves under the protection of Micanopy, or some other chief, whom they call master." Speaking in the language of masters and slaves, McCall explained how blacks possessed large fields "of the finest land," and pro-

9. John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964, [1848]), xxv.

10. Joshua Giddings, *The Florida Exiles and the War for Slavery* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964, [1858]), 79. For more examples, see McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 21; Mark Van Doren, ed., *The Travels of William Bartram* (New York: Dover, 1928), 183; Clarence E. Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956-1962), 22: 857. Hereafter, *TP*.

11. *American State Papers: Military Affairs* (Washington D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1832-1860), 6: 533. Hereafter, *ASPM*.

duced large crops of corn, beans, melons, etc. Still, they rendered a tribute to the chief of their associated settlement, and a portion of the livestock or wild game they accumulated. "Otherwise, they are free to go and come at pleasure, and in some cases are elevated to the position of equality with their masters." Even their houses, in some instances, were larger and more comfortable than Indian homes. Likewise, Seminole Indian Agent Gad Humphreys noted in 1827 that "the Negroes of the Seminole Indians, are wholly independent, or at least regardless of the authority of their masters...they work only when it suits their inclination and are their own judges, as to what portion, of the products of their labour, shall go to their owners'." Their habits were with few exceptions, the agent concluded, "indolent in the extreme."¹²

Numerous others noted similarly: for the most part, blacks lived independently, "and enjoy an equal share of liberty." They managed their stocks and crops, "as they pleased," giving what share to village chiefs as they thought proper. "In the case of the [Indian] Negroes," another suggested, "though comparatively civilized, in their manners pursue pretty much the same mode of life as their owners." They never furnished the Indians with any surpluses other than for consumption, "dwell in towns apart from the Indians," and, one observer concluded, "are the finest looking people I have ever seen." Their life was, compared to that associated with plantation slavery, "of luxury and ease." Missionary Jedidiah Morse even shared the paradox of his illustrations. He recognized them as "negro slaves," yet admitted that in Seminole country they lived separately, farmed for their own subsistence, and, only if they had surplus, did it go toward their Indian "masters."¹³

12. George A. McCall, *Letters From the Frontiers* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974, [1868]), 160; TP, 23: 911.
13. William H. Simmons, *Notices of East Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973, [1822]), 76; Woodburne Potter, *The War in Florida* (Anne Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 45-46; Jedidiah Morse, *Report to the Secretary of War* (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1822), 309.
14. For examples of these passages, see: McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 21; Mark Van Doren, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 183; John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964, c1848), xxv; Giddings, *The Florida Exiles*, 79; TP, 22: 857.

As these passages suggest, soldiers, missionaries, and even abolitionists used the language of slavery to describe relationships that clearly seemed paradoxical.¹⁴ Indeed, most misunderstood these relationships in similar ways, trying to make the Seminole model fit their own conceptions of southern, chattel slavery. Perhaps by reexamining those relationships from the position of Native agricultural traditions, historians can arrive at an explanation that seems less contradictory.

First, we can surmise a great deal about various Seminole traditions evident in black settlements. Take, for instance, planting and harvesting, and the giving of tribute. We can gather that the amounts of agricultural surpluses given by Africans to Seminoles were in all cases very small, given in an almost salutary way, and can be best understood perhaps as a sign of friendship, loyalty, or in the case of McCall at Peliklikaha, for ensuring a mutual protection against American expansionists. The giving of gifts between otherwise autonomous Creek towns served all of these functions, and it seems clear that the tradition was adopted to include African and Seminole settlements.¹⁵ What also becomes apparent are the culturally loaded suggestions of the authors. Most observers were unable to comprehend the lack of bondage they witnessed in the territory, regardless of whether they observed groups of blacks who they thought were directly under the control of Seminole chiefs, or on autonomous farms. Visitors clearly thought and spoke in the language of southern plantation slavery, and adapted its parlance to explain agricultural relationships that were not similar.

Specifically regarding "tribute," their words have been taken far too literally. Preconceptions regarding Africans and agricultural work informed onlookers' judgments, and based on those accounts, historians have been too willing to force black agricultural production into the more commonly recognized southern plantation paradigm without asking why. It has been argued, for instance, that a "Seminole slave-owning elite" coerced or capitalized on the production of black laborers in the Florida territory for the purposes of creating surpluses for trade or monetary gain, and

15. For examples of these traditions, see John E. Worth, "Spanish Missions and the Persistence of Chiefly Power," in Robbie Ethridge and Charles Hudson, eds., *The Transformation of the Southeastern Indians, 1540-1760* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

observable contributions are labeled tributes, and given as evidence.¹⁶ From a Native perspective, however, these offerings mirror the communal tribute systems normally expected of all Indians in Creek and Seminole tribes; indeed, they illustrate agricultural traditions present in the southeast for generations. Rather than approach black agricultural participation as payment to any single Seminole (and as such, as an exploitative relationship), the evidence suggests that blacks were only contributing to larger Seminole settlements, or talwas, in traditional ways.¹⁷

16. Mulroy, *Seminole Freedmen*, 24-25. Kevin Mulroy asserts this connection and pins much of his argument on Brent Weisman's archeological findings at Seminole sites: Brent R. Weisman, "The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole Indians and black Seminoles during the Colonial Era," in Jane Landers, ed., *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 136, 141-146. There he finds European artifacts that allegedly "attest to the economic integration and success of the Seminoles during the colonial era." He places Africans in that integration as contributors by virtue of their labor and the agricultural excesses they created for Seminole chiefs. Agriculture excess was transformed through trade into material wealth, and that can be viewed by archeological evidence. The problem with this interpretation is that more recent excavations have taken place at Peliklikaha, a large Black Seminole settlement in central Florida. There archaeologist Terry Weik uncovered many of the same material objects noted in Weisman's excavation. Thus, much of the material wealth seen in Seminole villages can also be seen in strictly African settlements, weakening the argument that chiefs acquired this form of wealth through to efforts of Black Seminoles. This research is visible in Jane Landers, "A Nation Divided?: Blood Seminoles and Black Seminoles on the Florida Frontier," in Richard F. Brown, ed., *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 115.
17. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 73-74; James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 6. When Bartram visited Creek and Seminole country in the late eighteenth century, for instance, he observed a large enclosed field in the center of town, which he explained as their common plantation, "and the whole town plants in one vast field together." After the crops had been harvested, the town assembled and each man carried off his allotment, but not before depositing a small amount into a large crib or granary, under the control of the chief, or *micco*. Although it would seem like a tribute, Bartram explained, it was, in fact, a contribution to a public treasury, supplied by volunteers, from which every citizen had a right to access. The crib accommodated strangers or travelers, other towns' needs, emergencies, etc. Otherwise, it was at the community's disposal, under the direction of the chief. See: Doren, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 400-401. Earlier generations of Florida Indians had governed themselves in a similar way—historian Amy Turner Bushnell understood one derivative as the "sabana system," and what John Worth also examined in "frontier chiefdoms." By helping assert the traditions that became Creek and then ultimately Seminole, their work not only helps chart the tribute system as it developed

Within this larger context of communal farming traditions among the Natives of the southeast, it is much easier to agree with the assertion that Seminoles, unlike frontiersmen or even other southern tribes, "neither acquired the structure of that on plantations."¹⁸ Instead, Africans incorporated themselves into Indian agricultural systems whether they lived in Seminole villages or independently, and contributed to the common good of their local settlements in ways all Natives had done for generations. Furthermore, large-scale agricultural development in Creek country, Kathryn Braund has argued, was not as promising as those of tribes farther north. As a result of environmental factors, Creek settlements, like later Seminole ones, existed in small, autonomous bands that subsisted equally on farming and hunting. Here both agriculture and slavery developed very differently than in Georgia or South Carolina. In fact, the establishment of plantation slavery there both scared and threatened large numbers of Creeks in philosophical ways that had deeply divisive consequences.¹⁹ Instead, Creek owners simply asked the Africans among them to participate in the same communal style agriculture as was practiced by all families in their villages. Additionally, blacks were also asked to hunt, tend cattle, clear fields, and build—all the traditional gendered activities that constituted a Creek community. "One thing is certain—black slaves among the Creeks were allowed more freedom and were subjugated to less abuse than among white slave owners."²⁰

These relations were most likely those William Bartram recognized in his late-eighteenth-century travels, along with countless other visitors who passed through Florida during the early nine-

in the Native southeast, but also explains the ease in which new populations like Africans could have integrated themselves into such a dynamic system. These relationships place blacks' agricultural contributions in their proper context. See: Amy Turner Bushnell, "Ruling 'the Republic of Indians' in Seventeenth-Century Florida," in Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, M. Thomas Hatley, eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 140-142; and Worth, "Spanish Missions and the Persistence of Chieftly Power."

18. Micco, "Freedmen and Seminoles," 19.

19. For this argument, consult Claudio Saunt, "The English Has Now a Mind to Make Slaves of Them All": Creeks, Seminoles, and the Problem of Slavery," *American Indian Quarterly* 22 (1998): 157-180.

20. Doren, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 400, 401; Kathryn E. H. Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," *Journal of Southern History* 57 (November 1991): 622.

teenth century. Blacks were allowed—even expected—to contribute, and strong cultural arguments have been made that the “surplus paid” by these Black Seminoles were the same contributions which would have been expected of anyone—“slave” or free—living in Seminole country, and not simply work realized by a slave owner. Should Seminole chiefs decide to use surpluses as trade or purchasing power, those surpluses came from all in the community, not just from coerced African laborers. Even when they planted separately, blacks contributed in tribal economic traditions as Seminoles.²¹

Similarly, it has been argued that Seminoles in positions of wealth traded for or otherwise acquired large numbers of slaves. According to this argument, some chiefs at one time or another held large numbers of slaves, and in doing so, were slave-owners in the more recognizable, southern-oriented fashion. Large sums of money, in fact, may have traded hands when purchasing slaves in the pre-territorial period.²² The first dilemma with this interpretation of captivity again denies the close ties Seminole traditions shared with Creek ones in their dealings with captives. The Native southeast includes a long history of enslavement for profit, and raids throughout present day Georgia and Florida illustrate that Creeks, like other regional tribes, had no problem enslaving and then selling captured natives—most frequently to the British.²³ With such an understanding, it can be argued persuasively that Seminoles dealt with blacks as they and their ancestors had dealt with Indian and even white captives for generations. From sources which place these raids and sales in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century north Florida, it can be convincingly argued that Seminoles did not categorically target Africans solely because of their skin color or worth as laborers—in many instances they killed blacks in the same raids that killed whites. While they did not hesitate to steal, sell, and buy slaves, it is only because they had dealt similarly with Natives in the past.²⁴

21. Bushnell, “Ruling the Republic of Indians,” 140-142; Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 7-8; Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 76.

22. Mulroy, *Seminole Freedmen*, 12.

23. See, for example: Allan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

24. For an example of seized slaves being traded, see Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 211-212.

Tribal adoption as a possible outcome of capture has similarly been overlooked. In Creek society, warriors tortured and killed male captives for ceremonial and religious purposes, regardless of ethnicity. In other instances, they were adopted into Native clans and hence, into their communities. As William Bartram observed of this second group, slaves, "both male and female, are permitted to marry amongst them: their children are free, and considered in every respect equal to themselves..."²⁵ Seminoles' treatment of captives mirrored these traditions closely. As historian Edwin McReynolds suggested, for instance, Seminoles were similarly merciful to vanquished enemies and spared many of their lives, choosing instead to enslave them and eventually assimilate. Conquered Yemasee Indians were visible to Bartram as he moved through stretches of Creek and Seminole country, where he noticed "in every town...more or less...captives, some extremely aged, who were free and in as good circumstances as their masters."²⁶

However, Africans being sold or traded to prominent Seminoles has been fairly well documented, and its frequency, although truly infrequent, must be examined. This concept alone has led a number of historians to suggest that Seminoles were in fact closer to the traditional slaveholder than has been argued.²⁷ As contemporary observers and these historians have noted, after all, wealthier chiefs occasionally purchased slaves of Europeans, traded for them, or received them as gifts. Some owned upwards of twenty or more. At face value, it is reasonable to conclude that because Seminoles acquired blacks, they were traditional slaveholders.

Further interpreting this phenomenon, some historians have suggested that Seminoles purchased slaves simply for novelty of their possession. Once in ownership, one historian has argued,

25. John Walton Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), 159.; Doren, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 167; Milton Meltzer, *Hunted Like a Wolf: The Story of the Seminole War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 38. For more information on the practices of Creeks relative to captives and slavery, consult Christina Snyder, "Conquered Enemies, Adopted Kin, and Owned People: The Creek Indians and Their Captives," *Journal of Southern History* 73 (May 2007): 255-288; and Micco, "Freedmen and Seminoles," 18.

26. McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 21, 74; Doren, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 164, 183; See also Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 57.

27. Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 44.

Seminoles "were rather at a loss to know what benefit they were supposed to derive from them, since they had no intention of devoting their lives to the management of slaves."²⁸ While these explanations attempt to explain away the purchasing of slave, a more meaningful interpretation considers the necessities of life in Indian country. In most cases slaves were not acquired with cash. Instead, they were exchanged for surplus goods, such as cattle. Rather than acquiring laborers or chattel, perhaps Seminole chiefs were simply trading, and in doing so, supplementing their populations and agricultural possibilities using surpluses at hand. Blacks—whether runaways or legitimately bought—were specialists in a number of ways. Kenneth Wiggins Porter surely understood this, explaining that blacks were actually "frontiersmen *par excellence*: as runaways and rebels, settlers, town founders, military colonists, hunters, stockraisers, farmers, scouts, guides, interpreters, and, above all, fighting men." Rather than viewing them as convenient for Seminole aggrandizement, we should be viewing Africans as the key to Seminole survival. For a Seminole community constantly moving into new territories and faced with new agricultural demands, would Africans—particularly runaway slaves—not hold the key to adaptation? Natives did not simply enjoy the fruits of their labor, they depended on African resources for endurance in a life of almost constant struggle.²⁹

Even when slaves were at one time or another sold to Seminoles, the treatment they received in their new locations also illustrates the developing significance of their relationships. Only seldom did Seminoles sell any of their slaves when they had them, and frequently Natives scorned those who did. As one observer noted, "only the sternest necessity alone would drive him to the parting."³⁰ "Though hunger and want be stronger than even the *sacra funes auri*," another elaborated, "the greatest pressure of these evils, never occasions them to impose onerous labours on the

28. Giddings, *The Florida Exiles and the War for Slavery*, 79; Charles H. Coe, *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974, c1898), 41; Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier*, 186-187.

29. Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier*, xi, xiii; also quoted in Micco, "Freedmen and Seminoles," 67; Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 50-52; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 134-135.

30. John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1962, [1837]), 239-240.

Negroes, or to dispose of them, though tempted by high offers, if the latter are unwilling to be sold." Perhaps chiefs bought slaves legally, but titles hardly ever changed their relationships. Indian Agent Wiley Thompson, for instance, concluded that a Seminole "would almost as soon sell his child as his slave."³¹

Chief John Hicks, for instance, complained of a slave claim held against one of his blacks, that even though the nation released the African for trial, they felt coerced. "He is not a run-away," Hicks charged, "but was raised in the nation, out of which he has never been." A fellow Seminole protected the boy, who resided in the nation and had been raised by an Indian family. In another claim, Hicks demanded the return of an African girl claimed by his daughter, adding that she had a husband in the nation and "a child about a year old...I suppose that by this time she has two children."³² After the outbreak of hostilities, in 1836, a friendly and well-respected chief on the Apalachicola River had slaves stolen from him by Georgian slave raiders, and petitioned the government for indemnification. Of the twenty slaves stolen, Chief E. Conchattamico complained, a great number of them "were born in my possession," and the older ones had been with him for more than twenty years. While this chief recognized their combined value at \$15,000, one contemporary later recognized that group of slaves and chiefs as refusing to emigrate for fear of being separated.³³ Such a group, it seems plausible, was held together by more than a chief's desire for agricultural surplus. As citizens countered, chiefs like this man simply claimed the blacks living with them as slaves, in an effort to protect them from their former owners—or in this chief's case, from a band of particularly avaricious slave raiders. Could the capture, buying, and selling of Africans, and their presence in the territory be an extension of Creek traditions, or did Seminoles reject those customs and embrace a system of chattel slavery based simply on economic profit? From the available evidence, and in consideration of the Creek and Seminole traditions that persisted in the Florida territory, chattel slavery seems the least likely explanation.

31. Potter, *The War in Florida*, 45-46; Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 50; ASPMA 6: 533-534.

32. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, 57, 60, 66; TP, 22: 762-763.

33. ASPMA, 6: 461-464; Giddings, *The Florida Exiles*, 74-75.

Social interactions outside of land ownership and economic contribution also give evidence to the dynamic and intimate relationships these two groups shared, particularly concerning the concept of race as it applied to both Creek and Seminole traditions of kinship and adoption. In Creek culture, for instance, not only did the majority of racially mixed offspring born of Creeks suffer little or no racial discrimination, they were usually regarded as Creek regardless of their parents' race or nationality.³⁴ "Throughout their pre-removal history in Georgia, Florida, and Alabama," one historian elaborated, "Creek Indians welcomed countless African, native, and European outsiders into their villages. Creeks often took the newcomers as spouses and occasionally adopted others into their families."³⁵ Likewise, in Seminole societies, as William Bartram witnessed, enslavement usually bore the same result. At least at the end of the eighteenth century, "All slaves have their freedom when they marry, which is permitted and encouraged, when they and their offspring are...upon an equality with their conquerors."³⁶

Both tribes seem to have shared the same practice among Indian captives, and at least for a short period, among Africans as well. The first step to adoption in these societies, Claudio Saunt asserted, was clan ownership—what other contemporaries as well as recent historians may have mistaken for private ownership.³⁷ Where Creeks began dismantling that tradition in the nineteenth century, Seminoles did not; intermarriage was still a visible tradition in Seminole society until removal. As a result, as historians John and Mary Lou Missall have commented, "Many...blacks were close friends and, through intermarriage, relations to the Indians." To the Indians, they continued, "a person of mixed blood was an 'Indian,' whether a portion of that blood was black or white."³⁸

Many prominent and visible Seminoles in fact were intermarrying, and miscegenation was apparently common. Chief Micanopy had an African wife, and it was reported that the widow of another prominent chief married a runaway. James Factor,

34. Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," 615. See also: Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, ch. 3.

35. Andrew K. Frank, *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 11.

36. Doren, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 183.

37. Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 134.

38. Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 86.

regarded as a "prominent Seminole or Creek,"³⁹ had a black spouse as well. In a letter to Governor Duval in 1823, Indian Sub Agent Oren Marsh noted payment to a delegation of Seminole or Creek chiefs, that included one "colour'd or mixed blooded one."⁴⁰ Furthermore, the prominent Seminole blacks Abraham and John Hicks were also known to have had Indian wives. A number of slaves on East Florida plantations "had wives among the Indian Negroes, and the Indian Negroes had wives among them," another report noted.⁴¹

The cultural ramifications associated with intermarriage could be significant, and in attempting to construct an autonomous maroon identity, these relationships have been marginalized as resourcefully as possible. Kevin Mulroy, for instance, has insisted upon creating a social identity for the Africans in Florida that closely mirrored isolated maroon communities in the Caribbean that had historically lower occurrences of Native and African intermixing, including Jamaica or Haiti, while eschewing the large mestizo populations of other similar settlements throughout central America.⁴² "Intermarriage between Africans and Seminoles certainly took place," This scholar has asserted, "but not to the extent that has been claimed..." Offspring were not always born into these systems of equality, and marriage seldom signaled adoption into Seminole towns and society. Furthermore, Africans were never fully functioning members of Seminole society; and, apparently, only a few seemed to have been "included in Indian clans or towns, the mainstays of Seminole social organization." To be excluded from these social connections meant being excluded from society. According to this argument, the evidence suggests instead that "Seminoles restricted adoption into their towns, or bands, to a small elite group of maroon leaders." They did adopt some blacks into their clans, as they had earlier with enslaved Indians," but, in conclusion, "such occurrences appear to have been exceptional."⁴³

39. Kenneth Wiggins Porter, "Relations Between Negroes and Indians Within the Present Limits of the United States: Relations in the South," *Journal of Negro History* 17 (July 1932): 325-326.

40. *TP*, 24: 233.

41. Giddings, *The Florida Exiles*, 74-75; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 80; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 196.

42. Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 25; Micco, "Freedmen and Seminoles," 52.

43. Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 20-22; Mulroy, *Seminole Freedmen*, 7, 30-31.

This argument assumes that the cases of Abraham, John Hicks, Osceola, or Factor, among other powerful Seminoles, constituted the entirety of circumstances in which intermarriage occurred, or those instances in which blacks were incorporated into the social fabric of Seminole villages. The historical record, on the other hand, suggests a much more widespread tradition: rather than restricting intermarriage, adoption, and racial equality to "elite" groups of maroon leaders, these phenomena were much more wholesale, particularly as slaves became more numerous on Florida plantations.⁴⁴ Such was the case in almost all cases of African and Native interaction, as far north as New England and stretching back into the early eighteenth and possibly seventeenth centuries.⁴⁵

If the leaders in a society are marrying in a certain way, does that usually reflect the reality of that society, or does it simply highlight the extraordinary? More specifically, in Seminole culture, were the unions of the most prominent Africans to Seminoles exceptional, or were the indicative of a widespread occurrence? While some see these marriages as exceptional, it seems more plausible that high-ranking marriages highlight cultural cohesion. Leaders naturally cemented relationships between allies and neighbors with their unions, and this tactic can surely explain the marriages of leading Black Seminoles. The marriages of visible Africans must at the very least question the actions of those less visible. If practically all of the extant Black Seminoles—the ones with the most coverage in the record—were marrying Seminoles, is it the most logical conclusion to assume that their actions ran counter to popular practice?

The argument that most blacks would not have enjoyed a position in Seminole clans or communities similarly requires a reexamination. Because a large number of runaways were males, that their offspring in Seminole country would not share clan affiliations is a nonstarter. Most of these men would have been assumed into clans upon first being accepted into the tribe.⁴⁶ Their marriage to Seminole women, furthermore, would position their children squarely in the matrilineal nature of clan ownership. The incidence of African women intermarrying with

44. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 197-198.

45. Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, 290-291.

46. Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 134-135.

Seminole men, although less frequent, was a reality and must be accounted for. One interviewed ex-slave, for instance, noted that during the Seminole Wars "Indians often captured slaves, particularly the women, or aided in their escape and almost always intermarried with them."⁴⁷ This scenario would represent the least likelihood of clan membership either for the mother or the offspring. Still, it would not necessarily have precluded either's adoption into of one related clan; because matrilineal power moved through the mother, one option might allow these women or their children to integrate into their father's mother's, sister's, or aunt's clan.

Further, recent studies have hinted at the importance of community in Creek villages, and the complete ostracism of an outsider without immediate clan affiliation has become a more problematic assertion. Joshua Piker, for instance, has produced a widely accepted study of the Creek town Okfuskee that centers not on its clan structures, but on its sense of community.⁴⁸ Scholar Joel Martin also developed that possibility, noting that in certain instances a tension between a town's "common collective identity" and its "multiplicity of clan identities" sometimes favored the collective. While the tensions Martin cited dealt with the Busk Ceremony, they illustrate how Creeks sometimes valued community over clan, or at least made compromises between two competing customs.⁴⁹ Nevertheless some Africans certainly did exist in Seminole communities but outside of clan membership. They still contributed to that town's well being and protection, however, were influenced by its culture, and were connected to its people socially—all of the markers of a community by any standards.

The marriage dynamic, however, should not be underemphasized. Scholar Tiya Miles suggested that previous to the Seminole example, in their enslavement together, "Indians (mainly women)," alongside "Africans (mainly men), brought members of both groups into intimate proximity; and a joining of families through intermar-

47. Interview of Frank Berry on 18 August 1936, in *Florida Slave Narratives*, accessed on University of South Florida's digital collection "Floridiana on the Web," <http://kong.lib.usf.edu:8881/> (accessed 30 October 2009), 4. Hereafter, Berry Interview.

48. Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

49. Joel Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogee's Struggle for a New World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1991), 39-40.

riage and a fusion of cultural ways emerged."⁵⁰ She further elaborated on the frequency of intermarriage, referencing historians William Loren Katz and Jack Forbes as having recognized newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves as evidence for a widespread acceptance of blacks in Native communities. Such advertisements indicated "not only the routes that slaves took to find their freedom but also the reality of intermarriage between blacks and Indians in the colonial and early national periods." Many of the advertisements located by the two historians focused on those runaways involving the Creeks and Seminoles, who were recognized as being "more open to accepting African slaves."⁵¹ Forbes in particular pointed to the importance of intermarriage in the history of contact between Natives and Africans, labeling it a "common phenomenon" throughout the scope of European colonialism, whether in Brazil or in North America. Similarly, along the British coast Katz concluded that "African and Native American women and men shared their sorrows and hopes, their luck and courage. They did not always know where to run to, but they knew where to run from."⁵²

With an understanding of this larger context, historians of the Seminole experience have stressed that interactions between Natives and Africans followed and elaborated on such traditions. Kenneth Wiggins Porter, for one, claimed that they "took slave women for their handmaids," and brought up any children "on a practical equality with their full-blooded offspring." J. Leitch Wright similarly noted that there seemed to be "an easy intercourse, a ready acceptance of Negroes by the Indians," and "little racial antagonism" between the two groups. It was in Creek and Seminole culture, Eugene Genovese added, that the absorption of Africans into native culture "proceeded the more rapidly," and many rose into positions of authority.⁵³ Contemporary Thomas

50. Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 28-29. See also, Porter, "Relations Between Negroes and Indians, 294-297.

51. Miles, *Ties That Bind*, 29; Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*, 90, 207-209; William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (New York: Atheneum, 1986) 100-110. For more examples of these runaway advertisements, see Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 199-200.

52. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*, 62; Katz, *Black Indians*, 103.

53. Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier*, 44; Wright, *The Only Land They Knew*, 261; Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 75; Saunt, *New Order of Things*, 111-112, 134-135.

Woodward, in the reminiscences concerning his slaves among these Indians, added from his own experiences that "they are raised to man or womanhood with their owners; and in many instances are better raised—always on an equality." He knew of multiple instances in which his slaves had been raised by natives, or had at multiple times moved in and out of the territory to live.⁵⁴

Aside from intermarriage, other social forces were drawing the two societies closer together. Kenneth Wiggins Porter provided one example, citing the Creek trading expeditions that included Africans. Reports placing Creek slaves in trading towns, Porter asserted, described them "like their employers," as they "joined in games and dancing, courted Creek women, drank rum, swapped tall tales with warriors, and, as much as possible, adhered to the rules set by their...hosts." At this time at least, Creeks "rarely attempted to control or direct the Negroes who lived among them, whether acquired by gift, purchase, capture or flight."⁵⁵ Their interaction in affairs of business and trade, witnessed early in Creek history, evidenced the traditions that endured and were also visible in the Florida territory.⁵⁶

Religious observances have become another contested and particularly inviting area of focus. As one historian has asserted, it was more natural for maroons to adopt African beliefs and customs, rather than associate with Seminoles and their religious practices.⁵⁷ This statement and the dearth of observations that informed it, however, reveal a great deal of exaggeration and/or speculation. Very little evidence has ever been available to view into the religious ceremonies of maroons in Florida at any moment with any clarity, and the charge that maroons retained a litany of African traditions contains almost no substantiating evidence. Very few sources substantiate the claim that maroons overwhelmingly relied on African or even Christian ceremonialism, just as a scant list of sources exists to suggest the opposite. As J. Leitch Wright argued, for instance, southeastern blacks "were relatively less numerous and more mobile," and many found it difficult to preserve their African her-

54. Thomas Simpson Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians: Contained in Letters to Friends in Georgia and Alabama* (Mobile, AL: 1965), 92-94.

55. Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," 609; Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier*, 208.

56. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 190.

57. Mulroy, *Seminole Freedmen*, 15. See also, Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 22.

itage. In one example, "Negro Alex Brackston related how as a youth he used to go to the Creek busk and stomp dance, where Indians tied shells on their ankles and beat drums while the medicine man distributed black drink."⁵⁸

The busk, or green corn dance, was among the largest religious celebrations in Seminole society, and Brackston recalled how, "Negroes like myself mixed, mingled, and danced together with the Indians." As Wright noticed, the Creeks were evidently open to new dances, and some reportedly had African origins. William Simmons was present at one such celebration, remarking on the Indians' "highly martial and graceful" movements as they performed the snake and mad dance. He added that Africans were present at the celebration and took part, although he noted they were much more "vulgar and awkward." As one ex-slave added, Natives occasionally took part in slaves' celebrations as well, further evincing their shared interactions.⁵⁹ Even the blacks who were well versed in Christianity provided examples of interactions with Seminoles. A missionary, traveling through the Seminole nation in 1828, recognized their influence over their Seminole brethren first hand, and wrote in his diary that he would first preach to the blacks among them. "I am in hopes," he remarked, "that if the blacks who can understand English will hear me," they would influence the Indians to do the same."⁶⁰

Relations also extended into the political sphere, and became an area where slaves exercised what contemporary John Sprague regarded as, "a wonderful control." Many blacks—particularly runaways—were bilingual or even trilingual, for instance, as they quickly learned Indian tongues.⁶¹ These skills not only evidence an important link between Seminole chiefs and American authorities, but also highlight the extent to which many had mastered one or more native tongues through their prolonged contact with Seminoles. Thomas Woodward could recall, for example, that "not one in fifty but speaks the English as well as the Indian language. Nearly all of them, at some time or another, are used as interpreters, which affords them

58. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 95.

59. Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 95; "Journal of Dr. W. H. Simmons," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 1 (1937): 36; Berry Interview, 4.

60. John C. Ley, *Fifty-Two Years in Florida* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1899), 42.

61. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War*, 81; Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles*, 81; Micco, "Freedmen and Seminoles," 62; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 6.

an opportunity to gather information that many of their owners never have, as they speak but one language."⁶² Others elaborated, that they were "more intelligent than their owners," and that most of them spoke Spanish, English, and Indian languages. Owing to these abilities, along with an intimate understanding of white culture, many of these fugitives were promoted into influential positions of interpreter, perhaps even "sense-bearer."⁶³

Their abilities soon placed the most prominent blacks in powerful advisory positions among some tribes—sometimes over chiefs—from which as one Indian Agent suggested, "they have great influence over the minds of the Indians."⁶⁴ Another Territorial official echoed the Agent's assumption, that, "in fact it is said [they] control their chiefs and councils."⁶⁵ General Ethan Allen Hitchcock recognized their influence yet misunderstood their position, nothing that "Indians and negroes easily live together under the extraordinary conditions that, whilst the Indian claimed superiority over the negro and held him a slave, in virtue of his superior courage, the negro maintained a sort of ascendancy over the Indian by something like superior intelligence and a little education."⁶⁶ Another visitor witnessed Africans in powerful positions in the Seminole town Suwannee. At one of the chiefs' gatherings, they were accompanied by "negro chiefs," who, "sat in council over them," most likely as advisors or sense-bearers.⁶⁷

Many similarities shared by Africans and Seminoles are more obvious. Blacks built their houses in the style of Seminoles, according to a number of sources, whether in Native settlements or their own. They even dressed similarly, wearing the same "colorful splendor of adornments" as Seminoles, including shawls, turbans, and ornaments.⁶⁸ While slight differences have attempted to be

62. McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 74; Myer M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1964, [1836]), xvii; Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences*, 94.

63. Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 76; Morse, *Report to the Secretary of War*, 310.

64. *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* (Washington D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1832-1834), 2: 411-412. Hereafter, ASPIA.

65. *TP*, 24: 669-670.

66. W.A. Croffut, ed. *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A.* (Freeport, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), 78.

67. John Millar, *A Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main* (Piccadilly, London: Burlington Arcade, 1819), 241.

68. Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 6-7; McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 48; For illustrations of Black Seminoles, see Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, Illustrations facing 134, and Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, illustrations after 175.

drawn concerning a few Black Seminoles in their renderings, most of the available evidence suggests that Africans dressed in the same European style that Seminoles became known for. Similarly, while some blacks retained traditionally African names, numerous others adopted Native ones.⁶⁹ Generally, similarities like these explain a very close cultural association of blacks with Seminoles in convincing ways. While differences were visible—while “negro dialects” existed in Black Seminoles, a dress pattern might slightly differ, or religions blended, the cultural commonalities are undeniable. Far from proving culturally and physically autonomous black populations, a close examination of their habits and appearances points to a “daily interaction” which inevitably led to “significant acculturation.”⁷⁰

Furthermore, while cultural forces merged the two groups over time, a sustained and often times desperate struggle in the face of European and American expansion operated to similar ends. The drawing of blacks and Seminoles together, scholar Melinda Micco noted, “played out in a region that was fraught with international warfare.”⁷¹ Many of the tightest bonds forged between the two groups came in Florida while it was under the control of Spain, and their legacies cannot be ignored. In fact, an interpretation of maroon identity that stresses autonomy can only survive by understating the long and bloody history Africans shared with Seminoles, side by side, while battling European and American advances. Rightfully so—those struggles not only influenced both Seminole and black Seminole identity, their combined resistance defined Seminole history in the early nineteenth century. After all, Jane Landers noted, they both struggled to maintain “their collaborative autonomy” there for a close to a half-century.⁷²

At the same time Seminoles gained their foothold in Spanish Florida, colonial authorities had created a beacon of hope for run-aways across the South. Only under Spanish control, and in the face of British threats to that authority, were the two groups able to coexist. And that history is a long one—the first group of fugitive slaves reportedly fled from English settlements to St. Augustine in 1687.

69. For an example of these kinds of examinations, see: Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 196-197.

70. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 197.

71. Micco, “Freedmen and Seminoles,” 22.

72. Jane Landers, “A Nation Divided?,” 103.

As incidents like these became more frequent, colonial authorities resolved to liberate "all...the men as well as the women...so that by their example...others will do the same."⁷³ Royal decrees later reinforced these initial guidelines, including one in 1733 that not only reiterated Spain's offer for freedom, but further prohibited compensation to English owners. In return, the fugitives were required to complete four years of service before the crown would officially proclaim their freedom. Ultimately, as one historian has argued, "The Spanish governors of the province of Florida recognized the maroons and the fugitive slaves as subjects of the Spanish Cross, entitled to the same protection as the white citizens and Indians."⁷⁴

Naturally, these liberties became increasingly conspicuous, and observers began taking notice of Africans' success under Spanish control. In 1822, for instance, William Simmons witnessed "the indulgent treatment" of the Spanish blacks, noting with special interest the "ample and humane codes of laws," for their protection, "both bond and free." Overall, their treatment was one "by which the Spaniards are so honourably [sic] distinguished."⁷⁵ Although living conditions were in reality less than ideal, and their liberty less than total, the fugitives, "nonetheless, made important gains in Spanish Florida." They had achieved comparative freedom, were welcomed into the Roman Catholic Church, and, importantly, "had borne arms in their own defense, proving their military competence."⁷⁶ The Spanish afforded Natives similar concessions. A report to the House of Representatives in 1823, for instance, outlined that previous to the cession of Florida to American authority, Seminoles were incorporated among Spanish subjects, and that each Indian had a right to land, "as well as, and on the same footings with, white, free black, and colored subjects." Altogether, American legislators admitted, the system combined "benevolence in its leading principles, and that, in practice, it exhibited a perpetual reciprocity of interest."⁷⁷

73. Jane Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives in Florida, 1687-1790," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 62 (January 1984): 297-298, 300.

74. Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives in Florida, 1687-1790," 297-298, 300; John J. TePaske, "Fugitive Slave: Intercolonial Rivalry and Spanish Slave Policy, 1687-1764," in Samuel Proctor, ed., *Eighteenth Century Florida and Its Borderlands* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975), 6; Coe, *Red Patriots*, 16.

75. Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 42.

76. Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary," 302.

77. *ASPIA*, 2: 409.

Being disillusioned, expelled, or otherwise no longer at home in Georgia or Alabama, various Creek bands fled into the same Spanish Florida that was luring Africans away from plantation slavery. According to Joshua Giddings, Seminoles "settled in the vicinity of the 'exiles,' associated with them, and a mutual sympathy and respect existing," their associations strengthened. And if it was possible that experiences including fighting and dying together could help expand upon that mutual respect, then Seminoles and Africans truly were, by 1821, tied inextricably close by the "violent, destructive, and sometimes fatal experiences" they had endured together for a generation, as historian Larry Rivers surmised.⁷⁸

Native and African confederacies as warriors stretch back to the mid eighteenth century, when combined forces repulsing a British attack on St. Augustine in 1740. In the east Florida Patriot engagements of 1812-1814, Seminoles only repulsed Georgian forces with the help of African warriors, who together, had become "vary daring."⁷⁹ When combined, historian John Mahon noted, and battling next to each other, African and Seminole warriors fought with "unparalleled ferocity."⁸⁰ Africans and Seminoles shared similar fighting styles, with both relying on guerilla warfare to frustrate superior numbers. These two groups, on the run, out-manned, out-maneuvered, and certainly out-gunned, coalesced in the presence of each other to create an "altogether formidable foe." Together they secured Spanish control, if only for a short time, and at a terrible cost.⁸¹

Later, a large refuge for both Natives and Africans materialized at an old British stockade aptly renamed Negro Fort, and became a beacon to runaways across the South. It was annihilated in 1816, however, in a fiery blast that consumed a staggering number of African and Native lives.⁸² Next, troops under the direction

78. Giddings, *The Florida Exiles*, 3-4; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 190, 192.

79. Price, *Maroon Societies*, 155. See also: Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, 294-295; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 21-23; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 236-241, 244-248.

80. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 21-23.

81. George Klos, "Black Seminoles in Territorial Florida," (M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 1990), 14. For information battles associated with the Patriot invasions, see: Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 190-191; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 4, 8-12; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 21-22.

82. For studies of the Negro Fort, see: Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 22-23; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 16-18; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 280-290; and Frank Lawrence Owsley Jr. and Gene A. Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 103-118.

of Andrew Jackson brazenly invaded Spanish Florida in 1817 hoping to "chastise a savage foe, who, combined with a lawless band of negro brigands," had been accused of various crimes against Georgian settlers—above many, of harboring runaway slaves.⁸³ Over six hundred blacks were visible in numerous Seminole towns according to an 1817 report, seen "on parade," in town squares, bearing arms, and "in complete fix for fighting." They spoke "in the most contemptuous manner" of Americans, this observer noted, and were threatening revenge for the destruction of the Negro Fort.⁸⁴

American commanders certainly recognized the collusion of Africans and Seminoles as warriors, but still attempted to persuade chiefs to give them up and avoid destruction. "You harbor a great number of my black people among you," General Edmund P. Gaines wrote to one in particular. "If you give me leave to go by you against them, I shall not hurt any thing belonging to you."⁸⁵ That capitulation never materialized, as Jackson must have known, and soon his invasions devastated both African and Seminole settlements across north Florida, including King Hajah's Town, Fowl Town, Mickasuky, and Suwanee. At least one was recognized as nothing more than a glorified slave raid: "The main drift of the Americans" Alexander Arbuthnot wrote his son, "is to destroy the black population of Suwanee."⁸⁶

Upon hearing of the approaching force, both Seminoles and Africans in King Hajah's town "immediately commenced crossing their families," and were just finishing as advance troops entered the town. And in a separate engagement, soldiers encountered a "spirited battle" from a mixed "concentrat[ion] of the negro and Indian forces."⁸⁷ Although the two groups fled south in the wake of these attacks and combined with more Native Creek and Seminole warriors, American troops and slave raiders pursued, destroying more Seminole towns and sweeping more Africans north to slavery.⁸⁸ Pushed further south into the veritable swamps

83. *ASPMA*, 1: 704

84. *ASPLA*, 2: 155.

85. *ASPMA*, 1: 723.

86. *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC: Gale and Seaton, 1832-1861), 4: 584. Hereafter *ASPFR*.

87. *ASPFR*, 4: 700; *ASMPA*, 1: 704; Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 18-22.

88. Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 25-26; Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 191-192; Weisman, *Unconquered People*, 24; *TP*, 23: 446.

of southern coastal Florida, Seminoles and blacks further associated with Redstick Creeks, themselves refugees from a war waged at least partly over the issue of slavery.⁸⁹ With the accumulation of Seminoles, Africans, and Redstick Creeks on Tampa Bay and below, the Seminoles whom American authorities came to face in the territorial period had become tried in battle, desperate, and very militant.

After all, they fought together, fled together, died together, and a few were even captured together. It seems only fit that in the wake of such disruption, "a stronger bond of unity welded members of these two darker races." In this unity, historian Larry Rivers concluded, "lay strength."⁹⁰ And without properly examining and weighing these experiences, it is impossible to chart the development of identity among Africans on the Florida frontier. Their fates became tied by their colonial involvement with Spain, and principally, against American frontiersmen. Rather than avoid their meanings through arguments that stress a far-flung maroon autonomy, we must accept that these engagements strengthened blacks' identities as fellow warriors and even brothers with Seminoles, and must move beyond the concept that Africans merely allied with Seminoles when it was convenient.

When taking these arguments into consideration, it seems evident that the southern frontier was, without doubt, a uniquely "triracial" one. It has been noted as such on more than one occasion, and certainly deserves the scholarly attention it has enjoyed.⁹¹ Nevertheless, in all of that scholarship, not enough attention has been paid to Native culture.

The majority of examinations into black culture in colonial and territorial Florida, for instance, are too reflective of contemporaries' biased and suggestive remarks—passages that should be approached with caution and properly contextualized. Agricultural and economic relationships should be questioned, foremost, not only because of the suggestive words of the observers

89. For more on the Redstick War of 1813-1814 and the movement of Creeks into Florida, consult: Saunt, "The English Has Now a Mind to Make Slaves of Them All"; Braund, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," 633-634; Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 22.

90. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 192.

91. Rivers, *Slavery in Florida*, 189; George Klos, "Black Seminoles in Territorial Florida," 9.

who wrote of them, but also because of the ways they clearly paralleled Native tradition. Similarly, much of the secondary scholarship on maroons or Black Seminoles have come in studies of American expansion or of southern slavery, and have for the most part ignored Seminole and Creek culture while attempting to explain circumstances heavily influenced by their presence and traditions. Because of the cultural adaptations and agricultural similarities evident in maroon communities, however, as well as the political and military necessities that further tied them to the region's Natives, Africans' identity can be explained only as being inextricably tied to Seminole culture, society, and reality.

In some cases Africans did chose to live somewhat separately, dress slightly differently, speak a different dialect, at times celebrate Christian traditions, or deal with adversaries autonomously. Many of these subtleties were, however, also representative of a Creek society comprised of highly autonomous towns that shared the same language group and religious ceremonies, some agricultural traditions based on reciprocity, and sometimes, not much else. Even more so, they explain the ethnogenesis of the Seminoles as a people. In that respect, it is simply unreasonable to assert that Africans should be viewed as a fundamentally separate and distinct people when they lived and acted in such similar ways.

Instead, where Africans are visible in the Florida territory, they are displaying an essentially Seminole culture, more or less, in every way—a product of “unique cultural traditions” that stretched back for centuries.⁹² Indeed, to say that Africans on the Florida frontier escaped, avoided, or ignored Native traditions to the point of flourishing as autonomous maroon entities not only ignores the unattainable realities of maroon communities, but betrays the unique experiences with Seminoles that allowed Africans to endure as long and as prosperously as they had, both in Florida and out west.

Past studies have accepted this cultural blending, and have attempted to fix a single semi-autonomous, yet frequently Seminole identity to those blacks who resided in Florida—what many have referred to as Black Seminoles. One identity is also what other arguments attempt to construct, even as they move to erase any semblance of a Seminole component. Perhaps the best explanation as to the position of Africans in Seminole society

92. Price, *Maroon Societies*, 1.

should stress constant motion and shifting identities, instead of a static arrangement—one which will best include the changing identities of Creeks and Seminoles, as well as the changing identities of Africans.

In closing, however, the inconsistency posed by the diametrical and competing identities discussed here must be resolved. Not only did their salvation depend on their cooperation with Seminoles, “rather than through their own unaided efforts,” the experiences, interactions, and cultural traditions Africans grafted from the region’s Natives are what easily separate Florida’s black communities from all others, and make them that much more phenomenal.⁹³ As Eugene Genovese surmised, it must be concluded that Africans either achieved Native acculturation, and became Native in “essential cultural respects,” or “stood in the same relationship to rapidly acculturating, semi-white Indian slaveholders that they did to white slaveholders.”⁹⁴ Where his conclusions imply the impossibility of any sustainable, “large-scale black maroon activity,” that is not what we can see in the Florida territory. We do not see maroons, we see Black Seminoles.

93. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 113. See also: Klos, “Black Seminoles in Territorial Florida,” 12; Voelz, *Slave and Soldier*, 12-13.

94. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 75-76.