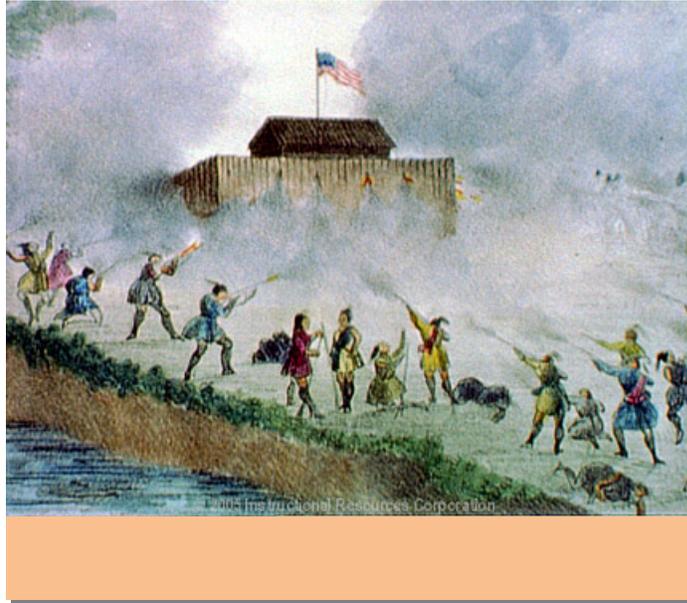


### The Black Seminoles

The term *Black Seminoles* refers to freed Africans and African Americans and runaway enslaved laborers who formed communities beginning in the 1700s in what is now Florida. Most of them had escaped from South Carolina and Georgia rice plantations and headed south to Florida, where they could live freely. During this same era, Native American tribes from Georgia and Alabama also fled south.

They were pushed out of their ancestral homes by white settlers who wanted their land.



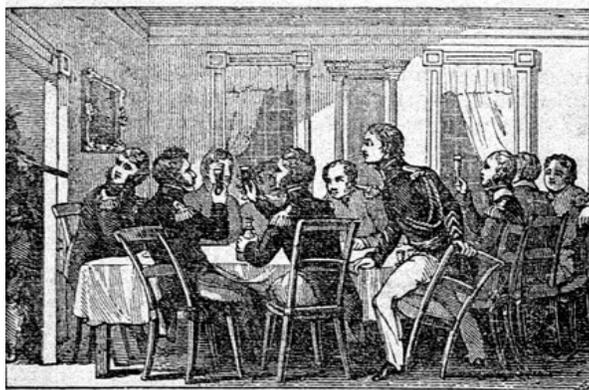
The Native Americans who became known as the Seminoles were originally members of the Creek, Miccosukees, Hitchitis, and Oconees tribes. They banded together for protection and fled to Florida in the 1700s, where the local Spanish residents called them “Seminole,” from the Spanish word *cimarron*, meaning “wild” or “untamed.” Around the same time, Africans and African Americans, many of whom were escaped enslaved laborers, began to take refuge in the area. They lived in separate villages, but they stayed friendly with the Native Americans. They both saw white settlers as a common enemy because the settlers wanted to take their land and freedom.

The Native Americans and the refugees of African heritage originally had two distinct cultures. They spoke different languages and observed different religious traditions. In many ways, however, they had similar lifestyles in Florida. The two groups lived in thatched-roof homes made from local trees and plants. They had similar economies as well. They relied on communal farming and hunting, meaning that members of the community shared their food with one another.

Over time, the cultures of the Native Americans, Africans, and African Americans began to merge. The Africans and African Americans began to wear Native American clothing. The Native Americans began to appreciate the Africans’ music and storytelling. After some time, members of the two groups began to intermarry. As the Native Americans married Africans and African Americans, the Spanish began to call the mixed-race people “maroons,”

“Seminoles Negroes,” or “Native American Negroes.” Today, these descendants of Native Americans and African Americans are included in the group known as the Black Seminoles. The Black Seminoles at times, especially war times, banded together with other Seminoles, but were usually identified as a separate group.

By the early 1800s, the Seminoles, including Black Seminoles, had become an important tribal force in the region. At that time, the U.S. government was trying to remove Native Americans from the southeastern United States and relocate them in the west, so white people could settle in that area. Southern plantation owners also began raids in Florida to bring back fugitive slaves. The Seminoles and Black Seminoles fought back against the U.S. government in a series of battles called the Seminole Wars. During the Seminole Wars, the Seminoles and Black Seminoles worked together to fight a common enemy.



Osceola's Attack.

Seminole leader Osceola is shown at the very left of this engraving. While U.S. soldiers are dining, he bursts in and surprises them.

### The Seminole Wars

In 1817, General Andrew Jackson invaded the region with 3,000 soldiers, beginning the first Seminole War. Jackson led his troops into northern Florida, destroying Seminole homes, farms, and settlements. The Seminoles fled into the interior of Florida. Jackson then attacked the Spanish holdings on the Gulf coast. Spain surrendered Florida to the United States in 1819. By 1822, the land was flooded with white settlers, eager to take Seminole lands.

With Florida officially a part of the United States, the Indian Removal policies now applied to Seminole lands. But when the U.S. government tried to force the Native Americans off their land, the Seminoles fought back. In 1835, war broke out again. For the first two years of the Second Seminole War, the Seminoles were led by the brilliant warrior Osceola. The Seminoles fought against the United States for seven years. It was largely a guerilla campaign in which Osceola led his troops against the United States in swift and deadly raids. They were often outnumbered, but they scored victory after victory against the U.S. troops. In 1837, Osceola was captured, and he died in prison the following year. The Seminoles fought on against the U.S. troops, and the war ended in 1842. This Second Seminole War had been costly for the United States. It lost 1,500 men and spent \$20 million on the war.

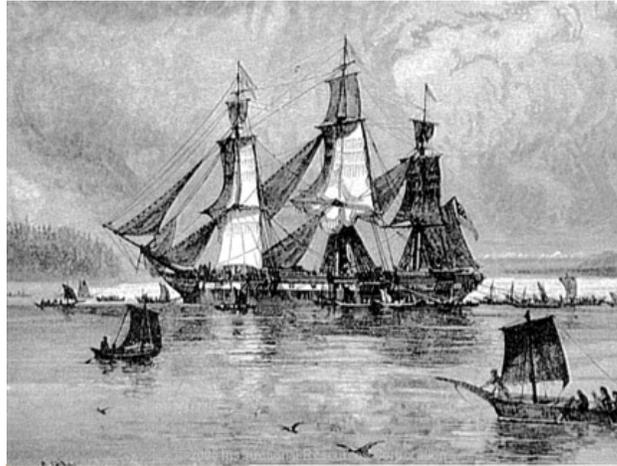
The Second Seminole War had been far costlier for the Black Seminoles, however. They realized that they could no longer stay in Florida, so most began the long journey overland to their new home in the Indian Territory. Only a small band of Black Seminoles remained in Florida, where they settled in the Everglades region.

### Moving West

The Black Seminoles resettled in what is now Oklahoma. They managed to get an agreement from the U.S. government that gave them legal status as free people. But as soon as they reached Oklahoma, it was clear that they were not truly free.

White slave owners tried to re-enslave them. U.S. Attorney

General John Mason declared that the United States had no power to free the enslaved people. The Black Seminoles decided to move again.



This illustration shows the removal of Seminoles from Florida by ship after the Seminole Wars.

Under the leadership of a Black Seminole named John Horse, a group of Seminoles fled across the border to Mexico in 1850. There, they established a free settlement. Within a few years, the government of Mexico legally recognized their settlement in the Nacimientto region. Soon, escaped enslaved laborers from Texas began to join them. In 1855, a group of Texas Rangers invaded the settlement and tried to destroy it. But the Black Seminoles fought them and sent them fleeing back across the border. When slave catchers crossed into Mexico to recapture the fugitive slaves, the Black Seminoles were ready and fought them too.

The reputation of the fierce and brave Black Seminoles spread. After the North won the Civil War in 1865, members of the U.S. Army traveled to Mexico. They invited the Black Seminole warriors to become scouts. The government called them Seminole Negro Indian Scouts. Three of these scouts went on to win the Congressional Medal of Honor, which is the highest honor in the American military.

Today, there are still Black Seminole Native Americans who live in areas in North America and the Caribbean. Most are descendants of the first Black Seminoles to settle in Oklahoma. They are now part of the Seminole Indian Nation. Another branch still lives in Nascimientto, Mexico. A small group lives in

Texas, near the forts where their ancestors served proudly as scouts. There is even a small community on Andros Island in the Bahamas who trace their ancestors to the Black Seminoles who left Florida after the First Seminole War. They all continue the tradition of the brave and independent Black Seminoles, a proud people who have left their mark on American history.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1. Who were the Black Seminoles?**
  - A.** African Americans who moved to Georgia in the 1800s
  - B.** freed Africans and escaped enslaved people who fled to Florida in the 1700s
  - C.** Cherokee Native Americans from Alabama
  - D.** Choctaw Native Americans from North Carolina
  
- 2. Who was Osceola?**
  - A.** a Seminole warrior and hero
  - B.** a Native American guide for the United States
  - C.** a Spanish military leader
  - D.** a Cherokee hunter
  
- 3. Which of the following is an example of how the U.S. government supported white slave owners over the Black Seminoles?**
  - A.** It gave slave owners money to buy slaves.
  - B.** It forced Black Seminoles to return to slavery.
  - C.** It invited whites into the army in order to capture escaped slaves.
  - D.** It stated that it had no power to free enslaved people.
  
- 4. Describe the causes and the outcomes of the two Seminole Wars. Provide details and evidence to support your answer.**