

**Savage Foes, Noble Warriors, and Frail Remnants:  
Florida Seminoles in the White Imagination, 1865-1934**

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## **Abstract**

Mikaëla M. Adams: *Savage Foes, Noble Warriors, and Frail Remnants: Florida Seminoles in the White Imagination, 1865-1934*  
(Under the direction of Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green)

Between the Civil War and the 1930s, white impressions of Seminoles changed as Anglo-Americans encountered new pressures of urbanization, modernization, and immigration. Their initial impression of the Indians as “savage foes” came as a legacy of three Seminole wars and white insecurity about their ability to dominate the wilds of Florida. Over time, more positive images of the Seminoles emerged as Americans dealt with national reunification and the arrival of new immigrants. In this context, the Seminoles appeared as “noble warriors” whose brave resistance served as a model for American patriotism. Yet, as railroad construction and Everglade drainage opened Florida to non-Indian settlement, Anglo-Americans began to view the Seminoles as “frail remnants” of a once-glorious past. Seeing the Indians as doomed to extinction, whites tried to protect them as an “endangered species” by securing reservation lands. Thus, Anglo-American representations of the Seminoles not only reflected their own cultural concerns but also influenced government policy in Florida.

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## Chapter I. : Introduction

In 1930, special agent Roy Nash entered the swamps of the Everglades and came face-to-face with a Seminole Indian. Sent by the United States government to conduct a survey of Florida's indigenous population, Nash traveled for nine hours "through mud and moonlight" in search of a Seminole village. In the opening page of his report to Congress, Nash painted a vivid portrait of Florida's remaining Indians. Standing with a poised spear in a dugout canoe, Nash's archetypal Seminole was an "astounding anachronism," "a primitive hunter 30 miles from a center of industrial civilization." Clothed in a brightly-colored, knee-length shirt, belted at the waist, this Seminole was "a man apart."<sup>1</sup>

For Nash and other Anglo-Americans of his time, the Seminole Indians of Florida held many meanings. Living in an age of industrial development, whites saw isolated Indian populations as relics of a distant time. Whether they portrayed the Natives in a favorable light or saw them as savage remnants that needed to be eliminated or brought into the fold of civilization depended largely on their intentions towards the Indians. This article examines Anglo-American responses to the Seminoles of Florida in the decades between the end of the Civil War and the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934. As whites wrote about the Seminoles in government reports, missionary tracts, novels, plays, and newspapers, they constructed an identity for these Natives in the

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1. U.S. Congress. Senate. *A Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*. Report by Roy Nash. (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931. Doc. 314.), 3-4.

Anglo-American imagination. This identity was not one that the Seminoles themselves necessarily embraced, yet the imagined character of the Seminoles influenced American policy towards the Indians, ultimately helping to shape the future of the Florida Seminoles. Over time, ideas about the Seminoles shifted from their supposed “savagery” to portrayals of Florida’s Natives as a noble, yet pitiful people in need of Anglo-American assistance. These shifting representations reflect how attitudes towards American Indians changed as the United States frontiers closed and as the nation entered the Progressive Era. As whites imagined new roles for Native Americans, their interpretations of Seminole identity also reflected their own anxieties about a rapidly modernizing world.

In the years between 1865 and 1934, Anglo-American attitudes towards Indian people underwent many changes. Even before the last Indian “battle” at Wounded Knee in 1890, Americans began to search for ways to solve the supposed “Indian Problem” by incorporating Natives into mainstream society. The General Allotment Act of 1887 intended to break up many tribal communities and to force Native people to live as yeoman farmers, isolated from the kinship networks and community ties that had long sustained them. Missionaries and educators flooded into Indian settlements, hoping at the very least to bring Native children to the “enlightenment” of Anglo-American religion and civilization. Indians, for Anglo-Americans of the time, were a “dying race,” destined to meld into modern society or perish to make way for the manifest destiny of a supposedly “superior” people.<sup>2</sup>

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2. See Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

Rejecting “civilization,” the Seminoles of Florida remained largely isolated from white society well into the twentieth century. As the survivors of three wars with the United States, these Indians had grown suspicious of American infiltration. Although they did not go untouched by the rapid influx of settlers to Florida or by the dramatic effects of Everglades drainage and railroad construction, the Florida Seminoles held on tightly to their traditional life ways, making a living in the swamplands through hunting, trapping, and small-scale agricultural production. The Florida Seminoles also resisted missionary efforts, so that by the 1930s very few had been baptized. Moreover, they overwhelmingly refused American education, preferring instead to instruct their children through traditional means.<sup>3</sup> For whites, the Seminoles were both intriguing and frustrating. They represented a strong challenge to Anglo-American cultural values that supposed that any logical individual would choose “civilization” over “savagery.”

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3. For a full discussion of the Seminoles’ economic pursuits and interactions with white traders during the period between 1870 and 1930, see Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides: White Traders among the Seminole Indians, 1870-1930* (Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1975).

## Chapter II. : Savage Foes

As the western frontiers closed in the decades following the Civil War, the marshlands of the Florida peninsula continued as an unbound wilderness. In the imaginations of many Americans, the Seminoles were a part of this wasteland. Skulking in the pinewoods and canoeing through the sawgrass swamps, these Natives seemed as dangerous as the landscape they inhabited. The Seminoles, who had rejected formal ties with the United States government, appeared mysterious and untamable, just like “the bears, deer and alligators that [were] found in those dark recesses.”<sup>4</sup> In particular, a dearth of reliable information about these Indians plus memories of the Second and Third Seminole Wars fueled the fears of settlers. Terrified of renewed hostilities, these whites fostered a “savage” impression of Florida’s Natives, which carried through in the public imagination into the early twentieth century. Although newspaper reports and government surveys slowly altered public perception of the Seminoles, writers of dime novels and Indian-fighter memoirs continued to draw upon ideas of Seminole savagery well into the 1930s to capture the attention of their audiences and to create a foil for imagined white bravery and racial “superiority.”

The year 1858 marked the end of the United States’ final conflict with the Seminoles of Florida and in mid-February, 1859, seventy-five Indians under the command of Billy Bowlegs reluctantly left Florida to join their relatives west of the

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4. “The Florida Indians,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, 1 November 1885, 4. Accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Hereinafter cited as *Constitution* and ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Mississippi.<sup>5</sup> Despite this American military victory, many Seminoles remained scattered across the peninsula, isolated in the wetlands of the Ten Thousand Islands, the Everglades, and the Big Cypress Swamp. The question of just how many Indians provoked concern among Florida's settlers. Some whites regarded the Seminoles' continued existence in Florida as "purely mythical," while others gave estimates of "fifty or sixty warriors."<sup>6</sup> Although most observers hovered at a count of around three hundred Seminoles, some suggested that as many as seven hundred or even fifteen hundred Indians occupied the Everglades.<sup>7</sup> Without knowing an exact number, Florida's settlers gave free rein to their imaginations. Noting that it was "impossible for them all to be seen, and much less to be counted," many insisted that the Seminoles were increasing in numbers.<sup>8</sup> They seemed destined to "reoccupy Southern Florida sooner or later" and displace whites who were not as well-suited to the landscape as the Seminoles' "roving

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5. James W. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 144.
  6. Frederick A. Ober, "Ten Days with the Seminoles," *Appletons' Journal of Literature, Science and Art* 14, no. 332 (Jul. 31, 1875): 142. Accessed through the American Periodical Series Online (hereinafter cited as American Periodical Series); "The Seminole Indian," *Constitution*, 14 March 1882, 2. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
  7. For estimates of between 200 and 600 remaining Seminoles see "Article 10," *Prairie Farmer* 44, no. 9 (1 March 1873): 72. American Periodical Series; Fred Beverly, "Wild Life in Florida," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, Yachting* 1, no. 13 (6 November 1873): 193. American Periodical Series; S. C. Clarke, "Among the Alligators," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 13 (February 1874): 220. American Periodical Series; "Are the Indians Dying Out!" *Friends' Review; A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* 31, no. 20 (29 December 1877): 307. American Periodical Series; "The Florida Seminoles," *Friends' Review; A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* 33, no. 4 (Philadelphia: 6 September 1879): 54. American Periodical Series; "The Everglades," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, Yachting* 61, no. 3 (New York: 18 July 1903): 49. American Periodical Series. For estimates of between 700 and 1,500 see J. W. Stranahan, "The Sportsman Tourist: Among the Seminoles," *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, Yachting* 48, no. 11 (New York: 13 March 1897): 202. American Periodical Series; "The Green Corn Dance," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 29 June 1896, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
  8. "The Florida Indians," *Constitution*, 1 November 1885, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



hunter[s].”<sup>9</sup> Confusion about Seminole numbers contributed to a tense atmosphere along the Florida frontier. The Seminoles’ invisibility intensified their menace in the imaginations of white settlers.

Fearful of the unknown and resentful that part of “their” territory could not be settled due to “the presence of a people who may at any time, and upon any real or fancied provocation, be driven to acts of hostility,” whites invented scenarios of Seminole uprisings.<sup>10</sup> They imagined with grim fascination the devastation that might be wrought if the Seminoles could muster as many as “five thousand fighters” and go on the “warpath.”<sup>11</sup> Titling newspaper articles with dramatic headings such as “Ready to Fight” and “Seminoles Run Amuck,” reporters speculated about the massacres that might follow the escalation of “bad feeling” between the Seminoles and settlers.<sup>12</sup> Although Anglo-Americans based some of their fears on actual incidents, such as the killing of Seminole livestock by cowboys, they exaggerated Seminole hostility by emphasizing the war dances performed by the Seminole “bucks” who supposedly dressed in “paint and feathers” to ready themselves for battle. In one instance, a journalist even made the wild assertion that Seminole hostility in the Everglades would spread to Fort Marion in St. Augustine, where the United States held a group of western Indians as prisoners in the late 1880s. While acknowledging that escape for these captured Apaches would be

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9. S. C. Clarke, “Among the Alligators,” *Lippincott’s Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 13 (Feb. 1874): 220. American Periodical Series.

10. U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Military Affairs. *Seminole Indians: Message from the President of the United States, in reference to the Indians remaining in Florida*. (32nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1853. H. exdoc. 19).

11. “Ready to Fight,” *Constitution*, 10 December 1886, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

12. “Ready to Fight,” 10 December 1886, 1; and “Seminoles Run Amuck,” 13 August 1909, 2, *Constitution*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

“difficult if not impossible,” the author connected Seminole antagonism to fears that these other Natives would become “dangerously restive,” thereby tying the Seminole presence in Florida to broader public fears of Indian hostilities in the West.<sup>13</sup>

Anglo-American memories of the Second and Third Seminole Wars compounded fears of Seminole hostility. In the decades following the Civil War, veterans of Florida’s Indian wars gained public attention through demands for government pensions for their service. In 1884, for example, a congressional bill proposed paying each of the approximately 3,270 surviving veterans from the Creek, Seminole, and Black Hawk wars a pension of eight dollars a month. Averaging seventy-three years in age at that time, these veterans began dying in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>14</sup> Obituaries reported their passing, along with accounts of their deeds in the Indian wars. For instance, General James Hughes, who died in December, 1890, had become a First Lieutenant for his services against the Seminoles and “continued to take active part in the Indians disturbances” for the rest of his career.<sup>15</sup> Brigadier General Benjamin Alvord, who died in October 1884, had fought in the 1835-37 campaigns against the Seminoles as well as in the later

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13. “Ready to Fight,” *Constitution*, 10 December 1886, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Public attention to Indians in the West during this period far outpaced attention to the Florida Seminoles. A search on the ProQuest Historical *New York Times* database revealed that 7,732 articles mentioned “Apaches” in the period between 1865 and 1935, while 16,169 mentioned “Sioux” and 5,191 mentioned “Comanches.” By contrast, only 1,510 mentioned both “Florida” and “Seminoles” (these terms being used together to distinguish the Florida Seminoles from their Oklahoma counterparts). These numbers highlight why authors were anxious to tie their descriptions of the Florida Seminoles to more widely-known concerns about Indians in the West. By placing the Florida Seminoles in a broader context of Indian hostility, these writers emphasized the imagined danger posed by remaining Indians east of the Mississippi.

14. “Bounties,” *Constitution*, 16 February 1884, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

15. “Obituary,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1890, 5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

expedition against Billy Bowlegs in the Big Cypress Swamp.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps most astonishing of all, reporters claimed that George W. Bromley, “a soldier of the Mexican war” who died in August, 1883, had “killed the Seminole’s chief Osceola in the Florida Indians war,” an impossibility since the Seminole leader died imprisoned in Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, in 1838.<sup>17</sup> Accurate or not, these reports kept the Seminoles in the public eye and contributed to a sense that the Indians who remained in Florida were as “savage” as their unconquered ancestors.

In celebrating the lives of veterans of the Indian wars, Americans hoped to memorialize the sacrifices made by United States soldiers who had braved the Seminoles to capture Florida. Particularly popular in these decades of post-Civil War patriotism were tales of Dade’s Massacre, an American defeat incurred during the Second Seminole War. Portraying Brevet Major Francis Dade and his men as “gallant martyrs,” tales of the massacre emphasized both Indian and African-American treachery. Supposedly, the Seminoles attacked “without a moment’s warning” and with “bloodcurdling yell[s]” struck the soldiers with “terror and dismay.” Despite the alleged bravery of the white troops against “more than a thousand Seminole Indians and a hundred negroes,” an exaggeration, only a single man survived the attack.<sup>18</sup> When a black man appeared in Jacksonville, Florida in 1892 claiming also to have been present at the battle and challenging the accounts of Dade’s courage, journalists suspected that he was a traitor

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16. “The Death List of a Day,” *New York Times*, 18 October 1884, 5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

17. “Burial of an Old Soldier,” *New York Times*, 20 August 1883, 1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

18. “Dade and His Command,” *New York Times*, 24 December 1894, 9. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

who had “betrayed Dade and his soldiers to the Indians.”<sup>19</sup> Calls for a memorial to the massacre provided a means to celebrate the bravery of Americans while emphasizing the duplicity of Florida’s Natives.<sup>20</sup>

Even after most of the veterans of the Seminole wars had died, tales of Indian savagery continued to circulate. Focusing on the most grisly aspects of Indian warfare, such stories painted the Seminoles as bloodthirsty murderers, not only of soldiers, but also of innocent women and children. In 1874, for example, journalist S. C. Clarke reported a conversation with the son of an Indian fighter who asserted that “the Indians were right savage against [his] father for guiding the regulars into their country... a party of them came up from the Everglades and murdered a family at the Musquito Lagoon, thinking that it was [his] father’s house and family.”<sup>21</sup> John Akins, an Indian scout, whose story was recorded by John Orlando Parrish in the early 1930s, also reflected on the supposedly cruel nature of Seminole warriors. According to Akins, Seminole men murdered and mutilated the twin babies of a frontier family, driving their young mother to death from heartbreak.<sup>22</sup> By positioning himself as the rescuer of the remainder of the family, and as the slayer of the “savages,” Akins, through Parrish, emphasized the

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19. “Another Version of the Dade Massacre,” 27 November 1892, 18; and “Was at the Dade Massacre,” 11 January 1895, 3, *Constitution*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
  20. U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Printing. *Story of the massacre by Indians of detachments of the First and Second Regiments of Artillery and Fourth Regiment of Infantry, United States Army, under the command of Major Francis L. Dade, on December 28, 1935*. Report by Frederick Cubberly (67th Cong., 1st Sess., 1921. S. Doc. 33).
  21. S.C. Clarke, “Among the Alligators,” *Lippincott’s Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 13 (Feb., 1874): 220. American Periodical Series.
  22. John Orlando Parrish, *Battling the Seminoles, Featuring John Akins, Scout* (Lakeland, FL: Southern Print Co., 1930), p. 30-33.

perceived contrast between white chivalry and Indian depravity. In this context, the imagined nature of the Seminoles provided a foil for showcasing the heroism of whites.

Pulp fiction writers at the turn-of-the-century also used the Seminoles as villainous foils for white heroes. In magazines targeted at adolescent boys, men, and even occasionally women, authors of tales of adventure, mystery, war, and the Wild West used formulaic storylines and twisting plots to draw mass readership.<sup>23</sup> In double-columned, monthly installments, these writers provided an outlet for Americans in the modernizing world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to imagine themselves in heroic roles, straddling the fine line between “savagery” and “civilization” in the comfort of their own living rooms. Young boys could read accounts of cowboys and Indians and tap into their “primitive” longings while maintaining a safe sense of their ultimate “superiority” as whites. For late nineteenth-century thinkers who feared that “over-civilization” endangered American manhood, these tales were believed to serve as a kind of inoculation that would allow boys to enjoy savage desires while they were young and in the process prepare them for a “civilized” manhood as they reached maturity.<sup>24</sup>

One popular series, the *Buffalo Bill Stories*, drew inspiration from Bill Cody’s famous Wild West Show and offered tales of “Buffalo Bill’s” exploits fighting Indians. Claiming to record a true account of Colonel William F. Cody’s adventures as a scout, this series supplied its readers lessons in “Border History.”<sup>25</sup> In a 1905 installment,

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23. John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 167.

24. See Gail Bederman’s discussion of G. Stanley Hall in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 97.

25. Prentiss Ingraham, *Buffalo Bill’s Florida Foes, or, Hunting Down the Seminoles* (New York: Street & Smith, 1905), 1.

Buffalo Bill left the western frontier for the wilds of Florida, again illustrating that in the imaginations of Americans, Florida's wetlands were as perilous as the West. Drawing inspiration from nineteenth-century captivity narratives, formulaic cowboy-and-Indian tales, and particularly savage portrayals of Seminoles found in newspapers, this issue painted a vile portrait of Florida's remaining Seminoles. The author took advantage of the Florida landscape to add to the tale's drama by offering descriptions of the Seminoles' imagined savage rites of sacrifice, which included feeding prisoners to alligators.<sup>26</sup> This particular anecdote likely found inspiration in an 1897 newspaper article which used similarly colorful language to recount the supposed execution by alligators of two Seminole lovers. These unfortunate individuals were "literally eaten alive" and "pulled apart" by "a roaring mass of saurians."<sup>27</sup> Such tales served to quench readers' bloodlust while safely showing the Indians as separate from and "inferior" to American whites.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a time of hardening racial lines across America, and Florida was no exception. Florida's harsh Black Codes, passed in 1866, foreshadowed the equally repressive Jim Crow laws enacted beginning in 1887 to ensure that African Americans in the state were subjected to a status of social, if not complete legal, bondage.<sup>28</sup> Perpetuators of racial violence remained active across the peninsula, and Florida led the country in lynchings per capita with twice the rates of Mississippi, Georgia, and Louisiana.<sup>29</sup> Florida's Natives did not escape this racial

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26. Ibid, 16.

27. "Eaten by Alligators," *Constitution*, 23 August 1897, 5A. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

28. Michael Gannon, *Florida: A Short History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 48.

29. Ibid, 86.

prejudice, and the Buffalo Bill story accordingly used racial language to create boundaries between the Indians and their white counterparts. According to the tale, the Seminoles “hate[d] whites like poison” and were “about the worst redskins on the continent.”<sup>30</sup> Not only did they resort to trickery in their efforts to kill the story’s hero, but they also yelled “like madmen” and retreated “like frightened rabbits” when they realized they would have no easy victory against Buffalo Bill in a gunfight.<sup>31</sup> In a particularly revealing passage, Buffalo Bill commented on the Seminoles’ retreat by declaring that they “acted in that matter just as any other Indian would have done...if they had been white men, they would have rushed in at any cost.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in his memoirs, Indian-fighter John Akins described the Seminoles as “not given to single deeds of daring...no Seminole has the nerve to enter a white man’s camp.”<sup>33</sup> For the authors and readers of these stories, the supposed cowardice of the Seminoles showcased their imagined racial inferiority to whites.

Whites’ obsession with racial categories took on a pseudo-scientific aura in this period as anthropological studies purportedly identified inherent qualities of people based on their blood. In particular, the field of phrenology asserted that the shape of individuals’ skulls reflected their personality, character, and level of civilization. Stories of the Seminoles mirrored this ideology of inherent racial traits. For example, the Buffalo Bill story’s white heroine, Zamora, a girl raised by the Seminoles since infancy, became dramatically aware of her racial “superiority” in a pivotal scene when she realized that

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30. Ingraham, *Buffalo Bill’s Florida Foes*, 4.

31. Ibid, 11.

32. Ibid.

33. Parrish, *Battling the Seminoles*, 98.

she was “living among a lower and an alien race.”<sup>34</sup> Throughout the tale, Zamora’s white heritage made her sympathetic to the cause of peace, while the story’s villain, Seminole Ned, remained a cheat, robber, and murderer due to his descent from an Indian grandmother: “He comes of a very good family, except from the Seminole blood.”<sup>35</sup> In a similar way, stories about the Seminole chief Osceola that were written in the period frequently attributed his bravery, stamina, and compassion to the notion that his father was white. Even authors who wished to give a good impression of the Seminoles could not always extricate themselves from this racial ideology. According to one account, for example, Osceola “had too much white blood in him to yield to the cowardly offers of the government.”<sup>36</sup> Phrenological reports on Osceola’s skull also argued that his “eminently elevated” head bore “the outline of civilization” with “the intellectual and moral organs...largely developed.” Even if these favorable traits were not due to his white heritage, the researchers argued, “warring with the white men alone gave more character to [the Seminoles] as a tribe.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, any noble quality that appeared in Seminole individuals was attributed to white heritage or influence, while any savage attribute came directly from their Indian blood.

Whites’ descriptions of Seminole women also expressed popular notions of Seminole “savagery” and imagined racial inferiority. A commonly-held belief at the turn-of-the-century was that extreme gender difference marked advanced evolution in a

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34. Ingraham, *Buffalo Bill’s Florida Foes*, 20.

35. *Ibid.*, 3.

36. Minnie Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida* (New York: Moffat, Yard, and Company, 1911), 23.

37. “On Ethnology,” *American Phrenological Journal* 47, no. 1 (January 1868): 20. American Periodical Series Online.



society. Although suffragists fought against this assumption, masculinist proponents of civilization insisted that sexual difference and racial difference were directly related—in short, that as civilized races advanced, they grew more unlike their racial inferiors and their women grew more unlike their men.<sup>38</sup> Thus, remarks about Seminole women’s “drudgery” in their villages showed the Seminoles as racial inferiors who had not yet learned to fully separate male and female roles.<sup>39</sup> In addition, in repeating long-held beliefs in the ease of Native women’s birthing, commentators like government agent Roy Nash committed the fallacy of assuming that childbirth was “no such ordeal of prolonged agony as with white women.”<sup>40</sup> Because in the European tradition, painful childbirth was associated with the Judeo-Christian telling of the story of Eve and considered a natural part of motherhood, women who did not experience “prolonged agony” were assumed to be somehow inferior and less womanlike.<sup>41</sup> Anglo-Americans further emphasized Seminole women’s imagined masculine attributes in accounts of their abilities to “hitch up a yoke of oxen” and walk “45 miles” to a trading post, “unaccompanied by man.”<sup>42</sup> Rather than praise Seminole women’s hard work and independence, such descriptions criticized Seminole men and showed the Indians as racial inferiors.

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38. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 160, 139.

39. James Lowther Berkebile, *Musa Isle: Stories about the Seminoles, Alligators, and Florida’s Most Noted Indian Trading Post* (Augusta, GA: Phoenix Printing Co., 1926), 5-7.

40. U.S. Congress. Senate. *A Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*. Report by Roy Nash (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931. Doc. 314), 7.

41. Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 35.

42. U.S. Congress. Senate. *A Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*. Report by Roy Nash (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931. Doc. 314), 8.

### Chapter III. : Noble Warriors

Although attitudes about white racial superiority continued well into the twentieth century, over time the most negative impressions of the Seminoles began to wane. As war veterans passed away and as railroad construction and Everglade drainage opened Florida to settlement, some of the fear targeted towards the Seminoles subsided. Indeed, some people even looked back regretfully at the frontier days, nostalgic for a time when frontiersmen “helped to wrest [their] state from the Indians and lived to enjoy the blessings of a family amid the usual frontier homes of the woods.”<sup>43</sup> In 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented his famous frontier thesis in Chicago, arguing that the “perennial rebirth along a continually advancing frontier line” had made Americans distinct from all other nations of people.<sup>44</sup> Turner’s discussion of the close of the American frontier created the sense that a stage of the United States’ national development had ended. New concerns over rapid societal change in the wake of American modernization gradually replaced old anxieties about Indian attacks.

In the American South, concerns over modernization encouraged nostalgia for pre-Civil War lifestyles. Pride for the “Lost Cause” led some southerners to sympathize with Natives who had suffered from the 1830 Removal Act: both groups had lost their

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43. Parrish, *Battling the Seminoles*, 27.

44. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1947), cited in Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 34.

land and freedom due to the actions of the federal government.<sup>45</sup> Along with their commiseration for a people who had suffered under the hands of the federal government was a mixed sense of admiration and envy that the remaining Seminoles in Florida had managed to preserve so many of their traditional life ways in the state's isolated swamps. The Seminoles, for these southerners, became a model of continued resistance.

Of particular interest to individuals nostalgic for the antebellum South were persistent rumors that the Seminoles continued to own slaves. Although actual reports from government agents who surveyed Seminole villages contradicted these rumors, newspapers described the ongoing enslavement of Seminole blacks in covetous rather than disapproving tones.<sup>46</sup> An 1889 article published in the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that two white men had “the pleasure of meeting the only genuine slaveholder in the land of the free, namely the Hon. Cypress Tiger, of the Everglade Seminoles.”<sup>47</sup> Rather than respond in shock to such tales, the “country laughed over the story,” clearly enjoying that the “impertinent meddling” of “government interference” had not yet reached this stretch of the Everglades.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, some whites even saw continued slavery among the Seminoles as an opportunity to carry on pre-Civil War practices themselves. According to another article, Florida cowboys recommended that visitors to the Seminoles bring an African American with them because one could “sell the negro to the Indians for enough

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45. Dr. Theda Perdue, personal communication, UNC Chapel Hill, March 2008.

46. In his 1884 report, government agent Clay MacCauley argued that he saw “nothing and could not hear of anything to justify [the] statement” that the Seminoles continued to own slaves. See Clay MacCauley, *The Seminole Indians of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 526. Originally published in U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology, Fifth Annual Report, 1883-1884.

47. “A Holdover Slaveholder,” *Constitution*, Jun. 27, 1889, 4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

48. “A Holdover Slaveholder,” 27 June 1889, 4; and I M'Queen Auld, “The Seminole Indians,” 27 February 1885, 5, *Constitution*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

to pay all of [one's] expenses." Such rumors were so persistent, the author argued with evident glee, "that a stranger cannot get a darky to accompany him in a journey to the Everglades...they are suspicious of one at once when asked to make such a trip."<sup>49</sup> These stories fed into southern hopes that their "peculiar institution" was not irrevocably lost.

Ironically, some Anglo-Americans in this period also glorified the Seminoles as freedom fighters who had bravely resisted the advances of a corrupt antebellum America. Although northerners also often romanticized the South's "Lost Cause" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, abolitionist rhetoric of years past continued to influence white conceptions of Seminole history. Of particular renown was the figure of Osceola, who became a symbol of devotion to freedom and detestation of slavery. Repeating rumors that abolitionists circulated prior to the Civil War, numerous authors argued that the Seminole leader had married a black woman who the Americans then unjustly enslaved.<sup>50</sup> According to the legend, this act of treachery instigated the Second Seminole War. Comparing Osceola's fight to that of Americans during the Revolution, one writer declared, "How can we blame him and his brother chiefs for fighting against such outrages while we glorify Gen. Washington for resisting unto blood a stamp on paper and a tax on tea?"<sup>51</sup> By conflating Osceola's fight for his imagined black bride with

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49. "The Florida Everglades," *New York Times*, 10 March 1889, 10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

50. Joshua R. Giddings recorded this story prior to the Civil War in his book *The Exiles of Florida: The Crimes Committed by Our Government Against the Maroons, Who Fled from South Carolina and Other Slave States, Seeking Protection Under Spanish Laws* (Columbus, OH: Follett, Foster, and Company, 1858), 99.

51. L. M. Child, "Indian Civilization," *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 21, no. 1054 (11 February 1869): 1. American Periodical Series Online. See also "A Romance of the Seminoles," *New York Times*, 3 August 1887, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers and Mary F. Dickinson, *Seminoles of South Florida* (N.p.: n.p., 1930), 7-9.

colonial America's battle for liberty, these whites also indirectly connected the Civil War with the American Revolution.

Living in a time of change with burgeoning industries, cities, and a rapid influx of foreign-born immigrants, Americans looked to Osceola's story as evidence for a type of patriotism that they hoped to build in their diversifying nation. In this estimation, the Seminoles had done "just what any other brave and liberty loving people would do under similar circumstances—they vigorously opposed all who would drive them from their last foothold on Florida soil."<sup>52</sup> As patriots with an "intense love of home, and determination to remain in their native land," the Florida Seminoles provided a model for "patriotism and fidelity the most deep-rooted of all."<sup>53</sup> Americans struggled in this period to formulate a national identity, and Anglo-Americans felt particularly vulnerable as immigrants from eastern and southern Europe poured into the country.<sup>54</sup> By using the Seminoles as symbols of American bravery, whites constructed a national distinctiveness designed to protect American identity from foreign influence. In this context, Osceola became an enduring national hero: "His fame will never die; centuries will come and go, but the name of Osceola will remain as long as the earth is peopled."<sup>55</sup> Even the Seminole leader's grave became a fetishized site of American legend. According to one account, the grave alone remained untouched when Fort Moultrie was bombarded during the Civil War: "Everything round it had been knocked to pieces by our shells, but not one had

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52. Harriet Randolph Parkhill, *The Mission to the Seminoles in the Everglades of Florida* (Orlando: Sentinel Print, 1909), 5.

53. Charles H. Coe, *Red Patriots: The Story of the Seminoles* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 222. Originally published in Cincinnati: Editor Pub. Co., 1898.

54. Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, xv.

55. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 118.

touched it, or even clipped the flowers around his grave.”<sup>56</sup> Osceola and his descendents in the Everglades became symbols of American identity.

Although whites appropriated Indian identity to create a national character, they also maintained a distinct set of racial lines. The Seminoles served as symbols of national pride, yet these Indians were somehow “different” from other “savages” of their race. Champion of the Seminoles Charles H. Coe in his book, *Red Patriots*, described Osceola as distinctive “not for that inhuman cruelty such as characterized most of our Western tribes, but for true patriotism.” He further quoted a white settler in Florida who argued that “the fiendish instinct which led the wild tribes of the West to prolong the death of a captive over a slow fire, was totally lacking in the red men of Florida.”<sup>57</sup> Similarly, one of the founders of the “Friends of the Florida Seminoles” organization, Minnie Moore-Willson, argued that “the caustic remark that the only good Indian is a dead Indian might apply to the savage Apache,” but not to the Seminoles.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Moore-Willson even went on to argue that the Seminoles were of a “superior” stock than Western Indians: they were descendents of the Aztecs who in turn were connected to the Ancient Egyptians. For evidence, she pointed to the “resemblance of the present Seminole to the ancient Egyptian” and “old Israelites.”<sup>59</sup> Neither of these writers argued with general assumptions about the “inferior” natures of Indian peoples, but only declared that the

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56. “The People of Fredericksburg,” *Liberator* 35, no. 13 (31 March 1865): 51. American Periodical Series. Poems, stories, theatrical productions, and pageants also celebrated Osceola. See Renn Cary Sheffield, *Osceola, Chief of the Seminoles, A Pageant* (Winter Park: Rollins Press, 1926).

57. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 117, 67-68.

58. Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 79.

59. *Ibid.*, 121.

Seminoles were somehow an exception. Thus, both were able to use the Seminoles as symbols of American identity while maintaining popular notions of white superiority.

Whites also appropriated the physical bodies of Seminole individuals as they created an ideal of American masculine identity. The turn-of-the-century was a time of anxiety for Anglo-American men, who saw the close of the frontier as a threat to traditional notions of masculinity.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, medical doctors feared that a disease caused by over-civilization, “neurasthenia,” was spreading through the middle class due to excessive brainwork and nervous strain.<sup>61</sup> In order to combat this perceived “softening” of Anglo-American men, whites developed images of “perfect men” who embodied both civilized manhood and “primitive” masculinity. Bodybuilder Eugene Sandow, escape-artist Harry Houdini, and the fictional character of Tarzan became household names that inspired American men to attain their level of physical male perfection. White men also looked to the darker bodies of African and Native American men with the hope of seizing the “primitive” strength, freedom, wildness, and eroticism they manifested to fortify themselves against civilized life.<sup>62</sup>

As increasing numbers of government agents, traders, journalists, and missionaries encountered the Seminole Indians in the Everglades, a common thread that ran through their reports was the close attention they paid to the bodies of Seminole men. Although these Americans also commented on the “regular and uncommonly attractive” features of Seminole women, their most detailed descriptions focused on the male form.<sup>63</sup>

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60. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 10.

61. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 14.

62. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 7, 10.

63. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 243.

Observers remarked upon men's "attractive" and "well built" bodies, noting their "perfectly formed limbs, jet black hair, a piercing eye of an eagle, aquiline nose, and prominent cheek bones."<sup>64</sup> They also commented on the Seminoles' "erect" posture, height, and "self-confident bearing," further emphasizing their manliness through descriptions of their "squareness" of face and "widened and protruding under-jawbone."<sup>65</sup> Whites even described older Seminole men as retaining their masculine strength. According to reporter Fred Beverly, "Tiger," a man of about seventy years of age, was "rather above the medium height, broad shouldered, massive arms, and legs like mahogany pillars, worn smooth and polished by many a brush with thicket and briar."<sup>66</sup> So enamored were white observers of these "magnificent specimen[s] of manhood" that some did more than simply gaze upon Seminole men: government agent Clay MacCauley reported that "two of the warriors permitted [him] to manipulate the muscles of their bodies...under [his] touch these were more like rubber than flesh."<sup>67</sup>

Fascinated by these perfect male bodies, whites who encountered the Seminoles hypothesized about the conditions that allowed these Indians to reach physical perfection.

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64. Irenaeus Trout, W.J. Goddon, and Harriet M. Beddell, *Among the Seminole Indians of Southern Florida* (Hartford, CN: Church Missions Publishing Co., 1908), 3, 6; U.S. Department of the Interior. Office of Indian Affairs. *Letter of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Senator Duncan U. Fletcher transmitting a copy of a partial report by Lucien A. Spencer, Special Commissioner to the Florida Seminoles, on conditions existing among the Seminole Indians in Florida* (63rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1913. S. Doc. 42), 3.
65. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 241-243; MacCauley, *The Seminole Indians of Florida*, 481.
66. Fred Beverly, "Wild Life in Florida," *Forest and Stream: A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, Yachting* 1, no. 13 (6 November 1873): 193. American Periodical Series.
67. U.S. Department of the Interior. Office of Indian Affairs. *Letter of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Senator Duncan U. Fletcher transmitting a copy of a partial report by Lucien A. Spencer, Special Commissioner to the Florida Seminoles, on conditions existing among the Seminole Indians in Florida* (63rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1913. S. Doc. 42), 3; MacCauley, *The Seminole Indians of Florida*, 482.



Some suggested that “the wars of their ancestors” had made the Seminoles the “brave and proud people that they are,” keeping them from becoming “indolent and effeminate.”<sup>68</sup> Others argued that the Seminoles’ lifestyle kept them fit: “As a result of the favorable diet and uniform activity of life, combined with good descent, the Seminole Indian is in personal appearance the finest specimen of the American Indian now extant.”<sup>69</sup> Still others saw the environment of the Everglades as responsible for the Seminoles’ physiology: “Physically they are an exceptionally fine race, as is apt to be the case with a natural people whose environment is such as to afford them abundant and healthful nutrition, with a climate that permits free and symmetrical development of the body.”<sup>70</sup> For these observers, the Seminoles’ physical perfection offered lessons to Anglo-American males. To be masculine men, they should emulate the “wild and free yet highly moral life of these children of the Everglades” through regimes of physical activity, good nutrition, and forays into wild environments that did not soften men like the urban centers of civilization.<sup>71</sup>

As if eager to take their own recommendations on attaining masculine perfection, many white men who visited the Seminoles dwelled upon the difficulties they overcame as they journeyed to the Indians’ Everglade homes. By describing voyages “through cypress swamps, saw-grass ponds, palm hummocks and muck plains” these men showed

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68. MacCauley, 530.

69. Leonora Beck Ellis, “The Seminoles of Florida,” *Gunton’s Magazine* 25, no. 6 (New York: Dec. 1903): 25. American Periodical Series.

70. Sylvester Baxter, “The Bureau of Ethnology’s Fifth Annual Report, I-III,” *The American Architect and Building News* 28, no. 751 (17 May 1890): 99. American Periodical Series.

71. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 242-243.

off their masculine prowess as conquerors of the wilderness.<sup>72</sup> In these accounts, whites emphasized dangers ranging from rattlesnakes, alligators, and panthers to quicksand which could “suddenly sink beneath one’s feet and land you in a living grave.”<sup>73</sup> Stressing their personal bravery at undertaking such risks, these men also made comparisons between their own voyages and the contemporaneous expeditions of European colonists in Africa. Such trips loomed large in the public imagination, especially following former President Theodore Roosevelt’s publicized African tour and the launch of the Tarzan stories.<sup>74</sup> Making these comparisons, one writer declared that the Everglades were as unknown as “the interior of the Dark Continent beyond the path of Stanley,” while another argued that only those who had “explored the interior of Africa [could] appreciate the difficulties of this semi-tropical jungle.”<sup>75</sup> For Americans, the Everglades, like Africa, remained one of the last wild places on earth, an area where American men could still find adventure and literally go where no white man had gone before.

In the accounts written by white men who journeyed to the Seminoles’ homelands, another popular theme was the uselessness of modern technology in Florida’s wilderness. In government agent Roy Nash’s 1930 report, for instance, the author relayed a tale of multiple stops and starts in a Ford truck, during which he constantly had to jump

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72. Charles W. Smith, “Osceola’s Seminoles Make Their Last Stand,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1925, SM14. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

73. “The Florida Everglades,” *The New York Times*, 10 March 1889, 10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

74. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 184.

75. “The Florida Everglades,” *New York Times*, 10 March 1889, 10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Our Florida Expedition,” *Forest and Stream; A Journal of Outdoor Life, Travel, Nature Study, Shooting, Fishing, Yachting* 2, no. 11 (New York: 23 April 1874): 168. American Periodical Series.

from his vehicle to push it across “half a mile of water and mud.” Eventually, this task proved so daunting that he was forced to abandon the Ford and transfer all perishable goods to a Seminole bull cart.<sup>76</sup> Facing “starvation in a trackless wilderness” if their voyages failed, white men not only needed “nerve and muscle” to reach the Seminole camps, but also the ingenuity to find solutions when technology failed them.<sup>77</sup> In 1925, for example, journalist Charles Smith and his companions managed to keep their car’s engine running “by wrapping the distributor in pieces of inner tubes to keep out the water.”<sup>78</sup> A better solution still was to adopt the Seminoles’ traditional means of transport: in 1910, anthropologist Alanson Skinner reached Everglade camps by an ox-team and canoes.<sup>79</sup> By emphasizing the failures of modern technology in the depths of the Everglades, writers not only showcased their masculine abilities to adapt to “primitive” landscapes, but also gave a subtle criticism of the modern world’s reliance on machines. Although industrialization had made America dependent on modern technology, in certain cases only old-fashioned manpower could take Americans where they needed to go.

Observers also used the Seminoles to criticize modern society in other ways. With the late-nineteenth-century publications of Clay MacCauley’s survey, Minnie-Moore Willson’s *The Seminoles of Florida*, and Charles H. Coe’s *Red Patriots*, public interest in

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76. U.S. Congress. Senate. *A Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*. Report by Roy Nash. (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931. Doc. 314.), 3-4.

77. “The Florida Everglades,” *New York Times*, 10 March 1889, 10. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 100.

78. Charles W. Smith, “Osceola’s Seminoles Make Their Last Stand,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1925, SM14. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

79. Alanson Skinner, “Notes on the Florida Seminole,” *American Anthropologist* 15, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1913): 63-77.

these Indians intensified and the Seminoles gained a much more favorable reputation.<sup>80</sup> These discussions entered a discourse of discontent with modern life, industrial corruption, and urban decay that found expression in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America through popular uprisings like the Populist Movement and in the voices of social reformers during the Progressive Era. Not only did these authors and others like them praise the Seminoles as patriots, but they also commented on their industry, honesty, and morality, insisting that Florida's Natives were "morally our equals if not superiors." Through descriptions of the supposedly untainted and genial natures of these "simple children of nature," white Americans created fantasies of an idyllic life unspoiled by corrupt modernity.<sup>81</sup>

"Noble" depictions of Florida Seminoles frequently focused on their home life in the Everglades, much in the same way as authors looking to understand Seminole male "perfection" turned to environmental explanations. According to anthropologist Alanson Skinner,

Life in the camps is cool, clean, and pleasant. The breezes sweep through the lodges beneath the thatched roofs, and the camps are usually as neat as possible. Often in the morning the Indians may be seen raking the village square clean. Little refuse is to be seen about, for while the Seminole throw the bones and scraps from their meals about promiscuously, the wandering dogs and pigs soon make away with them.<sup>82</sup>

This healthful home offered a sharp contrast to America's urban dwellings, which at the turn-of-the-century were often dirty and disease-ridden, especially in the working-class slums. Discussions of pre-Removal Seminoles' "humble villages of log houses

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80. Kersey, *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides*, 24.

81. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 225, 235.

82. Skinner, "Notes on the Florida Seminole," 67-68.

surrounded by tilled fields” further alerted Americans to the decay of their own cityscapes. Through describing the “clean, airy quarters” of the Seminoles, writers provided an alternative vision of “home,” one that matched more closely with idealized notions of an American agrarian past.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to describing clean homes, writers also emphasized the morality of the Seminoles they encountered. Whites observed that “from earliest infancy, they are disciplined in the moral codes of their tribe.” “High-minded” Indians, they believed, “could teach the white man much along the lines of honesty, truthfulness, virtue, and love for each other.”<sup>84</sup> According to their reports, the Seminoles never stole, nor did they cheat or lie. They felt safe leaving their personal belongings in open-air chickees without fear of theft because, as Minnie Moore-Willson put it, ostensibly in the dialect of her Seminole informant, “Indian no steal.”<sup>85</sup> If Seminoles broke white laws out of ignorance, “no second case of violation [was] ever recorded against them.” Within their own communities, rules were strict and faithfully obeyed: “if one is violated the erring one accepts the penalty, even though it be death itself, without a protest.”<sup>86</sup> For whites fearful of increased crime in urban centers inhabited by competing immigrant communities, Seminole honesty shone as a bright example.

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83. Elizabeth W. Champney, *The Florida Seminoles* (Jacksonville, FL: n.p., 1891), 2; U.S. Congress. Senate. *A Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*, Report by Roy Nash. (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931. Doc. 314.), 35.

84. Berkebile, *Musa Isle*, 23; U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Indian Affairs. *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States. Part 15: Oklahoma. The Florida Seminole*. Report by W. Stanley Hanson (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1930. S. Doc. 26 465).

85. Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 109.

86. U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Printing. *Special Report of the Florida Seminole Agency*. Report by Lucien A. Spencer (67th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1921. S. Doc. 102).

Whites also looked to the Seminoles for examples of the kind self-reliance that had long been a part of the “American dream.” Industrial monopolies and corporate corruption threatened this fantasy, but Americans held onto their Horatio Alger hopes of success through hard work. Whites remarked that the Seminoles were “industrious and frugal,” which led to “comparative prosperity.” Although their industry, in Anglo-American estimations, was not “the persistent and rapid labor of the white man of a northern community,” nonetheless, they were “workers” and not “loafers.”<sup>87</sup> “Self-supporting” through hunting and raising crops, they were “an independent race” who remained “contented and happy in their simple life as though they never had heard of the white man’s ways of living.”<sup>88</sup> For Anglo-Americans, the self-reliance of the Seminoles was admirable, but persistent assumptions of white racial and cultural superiority also made Seminole industry appear unfinished: “Dull must be the man who can not read from such signs the possibilities of great development inherent in this race.”<sup>89</sup> If the Seminoles were truly to rise from rags to riches, they would need the help of an “enlightened” and “progressive” people.

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87. MacCauley, *The Seminole Indians of Florida*, 472, 503.

88. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 224; Berkebile, *Musa Isle*, 5.

89. Leonora Beck Ellis, “The Seminoles of Florida,” *Gunton’s Magazine* 25, no. 6 (New York: Dec. 1903): 25. American Periodical Series.

#### Chapter IV. : Frail Remnants

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw rapid growth in the white population of Florida. Between 1860 and 1880, the number of American inhabitants in the state increased by ninety percent and by 1900, the non-Indian population of Florida exceeded 528,000. Land grants and railroad construction attracted many of these residents and by the turn of the century over 3,500 miles of railroad opened Florida to thousands of tourists as well as new settlers. Everglade drainage projects commenced in 1905 and by 1921, sixteen settlements with more than two hundred inhabitants existed in the once “uninhabitable” Lake Okeechobee region.<sup>90</sup> As one commentator put it, “that great hitherto unproductive territory will be made to yield latent riches for the benefit of man.”<sup>91</sup> Long gone were the days when settlers feared that the Seminoles would rise and retake the peninsula. Instead, some lamented that the Seminoles had been “driven into the last ditch, and that last ditch is being drained by our people.”<sup>92</sup> Mixed with accounts of Seminole nobility were new concerns that the Seminoles were dying out, piteously disappearing unless whites made efforts to “save” them.

The old trope of the “vanishing race” had been a part of Anglo-American discourse on Native people for years. Early nineteenth-century novels like James

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90. Gannon, *Florida: A Short History*, 53, 60, 65, 70.

91. Fisher Ames, “The ‘Four Corners,’” *The Youth’s Companion* 97, no. 31 (2 August 1923): 456. American Periodical Series.

92. A.W. Dimock, “A Despoiled People,” *Outlook* 97, no. 4 (28 January 1911): 201. American Periodical Series.

Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* popularized the notion that "noble savages" would inevitably disappear to make way for the "manifest destiny" of Americans. By the turn-of-the-century, ideas of the "dying Indian" took on a wistful quality, especially for those Americans who believed that societal change had come too rapidly.<sup>93</sup> For whites who encountered Florida's Seminole Indians, their "passing" appeared particularly tragic. Imagined as a "pristine" example of America's indigenous past, the projected demise of these Natives became a heartrending end to a chapter in American history.

In their reports on the Seminoles, Americans frequently commented on the cultural continuance of a people who lived "just as they lived hundreds of years ago before their white brethren set out to conquer the Everglades and develop Florida."<sup>94</sup> For them, the Seminole Indians were a perfect example of Natives who had remained in "splendid isolation" from the corruptions of modern America.<sup>95</sup> Yet as the white population of Florida grew, these Indians, according to observers, devolved to "only a frail remnant of that powerful tribe of Osceola's day." Seeing them as "a race whose destiny says extinction," whites lamented that "soon they will have vanished from the earth."<sup>96</sup> Anglo-Americans even taught their children to follow this line of thought. In a book written "to meet the ever growing demand for simple but interesting supplementary reading for the children of the primary grades," author Margaret Fairlie included a poem about Seminole Indians that ended with the troubling lines, "Two little Seminoles cleaned

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93. Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 197.

94. Berkebile, *Musa Isle*, 5.

95. Cecil Rhea Warren, *Florida's Seminoles: An Eye-Witness Story of Indian Want and Privation as Published by the Miami Daily News* (Miami: Miami Daily News, 1934), 3.

96. Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 6; Charles W. Smith, "Osceola's Seminoles Make Their Last Stand," *New York Times*, 26 April 1925, SM14. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



out a gun, /Off went the trigger, and then there was one. /One little Seminole played in the sun /Till he was hungry, and then there was none.”<sup>97</sup> This poem predicted a self-inflicted end as a result of Anglo-American “civilization,” the gun, and Native profligacy, play instead of labor. Certain that the Seminoles were soon to disappear, Americans comforted themselves with the thought that “they will have gone with heads held high, conscious that they have never been conquered.”<sup>98</sup>

Attributing much of the Seminoles’ perceived decline to contact with whites, Americans squabbled over who was to blame for their piteous end. Missionaries, who had made several, largely-unsuccessful attempts to Christianize the Seminoles, blamed traders who allegedly corrupted the Seminoles with lax morals and liquor. Not only did these whites steal the Seminoles’ “pigs and provisions,” but they also took their homes “again and again” until the Seminoles grew “grave” and distrustful of all whites.<sup>99</sup>

According to Charles Coe,

The distrust of the Indians was intensified by the malicious stories of white traders and whiskey peddlers, who for years had been buying their deer hides and other skins, and selling them an inferior grade of goods, including the vilest whiskey, at prices far above the actual value. This class of robbers—for they deserve no better name—realized that missionary work among the Indians would expose their own nefarious dealings, and cut off their highly remunerative trade. For this reason these unprincipled traders did their utmost to prejudice the red men against the mission and Government work.<sup>100</sup>

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97. Margaret C. Fairlie, *Stories of the Seminoles* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1930), 9, 52.

98. Charles W. Smith, “Osceola’s Seminoles Make Their Last Stand,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1925, SM14. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

99. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 6; Parkhill, *The Mission to the Seminoles in the Everglades of Florida*, 3-5.

100. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 233.

Missionaries saw alcohol as particularly destructive to the tribe. According to one writer, the Seminoles were “downright stupid when under the influence of liquor.” Not only did access to alcohol increase Seminole crime, but in some cases “fifty percent of the Indians’ total income goes for whiskey.”<sup>101</sup> Hoping to reduce the toxic effects of alcohol on Seminole culture, some observers called for the strict “enforcement of the laws against selling liquor to these child-like people.”<sup>102</sup>

For their part, traders agreed that “contact with civilization is of no benefit to the Indians, either materially or morally,” but argued that “the Indian agents, sent by the United States Government, have done more harm than good.”<sup>103</sup> The “civilized savage called white men” had taught the Seminoles “to curse and swear, drink and cheat” and the Indians’ homes were “exploited by great companies...speculators, promoters, and agents” who “wax fat on the sale of his lands.”<sup>104</sup> In a particularly damning report, one journalist argued that in the attitudes of Americans, “the Seminole of Florida stands in the path of our people, who covet his land, but we can brush him aside as easily as an automobile can run over a baby.”<sup>105</sup> American greed and modern corruption, according to these reports, were responsible for the destruction of the Seminole people. As with so

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101. Dickinson, *Seminoles of South Florida*, 27, 11.

102. Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 113.

103. Quoting a conversation with Indian trader Major Brickell, C. H. Howard, “A Remnant of the Seminoles,” *New York Evangelist* 67, no. 10 (New York: Mar. 11, 1897): 9. American Periodical Series.

104. “The Seminoles of Florida,” *Friends’ Intelligencer* 53, no. 34 (Philadelphia: 22 August 1896): 557. American Periodical Series; A.W. Dimock, “A Despoiled People,” *Outlook* 97, no. 4 (28 January 1911): 201. American Periodical Series.

105. A.W. Dimock, “A Despoiled People,” *Outlook* 97, no. 4 (28 January 1911): 201. American Periodical Series.

many accounts of the Seminoles, these reactions reflected general discontent with the modernizing world.

Of particular concern to observers of the Seminoles was the perceived health crisis that threatened the tribe. According to one journalist, the Indians faced “extinction in Florida unless the diseases are properly controlled.”<sup>106</sup> Although earlier reports had extolled the health and hygiene of these Natives, arguing that there was “very little sickness and at present no known case of tuberculosis or trachoma” among them, later accounts described Seminole health in alarming terms.<sup>107</sup> Apparently, “disease [was] rampant among them, partially caused by their own insanitary [sic] habits, but mostly by their contact with the white man’s civilization.” Their now “filthy” camp sites, combined with both medical and surgical neglect, led to conditions “which would shame a civilization far less advanced than Florida’s.”<sup>108</sup> Their “constant sickness” and their “thin, emaciated bodies” showcased their society’s disintegration.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, their alleged “drift toward promiscuity with its attendant evils of venereal diseases” suggested that the Seminoles suffered from moral as well as physical decay.<sup>110</sup> Seeing the Seminoles as partly to blame for their poor health, whites called for programs to educate them about the benefits of “proper scientific treatment:” “Seminoles need to be taught to

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106. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 3.

107. U.S. Department of the Interior. Office of Indian Affairs. *Letter of the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Senator Duncan U. Fletcher transmitting a copy of a partial report by Lucien A. Spencer, Special Commissioner to the Florida Seminoles, on conditions existing among the Seminole Indians in Florida* (63rd Cong., 1st Sess., 1913. S. Doc. 42), 3.

108. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 3.

109. Veronica E. Huss, *Life Among the Seminoles* (N.p.: n.p., 1930), 4-5.

110. Dickinson, *Seminoles of South Florida*, 29-30.

seek aid of the white men when they are sick and to be provided with care they need.”<sup>111</sup>

In this context, Americans simultaneously blamed “civilization” for the Seminoles’ health crisis while they suggested that only modern medicine could save them.

Programs designed to “save” the Seminole Indians began in the late nineteenth century with the establishment of organizations such as the “Friends of the Florida Seminoles.” Women often led these groups and drew upon Victorian claims of female moral authority to legitimize their involvement in this “public sphere.”<sup>112</sup> In addition, church groups had long been interested in Florida’s Natives with an eye to bringing them into the Christian flock and giving them a “Heavenly Home which can never be taken from them.”<sup>113</sup> Many of these groups employed the rhetoric of making up for past United States injustices against the Seminoles. Anguished by thoughts of “a chapter in history so black that we can only hang our heads in shame for our race and for our Government,” whites hoped that through “the sympathy and action on the part of our better citizens that we may in part atone for the past.”<sup>114</sup> Making amends for past wrongs showed the progressive improvement of civilization. Even if America had wronged the Seminoles historically, turning over a new leaf could complete “the last chapter” of the United States’ dealings with the Seminoles “with honor to the Nation and the State.”<sup>115</sup>

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111. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 3.

112. See Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

113. Parkhill, *The Mission to the Seminoles in the Everglades of Florida*, 3-4.

114. Parkhill, 1; W. Stanley Hanson to The Friends of the Florida Seminoles, Sept. 9, 1933, *Hanson Talks on Seminoles* (Fort Myers, FL: n.p., 1933).

115. Coe, *Red Patriots*, 258.

Convinced that the Seminoles were doomed to extinction if action was not immediately taken, many reformers decided that the best solution to the Seminole “problem” was assimilation. In 1884, for example, government agent Clay MacCauley argued that ultimately the Seminoles would either “perish in the futile attempt” to resist encroachment, or “submit to a civilization which, until now, they have been able to repel.”<sup>116</sup> Older generations of Seminole people were “shy and suspicious” of Americans, but “a better feeling toward the Government on the part of the younger Seminoles, many of whom are anxious for instruction and advancement” would provide “a chance to do much good, provided care, good judgment, and honest interest is shown in them.”<sup>117</sup> Early twentieth-century Progressive ideals of reform promised that by showing Florida’s Indians some of the advantages of American society that these Natives would become “good neighbor[s] and an asset to modern civilization.”<sup>118</sup>

Government agents, women’s associations, and missionaries made efforts to “teach the Indians useful, homely arts” and in the 1890s, the Episcopalians established a mission to the Seminoles thirty-five miles from Fort Myers. Named Immokalee, which meant “home” in the Mikasuki language, this mission included houses for both missionaries and the Indians they hoped would settle there.<sup>119</sup> Despite the Seminoles’ opposition to “all efforts to teach them English, or to instruct them in the rudiments of

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116. MacCauley, *The Seminole Indians of Florida*, 530.

117. U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Indian Affairs. *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States. Part 15: Oklahoma. The Florida Seminole*. Report by W. Stanley Hanson (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1930. S. Doc. 26 465).

118. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 28.

119. “Seminole Indians of Florida,” *New York Times*, Jul. 7, 1896, 3. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 66.

learning or of the Christian religion,” missionaries felt encouraged when Natives came to Immokalee and its accompanying hospital, Glade Cross, for medical treatment.<sup>120</sup> Doctor J.E. Breckt and Reverend Henry Gibbs made trips to the Seminoles’ Everglade homes in the hopes that “by living with and among these people they could gain a greater influence over them.”<sup>121</sup> In particular, they wished to minister to Seminole women and children, who they assumed would be easier to sway than the men. By gradually gaining the Seminoles’ confidence, missionaries hoped to bring them into the fold of modern civilization, to “domesticate” them, and to protect them from their perceived path to extinction.<sup>122</sup>

Reflecting national debates that surrounded government involvement in Progressive reforms, people interested in “helping” the Seminoles argued over what such programs might entail. Although most agreed that some sort of aid was necessary, several commentators rejected the notion of giving the Indians direct monetary support. “Don’t pauperize them with pensions,” warned W. Stanley Hanson, secretary of the Seminole Association of Florida.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, Seminole agent Lucien A. Spencer advised Congress not to make the Indians “an object of charity,” but rather to help them maintain their “independence and self-respect.” Accepting the American ideal of the self-made man, these individuals sincerely believed that the Seminoles would best be served through

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120. Trout et al., *Among the Seminole Indians of Southern Florida*, 10.

121. Ibid, 9.

122. Parkhill, *The Mission to the Seminoles in the Everglades of Florida*, 20.

123. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 30.

“proper instruction” in farming so they could become self-sufficient.<sup>124</sup> Such plans backfired when starving Seminoles were denied aid they desperately needed. In 1934, reporter Cecil Rhea Warren argued that efforts to keep the Seminoles off a “dole” system resulted in “actual hunger among them” when charitable aid was cut off “upon instructions of the agent.”<sup>125</sup> These discussions revealed some of the ideological conflicts between progressives and conservatives that determined public policy both on national and local levels.

In contrast to assimilationists, other Americans believed that these Indians should be preserved in their “natural” state. New ideas about environmental conservation emerged at the turn-of-the-century, partly as a result of American concerns that they would lose their distinctiveness with the close of the frontier.<sup>126</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt championed the development of the United States’ first national parks and encouraged efforts across the country to identify and protect endangered habitats and creatures. Florida was no exception, and observers fretfully commented on declining populations of alligators and waterfowl, noting that the “wonderland of the Everglades” was swiftly becoming “a scene of tragedy.”<sup>127</sup>

Some of the same individuals who sought to protect the Seminoles also threw themselves into conservation projects for Florida wildlife. For example, in 1925 Minnie Moore-Willson, “an authority on Southern bird life and on the Seminole Indians,” urged

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124. U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Printing. *Special Report of the Florida Seminole Agency*. Report by Lucien A. Spencer (67th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1921. S. Doc. 102).

125. Warren, *Florida’s Seminoles*, 25.

126. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 10.

127. “Alligators are Getting Scarce,” 12 July 1903, 28; and “Urges Everglades as Bird Sanctuary,” Sept. 16, 1925, 14, *New York Times*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

that the Everglades be set aside as a bird sanctuary.<sup>128</sup> These individuals frequently conflated the Seminoles' future with that of endangered animals. Moore-Willson drew this comparison when she demanded of her readers, "While we protect the deer and the alligator, the quail and the fish, shall we leave our brother in bronze a prey to the lawless and a helpless victim of every loafer?" Similarly, government agent Roy Nash insisted that "the Seminole and his culture are akin to the snowcapped mountain and the roseate spoonbill...Let him be an Indian so long as he may."<sup>129</sup> For these writers, assimilation was not the key to the Seminoles' survival. Instead, they urged that the "only way to protect these wards of Florida is to buy a reservation, and hold it in trust for them—forever."<sup>130</sup> Eventually the pressures put on the government by such individuals led to both the establishment of Seminole reservations at Dania, Brighton, and Big Cypress and to Congress's approval of the Everglades as a national park in 1934.<sup>131</sup>

By comparing the Seminoles to wild animals, authors sought to persuade their audiences that the Seminoles were as "eminently worth saving" as any feature in the natural landscape.<sup>132</sup> Simultaneously, however, the application of the language of environmentalism to Seminole people dehumanized them. In the eyes of whites, the Seminoles became little more than tourist attractions, part of the "romance and charm" of

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128. "Urges Everglades as Bird Sanctuary," *New York Times*, Sept. 16, 1925, 14. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

129. Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 70; U.S. Congress. Senate. *A Survey of the Seminole Indians of Florida*, Report by Roy Nash (71st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1931. Doc. 314), 76.

130. Moore-Willson, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 70.

131. Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida*, 209; "New Everglades National Park Will Open Tropical Wonderland," *New York Times*, 1 July 1934, E7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

132. Warren, *Florida's Seminoles*, 4.



Florida's wilderness.<sup>133</sup> According to one reporter, there were "few visitors to Florida who would confess not being interested in the 'unconquered Seminole,' the savage people that bested the strong United States."<sup>134</sup> The Indians' "barbaric ceremonies" attracted countless white spectators and the thousands of Americans who traveled to the state each year "would think their itinerary of Florida incomplete without looking in upon the Seminoles and the species of life maintained there."<sup>135</sup> In this context, Seminoles once again became remnants of the American past, a reminder of the old frontier days, and a sort of living museum for an American public fascinated by its imagined national origins.

Tourism, however, also helped create a new appreciation for Seminole culture. Although this interest may have served white economic goals, it led Floridians to value rather than denigrate Seminole communities and their place in the state. For their part, the Seminoles at times took advantage of this assigned role to make a living for themselves. Along the Tamiami Trail, Seminole women sold "home-made trinkets" to winter visitors while other Indians went to live in tourist camps where they earned money to practice traditional customs.<sup>136</sup> Thus, despite the unfortunate implications of the Seminoles' perceived link to wild animals, the natural landscape, and a "primitive" past in the white public's imagination, the Native people themselves could occasionally manipulate their exoticized image to support their families and traditions.

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133. Berkebile, *Musa Isle*, 21.

134. Warren, *Florida's Seminoles*, 31.

135. "Seminole Chief Marries," *New York Times*, 4 June 1926, 7. ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Berkebile, *Musa Isle*, 5.

136. Huss, *Life among the Seminoles*, 5; Hanson, *Hanson Talks on Seminoles*; for a full discussion of Seminole involvement in the tourist industry see Patsy West, *The Enduring Seminoles: From Alligator Wrestling to Ecotourism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

## **Chapter V. : Conclusion**

In the years between the Civil War and the 1930s, the American public's perception of the Seminoles Indians of Florida reflected their own changing ideas about their dynamic society. In the early years, lingering frontier fears served to demonize Florida's indigenous people, who, in the eyes of whites, remained formidable foes to settlements on the edge of a wilderness. Lacking confidence in their own domination of a land that seemed so impenetrable, whites transformed their personal insecurities to denunciations of the people they imagined threatened their preeminence. As America underwent its enormous turn-of-the-century changes towards industrialization, however, whites no longer feared their society would flounder, but instead worried over what direction it would take. In this context, Natives served as symbols of the kind of society Anglo-Americans longed for. The Seminoles became symbolic of a romanticized past, an America free from the corruptions of modernity. They also provided models for an idealized American identity at a time when Anglo-Americans struggled to preserve their national distinctiveness from the influences of foreign-born immigrants.

These more noble impressions of Florida's indigenous people were later challenged as Americans grew comfortable with their modernizing world. Confident that their society was progressing forward to a higher plane of civilization through reforms, whites sought to "fix" past wrongs and uplift the Seminoles, whom they now perceived as piteously frail and backward. At times, the Seminoles were able to use white images to benefit themselves. Whites who viewed the Seminoles as part of nature helped the

Indians to secure reservation lands, and Florida's growing tourist industry led commercially-minded whites to value traditional Seminole culture, if only for their own economic interests. Overall, however, perceptions of the Florida Seminoles revealed much more about American society and anxieties than they did about the Indians they described. Rather than enlighten Congress about Florida's remaining population of Natives, Roy Nash's colorful "anachronism" showcased American desires to reconcile their idealized past with their rapidly changing future.

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