# Rapid Approximation: African Americans and the Transformation of Muskogee Society, 1700-1819

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For historians of the Southeast few questions inspire more debate than that of what role Africans and African Americans played in Creek Indian society. Long ignored by scholars, the interplay between persons of native and African descent recently came back to the attention of academics. However, these studies have thus far failed to recognize certain cultural cues of both Creeks (also known as Muskogees) and blacks in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In fact, contact between these groups led to a transformative process within both ethnic spheres. This paper explores the ways in which Indians and ethnic Africans interacted in the Muskogee world and demonstrates that contact with blacks resulted in the end of one Muskogean confederacy and the rise of another.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Creek confederacy coalesced in present-day Georgia and Alabama from the remnants of Mississippian-era chiefdoms in response to slave raids from the Westo and Chickasaw Indian groups. The new confederacy was comprised of a very diverse group that spoke a multitude of languages, many of which were not mutually intelligible. Settling upon the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers were the Hitchiti-speaking Lower Creeks, while Muskogee speakers settled upon the Alabama and Flint Rivers and became known as the Upper Creeks. A

third group, the Seminoles, settled in Florida some time afterwards and will be addressed later.[1]

Within the confederacy were numbers of Creek towns, called *talwas*, that enjoyed significant autonomy from the rest of society. For instance, should the Lower Creek town of Coweta be attacked by a Choctaw war party, the Upper Creek town of Tuckabatchee was not obliged to come to its aid. Similarly, negotiations with the English on the part of Okfuskees were not necessarily recognized by Cussetas. Along with *talwas* were *talofas*, daughter towns who were obligated to follow the instructions of their mother towns, such as when to go to war, hold festivals, or honor its mother town with tribute. Functioning within the *talwas* and *talofas* was the system of clans which constituted the dominant political structure of Creek society. Muskogee society, like other Southeastern groups, was matrilineal. While men may have held the role of *mico* (town chieftain), women were the dominant voice within the clan and thus played an important part in Creek decision making. For these reasons, Creek foreign

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[1] For the formation of Creek society in response to Indian slave raids, see Alan Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670-1717* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 137-140; Robbie Ethridge, "Creating the Shatter Zone," in *Light on the Path: The Anthropology and History of the Southeastern Indians*, ed. Thomas J. Pluckhahn and Robbie Ethridge (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2006), 212-216; Ned J. Jenkins, "Tracing the Origins of the Early Creeks, 1050-1700 CE," in *Mapping the Mississippian Shatter Zone: The Colonial Indian Slave Trade and Regional Instability in the American South*, ed. Robbie Ethridge and Sheri M. Shuck-Hall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 188-189. For a comprehensive description of the location of Southeastern Indian groups in the eighteenth century, see Peter H. Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South: An Overview by Race and Religion, 1685-1790," in *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, ed. Gregory A. Waselkov, Peter H. Wood and Tom Hatley (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 57-132.

relations often tended to be the work of a town or a mother town and its daughters.[2]

The domestic lives of Creek men, women, and children featured a distinct sexual division of labor. Men were hunters and warriors while women engaged in small-scale farming, cooking, textile production and child-rearing. Men or women who crossed these lines were subject to public ridicule. Creeks worshipped a deity called the Maker of Breath and held annual celebrations of the Green Corn Dance during which towns invited their neighbors to share in a sense of community. It was here that bonds of friendship were renewed, marriages made, and boys underwent rites of passage to lead them into manhood.[3]

The establishment of the Carolina colony in the late seventeenth century led to an oft-tumultuous relationship between the Creek confederacy and the English empire. English attempts to develop an agricultural economy in North America led to experimentations with Indian slave labor. However, the practice of Indian slavery was never the success English planters hoped for. The English abandoned it altogether following the Yamasee War in 1715, during which the Yamasee Indians along with Creek and Choctaw allies nearly destroyed Carolina before the English repulsed them.[4]

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[2] For an in-depth look at one particular Creek town in the eighteenth century, see Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[3] John R. Swanton, "The Green Corn Dance," *Chronicle of Oklahoma* 10, No. 2 (June, 1932): 170-195; William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist's Edition*, edited by Francis Harper (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 323-328; James Adair, *The History of the American Indians*, edited by Kathryn E. Holland Braund, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 142-154.

[4] Gallay, *The Indian Slave Trade*, 330-331.

Following the downfall of the Indian slave trade, South Carolina planters developed a new work force using enslaved Africans. While African slave labor had been used in North America for some time, the high demand for it in the Caribbean resulted in relatively slow growth of the practice before 1715. However, experience with rice cultivation and a relative resistance to malaria made Africans assets that colonists could not afford to be without. Africans also were a logical labor choice for colonial land owners as they could be imported from overseas without upsetting the local indigenous population. The population of African slaves in South Carolina exploded from almost nothing in 1685 to over 40,000 in 1745. By the end of the century the new state boasted a population of almost 120,000 black slaves.[5]

Unlike Native American slaves who could escape and dissolve into the local Indian populations, African slaves had little hope for liberation. The English established the colony of Georgia in 1732 not only to buffer against possible Spanish attacks on South Carolina but also as a seine in which fleeing blacks might be caught. In 1740, a Captain Massey explained to the colony's trustees: "Georgia is a fine Barrier for the Northern Provinces, and especially for Carolina; And is also a great Security against the running away of Negroes from Carolina to Augustine, because Every Negroe at his first Appearance in Georgia must be immediately known to be a Run away, since there are no Negroes in Georgia."[6]

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[5] Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974), 49; Wood, "The Changing Population of the Colonial South," 70-71.

[6] Wood, *Black Majority*, 260.

Of course, in those Georgia woods were Creek Indians, many of whom were eager to capture African slaves in exchange for British goods. This was all well and good for the British government, which initially promoted hostility between the races as a way of defusing attempts by Indians to arm African-American slaves for revolt against their masters. As the Superintendent of Southern Indian Affairs wrote to British General Sir Thomas Gage in 1767, "To prevent the Indian Country becoming an Asylum for Negroes is a Matter of the utmost consequence to the prosperity of the province."[7]

British efforts to leverage Creek hostility against African slaves were hampered due to their imperfect understanding of Creek culture. Creek concepts of slavery and their seemingly arbitrary nature of dealing with black faces in Indian country mystified the British. As befit the autonomous nature of their society, Creeks had no one point of view regarding slaves. Often Creeks saw the benefit of capturing escapees and returning them to locales such as Charles Town in exchange for guns, ball and powder. Other times, Creeks simply killed and scalped the fugitives, knowing it would bring them war honors. Yet other times Creeks adopted blacks into their own societies either as slaves or as full members.

Even when Creeks brought blacks into their towns, they treated the new residents far differently than the English did under their system of chattel slavery. Creeks had no need for laborers

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[7] John Stuart to Thomas Gage, 26 September 1767, Gage Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan (hereinafter referred to as GAGE); Stuart to Gage, 27 November 1767, GAGE; Gage to Hillsborough, 10 November 1770 in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775, Volume I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 278; Martha Condray Searcy, "The Introduction of African Slavery into the Creek Indian Nation," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 66, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 23-24.

before the American Revolution as they did not engage in large-scale commercial agriculture; hunting for deerskins was still their dominant economic pursuit prior to 1776. Furthermore, Muskogee martial tradition dictated that male war captives (a category into which black males easily fit) were far too dangerous to be left in a *talwa* unguarded. For this reason some were scalped upon capture or ritually tortured in the Creek square grounds. However, most runaways were at least temporarily sheltered within Creek society. Many men became excellent hunters and warriors, the latter role being especially important in light of ongoing feuds with the Choctaws, Chickasaws and Cherokees. Women and children, on the other hand, were typically given menial tasks to perform until they could be married or adopted into a clan. Once they had clan membership, the newly adopted Creeks could ascend the Muskogee hierarchy. For instance, while not of African descent, the single most influential war leader during the American Revolution was Emistisiguo, who was said to be "of the slave race." However, the Creeks could revoke this new-found freedom should the need arise. Creek *micos* understood that nothing soothed tensions with the British (and later, Americans) better than the relinquishment of African Americans. This was exemplified in 1770 when the Earl of Hillsborough dictated that future treaties with Indians would include the proviso that any runaway slaves be returned to their English masters.[8]

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[8] Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 2003), 115-117; Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50-63; Joel W. Martin, *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogees' Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 71-75; Michelle LeMaster, *Brothers Born of One Mother: British Native American Relations in*

Blacks began to appear under a very different form of slavery in Creek towns after the American Revolution. This change occurred for two reasons: first, overhunting for deerskins resulted in the collapse of the Creek economy, forcing Indians to find a new way to acquire Euro-American goods they coveted. Second, European-American slave holders quickly expanded into the fertile soils of Creek territory. With them came black slaves, and many Creeks saw with their own eyes the prosperity of Southern plantation owners for the first time. Creek men, seeking riches of their own, quickly adapted as they revolutionized their concepts of ownership and property. But these changes ultimately led to war within the Creek nation.

Fittingly, the Creeks were led in this transition to slave and animal husbandry by a man of two worlds, Alexander McGillivray. McGillivray was the son of wealthy Scottish trader Lachlan McGillivray, and was educated in Charleston among British colonists. But his mother was a French-Creek mestizo named Sehoy, of the influential Wind clan. According to Creek custom McGillivray was considered a full member of the nation, despite the fact that three out of four of his grandparents were Europeans. During the war McGillivray supported the British and rose to prominence after Emistisiguo's death. Afterwards, he saw the potential for vast profits by securing a trade monopoly with the Panton & Leslie trading company. With the merchants' support, McGillivray ushered the Creeks towards European-American means of living, such as sustained agriculture, animal husbandry and ownership of chattel slaves. Upon his

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*the Colonial Southeast* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 51-83; Searcy, "African Slavery," 22-24.

premature death in 1793, McGillivray was fabulously wealthy, owning several estates, huge herds of cattle, and sixty African slaves.[9]

Creek society continued to transform after McGillivray's death. Sensing a power vacuum within the confederacy, the American government appointed Benjamin Hawkins as agent to the Creeks in 1796. A former Senator from North Carolina, Hawkins's job was to continue to usher the Creek people towards American ways of living. Certainly Hawkins encouraged slave ownership. Upon his arrival in Creek country, he remarked that one Creek leader owned five slaves, "though they are of little use to him." However, other Creeks were expanding the practice. McGillivray's sister maintained thirty slaves on her property and a Mrs. Durant was listed as being in possession of "fourteen working negroes." After his visit, Hawkins described the town of Eufaula:

> Several of these Indians have negroes, taken during the revolutionary war, *and where they are, there is more industry and better farms.* These negroes were, many of them, given by the agents of Great Britain to the Indians, in payment for their services, and they generally call themselves "*King's gifts.*" The negroes

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[9] John Walton Caughey, ed., *McGillivray of the Creeks* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), xvii; Creek leaders seeking good terms with Americans almost always had to address African slaves in Muskogee territory. On November 19, 1794 the mico of the Tuckabatchees informed the governor of Georgia that "the most hostile towns" promised to "give up all the property they had taken—and as a proof of the sincerity of their intentions, they delivered a negro which I have brought with me," *The American Minerva*, March 13, 1795.

are all of them, attentive and friendly to white people, particularly so to those in authority.[10]

Not every member of the Creek nation readily acceded to what historian Claudio Saunt terms the "new order." In fact, many in the Upper Creek towns that supported the British during the American Revolution detested Hawkins and his plans to Americanize the Indians. Upper Creeks felt that Hawkins and Lower Creek mestizos betrayed traditional Muskogee customs. Young men from towns like Tuckabatchee, Okfuskee and Tallassee seethed with anger at the decimation of their hunting grounds and their kinsmen's acceptance of the plow over the bow. Worsening matters was an eight-year drought in Creek country that began in 1804. While wealthy, plantation-owning Creeks survived the ordeal, those who relied upon hunting or small-scale agriculture starved. Poor Creeks witnessed a growing divide between themselves and wealthy, slave-owning Creeks, who refused to help—a stark rejection of Muskogee values. When the drought finally lifted in 1812, tensions between poor and wealthy Creeks were a smoldering tinderbox ready to immolate the entire confederacy. They only needed a spark.[11]

What they got was a shooting star and an earthquake. In the fall of 1811, the Creeks were visited at Tuckabatchee by Shawnee war leader, Tecumseh (Shooting Star). Here Tecumseh recruited allies for a pan-Indian alliance against the Americans. The Shawnee complained of white antics of stealing Indian lands and harassing Indian women. Worse yet, Indians had insulted their creator by taking

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[10] H. Thomas Foster II, ed., *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796-1810* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 30s, 40s, 66s.

[11] Saunt, *New Order*, 205.

up the white ways. Tecumseh challenged Creeks, Cherokees and other Indians to throw down their plows and hoes and take up their weapons against the American intruders. As proof of his power he said he would make the ground shake once he returned home.[12]

While pro-American Lower Creeks largely ignored Tecumseh's calls for action, poor young men of Upper Creek towns were moved considerably. They were moved literally when, shortly after Tecumseh's departure, a massive earthquake rocked all of Muskogee territory. For these young men it was a symbol that it was time to strike out at the Creeks who turned their backs to them in their time of desperation. These warriors, known as Redsticks, took to the trail against mixed-blood and white settlements, burning lands, killing livestock, and encountering slaves. The Redsticks appeared to hold two points of view regarding enslaved blacks: 1) slaves wishing to join the crusade were welcomed as capable warriors; 2) slaves not wishing to join the uprising were captured and kept as war prizes. It appears that Redsticks made a concerted effort not to kill enslaved African Americans. For instance, in the account of one unnamed black slave who escaped a Redstick assault on his home a warrior, spying him in a corner, beckoned him to come out as the Master of Breath had ordered them not to kill anyone other than whites or mixed-bloods.[13]

While the events of the Redstick War are far too numerous to describe here, we should briefly examine the roles that blacks played

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[12] John Sugden, *Tecumseh: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 243-251; Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 70-72; Gregory Evans Dowd, "Thinking Outside the Circle: Tecumseh's 1811 Mission," in *Tohopeka: Rethinking the Creek War & the War of 1812*, ed. Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 30-52.

[13] Gregory A. Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Redstick War of 1813-1814* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 132-133, 148.

in the war's zenith, the Battle of Fort Mims. On August 20, 1813, a force of 700 Redstick warriors and their black allies assaulted the hastily-constructed palisade called Fort Mims. Despite warnings from their African-American slaves of a large force of Indians gathering nearby, Americans and Creeks inside the fort were surprised by the arrival of the Redstick army. However, defenders beat back the initial brunt of the assault, and the Redsticks backed off the attack to consider their options. The Redsticks had taken significantly more casualties than expected, and their leadership were inclined to call off the attack. However, the black contingent railed against this idea, convinced leadership to attack again, and in fact led the new assault. What followed was a bloodbath. The attackers set the fort on fire and stormed the palisade, killing or capturing every American and mestizo Creek in the redoubt. Of the 550 settlers inside, only 36 escaped. However, consistent with their previous actions, the Redsticks allowed black slaves the option of either joining their army or becoming their captives.[14]

While the massacre at Fort Mims was the high point for Redstick fighters, it also spelled their doom. The carnage that survivors reported finally gave General Andrew Jackson the justification he needed to invade the fertile Creek grounds so coveted by southern planters. On March 27, 1814, Jackson's army and his Creek allies destroyed the Redsticks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. Following the assault, Jackson forced large land cessions from the

[14] Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 154-157; Some blacks inside the garrison assisted the Redsticks from inside, Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit*, 116-138.

defeated Redsticks as well as his Creek allies.[15] The old Creek confederacy was broken.

While African Americans partly contributed to the downfall of one Muskogee confederacy, farther south they spurred the formation of another. Following the Yamasee War, scores of disaffected Creeks moved south to the Alachua Plains near present-day Gainesville, Florida. They were led by a man known as Ahaya, or Cowkeeper. From 1715 to the mid-1750s these Creeks gained the name "Seminoles" and attracted castoffs from other Native societies such as the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Shawnees and the fractal remnants of Florida's remaining Indian population. In Florida, however, Seminoles encountered blacks in different ways than did the Creeks to the north. In fact, African Americans lived on the peninsula long before the formation of the Seminoles.[16]

Africans had long been part of the Spanish experience in North America. On his final voyage Columbus was accompanied by "Diego el Negro," and Africans served in the armies that conquered the Aztecs and Incas. In 1526, a group of black slaves rebelled against a newly established Spanish colony in Florida after its founder, Lucas Vasquez de Ayollon, died of disease. Ayollon's cohorts returned to Haiti by the end of the year, leaving approximately 100

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[15] Gregory A. Waselkov, "Fort Jackson and Its Aftermath," in *Tohopeka: Rethinking the Creek War & the War of 1812*, ed. Kathryn E. Holland Braund, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 158-169; Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 161-163; J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 171-183.

[16] Colin Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 246; Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 166. William C. Sturtevant and Jessica R. Catteling, "Florida Seminole and Miccosukee," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume XIV, Southeast*, ed. Raymond D. Fogelson, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2004), 429.

blacks to join with the local Indian population. In 1540 Hernando de Soto made his trek through Florida and brought with him 50 Africans. Blacks continued residing in the Southeast as the English began to claim territory. An English group traveling in Tuscarora territory in 1653 found a wealthy Spaniard living among the Indians. Among his possessions he counted a large family and seven black slaves.[17]

Unlike the English and later the United States, the Spanish actions encouraged interaction between blacks and Seminoles. Spain wooed runaway slaves to settle south of the St. Mary's River with promises of freedom to those who made the trek. However, Spain's claim to dominion over the peninsula was tenuous at best; they held but tiny portions of land at St. Augustine and in the panhandle.[18] Therefore, when slaves fled Georgia and South Carolina they entered not Spanish, but Seminole territory.

In Seminole country, African Americans were able to obtain a level of freedom unknown to them in the British colonies (and later, American states). While some Seminoles did own chattel slaves, the relationship between African Americans and Seminoles in the 1700s and first decade of the 1800s resembled feudalist societies. African Americans set up their own communities outside of Seminole *talwas* and offered an annual tribute of maize or other agricultural goods. In

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[17] Wood, *Black Majority*, 5-6; Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons within the Present Limits of the United States," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, ed. Richard Price (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 149.

[18] Susan Richbourg Parker, "So in Fear of Both the Indians and the Americans," in *America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 26; Rebecca B. Bateman, "Africans and Indians: A Comparative Study of the Black Carib and Black Seminole," *Ethnohistory* 37, No. 1 (Winter 1990): 3; Rosalyn Howard "'Looking for Angola': An Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Search for a Nineteenth Century Florida Maroon Community and Its Caribbean Connections," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 92, No. 1 (Summer 2013): 33.

return, they were protected from Euro-American slavers by the might of Seminole warriors. Aside from their annual tribute these Black Seminoles were free to do as they pleased.[19]

Black Seminole communities proved quite successful. Homes and towns were very similar to that of Native Seminoles, though blacks were apparently far better at agriculture. According to one visitor, "We found these negroes in possession of large fields of the finest land, producing large crops of corn, beans, melons, pumpkins, and other esculent vegetables. [I] saw, while riding along the borders of the ponds, fine rice growing; and in the village large corn-cribs were filled, while the houses were larger and more comfortable than those of the Indians themselves."[20]

While Black and Native Seminole communities may have looked similar, they sounded far different. Black Seminoles spoke a creole dialect related to Gullah, with a mix of English-sounding words and a mash of African, Spanish and Muskogean words thrown in. It was substantially different than the Muskogee or Hitchiti tongues favored by the Seminoles. Prayers offered by Black Seminoles were different than those of the Indians. Seminoles believed in origin stories attributing the world's creation to the Maker of Breath, while

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[19] Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 213-217; Laurence Foster, *Negro-Indian Relationships in the Southeast* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1935), 21; Bateman, "Africans and Indians," 9-10; Not all free blacks were associated with the Seminoles, see Jane G. Landers, "Free Black Plantations and Economy in East Florida, 1784-1821," in *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida*, ed. Jane G. Landers (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 136-149.

[20] Kevin Mulroy, "Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Seminole Maroons," *Journal of World History* 4, No. 2 (Fall 1993): 297; Brent R. Weisman, "The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole Indians and Black Seminoles during the Colonial Era," in *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida*, ed. Jane Landers (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 136-149.

refugee blacks followed a fusion of Protestant Christian, Roman Catholic, African, and Indian beliefs. Black Seminoles almost certainly did not participate in the Busk, the most important of all Native Seminole religious celebrations. Furthermore, while blacks and Seminoles co-existed they co-mingled socially very rarely. This was largely because blacks did not participate in the Native Seminoles' matrilineal clan system, though some intermarriage occurred.[21]

Native Seminoles benefitted from the presence of Black Seminoles, even if they rarely comingled. In addition to the annual tribute, Native Seminoles were able to call upon Black Seminoles in times of war. Perhaps even more important was the ability of Black Seminoles to serve as brokers between Anglo and Native American cultures. Few Anglo-Americans could comprehend the melodious rhythms of Muskogee or Hitchiti, and Seminoles struggled with English. However, escaped slaves often spoke combinations of Yuchi, Muskogee, Hitchiti, Shawnee, or other dialects. For this reason, Black interpreters often rose in prominence. The most famous of these was Abraham, a black man who carried much weight in Seminole society. During the Second Seminole War, Abraham served as a close advisor to Chief Micanopy. Described as distinguished and cunning,

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[21] Mulroy, "Ethnogenesis," 300; John Bemrose, *Reminiscences of the Second Seminole War* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2001), 17-20; For discussions on Gullah, see Wood, *Black Majority*, 167-191; For the successes and failures of other Maroon communities in the Americas, see Michael Mullin, *Africa in America: Slave Acculturation and Resistance in the American South and the British Caribbean, 1736-1831* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 45. An origin story recently published by Seminole historian Susan A. Miller helps to explain native feelings towards other races: "In the story, the Maker of Life creates a hutke [white person], takes pity on him because he is pale and weak, and lets him live. The the Maker of Life creates a black man and tells him, 'I do not like you. You may stand aside.' On the third try, the Creator gets it right and creates the ancestor of the Indian people." Susan A. Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones: A Seminole Saga* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 56.

Seminoles attributed his commanding oratory skills to a higher power. His political acumen was not lost on the Americans with whom he interacted; Colonel William Foster said Abraham "is compared to Martin Van Buren."[22] After the war, Abraham led a band of Black Seminole followers west to Texas.

While Black and Native Seminoles were somewhat separated socially, they were united by a shared hatred of the United States. During the War of 1812, American residents in East Florida, backed by militant Georgians and supported by the Madison administration, attempted to create an independent territory to be annexed to the United States. These "Patriots" invaded the region, quickly controlled the rich soils of northeast Florida, and soon attacked the Spanish position at St. Augustine. Georgia militiamen torched communities throughout the peninsula. Both blacks and Indians suffered mightily; *talwas* and *talofas* relocated deeper into the swamps as a result. Ultimately, Americans were no match for the brutal counterassault of combined Native and Black Seminole war parties. One American man wrote home fearful of the "dreadful lurking Indian," and described Black Seminoles as "strangers to fear."[23] Working together, the

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[22] For black linguists, see John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* Revised Edition (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1985), 78; Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*, 231-234; *South-Carolina Weekly Gazette*, December 19, 1783; Abraham was not the only prominent Black Seminole during the Second Seminole War. John Caesar and John Cavallo (John Horse) were greatly feared by American forces, Matthew Clavin, "'It is a negro, not an Indian war': Southampton, St. Domingo, and the Second Seminole War," *in America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 191; Mulroy, "Ethnogenesis," 299; Frank Laumer, ed., *Amidst a Storm of Bullets: The Diary of Lt. Henry Prince in Florida, 1836-1842* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1998), 26, 79; Mahon, *History*, 128-129, 238.

[23] Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 224.

combined Seminole force beat back their invaders and forced an American withdrawal.[24]

During the Patriot War, Lower Creek leaders called upon the Seminoles to give up their black slaves and not to engage the American militia. Seminole denial of these orders combined with their non-participation in the Redstick War demonstrates that between 1812 and 1814 the Seminoles underwent their own political ethnogenesis and broke away from the old Creek confederacy. Likewise, the relationship between Black Seminoles and Native Seminoles continued to evolve thanks to continued American aggression.

Following the Treaty of Ghent the British abandoned a fort on Prospect Bluff overlooking the Apalachicola River to their former allies, a group of freed slaves, Redsticks, and Seminole Indians. The post was hardly empty. The British left behind a large supply of guns, ammunition and even cannons and howitzers for fort's new inhabitants. Indians came and went but a large contingent of freed blacks made it their home and the redoubt came to be known as the Negro Fort. Its residents lived in a mutually antagonistic relationship with others along the border. Slave-raiding Indians harassed blacks who strayed too far from the fort. In turn, the inhabitants of Prospect Bluff made forays into the United States grabbing cattle and firing on boats that dared move down the Apalachicola River.[25]

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[24] David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 298; Snyder, *Slavery*, 221-222; Bateman, "Africans and Indians," 4; Saunt, *New Order*, 239-240; The Seminoles also took the war to American plantation owners in Florida, see *City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, September 13, 1812.

[25] David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, "Mr. Rhea's Missing Letter and the First Seminole War," in *America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011),

Both Andrew Jackson and General Edmund Gaines believed the Negro Fort threatened the institution of slavery in Georgia and Alabama. In 1816 the United States Army and Navy, joined by 500 Creek Warriors led by William McIntosh, attacked the fort; the Creeks' participation illustrates the extent of their divide from the Seminoles by this time. A lucky cannon shot detonated the fort's magazine, instantly killing 270 free blacks and injuring another 57 who were promptly reclaimed as slaves by their attackers. Most of the blacks who escaped fled deeper into Seminole territory and joined with the Black Seminoles.[26]

Jackson continued the American assault on blacks in Florida with another invasion in 1818, touching off the First Seminole War. Ostensibly a reaction to Native and Black Seminole attacks on American slave raiders crossing the border, Jackson's objective was clear: kill or recapture blacks in Florida.[27] Together with William McIntosh's Creek troops, Andrew Jackson's army burned down almost 400 Native and Black Seminole homes at Bowlegs Town in April. Vastly outnumbered, Black and Native Seminoles staged a desperate battle in order to give their families time to flee deeper into the peninsula.

Jackson's incursion into Florida fostered a shift in the Native/Black Seminole dynamic. What was a feudalistic relationship in the eighteenth century evolved by 1818 to resemble the old Creek

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124; Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 16; Saunt, *A New Order*, 273-290.

[26] Foster, "Negro-Indian Relationships, 24-26; After living for a time with the Seminoles some of the survivors eventually made it to the Bahamas where their tradition still remains, see Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (NewYork: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 340-342.

[27] *New-York Daily Advertiser*, December 18, 1818; Mulroy, "Ethnogenesis," 295; Landers, *Black Society*, 235.

confederacy. In Florida, Seminole *talwas* called upon Black Seminole *talofas*. When mixed Seminole forces confronted Jackson's soldiers they did so with both Native and Black Seminole leaders, demonstrating the shift in status of Black Seminoles.[28] This increasingly coequal relationship was reinforced seventeen years later when Americans again engaged Seminoles in an attempt to flush African Americans out of the peninsula and into the waiting arms of white slave owners during the Second Seminole War. Native Seminoles were not willing to trade their black comrades for the promise of peace; what resulted was the longest American war until the mid-twentieth century. When bands of Seminoles eventually quit the fight, they did so on the condition that Black Seminoles be allowed to migrate west with them to Indian Territory.[29]

The arrival of ethnic Africans in Muskogee territory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries irrevocably changed the social, political, and economic mores of the most powerful Indian nation in the American southeast and muddied once-clear concepts of Indian identity. Amongst the Upper and Lower Creeks, the presence of African Americans offered warriors new ways to obtain war honors by capturing or killing escapees. At the same time, the large rewards for those escapees helped the Creeks develop the economic system of an acquisitive society more like the European settlers'. However, not all blacks returned to their masters. Some runaways were adopted into *talwas* and clans. *Micos* appreciated that runaway slaves made for

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[28] Foster, *Negro-Indian Relationships*, 27.

[29]For removal to Indian Territory see Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 97-105. Some Black Seminoles exercised their autonomy and moved to the Bahamas where their tradition remains today. Irvin D.S. Winsboro and Joe Knetsch, "Florida Slaves, the 'Saltwater Railroad' to the Bahamas, and Anglo-American Diplomacy," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, No. 1 (February 2013): 55; Rosalyn Howard, *Black Seminoles in the Bahamas* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

powerful bargaining chips when negotiating with European powers and sought to exploit Europeans' lust for them. But amongst Upper and Lower Creeks the presence of African Americans was ultimately a contributing factor in the downfall of the confederacy. Lower Creeks came to covet the wealth they could amass plantation slavery and the slaves it required while young Upper Creek warriors rejected this new socio-economic order. The confederacy crumbled between 1811 and 1813 as the two sides engaged in a violent, bloody civil war.

To the south, the presence of African slaves contributed to the opposite result. Seminole castoffs finally broke away from the Creek confederacy during the Patriot War, in part because Seminoles did not share in the Lower Creeks' Europeanizing tendencies, including slavery. Seminoles ignored calls from the Creek National Council to relinquish African escapees. Among Seminoles, runaway blacks found refuge and formed autonomous maroon communities far away from American slavers. Over time this relationship evolved, as Black Seminoles proved themselves indispensable to Native Seminoles. African Americans brought with them improved farming techniques from southern plantations and the ability to bridge worlds with their linguistic acumen. When Seminole lands were invaded, Black Seminoles joined their Native compatriots in defense of their shared lands. No longer junior members of a feudal society, by 1835 African Americans were active participants in a new Muskogean coalition—the Seminole confederacy.