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"This Inglorious War": The Second Seminole War, the Ad Hoc Origins
of American Imperialism, and the Silence of Slavery

by

Daniel Scallet

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Introduction

In 1844, the famed artist George Catlin published *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, a grand synthesis of all that he had learned on the indigenous nations of the United States. He was largely sympathetic to the plight of the Indians, opposing removal as a violation of their rights and mourning the dozens of nations whose culture appeared to him lost, their morals corrupted. Near his conclusion, Catlin noted the recently completed struggle with the Seminole Indians in Florida, a conflict he believed to represent the last stand of Indians east of the Mississippi. He included only a brief summary of the war and begged the reader's indulgence for his brevity, explaining that he was too close to the end of the book to detail it further. To Catlin, that was a lucky coincidence, but one that established a pattern he hoped later writers would follow, rationalizing that "the world will pardon me for saying no more of this inglorious war; ... [but] as an American citizen I would pray, amongst thousands of others, that all books yet to be made might have as good an excuse for leaving it out." He need not have bothered; the implications of the war had never been comprehended well enough to be forgotten.¹

Nevertheless, it was a remarkable admission. Just six years before in January 1838, Catlin had traveled far south to Fort Moultrie, a United States fort on the coast of Charleston, to meet the captured Seminole war leader Osceola and several prominent Seminole chiefs. Though prisoners, the Seminoles had freedom to move within the fort, and they spent hours with Catlin in the fort's officers' quarters. There they recounted their own perspectives on the war and bitterly denounced the circumstances of their

¹ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians: Written During Eight Years' Travel amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844), 219.

capture, having been lured into the open by a white flag and then deceitfully placed in chains under the orders of General Thomas Jesup.²

The details of Catlin's visit to the Seminoles were well known for another reason - the great Seminole leader Osceola lay dying, suffering from quinsy, a complication of tonsillitis, an illness he had almost certainly contracted before his capture in October 1837. Inside the fort, Catlin spoke with the dying warrior and offered to paint his portrait. Osceola welcomed the attentions of a famous painter like Catlin and one can easily see how he influenced his own portrayal. Proud, dignified, and resolute, the Osceola depicted in Catlin's *Osceola, the Black Drink, a Warrior of Great Distinction* made a clear statement of Osceola's essential humanity in an era of Indian dispossession and removal.³



Before the artist's arrival, the warrior had sent for his white doctor and, knowing his death was imminent, declared through an interpreter "his country had been taken from him ... by the strong & oppressive hand of the white people, & if he wished to live, it was only to show them that an Indian never forgot an Injury." The Osceola of Catlin's depiction memorialized the history of injustice the true Osceola swore never to forget; it was etched in the very melancholy of his features. It fit Catlin's ideology as well. He believed Indians were to be celebrated, but only with a mournful tinge reflecting their

² Catlin, *Letters and Notes* 220.

³ The title of Catlin's painting, *The Black Drink*, was a translation of Osceola's name and referred to a ceremonial liquid.

inexorable march toward extinction. Following his visit, Catlin returned to the northeast to exhibit his paintings of the Seminole leaders, inspiring numerous homages and copies. The morning that Catlin left South Carolina, Osceola himself provided the final brushstroke for Catlin's image, passing away with his family at his side.⁴

Catlin may have hoped that the Second Seminole War might be forgotten, but it was not an isolated conflict on the outskirts of a nation. In Florida, several of the most powerful antebellum political, social, and economic movements collided with discomfiting results. There, Jackson and his fellow Democrats spent over thirty million dollars and ordered nearly 1600 men to their death to make their vision of the nation manifest. By obliterating the last vestiges of non-United States collective sovereignty and threatening the future of nonwhite autonomy, Jackson intended to extend the geographic reach of his two most vital constituencies, white settlers and Southern slaveholders, and consolidate the hegemony of the United States in the southeast, one of the most unstable regions in the Americas over the preceding several centuries. Removing the Seminoles would further integrate Florida into Deep South slave society and legitimize white owners' specious claims on dozens of the Seminoles' relatively autonomous African-American allies. His actions had disastrous consequences for his nation, in both the short and long term. Yet, even as Jackson pursued the policies that would bring his nation to the brink of destruction, many of his most prominent opponents remained silent,

⁴ John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1985), 214-218; Patricia Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 26-28; Frederick Weedon's Diary Pages, January 28-31, Fort Moultrie, S.C., Frederick Weedon Family Papers, SPR 251, Alabama Dept. of Archives and History; *Daily Cleveland Herald*, February 13, 1838; *New York Spectator*, February 8, 1838. On Catlin's personal views on Indians and their destiny, see William H Truettner, *The Natural Man Observed: A Study of Catlin's Indian Gallery* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979); John Hausdoerffer, *Catlin's Lament: Indians, Manifest Destiny, and the Ethics of Nature* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

unwilling to alienate or antagonize powerful slaveholding interests. Their silence ensured that the contours of Jacksonian expansion would become the sole precedent for United States continental and overseas expansion, a blueprint which demanded the colonization of native populations and the annihilation of their nonwhite political forms. He laid the groundwork for the imperial state.⁵

In arguing for a link between Jackson's crusade of conquest and the imperialists of the nineteenth century, I define imperialism as a form of domination in which an alien power imposes its authority over a subject people in an alien land. This is distinguished from an imperial state, in which political institutions are explicitly tasked with ruling subject peoples, erecting a legal framework to ensure their subjugation, and appropriating their resources for the benefit of the dominant nation. Through their Indian policy, Jackson and his ideological allies set out to annihilate Indian sovereignty on the United States' frontiers, but did not institutionalize the subjugation of the southeast Indians into law nor did they impose direct rule upon them following their removal. Rather, Jackson pursued conquest, the subjugation of a people and assumption of authority within a defined geographic space. His policies provided a blueprint for Gilded Age leaders, but stopped short of transforming the United States itself into an imperial state.⁶

⁵ To put those figures in perspective, Andrew Jackson's administration predicted that the total cost of Indian Removal for all the remaining Indians in the eastern United States would total three million dollars out of total yearly federal expenditures of around twenty-five million dollars during the war years. For budgeting information, see *Historical Statistics of the United States 1789-1945* (Washington: United States Department of Commerce, 1949), 310-311.

⁶ The use of the word "imperialism" is somewhat anachronistic here as it did not come into use until coined by an anonymous British writer in 1858 to criticize Napoleon III's imperial pretensions. See "France, Under Napoleon III," *The Westminster Review*, 344 (Oct., 1858), 167-194. On the history of the word "imperialism," itself, see Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964). Jackson's crusade of conquest differed markedly from what historian Peter Onuf identified as the central premise of the Jeffersonian creed, the creation of a new republican empire founded on the principles of the American Revolution. Where the conquests of Jackson and the imperialists of later eras were rooted in

I argue that Jackson designed his policies to eliminate the possibility of both nonwhite autonomy and Indian sovereignty within the North American continent. The two concepts are linked, though the latter is a specific form of the former. In *Worcester v. Georgia*, Justice John Marshall famously declared Indian nations to be “domestic dependent nations,” recognizing their right to self-government but subordinating their laws to United States federal authority and eliminating their right to form relationships with any foreign power except the United States. Throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a succession of presidential administrations established the principle that the United States would negotiate with Indian nations through the medium of treaties, recognizing and reinforcing their claims to sovereignty. Though he expressed little interest in curtailing Indian self-government, Jackson was militantly opposed to negotiating with Indian entities, and attempted to form a new relationship with Indian nations founded on the imposition of control. Similarly, Jackson was hostile to nonwhite autonomy in general, and feared the influence of the Black Seminoles upon the slave populations of the southeast. I use the phrase nonwhite autonomy to differentiate Jackson’s pragmatic fears of Seminole and Black Seminole cross-racial collaboration

the subordination of alien peoples, Jefferson explicitly welcomed foreign nationals of European descent as equal members in his imagined empire. See Peter Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of Early American Nationhood* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 17. For a partial overview on the conception and definition of imperialism, see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 3-14; Wolfgang Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*, trans., P.S. Falla (New York: Random House, 1980); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, trans., Shelley Frisch (Princeton, NJ: M. Wiener, 1996); P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 2 Vols (London: Longman Press, 1993); D.K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1965); Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-imperial Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); James Muldoon, *Empires and Order: The Concept of Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999); Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004); Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue ed., *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2007); John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System* (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

from his more abstract opposition to the expression of Indian rights independent of their relationship with the United States.

The situation in Florida differed from that of the rest of the southeast. In Georgia, land hungry settlers propelled the dispossession of the Cherokees through a process some scholars have identified as settler colonialism. As they have defined it, colonizing settlers eradicate indigenous societies with the intention of settling the land upon which they would erect their own societal structures. However, in Florida settlers were not clamoring for Seminole land. Unbearably hot and possibly sickly, the Florida climate itself discouraged white settlement. In contrast to the dispossession of other southeast Indian nations, federal Indian policies and the agitation of slave owners instigated the Second Seminole War rather than the land hunger of local settlers. Young white males were happy to assist in the dispossession of the Seminoles, but they were largely uninterested in Florida land.⁷

Throughout its duration, contemporary Americans decided that the reality of the conquest of the Seminoles was a story best left untold. Not completely, of course. There were reports of battles, narratives of service, accounts of families massacred, and stories of Indians captured by deceit, but the fundamental arguments of the war - why it had been undertaken, how it was to be fought, why it had to be won - occurred wholly outside of the public view, if they occurred at all. Abolitionist David Lee Child recounted that one unnamed northern senator who had proposed an appropriation of half a million

⁷ On settler colonialism, see Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous Peoples in America and Australia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

dollars to continue the war, had replied to a question as to why the war was being fought “that really he did not know what was the cause of the war – but he knew that war existed and must be prosecuted!” It was a lament echoed tragically a decade later when Henry Clay, the leading opponent of the Mexican-American War, mourned his son who had died serving his country: “My poor son did not however stop to enquire into the causes of the War. It was sufficient for him that it existed in fact.”⁸

The Second Seminole War, like all wars, had many proximate and remote causes, stretching back decades and arising from the racial and imperial turbulence of colonial Florida. Decades before, the Seminoles had reinforced Spanish Florida against United States filibusterers, forestalling its annexation. The conflict continued for decades, spanning Jackson’s illegal campaign in the First Seminole War and resulting in the Seminoles’ agreement to emigrate to southern Florida. It appeared to culminate in the Treaty of Fort Gibson, when seven Seminole chiefs, likely bribed and coerced, spoke for the rest of their nation and agreed to emigrate further, to designated land in Arkansas. Nevertheless, several years later and weary of Seminole intransigence, Jackson scribbled on the back of a letter, “let a sufficient military force be forthwith ordered to protect our citizens & remove & protect the Indians.” Eight months later, on a cold morning on December 23, 1835 in the Florida wilderness, 180 Seminoles descended upon a hostile battalion of 110 United States soldiers and left only a single survivor, leaving no doubt that war had begun.⁹

⁸ David Lee Child, “Texas,” *Philanthropist*, May 27, 1836, 1.22, 2; William Henry Clay to John M. Clayton, April 16, 1847, in Henry Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay: Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Statesman*, ed., Melba Porter Hay (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 10: 322. The unnamed senator was likely Daniel Webster. On Webster, see discussion in chapter 4. On Child, see chapter 6.

⁹ Duncan Clinch to Adjutant General Jones, April 24, 1835, *Territorial Papers*, 25:129-130; Thompson, Harris, and Clinch to Cass, April 24, 1835, *Senate Document 152*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 38-39.

Each of those provocations by the United States - the battalion marching against the Seminoles, Jackson's plan to overawe the Seminoles through shows of force, the fraudulent Treaty of Fort Gibson, the adventurers in Spanish Florida – were in response to persistent fears of instability in the southeast. For many in the United States, the southeast Indians, especially the Seminoles in undeveloped Florida, threatened the United States in several distinct ways. By accepting fugitive slaves into their society, the Seminoles' very presence imperiled slavery throughout Florida. Worse, many feared that the influence of slaves living amongst the Seminoles on slaves owned by United States planters would lead to widespread slave rebellion. Moreover, the Seminoles had a history of allying with European powers against the United States. The southern tip of Florida would have served as an ideal beachhead for a British invasion, which itself would benefit from slave insurrections that the Seminoles might provoke. Aside from the tactical vulnerability posed by the racial situation in Florida, dozens of whites held tenuous claims on free and enslaved African-Americans allied with the Seminoles, collectively identified as the Black Seminoles, who were shielded from the harsh chattel slavery of the South, but represented a potential fortune in human property. Removing the Seminoles would alleviate each of these interlocked threats and, as welcome byproducts, spur the economic development of Florida, deliver dozens of slaves to white owners, and open up Seminole land for white settlement.¹⁰

¹⁰ On the Black Seminoles, see Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People*, ed., Alcione Amos and Thomas Senter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: the Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Anthony Dixon, "Black Seminole Involvement and Leadership during the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842," (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2007); Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977); Kevin Kokomoor, "A Re-assessment of Seminoles, Africans, and Slavery on the Florida Frontier," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 88.2 (Fall 2009), 209-236. More national in scope, though brief are

To win the war and eliminate the problems the Seminoles posed in Florida, the administrations of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren yoked the conflict to their vision of a white, democratic, independent nation. Relying on the military prowess of volunteers recruited throughout the South, they imagined brigades of independent young men, buttressed by the organizational might of the federal army, marching forth to liberate Florida from the Seminole threat. The offensive embodied their belief in the providential destiny of the United States, and they saw in the Second Seminole War a few more incremental steps toward a continent peopled by United States citizens, not European subjects or “savage” Indians. The war would make clear the futility of Indian resistance. Any expression of Indian autonomy in the face of United States aggression would be crushed. Compliance would be their only recourse.

The Second Seminole War unleashed energies which Jackson had not anticipated. He had proposed Indian removal and the destruction of Indian sovereignty as a means of securing white settlement and protecting national security. Yet, in their violent refutation of Indian autonomy, thousands of Americans embraced Indian killing for both themselves and their nation. As many Southerners repudiated the very conception of negotiating with Indian enemies, they celebrated the violent subordination of Indians in their midst. The war began as a pragmatic means of advancing the interests of slaveholders. It ended with an affirmation that expansion and the annihilation of nonwhite autonomy were national imperatives.

Bruce Twyman, *The Black Seminole Legacy and North American Politics, 1693-1845* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1999) and Brent Weisman, “Labor and Survival among the Black Seminoles of Florida,” in *Florida’s Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration*, ed., Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 64-85.

As a result, Jackson's Democratic vision failed in two instances, first to solve the problems that undermined the development and security of the state and second to make manifest his conception of the nation. When the war ended, the thousands of soldiers and volunteers who had streamed into Florida had forced most of the Seminoles to emigrate to their new lands in Arkansas, but left hundreds behind. Notwithstanding a cost of over a thousand lives and tens of millions of dollars, the same impediments to national security remained. Jacksonian nationalism faltered as well. Success, partial as it may have been, was secured through the institutionalized, bureaucratized efforts of the army, not the irresistible passions of settler democracy. The volunteers who fought in Florida arrived boisterously and left quietly, their courage and force of arms having withered in the wilderness. In the end, the United States realized its progress in a war against nonwhite autonomy through negotiations with Seminoles and African-Americans and pledges to recognize the rights of their enemies.

Yet the fundamental failures of Jackson's program were, as Catlin hoped, largely hidden. Certainly, Americans were aware that the several military campaigns had failed and numerous generals returned from the front with their reputations tarnished. It was a war championed by slaveholders and led by Democratic administrations determined to spread white supremacy throughout the American continent. It made clear the full consequences of the recently-controversial Indian Removal Act: Indian autonomy itself was to be punished by force. It was fought to consolidate white control of Florida and bring it into the Union as a slave state, to end the Seminole sanctuary for slaves in the Deep South, and to seize the hundreds of Black Seminoles – Henry David Thoreau spent a night in jail protesting the Mexican-American War over less. But while protesting

voices were not silent, they came from the edges of American society, from abolitionists and reformers far from the centers of power. The nominal opposition party, the Whig Party, was, in this, largely silent. The history of the Second Seminole War was being hidden even while it was being fought.

To accept an absence of debate as the vital characteristic of a nation otherwise embroiled in highly contentious partisan battles is to redefine the second American party system as radically stunted rather than path breaking. Debates over race, expansion, and the frontier defined the rest of the century, spanning the Mexican-American War to the Spanish-American War. In that light, the silence which largely surrounded the Second Seminole War takes on greater salience. Why did the annexation of Texas come to redefine its decade as the era of Manifest Destiny while the consolidation of Florida registered only barely? Why did the Indian Removal Act help secure a political movement, inspire mass protests across the nation, and pass the House by the thinnest of margins while only a few years later the Second Seminole War inspired merely a handful of dissenting votes in Congress? These are questions that confound prior histories of the period and are answerable only in light of the central lacuna of their era.¹¹

¹¹ For an insightful meditation on both historical silence and the ways in which failure to probe those silences can replicate centuries-old imbalances of power, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). For sources on the Slave Power, see note 15, below. The effects of the veil over slavery were plain to contemporary abolitionists. For example, writing to Henry Clay, himself, abolitionist Gerrit Smith once vigorously protested, “the declarations of such men as Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun, that slavery is a question not to be discussed, are a license to mobs to burn up halls and break up abolition meetings, and ... murder abolition editors.” Gerrit Smith to Henry Clay, March 21, 1839, *The Papers of Henry Clay, Volume 9: The Whig Leader, January 1-December 31, 1843*, ed., James Hopkins (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 296. For the debate about Indian removal, see John Andrew, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Satz, *American Indian Policy*; Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship*. On Texas, see Joel Silbey, *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

That lacuna had devastating implications for the future of United States expansionary policy. Through the process of Indian removal, a policy whose full dimensions were revealed by the Second Seminole War, Jackson authored a subtle, though profound shift in the relationship between the United States and nonwhites within its sovereign territory. In broad strokes, Jackson's Indian policy hardly differed from that of his predecessors. Though earlier federal administrations had praised the revolutionary potential of Indians, almost uniformly they pursued an unofficial policy of dispossession, removal, and ardent expansionism that disregarded their stated respect for Indian sovereignty. They utilized a variety of means - ensnaring Indians in debt and proceeding to leverage their vulnerability, threatening the use of force to extort biased treaties, unleashing violent settlers to make Indian habitation untenable, and outright coercion - to force Indians to abandon their land and further the expansion of white settlement. Whatever their motivations or sympathies, a long line of United States officials had begun the process of Indian removal years before Andrew Jackson ascended to the presidency.¹²

¹² On the reality of early republic Indian policy, see Robert Owens, *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Alan Taylor, "Land and Liberty on the Post-Revolutionary Frontier," in David Konig, ed., *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 81-108; Maureen Konkle, "Indigenous Ownership and the Emergence of U.S. Liberal Imperialism," *The American Indian Quarterly*, 32.3 (2008): 297-323; Reginald Horsmann, "The Dimensions of an Empire of Liberty: Expansion and Republicanism, 1775-1825," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9 (Spring, 1989), 1-20. Early republic Indian policy was inextricably linked to differing attitudes toward expansion and international law. See David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); James Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Peter Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010); Christian Keller, "Philanthropy Betrayed: Thomas Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Origins of Federal Indian Removal Policy," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 144.1 (Mar., 2000), 39-66.

Nevertheless, the stated aims of early republic Indian policy before Jackson were not valueless, regardless of how they differed from reality on the ground. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had acknowledged, if with hesitation, that Indian nations were self-governing communities with distinct legal, political, and societal forms. Believing that the gradual workings of progress inevitably doomed the Indian race to extinction, these leaders advocated assimilation as the only means by which they might escape their fate. It would not be easy. As Thomas Jefferson and others conceived it, assimilation would require a thoroughgoing transformation of Indian society: the casting off of hunting as a mode of production, the adoption of an agricultural-based domesticity in the mode of their white neighbors, the rearrangement of gender roles in which men had overburdened women with labor, and a decisive break with European powers, whose imperial pretensions had corrupted Indian societies by instilling aristocratic privilege in place of their original democratic culture. If they completed those tasks, arduous and harrowing as they may have been, Jefferson and others declared themselves willing to welcome Indians as equal partners in the United States, friends and brothers in the republican project.¹³

Though this vision of domestic, dependent nations existing within the sovereign territory of the United States was necessarily discordant with the priorities of white settlement, national expansion, and the construction of concrete national borders, this

¹³ On the putative foundations of early republic Indian policy, see Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of Early American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 18-52; Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 157-163; Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 1973); Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 135-158.

uneasy equilibrium largely persisted. Treating Indian nations as dependent was not the equivalent of trampling Indian rights. The removal of the Cherokees represented the clearest example of the difference between early republic Indian policy and that of Andrew Jackson. During the dispute between the Georgia state government and the Cherokees, President John Quincy Adams, an able adherent to the policies of his forbears, had actively advocated for the removal of the Cherokees, but steadfastly refused to coerce them and eventually restrained the Georgians' worst excesses. As president, Jackson threatened to unleash the full fury of Georgia law, government, and its populace against them, leaving southeastern Indians only a single choice. They could leave their property in the east or they could submit to the rule of their respective states as subordinates to the neighboring white citizenry. Nowhere were the consequences of that choice starker than in Florida.¹⁴

The policies of Washington and Jefferson pointed toward a vision of national expansion that respected the political and legal structures of the colonized. By forcing the southeastern Indians to accept either removal or absorption into the white populace as subordinate members, Jackson began his nation on an unsteady course toward empire. When the circumstances of future expansions changed, for example when whites coveted

¹⁴ On the debates over Indian removal and the policy's break with the past, see John Andrew, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Ronald Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); David Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), 147-164; Ralph Lerner, "Reds and Whites: Rights and Wrongs," *The Supreme Court Review*, 1971 (1971), 201-240; Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *Journal of American History* 86.1 (Jun., 1999), 15-40; Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Removal and assimilation should not be seen as diametrically opposed. Many early republic leaders advocated for removal in the hope that Indians might utilize their new homes as an opportunity to embrace "civilization." Jackson's plans for removal lacked that vision. See Nicholas Guyatt, "'The Outskirts of Our Happiness': Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History*, 95.4 (Mar., 2009), 985-1011.

the land of Indians who had nowhere left to emigrate or when the United States wrested control of the Philippines, Jacksonianism led to the Dawes Act of 1887 and the violence of the Philippine War of Independence. Proponents of the colonization of the Philippines explicitly seized on Jackson's repudiation of the right of Indians to be ruled by the consent of the governed. Had they drawn from an earlier tradition of Indian relations or had Jackson's contemporaries challenged his radicalism forthrightly, they perhaps would have devised strategies to secure their objectives without insisting on the subordination of the colonized.¹⁵

Unfortunately, the Americans of the 1830s allowed their voices to be silenced and the Gilded Age leaders who launched the Spanish-American War knew of no other precedent. The decision of the antebellum elite to ignore the implications of what John L. O'Sullivan would soon popularize as "Manifest Destiny," was the consequence of a general understanding among political leaders of both parties that debate over slavery and empire would be silenced, both by mores, constricting debate, and by law, through gag rules in the House and Senate that forbade Congressional discussion of slavery. As slaveholders staked the future of their institution on the removal of nearby Indians, antebellum expansion became, in effect, a sectional issue, subsumed within slavery's all

¹⁵ On the Dawes Act and Indian removal, see William Savage, *The Cherokee Strip Live Stock Association: Federal Regulation and the Cattleman's Last Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), Vol., 2; Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2005). On the connections between continental expansion and the seizure of the Philippines, see Hendrickson, *Union Nation, or Empire* 268-272; Sean McEnroe, "Painting the Philippines with an American Brush: Visions of Race and National Mission among the Oregon Volunteers in the Philippine Wars of 1898 and 1899," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 104.1 (Spring, 2003), 24-61; David Burton, "The Influence of the American West on the Imperialist Philosophy of Theodore Roosevelt," *Arizona and the West*, 4.1 (Spring, 1962), 5-26; Richard Slotkin, "Nostalgia and Progress, Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier," *American Quarterly*, 33.5 (Winter, 1981), 608-637.

encompassing silence. Throughout the Second Seminole War, Democrats and Whigs, then, disagreed not over the war itself but over which side could win it more efficiently. For all of the very real advances of white male democracy in the wake of Andrew Jackson's election, political realities stunted debate on some of the most consequential issues of the age.¹⁶

Though historians have insightfully connected the Second Seminole War to the history of slavery – the war has been identified as “the largest slave rebellion in American history” as often as it has “America’s longest Indian conflict” – they have generally viewed the war through a local lens, examining the influence of the conflict on slavery in the Deep South and territorial Florida, but ignoring its implications for the rest of the country. The Second Seminole War, though on the margins of the nation, was, for a generation of Americans, the greatest drain of blood and treasure they knew. Abraham Lincoln, in his first speech to Congress following the fall of Fort Sumter cited the “very large sums (in the aggregate ... nearly a hundred millions) to relieve Florida of the aboriginal tribes,” as evidence that the seceding states owed a debt to the Union that could not be repaid save by their allegiance. The war represented a unique opportunity to interrogate the influence of slaveholders upon the federal government, but it was an opportunity left untaken.¹⁷

¹⁶ Though John L. O’Sullivan may have popularized the term “Manifest Destiny,” Jane Cazneau likely coined it. See, Linda Hudson, *Mistress of Manifest Destiny: A Biography of Jane McManus Storm Cazneau* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 2001).

¹⁷ For Lincoln’s speech, see Abraham Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865*, ed., Roy Basler (Washington: Library of America, 1989), 257. On the Second Seminole War as a slave rebellion, see Larry Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 219; Anthony Dixon, “Black Seminole Involvement and Leadership during the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842,” (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2007).

The partially enforced absence of slavery from political and popular discourse had a stultifying effect upon American policy prior to its dramatic reemergence with the Wilmot Proviso, a proposal to ban slavery from all lands gained during the Mexican-American War, in 1846. There were vital ideological debates of the era, but aside from the Nullification Crisis in 1832, few Americans debated the relationship between the interests of slaveholders and national policy. In 1844, presumptive presidential nominees Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren would critically wound their own careers by agreeing to ignore the potential annexation of Texas, but they merely echoed an earlier de facto agreement between Democrats and Whigs. The Second Seminole War, fought to protect slavery in Georgia and Florida, was outside the realm of discussion. Both parties benefited greatly from the gag rule they imposed on themselves; northern Democrats could effectively vote as pro-slavery ideologues without fearing competition from antislavery opponents while silence masked significant sectional and ideological tension between northern and southern Whigs. Into that black hole fell the Second Seminole War.

Despite the rise of institutionalized, vibrant party organizations, the degree to which these fully realized political organizations circumscribed debate is both startling and confounding. Considering the cataclysmic disputes which led to the Missouri Compromise and the furor which surrounded the annexation of Texas, slavery was only the most glaring absence from mainstream political dialogues. On a whole host of issues – national expansion, the repercussions of the Indian Removal Act, the nation's relationship with other recently independent countries throughout the Americas – the structure of the two party system stifled, rather than stimulated, debate.¹⁸

¹⁸ On the importance of political identity, see first: Arthur Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1971). On the disinterest of antebellum northern Democrats in the ultimate

The extent to which Whigs, and especially northern Whigs, acquiesced to their southern allies and dominant Democratic policies has been masked by prominent symbolic gestures which had precious little impact on national policy. Whig Congressional leaders did appoint the most prominent voice against Indian removal in Congress, John Quincy Adams who had recently deplored Jacksonian expansion as promulgating a slaveholder-driven “crusade of conquest,” to head the Committee of Indian Affairs in 1841, and nominated Theodore Frelinghuysen, the leader of anti-removal forces a decade before, to run alongside Henry Clay in 1844. More telling, however, was Adams’ decision to quit days after receiving the appointment, declaring that “all resistance against this abomination is vain.” The Whigs felt free to reclaim their defense of the American Indian only after Jackson’s vision had already won out. Scholars have seized on the general opposition among Whigs to the annexation of Texas and, surely, they opposed the measure. However, they opposed the war not for its underlying ethos, but out of abject fear of the cultural ramifications of so jarring an addition to the Union. The vast majority of Whigs feared not the ethical implications of expansion but its practical effects.¹⁹

That they complied was due not to latent white supremacy or a disinclination to oppose Jacksonian expansionism (though these were certainly factors). Rather, their

course of slavery, see John McFaul, “Expediency or Morality: Jacksonian Politics and Slavery,” *Journal of American History*, 62 (1975), 24-40; Joel Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87-115.

¹⁹ John Quincy Adams, *The Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, ed., Charles Adams (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1876), 10: 492; John Quincy Adams, “Indian Hostilities – Speech of Hon. John Q. Adams of Massachusetts,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, May 25, 1836, 447-451. For a defense of the Whig stance toward removal, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 42. On John Quincy Adams’ appointment, see Lynn Parsons, “‘A Perpetual Harrow upon My Feelings’: John Quincy Adams and the American Indian,” *New England Quarterly*, 46 (Sept. 1973), 339-379. On the Whig critique of Texas annexation, see especially Michael Morrison, “Westward the Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 10.2 (Summer, 1990), 239-240.

acquiescence flowed from an understanding of their increasingly complex political system and the influence of interest groups more generally, and the Slave Power specifically. Though even contemporary antislavery and Free Soil activists disagreed as to the extent of the Slave Power conspiracy or which leading Americans belonged to it, interest groups commanding vast influence were hardly foreign to Madisonian systems of government. Slaveholders, whose human property represented several billion dollars of wealth, represented an unorganized but coherent political faction to whom presidents and members of Congress had little choice but to capitulate, especially in light of the lack of political weight given to antislavery in the North. Considering the exigencies of their political situation, submitting to the priorities of slaveholders in the South, up to and including launching wars against obdurate Indian nations in the South, was good politics for successive administrations. For individual legislators, the insidious pressure of slaveholder interest was all the more difficult to resist.²⁰

As reformers and politicians confronted the Slave Power in antebellum political culture, the conditions that cloaked the Second Seminole War slowly gave way. Following the plainly pro-slavery objectives of the annexation of Texas and after several years of opposition to the excesses of the Second Seminole War, antislavery activists ensured that national expansion would be the central issue of the coming decade. Without

²⁰ The seminal texts of the weak presidency are Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Politics of Leadership* (New York: Wiley Books, 1960) and Fred I. Greenstein, "Nine Presidents in Search of a Modern Presidency," in *Leadership in the Modern President*, ed., Fred O. Greenstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Though Neustadt confined his theories of presidential power to the "modern" (post-Franklin Roosevelt) presidents, political scientists, who themselves disagreed with significant aspects of his argument, have questioned the quarantining of the recent holders of office from their predecessors. See Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); David Nichols, *The Myth of the Modern Presidency* (Happy Valley: Penn State Press, 1994). Andrew Jackson and, to a lesser extent, Martin Van Buren, hardly needed slaveholder encouragement to launch wars against Indians, but the timing and texture of those wars were clearly influenced by slaveholding voices.

the dampening effect of silence, the rigid priorities of slaveholders and the steadfast opposition of an increasingly engaged North made war nearly inevitable. That conflict, and the defeat of the South, destroyed Jackson's vision of a nation forged in racial conflict, but its legacy would live on. Modeling their policies on Jackson's vision of racial superiority and continental expansion, succeeding generations of imperialists would fuse Jackson's language of conquest with a series of laws that codified the subordination of nonwhites, making possible the imperial American state. In Puerto Rico, for example, when United States officials declared its citizens foreign "in a domestic sense," and deprived them of the protections of the Constitution, their actions were rooted in an ideology crafted by slaveholders and perpetuated through a general consensus of the antebellum elite.

Decades before in Florida, the influence of slaveholder interests was significantly more obvious. By 1840, even following the disruptions of the Second Seminole War, the 55,000 whites of Florida owned more than 45,000 slaves between them, making the territory one of the places most heavily dependent on slavery in the Union. Throughout the war, eastern Florida slaveholders inundated the War Department with letters and petitions urging officials to keep fighting the Seminoles until they were removed entirely. Whenever Black Seminoles surrendered or were captured, soldiers would carefully mark down their names, their physical characteristics, their age, their distinguishable markings, anything that would make it easier for their former owners to identify them. Slave catchers prowled army camps, hoping to recover slaves for their owners. Generals offered bounties of slaves to allied Indians, plantation owners purchased specious claims on Black Seminoles, and slaveowners resorted to the court system to prevent the government

from granting freedom to the Black Seminoles. And, looming over the war, was the fate of the Seminoles. Their very presence in Florida destabilized its nascent slave society. To secure it, they would have to be removed, and removed completely. The unresolved questions over their fate flowed directly from Jackson's decision to substitute unvarnished force in place of treaty making and led, haltingly, toward empire.

In this dissertation, through the use of public debates, newspaper commentaries, private letters, personal narratives, and official reports, I will contextualize the Second Seminole War within a larger national framework to explain why thousands of whites and Indians died there, dozens of Black Seminoles seized their freedom, and the vast majority of one of the most powerful Indian nations in the southeast began a long, bitter journey west. The answers, bound together with sharply contrasting visions of the nation, were foundational elements of the nation's political culture, economic structure, and social fabric. Viewed from a distance, the era of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842, appears something of a peaceful interlude in the midst of the maelstroms that beset much of antebellum history. Yet the very conditions that made such an oasis possible made the Civil War almost inevitable. The silence that descended over the Second Seminole War enveloped an entire generation between the Missouri Compromise and the annexation of Texas. It was a silence that could not last. In 1852, during the oration in which he famously asked, "what to the slave is the fourth of July," Frederick Douglass argued, "it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder." When George Catlin begged for silence in the aftermath of the Second Seminole War, the implicit answer he received in 1861 was, as Douglass put it in that same speech, "the storm, the

whirlwind, and the earthquake.” Yet, though the hegemonic silence that enveloped the Second Seminole War may have died by fire, its legacy lived on far beyond the horizon.²¹

State, Nation, and Expansion in Jacksonian America

In analyzing an array of issues - most importantly the motivations behind Indian removal, the connection between Indian removal and national expansion, and the role of slavery in national expansion - historians have begun with wildly divergent first principles, leading them to vastly different conceptions of the role of the frontier in antebellum American society.

Following Andrew Jackson’s lead, who assured the public that “to save [the Indian] from ... utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense,” historians sympathetic to Jackson have identified the motivation for removal as largely paternal. Though they find Indian removal still symptomatic of pervasive white supremacy, these scholars have generally believed Jackson to be concerned with doing justice to the dispossessed, given the undeniably difficult constraints of the era. Though allowing for the central injustice of Indian removal, they have tended to characterize leading Democrats as forced into action by the lawlessness of settlers and local officials in the lower South, concluding that removal was the most humane realistic solution to the conflict. Extending their view further, historians of this school have tended to find Whig opposition to Indian removal largely insincere, less concerned with the fate of the southeastern Indians than with opposing the policies of their rivals. By taking seriously the humanitarian concern of those who championed removal and submerging the opposition to it within the larger

²¹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton, & Co., 1857), 444.

ideological concerns of its opponents, these historians have tended to view Indian removal discretely, in isolation from the longer history of American expansion.²²

Others have offered a far different interpretation of the Democrats' position, echoing Alexis de Tocqueville's observation of the executors of Indian removal that "it is impossible to destroy men with more respect to the laws of humanity." Those advancing this interpretation have depicted the paternal rhetoric of Indian removal as a Trojan horse used to justify overwhelming violence against recalcitrant Indians. Generally, historians of this perspective have identified Indian removal with subsequent expressions of Manifest Destiny, arguing that as patriarchs, white American men believed themselves morally justified to pursue national expansion in order to spread the virtues of civilization to other ethnicities and nationalities.²³

Another subset of historians view Indian removal and national expansion as the natural conclusion of the Jacksonian project. Highly skeptical of their paternalist rhetoric, they have instead identified Jackson and his allies as the earliest proponents of American imperialism. By arguing for expansion as the primary goal of Jackson and his successors, advocates of this interpretation usually identify white supremacy as the key component of Jacksonian democracy, characterizing Indian removal as part of a continuous process

²² On paternalism, see Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy* 322-326; Francis Paul Prucha, SJ, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Robert Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal, and Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 179-242. For a study of the discordance between word and deed among proponents of removal, see Ronald Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

²³ Tocqueville quote from Alexis De Tocqueville, trans. Henry Reeve, *Democracy in America* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 2: 380. On the darker aspects of paternalism, see Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Knopf, 1975); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). More dubious of paternalism as the dominant expression of removal, but of the same vein is Reginald Horsmann, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Radical Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

culminating in the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War. They usually depict the Whigs as skeptics of expansion, believing it incompatible with their underlying faith in ordered progress and generally conservative outlook. To these historians, leading Whigs sincerely attempted to rein in the excesses of their political enemies and defended, if indirectly, the rights of those incorporated into the United States.²⁴

A related, though not identical, approach to national expansion argues that expansion came at the behest not of Jacksonian Democrats specifically, but due primarily to the lobbying of influential slaveholders. In this, they echo antislavery activists of the day who warned against the nefarious influence of a slaveholder conspiracy they identified as the Slave Power. Though the Slave Power theory would reach its full apogee prior to the 1860 election, abolitionists such as William Channing and Joshua Giddings during the 1830s laid the crucial groundwork for the theory. Historians of this school credit expansion to slaveholder agitation, though they do disagree over the extent of slaveholder control of the federal government. One explanation argues that their control over federal policy was real, but indirect, identifying in slaveholders' warnings of slave

²⁴ John Quincy Adams, "Indian Hostilities – Speech of Hon. John Q. Adams of Massachusetts," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, May 25, 1836, 447-451. On Indian removal as the natural outgrowth of Jacksonian ideology and its ties to expansion, see especially Howe, *What Hath God Wrought* 412-429. See also Thomas Hietala, *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 51-80, 161-190; Major Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974); Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era*. Historians of Whig thought have tended to view expansion in this manner, see Thomas Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) and Michael Morrison, "Westward the Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 10.2 (Summer, 1990), 221-249.

rebellion the means by which they compelled that same government to aid them protecting their investment in human property.²⁵

Alternatively, some historians have argued that if the priorities of slaveholders dominated national politics, they did so as a result of a general agreement among leading Americans to forestall further discussions over slavery so as to not risk dissolution of the Union. Taking seriously Martin Van Buren's 1827 proposal to replace "geographical divisions founded on ... prejudices between free and slave holding states" with a grand alliance between Southern planters and Northern democrats, they argue that the second party system was an artificial construct of political elites meant to substitute party feeling in place of sectional tension. In this context, statesmen refused to consider the implications of national expansion out of both an abject fear of disunion as well as the political cynicism of men like Van Buren who clung to the banner of their party, even if it meant a pact with slavery against the interests of their home states. Considering the

²⁵ William Ellery Channing, *A Letter to the Hon. Henry Clay on the Annexation of Texas to the United States* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1837); Joshua Giddings, "Speech of Mr. Giddings of Ohio," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, February 9, 1841, 26th Congress, 2nd Session, 346-352; and further fleshed out in Joshua R. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida: The Crimes Committed by our Government against the Maroons who Fled from South Carolina and Other Slave States* (Columbus: Follett, Foster, and Company, 1858). For the dominance of the Slave Power, see Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). On the indirect influence of the slave power, see Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Adam Rothman, "The 'Slave Power' in the United States, 1783-1865," in *Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy*, ed., Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 64-91; See also Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 99-102. Donald Fehrenbacher and Ward McAfee, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, ed., Ward McAfee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) argues for a middle ground, in which slaveholders dominated national policy due to their unanimity of action, in contrast to hopelessly splintered Northern partisans. For the emerging popularity of the narrative prior to the Civil War, see William Pfau, *The Political Style of Conspiracy: Chase, Sumner, and Lincoln* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005). For skepticism on the existence of the Slave Power, see especially David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

explosive nature of disputes over slavery, agitation over diverse issues including Indian removal represented, as one historian put it, the “sublimation” of concern over slavery.²⁶

Lastly, another school of historians largely focused on Indian history have argued that Jacksonian expansion can best be described as imperial. In their view, a series of jury rigged orders and informal understandings institutionalized a set of relationships in which the United States used its powerful military apparatus to exert effective control over significant aspects of Indian society. Though some scholars have argued that the definition of imperialism necessarily excludes continental expansion, others have countered that in extinguishing Native American sovereignty the United States acted identically to European nations in Asia and Africa. Moreover, to view the situation from the perspective of Indian nations like the Seminoles, who did not identify themselves as a part of the United States on any political level, is to obliterate the distinction entirely.²⁷

²⁶ See especially, Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); see also Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition, 1780-1849* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 237. For an argument of the artificiality of the division between Democrats and Whigs, though not using sectional tension as an explanatory factor, see Richard McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966). Some evidence for this position can be found in Thomas Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives, 1836-1860* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967).

²⁷ In recent years, a number of historians have likened antebellum expansion as well as the relationship between United States and neighboring Indians to imperialism, see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Patricia Nelson Limerick, “Going West and Ending up Global,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 32 (Spring 2001), 5-23; Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-200* (New York: Viking Books, 2005); Gray Whaley, “Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic: A Case Study of American Colonialism, 1843-1858,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 36.2 (Summer, 2005), 157-178; Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 6-10; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Mark Rifkin, *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 421; Kinley Brauer, “The Great American Desert Revisited: Recent Literature and Prospects for the Study of American Foreign

The events that led inexorably to the Civil War eventually exposed the political machinery that initiated the Second Seminole War, but the same propulsive forces had a legacy in the overseas expansion of the late nineteenth century. Though historians have been correct in viewing continuities between national and continental expansion, they have generally read the line of casualty backwards. The imperialists of the Gilded Age resemble Jackson, Cass, Tyler, Polk, Upshur, and Calhoun because they explicitly modeled themselves upon their inspiration. Their policies, designed to obliterate indigenous sovereignty and promote white settlement, when uprooted from their specific context would be translated into imperial campaigns across the Pacific. This dissertation argues that language matters. The assimilationist speech acts of early republic leaders such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson held great meaning to their contemporaries, even if that rhetoric was entirely devoid of actual content. As Jacksonian language, which challenged the legacy of Indian reformers and self-styled philanthropists, itself went unchallenged, it created an easily appropriated legacy for future expansionists and would-be conquerors.²⁸

People, Places, Events

The vast majority of events during the Second Seminole War occurred between the northern edge of the Withlacoochee River and 150 miles south, to the banks of Lake Okeechobee. Throughout the eighteenth century, several different groups of Native Americans gradually migrated to Spanish Florida, drawn by its fertile soil and its ease of

Relations, 1815-1861," in ed., Michael Hogan, *Paths to Power: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations to 1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 61-64.

²⁸ On the relationship of language to governance in an earlier era, see especially Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of Early American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 18-52.

trade with several European outposts. The largest bands were Lower Creeks migrating south to evade the increasing power of Upper Creek leaders in present-day Georgia and Alabama, but other Indians, including Choctaws, Yamasees, and Chickasaws migrated as well. These diverse bands of Indians, many of whom spoke related, but not identical languages, generally considered themselves to be politically and socially distinct from each other. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they would buttress their numbers through an alliance with the Black Seminoles, free and enslaved African-Americans, most of whom were owned by Seminole masters, who formed communities near Seminole lands. In exchange for regular tribute, the Seminoles offered substantial autonomy to their slaves, utilizing them as strategic allies to augment their military strength. However, many whites and Creek Indians held disputed claims to the ownership of the Black Seminoles, and throughout the 1810s and 1820s, they attempted to gain their possession through legal and other means.²⁹

When England gained control of Florida following the Seven Years War, the Florida Indians formed a strong trading relationship with imperial officials stationed at the far reaches of the English empire. They bitterly resented the return of Florida to Spain following the American Revolution, unhappy with Spanish restraints on their trade. As time went on, the Florida Indians began to act collectively, signing treaties with England and formalizing their economic relationship with their new Spanish neighbors. During the

²⁹ Several scholars have studied the Second Seminole War. Indispensable is John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1985). See also, John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004); Joseph Sprague, *The Origin, Process, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1848); Susan Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones: A Seminole Saga* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003); Patricia Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006). See also sources in note 10.

first decade of the nineteenth century, the Seminoles entered into an uneasy alliance with the Spanish, though they remained frustrated with the terms of Spanish trade.³⁰

During the second decade of the nineteenth century, Florida was transformed by the revolutionary fervor that spread throughout the Americas. Spanish presence in the colony was always light and, after diverting the vast majority of their resources to quelling Latin American revolutions, Spanish rule over Florida appeared close to falling. Between 1812 and 1819, several United States adventurers launched unauthorized filibustering offensives against Spanish Florida, hoping to secure its annexation. Though ambivalent toward Spanish rule, the Seminoles recognized the bellicosity of the United States and feared the extension of white settlement on their land. To combat the threat, they reluctantly aided the Spanish against several invasions and pledged their allegiance to the British during the War of 1812. By the end of the decade, leading Southerners had identified the Seminole-British alliance as a threat to their region, culminating in General Andrew Jackson's unauthorized invasion of Spanish Florida and the destruction of numerous Seminole settlements. After Jackson obliterated Spanish control of the colony, the Spanish reluctantly sold Florida to the United States in the Adams-Onís Treaty. Despite Jackson's victory, many in the southern United States still lobbied for the removal of the Seminoles, believing their presence in Florida provided a ready beachhead for a renewed British invasion and threatened to destabilize slavery throughout the region. Moreover, many southern slaveholders held semi-legitimate claims on dozens of Black Seminoles, some of whom had escaped from southern plantations. If they could

³⁰ Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* 10-27; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 18-22.

force the Seminoles to emigrate, then, many southern slaveholders stood to benefit, directly and indirectly.³¹

Weakened by the events of the 1810s, the Seminoles agreed to surrender significant tracts of land to the United States in the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek, though they retained about four million acres. After a year, dissatisfied with the fertility of their remaining land and suffering from massive displacement, many Seminole bands applied to United States territorial officials for higher annuities and more supplies. These officials, strongly desiring the removal of the Seminoles to further integrate Florida more deeply into the fabric of the nation, began to leverage Seminole privation to persuade the Indians to emigrate west. In the wake of Nat Turner's revolt and the fear mongering that accompanied British abolition, securing the institution of slavery was as much about national security as economic development. Following Andrew Jackson's elevation to the presidency and the passage of the Indian Removal Act, Jackson and his subordinates seized on Seminole deprivations as a means of pressuring them to accept removal to new lands in the Arkansas Territory. By 1834, through the signing of two treaties tainted by varying degrees of fraud, the United States succeeded in their goal to the dissatisfaction of the most militant Seminoles.³²

In December 1835, angered by Seminole intransigence in violation of what they held to be a sacred compact, United States officials dispatched Major Francis Dade and 110 men to enforce the compliance of the Seminoles. As they marched, several hundred of Seminole and Black Seminole partisans descended on their position, leaving only one

³¹ See chapter one for these events in much more detail.

³² On the effects of Nat Turner's rebellion, see Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Kenneth Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

white survivor. Enraged, Jackson ordered thousands of volunteers and soldiers to put down the Seminole rebellion, seize the Black Seminoles, and force the surviving Indians to emigrate. Led by their hereditary chief Micanopy and the famed warrior Osceola, the Seminoles girded for war. With militant Seminoles deeply opposed to removal and fearful that the United States intended to seize the Black Seminoles, the Seminole coalition was prepared for a long, drawn-out conflict. For the United States, the results were catastrophic.

The first general to reach Florida, Edmund Pendleton Gaines, launched an immediate offensive. Overwhelmed by Indian forces, his men entrenched themselves on the Withlacoochee River, initiated peace talks without the consent of the War Department, and eventually returned, defeated. In May, 1836, General Winfield Scott arrived in Florida and began a complicated series of maneuvers, hoping to trap Seminole bands in a vice. His laborious planning allowed the Seminoles time to avoid his attack and space to continue to raid the frontier. Frustrated at the failures of Scott, his political rival, Jackson installed his personal friend Quartermaster General Thomas Jesup as the commanding officer of the war effort. As the war entered into its second year and the United States poured increasing amounts of money into it, Whig politicians began to raise objections and questioned the Jackson and Van Buren administrations' effectiveness.

Jesup, a partisan Democrat, flailed in Florida. Like his predecessors, he was unable to locate his enemies in the vast wilderness. Though often on the brink of a diplomatic agreement with his enemies, several treaties collapsed just prior to the date of emigration. Jesup's only breakthrough came through negotiations with the Black Seminoles. Convincing his superiors to forgo claims on fugitive slaves, Jesup offered

freedom to the Black Seminoles in return for their aid as guides against their erstwhile Indian allies. His offer worked, but the vast majority of Seminoles remained beyond his reach. In late 1837, exhausted by the futility of his efforts, Jesup devised an extraordinary stratagem. He had a group of men meet with Osceola under a white flag, then, at a prearranged signal, surround the chief and take him into custody. Animated by the romantic image of the noble savage, many across the country scorned Jesup for betraying their nation's honor.

In the aftermath, though the Seminoles had won nearly every pitched battle, the daily attrition of concerted guerilla warfare began to take their toll. With entire Seminole families constantly moving throughout southern Florida and lacking the opportunity to plant crops, significant numbers of Seminoles began to suffer from severe privation. Finding continued opposition nearly impossible, increasing numbers of Seminoles began to surrender to United States forces throughout 1838 and 1839. Though the war continued for several more years under the command of several officers including future president Zachary Taylor, its outcome was nearly inevitable. By 1840, United States commanders were tasked with rounding up the stragglers through wilderness raids, delicate negotiations, and, in one controversial incident, the importation of Cuban bloodhounds. By 1842, his resolve dwindling, commanding officer Colonel William Worth convinced the newly inaugurated Tyler administration to end the war, leaving several hundred Seminoles in southern Florida, beyond the reach of white settlement. At a cost of thousands of lives and tens of millions of dollars, the Second Seminole War had ended.

Organizational Principles

This work will be organized thematically, though each chapter will proceed roughly chronologically from the one before with significant temporal overlapping. Each chapter will place the Second Seminole War in different contexts, exploring it from the perspective of Americans who diverged widely and wildly, in geographic origin and ideological commitments. Though unconventional, this organizing principle better illuminates the complicated relationship between the frontier periphery and the political culture of Washington, DC. For example, though the nation's two most prominent voices advocating the moderation of American policy were General Thomas Jesup, the longest-serving general in Florida, and groups of antislavery reformers in the North, there was no dialogue between them. Indeed, the reformers considered Jesup, the notorious betrayer of Osceola, to be no better than a war criminal, and Jesup, a slaveholder, paid little heed to distant Northern voices of protest. By subsuming the war into broader issues of national expansion, the eradication of nonwhite autonomy, and the consolidation of planter hegemony, the politics of slavery cleaved political coalitions, isolated military commanders, and allowed local planters de facto authority over national frontier policy.

Chapter 1 will provide an extended prologue to the rest of the dissertation. Focusing largely on the twenty-five year period prior to the beginning of the Second Seminole War and culminating with the ambush of Dade's command, this chapter will chart the gradual decline of an earlier era of expansion and Andrew Jackson's influence on the southeast. As Jackson's experiences on the Tennessee frontier increasingly convinced him that autonomous Indian communities threatened national security, he began to repudiate the ideals of an earlier generation of Americans and worked to eliminate rival powers on the nation's borderlands. In the face of United States pressure,

Seminole leaders were forced to submit to their demands, gradually ceding land and property until impending removal convinced militant leaders that violent resistance was their only recourse.

Chapter 2 largely considers the war as seen through the eyes of General Thomas Jesup. It charts the failures of Edmund Gaines, Winfield Scott, and Richard Keith Call to come to terms with the multifaceted politics of antebellum Florida. Only Jesup, by pragmatically considering the interests of the Seminoles, Black Seminoles, and local slaveholders, managed to navigate the complicated depths of Floridian power dynamics. Through a focus on Jesup's correspondence with his superiors in the War Department, the chapter will argue that he struggled against orders that demanded the Seminoles' removal, finding removal morally dubious and an utterly needless means of advancing his nation's objectives. In his opposition, Jesup faced harsh opposition from many slaveholders who saw the war not merely as necessary to safeguard slavery in the Deep South, but as a means to enrich themselves through the re-enslavement of the Black Seminoles. Struggling with the burden of winning the war, Jesup cast about for tactics that would ensure victory, tarnishing his reputation by deceitfully capturing Osceola and alienating slaveholders by promising freedom to the Black Seminoles. By the end of his command, Jesup had broken with Democrats across the country by proposing that the Seminoles be allowed to remain in Florida. He returned to Washington in disgrace.³³

Like the preceding chapter, chapter 3 will focus on events in Florida, describing the experience of the thousands of volunteers from the Deep South who streamed into the region during the first months of the war. Embodying Jackson's vision of a nation of

³³ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 421; Henry Fritz, "Humanitarian Rhetoric and Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Policy," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 79 (Spring 2001), 84.

independent white men and reared in a culture of masculinity and mastery, most volunteers based their service explicitly on the defense of the white homestead against marauding Indian and black hordes. When the Seminoles frustrated their efforts, the volunteers responded by reconceptualizing the purpose of their service, through the medium of mastery which they so valued, as personal and public displays of bravery against nonwhite enemies. Historians such as Amy Greenberg and Robert May have probed the degree to which the priorities of slaveholders, both economic and cultural, circulated among the filibusterers of the 1850s, but this chapter will establish the ways in which the ideology of mastery informed and motivated expansionists throughout earlier eras of American history.³⁴

Chapter 4 covers roughly the same time period as the previous chapters, but they intersect only tangentially. Through a reading of congressional debates throughout the war, this chapter finds almost total assent among mainstream Whigs and Democrats to the removal of the Seminoles from Florida. By extending the analysis beyond the debate surrounding the Indian Removal Act and its immediate aftermath, this chapter argues that scholars have drastically overestimated the extent to which opposition to Indian removal animated the Anti-Jacksonian coalition. Though Whigs were heavily critical of the conduct of the war, they seldom disagreed with the administration's war aims. Their silence, along with nearly lock-step support among Democrats, ensured that the nation would pursue the Second Seminole War to its bitter end. The difficulties of the war did lead some Democrats to suggest novel strategies as it dragged on throughout the late 1830s. With Thomas Hart Benton's suggestion to pass a Homestead Act and utilize white

³⁴ Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

settlers to guard against Seminole attacks and appropriate Indian territory, Democrats attempted to officially replace the nuanced political maneuverings of army officers such as Thomas Jesup with the seemingly inexorable march of land hungry whites on the frontier.

Chapter 5 will examine the growing opposition of antislavery reformers to the Second Seminole War. Joining together their struggle against both the Second Seminole War and early attempts to annex Texas, this chapter will argue that abolitionists of most persuasions perceived Jacksonian expansion as immoral attempts to extend the reach of slavery and trample the rights of nonwhites. It will culminate with Joshua Giddings's 1841 speech in the House of Representatives, which defied the gag rule that silenced Congressional debate of slavery. In contrast to the collaboration of more prominent Whigs, the breadth and the substance of the abolitionists' association of expansion with white supremacy offered an alternative vision of an America in which the status of nonwhites lay at the heart of a functioning democratic society. Contrasted with the national parties, both of whom were too wed to southern interests to oppose the slave interest, the abolitionists' marked opposition to aggressive expansion revealed the strength of slaveholder control over national institutions during the Jacksonian era.³⁵

Chapter 6 will return to Florida and detail the course of the war from the perspective of the Seminoles and Black Seminoles. Seminole and Black Seminole leaders began the war believing that by dispersing into small groups into the Florida expanse, they could frustrate the United States into moderating its absolute insistence on removal. The Seminoles did not understand that their adversaries were so committed to the

³⁵ On Whig opposition to Texas, see especially Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 39-40. Giddings himself, a Whig, was censured for antislavery speech in the House of Representatives in part by members of his own party.

consolidation of white supremacy that they would pursue it without regard for the cost, in money or lives. Instead, as the Seminoles and Black Seminoles fought, more conciliatory factions within the Seminole leadership frayed their alliance, even as Thomas Jesup successfully convinced leading Black Seminoles to surrender in return for a guarantee of their freedom.

Chapter 7 will describe events in both Florida and Washington, as President John Tyler, Senator Thomas Hart Benton, and Colonel William Worth worked together to end the war, overcoming the wishes of a populace committed to absolute removal. They found that negotiations could not end the war. Throughout the last years of the conflict, the Seminole leadership proved too decentralized to enforce treaties on its populace even while large numbers of United States citizens violently opposed the principle of negotiating with Indians. When more violent means of winning the war - the importation of bloodhounds and the summary execution of the enemy - failed as well, Tyler, Benton, and Worth seized on a plan to allow several hundred Seminoles to remain in Florida through an informal declaration of peace. The remaining Seminoles, unbound to the United States by law and lacking any channel of official communication, would be policed by settlers lured to Florida by promises of free land in return for their service.

The Second Seminole War produced two enduring conflicts of historical significance. In the most overt struggle, thousands of United States troops and volunteers streamed into Florida determined to eradicate the Seminole threat and clear all obstacles to Florida's incorporation into the Union as a loyal member of the Deep South. The majority of whites who fought in Florida did so for reasons not entirely clear to themselves. Echoing the advice of Whig Representative James Harper, they "did not stop

to inquire who was right and wrong;” rather, they lent their service to a vast adventure, forcibly removing nonwhites from their homeland and appropriating their resources to enrich themselves and their countrymen. Their invasion of the Seminoles’ homeland linked together currents of conquest, the gradual transformation of the nation’s frontiers into land primed for slavery, and efforts to constrict nonwhite autonomy throughout the United States. The war marked a crucial turning point for the nation, away from the ideals of liberty and toward an intense focus on appropriation and consolidation.³⁶

The second battle was quieter, and limited to the margins of public debate. It derived from an insight among those best positioned to conceive it: the military officers compelled to win the war and the abolitionists most attuned to its effects. Neither could ignore questions of morality and righteousness. In part owing to the Second Seminole War, abolitionists began to perceive the intrinsic and intricate connections between the future of slavery, the expansion of the frontier, and the military domination of the region. Through their opposition to the war, they felt increasingly alienated from the two-party system, which ignored their warnings, and appeared entirely corrupted by the Slave Power. It was in the collision of these two interrelated conflicts – the federal army on the frontier doing the implicit bidding of slaveholders and the growing discontent among those who perceived and abhorred that development – that would define the course of the nation over the coming decades.

³⁶ “Sufferers in Florida,” *Gales and Seaton Register of Debates*, January 30, 1836, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 2447.

Chapter 1

*“Perish Principle But Save the Country”:
Andrew Jackson, Florida, and the Evolution of United States Indian Policy*

In 1835, recalling the aftermath of Andrew Jackson’s brazen and unauthorized invasion of Florida in 1819, John Quincy Adams retold the story of how he had defended the general’s actions. He remembered utilizing the arguments of Grotius, Puffendorf, and Vattel, the recognized authorities on the laws of nations, as well as Jackson’s response: “D-n Grotius! d-n Puffendorf! d-n Vattel! – this is a mere matter between Jim Monroe and myself!” That disjuncture emblemized the rivalry between the two men. Similarly ambitious, Adams and Jackson both understood themselves to have inherited a legacy from the Founders and had pledged their lives to the perpetuation and expansion of the Union. Belying their bitter rivalry, they supported many of the same policies during their presidencies: territorial acquisition, the consolidation of United States governmental authority on its frontiers, Indian removal, and the independence of the Americas from European influence. Yet, for all that they had in common, when Adams told a fellow politician, “I especially mean to say that Andrew Jackson is a bad man because he has no principles,” he could do so without taint of hypocrisy. Upon Jackson’s death in 1845, one of Jackson’s many eulogizers, a man who marched beside him in war, asserted that Jackson would do anything to save his beloved nation - that in the moment of need he would cry out “perish principle ... but save the country.” In marshaling a similar expansionary program as his predecessors yet stripping its language of their putative

ideals, Jackson distorted early United States Indian policy and initiated a new era of national expansion.¹

Early republic United States leaders articulated lofty visions of their nation's future. Believing that Native Americans were destined for extinction, these leaders expanded their own conception of the nation and, at least publicly, welcomed their Indian neighbors into it. Their proposals were fraught with racism, paternalism, faulty science, and condescension, but they did offer forthright statements that Indians were imbued with the rights of life, self-government, and property. These ideals, however, proved exceedingly abstract against the realities of the early United States and its borderlands. As settlers jostled for land and the alliance between European agitators and hostile Indians impeded national expansion, nearly every federal leader surrendered to expediency, empowering violent white frontiersmen, defrauding Indians through treaties, ensnaring them in debt, and declaring outright war against the remainder. Andrew Jackson, along with his Indian and borderlands policies, was a product of that reality, a weapon who numerous leaders, including James Madison and John Quincy Adams had enthusiastically aimed at Indian and European targets for over a decade. Despite that shared history, in the wake of Jackson's Indian removal policies, John Quincy Adams confided to his journal in 1841 that rather than accept the position of Chairman of the

¹ Henry Wise, *Seven Decades of the Union: The Humanities and Materialism* (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1872), 151-152; John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford, 1955), 62-6; Samuel Cartwright, "Eulogy, Delivered at Natchez, Miss., July 12, 1845," in *Monument to the Memory of General Andrew Jackson: Containing Twenty-Five Eulogies and Sermons Delivered on the Occasion of His Death*, ed., Benjamin Dusenberry (Philadelphia: Walker & Giles, 1846), 304. On the influence of Vattel, who justified European appropriation of Indian lands in the name of "productive" cultivation, on early United States thinkers, see Nicholas Onuf and Peter Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1993).

House Committee on Indian Affairs, he would prefer to turn his eyes away from “the sickening mass of putrefaction” of contemporary United States Indian policy.²

Nevertheless, when Andrew Jackson loudly and decisively turned his back on that tradition, many believed a great moral chasm had been breached. His political campaign against Indian autonomy was inextricably bound together with the nation’s tumultuous relationship toward its borderlands. With England, Spain, and France commanding vast territories on the nation’s frontiers, early republic leaders viewed nonwhites as dangerous elements, potential enemies of the state in the event of a foreign war. The War of 1812 seemed to justify those fears, as Indian nations from Canada, the Ohio valley, and the southeast eagerly joined the British ranks. Jackson, who personally

² On the putative foundations of early republic Indian policy, see Peter Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of Early American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 18-52; Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 157-163; Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina Press, 1973); Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 135-158; Nicholas Guyatt, “‘The Outskirts of Our Happiness’: Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic,” *Journal of American History*, 95.4 (Mar., 2009), 985-1011. On the reality of early republic Indian policy, see Robert Owens, *Mr. Jefferson’s Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Alan Taylor, “Land and Liberty on the Post-Revolutionary Frontier,” in David Konig, ed., *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 81-108; Maureen Konkle, “Indigenous Ownership and the Emergence of U.S. Liberal Imperialism,” *The American Indian Quarterly*, 32.3 (2008): 297-323; Reginald Horsmann, “The Dimensions of an Empire of Liberty: Expansion and Republicanism, 1775-1825,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 9 (Spring, 1989), 1-20. Early republic Indian policy was inextricably linked to differing attitudes toward expansion and international law. See David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); James Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Peter Kastor, *The Nation’s Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010); Christian Keller, “Philanthropy Betrayed: Thomas Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Origins of Federal Indian Removal Policy,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 144.1 (Mar., 2000), 39-66. On John Quincy Adams’s changing stance toward United States Indian policy, see Parsons, Lynn H. “‘A Perpetual Harrow Upon My Feelings’: John Quincy Adams and the American Indian,” *New England Quarterly*, 46 (Sept., 1973), 339-79.

identified with white frontiersmen, nurtured an insistent hostility against Indians as people who could not be trusted as loyal allies in war and who impeded white settlement in peace. On that basis, between 1812 and 1835, he obliterated the southeast borderlands, circumscribed Indian autonomy, and brought about the forced emigration of the indigenous populations of the region. A veteran of multiple frontier wars, Jackson understood the reality of early republic Indian policy as well as anyone. In introducing the Indian Removal Act as being consistent with older policies through more honest means, he was entirely justified by history. The ideals of early American Indian policy were of little solace to the thousands who were dispossessed.

As president, John Quincy Adams believed in those ideals, even as he tarnished them. Like Jackson, he disdained the chaos of the nation's borderlands as constraining economic and geographic expansion and imperiling national security. He was all too willing to empower Andrew Jackson to bring about their destruction. Once the borderlands had perished, however, Adams found himself torn between building the state and upholding the principles of his nation. Though he welcomed voluntary Indian removal as a member of James Monroe's cabinet and as president, he nonetheless maintained his belief in what he perceived as earlier traditions of early republic Indian policy. In separate instances, he protected Creeks and the Cherokees from iniquitous white speculators and acquisitive state governments. In Florida, his agents often, though not invariably, defended Indian property rights against white claimants. As little sway as those ideals might have held on the frontier, they did check many United States leaders in power, including Adams.³

³ Hemmed in by a hostile Congress, Adams ultimately acquiesced to defeat over the fate of the Creeks following the passionate opposition of Georgia politicians. For more on Adams and the Creeks, see

Even unfulfilled ideals were not valueless. One can envision later presidential administrations dedicating themselves to the language rather than the grounded reality of their predecessors' policies. Had evangelical Whigs succeeded in defeating the Indian Removal Act in the House of Representatives, the reform-minded wing of the party likely would have held greater influence in the party's nascent coalition and could have dragged the country toward a more humanitarian, if still highly paternalistic, Indian policy. In contrast, the results of the newly minted Jacksonian tradition were clear: the destruction of Indian self-government and the appropriation of their property.

Between 1812 and 1835, the relationship between the Seminoles and the United States embodied this vital shift in United States Indian and borderland policy. In the early nineteenth century, United States officials first encountered the Seminoles as ambivalent allies of a teetering Spanish empire. When the Seminoles, like many of the southeast Indians, decisively cast their lot with Spanish and British interests against the United States in 1812, Andrew Jackson marshaled the bellicose settlers of the region and moved to obliterate the borderlands altogether. Amidst the ruins, a series of politicians operating within the discourses of early republic United States Indian policy acted in contradictory ways, at once marginalizing Seminole sovereignty while still encouraging them to plant ever deeper roots in Florida in the mold of white settlers. Even as those officials and Seminoles leaders cautiously circled each other, their negotiations were gradually

Richard J. Hryniewicki, "The Creek Treaty of Nov. 15, 1827," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 52 (1968), 1-15. On the debates over Indian removal and the policy's break with the past, see John Andrew, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Ronald Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); David Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), 147-164; Ralph Lerner, "Reds and Whites: Rights and Wrongs," *The Supreme Court Review*, 1971 (1971), 201-240; Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *Journal of American History* 86.1 (Jun., 1999), 15-40.

overtaken by two intertwined political movements. Within Florida, slave owners and settlers in the state legislature agitated for the removal of the Seminoles just as Andrew Jackson was elected to the presidency in Washington. After taking office, Jackson informed the Seminoles of their predicament. If they remained in Florida, he would do nothing to protect them from murderous settlers, reprobate speculators, and iniquitous state legislators who had designs on their land.

The generation of Seminoles that waged the Seminole War had witnessed violent upheavals - the fall of the Spanish empire, failed foreign invasions from three countries, Andrew Jackson's unauthorized offensive – and remained staunchly opposed to both assimilation and removal. They defined their claim to self-determination broadly, reproaching every attempt from agents of the United States to curtail it. In the face of American pressure to move west in 1829, when aging Seminole chief John Hicks made clear his determination to remain in Florida: “I am getting to be very old, and I wish my bones to be here,” he expressed the sentiment that his people shared emphatically. By the mid-1830s, however, many factions within Seminole society felt a nearly apocalyptic sense of dread. Over the past two decades, they had witnessed the rise and fall of empires and had watched as their geographic and cultural position gradually eroded in the face of United States expansionism. Prophets, chiefs, and warriors came to the same conclusion. Rather than be ground to dust by the institutional might of Andrew Jackson's United States, many Seminoles made the only decision left to them, at a cost of thousands of lives and untold suffering.⁴

⁴ For more on the Seminoles' antagonism toward the United States, see Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1763-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For more on the dynamics of North American borderlands, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in

This chapter will describe the fall of the southeast borderlands and the effects of Jackson's persistent attacks on Seminole autonomy, chronicling Florida's long and circuitous path from the backwaters of the crumbling Spanish empire to a United States territory. It will detail the international intrigues that dominated the last years of the Florida colony and the slow, grinding process of consolidation that brought it into the orbit of the Deep South. As American policy evolved, the Seminoles responded as well, adapting politically and diplomatically to the changing world around them. Their response to their increasingly bellicose white neighbors would culminate in the infamous ambush of Dade's command and demonstrated that no matter Jackson's intentions, his Indian policy could not be imposed by fiat, but would have to be enforced.

Early Republic Borderland Policy and the Contested Ground of Florida

Had the attention of the Spanish government not been focused on its Latin American colonies, the tumultuous events of Florida during the 1810s might easily have sparked a war with the United States. Two different United States officers, George Mathews and Andrew Jackson, launched brazenly illegal invasions of Spanish Florida, violating nearly every norm of international diplomacy. Though both were motivated by a fervent desire for national expansion, the different tactics of the two men revealed a vital disjuncture in the worldviews of Jackson and Mathews's patron, James Madison.

North American History," *American Historical Review*, 104.3 (June 1999), 814-841; Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). For studies that argue for Indian control of the borderlands see Kathleen Duval, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Mathews took advantage of the chaos of the Florida borderlands to commandeer Florida land with the intention of incorporating Spanish whites into the United States. He had no interest in curtailing the autonomy of nonwhites nor was he concerned with their status should he succeed in annexing Florida. For Jackson, the Spanish were distinctly a secondary concern. The Seminole Indians who he believed to be armed and radicalized by British agents, were his avowed adversaries, and he would spend much of the decade of the 1810s tearing down the Florida borderlands and killing or removing everyone he deemed hostile to the United States, whether they be British, Spanish, Indian, or African-American. To Jackson, they were all potential enemies of the state.

In January 1811, when Mathews re-entered the service of his nation, he was positive he stood on the precipice of a new world, though its shape was impossible to know. War appeared imminent. England had continued to restrict the neutral United States' trade with France, implicitly asserting its authority over its former colony. To the west, Tecumseh and William Henry Harrison had already fought the first of several pitched battles. Yet even those events paled in comparison to recent happenings on the world stage. Mexican Creoles had already declared their nation's independence from Spain, and it was likely that South American elites would soon follow. Whatever the result, the upheavals in the New World would surely be enormous and, in them, George Mathews and his patron, President James Madison, saw an opportunity.

The teetering Spanish empire retained nominal control over two colonies adjacent to the United States, East and West Florida. Madison believed both to be vitally important to possess in order to expand the nation's geographic space, preempt British claims, and protect American shipping lines. West Florida spanned the northern coast of

the Gulf of Mexico, encompassing much of the Florida Panhandle and stretching west, into modern-day Louisiana. The United States did hold something of a legitimate claim to West Florida, as Madison and Jefferson had both long maintained that the terms of the Louisiana Purchase conveyed the colony to the United States. Armed with that interpretation, as Spanish Central and South America descended into civil war, Madison sent word to leading citizens of West Florida that if they obtained an expression of consent from the people, he would move to incorporate it into the United States under international law. However, Madison's plan surprised even him by working too well. Rather than evincing a vague future intention to join the United States, the West Florida convention declared the colony independent and requested immediate annexation.⁵

East Florida, however, would prove far more difficult to acquire due to the presence of the Seminoles. Though East Florida was formally comprised of the rest of modern-day Florida, in practice, Spanish authority was confined to St. Augustine and its immediate environs. With some justification, the 2000 Spanish residents of this largely unprofitable colony believed themselves to be afterthoughts on the edge of the world. In contrast, there were at least 3000 Indians living in Florida who, following the ruptures of the American Revolution, acted increasingly independently from their onetime allies, the more populous Creek nation to the north. Benefiting from a vibrant economy centered on the trade of deerskins, the Seminoles leveraged their prosperity to become the preeminent military power in the region. However, their power was not absolute. The Spanish had

⁵ William Davis, *The Rogue Republic: How Would-Be Patriots Waged the Shortest Revolution in American History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); Peter Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 124-132; Wanjohi Wacuima, *Intervention in Spanish Floridas: A Study in Jeffersonian Foreign Policy* (Boston: Branden Press, 1976), 130-195; J.C.A. Stagg, "James Madison and George Mathews: The East Florida Revolution of 1812 Reconsidered," *Diplomatic History* 30 (2006), 28-29; Robert Taylor. "Prelude to Manifest Destiny: The United States and West Florida 1810-1811," *Gulf Coast Historical Review*, 7 (1992), 47-50.

granted a monopoly over Indian trade to a Scottish trading firm, Panton, Leslie and Company, leaving the Indians vulnerable to price manipulations and, consequently, heavily in debt by 1810.⁶

Aware of Spanish weakness, Madison sent George Mathews to pass along a message to the leading citizens of East Florida that should East Florida declare independence from Spain, “a common interest” would bind them to the United States and he would welcome their incorporation. A better patriot than a diplomat, Mathews had served in the Continental Army, the Georgia state legislature, and the House of Representatives. Already aged at 72, Mathews had little patience left for delicate negotiations and excitedly sent word from Florida that though the inhabitants were “ripe for revolt, they [were] however incompetent to effect a thorough revolution without external aid.” Not one to hesitate, Mathews decided to provide that external aid himself. After writing to Madison and taking his lack of reply as tacit consent, he raised 125 troops from among Georgia citizens and Spanish Floridians in March 1812. Dubbing them the Patriot Army, he formed a militia and seized Amelia Island, a small island near Georgia just inside the East Florida boundary line and close to St. Augustine. Once in power, he intended to form a new government, express interest as the executive of a

⁶ The Panton Company’s threat was not merely economic. The Seminoles had heard rumors that the company intended to settle their newly acquired land with, as one chief put it, “all the vagabond Americans [they] could find.” James Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993), 25-28; David Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 276-278; William Coker and Thomas Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola: University of West Florida Press, 1986) 243-272; John C. Upchurch, “Aspects of the Development and Exploration of the Forbes Purchase,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 48.2 (October 1969), 117-124; James Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of East Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 46; “The Forbes Purchase: A Letter from James Innerarity to William Simpson, Partners of John Forbes and Company,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 10.2 (Oct 1931), 102-108; Edwin McReynolds, *The Seminoles* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1957), 41.

nascent independent state in joining the United States, and, as a representative of the Madison administration, accept his own offer.⁷

For all of Mathews's ambitions, he still commanded only a small sliver of land off the coast of Florida and had yet to make contact with the Seminoles. The Seminole nation was relatively young, formed from a heterogeneous mix of Creek dissidents, Yamasee War refugees, and outlying Choctaws bands during the seventeenth century. Feeling increasingly alienated by Creek leaders throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, many Lower Creek clans had migrated to northern Florida, likely drawn by its relatively untapped soil, abundant hunting opportunities, and lack of powerful European and Indian rivals. There, isolated by distance and culture and, having expelled some local Indians and absorbed their remnants, they formed a new political entity, the Seminoles. Incorporating other Indian bands of a different linguistic heritage, the ties that bound the Seminole nation were tenuous, but by 1784, both the Spanish and English recognized them as independent from the Creeks.⁸

Once in place, Mathews moved not to recruit the Seminoles to his cause, but to assure their neutrality. In April 1812, he traveled to a Seminole camp to meet with the two most influential Seminoles at the time, Chief Payne and his younger half-brother Bowlegs. Having prospered within Spanish Florida, both men owned large European-

⁷ Quote from Stagg, "James Madison and George Mathews" 43. Rembert Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1954), 124-125, 165-166; Joseph Smith, *The Plot to Steal Florida: James Madison's Phony War* (New York: Arbor House, 1983), 254-257; A.H. Phinney, "The First Spanish-American War," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 4.3 (Fall 1926), 114-129; Owsely and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*; Rufus K. Wylls, "The East Florida Revolution of 1812-1814," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 9.4 (Nov 1929), 415-445.

⁸ For more on the shared history of the Creeks and Seminoles, see James Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993); Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1763-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1993).

style plantation houses, slaves, and hundreds of heads of cattle. Mathews personally met with Payne and tried to persuade him of the Patriots' disinterest in Seminole property. An old man and weary of conflict, Payne took Mathews at his word and promised to keep the Seminoles out of the fray. His younger brother went further. Long distrustful of their Spanish neighbors and desperate to end the Panton Company's monopoly which had impoverished his people, Bowlegs offered to fight at Mathews' side. With success in his grasp, Mathews demurred. "It was a quarrel among white people," he told Bowlegs, "and he did not want their assistance."⁹

Mathews might not have had had any interest in the Seminoles, but others in the borderlands were more aware of their power and influence. Spanish agents and African-American slaves traveled to Seminole camps with dark tidings of the Patriots' designs. Hearing of Seminole disquiet, Mathews attempted to reassure the Seminoles once again. He had his men kidnap Tony Proctor, a well-known and respected slave of the Forbes Company who had earned renown as a translator. Upon meeting with the Seminoles, Proctor deceived Mathews by feigning to translate his words of conciliation, and instead warned the Seminoles "these fine talks are to amuse and deceive you. They are going to take your country beyond the St. Johns, the old people will be put to sweep the yards of the white people, the young men to work for them, and the young females to spin and weave for them." Though unaware of the deception, Mathews sensed the Seminoles'

⁹ Bowlegs may also have been aware that war with Britain was imminent and intended to play both sides off the other. Smith, *The Plot to Steal Florida* 258; Cusick, *The Other War of 1812* 214-215; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco* 180. For Seminole connections to Spanish Florida, see Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 111-115; Kenneth Porter, "Negroes and the East Florida Annexation Plot, 1811-1813," *The Journal of Negro History*, 30.1 (Jan 1945), 9-29; James Innerarity to ?, "Letters of James Innerarity: The War of 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 10.3 (Oct 1932), 136. On Cowekeeper, see Kenneth Porter, "The Founder of the 'Seminole Nation': Secoffee or Cowkeeper," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 27.4 (Apr., 1949), 362-384.

hostility and lost his temper, swearing that if the Seminoles resisted, they would be driven from their land and their villages would be burned to ash. Aware of the discord, Spanish Governor Sebastián Kindelán pounced. Days later, when Proctor returned it was at the side of a Cuban soldier offering Kindelán's terms: in return for their aid against the Patriots, he would give them arms, gifts, and bounties for the scalps of Patriot leaders. The Seminoles were in the field.¹⁰

Over the coming months during the fall of 1812, Seminole attacks shattered the Patriot force. Sneaking behind the Patriot main body, Seminole war parties struck at Patriot positions in northern Florida, scalping settlers and capturing dozens of slaves. "Nothing can be heard by the lonely traveler," wrote one volunteer to his family with palpable fear, "save the screeching of the owl or howling of the wolf, his fears anticipating an attack from the more dreadful lurking Indian." Mathews had been content with the Seminoles' profession of neutrality and it became his undoing. Unwilling or unable to conceive of the full range of the Seminole chiefs' interests, he had taken their word at face value, not realizing the Spanish might offer inducements of their own. He did not envision a place for them within his imagined Florida republic, but similarly did nothing to neutralize their autonomy as well. One observing American officer despairingly informed his superiors that the Patriots "only fears now seem to be about the Indians. In providing means for their present security they appear to have lost sight of the first grand object, the conquest of the Province, & ... it is doubtful whether the 'Patriot Army' will ever revive again." Mathews returned to Georgia, defeated.¹¹

¹⁰ Cusick, *The Other War of 1812* 215-217; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco* 181-183; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 222-225.

¹¹ Landers, *African Creoles* 115; Cusick, *The Other War of 1812* 239-241; Colonel Newnan to Governor Mitchell, October 19, 1812, "United States Troops in Spanish East Florida, 1812-1813 III," *Florida Historical*

Mathews, like his patron, believed that the instability of the Florida borderlands impeded the development of the United States. A believer in republican theory, he utilized his faith in an imagined empire of liberty to drive the Spanish out of Florida. When Spanish whites did not flock to his cause, he had no means of attacking St. Augustine or of leveraging his position on Amelia Island. The Seminoles and Black Seminoles were, to him, irrelevant to the fate of Spanish Florida until they drove him out of Florida altogether.

Andrew Jackson did not repeat Mathews's mistakes. For several years before the onset of the War of 1812, he had carried on a correspondence with the new governor of Tennessee, Willie Blount, advocating the removal of the state's Indians to both expand and secure the nation's territory. The incipient war with England only confirmed his fears. Learning that a dissident Creek band of Red Sticks had massacred several Tennessee families in May 1812, Jackson hurriedly wrote to Blount and asked him for authorization to lead 2500 men against the perpetrators. "*They must be punished* – and our frontier protected," he thundered, "and I have no doubt but the[y] are urged on by british agents and tools." To Jackson, there was no distinction between British agitation and Indian atrocity. War against the British could not be won unless every one of their allies, and potential allies, was removed.¹²

Jackson's Anglophobia was well-earned. Famously scarred as a young boy by a British officer during the American Revolution, Jackson believed he had witnessed the

Quarterly, 9.3 (Jan 1931), 146-155. Lieutenant Colonel Smith to Governor Mitchell, August 21, 1812, "United States Troops in Spanish East Florida, 1812-1813 II," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 9.2 (Oct 1930), 110-111; Wm Kinnear to Mother and Brother, undated, "Letters of the Invaders of East Florida, 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 28.1 (July 1949), 61-62; Fielder Ridgeway to Thomas Ridgeway, September 11, 1812, "Letters of the Invaders of East Florida, 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 28.1 (July 1949), 60.

¹² Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Viking, 2001), 54-56.

depths of their tyranny first hand. The racialized violence of the War of 1812, with its legions of armed Indians, appeals to slaves throughout the South, and massive, possibly polyglot, foreign armies marching throughout the country, reinforced the nature of the threat. To Jackson, the solution was comprised of a series of interlocked steps. The British would have to be defeated. The Spanish would have to be driven out of Florida. The remaining southeast Indians would have to be removed. Failing in any of those three tasks would leave the South vulnerable to foreign invasion and make the massive scale of the slaveholding society with which he identified nearly impossible.¹³

Finally, in September 1813, Blount authorized Jackson to march against the dissident Creeks in eastern Alabama. The general led a multiracial force, staffed largely of Tennessee militiamen and allied Creeks. The fighting was brutal. In the Creek town of Tallushatchee, Jackson's men surrounded dozens of warriors and, in the words of Davy Crockett who was present, "shot them like dogs." Jackson's friend and future Florida governor, Lieutenant Richard Keith Call, was stunned at the aftermath, having witnessed bodies piled against one another and dogs feasting on their former masters' corpses. Jackson proceeded south, killing 300 Red Sticks at Fort Strother where he spent the winter, consolidating his forces. There, he received word from the Hillabees, one of the most militant enemy bands, that they were willing to lay down their arms. However, as Jackson carried on a correspondence and set the terms of the agreement, one of his lieutenants, acting independently and ignorant of Jackson's negotiations, unknowingly launched an attack on the largest Hillabee settlement, killing dozens, capturing hundreds,

¹³ On Jackson and his Anglophobia, see William Belko, "The Monroe Administration, American Anglophobia, 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*, ed., William Belko (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 54-102.

and burning the town to the ground. Jackson never expressed remorse for the mistake. The following spring, he marched on the main Red Stick force at Horseshoe Bend where he launched his final assault. The killing dwarfed even that of Tallushatchee. Jackson's men laid waste to Creek warriors, shot noncombatants, sliced long strips of skin from their victims to make bridle reins, and cut off the tips of the nose of the fallen to better count the dead. 850 Red Sticks died against 26 United States troops.¹⁴

The remnants of the Red Stick army fled south to Florida, out of the United States and toward Seminole land. As the dissident Creeks had long been hostile to the cultural and economic manifestations of Americanization – the expanding slave trade among their people, the widening conception of private property, the growing entanglement with a broadening market economy, and the concomitant abandonment of traditional Indian cultural practices – they were natural allies of the Seminoles. By 1814, British officers had recruited thousands of such dissidents to their cause throughout the southeast, welcoming Creeks, Seminoles, and African-Americans to their ranks. Though the Treaty of Ghent ended the war before the British could marshal their new army, the conflict nonetheless swelled the Seminoles' ranks and offered them direct lines of communication to British emissaries.¹⁵

In the aftermath, Jackson, ever mindful of the British threat, adamantly reiterated his vision of the future of the Creeks, friendly and hostile. He urged representatives of the Madison administration to strip a large tract of land from the Creeks cutting through Alabama and Georgia to isolate them from Spanish Florida. He wanted the government to

¹⁴ Remini, *The Indian Wars of Andrew Jackson* 62-79; Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 150-159.

¹⁵ Philip Coolidge Brooks, *Diplomacy and the Borderlands: The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 85-87; Owsely and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists*, 120-121; T. Frederick Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 7.1 (July 1928), 8-11.

abrogate all Cherokee and Chickasaw claims within Tennessee and entirely isolate the southeast from any potential European influence. In August 1814 at Fort Jackson as a newly minted brigadier general of the United States army, Jackson met with friendly and hostile Creek leaders and made his demands clear. They would have to surrender nearly half of the land to which they laid claim in Alabama and Georgia and allow the United States to build on the remaining land as it saw fit, including the construction of military outposts. If the Creeks, many of whom had fought beside him against the Red Sticks, chose not to sign the treaty and cast their lot with the British, he assured them they would face his wrath. The Creeks signed. A year later, after the Treaty of Ghent ended the war between the United States and England and explicitly superseded the harsh terms Jackson had imposed on the Creeks, Jackson insisted that his own treaty remained in effect, defying England, several Indian nations, and the rest of the federal government.

In the midst of the war with England, Andrew Jackson's campaign against the Creek Indians did as much to advance the United States' interests as any other facet of the war. The Treaty of Fort Jackson opened vast tracts of land to white settlement and left the Creek nation severely weakened. By leveraging the southeast borderlands conflicts to his nation's benefit, he had deeply wounded Creek political and economic autonomy. He understood, as Mathews had not, that European nations largely projected their strength in North America through their Indian allies. Neither could be dealt with in isolation. Through the defeat of hostile Indians, the United States would acquire more land for settlement, forestall future invasions, and provide energetic young men an outlook to pursue self-realization. Andrew Jackson's insight, one that he would apply over the

coming decades, was that those same lessons applied to Indians with whom he was nominally at peace as well.

Jackson's Physical and Rhetorical Assault on the Florida Borderlands

Though the Treaty of Ghent formally ended the War of 1812, its aftershocks continued to plague the southeast throughout the rest of that decade. James Monroe's secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson each believed that the southeastern borderlands, which still housed hostile Indians and British agents, remained a threat to national security. Faced with frontier raids and the threat that the War of 1812 might be rekindled, the Monroe administration expected Spain to enforce its territorial sovereignty over its colony by deporting British agitators and isolating the Seminoles from foreign envoys. When it became clear that Spain would not, and could not, do so, Andrew Jackson decided to eliminate the problem himself, unilaterally invading Spanish Florida and making their further possession of the colony untenable. When Adams became aware of the full breadth of Jackson's campaign, he worked backward, seizing upon every justification under international law that might support his and Jackson's cause. Jackson, however, had wider goals. To him the problem of the southeast borderlands was not the influence of the British at all, but rather the very presence of autonomous nonwhites who might threaten the United States.¹⁶

The end of the War of 1812 did not mean the end of a British presence along the Gulf Coast. In 1817, along the Suwannee River, a Scottish merchant from the Bahamas,

¹⁶ Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 348-349; David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Old Hickory's War: Andrew Jackson and the Quest for Empire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 119-121; Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 414-417.

Alexander Arbuthnot, established a trading post through which he conducted trade with the Seminoles and their allies. He became a tireless exponent for the Indians, dashing off letters to the Monroe administration, the British governor of Nassau, the British minister to the United States, and the Spanish governor in St. Augustine. His trading posts guaranteed the Seminoles supplies at reasonable prices, while his advocacy promised them the opportunity to reclaim both disputed Creek lands and land they had ceded to the Forbes Company. Jackson, who remained a general in the United States army, did not welcome his presence. Even more troubling to Jackson were reports of British agents throughout East and West Florida, promising firearms, supplies, and vast tracts of land to Indians and African-Americans.

Perhaps nothing could have drawn Andrew Jackson's attention like the confluence of British agents, Seminole intransigents, and autonomous African Americans in the southeast. Their presence threatened to destabilize the slave system, fully resurrect the southeast borderlands, and drive yeoman white settlers from the frontier. For Jackson, who fervently believed in the right to own slaves, disdained the British unreservedly, and had dedicated his life to expanding the nation in the name of *herrenvolk* democracy, Spanish Florida seemed to foretell a dark future in which racial warfare and British designs undid the republican project.

For others who supported Jackson, the problem was even more immediate. If the Seminoles and the British remained, slavery could not flourish in the southeast borderlands at a time when the institution was enjoying a boom period, economically and culturally. The nation's slave population had tripled since 1776 and, even by 1817, a brisk network of forced migration had spread slavery throughout the South, enveloping

and transforming whole regions with startling rapidity. For those who viewed the institution even more favorably than Jackson, as the social and economic lynchpin of the South, action was ever more urgent.¹⁷

With the marked decline of Spanish prestige in the region, settlers and squatters in southern Georgia began to settle along the Georgia-Florida border, in the proximity of several major Seminole towns. Tensions in the area were already high, and centered immediately on an autonomous African-American community in West Florida, identified throughout the southeast as the “Negro Fort.” Though an American force demolished the fort in July 1816, hundreds of African-Americans fled from its ruins to East Florida, further empowering and radicalizing an increasingly polyglot Seminole society and sparking a series of reprisals along the Georgia-Florida border. The borderland violence culminated in the fall of 1817, when United States troops burned the Lower Creek settlement Fowltown and, as revenge, Seminoles launched an attack upon a boat carrying forty soldiers and eleven of their dependents, leaving only six survivors. With war appearing inevitable and expecting aid from their erstwhile British allies, the Seminoles intensified their raids on American border towns in Georgia.¹⁸

¹⁷ On the growth of slavery in the 1810s, see Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 325-357; Roger Kennedy, *Mr. Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery, and the Louisiana Purchase* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 169-243.

¹⁸ Heidler and Heidler, *Old Hickory's War* 60-94; Owsely and Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists* 145-157; Frank L. Owsely, Jr., “Ambrister and Arbuthnot: Adventurers or Martyrs for British Honor,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 5.3 (Autumn, 1985), 294-295; Landers, *Atlantic Creoles* 187-188; Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands* 314-316; Rogin, *Fathers and Children* 194-196. For the incorporation of African-Americans into Seminole society, see Landers, *African Creoles* 184-187; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People*, revised and edited Alcione M. Amos and Thomas P. Senter (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996); Kevin Mulroy, *The Seminole Freedmen* 16-17.

Well-armed following decades of trade with the Panton Company and molded by several years of nearly constant warfare, the Seminoles were hardly defenseless. Moreover, so long as President James Monroe respected the territorial integrity of Spanish sovereignty, the Seminoles believed themselves immune from direct reprisals. In early 1818, Monroe reinforced that presumption, privately disavowing a proposal then winding through Congress that would have authorized him to occupy East Florida for fear of inflaming a wider war. Nevertheless, mindful of the effects of Seminole raids on the frontier, Monroe ordered Jackson and Edmund Gaines to quell Seminole attacks and, risking Spanish displeasure, authorized them to cross into Spanish Florida in pursuit of the Seminoles. However, he made clear that Spanish forts, even if they housed Seminoles, were off limits. Jackson, testing his boundaries, replied with a proposal to use the Seminole attacks as a pretext to seize East Florida. Monroe never answered Jackson's request, years later claiming that an illness had prevented him from reading his message and acting on it immediately. Jackson, true to his nature, took Monroe's silence as tacit permission, and moved with alacrity to bring down Spanish Florida.¹⁹

¹⁹ Richard Stenberg, "Jackson's 'Rhea Letter' Hoax," *Journal of Southern History* 2.4 (Nov., 1936), 480-482; Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* 134-138. Historians have fervently debated Monroe's complicity in Jackson's transgression of Spanish sovereignty. Several argue for his active participation, see Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* 137-140; William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992), 109-110. Others argue Jackson acted on his own, see Heidler and Heidler, *Old Hickory's War* 121; Harry Ammon, *The Quest for National Identity* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1971), 417. Still others argue that Monroe actively refrained from endorsing Jackson's actions, but only as a means of maintaining plausible deniability of his invasions. See Howe, *What Hath God Wrought* 99; Samuel Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 314. Regardless of the extent of Monroe's involvement, his administration clearly desired the annexation of Florida. Indeed, John Quincy Adams had already sent overtures to Spanish officials inquiring of the possibility. The policy on consolidating the nation's control over its borderlands was nearly universally held among elite Americans. Given the upheavals of the Atlantic World in the early nineteenth centuries, Jackson's invasion would likely have appeared to Monroe a valuable invasion of which to be ignorant.

In March 1818, Jackson, at the head of a large force, traveled to the site of the Negro Fort and constructed a base of operations. He then marched east to the Spanish fortress of St. Marks, burning abandoned Indian towns on his way. At Fort Marks, he seized a Spanish fort where he discovered and captured his imagined archfiend, Arbuthnot, and continued east to the Suwannee River razing Indian villages on the way. Aware of Jackson's strength and unprepared for war, the Seminoles chose not to engage and retreated further south into Florida's interior. While Jackson pursued his prey, he received a bit of luck. One night, Robert Ambrister, a British officer delegated to meet with the Seminoles, stumbled into Jackson's camp, believing it to be his own. Jackson immediately returned to St. Marks, executed both Britons following a brief trial, and continued west to Pensacola, which he captured over the protests of the governor of West Florida. Satisfied with his demolition of Spanish Florida but frustrated at his failure to confront the Seminoles, Jackson returned home to domestic outrage and official statements of ignorance from his superiors after bringing his nation to the brink of war with two nations. Militarily what became known as the First Seminole War was a resounding success. Diplomatically, it was less so.

In May 1818, following the war, Jackson sent along a brief report from one of his subordinates, Captain Hugh Young, to Secretary of War John Calhoun, retroactively justifying their foray into Spanish territory. It made clear Jackson's priorities by subtly shifting the logic of early republic Indian and borderland policy, retaining their focus on physical expansion but excising their assimilative and republican ideals. In his report, Young rejected Enlightenment theory and championed martial strength in its place. Noting that the Seminoles' and the other four civilized tribes' only "title to territory rests

on forcible occupancy and the dispossession of other tribes,” Young argued that their claim to the land was a chimera. To Jackson and Young, the United States should not deal with the Indians except as occupiers of land they did not own, as squatters, not as a people. His argument represented a significant departure from older traditions of Indian policy. For all of their equivalencies and hypocrisies, previous leaders had at least recognized Indian title and, even if they did acquire Indian land through less than ethical means, they did not disavow the Indian right to own that land altogether.²⁰

Similarly, in he and his defenders’ justification for the executions of Ambrister and Arbuthnot, Jackson articulated a vision of his nation engaged in perpetual war with the English and their Indian allies. By implication, Jackson deemed anyone who reinforced the sovereignty of the southeast Indians as acting outside the law. Consequently, Arbuthnot, a civilian who had committed no military acts against the United States, was found guilty of aiding nonwhite partisans as a de facto English agent. Similarly, the Seminoles who had consorted with British agents and gone unpunished by the decrepit Spanish colonial government were subject to American reprisals for their crimes if not legally then, by Jackson’s lights, morally. He deemed them outlaws who “had forfeited the rights of civilized men.” They had no right to a fair trial, were immune from strictures against cruel and unusual punishment, and had no moral or legal recourse

²⁰ Ammon, *James Monroe* 412-413; James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 96-115; Heidler and Heidler, *Old Hickory’s War* 121, 206; Hugh Young, “A Topographical Memoir on East and West Florida with Itineraries of General Jackson’s Army, 1818,” ed., Mark F. Boyd and Gerald Ponton, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 13.1,13.2,13.3 (Summer 1934, Fall 1934, Winter 1935) 16-19, 82-104, 129-164.

to challenge their status. To Jackson, the gradual decline of the Spanish empire had left a power vacuum in the borderlands. He intended to fill it with sheer, unvarnished force.²¹

Jackson's radical advance did not go unnoticed. In January 1819, as Congress debated whether to censor Jackson for his execution of Arbuthnot and Ambrister, Henry Clay took to the floor. The senator had already earned acclaim for his eloquence and he intended this to be a command performance. Though Clay seldom expressed much concern over the fate of Indians, he had demonstrated a distinct respect for the Indian right of self-government over his career, most famously as John Quincy Adams's Secretary of State when he urged the president to use force against Georgia settlers to defend Creek property. Elite men and women, foreign ministers, and curious onlookers crowded into the chamber to listen and they were not disappointed. In his speech, Clay reminded Jackson that "we are fighting a great moral battle, for the benefit not only of our country, but all of mankind. The eyes of the whole world are in fixed attention upon us." And Jackson had wilted under the gaze. With disgust, Clay castigated the general's motives and declared his reliance on vengeance and the "right of retaliation" a novel and shameful justification for United States Indian and borderland policy. Clay steadfastly believed that his American System, rooted in an unyielding faith in republicanism and progress, and not force, would bring the nation's borderlands further into their orbit. In undermining those precepts, Jackson's pursuit of conquest, racial subordination, and use of extra-legal tactics endangered the nation. The next day, Clay sent word to Jackson that

²¹ Rogin, *Fathers and Children* 198; Deborah A. Rosen, "Wartime Prisoners and the Rule of Law: Andrew Jackson's Military Tribunals during the First Seminole War," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28.4 (Winter 2008), 559-595.

he hoped their friendly relations would continue. Clearly, he did not know Andrew Jackson as well as he thought he did.²²

Andrew Jackson may have had to deal with the slings and arrows of Congress, but Secretary of State John Quincy Adams faced the cannons of Spain. In late 1818 and early 1819, Adams, highly ambitious and believing himself to have a clear path to the presidency, correctly deduced that Spanish leaders had given up hope of retaining Florida following the upheavals in the New World. Dedicated to national expansion as an economic necessity and believing in the spread of republicanism as a moral good for the world, Adams decided that rather than defend Jackson, he would vindicate him. He cast his eye across the recent history of the Florida borderlands and performed a precise rhetorical sleight of hand. Taking Jackson's reconceptualization of an eternal war between English agents and Indian proxies as his own, Adams re-imagined the borderlands not as a crucible of liberty, but as a cesspool of despotism.

Legitimizing Jackson's invasion, Adams argued that to retain national sovereignty a nation was required to deter partisans within its national borders. Therefore, he argued, as it was "the obligation of Spain to restrain, *by force*, the Indians of Florida from hostilities against the United States and their citizens," their failure to do so justified Jackson's actions on the ground of self-defense. Having failed to consolidate its control over its own territory, Spain had ceded its claim to inviolate borders, essentially legitimizing Jackson's invasion. But Adams's reconceptualization could only function as

²² Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55-56; Henry Clay, *The Life and Speeches of the Honorable Henry Clay*, edited and compiled by Daniel Mallory (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1857), 420-445; Michael Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 133. On Clay and frontier policy, see John R. Van Atta, "'A Lawless Rabble': Henry Clay and the Politics of Squatters' Rights, 1832-1841," *Journal of Early Republic*, 28.3 (Fall 2008), 337-378. On Clay and the Spanish borderlands, see Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood* 136-143.

long as he imagined Indian nations as necessarily dependent upon imperial claimants and lacking standing of their own in the diplomatic sphere. He stated what his predecessors had left implicit - Indians had no rights the federal government was bound to respect. Hence, when Adams characterized the chaos of Florida as “this creeping and insidious war, both against Spain and the United States; this mockery of patriotism; these political filters to fugitive slaves and Indian outlaws,” he publicly endorsed the destruction of the Florida borderlands and prioritized the reality of early republic Indian policy, with its focus on the circumcision of nonwhite autonomy, over its oft-articulated ideals. In February, 1818 when Adams reached the Transcontinental Treaty with Spanish minister Louis de Onís and formally acquired East and West Florida, he did so by acting in the mode of Jackson.²³

The Transcontinental Treaty was the capstone to several decades of United States campaigns to seize Florida from Spain and annihilate the southeastern borderlands. For all of its efforts, the United States owed its success primarily to Latin American revolutionaries who had stretched the Spanish empire beyond its breaking points and left most of its remnants, aside from Cuba, relatively valueless to Spain. But the threat remained: if, in the future, the British again allied with the southeast Indians, it would be due to a lack of vigilance on the part of United States officials to police the frontier. As his actions had shown, Andrew Jackson, for one, would not let that happen. And, though in later decades he would be the loudest voice of protest against what he would come to deride as Jackson’s crusade of conquest, as Secretary of State, Adams had granted

²³ Weeks, *John Quincy Adams* 105-122, 139-146; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Verso: London, 1990), 38-41; John Quincy Adams to George William Erving, November 28, 1818, *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), 6: 474-503.

Jackson's lawless invasion ideological heft. Only with the demise of the southeast borderlands and the adoption of responsibility for the Indians of the area, would he come to understand the full implications of his actions. In time, he would show far more respect for the precepts of international law and nationhood, and would come to believe in the ideals of Clay's eloquent faith in an expansion pursued through more moral means.²⁴

Governor Jackson and United States Indian Policy

Following the cession of Florida to the United States, Monroe chose Andrew Jackson to serve as the territory's first governor. Jackson's bellicosity appealed to the president; he was sure that once Jackson had imposed his rule on the territory, the "smugglers & slave traders will hide their heads; pirates will disappear, & the Seminoles cease to give us trouble." Following a perfunctory ceremony in Pensacola in July 1821, Jackson took possession of Florida and, as his first act as governor, set about searching for a suitable residence. The Government House, the traditional seat of the governor, had appeared barely habitable. It was a fitting metaphor for the state of the territory as Jackson regarded the remains of Spanish similarly decrepit, having left behind no working legislature and little in the way of public regulations. East Florida, at least, enjoyed a functioning system of government, allowing Jackson to focus on other concerns. With monomaniacal intensity, he set about undermining the Seminoles' property rights and ability to negotiate with the United States under international law.²⁵

²⁴ Jefferson to Monroe, January 18, 1819, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Ford, 12: 113-114.

²⁵ For more on Jackson's brief term as governor, see Herbert Doherty, "The Governorship of Andrew Jackson," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 33.1 (Jul., 1954), 3-31. Monroe to Jackson, May 23, 1821, *Territorial Papers of the United States: The Florida Territory, 1821-1824* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 22: 57.

After receiving his initial orders from Adams, Jackson requested clarification on the United States policy concerning the Florida Indians and offered his own advice on the subject. In his own experience, he assured Adams, the vast majority of Indians in Florida were once dissident Creeks whom Jackson claimed to have “conquered” during the War of 1812 and the First Seminole War. Therefore, it was only proper that he be given the authority to round up the Florida Indians and transfer them back to Creek country, in the process opening the frontier to white settlement. Having dealt with the Creeks over the previous decade, Jackson was well aware that the Indians living in Florida, whether Creek or Seminole, detested the current Creek leadership and would never consent to being re-admitted into their former nation. However, his vision of the Florida Territory, a land of borders, fences, farms, and slaves, held no space for the Seminoles or their culture. Regardless, Secretary of War John Calhoun denied Jackson’s recommendation, arguing that they would need the approval of both Georgia settlers and the Seminoles themselves to relocate them to Georgia and neither would be forthcoming.²⁶

The Seminoles themselves understood the past decade to have demonstrated their relative weakness. Though they had suffered few casualties during the First Seminole War, Jackson had brought about massive social and cultural displacement as he burned their towns and forced their retreat south. Politically, the Seminoles were likely fractured as well. Bowlegs had died of natural causes following the First Seminole War and his

²⁶ Amusingly, Jackson closed his letter by assuring Adams that no matter the president’s instructions, he would obey them, in effect promising not to launch another war unilaterally. Andrew Jackson to John Quincy Adams, April 2, 1821, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 28-29. In his goal of relabeling the Seminoles as a fringe group within the larger Creek nation, Jackson had the support of William McIntosh, a Creek leader who led a battalion of Upper Creeks against the Seminoles during the First Seminole War. McIntosh’s motivations were primarily monetary. If the Seminoles were treated as a faction of the Creeks, then he would profit from any payment to the Seminoles in return for their removal and also have the opportunity to appropriate their property. Calhoun to Jackson, May 25, 1821, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 40-41.

natural hereditary successor, Micanopy, came to power as Spain and the United States negotiated the Adams-Onís Treaty. During such a tumultuous transition period, no Seminole chief would manage to consolidate enough authority to control the disparate bands of Florida Indians for nearly a decade. Complicating the situation, the Seminoles lacked any means of communication with the new territorial government. In the past, Spanish officials had welcomed Seminole chiefs into major settlements and freely distributed presents to assure their loyalty. No such invitations were forthcoming from Jackson.²⁷

In desperation, the Seminoles stumbled upon two candidates to carry their message to the governor. Horatio Dexter, a plantation owner and Indian trader, and Edward Wanton, a former agent for the Panton Company, approached the Seminoles as representatives of a group of leading St. Augustine merchants who wanted permission to build a settlement on Seminole land. Both Dexter and Wanton had dealt with the Seminoles before and, to further ingratiate favor with tribal chiefs, employed Tony Proctor as their interpreter. When the two parties met, however, the Seminoles were far less interested in Dexter and Wanton's land proposal than their access to Jackson. Shrewdly, the chiefs categorically refused to strike a land deal until Dexter and Wanton agreed to serve as their intermediaries with the territorial government. As their interests and those of the Seminoles largely coincided, Dexter and Wanton agreed readily. Each

²⁷ "Talk by the Delegation of Florida Indians," May 17, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 548-551; Charles Vignoles, *Observations upon the Floridas* (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1821), 135; Covington, *The Seminoles* 20-23.

wanted to prevent the arrival of Georgia settlers - the Seminoles to preserve their land, Dexter and Panton to secure a more orderly and profitable settlement.²⁸

Dexter and Wanton's intervention enraged Andrew Jackson. In a letter to John Calhoun, with words that echoed his charges against Alexander Arbuthnot, Jackson bellowed that the unofficial Indian agents intended to "impress upon the minds of the Indians their absolute right to the country." American emigration to Florida was, in Jackson's estimation, ongoing, inevitable, and desirable. The Seminoles, who had continuously opposed the United States over several decades, could not arrest Florida's development. "Is the safety of our frontier," Jackson asked, "to be jeopardised by the complaints of a few indians excited by would be indian agents, and indian treaty makers, who compose flowry talks of them and put words into their mouths they never" spoke?²⁹

After a brief time as governor, exhausted by laborious negotiations with multinational subjects and worried that the Florida heat was weakening his wife's already deteriorating health, Jackson announced his plans to step down as governor by the end of 1821. As one of his last acts, Jackson wrote a letter to his superiors advancing a radical reformulation of the relationship between the United States and its Indian neighbors. Jackson asserted that American officials held a moral obligation to do justice to their Indian neighbors, but disclaimed the legitimacy of treaty-making. Willing to only envision relationships with Indians governed by naked considerations of power, Jackson allowed that such negotiations had been a prudent exercise following independence, when the Indians were "numerous and hostile" and the federal government too weak to unilaterally enforce its will. In the present day, "when the arm of the government is

²⁸ Frank Marotti, "Edward Wanton and the Settling of Micanopy," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 73.4 (Apr., 1995), 466-467.

²⁹ Calhoun to Jackson, September 17, 1821, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 205-207.

sufficiently strong” to enforce policies that did justice, however defined, to the southeast Indians, treaty-making, was “not only useless but absurd.” He launched an attack on the very principle of Indian sovereignty.³⁰

In his letter, Jackson staked out a position far more extreme than even the policies he pursued as president, during which Indian removal was achieved entirely through the use of treaties. Those were agreements governed by coercion, fraud, and the overt threat of violence, but they were agreements nonetheless. In proposing to curtail Indian consent, Jackson envisioned taking the least moral, most expeditious aspects of early republic Indian policy and recasting them as its central component. By implication, Jackson argued that with the demise of the southeast borderlands, white policymakers could dispense with the charade of Indian rights and instead impose their will on their new subjects. Whatever measures Washington, Jefferson, and others had authorized on the nation’s frontiers in the name of white settlement, they had publicly upheld Indian rights to property and self-government, however limited. Even their most draconian conditions had been ratified by treaty agreements which defined some measure of obligation upon the part of the United States. With the demise of the southeast borderlands having given Jackson the opportunity to deal with Indians without worrying about the ramifications with European imperial powers, he rejected the possibility of Indian sovereignty altogether.

The Conflicting Interests of Settlers, Indians, and Federal Officials

Though Jackson began the process of integrating the Florida Territory into the United States, his successors would have to deal directly with the implications of its

³⁰ Calhoun to Jackson, September 17, 1821, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 207.

incorporation. Several powerful influential local constituencies held an abiding interest in the fate of the Seminoles and fervently worked for their political and economic marginalization. United States officials would face an overriding question: could their nation legally and morally impose its policies on neighboring Indians or would it continue to prioritize assimilation as the primary element of its policies? Faced with constituencies with divergent interests, the disjuncture between early republic rhetoric and its reality, and conflicting orders from their federal superiors, numerous officials would find themselves defending Seminole rights to property and self-government even as they worked to undermine those principles.

In Jackson's place, Monroe appointed William Pope Duval, a frontier lawyer from Kentucky who had recently begun serving as one of Florida's first federal judges. Duval, who would be reappointed by both John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, was popular socially and, with deep roots in the Virginia gentry, one of the most influential people in the territory. Filling out the rest of the territorial government, Monroe named Gad Humphreys, a former major from New York, to serve as Indian agent to the Seminoles. The two men were faced with vague orders and uncertain priorities. Monroe and Calhoun made clear they desired the complete removal of the Seminoles from Florida but were unwilling to authorize it unilaterally. Even more unsettled was American policy toward the Black Seminoles. Though many American planters demanded the return of hundreds of slaves for whom they held claims, the condition of the Black Seminoles - free or slave, American property or Seminole - had yet to be adjudicated by anyone in the federal government, nor could they predict how the Seminoles might react to any edict. Complicating the officials' relationship with their

Florida constituents, many bellicose settlers soon began to call for the territory to take military action against the Seminoles, but the state militia was plainly not capable of an offensive. Obligated to three parties with conflicting interests - federal officials, Florida citizens, and the Seminoles themselves - Humphreys and Duval blazed separate paths.³¹

The Seminoles made clear they would not consent to rejoin the Creeks. Too much blood had been shed, too much time had passed, and too few ties persisted for it to be viable. Though they were well aware of the relative power disparity between themselves and the United States, they would not meekly submit to American demands to emigrate. They knew their position was untenable. The past decade of continual displacement had been devastating to Seminole quality of life. In the aftermath of the First Seminole War many bands suffered from severe privation, and most hesitated to plant crops or improve their land for fear that territorial officials might seize it without notice. One chief, remembering his peoples' past prosperity, admitted, "when I walk about these woods, now so desolate, and remember the numerous herds that once ranged through them ... tears come into my eyes." Unfortunately, given the rapid turnover within the territorial government, the need for Congressional authorization, and the difficulty of communicating across large distances, American officials required preparation time to negotiate, forcing the Seminoles to request sustenance and supplies from the territorial government. It would take over two years for the United States to enter into treaty discussions.³²

³¹ Duval had encountered Washington Irving several times in the past and the author used him as the basis for Ralph Ringwood, the main character of several of his short stories. For more on Duval, see James Owen Knauss, *William Pope Duval: Pioneer and State Builder* (Tallahassee: Florida Historical Society, 1933).

³² Worthington to Calhoun, December 4, 1821, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 294-95; William Simmons, *Notices of East Florida: With an Account of the Seminole Nation of Indians* (Charleston: A.E. Biller, 1822), 89.

In the interim, Duval did his best to placate federal officials, Florida settlers, and the Seminoles. As he was unwilling to allow the Seminoles to starve, he sought and received permission from Calhoun to supply the Seminoles. Fearful of renewed violence between Indians and settlers, Duval acted to quarantine the Indians from the onrushing white populace by forbidding unlicensed whites from trading with the Seminoles and discouraging whites from living in the vicinity of Seminole towns. While addressing the Seminoles' immediate concerns, Duval advanced the long term interest of Florida settlers by recommending to his superiors that the Seminoles rejoin the Creeks in Georgia or, failing that, be sent west of the Mississippi. He warned that the Seminoles currently occupied "the richest and most valuable part of all Florida" and concluded that "there are no bodies of good land in East or West Florida but in that region of country."³³

Faced with the opposition of both the Seminoles to removal and white Georgians to accept them as neighbors, Monroe and Calhoun opted instead to concentrate the Seminoles within southern Florida, away from both coasts in order to distance them from foreign agents, and south of Port Charlotte, where few whites had designs on land. Should the Seminoles reject the proposal, they enjoined their representatives to offer more land to the north, between Port Charlotte and Tampa Bay. The negotiation would be

³³ "Proclamation of the Governor of the Territory of Florida," July 29, 1822, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 504; Duval to Calhoun, September 22, 1822, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 533. As the date of the meeting between the two sides approached, the disarray of the territorial government was so complete as to approach farce. Gad Humphreys, still attending to business to the north, had yet to report to his post. The acting subagent, Peter Pellham, fell ill and had to leave the territory as well. Then, two months before the November, 1822 meeting time, Duval abruptly left the territory as well, needing to tend to personal business back home in Kentucky and leaving Acting Governor George Walton to deal with the Seminoles. In his haste, Duval departed without leaving instructions for his substitute; Walton was entirely ignorant of the government's priorities and even lacked funds to purchase food or presents for the arriving Indians. Panicking as the appointed day approached, Walton failed to make adequate arrangements, and, when the Seminoles arrived at the meeting place, found no representative present to greet them. Local army officers were left to beg the forgiveness of the Seminole chiefs and promised that the treaty negotiations would be resumed the following spring. John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1985), 37.

crucial. Authorizing their representatives in the immediate aftermath of the *Johnson v. McIntosh* decision, which ruled that only the federal government could acquire land from Indian nations, the deliberations would be their only means of opening Seminole territory to white settlement. To secure their objectives, they enlisted James Gadsden, a former officer who had served under Andrew Jackson. Gadsden was a southerner and his attachment to the institution of slavery deeply informed his mission. His primary fear that the Seminoles might ally “with another class of population which will inevitably predominate in Florida,” led Gadsden to believe Indian removal would most benefit the whites of Florida. If he could not achieve removal, he urged his superiors to install a military base next to the Seminole reservation, in order to “render them perfectly Subservient to the views of the Government.”³⁴

The two parties met at Moultrie Creek in September 1823 to negotiate the future of Florida. The Seminoles were at a crossroads. The political upheaval of the past two decades had left them without a unified leadership structure, even as circumstances forced them to make consequential collective decisions. The divides separating the Seminoles, between older chiefs and younger warriors, traditionalists and assimilationists, Mikasuki and Creek speakers, violent and pacifistic, Seminole and Black Seminole, stretched tribal institutions to their breaking points. Without the necessity of collective resistance against the United States, likely nothing would have held the Seminole coalition together. With their hold on command weak and facing the difficult

³⁴ Calhoun to James Gadsden and Bernard Segui, April 7, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 659; Gadsden to Calhoun, June 10, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 695-96. Gadsden’s views coincided exactly with those of Jackson, who, though he no longer officially served the Florida Territory, sent a note to Calhoun urging removal and arguing that if the Seminoles remained in Florida, the United States should post a military battalion nearby. Jackson to Calhoun, July 14, 1823; *Territorial Papers*, 22: 719.

task of preserving their autonomy in the face of overwhelming United States' arms and amid severe deprivations, Seminole leaders had few viable options.³⁵

Addressing about 75 chiefs and warriors, Gadsden began the proceedings not with a negotiating position but with a history lesson. He delivered a lengthy speech whose primary purpose appeared to be to renationalize the Indians gathered to hear him. Discoursing on the aggression of the Red Sticks and their natural place alongside the Creeks, he noted that, just a hundred years ago, the Seminoles, too, had been a part of the Creek nation. As by the estimation of most, the Red Sticks remained Creeks, he implied that the Seminoles were as well. He then abruptly closed with an implicit threat, demanding that the Seminoles turn over former Red Sticks. Few could have missed his meaning when he conjectured that the Seminoles were so weak that they resembled "the deer of the forest, that might be hunted to their destruction." It was for nothing. Despite the past few years in which the Seminoles had prostrated themselves before their new neighbor, their leaders categorically refused Gadsden's demand to return the Red Sticks to Georgia. The next day, Gadsden, apparently changing course on the fly, announced, "we are happy you have received as brothers those of the Creek nation among you ... long may they continue so!"³⁶

Gadsden's failure to resolve the dispute over the Red Sticks was emblematic of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. Despite his overwhelming advantages, Gadsden secured none of his ostensible priorities. The Seminoles' obstinacy toward removal west of the

³⁵ For more on the negotiations of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, see John Mahon, "The Treaty of Moultrie Creek," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 40.4, (Apr., 1962), 350-372. Joshua Nichols Glenn, "A Diary of Joshua Nichols Glenn: St. Augustine in 1823," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 24.2 (Oct., 1945), 148; *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 439.

³⁶ J. Leitch Wright Jr., *Creeks & Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 234-236; *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 438.

Mississippi was so apparent that Gadsden decided not to propose it. They refused even to conduct a census of the number of Black Seminoles in their nation, let alone surrender them. Little wonder that when Gadsden formulated a formal offer to the Seminoles that would confine them between Ocala and Tampa Bay, establish a twenty-year annuity, bind them to return all fugitive slaves after its signing, recognize the autonomy of the Black Seminoles, and provide them farming equipment to facilitate their assimilation to sedentary agriculture, he reported that they signed the treaty “without hesitation.”³⁷

It was a curious result. When Gadsden summarized the process of the negotiations to Calhoun, he described the Indians as throwing themselves on the mercy of the United States and appealing to the compassion of the commissioners to end their plight. Yet the Seminoles not only convinced Gadsden to contravene his orders and offer land well north of Tampa Bay, but won the right to have Gadsden examine the land personally and, if it did not appear sufficiently habitable to support them, extend it further northward. This was not an idle promise: Gadsden would later personally lobby for just such an extension. Having given ground on nearly every vital point, Gadsden nevertheless avowed to Calhoun that, in his estimation, “the Indians would never have voluntarily assented to the terms had they not believed we have both the power and disposition to compel obedience.” It was, however, the Seminole chiefs who had clearly won the day. The treaty they struck was their best choice politically, in which they secured significant concessions from their adversary while leaving them content enough to refrain from the application of force. In contrast to Gadsden’s characterization, the treaty was in the vein of the language of early republic Indian policy, not only recognizing but reinforcing tribal

³⁷ *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 436-439; The Indian Commissioners to Calhoun, September 16, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 748.

sovereignty and making substantial concessions – a school, tillable land, support for chiefs amenable to American culture – designed to facilitate the assimilation of the Seminoles and support their continued residence in Florida.³⁸

Powerful constituencies within white Florida found the treaty lacking in important respects. Within a month of its signing, a group of influential Middle Florida planters petitioned Monroe, directly requesting he empower Duval to convene a tribunal to adjudicate conflicting white and Indian claims to the Black Seminoles. They were outraged at the terms of the treaty, which made no attempt to address their grievances, and they feared their former slaves had fled beyond their reach. Writing for the president, Calhoun informed the planters that he lacked legal standing to address their problems, seemingly leaving them without options. However, they gained a stroke of luck with the incoming Adams administration in 1825. John Quincy Adams's new secretary of war, James Barbour, wrote to Acting Governor George Walton (Duval was briefly away from the territory) and, perhaps not realizing he was authoring a change in American policy, authorized Indian Agent Gad Humphreys to seize the slaves in question and hand them over to their American claimants should the claims appear valid. Interpreting Barbour's words to suit his own preference, Walton discarded Calhoun's strict legalism and went further, relaying to the Seminole chiefs that they were not to "harbor runaway negroes

³⁸ Treaty with the Florida tribes of Indians, 1823, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, ed., Charles Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 203-207; Gadsden to Calhoun, September 29, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 752; Duval to Calhoun, September 23, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 744. For more on the role of the politics of slave claims in Florida, see Kevin Kokomoor, "Indian Agent Gad Humphreys and the Politics of Slave Claims on the Florida Frontier, 1822-1830," Master's Thesis, Department of History, University of South Florida, 2008.

and ... they will be required to give up such negroes as are now residing within their limits” regardless of their legal status, ignoring the language of the treaty.³⁹

Walton’s increasingly forceful demands reflected a situation that was spiraling out of control. Having emigrated to their new reservation, the Seminoles found it lacking arable land and healthy water. Already, Gadsden had tried to relieve them by extending their reservation an additional five miles to the north – he justified this by reporting to his superiors that it was done “without allocating to the Indians any larger body of good land” – and further concessions appeared unlikely. Lacking options, some Seminoles ranged onto white property and killed their cattle, angering their white neighbors. Exacerbating the situation, whites began to settle the lands immediately north of the reservation, constraining Seminole expansion and leading several planters to petition the war department to arm volunteers in anticipation of war. On the outskirts of a thinly populated territory, the physical capabilities of white settlers paled in comparison to that of the Seminoles. Instead and perhaps with forethought, the settlers found other means of achieving their goals, trapping the Seminoles in a vise. By agitating the territorial government to police the reservation’s borders, they ensured the Seminoles would continue to suffer from near-starvation. Then, with startling audacity, they turned around and petitioned the federal government to enforce the emigration of the Seminoles on the grounds that it would be a humanitarian act. After all, the Seminoles were starving on their land.⁴⁰

³⁹ Petition to the President by the Inhabitants of the Territory, October 4, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 762-63; Calhoun to Cook and Others, November 30, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 820-21; Petition to Congress by the Inhabitants of East Florida, March 8, 1824, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 857-58; George Walton to Humphreys, May 22, 1825, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 634.

⁴⁰ Doyle to Walton, October 20, 1825, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 638; Gadsden to Calhoun, January 27, 1824, *Territorial Papers* 22: 841; Humphries to McKenney, August 20, 1825, *Territorial Papers*

Later that year in May 1826, Secretary of War Barbour met with a six-person Seminole delegation that included John Hicks, Neamathla, and Micanopy, with the Black Seminole Abraham serving as an interpreter. Barbour opened by informing the Seminoles that he would extend their territory to more habitable lands, provided they gave up all the fugitive slaves in their country and pledged not to raid white farms. In addition, he reminded them that the Treaty of Moultrie Creek provided funds for a school to teach Indian children reading, writing, and agriculture, which had yet to be built. He closed by telling them that Creek leaders, even as they spoke, were making plans to inspect lands west of the Mississippi in preparation for removal and, should they also be interested, he would happily provide for their transportation.⁴¹

Gently, but firmly, the Seminole delegation rebuffed every one of Barbour's overtures. "The land we occupy," began John Hicks, "we expect will be considered our own property, to remain as such for ever." They had no desire to go west, Hicks told Barbour firmly, "we will not involve ourselves in the troubles of the Muscogees – we are a separate people and have nothing to do with them." Once again, he pledged to return all slaves who had escaped to the Seminoles following the execution of the treaty to their white owners – indeed the process had already begun - but reminded Barbour that the Treaty of Moultrie Creek made no mention of fugitive slaves who had entered Seminole society prior to its signing. He closed by flatly rejecting Barbour's offer to build a school

of the United States: The Territory of Florida, 1824-1828, 23: 310; Walton to McKenney, July 25, 1825, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2: 637; Hernandez to Barbour, August 9, 1825, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 291; Duval to Calhoun, January 12, 1824, *Territorial Papers* 22: 841; Duval to Calhoun, July 29, 1824, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 22; Gadsden to Barbour, July 7, 1825, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 279; Duval to Barbour, December 12, 1825, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 385; Walton to McKenney, October 21, 1825, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 345; Duval to Barbour, December 12, 1825, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 413; McKenney to Barbour, November 28, 1825, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 358; Gadsden to Barbour, March 25, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 489.

⁴¹ McKenney to Humphries, May 11, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 538-541.

in the name of cultural preservation. It was a thorough reaffirmation of the Seminole right to live as a separate people in Florida, plainly rejecting both assimilation and removal.⁴²

In Florida, Duval found himself torn between his responsibilities as governor and Indian superintendant, his compassion for the Indians' plight, the demands of his white constituents, and his own conflicting objectives of treating the Indians humanely while still facilitating the seizure of fugitive slaves. Frustrated with decentralized Seminole politics, he decided he could more easily impose his will upon the Seminoles if they recognized a single head chief of his choosing. Flouting the principle of self-determination, Duval began with a show of force. Two companies from Fort Brooke led by Major Francis Dade were dispatched to Seminole territory. Hailing from an aristocratic Virginia family, Dade had yoked his career to that of Andrew Jackson, serving him faithfully in his Florida invasion. Now, Dade's mission was simple - intimidate the Seminoles into holding elections for a head chief. Faced with the size of his force, the Indians had little choice but to comply.⁴³

Quickly, two contenders for the title came to the fore. John Hicks, who had led the delegation to Washington and commanded the most populous Seminole bands, appeared the most likely candidate. His largest rival was Micanopy, the grandson of the former chief Payne and ally of the most influential young warriors in the nation. Though Duval desperately hoped for Hicks's elevation, the difference between the two chiefs was essentially non-existent. Both shared a similar ideology; they had traveled together to

⁴² Talk by the Delegation of Florida Indians, May 17, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 548-551.

⁴³ Touring swampland, infertile soil, inhospitable hammocks, and sandy hills, Duval concluded that he had "visited every spot where any lands were spoken of as being good, and I can say with truth that I have not seen three hundred acres of good land." Duval to McKenney, February 22, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 445; Canter Brown, "The Florida Crisis of 1826-1827 and the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 73.4 (Apr., 1995), 430. See Duval to McKenney, March 2, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 452; Duval to McKenney, March 17, 1826, *Territorial Papers*, 23: 472.

Washington and, though Hicks had spoken there, Micanopy had signed on to his message readily. In the end, Hicks won election over Micanopy as the head chief of the Seminoles, but it was all for naught. The Seminoles had humored Duval and Gadsden by electing a head chief, but Hicks's new title did not grant him any practical authority over recalcitrant young warriors nor did it offer a solution to alleviate the Seminoles' now persistent privations.⁴⁴

By the end of 1826, settler resentment of the Seminoles' trespasses on white land brought the two sides to the brink of violence. For Duval, the Seminoles' absolute obedience to the terms of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek now came with a deadline. He had scheduled a major land auction for January 1827, land upon which the Seminoles had built several villages. After consultation with Dade, the major recommended a solution: "absolute force" to drive the Indians off white land. Following an isolated Creek raid in southern Georgia, Duval seized upon the act as a provocation and dispatched Dade to round up any Indian party transgressing the bounds of Seminole territory.⁴⁵

Duval authorized two brigades, Dade's battalion and one consisting of East Florida militia groups led by Richard Keith Call. Volunteers flocked to Call's command, bringing with them dogs to flush the Indians from the wilderness. Despite their enthusiasm, the volunteers lacked sufficient training or supplies and were unable to

⁴⁴ Following the Treaty of Payne's Landing, Micanopy claimed that whites had forged his name and that he had not actually signed it. Given the hostility of the bulk of the Seminoles to the treaty and the questionable motives for a forgery (would any white American have cared if an influential chief had or had not signed a treaty? Would word of Micanopy's affirmation have mattered to any Seminole if the man himself renounced it?), he was likely misleading his listeners to cement his chieftom within the nation. In addition, Hicks and not Micanopy was among the seven-person delegation that signed the Treaty of Fort Gibson, however the evidence that his signature was obtained through either fraud or coercion was strong enough to cloud its relevance. Brown, "The Florida Crisis of 1826-1827," 433; George McCall, *Letters from the Frontier: Written during a Thirty Years' Service in the Army of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 147-148.

⁴⁵ Brown, "The Florida Crisis of 1826-1827," 434.

pierce the dense wildernesses of East Florida. They returned home, unharmed yet boastful of their service. Dade found much greater success. Displaying ruthless efficiency, the major led his men from one Seminole settlement to the next, burning each to the ground, and compelling the refugees to begin a long, bitter march south. With the outlying Seminole towns destroyed, the avowed perpetrators dead, and the vast bulk of the Seminoles confined back to their reservation, Dade's campaign was, ostensibly, an unmitigated success.

Having succeeded in forcing the Seminoles to accede to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, Duval had only to return the Black Seminoles to the white planters who claimed them. In the summer of 1828, Duval confronted a delegation of chiefs and threatened to hold back promised annuity payments until the Seminoles surrendered every runaway upon whom whites held a claim, acting as though he was not legally bound by the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. When Indian Agent Humphreys accused the governor of acting illegally and insisted on impartial adjudication of slave claims, Duval barraged Humphreys's superiors in the Adams administration with nearly a dozen charges against the agent for professional misconduct. He was adamant: any honest, diligent Indian agent could coerce Indians into acceding to any agreement. In effect, the fact that the Seminoles were secure in their property and refused to turn over their slaves became proof of Humphreys's corruption. Though Duval's accusations failed to withstand minimal scrutiny and Adams's subordinates rejected the accusations, the dispute further divided

Florida's territorial government and marginalized Humphreys, one of the only territorial officials with regard for Seminole rights under the law.⁴⁶

Hicks rebuffed Duval as well and steadfastly insisted that all of the remaining Black Seminoles were the property of Indian owners. Summoning local army officers to a meeting, Hicks protested the conduct of the territorial officials and reaffirmed his expansive view of Seminole sovereignty. Hicks centered directly on slave claims, protesting that “when an Indian buys a black man, they come and take him away again, so that we have no money and negroes too,” all with the direct complicity of the president himself. The problem was no dry legal matter, Hicks made clear: “there is a negro girl at Charleston, that belongs to my daughter – her name is Patience. I want her restored to me. She has a husband here: she has a child about a year old ... I want my big father to cause them to be sent to me.” He closed with a brief statement, six short sentences long. He was getting old, he said, and he intended to leave his bones in Florida. “We hurt nothing on this land,” he concluded.⁴⁷

Throughout John Quincy Adams's presidency, events in Florida presented him with a choice between upholding the claims of the Seminoles and pleasing his territorial constituents. Humphreys represented the former choice as he diligently executed the terms of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek and pushed back against territorial officials who attempted to circumvent them. Duval represented the latter option, choosing to prioritize the wishes of his Florida constituents by working to seize the Black Seminoles at every opportunity. Faced with the opportunity to side with Duval and remove Humphreys from

⁴⁶ McKenney to Porter, November 1, 1828, *The Territorial Papers of the United States: The Florida Territory, 1828-1834*, 24: 94-97; Alexander Adair to John Eaton, April 24, 1829, *Territorial Papers*, 24: 203-207.

⁴⁷ Sprague, *The Florida Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1848), 65-67.

office, in effect abrogating the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, Adams and his cabinet instead acted with regard for Seminole rights. They did not unilaterally seize Seminole land and property, instead making honest overtures to introduce “civilization” into their culture. They lobbied for the Seminoles to rejoin the Creeks in the west, but pointedly refrained from imposing their will against them. They, like the Seminoles, considered themselves bound by the terms of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek.

The Removal of Indian Sovereignty

The complex balance of power in Florida between Hicks, Micanopy, Humphreys, and Duval was upset by events beyond any of their control. One month before Hicks rejected Barbour’s overtures, United States voters overwhelmingly elected Andrew Jackson to the presidency. If the Seminoles had grown frustrated with John Quincy Adams, they nevertheless were all too well acquainted with Andrew Jackson and the medium of violence in which he dwelt. For all of Adams’s equivocations, he had consistently mediated his desire for national expansion with a respect for Indian rights. Duval, who had failed to persuade Adams to pursue a harsher line, could now appeal to a far more receptive authority. And, though he had largely not campaigned on Indian policy, Jackson made Indian removal the top priority of his administration.

He did so by utilizing the language of Jeffersonian assimilation even as he wrote its epitaph. Addressing Congress for the first time as president, Jackson meditated on the terrible destiny of the Indian race and concluded that “philanthropy has been long busily employed in devising means to avert it, but its progress has never for a moment been arrested.” Nevertheless, Jackson claimed the time for philanthropy had not passed. Indian

removal would be, in his telling, “but a continuation of the same progressive change, by a milder process.” Where Jefferson had tried to remake Indians in the image of whites, Jackson would allow them the opportunity to tread the same paths as his own ancestors had, wrenched “from the land of their birth to seek new homes in distant lands.” This was not a tragic process, he argued, but an opportunity to be celebrated, the most humane of solutions to the problems of the coming decades. It was a stance utterly incompatible with Hicks’s quiet insistence that his bones would remain in Florida and with the precepts that had once publicly informed United States Indian policy. Jackson publicly cast removal as an alternative to Indian annihilation, not realizing that many Indian chiefs, especially among the Seminoles, equated the two.⁴⁸

The Indian Removal Act inspired passionate debate in Congress. Prominent Protestant leaders, in and out of Congress, campaigned fiercely against the bill, celebrating the economic and cultural evolution of Cherokees who had adopted Christianity and remade their economies in the image of their white neighbors. Led in part by leading Christian activist Jeremiah Evarts, reformer Catherine Beecher, and Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen, Christian leaders rallied anti-Jacksonian politicians to their cause, leading to passionate and memorable exchanges in the halls of Congress. Jacksonians wavered. Many of the president’s northern allies, citing treaty obligations and fearful of the bill’s price, defected during the initial rounds of voting. Jacksonians of the Deep South, though among the most fervent advocates for removal, rejected Jackson’s appeals to Indian welfare outright, declaring Indian civilization an oxymoron and assimilation impossible. The Cherokees, the Indians that had most publicly identified assimilation as the conscious goal of their people, lay at the center of the debate. To

⁴⁸ Andrew Jackson, “First Annual Message,” *Presidential Messages*, 2: 458-59.

northern Protestants, their removal would be a tragedy, undercutting the significant progress they had made toward a pious and enlightened society. Yet, to southern hardliners who viewed Cherokee land and resources covetously, the very principle of Indian autonomy threatened their designs. Mention of the Seminoles was notably absent. Their resistance to literacy, farming, and industry, left them outside the prevailing discourse.

Following the close passage of the bill, Jackson implemented the paternalistic and coercive policies he had laid out as governor of the Florida territory throughout the country. On his instructions, his agents freely violated legally binding treaties, bribed Choctaw leaders to betray the wishes of the majority of their people, froze annuity payments to the Cherokees, encouraged state legislatures to extend state sovereignty over tribal land, and made no effort to restrain rapacious white settlers from settling Indian land and seizing their property. When Superintendent of Indian Affairs Thomas McKenney, a conflicted advocate of removal, failed to move with the alacrity that the president expected, Jackson relieved him of his post. Gad Humphreys's commitment to Jackson's policies was similarly suspect and he, too, was removed from office.⁴⁹

It was, all in all, an efficient operation. Jackson directly and indirectly empowered intermediaries - corrupt Indian agents, land-starved settlers, merciless state legislatures, coercive military officials, and innumerable merchants, militia members, and outright criminals - to render Indian sovereignty untenable east of the Mississippi River. When Indians attempted to resist collectively, as Sauk and Fox under the command of their chief Black Hawk did in Illinois and Wisconsin, Jackson unleashed the full fury of settler rage, massacring Indian bands and condemning the survivors to near-starvation.

⁴⁹ Kokomoor, "Indian Agent Gad Humphreys" 125; Sprague, *The Florida War* 70-71.

Following other Indians' attempts at conciliation, Jackson cloaked himself in the mantle of his forbears, offering peace, civilization, and sanctuary in the west, so long as the Indians surrendered their land, resources, and, in some cases, their very identity. It was alienation in the guise of assimilation, subjugation in place of civilization.⁵⁰

The Seminoles were somewhat protected by their unique circumstances. Florida remained on the outskirts of the nation, lacking the institutions and infrastructure necessary to organize well-functioning volunteer militia groups who might realistically threaten to seize Indian land as they did throughout the rest of the southeast. Nevertheless, as Jackson implemented his policies throughout the country, the people of Florida did not sit by idly. Leading planters bombarded Washington with several petitions, urging Congress to begin treaty negotiations with the Seminoles to remove them beyond the Mississippi. Well aware of the long history of cooperation between Seminoles and Florida's African-American population, these leading regional slaveholders insisted that the Seminoles' presence would hamper the development of slavery throughout the territory. For Florida to increase its population, expand its economy, and graduate to statehood, the Seminoles would have to be removed.⁵¹

In January 1832, Jackson began treaty deliberations with the Seminoles. He sent the most qualified man in the country to lead his delegation - James Gadsden, who had negotiated the Treaty of Moultrie Creek and was an avowed advocate of removal. His parameters were simple: gain the Seminoles' assent to move west where they would be

⁵⁰ For more on Jackson's guise in proposing Indian removal, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hat God Wrought* 421; Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: 1990), 108-110.

⁵¹ Petition of Jefferson County to Duval, January 18, 1832, *Territorial Papers*, 24: 632; Memorial to Congress by the Legislative Council, February, 1832, *Territorial Papers*, 24: 667; Petition from Alachua County to Congress, March 26, 1832, *Territorial Papers*, 24: 678-680.

reconstituted within the Creeks, offer one year worth of supplies, and repay the Seminoles for the improvements they had made in Florida. Any outcome that did not result in the Seminoles rejoining the Creeks would not be permitted.⁵²

Gadsden met with the Seminoles at Payne's Landing in the spring of 1832. No minutes exist from the meeting, and its events remain largely shrouded. Whatever the details, it concluded with the Treaty of Payne's Landing, a document whose meaning was no less contested than the process by which it was reached. To Gadsden, the outcome of the treaty was clearly written into its first article, "the Seminole Indians relinquish to the United States, all claims to the lands they at present occupy in the Territory of Florida ... and will be received as a constituent part of the Creek nation." Though that eventuality was predicated upon the assent of a delegation of six chiefs who would travel to Arkansas to inspect the land and determine its suitability for habitation, Gadsden expressed little doubt that the chiefs would find everything satisfactory.⁵³

Viewed from the perspective of the Seminoles, however, the treaty's terms were far less definitive. Micanopy took the lead in negotiations. Hicks, likely in failing health and never having enjoyed a secure base of power, remained in the background. At the outset, Micanopy enunciated a clear position. According to one observer, he "made but one answer, repeating again and again that the Indians had made one treaty, by which they were entitled to remain undisturbed in their country." Gadsden replied with veiled threats. He warned that the government would not continue to feed the Seminoles and that if the Seminoles remained, the state legislature would almost certainly extend its jurisdiction to Seminole land. Unmentioned was the constant threat of military invasion,

⁵² Cass to Gadsden, January 30, 1832, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6: 473.

⁵³ Gadsden to Cass, June 2, 1832, *House Document 271*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 124-126.

as neither side could easily forget Dade's invasion five years prior. In the face of Gadsden's intransigence, Micanopy struck the most advantageous deal available to him. As it was predicated entirely on the finding of the delegation which would inspect the western lands, the treaty he signed had no legal force of its own. Micanopy effectively bought time. It would take at least a year for the delegation to be massed, preparations to be made, the land to be inspected, and the remaining Seminoles to vote on their findings. Time enough for a new president to be elected, or perhaps time for a small nation on the edge of a continent to prepare for war.⁵⁴

The treaty, however, was entirely opaque in its meaning. The preamble laying out the terms under which the delegation would inspect the western lands was unclear. Utilizing the pronoun "they" without a clear antecedent, the treaty ambiguously denoted either the delegation itself or the entire Seminole people as the designated body who would vote to determine the land's suitability. Gadsden's interpretation that the power lay

⁵⁴ The treaty certainly bought the Seminoles an ample amount of time. Jackson did not submit it to the Senate for ratification until December 1833, nearly two years after it was signed. James Gadsden to Editor, *St. Augustine News*, July 3, 1839; Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, USA*, ed., W.A. Croffut (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), 79; Sprague, *The Florida War* 80. Even ignoring the implied threat of coercion that hung over the deliberations, there were other, credible accusations that Gadsden had reached the treaty by fraud. Many Seminoles circulated rumors that Micanopy and other senior chiefs had not been present at the meeting at all. Instead, they claimed, younger warriors had impersonated them and signed their names to the paper. More credibly, Micanopy claimed he had never signed the treaty at all and that whites had forged his mark, an "X," of course, not being particularly difficult to forge. Other chiefs insisted they had signed the treaty only at the point of a gun. One white officer at the scene accused Gadsden of resorting to outright fraud. According to him, Gadsden had bribed Abraham, the leading Black Seminole and interpreter to Micanopy, to convince the chief to send the delegation west. Though the accusation of bribery rested on hearsay, evidence of payment was written into the treaty itself, it promised \$200 to both Abraham and Cudjo, another Black Seminole interpreter. Lending credence to the possibility that Abraham was bribed, the \$400 was to come out of the payment the Seminoles received for their Florida land. Given that the treaty promised \$15,400 to the entire nation in recompense for all of their land and any improvements they had made upon them, a full 2.5% of the funds were earmarked to the two interpreters. However, removal almost certainly was not in Abraham's interest. Subsuming Seminole society into Creek would threaten dozens of Black Seminole families and cause many to be re-enslaved by the Creeks, many of whom practiced chattel slavery. Most likely, Abraham counseled the insertion of the language into the treaty in the belief that it would never be exercised. Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field* 79-80; Mahon, "Two Seminole Treaties" 9.

in the hands of the delegation proved expedient. Seven chiefs, after all, could be more easily coerced than a nation. In March 1833, after several months of inspection, the chiefs produced the Treaty of Fort Gibson, a document whose legitimacy was far more dubious even than that of the Treaty of Payne's Landing. In it, the Seminole chiefs declared the land satisfactory, and agreed to subsume their people within the larger Creek nation. The treaty flew in the face of a century of Seminole culture and politics. It could not have been reached save by fraud.⁵⁵

The ways in which Andrew Jackson achieved the removal of the Seminoles differed markedly from those of his predecessors. Though they each followed a similar, broadly continuous pursuit of white settler expansion and Indian removal, Jackson, by closing out the possibility of Indian endurance in the southeast on any terms, fundamentally shifted the relationship between the United States and its Indian neighbors. The administration of John Quincy Adams had room for men such as Gad Humphreys who recognized, however dimly, Indian rights to property and impartiality under the law. Under Jackson, there was none. The difference was even starker throughout the rest of the nation. Once hailed as proof positive for the human capacity for progress, the Cherokees were cast aside as obstacles to progress themselves. Other Indians throughout the nation suffered similar fates. Even in its hypocrisy, early republic Indian policy had

⁵⁵ In the aftermath, several chiefs claimed their signatures had been forged. Others asserted that even if they did sign, they did not have the authority to bind the rest of the nation to its terms, by their interpretation, the Treaty of Payne's Landing required a national vote. The same officer who accused Gadsden of bribing Abraham produced an explanation for their signatures. Indian Agent Phagan (not yet fired for gross financial misconduct) had escorted the Seminoles west and, after they refused to sign the treaty, implied that he would not convey them back to Florida unless they gave their assent. Mahon, "Two Seminole Treaties" 17; George McCall, *Letters from the Frontier: Written during a Period of Thirty Years' Service in the Army of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 301.

recognized that whites and Indians were bound together in the future of North America, but for Jackson, Indian destiny lay far over the horizon.

Coercion and Resistance

Though Micanopy's delaying tactics bought his nation significant breathing room, Andrew Jackson's resounding victory in the election of 1832 cemented Indian removal as the official policy of the United States. As Jackson strengthened his hold on national politics, Micanopy gathered his strength as well. John Hicks passed away of natural causes near the end of 1833, making Micanopy the unrivaled leader of the Seminoles. As Micanopy expanded his authority, Americans began recording the presence of a new advisor at his side. Though he was not a hereditary chief, the young warrior, identified by whites as Osceola, was said to hold great sway with his chief. Eminently charismatic and physically imposing, Osceola almost uniformly struck whites with the force of his character.

Against Micanopy, Osceola, and their allies, were arrayed an entirely new group of federal officials charged with the removal of the Seminoles. Duval, after 13 years of tireless advocacy, resigned his post to practice law. Secretary of War John Eaton, after having embroiled the Jackson's administration in scandal over the social respectability of his young wife, Peggy Eaton, was exiled to Florida and appointed Duval's replacement. Taking Eaton's place in the war department was Lewis Cass, who had served as the governor of the Michigan territory for nearly two decades and fancied himself something of an Indian expert. Finally, discovering corruption in the dealings of Gad Humphreys's replacement, Indian Agent John Phagan, Jackson removed him from office and replaced

him with General Wiley Thompson, a four-term Jacksonian in the House of Representatives from Georgia. He had served alongside Andrew Jackson in the Creek War and had earned the title of general from his service with the Georgia militia. They faced an urgent task. In the aftermath of Nat Turner's revolt in Virginia and British abolition in the Caribbean, all agreed that the removal of the Seminoles and their destabilizing effect on Florida slavery was vital.⁵⁶

These personalities, inexperienced and volatile, collided with the Seminole leadership in October 1834. The Senate had passed the Treaty of Payne's Landing several months before and, among whites, Seminole removal appeared a *fait accompli*. The Seminoles, though not entirely unified in their opposition, continued to disclaim the legitimacy of the Treaty of Payne's Landing. With the time for payment of their annuity coming due, Thompson called a meeting with the Seminoles and made clear the government's position. This would be the last payment they would receive in Florida, and all future payments would be contingent on their removal.⁵⁷

According to Thompson's report, the Seminoles then held a private council to formulate their response. There, Osceola opened the council by forcefully opposing emigration. He swore to resist all impositions on his autonomy and would consider any Indian who defied him an enemy. Though some chiefs demurred from Osceola's tone,

⁵⁶ Eaton, who had no ties to the powerful community of Florida planters who controlled the territory, was somewhat out of step with his constituents and his superiors. After Jackson waited nearly two years to ratify the Treaty of Payne's Landing, Eaton inquired as to whether the delay had abrogated its terms as, during the interim, the United States had missed several deadlines. Unsurprisingly, Jackson and his attorney general decided it remained valid.

⁵⁷ Accounts of the meeting can be found "Abstract of Council," October 23, 1834, *Senate Document 152*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 20-28; M.M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston: Burges and Honour, 1836), 57-63; Woodbourne Potter, *The War in Florida: Being an Exposition of Its Causes and an Accurate History of the Campaigns of Generals Clinch, Gaines, and Scott* (Baltimore: Lewis and Coleman, 1836), 53-70. Potter's book contained transcripts of the meeting not present in other sources, though they were likely at least somewhat fictionalized.

when they met with Thompson, the Seminoles spoke with a unified voice. They argued that the execution of the Treaty of Payne's Landing was predicated upon the adoption of the Treaty of Fort Gibson, which, having been reached by fraud, rendered the former worthless. Thompson bellowed, "don't bring to me any more foolish talk ... men do not listen to the talks of a child, and remember that the talk I gave you must and will stand."

The meeting closed portentously. Tired of the Seminoles' intransigence, Thompson sketched out their future should they remain in Florida. Land adjacent to their reservation would be surveyed and sold to whites. The territorial government's jurisdiction would be extended over their villages. Their laws would be nullified, their chiefs deprived of their authority. In turn, every Indian would be tried in court, some for murder, others for defaulting on their debt. One by one, whites would produce claims for their slaves, some legitimate, some not. Their cases would be decided by white men's law, Indians would be prohibited from introducing evidence, and whites would testify against them falsely with impunity. Addressing Micanopy directly, Thompson offered a vision of his future. If he remained in Florida a few more years, Thompson assured the chief, "he would be reduced to hopeless poverty; and when urged by hunger to ask, perhaps of the man who would have thus ruined him ... for a crust of bread, he might be called an Indian dog." Thompson recorded that at this Osceola, seated next to Micanopy, urged the chief to stand firm. Following Osceola's lead, Micanopy said simply he would not comply. Disgustedly, Thompson called an end to the meeting and pledged to report them to Jackson. Upon receipt, Jackson was satisfied with Thompson's tactics and scribbled his orders on the back of his letter: "let a sufficient military force be forthwith

ordered to protect our citizens & remove & protect the Indians agreeable to the Stipulations of the Treaty.”⁵⁸

Jackson’s order to “remove and protect” the Seminoles was not cynical doublespeak. Settlers throughout the southeast were coercing Indians into giving up their land and abandoning their property with increasing frequency. To the north, land speculators and squatters had defrauded Creeks and Cherokees of their possessions, state legislatures had begun extending their jurisdiction over Indian territory, and across the region thousands of young men were forming volunteer militias to dispossess their Indian neighbors. With its lack of infrastructure and relatively weak institutional foundation, Florida did not move as quickly as had Georgia and Alabama to leverage its strength over its Indian nations, but Jackson well understood that the territory would do so soon enough. Unwilling to restrain rapacious settlers and corruptible territorial politicians, Jackson’s only option, if he intended to protect the southeast Indians from the worst ravages of settler violence, was to see removal to its conclusion.

The march toward war could not be abated. The young warriors and Black Seminoles who represented Micanopy’s base of support would not emigrate, no matter Thompson’s assurances. Pressure from his superiors and the planters of Florida boxed Thompson in as well. Whether voluntarily or by force, removal would begin in 1836. Micanopy could not bend and Jackson would not. The Treaty of Moultrie Creek was the

⁵⁸ Thompson to Herring, October 28, 1834, *The Territorial Papers of the United States: The Florida Territory, 1834-1839*, 25: 58-63; Duncan Clinch to Adjutant General Jones, April 24, 1835, *Territorial Papers*, 25: 129-130; Thompson, Harris, and Clinch to Cass, April 24, 1835, *Senate Document 152*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 38-39.

only basis for peace and, when Jackson declared it no longer binding, war was the only possible outcome.⁵⁹

Osceola and Wiley Thompson would meet twice more. In their first encounter, in June 1835, Osceola burst into Thompson's office and, according to Thompson's characterization of the event, insulted him "by some insolent remarks." According to one account, Osceola called Thompson an intruder on his lands, mocked his authority, and pledged to drive him from Florida. Whatever his exact words, they were likely an extension of Osceola's remarks at the annuity grounds, an expression of Indian peoplehood and a reclamation of Seminole control over their future in Florida. Osceola's grievous "insults," as crude as they may or may not have been, undermined the foundations of Thompson's authority in their opposition to the physical strength of the United States. Thompson, understanding the rules which Osceola had set, saw that the time for implied threats had passed. He chained Osceola in irons for six days until the warrior pledged to obey the Treaty of Payne's Landing.⁶⁰

Soon after Osceola's release, events further spiraled toward war. The United States continued to leverage Seminole privations to encourage removal. Indians and whites exchanged fire in Alachua Country. In August, a mail carrier was found murdered. In November, Osceola shot and killed Charley Emathla, the leading voice for emigration among the Seminoles. It was said that Osceola searched through the dead chief's pockets, seized his American currency, and scattered the bills to the wind. With war seeming imminent, panicked Florida planters succeeded in getting 150 mounted horsemen

⁵⁹ For more on the complicated politics of Seminole leadership, see chapter 6.

⁶⁰ For vague details of what happened between Osceola and Thompson, see Sprague, *The Florida War* 86; A., *National Intelligencer*, February 23, 1838; Patricia Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 33-36; Thompson to Gibson, June 3, 1835, *Senate Document 152*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 43.

dispatched to the territory. In early December, a large body of Indians ambushed and hijacked a wagon train, engaging a militia company in pitched battle. When informed of the hostilities, an impatient Jackson demanded movement from the leading officer in the field, Duncan Clinch. And, on the morning of December 28, two white men miles apart left the safe confines of their forts. One, Major Francis Dade, led a battalion of 110 troops from Fort King. He remembered well the lessons of 1828. The Seminoles, he was sure, would scatter at his approach and meekly adhere to the Treaty of Payne's Landing. Fifty miles to the north, Wiley Thompson and an officer left the walls of their fort to take an afternoon stroll. Concealed, Osceola and several other warriors followed. As Dade marched, overconfident and injudicious, he declined to send scouts to watch his flanks. Suddenly, 180 Indians surrounded his force on all sides. Most of the American troops fell in the first minutes. Only one made it back to camp alive. Thompson was not so lucky. They found his body riddled with 14 bullet holes, his scalp missing. Osceola had secured his revenge and the Second Seminole War had begun.

Chapter 2

*“A Reckless Waste of Blood and Treasure”:
Thomas Jesup, the Politics of Florida, and the State*

In the fall of 1837, emissaries of General Thomas Jesup met with the great Seminole warrior Osceola under a white flag. At a prearranged signal, dozens of soldiers raised their guns and seized Osceola, an act that would tarnish Jesup’s reputation for decades. Even as Jesup put into place his duplicitous plans in Florida, hundreds of miles away another of his tactics to end the war unfolded during a face-to-face meeting in the War Department. In November, Captain John Rogers Vinton, a well-educated graduate of West Point and a trusted subordinate to Jesup on leave from Florida, received a letter from his commander, asking him to meet with Secretary of War Joel Poinsett. Needing some clarification of his orders, Jesup believed he sent an ideal messenger, as he assured his subordinate that he was “fully informed of my views in relation to our Indian policy.” Dutifully, Vinton met with Poinsett, where he informed the Secretary of Jesup’s questions. Poinsett resolved Vinton’s confusion and, according to the officer, assured him “that by all the means now at [Jesup’s] disposal, and the blessing of God,” he hoped the war would soon end. Vinton, unfazed by the chain of command, disagreed. He defended Jesup’s efforts, but insisted that the contention that “we could consistently invoke the blessing of God on our effort, was more questionable.” This led to what Vinton termed “some little discussions,” and, he informed Jesup, he “had occasion to utter some truths that had not often met the Secy.’s ear.”¹

¹ Thomas Jesup to John Rogers Vinton, November 10, 1837, National Archives Record Group 94, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, 1780s-1917, General Jesup Papers (hereafter cited as Jesup Papers), Letters Sent; Vinton to Jesup, November 22, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers. An amateur artist, Vinton’s most lasting legacy to the war was a personal sketch of Osceola he created during the warrior’s imprisonment at Fort Mellon in May, 1837.

Over the ensuing year, Jesup would openly flirt with the pacifistic impulses that Vinton articulated to Poinsett. When he was rebuffed, he would lose his political support and, with it, his command. The capture of Osceola was even more damaging to the general's reputation. For the rest of his days, Jesup was dogged by charges of duplicity and deception. The two confrontations were linked by more than their effect on Jesup's legacy. Though each arose from diametrically opposed impulses - the former a refutation of nonwhite rights during wartime, the latter manifesting a direct challenge to the ethos that justified that refutation - they represented the range of options made available to Jesup by the complex politics of Florida and the aggressive expansionism of his superiors. To win the war, Jesup could either zealously pursue removal, re-enslavement, and, possibly, extermination, or stand as a bulwark against the tide. Paradoxically, he did both.

This dilemma was not unique to Jesup. Though United States generals spent years devising ways to win the Second Seminole War, they struggled even more with the politics of antebellum Florida. They faced complications common to any extended campaign: mediating the orders of their superiors, the recommendations of their officers, the fervor of their volunteers, and the antipathy of their soldiers. In Florida, outside pressures were especially significant. As the Seminoles were protected by the vast fastnesses of the Florida wilderness, defeating them required not merely an understanding of their tactics and strategy but close study of Seminole culture and an appreciation of the complex relationship between the Indians and the Black Seminoles. Should generals attempt to leverage the cracks between the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles, a move which defied their orders to in no way conciliate with their nonwhite enemies, they faced

immediate and withering vituperation from local slaveholders committed to the total removal of the Seminoles and the re-enslavement of the Black Seminoles. And these slaveholders often curried greater favor from the Jackson and Van Buren administrations than any general. Commanding officers, then, had to navigate numerous organized factions in Florida, each with their own priorities and most of them conflicting. The first three commanders in Florida, Winfield Scott, Edmund Gaines, and Richard Keith Call, entered the territory bombastically and left soon after, having failed to advance their nation's war aims. Thomas Jesup, the fourth, comprehended the complicated interplay of interests that comprised the Florida War, but he too failed, unable to conquer the Seminoles, unwilling to exterminate them, and incapable of moderating official American policy predicated on the absolute racial domination of Florida.

Jesup understood that the politics of the Second Seminole War pivoted around the co-existing and conflicting systems of slavery vying for control of East Florida. From the moment of Florida's annexation to the United States, large plantation owners had streamed into the state, attracted to its fertile lands and warm climate. Though many prospered, they increasingly grew fearful of their Seminole neighbors who, in offering sanctuary to runaway slaves, threatened to destabilize Florida's fragile slave regime. The Seminoles were slaveholders themselves, but of a different stripe. In Seminole society, most slaves enjoyed substantial autonomy, living in their own communities and retaining control of their own labor, though they still owed regular tribute to their Indian masters. As slaves in Florida and Georgia fled their homes in greater frequency and found sanctuary with the Seminoles, white slaveholders began to pressure the federal

government to enforce the terms of the Treaty of Payne's Landing. They demanded that every Seminole be removed and every fugitive slave returned to their white owner.²

When Secretary of War Lewis Cass dispatched Winfield Scott to Florida in 1836, he laid out clear orders that reflected slaveholder pressure. Scott was to force the complete subjugation of the Seminoles and recapture any fugitive slaves upon whom white owners had a plausible claim. He was to do this without negotiating with the enemy, and he could not offer concessions. His orders reflected not the exigencies of the conflict, but the underlying logic of Indian removal. Three years before, during the Black Hawk War in Illinois and Wisconsin, a war which began when the state militia opened fire upon a delegation of Sauk and Fox Indians intending to negotiate a truce, Cass himself had rushed to the scene to oversee the joint efforts of Illinois militia, federal troops, and allied Sioux Indians. The overpowering United States coalition routed Black Hawk's warriors and, at the final battle of the war at Bad Axe, massacred hundreds of men, women, and children. Following his army's strategic triumph, Cass secured an existential one as well. By displaying the captured Black Hawk across the country before curious onlookers, Cass's War Department crafted a narrative that depicted white superiority over a savage enemy even as it overawed the captive chief with the immensity of the nation's population. Having overwhelmed Black Hawk and his band so utterly, many Americans believed there would be no more frontier wars, that Indian fear of United States strength would silence their grievances with the nation's conduct. The need to demonstrate American superiority, to make manifest the racial principles of the era in

² On slavery in Florida, see Larry Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000). See also Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 2002); Clifton Paisley, *The Red Hills of Florida, 1528-1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989).

Florida, was as much an element of Cass's war plan as his orders regarding troop movements and supply depots.³

The priorities of the Jackson administration made clear their intent to eradicate Seminole sovereignty. They did not cloak their orders with paeans to liberty or references to a glorious national destiny. Negotiations with nonwhites were counterproductive, an exercise in forfeiting national honor. African-Americans were to be re-interred into the slave system. Indian autonomy was to be crushed. In all cases, Jackson's policy demanded the imposition of American authority onto the geographic space of Florida, the forced transformation of autonomous nonwhites into subjects of the state, and the appropriation of their resources to enrich members of the body politic.

Successive generals chafed against these orders. Winfield Scott explained they were without precedent, that to deprive a military officer the right to negotiate rendered his task nearly impossible. Edmund Gaines, who had the temerity to initiate peace talks with the Seminoles, found himself having to defend the very legitimacy of negotiating with nonwhite enemies. The largest transgressor of all, Richard Keith Call, onetime close friend of Andrew Jackson, violated his orders and *retreated* in the face of Seminole fire. Upon his return from the field, he was Andrew Jackson's friend no longer. All three

³ The first book to be published on the Second Seminole War began with a note of surprise – the author believed that no Indian tribe would be foolhardy enough to confront the United States following Black Hawk's defeat. See D.F. Blanchard, *An Authentic Narrative of the of the Seminole War* (Providence: D.F. Blanchard, 1836), 1-3. For more on the Black Hawk War, see Patrick Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Anthony F.C. Wallace, "Introduction," *The Black Hawk War 1831-1832*, ed. Ellen Whitney (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1970) 1-51. On the imperatives of subjugation and domination which underlay antebellum frontier policy, see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 145-266; James Merrill, *Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: Norton, 2000); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: Norton, 2007); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1997).

generals foundered against the unyielding constraints of the American war effort: the only criterion by which the United States could win the war was the subjugation of the Seminoles, but exigencies of the climate and the unmapped wilderness shielded the enemy from the American war machine. Jesup arrived in Florida a naïve believer in his nation's overwhelming might. Within a month, Jesup relayed an apology by way of the War Department, admitting if he had "at any time said aught in disparagement of the operations of others in Florida ... knowing the country as I know it, I consider myself bound, as a man of honor, to solemnly retract it." The problem was one of aggressive expansionism: "This is the first instance in our history in which we have attempted to transfer Indians from one wilderness to another – on all other occasions the white population has been pressing them and crowding them out, before we have attempted to remove them." Having confronted the hopelessness of the military situation firsthand, Jesup began to appreciate the complex politics of Florida, a web of interests his predecessors had lacked both the time and the inclination to comprehend.⁴

Thomas Jesup realized that the disjuncture of interests between the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles represented an opportunity. Having alternatively escaped from American plantations, been purchased by Seminoles, or secured their emancipation from Spanish masters, the Black Seminoles were maroons, an identifier usually used to describe isolated and autonomous black communities in the New World. Correctly judging the divergent objectives of the Seminoles who fought to remain in Florida and the Black Seminoles who hoped to prevent their re-interment into the chattel slave system of the Deep South, Jesup utilized the difference to divide the two groups. If he could gain

⁴ General Thomas Jesup to Brigadier General Roger Jones, February 7, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 68.

the allegiance of the Black Seminoles, he would deal the Seminoles a double blow. The loss of their allies would hinder their ability to make war and provide subsistence for their remaining communities, while the Black Seminoles' knowledge of Florida topography would be an incalculable boon to United States forces too often literally lost in the wilderness. He had to move cautiously, however, as any move to guarantee the freedom of African-Americans risked alienating the southern slaveholders who eyed their former slaves as a fortune in bonded human capital. After gaining the allegiance of the Black Seminoles, Jesup and other army officers would find themselves defending their new allies against slaveholder petitions, repelling prowling slavecatchers, and contending against slaveowner claims in court.⁵

When even the aid of the Black Seminoles failed to end the war, Jesup launched two alternative efforts, each with opposite effects. In the first, Jesup lobbied the War Department to allow him to end the conflict through negotiation. Warning that the Seminoles were both resolute and unreachable in their wilderness fastnesses, Jesup urged a series of compromises to end the war. Could the United States, he asked, suffer to allow the Seminoles something akin to a reservation on the southern tip of Florida if they pledged not to attack frontier settlements or welcome fugitive slaves? If not that, then what if the Seminoles consented to live in Florida subject to state law? When his superiors received his suggestions with increasing hostility, Jesup offered alternatives.

⁵ There is an extensive, and often contentious, literature on the relationship between the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles. See Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People*, ed., Alcione Amos and Thomas Senter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Anthony Dixon, *Black Seminole Involvement and Leadership during the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2007); Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977); Kevin Kokomoor, "A Re-assessment of Seminoles, Africans, and Slavery on the Florida Frontier, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 88.2 (Fall 2009), 209-236; Bruce Twyman, *The Black Seminole Legacy and North American Politics, 1693-1845* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1999).

Would the nation countenance the extermination of the Seminoles? Could he be authorized to import bloodhounds to track the Seminoles and, perhaps, tear them limb from limb?

Taken together, Jesup's correspondence represented a crossroads. In one direction lay a moralistic course that prioritized mediation with nonwhites and a recognition of their de facto sovereignty. The other presented an unfettered vision of racial domination and nonwhite subjugation. Jesup was a lonely advocate for the former. Hamstrung by an unwillingness or a disinclination to challenge slaveholder interests, politicians of both parties displayed no interest in moderating frontier policy. In pursuing racial domination, Jesup enjoyed the support of the vast majority of federal officials, thousands of elite slaveholders, and tens of thousands of settlers living along the nation's frontiers.

While much of the country was occupied elsewhere, Thomas Jesup grappled with the implications of the United States' aggressive expansionism. He concretely weighed the value of United States dominance and ruminated on the relationship between national honor and compromise. He was not morally blameless: on balance he was as likely to intensify rather than moderate the violence of his nation's war tactics. Absent the orders of his superiors, he likely would have cast aside moral qualms altogether and pursued outright extermination. Nevertheless, his actions reflected a conscious understanding of both American policy and its alternatives. In a time when few contextualized or comprehended the war effort, his decision to wrestle with the politics of Florida granted him real insight into antebellum political culture and the conflicting interests of slaveowners and the putative objectives of the war.

This chapter will detail the first several years of the war in Florida from the perspective of successive military commanders, Edmund Gaines, Winfield Scott, Richard Keith Call, and Thomas Jesup. The first three men wrestled with the meaning of victory and defeat in a context in which reaffirming racial dominance proved more important than military reality. Unable to vindicate white supremacy in the face of Seminole resistance, they left Florida in disgrace. Alone, Jesup challenged the morality of his orders and made a forceful case for allowing the Seminoles to remain in Florida, regardless of the imperatives of racial domination and aggressive expansionism.

The Physical and Metaphysical Defeats of the First Wave

The first two United States commanders of the Second Seminole War, Winfield Scott and Edmund Gaines, were as infamous for their mutual enmity as famous for their military accomplishments. Their failure in Florida, however, sprang from a common source - each took a martial rather than a political approach to the war. Believing that shows of force could quell any Indian rebellion, both men gravely underestimated the effectiveness of Seminole strategy and the strength of their arms. Gaines, always the more headstrong, barreled into Florida, fell into a Seminole ambush, and initiated unauthorized treaty negotiations, enraging his superiors. Scott fell into a different sort of trap. Believing that military precision could overcome any Indian force, he was oblivious to the ways in which the decentralized structure of Seminole society enabled his enemy to avoid his sweeping offensives. Neither came to grips with the overarching problem of their assignment: the Seminoles could not be beaten on the battlefield and their superiors would not let them win the war off of it.

The Second Seminole War began under the watch of President Andrew Jackson and Secretary of War Lewis Cass. Cass, the longtime governor of the Michigan Territory, had dealt with Indians for twenty years. As governor, he, like many of his generation, pragmatically dealt with frontier Indians as political actors and with the understanding that, as he said, “it is the part of true wisdom . . . to attach them to us through the medium of their affections and interests.” Throughout the 1820s, Cass wrestled with the justice of Indian removal until the end of the decade when, whether through sincere belief or craven ambition to rise in the nascent Democratic Party, he offered a full throated defense of removal. By 1835, content with the basic justness of the Treaty of Payne’s Landing, Cass refused to consider Seminole grievances with the agreement, certain that “nothing less than insanity, or an utter ignorance of their own position” would lead the Seminoles to revolt.⁶

In his initial dispatch to Winfield Scott ordering him to Florida, Lewis Cass translated Jackson’s drive to consolidate United States control of the frontier into a military frame. He forbade Scott from pursuing pacification through any means until the Seminoles were “unconditionally subdued.” Not only did Cass forbid Scott from negotiating a peace until after the Seminoles had consented to emigrate, he ordered Scott to allow no terms to the Indians until every slave upon whom white owners held a plausible claim was given up. Scott could make no agreement with the Seminoles which

⁶ For more on Cass and his treatment of Indians, see Francis Paul Prucha, *Lewis Cass and American Indian Policy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967); Willard Carl Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1996), 85-90; Frank Woodford, *Lewis Cass, the Last Jeffersonian* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 182-183; Andrew McLaughlin, *Lewis Cass* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 159-164. Lewis Cass to Seminole Chiefs, November 22, 1834, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:69; Cass to Wiley Thompson, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:436; Cass to Duncan Clinch, April 14, 1835, John Sprague, *The Origin, Process, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1847), 85.

did not ensure the regional hegemony of the United States and not only re-secured but also reformed the bonds of slavery ruptured by the Seminoles' presence on the frontier. These policies perfectly mirrored the council of prominent Florida slaveholders who wrote to Cass and warned that to end the war on any terms aside from the total subjugation of the Seminoles and their allies would be "a sacrifice of national dignity."⁷

Scott moved deliberately. He was, by nature, an organizer who endeavored to leave nothing to chance. Before the start of the war, for all of his growing prominence as a partisan figure and political opponent of Jackson, Scott remained a celebrated military figure, a national hero so lauded that guidebooks led tourists to the sites of his greatest victories. Though he would founder amidst the fastnesses of Florida, even *The Globe*, the Democratic Party's preeminent organ, consistently wrote of the general in reverential tones, recalling his great victories even when describing his present failures in Florida.⁸

Scott immediately set out for Florida and on the way issued a call for 3700 volunteers from South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. He spent a month setting his plans in motion, waiting for his troops to arrive, and sketching out a plan of attack. With his first orders to the newly arrived volunteers, he acknowledged their independent backgrounds and reminded them that in this campaign the science of warfare would be paramount, as "valor and patriotism are not sufficient ... some tactical instruction and an exact obedience to commands" would be necessary. He planned a complicated attack,

⁷ Jackson went so far as to order the Navy to patrol the Strait of Florida lest the Black Seminoles escape to Havana, see Jones to Cass, February 9, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:58. Cass to Scott, January 21, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:63.

⁸ On Scott's popularity, see, for example *The Northern Traveller; Containing the Routes to Niagara, Quebec, and the Springs; with Useful Depictions of the Principal Scenes, and Useful Hints to Strangers* (New York: Wilder & Campbell, 1825); Thomas Wilson, *The Biography of the Principle American Military and Naval Heroes; Comprehending Details of Their Achievements during the Revolutionary and Late Wars* (New York: John Low, 1819); "General Scott.," *The Globe*, June 1, 1836.

comprising three troop columns that would sweep across Florida along different trajectories and converge upon the Withlacoochee River to force a general engagement with the enemy. However, Scott failed to understand that the nature of American warfare had shifted from that of his youth. In a protracted war in which the United States was the aggressor, if he could not find the enemy, he could not win.⁹

As Scott tarried, General Edmund Pendleton Gaines heard word of the ambush of Dade's command in New Orleans on January 15, and hurried to Florida. On his journey, he belatedly learned of Scott's assignment, but chose to continue on regardless. In part, Gaines feared that if he turned back, he would deprive the territory of needed manpower, but he also allowed a deep animus toward Scott to motivate him, quite sure that his rival's scientific tactics would succumb to the harsh climates of Florida. Weathered by countless nights on the frontier, Gaines was a gruff commander who prized combat experience and was known to dismiss his rival as "the vain-glorious Giant votary of science." Despite their shared admiration for martial strength, Gaines and Andrew Jackson, too, had clashed in recent years. A quiet but avowed opponent of Indian removal, Gaines believed that the nation should foster "civilizing" programs in the southeast and rely on treaties to keep the peace between the two peoples.¹⁰

⁹ Winfield Scott to Jones, January 31, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 215-217; Scott to Jones, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 218-219; Winfield Scott, "Orders No. 1," *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 258-259; John Bemrose, *Reminiscences of the Second Seminole War*, ed., John K. Mahon (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1966), 73. For criticism of Scott's strategy during the war, see, for example, "The Campaign in Florida – Gen. Scott and the Indians.," *Georgia Messenger*, June 2, 1836; *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, April 14, 1836; "Florida.," *Maryland Gazette*, May 19, 1836; "The Florida War.," *Fayetteville Observer*, May 12, 1836.

¹⁰ As an imaginary line split responsibility for defending Florida in half between the two generals, Cass specifically ordered Scott not to hesitate should he march on territory under Gaines' jurisdiction. See Cass to Scott, January 21, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:63; Edmund P. Gaines to Jones, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 637-638; Gaines to Clinch, February 2, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 639; Gaines to Jones, February 6, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 641-642; Gaines to Jones, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session,

Where Scott planned the grand movement of three columns, Gaines outlined a simpler strategy: “To find the enemy, we must search for him; and when we find him we must take or destroy him.” Arriving in Florida, Gaines blundered in the direction of the Withlacoochee River and found the river impassable. Trapped on its banks, he was beset by Indian warriors on all sides. His men quickly constructed a makeshift fort and watched as the Seminoles settled down for a lengthy siege. Gaines seized on the crisis as an opportunity and sent messengers to Brigadier General Duncan Clinch who was stationed nearby, urging him to rush to the Withlacoochee where he could attack the Indians’ flank. Upon the arrival of the messenger, Scott, however, held firm to his own plans and forbade Clinch from joining Gaines. Gaines regarded Scott’s decision as not just an attempt to “starve me and my command *in my position* on the Withlacoochee, but to starve me *out of it*.” Finally, after several days, Scott thought better of leaving Gaines bereft, and authorized Clinch to come to his aid.¹¹

Unbeknownst to his peers, Gaines had achieved a small measure of success. The Seminoles, unused to prolonged sieges and rightly assuming they had the advantage, offered to withdraw if the embattled Gaines would abrogate the Treaty of Payne’s

653-665. Gaines, too, had earned Jackson’s ire for offering a cool reception to Peggy Eaton. See Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 184. On Gaines’ opposition to Indian removal, see James W. Silver, “Edmund Pendleton Gaines and Frontier Problems, 1801-1849,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 1.3 (Aug 1935), 340-342. On Scott’s attempt to modernize the army, see Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*. For more on Gaines, see James Silver, *Edmund Gaines, Frontier General* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949). On the Scott/Gaines feud, see Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* 75-77; Timothy Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory* 91-98; James W. Silver, *Edmund Pendleton Gaines* 130-136.
¹¹ John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1985), 147-150; Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field, Diary of Major-General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, U.S.A.*, edited by W.A. Croffut (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909), 89-91; Hitchcock to Gaines, February 22, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 645-647; Gaines to Clinch, February 22, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 644-645; Gaines to Clinch, February 28, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 648-649; Gaines to Clinch, February 29, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 650-651.

Landing. Through emissaries, Gaines admitted that he lacked the authority to do so, but promised to present their offer to his superiors. Before the Seminoles could respond, Clinch and his troops arrived, scattering the Seminoles. After their ordeal, Gaines and his men returned to Fort Drane. According to one observer, they resembled “emaciated skeletons.”¹²

When word of Gaines’s campaign reached the rest of the nation, the news that Gaines had welcomed the Seminoles’ overture stunned many. In willingly receiving the Seminoles’ terms, Gaines had provided an implicit rebuke to Jacksonian Indian policy. He was not directly disobeying Cass’s instructions as Gaines had rushed to the frontier so quickly that he was likely ignorant of Scott’s precise orders, but the image of an American general suing for peace appeared to some to be a betrayal of national honor. Critics assailed Gaines for believing the Seminoles to be sincere in their promise to live in Florida peacefully and naïve for thinking anything aside from complete submission could end their threat.¹³

Gaines forcefully stood against the tide. In the face of critics who, Gaines warned, tried to “forestall and mislead public opinion – to condemn my movements, and cover me with the vilest detraction,” he set forth his principles clearly. Gladly admitting that he “did not require my officers and men at the Withlacoochee to take from the enemy as *many lives* as they had, by their savage conduct, forfeited,” Gaines upheld “the bond, or the principle, of the laws of war, or of nations,” which compelled him to treat with the

¹² “Interview between General Gaines and Powell,” *Savannah Republican*, March 19, 1836; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 149-150; Bemrose, *Reminiscences of the Second Seminole War* 77; Jones to Gaines, March 10, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 651-652.

¹³ Naturally, the Democratic party paper, *The Globe*, took the lead on criticizing Gaines, a political opponent of Jackson. For criticism of Gaines, see, for example: W, “To the Editors of *The Globe*,” *The Globe*, April 5, 1836; *The Globe*, April 11, 1836; *The Floridian*, May 21, 1836.

Indians after they approached under the white flag. In Mobile, when thousands gathered to greet Gaines as a returning hero, the old general insisted he had left the field victorious, having satisfied “all the reasonable demands of justice, in accordance with the known laws of war, laws which ought to be extended alike to the weak and the strong – to the Seminole as to the Briton, the Frank or the Russian!” Gaines directly confronted the prevailing conquering ethos of the War Department and found it morally wanting.¹⁴

When it came time for Scott to launch his attack, his overly complex campaign in which three wings of United States troops converged on a single point proved unworkable. Scott might have believed he required ambitious tactics to fulfill the administration's objectives. At Fort Drane, one soldier overheard Scott informing a group of allied Indians and an interpreter, “I am determined to carry on a war of extermination . . . I will shoot down every man.” Depending on perfect coordination through unmapped wildernesses, Scott's plan crumbled as the three wings failed to intersect at the appointed times and, in their frustration, embittered volunteers rebelled against their assigned officers.¹⁵

Over the final two months of his command in Florida, Scott flailed about hopelessly in search of an advantage. Thinking that he might force the Seminoles' submission by destroying their settlements, he launched a total war. It failed. His troops fought no pitched battles, located few Seminole homesteads, and achieved nothing. One

¹⁴ Gaines to Jones, July 4, 1836; *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 520-521; *Mobile Chronicle*, March 28, 1836; “Gen. Gaines’ Florida Campaign,” *Mobile Mercantile Advertiser*, reprinted in *Fayetteville Observer*, May 5, 1836

¹⁵ For more on the collision between Southern volunteers and their military superiors, see chapter 3. Scott to Eustis, March 14, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 284-286; Gadsden to Lindsay, March 13, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 286-287; Gadsden to Eustis, March 16, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 294-296; “Mr. Potter, a Witness on the Part of Major General Gaines,” *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 572. For an overview of Scott's campaign, see Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 151-161.

Florida soldier recounted marching 31 days before actually encountering any Indians. On the 32nd day, the soldier's hopes shot up thinking he had found one, only to be disappointed when the rustling in the brush turned out to be a possum. Such was the activity that marked Scott's time in Florida. In mid-April, Cass gave Scott permission to put down a Creek uprising in Alabama and, one month later, he left Florida.¹⁶

In the years that followed, Scott defended his strategy by pointing out that his successors all enjoyed the "diplomatic faculty" that he lacked. As the Jackson administration had ordered him "to hold no parley, no negotiation," they had prohibited him from even assuring the Seminoles kind treatment on their journey west. Nevertheless, observers criticized Scott not merely for his lack of success, but also for the ways in which he had failed. In light of his raids against Seminole homes directed at women and children, one New York writer called his actions a "disgrace" and disdained Scott's copious laurels as newly tarnished. His own officers criticized Scott for risking a summer campaign in the midst of Florida's sickly season, one complaining that "I see no reason why hundreds of men should be sacrificed to heal General Scott's wounded vanity." Ordered to induce total submission, but lacking both logistical support and wholesale commitment from his men, Scott had no way of winning the war on the administration's terms.¹⁷

¹⁶ Andrew Jackson greatly approved of Scott's plan, thinking that, in his words, "movement against the negroes, women and children of the hostile Indians" and the destruction of their settlements would best insure the end of the war. See Jones to Scott, May 5, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:441; Scott to Jones, April 12, 1836, *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 305-313; Solomon C. Hargrove Journal, March 19, 1836, March 26, 1836, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

¹⁷ "Major General Scott's Address," *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 131; Andrew Atkinson Humphreys, "Documents: Andrew Atkinson Humphreys' Seminole War Field Journal," ed., Matthew T. Percy, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 85 (Fall 2006), 217; "Glorious Re-Opening of the Florida Campaign," *The Herald*, May 9, 1836.

With Scott gone, the Jackson administration searched for a successor. Richard Keith Call, the newly appointed governor of Florida, cannily ensured they would not have to look far. Panicked by the Seminoles' success, Call, who had no experience commanding troops, begged for command against the Indians, writing no fewer than ten letters to Cass between the end of April and the second week of May. On May 12th, he wrote to Andrew Jackson as well, admitting that he had written to Cass almost every day since taking office, but did so only because the situation in Florida was so dire. Call had good reason to think Jackson might listen as the two had enjoyed a long and sincere friendship. Twenty years before, Call impressed Jackson when, as a volunteer officer in command of a Kentucky unit, he had been deserted by his troops after their enlistment had expired. Rather than return home, Call excoriated his men as mutineers and presented himself at Jackson's tent, offering his service. Now Call offered a plan that piqued Jackson's curiosity. Where Scott had meandered after the failure of his complex three-column plan, Call planned to use boats to land troops near the cove of the Withlacoochee under the cover of night. There, his men would march speedily into the country and capture the Seminole warriors' dependents, burn their corn, seize their cattle, and force the warriors to quit the field and tend to their homes. After reading Call's proposal, Jackson scribbled on the letter that his plan would "redeem us from that disgrace which now hangs over us."¹⁸

¹⁸ Call addressed Jackson as "my dear general," in his proposal. For more on the relationship between Call and Jackson, see Herbert J. Doherty, *Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961). Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 168-171; George C. Bittle, "Richard Keith Call's 1836 Campaign," *Tequesta*, 29, 1969, 67-72; Cass to Call, May 14, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:438; Journal of Richard Keith Call, Florida State Archives, 384-385; Call to Cass, May 6, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 37-38; Call to Cass, May 10, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 43; Call to Jackson, May 12, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 45; Call to Jesup, July 2, 1836, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers; Call to Jesup, July 30, 1836, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers.

Jackson celebrated Call's plan as much for its brazenness as its substance. Rather than negotiate, as Gaines had done, or tarry, as had Scott, Call planned a frontal assault against the enemy's homes, destroying the Seminoles' roots in Florida and compelling their emigration. Whether consciously or not, Call proposed the same strategy his patron had executed during the First Seminole War when he demolished dozens of Seminole settlements and facilitated the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek, which greatly circumscribed the Seminoles' territory.¹⁹

To his chagrin, Call came to learn that Scott's careful and cautious planning did have some benefit. Though he had initially planned to launch his attacks within three weeks of taking command, he had to wait several long months for further recruits to arrive and, as he waited, illness incapacitated a third of his idle troops. While they recuperated, the enlistments of most of his volunteers expired. By the time new volunteer companies from Tennessee had arrived, it was already September. When he hurriedly embarked, Call led 1350 men composed of Tennessee and Florida volunteers to the Withlacoochee. Upon arriving, he realized that in his haste he had forgotten to bring axes and was unable to construct rafts to ford the waters of the Withlacoochee. Contrary to his expectations, it was he who was trapped at the river's edge under heavy fire. Starving and overburdened, his men butchered horses, burned saddles to relieve themselves of the weight, and pressed Call to return to their base. Extremely ill, Call decided to turn back, having failed to provoke a single large-scale engagement. Several weeks later, he would

¹⁹ For more on the First Seminole War, see David Heidler and Jeanne Heidler, *Old Hickory's War: Andrew Jackson and the Quest for Empire* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 1996); John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 32-69

launch a second campaign, this time with the aid of a brigade of allied Creek Indians, but would again have to turn back upon reaching an impassable swamp.²⁰

In Washington, as Call was in the field for a second time, a veteran of the first offensive arrived with distressing news, characterizing Call's initial withdrawal from the Withlacoochee as a retrograde movement. Jackson listened with incredulity at the news that his longtime friend had marched on the Seminoles, only to retreat back to Fort Drane. This was an affront Jackson could not abide. Without waiting for Call's official report, Jackson instructed Acting Secretary of War Benjamin Butler to write to Call immediately. Butler informed Call that Jackson was both "disappointed and surprised." To suffer defeat, as Scott had, was bad enough. To willingly falter in the face of Indian gunfire and implicitly concede Indian superiority on the battlefield violated the tenets of white supremacy, unbridled expansion, and American's bellicose stance toward the rest of the world, Indian or foreign. Jackson expected Indians across the country, impassioned by the Seminoles' success, to flout American authority and foment uprisings across the continent. Butler used Call's oft-feeble health as a pretext for his actions, but nonetheless

²⁰ For a description of Call's campaign, see Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 168-190. Richard Keith Call Journal, Florida State Archives, 408-412; Call to Cass, October 10, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 86; Call to Cass October 19, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 86-88. Tragedy cast a pall over Call's second campaign before it began. Colonel John Foote Lane, a well regarded young officer, committed suicide in his tent just days after entering Florida. Lane was likely suffering from some form of mental illness. Just one year before, Lane, the son of Democratic Representative Amos Lane, had accosted one of his father's political rivals on the streets of Washington and beaten him with a cane. Witnesses had described him as preternaturally calm. The commanding Indian officer of the Creeks was David Moniac, the first Indian to graduate from West Point. Moniac had enrolled at West Point under the terms of an old treaty that provided free education to a limited number of Creek Indian children. At West Point, John Quincy Adams once watched Moniac march and recalled hearing onlookers point exclaim, "Look there! There's the Indian!" He would heroically risk wading the river and charging the Seminole position, but was cut down. No whites followed his lead. On Lane, see "Case of Lieutenant Lane," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, Apr 16, 1835; 1.16, 121; "Lieut. Lane's Case.," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, Apr 23, 1835; 1.17, 129-130. On Moniac, see Benjamin Griffin, "Lt. David Moniac, Creek Indian: First Minority Graduate of West Point." *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 2 (Summer 1981), 99-110; GW Patten, "The Fall of Moniac," in *Voices of the Border* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1967), 299-301. Sprague, *The Florida War* 166; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 185-187; Call to Butler, November 27, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 92-98.

closed the letter by bluntly removing Call from command. The politics of conquest had no room for retreat.²¹

Gaines, Scott, and Call found that the Seminole position in Florida, protected by dense wilderness and well-armed warriors equipped with an encyclopedic knowledge of the geography, was nearly impregnable. Given that their orders necessitated the complete subjugation of the Seminoles, they were stalemated by the exigencies of the battlefield and the intransigence of their superiors. As Jackson's vision of the nation held no room for Indian autonomy, his officers' failure to authorize their subjugation left the president with only two options. He could moderate his orders or disgrace his generals. Gaines, Scott, and Call were disgraced in turn.

Jesup, Race, Honor, and the Politics of the Florida War

Following Scott's departure from Florida in May 1836, Cass ordered him to Georgia to quell an uprising of Creek Indians. There, Scott anticipated an easier campaign, writing to a friend, "Thank God! here an enemy may be reached." Once again, two major generals would occupy the same theater as Cass instructed Quartermaster General Thomas Jesup to go to Georgia to serve under Scott, but to act on his own recognizance to force the "unconditional submission of the Indians" as he awaited Scott's arrival. Cass clearly envisioned a different form of war from the Florida conflict, omitting the explicit injunction against negotiation and urging Jesup to identify Creeks with friendly dispositions and to treat them with the kindest affection. Above all, he instructed

²¹ Butler to Call, November 4, 1836, *Senate Document 278*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 10-12.

Jesup to isolate the Creeks from the Seminoles. Any alliance between hostile Creeks and the Seminoles would be a disaster.²²

Like Scott and Gaines, Thomas Jesup had risen through the ranks quickly during the War of 1812, serving with special distinction at Lundy's Lane where Scott had won one of his first and finest victories. Like Scott, he had spent years studying military science, learning tactics, and gradually professionalizing and bureaucratizing the army into a modern institution. Unlike Scott, he was born on the Kentucky frontier and was well-acquainted with settler concerns, often prioritizing action over caution. Following the War of 1812, President James Monroe judiciously assigned the ambitious young officer to the Quartermaster's Office, an ideal location where he could utilize his penchant for modernization while preventing him from indulging his brash ambitions. Unlike both Gaines and Scott, he was a close ally of the Jackson administration and the next door neighbor of Francis P. Blair, a member of Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet and the editor of *The Globe*. Despite their political differences, Scott had often worked closely with Jesup and the two men regarded each other warmly.²³

In the field, however, Jesup bristled at Scott's caution. Stationed at different points, Jesup lobbied Scott throughout the first weeks of June 1836 to launch an attack against the Indians. Arguing to Scott he was just miles from where "hostile Indians are committing the most cruel and distressing outrages" and with his supplies running low,

²² Winfield Scott to ?, May 22, 1836 in "Creek War," *Niles' Weekly Register*, June 11, 1836; 50, 257; Cass to Jesup, May 19, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:622-623; Cass to Jesup, May 23, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:631 ; Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* 93-96. For more on the Creek War, see John Ellisor, *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

²³ For more on Jesup, see Chester L. Kieffer, *Maligned General: The Biography of Thomas Sidney Jesup* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1979). On Jesup's youthful ambitions, see James E. Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 92-94

Jesup desperately urged an attack. As Scott hesitated, Jesup grew frustrated. In exasperation, he struck sharply at his friend, pointedly admitting that he had “none of the courage that would enable me to remain inactive, when women and children are daily falling beneath the blows of the savage.” Out of regard for their former friendship, he urged him to move quickly against the Creeks; otherwise, he declared, “you are lost.” However, Scott continued to wait anxiously for the arrival of guns and tents, not willing to go to battle half-stocked.²⁴

As Scott waited for the perfect moment to march, he received news that shocked him - Jesup had attacked. With astonishment, Scott wrote harshly to his subordinate. Like Gaines, a general had marched against orders, disrupting Scott’s careful planning and compromising his complex stratagems. It was, as Scott wrote to Jesup, “precisely General Gaines’s movement” all over again. Signing his letter “in grief,” Scott confessed he found Jesup’s actions “infinitely strange, . . . the last thing in the world that was to be expected from *you*.” Jesup wrote back that with women and children suffering, he could not help but act and that he had complied with the spirit of Scott’s orders to protect the frontier. He stated his intention to attack again the following morning, fearing that should he tarry the enemy would escape. Accepting Jesup’s explanation, Scott wrote graciously to Jesup, praising his conduct and agreeing to lay aside their disagreement. Before Jesup

²⁴ Jesup to Cass, June 10, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:325; Jesup to Cass, June 11, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:325; Kirby to Beard, June 10, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:326; Scott to Jones, June 17, 1836, ; Scott to Jesup, June 16, 1836; Jesup to Scott, June 15, 1836; Jesup to Scott, June 17, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:364; Governor C.C. Clay to General John W. Moore, June 6, 1836, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Governors.

received this conciliatory letter, however, he dashed off one of his own on the dispute to his old neighbor, Francis Blair.²⁵

Shortly thereafter, Scott received word recalling him to the War Department. Returning to Washington, he barged into the War Department, hoping to learn the details of his removal from command. The chief clerk obligingly handed Scott the relevant files where he read Jesup's fateful letter to Blair. Jesup had begun alarmingly, warning that in Georgia, "we have the Florida scenes enacted again." Enlarging his own contributions, Jesup took full and presumptuous credit for pacifying the frontier and warned that had he not acted, the white settlements would have erupted in flames. Informing Blair that he assumed Scott would imminently order his arrest, Jesup begged him to show the letter to the President before it was too late. Jesup cagily played upon Jackson's dissatisfaction with Scott's caution in the face of frontier warfare. Having lived on the frontier, Jackson well-remembered the constant panic that pervaded settlements in the midst of Indian war and Jesup's warning that "Indians were plundering, murdering, and burning, in all directions" confirmed Jackson's suspicions of Scott's unfitness for frontier war. When he turned the letter over, Scott learned it had done its work. On its back, after having received it from Blair, Jackson had written that due to "the unaccountable delay in prosecuting the Creek war, and the failure of the campaign in Florida," Scott was to be

²⁵ That Jesup sent the letter to Blair rather than Secretary Poinsett indicated that he recognized the latent insubordination of his report, and feared that the military establishment would reject his reports out of deference to the chain of command. Possibly, he also hoped that the letter would not be archived along with his official correspondence as well and, therefore, hidden from Scott's sight. Scott to Jesup, June 17, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:332-333; Jesup to Scott, June 19, 1836; *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:334-336; Scott to Jesup June 19, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:332-333; Jesup to Scott, June 20, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:337-338.

recalled to Washington and Jesup anointed the commander of both the Creek and Florida Wars.²⁶

Jesup took over the war effort in December 1836. Benjamin Butler, the acting secretary of war, welcomed Jesup with thinly disguised contempt for his predecessor, Call. Butler's casual assurance that the new commander had "become fully acquainted with the retrograde movements of Governor Call" served as both an instruction and a warning. Butler promised new brigades of volunteers from the Deep South and instructed Jesup to use them to ensure the total subjugation of the Seminoles. However, the reversals of the previous year had tempered the administration's instructions. Whereas Cass had explicitly enjoined against seeking compromise, Butler allowed Jesup to utilize "sound discretion" in his dealings with the Seminoles. Butler omitted another of Scott's instructions. Where returning runaway and captured slaves was Scott's secondary objective, Jesup was given no similar order.²⁷

In part, the relative latitude given to Jesup reflected the differences between the two secretaries of war, Cass and Butler. Whereas Cass styled himself something of an expert on the frontier, Butler was a scholar of the law, a former partner in Martin Van Buren's law firm, whom Jackson had tapped to replace Roger Taney as Attorney

²⁶ That Andrew Jackson would relieve one commander of duty and install another by jotting down a couple sentences on the back of a letter sent to a newspaper editor (granted a member of his inner circle), was rather remarkable. "General Scott.," *The Globe*, July 29, 1836; Jesup to Francis P. Blair, June 20, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:338-339. Scott would later call witnesses who defended his characterization of the frontier, see *Senate Document 224*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 92-129; Jesup to Scott, June 8, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:325; Scott to Jesup, June 16, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:330-331.

²⁷ Call harbored no ill will toward Jesup for replacing him in Florida, assuring him "there is no man in the country for whose capacity in the field, I have so much respect." He would maintain a similar tone throughout Jesup's command. Call to Jesup, September 8, 1836, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers. Butler to Jesup, November 4, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 6:993; Winfield Scott and his supporters would complain that had the general the same latitude, he would have ended the war quickly, see for example "Latest from Florida," *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 16, 1837.

General. With Cass's plum October 1836 reassignment to the French ambassadorship, Jackson appointed Butler to temporarily head the War Department, placing an ally of the incoming president in the cabinet to facilitate the changeover. Butler, despite his history with Van Buren, was a heterodox Democrat, deeply pious and heavily involved in reform movements. He had gone so far as to recently propose that any potential Indian confederacy in the west deserved representation in Congress. Butler, whose identification with the Democratic Party derived not from the idealized vision of individualized yeoman settlers but from theories of constitutional democracy, differed with Cass over the relative importance of subjugation and re-enslavement in Florida.²⁸

Jesup viewed the war through an altogether different prism from his predecessors. In his first letter back to Washington following his assumption of leadership in Florida, Jesup included a brief aside to his superiors. This "is a negro, not an Indian war," wrote the general, "and if it be not speedily put down, the South will feel the effects of it on their slave population." Already in Florida, the effects of a cross-racial and cross-cultural alliance between Indians and slaves, with the Black Seminoles as a conduit, were evident. Jesup informed a local militia leader that one of his former slaves, who had escaped to the Seminoles, was currently communicating with slaves in St. Augustine and had even procured supplies from a local free African-American. Writ large, the implications of such cross-cultural alliances were devastating. Lacking sufficient troops and all too aware

²⁸ Unlike his friend Martin Van Buren, Butler migrated to the Republican Party following the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Willard Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1996), 92. On Butler, see Ronald Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975) 213-214, 237-238; Benjamin F. Butler, *Representative Democracy in the United States: An Address* (Albany: C. Van Benthuysen, 1841); BF Butler, "Annual Report of the Secretary of War," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, December 29, 1836, 3.26, 401-403. There is surprisingly little literature on Martin Van Buren and his Indian policy, save for analyses of his administration's role in the Trail of Tears.

that the commissions of many of his volunteers would soon expire, Jesup hoped his racialized warnings would accelerate recruitments throughout Florida's neighboring states. If participating in an endless war of attrition failed to attract volunteers, perhaps a threat that struck closer to home might.²⁹

Jesup's warning had a strategic purpose as well. Jesup likely examined his orders and seized upon his discretion with the Black Seminoles. Under no circumstances could he satisfy the Seminoles' key demand to stay in Florida, but he now had permission to offer the Black Seminoles what they most coveted, freedom in the eyes of the law. For the African-Americans whom the Seminoles had purchased directly from white merchants, their safety from chattel slavery was not in the balance. The Treaty of Payne's Landing guaranteed the Seminoles' right of property during removal, but these Black Seminoles did remain slaves of the Seminoles nonetheless. For the dozens of slaves who were either captured by the Seminoles, had found sanctuary with them, or were subject to disputed claims by Creek Indians and whites, their fate depended on the outcome of the war and was, therefore, a bargaining chip.

Jesup attacked that vulnerability. In separate letters, Jesup reiterated three times that the negroes "rule the Indians," implying that Indians submission could be brought about through settlement with their African-American allies. Jesup knew that his strategy would have to navigate treacherous waters. On one side, he would need to obviate or overcome the inevitable protests of Florida settlers who viewed the reclamation of their human property as of equal justification for the war as the removal of the Seminoles. On the other, he would have to gain the trust of the Black Seminoles while not disrupting

²⁹ Jesup to Butler, December 9, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:820-821; Jesup to General Hernandez, January 19, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent.

their relationship with the Indians to the point that, should the Black Seminoles ally with Jesup, the Seminoles might not listen to their former allies' counsel.³⁰

Jesup pursued a two-track strategy. He followed Call's general plan of erecting supply depots throughout the Florida wilderness and launching small parties to hunt down Indian bands near the Withlacoochee. At the same time, he released Seminole and Black Seminole prisoners back to their leaders with messages that he was willing to negotiate. Ideally, his offensives into Indian country would have enough success to lead to negotiations with the Black Seminoles and, through them, convince the Indians to emigrate to the West.³¹

Once in the field, Jesup encountered many of the same problems as his predecessors. His 1000 man force relied heavily on volunteers, but their usefulness proved limited as several brigades' commissions were expiring just as Jesup entered the field. Other companies insisted that organizers had defrauded them, deceiving them into signing year-long contracts when they had intended to stay only six months. Of the troops that remained, a great many were consigned to their sickbeds – of the 400 Alabama volunteers, 60 were ill or incapacitated and they were joined in their illness by an additional 54 Georgia volunteers. The Seminoles, however, were suffering worse. As had happened repeatedly in conflicts between whites and Indians in the New World, though they fended off initial American attacks, the burdens of a total war soon took a tremendous toll on Indian society. Having to migrate from their established settlements

³⁰ Jesup to Butler, February 7, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 65-66; Jesup to Jones, March 26, 1837, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:835; Jesup to Jones, May 17, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 86-87.

³¹ Jesup to Butler, December 9, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 52; Jesup to Butler, December 12, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 52-53; Jesup to Butler, December 12, 1836 (2), 53-54; Jesup to Butler, December 17, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 54-55; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 195-197; Keiffer, *Maligned General* 154-159.

and conceal themselves in squalid conditions, the Seminoles suffered from the same cycles of violence and deprivation that had beset Indians since the seventeenth century.³²

In late January, Jesup began hearing from prisoners that division wracked the Seminole leadership and several chiefs were open to emigration. Jesup traveled south to the Ocklawaha River where, venturing alone, Abraham, the most influential Black Seminole and personal advisor to the Seminole chief Micanopy, entered Jesup's camp and reported that Ote Emathla and Halpatter Tustenuggee, two of the leading Seminole chiefs, wished to meet with him. At their meeting, Ote Emathla disclaimed responsibility for the war, blaming Indian bands outside of Seminole control for the violence along the frontier. "The Seminoles were desirous of peace," Ote Emathla assured Jesup, "and wished to live on terms of friendship with the white people."³³

Understanding that Ote Emathla evinced not a willingness to emigrate, but a desire to coexist in Florida in peace, Jesup insisted that peace could come only on the terms of the Treaty of Payne's Landing. The Seminoles would be required to leave Florida and rejoin the Creeks, from whom they had splintered a century before. Ensuring the Seminoles understood exactly the rigidity of his position, Jesup explained "the United

³² Chambers to Jones, December 27, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 57; Jesup to Jones, January 1, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 60; Jesup to Jones, January 20, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 63-64; ; Jesup to Jones, August 13, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 102-103; Jesup to Butler, January 21, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 64; Jesup to Butler, February 7, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 65-66. On the total number of Alabama volunteers, see Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 196. On the total number of sick, see List of Sick Men, April 22, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers, Major Churchill Folder. On the attrition that beset Indian forces during war, see, for example: Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000); Jung, *The Black Hawk War of 1832*; Eric Schultz and Michael Tougias, *King Philip's War: The History and Legacy of America's Forgotten Conflict* (Woodstock: Countryman Press, 2000).

³³ Thomas Jesup Diary, February 3, 1837, State Archives of Florida; Jesup to Butler, January 21, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 64-65; Jesup to Butler, February 7, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 65-66. For more on Abraham, see Kenneth W. Porter, "The Negro Abraham," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 25 (1946), 1-43

States had purchased the whole country,” and the Seminoles “had no right to any land except that which the United States had given them.” Ote Emathla protested, but Jesup was resolute and convinced him to gather the rest of the Seminole chiefs for a meeting at the end of the month.³⁴

Jesup may have seemed the very embodiment of American intractability to the Indians, but privately he expressed deep concerns over the administration’s policy. Four days after meeting with the Seminole chiefs, he sent separate letters to Tallahassee and Washington, DC. He sent his Tallahassee letter directly to Governor Call and enclosed a simple question: “would the people of your territory be willing to allow [the Seminoles] to remain in the country subject to your laws as citizens?” Without waiting for Call’s reply, in his first report to the War Department following the initial meeting with Ote Emathla, Jesup made the same request to his superiors, informing them that if the United States did not require emigration, a peace treaty could easily be reached. Searching for a different solution and likely aware that even following *Worcester v. Georgia*, in which the Supreme Court had declared that state law had no jurisdiction over Indian land, leading Cherokees nevertheless had been willing to remain in Georgia subject to the state’s jurisdiction, Jesup moved to transpose the proposal to Florida. Taking the prior history of United States civilizationist Indian policy literally, Jesup asserted that the Seminoles would lay down their arms if they could remain in Florida, to the point of becoming citizens under the law. Though Jesup offered no details on his plan, he likely

³⁴ Thomas Jesup Diary, February 3, 1837, State Archives of Florida.

envisioned the Seminoles occupying a space in Florida society similar to free African-Americans, somewhere in the hazy space between enslavement and equality.³⁵

Jesup received a reply from Call before hearing back from the secretary of war. Call assured the general that public opinion as well as his own “would be decidedly opposed to any measure short of a full and complete execution of the several treaties.” Too much had passed between the two peoples, too much blood spilt to reconcile. Undeterred by Floridian opposition and still not having heard from his superiors, Jesup sent a second letter to Washington with a more explicit request to moderate American policy. If the war recommenced, he warned, success was assured but the cost could be catastrophic, as the Seminoles’ desperate offensives would devastate Florida’s already unsteady development. Still prioritizing the protection of white settlers on the frontier, Jesup nevertheless confronted his superiors’ objectives by setting racial dominance and American expansion in direct opposition. His answer arrived several days after Martin Van Buren’s inauguration. When he opened the reply, Jesup found only warm wishes and gratitude from Butler, whose tenure as acting secretary of war was ending with Van Buren’s inauguration. His suggestions were ignored.³⁶

³⁵ Andrew Jackson personally struck out a clause in the Treaty of New Echota that would have allowed the Cherokees to retain some of their land and become citizens of the states in which they resided. See John Brown, *Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal to the West, 1838* (Kingsport: Southern Publishers, 1938), 498-499; Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932). Jesup to Call, February 7, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent; Jesup to Butler, February 17, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 75-76; Jesup to Butler, February 7, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 65-66.

³⁶ Jesup would receive an unofficial letter from his aide de camp, TB Linnard, then in Washington, prior to receiving Butler’s reply. Linnard reported that Poinsett claimed the president had no authority to impose anything aside from a temporary truce. Linnard to Jesup, February 22, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers. Call to Jesup, February 15, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers; Butler to Jesup, March 11, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 28-29.

In the meantime, Jesup waited impatiently to meet with the Seminoles until, on March 5th, several Indian chiefs dutifully entered his camp. The general's offer was simple. In return for the Seminoles' pledge to emigrate, Jesup would allow them one month to prepare, guarantee their private property, offer them a fair price for their ponies and cattle, provide them with significant provisions, and, most important, allow for the free emigration of all Black Seminoles, regardless of any slaveowner claims upon them. For Ote Emathla, who spoke for Micanopy, this was enough and he agreed to send word to the dispersed Seminole bands that the war had ended. Anticipating his superiors' concerns with his concessions, Jesup wrote to assure them that though he had "granted the Indians the most liberal terms," his choice was dictated by "policy as well as sound economy. To have attempted the extraction of severe terms, might have led to a renewal of hostilities."³⁷

Following the conclusion of the peace treaty, Jesup turned his eyes toward the last party who might prolong the war for their own purposes, unscrupulous whites on the frontier. Reports streamed in from army camps that whites were spreading rumors that all Indians who surrendered would be executed, not removed. Further, many officers steadfastly believed that other Florida whites had cravenly influenced the Seminoles to keep fighting even as they urged the government to remain steadfast, a plot to enrich merchants who soaked the army with hefty bills. Exacerbating the friction between the military and local civilians, townspeople derided the effectiveness of the army while

³⁷ Thomas Jesup Diary, March 5, 1837, State Archives of Florida; Jesup to Jones, March 6, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 51; Thomas Jesup, "Capitulation of the Seminole Nation of Indians and Their Allies," March 6, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 52-54; Jesup to Poinsett, April 9, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 147-148.

celebrating the aid of the volunteers, a serious slight given the animosity between the two groups.³⁸

Jesup's primary antagonists among the whites, however, were slaveholders who viewed the massing Black Seminoles as their rightful property. Immediately after signing the treaty allowing the Black Seminoles free passage, Jesup received a letter from a local lawyer representing a large estate, demanding dozens of slaves as well as their children who had been born among the Seminoles. The legal request was only the most formal entreaty; Jesup personally received at least fifteen letters from slaveholders inquiring after their wayward human property. The intrusion of white slavecatchers into Seminole camps threatened the careful balance Jesup had struck between the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles. He warned slaveholders that their designs would endanger the peace process and soon after signing the Seminoles' capitulation, Jesup issued a general order inveighing against "the interference of unprincipled white men with the negro property of the Seminole Indians" and forbade any white man not in the service of the United States from setting foot in Seminole country. Jesup, a slaveholder himself, admitted that he may "sympathize with ... [their] afflictions and losses, but, responsible as I am for the peace of the country, I cannot ... permit that peace to be jeopardized."³⁹

³⁸ Jesup to Jones, April 23, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 83; Jesup to Jones, March 26, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 81; Jesup to Jones, May 5, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 85; William Foster, *This Miserable Pride of a Soldier: The Letters and Journals of Col. William S. Foster in the Second Seminole War*, ed., John Missall and Mary Lou Missall (Tampa Bay: University of Tampa Press, 2005). Joseph Sprague's enmity for the Florida populace runs throughout Sprague, *The Florida War*.

³⁹ Elias Gould to Jesup, April 27, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 57; Jesup to Poinsett, April 9, 1837, *Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 868-869; Jesup to Miller, March 27, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 9; Jesup to J.L. Smith, April 27, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent. The fifteen letters from slaveholders: Harry Kemble to Jesup, May 22, 1837; Arnon to Jesup, April 30, 1838; Cargile to Jesup, July 4, 1837; Affidavit from John Percival, May 12, 1837; Duncan Clinch to Jesup, April 3, 1837; Clark to Jesup, April 9, 1837; Crowell to Jesup, May 14, 1837; Jennings to Jesup, February 7, 1838; Joseph Smith to Jesup, April 18, 1837; Humphreys to Jesup, May 8, 1837; Faustes to Jesup, January

Even as Jesup warned against the encroachments of white settlers, he followed the orders of his superiors to re-enslave certain Black Seminoles who were claimed by white owners and began to identify them. Though the treaty had stipulated that all of the Indians and their “allies” were to be sent west unmolested, Jesup unilaterally decided that slaves captured during the conflict were not protected by the treaty, justifying his orders on the basis of an oral agreement with Coa Hadjo, a single Seminole chief. As the Seminoles came in to army camps, Jesup initiated the long process of identifying captured African-Americans, verifying their enslaved status, and setting into motion their return to slavery. The rolls which he ordered his troops to record - listing in order their name, gender, “tribe, town, or owner,” estimated age, and distinctive features - took on the appearance of a plantation owner’s ledger book, as he transformed the army into an outlet of Florida’s slave system, judging identities, transferring captives throughout the state, and notifying owners of the locations of their slaves.⁴⁰

76	Nancy	-	-	Female	-	Do	-	-	1	-	Rachel's child. } Mother and child, cousin to Murray; (a defect in Katy's right eye; said to be the property of Colonel Humphreys.)
77	Katy	-	-	Female	-	Jumper	-	-	25	-	
78	Fanny	-	-	Female	-	Do	-	-	2	-	

With the war seemingly close to its end, Jesup grew increasingly frustrated with the compromises he had made. Trapped between the demands white southerners who wanted the army to return slaves upon whom they held claims and knowing that only more conciliatory measures could secure the surrender of his enemies, Jesup pursued strategies whose tactics conflicted directly. In effect, following the signing of his treaty,

9, 1837; Ruiz to Jesup, May 18, 1837; Bennet Drew to Jesup, March 27, 1837; Jose de Royster to Jesup, April 13, 1837, all located in Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Slaveholders.

⁴⁰ Antislavery critics strongly suspected that Jesup had fabricated the oral agreement altogether, see Joshua Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida* (Columbus: Follet, Foster, and Company, 1858) 142-156. CA Harris to Jesup, May 5, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Indian Affairs; Churchill to Peyster, April 17, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 10-11; Churchill to Forrester, April 17, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 11; Jesup to Brown, April 26, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 12; Jesup to Humphreys, April 30, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 13.

Jesup began to disclaim any responsibility for obeying it. In regard to slaves who had joined the Seminoles during the war and remained at large, he was consistent, relaying word to Osceola that he intended to send out scouting parties searching for any Black Seminole rightfully claimed by a white slaveowner and, betraying his mounting frustration, that he was “sending to Cuba for bloodhounds to trail them and . . . to hang every one of them who does not come in.”⁴¹

Soon after Jesup received the Seminoles’ capitulation, a group of Florida slaveholders sent a petition to Joel Poinsett. The men, all of whom had fled Florida and were residing in Charleston, vociferously protested Jesup’s protection of the Black Seminoles who had escaped prior to the beginning of the war. So fearful of the Seminole threat that they had left the territory altogether, they nevertheless insisted that unless the Seminoles restored their stolen property, the United States should forge ahead with the war. Rather than predicating their stance on the defense of property, the seven men played upon the insecurities that underlay the expansionistic effort. To end the war on these terms, they argued, “would be a sacrifice of the national dignity, and an absolute and clear triumph on the part of the Indians.”⁴²

Upon reading the memorial, Jesup tersely dismissed their concerns, mocking them for running from Florida at the first sign of trouble and then stating that he could “have no agency in converting the army into negro-catchers, particularly for the benefit of those who are evidently afraid to undertake the recapture of their property themselves.” Despite his evident frustrations with the slaveholders who had attempted to undermine him, Jesup

⁴¹ Jesup to Smith, April 27, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 13; Jesup to Gould, May 4, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 14; Jesup to Poinsett, May 8, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 57; Jesup to Harney, May 25, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 16;

⁴² Gad Humphreys, et. al to Poinsett, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 55-56

continued to do their bidding, quietly and largely unobserved. To one frustrated slaveowner, Jesup admitted that he had intended to imprison many of the slaves who had run away prior to the war, only to abandon his plan after prowling slave catchers had alarmed his captives. He dutifully sent messengers to inspect dozens of captured slaves in search of those claimed by Florida citizens and reported his findings back to the aggrieved slaveholders. After receiving a petition from citizens of St. Augustine complaining that he had forbade whites from entering Indian territory, Jesup modified his order and allowed whites to travel south to the Withlacoochee in search of lost cattle, a pretense given that many slaveholders had far more pressing issues to which to attend. For some in Florida, even this was not enough. One newspaper in Jacksonville disdained Jesup as worse than the abolitionist who “only seeks to dissolve the relationship between Master and Slave. Gen. Jesup . . . prohibits the owner from even making his claim!” With varying success, then, Jesup carefully modulated his actions. If he could recapture slaves without alarming the Seminoles or scaring off Black Seminoles, he did so. Otherwise, he left well-enough alone.⁴³

Even as Jesup gradually ensnared his black captives, Seminole bands trickled into army camps, preparing for removal. By the end of May 1837, almost all of the major chiefs had visited the camp and pledged to uphold the Treaty of Payne’s Landing and emigrate to Arkansas. On their arrival, their condition was very poor, many of them

⁴³ Joel Poinsett largely sided with Jesup over the relocated Florida plantation owners. See Poinsett to Jesup, May 25, 1837, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, ed., Clarence Carter, 25:392. Registry of Negro Prisoners Captured by the Troops Commanded by Major General Thomas Jesup, in 1836 and 1837, and Owned by Indians, or Who Claim to Be Free, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 66-69; Jesup to Poinsett, May 8, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 57; Jesup to Smith, April 27, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 12-13; St. Augustine Petition, April 8, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Slaveholders; Jesup to McClintock, May 1, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 13; Jesup to Armistead, May 2, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 13-14; *Jacksonville Courier*, June 22, 1837.

nearly naked and desperate to trade for clothing. Worse, an outbreak of measles, certainly exacerbated by the exigencies of guerilla warfare, had erupted among the Seminoles. Nevertheless, with Micanopy, Ote Emathla, and Halpatter Tustenuggee in camp, Jesup allowed himself moments of optimism, reporting to his superiors that he expected that barring any unforeseen catastrophes, the war would soon be over. From a nearby outpost, Lieutenant William Harney reported that all of the Seminoles shared a similar sentiment: “We are once more happy. We are no longer afraid to show ourselves to a white man – we are no longer compelled to run from one swamp to another, but when we see a white man now, we walk up to him straight (upright) and shake him by the hand.” Newspapers across the country trumpeted the glorious news that the war had, at long last, ended. Yet Jesup would not rest easy until the Seminoles boarded the boats assembled in Tampa Bay and privately admitted to Harney that he believed the agreement would crumble. On May 31, he decided against ordering Harney to seize the massed Seminoles to forestall their escape, but affirmed that should the Seminoles abscond, “then we shall have no other course but to exterminate them.” He would see it through to the end.⁴⁴

On the night of June 1st, one of the allied Creeks reported a rumor that a large band of Seminole warriors planned to invade the camp and force the emigrating Seminoles back into the wilderness. Jesup stepped up patrols and attempted to infiltrate the Seminole camp. Throughout the afternoon on June 2nd, Jesup heard reports that unidentified Indians were in the area, but his spies failed to offer any useful information.

⁴⁴ Contrary to his intimations to Harney, in the months to come, Jesup would often portray himself as personally offended by the betrayal of the Seminoles and taken wholly unaware. “From the Army,” *The Globe*, May 25, 1837; Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 204; Jesup to Poinsett, April 11, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 150-151; Harney to Jesup, April 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers; Jesup to Harney, May 20, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent; Jesup to Harney, May 31, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent; Major Thomas Childs to Jesup, April 3, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers.

Jesup slept fretfully and awoke to learn that all of the Seminoles, some 750 of them, had left in the night. All of his careful negotiations had been for nothing.⁴⁵

Following the breakdown of Jesup's agreement, both Jesup and the Seminoles offered different, though not conflicting, explanations for its collapse. At times, Jesup blamed the machinations of whites, thinking the presence of slave catchers had alarmed the Black Seminoles who had, in turn, convinced the Seminoles to run. More likely, Osceola, who had long argued to Seminole chiefs that the fate of their people and the Black Seminoles were intertwined, had learned of Jesup's decision to imprison African-Americans not protected by the treaty. Regardless, camp conditions had exacerbated the outbreak of measles and many Indians likely feared that their long journey to Arkansas would only worsen its effects.⁴⁶

Disheartened, Jesup decided to forfeit his command. In a series of letters, he attested to his superior, Secretary of War Joel Poinsett, that the war, as the administration had conceived it, was unwinnable. Having begun his campaign expecting a hard-fought but simple victory, Jesup now reflected that "at no former period of our history had [the United States] to contend with so formidable an enemy." Had his superiors allowed him to negotiate with the Seminoles, "to have made a durable peace would have been an easy matter," Jesup contended, "but the scheme of emigration I consider impractical." He cautioned, "To rid this country of them you must exterminate them. Is the government prepared for such a measure? Will public opinion sustain it?" It was a measure too

⁴⁵ Jesup to Poinsett, June 7, 1837; *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 158-159.

⁴⁶ For more on Jesup's treaty with the Seminoles, see chapter 6. Forry to Phelps, July 3, 1837 in "Letters of Samuel Forry, Surgeon U.S. Army, 1837-1836," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 6.3 (Jan 1928), 133-135; Thomas Jesup Diary, March 17, 1837, State Archives of Florida; Kenneth W. Porter, "Osceola and the Negroes," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 33.3, 33.4 (Jan-Apr 1955), 235-239; Harney to Jesup, June 6, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers; Harney to Jesup, June 16, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers.

extreme for Jesup to contemplate and he requested transfer back to the Quartermaster's Office.⁴⁷

As he awaited word of who would replace him in command, Jesup ruminated in writing on the nature of warfare with the Seminoles, in the guise of offering advice to his successor. Given the Seminoles' determination to remain in Florida and his superiors' commensurate determination to remove them, Jesup kept returning to a single idea: if the Seminole could not be convinced to leave, for the United States to win, every Seminole would have to be killed. He believed the Seminoles would not hold to their word, and even if the chiefs intended to do so, they could not restrain militant warriors who disdained soldiers as thieves, murderers, and enslavers. "Such a people you may destroy," Jesup reflected, "but cannot readily conquer." Tragically, Jesup came to understand that though the Seminoles wanted to live in Florida in isolation above all, it was on terms that the United States would not countenance.⁴⁸

At the brink of despair, Jesup received a letter that evidently caused him to broadly re-evaluate his assessment of the campaign. Samuel Vinton, who five months later would confront Secretary Poinsett in Washington, DC, wrote to one of Jesup's aides and asked him to show the letter to his commander. Vinton seized on Jesup's insecurities and urged him to confront his superiors boldly. To Vinton, the situation was simple. Success, if it could be achieved at all, would require millions of dollars and a minimum of 40,000 troops, all for a tract of land inhospitable to any white person. Instead, he proposed a new treaty that would allow the Seminoles to remain in south Florida. It

⁴⁷ Jesup to Poinsett June 22, 1837, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:871-872; Jesup to Jones, July 25, 1837 in Sprague, *The Florida War* 180-181.

⁴⁸ Jesup to Poinsett, June 7, 1837, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7:871-872; Jesup to Poinsett, June 10, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 160; Jesup to Poinsett, June 15, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 161-164.

would not be charity. Referring to the Maroon War in Jamaica as evidence, Vinton described a workable truce. The United States should offer the Seminoles land in Florida in return for their service as enforcers of the Deep South slave system. Should any African-American escape from a Florida plantation, the government would rely on the Seminoles, bonded to service by this grant of land, to hunt down and return the fugitives. In a masterstroke, Vinton argued that only his plan could secure the approval of Florida slaveholders by tasking Seminoles with faithfully restoring “property to the master” and keeping the lower peninsula free from “negro banditti.” Moving beyond Florida politics, he understood something of the monomaniacal obsession with conquest that had consumed Washington as well. Rhetorically asking what would stand in the way of such a treaty, Vinton answered he knew all too well: “because the honor of our Government requires that we should consummate what we have undertaken – such is the ready answer of men who . . . regard conventional ‘honor’ more than moral right.”⁴⁹

The letter influenced Jesup. Just a few days after dispatching messages counseling extermination as the only policy with a chance of success, he sent a new letter to Poinsett that urged the adoption of a plan identical to Vinton’s in every specific. In a clear indication that he drew his inspiration from Vinton, Jesup referred directly to the Jamaican Maroon War as evidence for the strategy’s practicality. Although Jesup adopted Vinton’s content, he ignored his form. Jesup did not echo Vinton’s evocation of “moral right,” nor did he even fully endorse the plan. Rather, he closed by testifying that he merely offered these “hints” for his superiors’ consideration, “without pretending to offer

⁴⁹ Vinton was on less firm ground when he asserted that two thirds of Americans would “rejoice that the Seminoles were allowed to remain in their nation’s land.” Vinton to Chambers, June 9, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers.

an opinion as to the propriety of adopting them.” Despite his declamations, subsequent events would prove that these were more than “hints.”⁵⁰

The Van Buren administration ignored Jesup’s proposal. Instead, Poinsett replied with a broad defense of Indian removal and of the importance of subduing the Seminoles, acting as though Jesup merely lacked motivation. Poinsett admitted that the Seminoles had proven to be able and courageous foes, but insisted that their bravery did not “alter the nature of the war, nor diminish our obligation to subdue them.” Poinsett warned that if the United States withdrew, it risked tarnishing the honor of its arms, unknowingly failing Vinton’s challenge to prioritize moral right over a vacuous notion of honor. Poinsett likely had other concerns as well. Just a month before, New York banks had begun to accept payment only in gold and silver coinage, sparking the Panic of 1837. With the nation facing a nearly unprecedented financial crisis, the Van Buren administration could ill afford a military humiliation as well. Poinsett urged Jesup to remain in command and craft a plan of action not dependent on extermination or moderation to achieve his goals. Weary of public criticism and still determined to find a way to end the war, Jesup took Poinsett’s offer.⁵¹

After he recommitted to command, Jesup formulated a new strategy to defeat the Indians. If he could not force the Seminoles to surrender and would not exterminate them,

⁵⁰ Jesup to Poinsett, June 16, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 167-168.

⁵¹ Poinsett likely relayed another message to Jesup through his subordinate in the Quartermaster’s Office as well. Captain George Crosman, after mentioning he had talked with Poinsett several times recently, insisted to Jesup that “the people would not, for a moment, sanction the idea of allowing the Indians to remain in Florida.” Captain Crosman to Jesup, July 18, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers. Poinsett to Jesup, July 25, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 73-75; Jesup to Call, July 8, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent; Jesup to Read, July 25, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 204; Jesup to Jones, July 25, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 96-97. On the Panic of 1837, see Peter L. Rousseau, “Jacksonian Monetary Policy, Specie Flows, and the Panic of 1837,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 62. 2 (2002), 457-488; Jessica Lepler, *1837: Anatomy of a Panic* (PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University, 2008).

the only avenue left to him was deception. Lacking the troops to undertake long marches along the frontier during Florida's harsh summer, Jesup began intermittent negotiations with the Seminoles with the sole object of forestalling their attacks until the coming autumn. The Seminoles, who had largely ceased raiding the frontier over the previous months, willingly remained south of the Withlacoochee River, content with an unacknowledged truce. Jesup responded in kind, implying through messengers that he might still revisit the Treaty of Payne's Landing, even while he secretly plotted out another campaign. From his own troops, Jesup kept another secret. He was sending letters to Governor Call and to General Leigh Read of the Florida militia, informing them that he intended to exterminate the Seminoles and asking whether Florida citizens would countenance the importation of bloodhounds for the sole purpose of hunting down the Indians. Unaware of so many distant machinations, the Seminoles had largely ceased their depredations by October 1837.⁵²

While Jesup was presenting the Seminoles with a calm façade, he offered something else entirely to the Black Seminoles. Enraged over their refusal to submit to re-enslavement, Jesup dashed off instructions to his subordinates to summarily hang any runaway slaves whom they captured. After careful consideration of his options, however, Jesup countermanded his order. Faced with declining morale among his troops, Jesup offered the most readily available inducement, plunder in the form of captured slaves. Again utilizing Seminole treachery as a justification for his own moral transgressions, Jesup wrote to his subordinates that "there is now no obligation to spare the property of

⁵² Jesup admitted to Poinsett that he only entered into negotiations to slow the Seminoles and had no intention of reaching peace. Jesup to Poinsett, August 22, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 894-896; Galt to Jesup, August 11, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 104-105; Childs to Jesup, August 3, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 101-102; Jesup to Poinsett, October 15, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 906-907.

the Indians – they have not spared that of the citizens.” To the Creek regiments, Jesup made the same promise. Such an order was unprecedented in the annals of American warfare. Commanders during the War of 1812 had brooked no such confiscation, nor had the commanders of Black Hawk’s War, nor had Scott, Gaines, and Call in Florida. One South Carolina newspaper mocked Jesup’s policy, insisting with his methods he intended to “produce a *squaw*-ly and *niggar*-dly campaign.” Jesup had placed so high a priority on recovering the Black Seminoles that he communicated to the Seminoles that all negotiations were to be cut off until they surrendered all of the African-Americans in their bands.⁵³

Jesup’s policy toward the Black Seminoles was entirely incoherent. Even as he held out the prospect of seizing runaway slaves as plunder to his troops, he continued his plans to separate the Black Seminoles from their Indian allies with the promise of freedom. And he was having success. As the majority of the Seminoles had expected to emigrate in the summer and fall, they had chosen not to plant full crop yields, leading to harsh deprivations throughout the summer. For some Black Seminoles, the prospect of freedom with the Americans, however tenuous, was more promising than starving in the Florida wilderness. There were other inducements as well. After Abraham, the most influential of the Black Seminoles, arrived in American camp, Jesup reported to his superiors that he trusted his new captive to cooperate not because he was faithful, but because the general had made the decision easy for him. If he proved genuine, Jesup had guaranteed him the freedom of his family. If he dissembled, Jesup had sworn to hang

⁵³ Jesup to Warren, July 7, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 19; Jesup to Mills, July 24, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 19; Jesup to Armstrong, September 17, 1836, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 20; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 209; *Camden Commercial Courier*, September 16, 1837; Jesup to Hernandez, September 30, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent.

him. Other threats need not be so overt. When one Black Seminole named John arrived at an American camp with his wife, he pledged his service to guarantee her freedom. His loyalty secured, John led American troops to Philip, the most powerful Indian chief captured by that point of the war. Once individual Black Seminoles aided the United States, there was no going back. Through sources Jesup learned, and made sure to inform Abraham as well, that Seminole chiefs had assigned no fewer than twenty warriors the task of finding and killing the Black Seminole leader.⁵⁴

For Jesup, himself at the crossroads, there was no going back as well. In October 1837, with Seminole violence nearly abated, Jesup faced the same choice he had set out for himself months earlier: urge his superiors to moderate the objectives of the war or set aside moral boundaries and persist to the war's bitter conclusion. True to his nature, Jesup did both. In a new letter, Jesup made a more forceful case for moderation than ever before. He laid out Vinton's original plan to utilize Seminole warriors as auxiliaries to police southern plantations, assuring his superiors there could be no better safeguard for the nation's security in the event of a British invasion from the West Indies. Yet, at the last moment, Jesup faltered again. Flirting with outright opposition to his superiors' firm insistence on absolute removal, he instead took his pen and crossed out the offending passage, a giant X marking an entire page. Whether he truly thought better of taking such a bold stance - if he had second thoughts, surely he would have merely written another

⁵⁴ The deprivations suffered by the Blacks Seminoles only served to further confirm southern assumptions that African-Americans were best off in slavery. Kenneth W. Porter, "Negroes and the Seminole War, 1835-1842," *Journal of Southern History*, 30.4 (Nov 1964), 427-450; *Army and Navy Chronicle*, Sep 28, 1837; 5.13; American Periodicals Series Online, 200; Jacob Rhett Motte, *Journey into the Wilderness: An Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field during the Creek and Seminole Wars, 1836-1936*, edited by James F. Sunderman (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1953), 116-123; Edward Davis Townsend Diary, November 17, 1837, Huntington Library; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 205, 211-212; Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida* 162; Hernandez to Jeusp, September 16, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 109-112; Jesup to Harris, September 24, 1837, *House Document 225*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 21-22; Jesup to Zachary Taylor, October 27, 1837.

letter - the effect was consistent with Jesup's prior policy. The X dissociated him from his own advice, but was not nearly enough to prevent Poinsett from comprehending it.

Whatever Jesup's intention, Poinsett made no mention of his proposal.⁵⁵

Where Jesup pursued peace through half-measures, he cast off moral restraint whole-heartedly. By not launching a significant invasion, Jesup had effectively imposed peace upon the Florida frontier, but when he broke that peace, he assured that his reputation would be forever tarnished. Months before, Jesup had personally handed yards of white cloth to selected Indian prisoners, promising that should they approach American troops unarmed and flying their makeshift flags, they would be treated as noncombatants. Now, Jesup realized that the white flag might serve to invite Seminoles to a trap rather than a parley. He thought his intended victim an example of poetic justice - as Osceola had instigated the Second Seminole War through an ambush upon Indian Agent Wiley Thompson, Jesup planned to return the favor. More than justice was at stake. In subsequent letters, Jesup would admit that immediately following the Seminoles' escape from his camp in June 1837, he had "resolved to take all who were concerned in the measure, whenever the opportunity might present." His personal enmity for Osceola, especially, burned bright.⁵⁶

On October 27, 1837, Osceola and some of his fellow warriors met with one of Jesup's officers. Before springing the trap, Jesup's representative entered into a discussion with Osceola, who professed, in the words of the American officers, to have

⁵⁵ The letter was addressed to Poinsett, included in Jesup's correspondence, sealed, and opened - by every indication, Poinsett received that specific copy. Jesup to Poinsett, October 17, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent. The letter was included in a published set of Congressional documents however the compiler respected Jesup's edit and chose not to reprint the marked out passage. Poinsett to Jesup, October 13, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 187.

⁵⁶ "Statement by Major-General Jesup," *Daily Intelligencer*, October 13, 1858.

“done nothing all summer, and wanted to make peace.” Having already rejected emigration months earlier, the Seminoles clearly expected that Jesup intended to offer a compromise that would allow them “liberty to walk about,” as Osceola put it. In response to their request, as Jesup had instructed, the American officer interrogated the Seminoles on their black allies. Were they ready to surrender them? Why had they not done so? Where were they? The Seminoles replied that the runaway slaves had scattered in the aftermath of the early spring negotiations, but they were now willing to deliver them in the name of peace. Following a series of further questions on the disposition of other Seminole leaders, Americans raised their guns and took Osceola and his fellow Seminoles into custody, violating the implicit promise of the white flag.⁵⁷

In the months that followed, the controversy over Osceola’s capture reverberated throughout the country. Renowned for his prowess in battle and celebrated for his success, Osceola inspired emotions approaching empathy from many thousands of Americans. For Jesup, the capture of Osceola was borne of a profound frustration with his failure to win the war on the battlefield. Attempting to redeem numerous minor military defeats, Jesup instead succumbed to a profound moral bankruptcy in the face of what must have appeared constant humiliation. For his conduct, Jesup faced withering criticism: even in 1858 he was still writing letters to newspaper editors, vigorously defending his actions. There was, however, something farcical in the debate over Jesup’s capture of Osceola, one act of deception among hundreds. Very few raised any outcry when Jesup offered captured slaves as plunder and fewer still cared when Jesup threatened Black Seminoles with death to assure their allegiance. Yet, Osceola

⁵⁷ K.B. Gibbs, “Note of a Talk between Brigadier General Hernandez and the Indian chiefs ...,” *House Document 327*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 7.

transcended the war in ways that others did not. Americans regretted Osceola's capture not merely due to its treachery, but because Osceola himself appeared, somehow, American. Following Osceola's death in February 1838, the *Charleston Mercury* published a widely reprinted obituary. Its conclusion was bracing: Osceola was a self-made man, a common Indian who had grown into a great warrior due only to his own talents – "From a vagabond child, he became the master spirit of a long and desperate war. He made himself; no man owed less to accident." In celebrating Osceola, Americans celebrated themselves, their capacity for reinvention, and their strength of character in an indifferent world.⁵⁸

In July 1837, as the controversy over Osceola's capture raged, John Sherburne, an emissary of Poinsett, approached Cherokee leader John Ross. Ross was in Washington resisting Indian removal through the political system, having forsworn violent resistance. From the perspective of Poinsett and Sherburne, Ross seemed the perfect mediator to end the Second Seminole War. Sherburne believed that Ross, a chief who had accepted the overwhelming superiority of American military power, might be able to succeed in re-empowering Seminole factions sympathetic to emigration. For his part, Ross truly believed that the Seminoles best interests lay in peace. Located in the heart of the Deep South, the Cherokees had gained, through bitter experience, a far better understanding of American power than had the Seminoles, isolated in their Florida fastnesses. They were first-hand witnesses to removal and understood the all-consuming expansionist desire

⁵⁸ In late 1839, the American ship *Cyane* docked in Naples beside the English ship, the *Hastings*, which carried several of the English nobility including the Queen Dowager Adelaide. As a show of respect, the captain of the *Cyane* sent over a portrait (presumably that of George Catlin) of that quintessential American, Osceola. Osceola, "For the Emancipator," *The Emancipator*, September 19, 1839; "Death of Oseola," *Charleston Mercury*, February 1, 1838; "Statement by Major-General Jesup," *Daily Intelligencer*, October 13, 1858.

which underlay American policy. The Seminoles were not ignorant. They had met Andrew Jackson on the battlefield two decades before and had maneuvered in the diminishing space among the Spanish, the English, and the Americans. Moreover, their allies, the Black Seminoles, certainly knew something of the nature of American domination. Nevertheless, they had never experienced the full weight of the American war machine. Ross hoped that his emissaries could explain something of that.⁵⁹

Jesup was less than thrilled to learn that his superiors had sent a delegation of Indians to influence the course of his campaign. Though Poinsett repeatedly advised that if he expected negotiations to delay his campaign he should send the Cherokees away, Jesup grudgingly accepted their help. According to the Cherokees, however, Jesup dismissed talks with the Seminoles as useless since “nothing but powder and ball could effect any thing” with them. His anger over the events of the previous June still fresh in his mind, he grew even more hostile to the emissaries after reading their intended message to the Seminoles.

In his message, Ross spoke to the Seminoles of a third option besides removal and conflict. He reached back to the presidency of George Washington and reminded the Seminoles that the United States had always promised to “hold fast to the faith of treaties, which, by mutual consent, had been solemnly pledged between our nation and the United States.” As Jesup knew, this phrasing had ominous implications – the Seminoles did not consider the Treaty of Payne’s Landing to have been reached by mutual consent. Further, Ross informed the Seminoles, he had met with Joel Poinsett who, admitting too much, had informed Ross that the United States wanted peace but “could not take any steps in

⁵⁹ On the Cherokee mediation, see Gary E. Moulton, “Cherokees and the Second Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 53.3 (Jun 1975), 296-305.

your affair which may be interpreted into an act of weakness.” To act where their enemies would not, Ross urged the Seminoles to lay down their arms and surrender so that a treaty of peace could be negotiated between the two peoples. He offered no advice as to the content of the treaty, but implied that Poinsett had promised to compensate the Seminoles for any injuries dealt them by unscrupulous whites. To Jesup’s dismay, Ross said nothing of removal.⁶⁰

The Cherokee deputation convinced Micanopy and about a dozen sub-chiefs to meet with Jesup later in the week. Returning to Jesup, the Cherokees learned why he had accepted their aid. Described as “cold, and almost repulsive,” Jesup expressed no approbation for their service. Instead he probed them for information on the enemy about their location, numbers, and condition. When he finally asked the Cherokees of their opinion of the Seminoles’ disposition, they replied with the obvious answer - the Seminole were interested enough to meet with Jesup in person. With the offer of peace in one hand, Jesup violently explained his own lack of interest in the same. “The Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee volunteers were on their way to join him,” Jesup thundered, “and it would be impossible to hold them back, and that his *force was very great*.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Jesup sent Samuel Vinton to meet with Secretary Poinsett to learn if he had authorized the Cherokees’ message as a tacit modification of American policy. It was during that meeting that the latter two men had their confrontational meeting. Poinsett to Jesup, October 13, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 78; Richd Fields, Hair Conrad, Jesse Busyhead, Thos. Woodard, Pole Cat, “Report of the Cherokee Deputation into Florida,” ed. Grant Foreman, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 9.4 (Dec 1931), 423-438; Jesup to Poinsett, November 4, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 909-910; Koo-We-Skoo-We, *alias* John Ross, “To the Chiefs, Headmen, and Warriors of the Seminoles of Florida,” October 18, 1837, *House Document 285*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 6-8; Jesup to Poinsett, November 4, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 910-911; Jesup to Poinsett, November 10, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 911-912; Jesup to Poinsett, November 28, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 916-917.

⁶¹ Cherokee Delegation, “Domestic Intelligence,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, Dec 7, 1837; 5.23, American Periodicals Series Online, 364. According to Keiffer, one of the Black Seminoles serving as an American guide testified to Jesup that the Cherokee delegation had offered an alternate talk to the Seminoles, telling them that the Americans were weakening and that they should hold out as long as possible. His

Upon meeting with Micanopy, Jesup made his position clear. The Seminoles would have to abide by their own agreement and emigrate immediately. In a move which the Cherokees believed “calculated to degrade” the Seminoles, Jesup demanded they bring in their families and surrender their arms before any negotiation could continue, terms the Seminoles could not accept. Immediately, Jesup acted, ordering his men to seize Micanopy, his band, and the rest of the Indians who had entered the fort under a white flag. Outraged, the Cherokees protested to Jesup, both due to moral revulsion and a fear that the Seminoles, who might one day be their neighbors in the west, would think them complicit. Ignoring their threats, Jesup declared that he would hold the Seminoles in captivity and, if any of the remaining warriors in the field spilled a single drop of white blood, he would hang the lot of them. He reported the deception to Poinsett in a single, dry sentence. In some quarters, Jesup’s actions were predictable enough that a Georgia newspaper had urged him to capture the Seminoles two days before he did so.⁶²

Throughout the fall of 1837, Jesup planned his final assault upon the Seminoles. Convinced by Poinsett that outright extermination was not viable, Jesup settled upon overwhelming force instead. The bulk of his troops, some 9000 men, he sent into the southern half of Florida. After years of service, many officers were weary of battle, wondering how many men had to be sacrificed to, as one officer put it, “the outrages and scandalous policy pursued by our government to the Seminoles.” Following Scott’s

testimony conflicted with the private correspondence of the Cherokees and the response of the Seminoles, and matched preternaturally well with Jesup’s pre-conceived biases. Most likely, the former slave was attempting to further ingratiate himself with his new allies. See Keiffer, *Maligned General* 192.
⁶² Jesup to Poinsett, December 15, 1837, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 919-920; “The War Party in Peace, The Peace Party in War,” *The Globe*, January 25, 1838; “To the Editors,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 27, 1838; “Remarks of Mr. Glascock of Georgia,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, January 24, 1838, 66-68; Jesup to Poinsett, July 7, 1838; “The Captive Seminoles.,” *The Atlas*, January 22, 1838; Cherokee Delegation; Cherokee Delegation; “Affairs in Florida,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 5, 1838; “Important from Florida,” *Savannah Georgian*, December 12, 1837.

template, Jesup planned to divide his men into seven columns, each of whom had orders to find and engage the Seminoles wherever they may be hiding.⁶³

On December 19, Jesup gave Colonel Zachary Taylor, newly arrived in Florida, permission to launch a campaign in search of the enemy. Leading over a thousand men, Taylor moved deep into southern Florida toward Lake Okeechobee. There, for the first time since the early months of the war, some 400 Seminoles offered a direct confrontation. They had chosen a location with decisive tactical advantages. Encamped in a densely tangled hammock with swamps in front of them and Lake Okeechobee behind, they believed their position impregnable. That day, waves of American troops struck at the Seminoles and faced heavy fire. After a series of withering exchanges, the Seminoles withdrew. The Americans had suffered the bulk of the casualties, 26 killed and 112 wounded. For several days, Taylor's troops took on the melancholy task of burying the dead, rounding up the wounded, treating them, and transporting them back to camp. Gaines, Scott, and Jesup had all bragged that the United States had never lost a single engagement with the Seminoles. Following Okeechobee, that could no longer be said.⁶⁴

"Disastrous News from Florida," read the headline of the *Daily National Intelligencer*. Though reporting that the Americans had "cut up" the Indians, news that the United States had suffered well over a hundred casualties stunned observers. Across the nation, newspapers reprinted the article with the same headline. Writers nearly unanimously agreed that the United States had suffered a significant setback. Though

⁶³ "Extracts of a Private Letter of an Officer Now in the United States Army in Florida," *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 21, 1837; *New York Spectator*, December 25, 1837; Robert C. Buchanan, "A Journal of Robert C. Buchanan during the Seminole War," ed., Frank White, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 29.2 (Oct., 1950), 132-142.

⁶⁴ Mahon, *Second Seminole War* 219-230; "Very Late from Florida," Robert C. Buchanan, "A Journal of Robert C. Buchanan," 145-148; *Savannah Georgian*, December 22, 1837.

Taylor and his officers conjectured that the Seminoles had suffered similar losses and disguised them by carrying off their dead, they had little proof aside from some scattered bloodstains. The tactical defeat was minor, 130 men gone from an army essentially limitless, but the defeat was more than physical. For years, army officers had held out the prospect of a European-style engagement as a talismanic guarantee of success. Yet having achieved it, their offensive had been decisively repulsed. As one writer admitted grimly, “It really seems as though Ocoola’s words are to be made true, as to a five years war.” Another reporter joked that Taylor and his men had suffered through “Christmas and New Year *a la Seminole*.”⁶⁵

Over the next month, Jesup’s forces and the Seminoles fought a series of inconclusive battles in which each side suffered minor casualties. “Enough,” said a series of Jesup’s officers. Tasked with marching through an impassable wilderness to secure land that appeared valueless, a succession of Jesup’s most trusted subordinates approached him and urged him to allow the Seminoles possession of a district in southern Florida, far south from any point in which any white would, or could, live. They reported to Jesup that “most, if not all” of the officers in the army agreed in their assessment. The logic of conquest had led them through the swamps of Florida for no purpose beyond the dictates of leaders who defined American honor strictly through a racialized spectrum of domination, consolidation, and force. Jesup, having taken their mission as his own, was now the one best positioned to moderate it. As one officer asserted, surrender may entail

⁶⁵ “Disastrous News from Florida,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 11, 1838; “Authentic from Florida,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 18, 1838; “Latest from Florida,” *Camden Commercial Courier*, February 3, 1838.

“giving up the point, but better to do that, than prosecute as we have done, a war, to say the least, of doubtful policy and more doubtful justice.”⁶⁶

Most likely, Jesup would have ignored the entreaties of his subordinates, as Poinsett had pointedly ignored his two prior attempts to temper American policy, but in the aftermath of the Battle of Okeechobee, Jesup received a letter from Colonel John Sherburne in Washington, the officer who had organized the Cherokee deputation. His report was explosive. According to Sherburne, after Taylor’s loss at Okeechobee, there nearly was enough momentum in Congress to authorize Jesup to make peace and allow the Seminoles to remain. However, the Florida Territorial delegate, Charles Downing, being, in Sherburne’s words, “supported by certain nameless characters, high in office, who are very fearful of your success,” quashed the proposal. Sherburne claimed he had directly lobbied Poinsett to end the war on Jesup’s terms. In response, Poinsett had maintained that he and Jackson had come too far to deviate. Nevertheless, Sherburne’s news motivated Jesup to make a last, desperate attempt for peace.⁶⁷

On the morning of February 7, 1838, Jesup received a Seminole messenger and arranged a meeting with the hostile chiefs that evening. There, Halleck-Hajo, speaking for the Seminoles, expressed a desire for peace, provided they could remain in Florida. They would, he said, accept any territory, however small. Jesup then went back to his tent

⁶⁶ R Archer to Reverend D Goodwin, January 6, 1839, James David Glunt Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida; Keiffer, *Maligned General* 202-204.

⁶⁷ H. Sherburne to Jesup, January 22, 1838, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers. On the questionable merits of Sherburne’s assessment of the political situation, see chapter 4.

and penned a letter to Washington. One month later, after having received no answer, he wrote a second.⁶⁸

Taken together, Jesup's letters provided a remarkable dissenting voice on the efforts to impose American rule on Florida. Jesup understood the intertwining of conquest and subjugation, in some ways better than anyone. Over the past months he had threatened, deceived, extorted, and brutalized. He had unleashed the full force of the American war machine. And, upon careful reflection, he rejected the logic that he had so zealously made manifest.

In Jesup's first letter, he began by reiterating the argument he had made to no avail the previous year: removing Indians who were not hemmed in by white settlers was both pointless and inordinately difficult. Although he wholeheartedly supported the policy of Indian removal, he believed that Florida was not yet a mature enough society to carry it out. Where in the past, he had couched his opposition to the war as mere musings or blotted out his arguments with a large X, this time he went further, directly questioning whether "the object we are contending for would be worth the cost?" Proposing to weigh the monetary demands of the war against its object, Jesup concluded it would be far better to allow the Seminoles refuge in southern Florida, guarded by a military detachment and served by an American trading outpost.

In Jesup's second letter, he utilized the same discourse as his superiors to take direct aim at the pointlessness of the American effort: "It has been said that the national honor forbids any compromise with them ... a band of naked savages, now beaten, broken, dispirited, and dispersed. I think those who believe so form a very low opinion of

⁶⁸ Jesup to Poinsett, July 6, 1838, *Senate Document 507*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 2-12; Mahon, *Second Seminole War* 234; "Further from Florida," *Maryland Gazette*, January 18, 1838. Jesup to Major Jupiter, February 12, 1838, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent; Jesup to Taylor, March 5, 1838, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent.

national honor.” He characterized the war itself as a “reckless waste of blood and treasure” and asserted that if the United States allowed the Seminoles a few years on a miserable tract of land, they would soon request emigration themselves. All it would take would be for the War Department to not identify success solely with an unyielding drive to subjugate the Seminoles.⁶⁹

Poinsett responded to Jesup before receiving his second letter. He disclaimed all responsibility for setting Indian policy. The Van Buren administration was bound, he wrote, by the fair and lawful Treaty of Payne’s Landing as well as by legislation passed by both houses of Congress and signed by Andrew Jackson. The President, therefore, had a constitutional duty to fulfill the terms of both the law and the treaty and it was Jesup’s duty to carry out his orders. The matter was settled; indeed, according to Poinsett, it had been settled seven years ago with the passing of the Indian Removal Act. After receiving the letter, Jesup regretfully wrote to Zachary Taylor in a letter marked confidential, lamenting that we “have a war on our hands for the next ten years.”⁷⁰

The Florida that Thomas Jesup envisioned, in which Seminoles and whites would live together as neighbors, was unworkable in reality. Though the Seminoles often evinced a willingness to remain in the southern tip of the territory, white Florida public opinion against the measure was uniform and violent. Slaveholding settlers would never feel secure in their property if their slaves had the opportunity to flee south and find sanctuary with the Seminoles. They would not have ceased lobbying the territorial and federal government. If Jesup had succeeded in extending the territorial government’s

⁶⁹ Jesup to Poinsett, February 11, 1838 in Sprague, *The Florida War* 199-201; Jesup to Poinsett, March 14, 1838, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, ed., Clarence Carter, 25:494-495; Keiffer, *Maligned General* 204-205.

⁷⁰ Poinsett to Jesup, March 1, 1838, in Sprague, *The Florida War* 201-202; Jesup to Taylor, March 5, 1838, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent.

jurisdiction over Indian territory as a compromise measure, the results of his armistice were easy to envision, whether Jesup realized it or not. State legislatures had made their intentions clear during the late 1820s: Indian government would be dissolved, their chiefs deprived of their authority. Individual Indians would be trapped by debt and thrown in prison. Whites would produce claims for the Seminoles' slaves and forcibly reincorporate them into the slave society of the Deep South. The Seminoles' victory would be short lived and pyrrhic. Yet, for all the impossibilities of his proposals, Jesup envisioned a future in which Indians, secure in their autonomy, could coexist alongside a strong American state. The impracticality of an idea does not invalidate its moral worth.

Unfortunately for Jesup, though his advice would go unheeded by the administration, his dissent would not go unnoticed. Francis Blair, Jesup's putative friend and neighbor, opened the floodgates. Inverting all logic, Blair publicly accused the general of allowing the Seminoles to "conquer a peaceable possession of the land they had ceded," obliterating the distinction between conquest and compromise. As the Seminoles would still offer a haven to runaway slaves and a foothold for a foreign invasion, he argued Jesup's request was "inadmissible." Other Democratic editors followed with combustible language: "This yielding of the palm of victory to the savages, this dastardly project to tarnish the fair fame of American arms." "Shall we ... acknowledge ourselves vanquished by a pitiful tribe of Indians?" "The war is to be ended – by the triumph of the Seminoles." "MORAL TREASON." Victory had become a moral imperative. The means by which it might be achieved were irrelevant. Any outcome

which offered all of the same benefits as victory was surrender. Only complete removal could suffice.⁷¹

It was not a surprise, then, that one month later in early April, Poinsett ordered Jesup to return to Washington to resume his command of the Quartermaster's Office. After settling his affairs, Jesup turned over the campaign to Brigadier General Zachary Taylor, who had earned promotion after the Battle of Okeechobee. Looking back over his campaign, Jesup contented himself with the knowledge that he had captured 2400 Seminoles and African-Americans. As his final acts as commander, Jesup wrote out two statements, one guaranteeing freedom to Abraham should he prove faithful and a second cementing the emancipation of another Black Seminole who had aided his troops.⁷²

When Jesup turned his command over to Zachary Taylor, he wrote him a personal letter describing the situation on the frontier, and closed with a wish: "hoping you may before the close of the season wind up this perplexing and harassing war to our own satisfaction, and wishing you health, fortune, and prosperity." Jesup may have meant the final phrase, the entreaty to end this war "to our own satisfaction," as a stock conclusion, a platitude over which he never lingered. Still, nothing could have better summarized his own hazy relationship to a command for which he hungered, but whose objectives he never embraced. For Jesup, ending the war on any terms would have satisfied him. Bloodhounds or peace treaties, extermination or emancipation - either path might have sufficed. If Jesup's nearly pathological embrace of amorality irrevocably estranged him

⁷¹ "Florida War.," *The Globe*, March 16, 1838; "The Florida War and the Seminoles. General Jesup.," *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, March 21, 1836; *The Floridian*, March 31, 1838; "The War.," *Charleston Courier*, March 30, 1838; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, reprinted in "The War in Florida," *Boston Courier*, March 22, 1838.

⁷² Jesup to Poinsett, July 6, 1838, in Sprague, *The Florida War 183-197*; Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles*, 31-32; Taylor to Jesup, April 8, 1838, Thomas Sidney Jesup Papers, 1780-1907, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

from reformers who opposed the war as a defense of minority rights, it offered him a dispassionate vantage point from which to appreciate the distorted priorities of his superiors and their Democratic allies. To them, to remove Indians was to foster progress and equality, a goal so vital to the nation that compromise appeared equivalent to dishonor. It was a logical leap Jesup would not make. It was a paradoxical and tragic aspect of Jesup's personality: the same impulses that led him to seize Osceola and blacken his name compelled him to put pen to paper and deride the war as a "reckless waste." Regardless of the result, his critique of the expansionistic ethos of his superiors, no matter how hypocritical or tentative, was the most perceptive and public denunciation of American frontier policy between the passage of the Indian Removal Act and the annexation of Texas. An ineffectual and inconsistent voice of protest, Thomas Jesup protested nonetheless.⁷³

⁷³ Jesup to Taylor, May 15, 1838, Jesup Papers, Letters Sent.

Chapter 3

“You Will Gird on Your Swords”: Volunteers, Nationalism, and Violence during the Second Seminole War

The friction between Major Mark Anthony Cooper and General Winfield Scott came to a head in March 1836. A week earlier, Scott had promised Cooper that his battalion of Georgia volunteers would play an important role in the coming campaign against the Seminoles. However, when the day came, Scott left orders for Cooper and his men to remain behind as a reserve unit. Furious, Cooper marched after the general's mounted retinue, reached him several days later, and demanded that his superior officer include him in his plans. Scott acquiesced, but only after taking notice of the battalion's rations, five wagons filled with the finest Georgia bacon. Knowing that the coming campaign would stretch his army's stocks to the limit, Scott ordered Cooper to hand over the bacon so it could be distributed to the rest of the troops. Not an unusual request from a commanding officer, but Cooper, whose later political career would distinguish him as a fervent believer in states-rights, refused to obey it. Scott demanded Cooper come to his tent. According to his own account, expecting to be arrested, Cooper coolly pulled aside two trusted officers and swore to them, "We will hold onto the bacon, come what may. You will gird on your swords and follow me . . . Do as I order and strike when I strike." At their meeting, contrary to Cooper's threatening words, the two men did come to something of an accord. Of the five wagons of bacon, Cooper and his volunteers would take three. The remaining two would feed the rest of the army. Cooper promptly returned to his battalion, ordered all of the bacon crammed into his three wagons, burned the empty two wagons earmarked for the rest of the soldiers, and marched to the front. Less

than three years after this, the second bacon's rebellion, Georgia voters elected Cooper to the House of Representatives.¹

Mark Anthony Cooper, alongside thousands of Southern men who rushed to Florida, fervently believed in the Indian-hating ethos that they thought underlay the Second Seminole War. They came to Florida determined to "chastise" the Seminoles and eradicate the last bastions of nonwhite autonomy in the southeast, in the process incorporating Indian land into the plantation system of the Deep South. They had no interest in assimilation, even as it had been redefined by Jackson. Unlike settlers throughout the rest of the Deep South, they fought largely for abstract principles of white supremacy, masculine independence, and self-actualization rather than the personal acquisition of land. They crafted a chivalric narrative around themselves as knights in the service of their nation, sent to defend wailing widows and crying orphans against a savage threat. Their enemies were subhuman, bestial, the scourge of domestic tranquility. In subjugating their foes, if all went according to plan, they would pacify Florida, enrich themselves, and earn the laurels of a nation. Their conception of their identity and that of Jackson's imagined nation coincided utterly. By forcing the Seminoles to submit to their country's terms through the application of martial violence, they would realize their full potential as young masculine men. Simultaneously, their nation would prove itself a vigorous force on the world stage by actively repressing the last vestiges of its savage past. The thousands of volunteers in the Second Seminole War made manifest their

¹ For more on Cooper's political career and his confrontation with Joshua Giddings, see chapter 5. Mark Cooper Pope III and J Donald MacKee, *Mark Anthony Cooper: The Iron Man of Georgia* (Atlanta: Graphic Publishing, 2000), 275-277.

visions of manhood through cultural processes by which they linked their capacity for violence to the self-realization of both their nation and themselves.²

The volunteers connected this process of violent self-realization, on some level, to the example of the Seminoles themselves. Though they were not consciously aware of the irony, the volunteers envied what they overtly disdained as the unconscionable savagery of their enemy. The Seminoles killed, raped, and pillaged; through Indian war, they had the chance to do so as well. Unbridled Indian killing, patterned after what they viewed as unprovoked massacres of whites, gave them the opportunity to legitimize themselves as autonomous young men in the service of their country. They fought not to remove the Seminoles, but to displace them.³

The priorities of the volunteers necessarily lay in tension with the policies of their government. For all of the iniquities of federal Indian policy, few leading politicians ever

² For more on manhood as a process rather than as a collection of traits, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). M.M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston: Burges and Honour, 1836), 117; A Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War, and Sketches during a Campaign* (Charleston: Dan J Dowling, 1836). I distinguish the motivations of the volunteers from what some scholars have identified as settler colonialism, settlers who migrate to new lands with the intention of forming permanent communities, founding new political orders, and eliminating native populations, whether through violence or removal. In contrast, the vast majority of Second Seminole War volunteers displayed little inclination to remain in Florida following their service. For more on settler colonialism, see Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999); Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous Peoples in America and Australia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

³ On the linkages between settler violence and their identification with Indians, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

countenanced outright slaughter. Indian killing writ large would never be the nation's official policy, every president from Washington until Nixon gestured toward assimilation as an ideal that might one day be reached. Yet Jackson recognized that the unrestrained brutality of the volunteers represented a fount of power that could be harnessed in the nation's interest, even if their goals were not explicitly adopted. And, although extinction was outside the bounds of political discourse, subjugation was not.

When the volunteers failed, when their contracts ended and the war still raged – when they lost – they rationalized away their ineffectiveness through the discourses with which they were so familiar. They mythologized their service and found others to blame for the inconsequence of their experience. They no longer spoke of the defenseless women and children who they had once held to be the true beneficiaries of their mission. National security no longer hung on the force of their arms. When all available evidence pointed to their failure, they instead found success within - their own dignity, their own reputation, and their own bravery. Failure lay without, in the federal government that restrained their violent energy, bound them within ossified military regimens, and prioritized not Indian subjugation, not Indian killing.

For the volunteers and the likeminded, this trapped them within a dilemma seemingly without a solution. They were nationalists distrustful of their government and ardent expansionists who were opposed to the intervention of the federal army, yet utterly dependent on its resources and logistical might. Their only answer lay in agitating for their government to give them free rein in expansive warfare, offer them logistical support on the nation's frontiers, and then refrain from imposing any ideology of its own on foreign policy. In their unique position lay the roots of Southern Manifest Destiny and

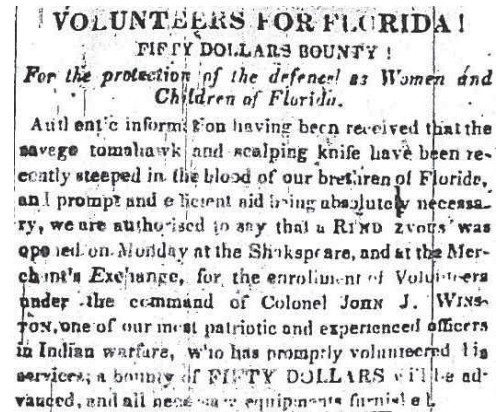
the enduring myth that any limit, be it moral or legal, on individual experience was a restraint on their freedom. Consequently, beginning in the 1830s, popular southern arguments for aggressive expansion evolved separately from those of northern agitators, and paradoxically led to seemingly congruent arguments for national expansion with diametrically opposed visions of the nation's future. Andrew Jackson and his ideological allies believed they had unleashed likeminded partisans into the field, but subjugation and annihilation were not identical impulses and the mythmaking of the volunteers could not be controlled.

The Volunteer Persuasion

The volunteers who flocked to Florida cared deeply about the outcome of the Second Seminole War. Their struggle against the Seminole Indians was more than a mere campaign to police the frontier. Rather, while they hunted the Seminoles through the Florida wilderness, they tested the racial and gender assumptions that undergirded their own identities. They believed the progress of the war was inextricably linked to their own demonstrations of masculinity and, when the war effort faltered, required them to explain away their defeats in language that nonetheless vindicated their own martial spirit. In the independent masculinity of the volunteers, Andrew Jackson and other leading Democrats identified their own vision of the ideal nation, but the patriotism of the volunteers was exceedingly circumscribed. Having identified the war effort with their own success, the volunteers were far more concerned with the personal, not the national, ramifications of the Second Seminole War.

During the first weeks of the war, news of the Dade ambush spread from town to town throughout the South. Invariably following soon behind, published in newspapers and posted in public spaces, were calls for volunteers to march to Florida and aid those plagued by irredeemably savage forces.

Authored by prominent citizens, the notices urged their neighbors to leave their farms and join militia groups en route to Florida. They were of a piece, conjoining nationalism to the defense of white supremacy in, as one article put it, the “patriotic duty of arresting the



VOLUNTEERS FOR FLORIDA!
FIFTY DOLLARS BOUNTY!
For the protection of the defenseless Women and Children of Florida.
Authentic information having been received that the savage tomahawk and scalping knife have been recently steeped in the blood of our brethren of Florida, and prompt and efficient aid being absolutely necessary, we are authorized to say that a RIFLE ZEVOTIS was opened on Monday at the Shakspeare, and at the Merchant's Exchange, for the enrolment of Volunteers under the command of Colonel JOHN J. WINSTON, one of our most patriotic and experienced officers in Indian warfare, who has promptly volunteered his services; a bounty of FIFTY DOLLARS will be advanced, and all necessary equipments furnished.

tomahawk, and the scalping knife, in their work of death and destruction,” for the benefit of “the helpless females and starving orphans, now houseless, wandering and unprotected.” Many calls, like the one shown here, made specific references to the defense of “our brethren,” explicitly invoking volunteer service in the name of racial solidarity. And volunteers answered, 23,530 of them within the first year of the war. With the exception of 67 from Washington, DC, all hailed from the Deep South and its immediate neighbors: South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee. Aside from South Carolina in the wake of the nullification crisis, these states were the most loyally Democratic in the nation. The volunteers identified with and idolized Andrew Jackson, another man who had volunteered to march in the service of his country against the nation’s foes on the frontiers. In most states, prominent local citizens sent out calls for volunteers, governors authorized bounties to attract recruits, renowned Indian fighters took the command, ambitious sons of the gentry served as officers, and nonelite

Southerners made up the bulk of the forces. The volunteer groups rarely attracted men in charge of their households, the responsibility of tending to farms and providing for a family precluding a six month commitment. Once they arrived in Florida, the militia groups would serve alongside, though not intermingled with, army brigades and under the direct command of officers in the army.⁴

The calls invariably emphasized the Seminoles' assault on the domestic. References to the helpless women and children of Florida motivated thousands of volunteers, their selfless defense of the defenseless providing evidence of their own martial manhood. As one Georgia newspaper described it, though the duty they had chosen to undertake was arduous, they were men "animated by the feelings of Americans, who cannot stand and look on to see their countrymen and countrywomen, robbed, ravished, and murdered." Commenting on the proposed mission, one New Orleans newspaper urged its readers to "remember our own countrymen invoke us – the flames of their dwellings rise to the heavens." Presses reprinted massacre narratives from Florida, all implicitly asking the same questions that one stated explicitly: "Who can hear the bare recital of such a deed, and not feel horror stricken at the cold-blooded barbarity? Who can hear and not feel a thirst to revenge such outrage?"⁵

⁴ "Volunteers for Florida!," *Mobile Commercial Register*, January 27, 1836; "The Meeting in Behalf of the Floridians," *The Charleston Courier*, January 20, 1836; "Volunteers for Florida," *Virginia Free Press*, February 18, 1836. For an overview of the volunteers' relationship to the army, see John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1985), 188; John Missall and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 101-103.

⁵ Andrew Welch, *A Narrative of the Life and Sufferings of Mrs. Jane Johns ...* (Charleston: Burke and Giles, 1837); *An Authentic Narrative of the Seminole War* (Providence, RI: D.F. Blanchard, 1836). For more on white reactions to Indian assaults on the domestic space, see Jane Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 71-96. On Southern ideology and the domestic space, see Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Willie Lee Rose, "The Domestication of Domestic Slavery," in *Slavery and Freedom*, ed., William Freehling (New York: Oxford

If the calls for volunteers crafted a mythology of disinterestedness and chivalry around the militia, the volunteers were all too happy to contribute as well. In books and articles detailing their motivation to volunteer, most men, naturally, emphasized their own bravery, chivalry, and selflessness. At every point they distinguished themselves from their enfeebled peers in the army. As one Tennessee writer explained, “they were volunteers, from among the first classes of our citizens; men vastly superior to the despicable and degrading impulses, which induce the mere mercenary rabble to enlist in the ranks of regular armies.” Their differences lay not in the fact of their service, but in their motivations for undertaking it. “We stood up manfully for our *own* rights,” one Charleston volunteer wrote, “we desired to assume the loveliest attitude of power, when it is seen to stoop to the weak and unprotected.” Numerous editorials across the South lauded the volunteers as heroes for risking their lives in aid of the defenseless. One young girl in Charleston wrote in her diary that she thanked God a volunteer group had turned her brother away, but still stole away to the Citadel and watched in awe of the young men drilling in preparation for their Florida expedition. From the pulpit, ministers mediated the necessity of bloodshed with the tenets of Christianity and praised the volunteers for placing country above their own lives, conjoining patriotism with Christian brotherhood. As the volunteers embarked, young ladies showered them with laurels, poets dedicated works to their honor, and families beamed with pride as they watched their sons depart.⁶

Press, 1982), 18-36; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1998), 84-90; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

⁶ Cohen, *Notices of Florida* 107; January 8, 1836 and February 9, 1836, Anna Caroline Lesesne, *A Journal Commenced by A.C. Lesesne*, South Carolina Historical Society; Benjamin Franklin Baldwin, *Notices of the Campaign of the TN Volunteers under General Robert Armstrong in the Years 1836-7* (Nashville, Cameron and Fall, 1843), 5-6; List of Laurens Volunteers for the Saluda Regiment, Tennessee Historical Society, Special Collection.

Faced with an overt assault against a space they considered sacred, the Southern volunteers viewed the Seminoles starkly, as absolute evil. To them, the Indians appeared agents of malevolence, corroding all they touched with no purpose save destruction. In recounting his first glimpse of the enemy, one South Carolina volunteer launched into telling hyperbole: “here were the red devils at last,” he wrote, “in legitimate red skins, body and bones.” Given the atmosphere surrounding the war, the reference to “red devils” was commonplace, as was the second clause, which reduced the Seminoles to collections of body parts and organs, stripping them of their soul. The war confirmed what the volunteers were certain they knew from history. Living in the southeast, they had come of age in the aftermath of the War of 1812 and were well aware of the devastation British-allied Indians had wreaked. They defined themselves as civilized, white, and Christian, all the better to differentiate themselves from the savage heathens of the wilderness. The Second Seminole War offered them a confrontation with the most iniquitous of their Indian neighbors. In the aftermath of the Dade ambush, it seemed as if the contrast between races had never been so stark, the triumph of white supremacy never so urgent.⁷

⁷ Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 186. On the tendency of soldiers to dehumanize their enemy, see Elaine Scarry, “The Difficulty of Imagining Other Persons,” in *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, ed. Eugene Weiner, (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1998), 40-62; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translator Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1-52. On early American settler attitudes toward Indians, see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); James Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); Fred Anderson, *The Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America* (New York: Vintage, 2001).

As they set off for Florida, the volunteers identified their commitment to white supremacy and forceful expansionism with the national interest. For them, there was no distinction between the two. Their passage to Florida was a responsibility, one they had inherited from their fathers at birth. The volunteers of New Orleans made the point explicitly, identifying with Jackson's victory at the Battle of New Orleans. The recruitment committee announced "the spirit which pervaded New Orleans on the 23rd December, 1814 was awakened in this community ... to meet, disperse and conquer the motley hordes of Seminoles and Negroes that are now spreading havoc, massacre and fire." Senator Thomas Hart Benton praised the volunteers, asserting "courage was their birthright and inheritance." This pride was national; Governor Richard Keith Call appealed to his fellow Floridians by reminding them that they were the "descendants of the war-worn patriots of '76," and that volunteering was their duty as much as their honor.⁸

The size of the conflict may have appeared small, but its stakes were not. Not merely a defense against an Indian threat, this, as the New Orleans committee in charge of recruiting put it, was "the fiery trial of patriotism." Invoking the recent Nullification Crisis, in Charleston, the corresponding committee modulated its message to attract states-rights South Carolinians, cautioning that "confusion seems to prevail both in the war and financial Departments of the Government at Washington" while much of Florida burned. Most distressingly of all, the committee warned "the negroes, in considerable numbers, are leagued with the Seminoles and to the horrors of an Indian war, will

⁸ Genovese, *Mind of the Master Class* 338, Brown, *Southern Honor* 34; Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2008). "Volunteers.," *Southern Banner*, January 28, 1836, quoted from *Augusta Constitutionalist*; "Patriotism of New Orleans," *New Orleans Bee*, January 25, 1836; "Services of the Volunteers," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 403-406; Richard Keith Call, "Fellow Citizens," *The Floridian*, June 25, 1836.

probably be added those of a servile conflict.” According to one writer, the solution was simple: “these savage tribes in Florida must now be exterminated.”⁹

In their service, the volunteers amalgamated wildly contradictory ideas to rationalize their mission. Though they penetrated wildernesses seldom seen by white eyes, they explicitly viewed Florida as their own land under assault by an alien force. It was this act of invasion, what one South Carolina writer described, in an unintentional echo of Andrew Jackson’s harangue against white intermediaries who had advised the Seminoles in 1821, as the Seminoles’ deliberate transgression by which they “invaded regions which they never pretended to possess,” that required defense. It was as though the Treaty of Payne’s Landing had rewritten reality itself – if the Seminoles had agreed to emigrate, their presence in Florida represented a violation of the natural order. According to Florida governor Richard Keith Call, in detailing his decision to raise the Florida militia, “the invasion of the country, and the murder of our citizens at their own threshold . . . while engaged in cultivating their fields,” necessarily demanded the strictest of responses, implicitly contrasting the ordered tranquility of white, Floridian domesticity with Indian anarchy. A Floridian, attempting to organize a volunteer group to defend his community wrote a breathless letter to his brother, explaining the dystopian reality that had set itself on Florida: “all of east and a large portion of Middle Florida is laid waste – plantations abandoned – the women and children in black houses.” All of the women and children in black houses, a apocalyptic vision at once evoking both the empty frames of homes that Indians had burned to the ground and, perhaps, a world in which African-Americans seized control of the frontier – were, to him, the epitome of the Seminole

⁹ “Florida.,” *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, January 25, 1836; “Florida.,” *New-Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, January, 25, 1836 (2); “Public Meeting.,” *Charleston Courier*, January 22, 1836.

threat. One Tennessee volunteer, who left for the front just five days after the birth of his daughter, recalled in his memoirs, that though he was “endowed with an eminently amiable and domestic disposition,” he surrendered at once “the tenderest ties of family and home.” To honor those ties, to protect the Florida children who themselves faced violence and death, he chose to serve. In their own ways, the volunteers convinced themselves of their lofty purpose.¹⁰

That noble dream legitimized war to the knife. In conceptualizing Florida as suffering the invasion of an alien race rather than the organized resistance of an Indian nation rooted in the territory, the volunteers transformed their mission from one of defense into one of eradication. In normalizing the condition of Florida into one that reflected the homogenous plantation-centered economy and culture of its neighbors, the volunteers disdained the rhetoric of assimilation and civilization. Florida would be as white as their own homes.

The volunteers might have thought of the Seminoles as subhuman, but the Indians enraged and confounded them by unabashedly refusing to accept their subordinate position. The volunteers’ society had taught them clearly: Indians were as children to them, to be guided, shepherded, and overseen. Osceola’s stunning murder of Wiley Thompson broke that implicit contract. As if reciting a litany, several volunteer accounts referenced Ransom Clarke’s oft-reprinted narrative of the Dade ambush, the Seminoles’

¹⁰ On the relationship between slavery and patriarchy, see Michael P. Johnson, “Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 46.1 (Feb 1980), 45-72; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1974). General William Bowen Campbell, *Sketch of the Life and Public Services of Gen. Wm. B. Campbell of Tennessee* (Nashville: The Offices of the *True Whig and Republican Banner*, 1851), 5-6; Jackson Morton to Leo Morton, July 19, 1836, Papers of the Related Morton and Dickinson Families of Orange and Carolina Counties, Va., 1727-1978, Accession #9755--9755-b, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; Cohen *Notices of Florida* 136; Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 153; Richard Keith Call, *Supplement to the Floridian. Tallahassee, Fla.: Correspondence, &c.: the Following Message of His Excellency the Governor* (Tallahassee, FL: The Floridian, 1838), 2.

striking demonstration of autonomy, agency, and dominion, in their own letters and diaries. The Seminoles' brazen act of violence against their enemies was, to them, as much a statement of principle as a military act. To the volunteers who marched against expressions of Indian sovereignty, it was another reason for the war's urgency.¹¹

In basing their service on the defense of white supremacy, the volunteers wholly associated their rationale for service with its moral underpinnings. As debates over Indian removal had shifted from Congress and the courts to everyday struggles between settlers and Indians over land, property, and legitimate authority, Southerners increasingly asserted justifications for violence against Indians in the name of civilization. They learned, as one observer of the Black Hawk War put it, of "the border feeling, which permits the destruction of an Indian upon the same principle that it does the wolf." Andrew Jackson and other Democratic officials had used that incipient violence as a cudgel against Indians before, utilizing the rage of local settlers to cast Indian removal as a means of protection for the embattled Indians. In Florida, Jackson had the opportunity to utilize that fury more directly. This disparate compound of elements linking violence to white supremacy impelled the volunteers to Florida, offered them a basis for their actions, and justified the risk of their lives.¹²

In their violation of the Southern domestic space and their violent affirmation of nonwhite autonomy, the Seminoles struck at the very core of many of the volunteers' sense of identity. In response, the volunteers struck back, with all the savagery they could

¹¹ For the reprinting of Ransom Clark's account of the Dade ambush, see Cohen, *Notices of Florida* 70-73; Barr, *A Correct and Authentic Narrative* 9-12; Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 38-41.

¹² Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975) 113-114; Charles Wittlesey, "Recollections of a Tour through Wisconsin in 1832," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, 1 (1903), 83.

muster. One veteran of the Florida volunteers recalled one afternoon in which he and his friends had discovered a lone Indian woman walking into a nearby white town. The men opened fire, killing her instantly, and, in the words of the volunteer, approached her body and “mutilated her shamefully.” In another instance, when one South Carolina brigade killed its first Indian, several volunteers seized the body, scalped it, stretched it naked onto a pole, and marched it into camp for all to see. Many gathered around to gaze at their fallen enemy, his body grisly proof of the force of their arms. One volunteer, though alienated by the proceedings, hesitantly gazed up at the body and saw it as an oblation, a reference to an offering from God often signifying the body and blood of Christ. Though obscure, it was a fitting reference. The volunteers had sacrificed their victim in the name of what to them was sacred, transforming their fallen enemy into an offering that reasserted what they viewed as the natural order of the frontier. They spoke in the language of the very violence they abhorred.¹³

On the march, volunteers blithely committed acts of unrestrained barbarity. They likely freely scalped their enemies and executed helpless prisoners with offhanded disdain. During the first months of the war, long before Thomas Jesup set off a national firestorm by capturing Osceola under a white flag, Georgia volunteers recounted casually ignoring white flags and ambushing unsuspecting Indians. Of course, the men were not uniformly amoral. One volunteer admitted years later to often thinking of a captured squaw who, he remembered, “was mounted on a horse and compelled to lead the enemy of her people along the by-paths to their paces retreat for the purposes of having them slaughtered.” Putting himself in her place, he admitted to sympathizing with her having

¹³ James Ormond, *James Ormond III Reminiscences* (unpublished), Ormond Family Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida; Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 247-248.

to endure the terrible ordeal of being forced to betray her own people. But for most, the experience was like that of the Louisiana volunteers who, as one observer described them, “rushed in like so many wolves, disregarding every obstacle, and pursued the enemy to the banks of the river, following them by the blood which had flowed in streams.”¹⁴

For many of the volunteers, war and slavery could not be disentangled. When the Missouri volunteers set off for Florida several years after the start of the war, they expected the government would allow them to keep any runaway slaves that they might capture. Closer to home, one Florida woman suspected that volunteers went “entirely to speculate, in land, negroes, and horses and for all the property owned by the tribe.” Moreover, even if the volunteers did not personally carve a homestead out of Seminole land, the absorption of Florida and, with it, the expansion of slave markets, necessarily benefited them, however indirectly.¹⁵

¹⁴ Josephus Guild, the memoirist who recalled the pain of the captured Indian woman, recorded the incident in his diary as well. It clearly troubled him at the time; Guild details the woman’s ordeal over several pages, in far more detail than her importance to the day’s narrative demanded. He also mentions a fact that went unrecorded in his memoir, the woman had a small child with her, and the volunteers forced her to leave him behind with the other captive Indians while they marched. October 13, 1836, Josephus Conn Guild Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives. Though the act of white scalping occasionally surfaced in the volunteers’ texts (see, for example Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 189), they were not commonly recorded. Most likely, the authors, deeply invested in crafting a chivalrous glow around their service, omitted them from their accounts. Certainly many observers at the time believed the worst of the volunteers, see “A Tale of Dreadful War,” *New York Spectator*, December 14, 1837. “Latest from Florida,” *National Intelligencer*, February 8, 1836; Josephus Conn Guild, *Old Times in Tennessee: With Historical, Personal, and Political Scraps and Sketches* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1878), 133; Barr, *Authentic Narrative of the Seminole War* 20. On volunteer atrocities in the Mexican-American War (which were reported far more widely), see Paul Foos, *A Short, Offhand Killing Affair: Soldiers and Social Conflict during the Mexican-American War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 113-137.

¹⁵ Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 119; Mary Watts to William Watts, December 13, 1835, Breckinridge, Gamble and Watts Family Papers, circa 1794-1850, Accession #12170, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.; Phillip Thomas Tucker, “A Forgotten Sacrifice: Richard Gentry, Missouri Volunteers, and the Battle of Okeechobee,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70.1 (Oct., 1991), 153; *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, October 18, 1837.

The presence of the Black Seminoles sparked further anger and violence in defense of their region and culture, the presence of autonomous African-Americans directly linking Indian removal to slavery. One South Carolina volunteer, a planter, philosopher, and poet, rigidly opposed the nation's removal policy. In his mind, to offer civilization to a savage with one hand while taking away their attachment to their homeland - domesticity being the most civilizing impulse of all - was counterproductive to the point of inanity. However, he believed that the Black Seminoles, who in battle were, in his words, "outvying their savage masters in hellish cruelty," posed a special threat to American society, at least for the inveterate defender of slavery. With Nat Turner's rebellion only a few years in the past, Southerners were well aware of the horrors of slave rebellion. The only extant, and therefore widely circulated, account of the Dade ambush made special note of the excessive cruelty of the Seminoles' black allies, recounting how they personally went from wounded man to wounded man, looting the dead and executing those who clung to life. The apparent blood thirst of the Black Seminoles upset the volunteers' conception of the natural order of society, even as it seemed to confirm the righteousness of white supremacy. While marching through Florida country, one South Carolina volunteer insisted that slaves had, "with but few, very few exceptions, rejected the overtures [of the Seminoles] and preferred the condition in which fate had placed them," replicating the accepted trope of slaves who loved their masters and ignoring the several hundred slaves who ran away at the start of the war and made the opposite, far riskier, decision. Those who did consider the implications of the Seminole and Black Seminole alliance found they reinforced the necessity of the South's

slave system: freed from white coercion, African-Americans were liable to strike at the very people who had pledged themselves bound to both enslave and foster them.¹⁶

They well understood the vulnerabilities of slave societies: fear of slave rebellion and racial conflagration had animated them since birth. For many of the volunteers, then, the primary purpose of their mission was to subjugate the masses of Indians before the Seminoles and their allies could liberate Florida's slave population. Weeks after the Dade ambush, the first volunteers to reach Florida, a detachment of Charleston volunteers, marched not to the frontier, but to St. Augustine where anxious planters had transplanted hundreds of slaves, hoping to isolate them from the frontier contagion. They served to reinforce the city's police force and forestall a possible slave uprising, not to repel an unlikely Indian assault on the fortified city. The experience of the plantation had taught them well of the need for intimidation to quell nonwhite agitation.¹⁷

The slaveowning culture of the volunteers had practical implications for their service in Florida. Used to associating manual labor with slave work, many volunteers simply refused to undertake the drudgery that comprised the bulk of modern, organized warfare. The effect was not lost on many. General Thomas Jesup complained that though

¹⁶ Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 38, 80-88; F.S. Belton, "Official Account of the United States Troops by the Indians," *New York Spectator*, January 28, 1836; Cohen, *Notices of Florida* 81; Canter Brown, "Race Relations in Territorial Florida, 1821-1845," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73.3 (Jan., 1995), 287-307. For more on the connections between the Second Seminole War and fears of slave revolts, see Matthew Clavin, "'It Is a Negro, not an Indian War': Southampton, St. Domingo, and the Second Seminole War," *America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858*, ed., William Belko (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 181-208. Clavin noted that the frontispiece to Blanchard's narrative literally used identical engraving as a narrative of Nat Turner's rebellion.

¹⁷ Guy A. Cardwell, Jr, "William Henry Timrod, the Charleston Volunteers, and the Defense of St Augustine." *North Carolina Historical Review*, 18 (Jan 1941), 27-37; On the fear of slave rebellions in the Deep South, see James Dormon, "The Persistent Specter: Slave Rebellion in Territorial Louisiana," *Louisiana History*, 18.4 (1977), 389-404; Lacy Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 328-357; Michael Johnson, "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 58.4 (Oct., 2001), 915-976.

he respected their fighting ability, “the Southern militia do not labor for themselves, and consequently cannot or will not labor for the public.” Another officer reported that volunteers consistently refused any request that they assist in fortifying, digging, or supplying as each explained he “did not come to work, but to fight.” As the volunteers seethed at the slow pace of the war, tension between army officers and their volunteers grew, hindering the war effort further.¹⁸

The rivalry between the volunteers and regular soldiers was no narrow dispute lacking wider national import. During the flush times of the early 1830s, the nation had enjoyed its first sizable national surplus and arguments coursed through Congress over how to best utilize it. Several prominent politicians pointed toward the increasing tension with Britain and France and suggested that the government augment its army to guard against future attacks from European powers. Many in the South demurred. They echoed the Founding Fathers in their distrust of a standing army and instead suggested that the nation could rely on citizen soldiers in case of an emergency.¹⁹

The volunteers, many of them ardent believers in states-rights, well understood themselves as points of evidence in the argument over the size of the federal army. Should the volunteers have triumphed, the Second Seminole War could have well have been seen as having proven the value of an armed citizen force. Where the militias could hardly match the army in terms of numbers, their supporters theorized they would exceed

¹⁸ Jacob Rhett Motte, *Journey into the Wilderness: An Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field during the Creek and Seminole Wars 1836-1838*, ed., James F. Sunderman (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1953), 196; Thomas Jesup to B.F. Butler, December 12, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 52. For a contemporary critique of slaveholder aversion to manual labor, see Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (New York: Burdick Borthers, 1857), 41.

¹⁹ See, for example, the following series of Congressional debates over the use of volunteers in the Second Seminole War in April, 1836: “Acceptance of Volunteers,” *Gales and Seaton Register of Debates*, 24th Congress, 2nd Session, 3322-3325, 3330-3354, 3367-337.

their rivals in fighting spirit. It was not merely self-aggrandizement, they believed their service had deeper meaning: “experience teaches that large standing armies are fatal enemies to all Republics,” one volunteer wrote, “in all such governments the *people* must be the bulwark and palladium of their defense.” Victory in Florida would weaken arguments for a standing army and therefore the power of the federal government, of whose fidelity to slavery the South always questioned. In fact, several writers in South Carolina bitterly recalled that prior to the Second Seminole War the last time the federal government threatened to mobilize it was aimed not at an enemy of the state, but at Nullifiers. The defeat of the Southern volunteers would not just leave them vulnerable to hostile Indians; worse, it would weaken their ideological position against the overwhelming might of the federal system.²⁰

Ideological tensions were ingrained into the relationship between the officers and the volunteers subordinate to them. While the volunteers rushed to Florida in service of their country, officers were deserting it at a record rate. Though the rate of resignation among the officer corps would skyrocket in 1837 after most of the volunteers had finished their terms, their apathy was apparent well earlier. Ever the most fervent supporters of the war, volunteers bristled at having to take orders from officers who appeared indifferent, if not hostile, to their avowed mission. It was a curious fact of life around army camps throughout Florida: army officers, men who had lost close colleagues and longtime friends, seldom vowed to revenge the Dade ambush. Instead, the volunteers,

²⁰ *Charleston Mercury*, February 13, 1836; “Seminole War.,” *Columbus Enquirer*, January 15, 1836; Henry Hollingsworth, “The Tennessee Volunteers in the Seminole Campaign of 1836: The Diary of Henry Hollingsworth,” edited by Stanley Horn, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 1.2 (Dec., 1943), 329. On the rivalry between volunteers and the army, see also Foos, *A Short, Offhand Killing Affair* 45-59; Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Citizens: The Martial Spirit in America 1775-1865* (New York: MacMillan Books, 1968); Harry Laver, *More than Soldiers: The Kentucky Militia and Society in the Early Republic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

who in December 1835 were safely ensconced on farmsteads hundreds of miles from the Withlacoochee, enthusiastically adopted the mantle of being the avengers of the fallen.

To the volunteers, the officers appeared scared. “We ought to have followed and destroyed them ... but strange to tell our leader has detained us here,” wrote one Tennessee volunteer after a minor victory, his tone suggesting he could not comprehend the actions of his superior officer. Contrary to the officers they believed to be cowardly, in their letters, journals, and memoirs, the volunteers themselves never admitted to fearing death. A supreme confidence in their own fighting abilities along with an equivalent underestimation of the dangers of the Florida frontiers shielded them from confronting the risks they would eventually face. In his diary, one Tennessee volunteer recorded the details of one day’s action. The events were mundane: they had startled a small handful of Indians out a dense tangle of wilderness and fired upon them without facing any real danger from their foes. The volunteers outnumbered their foes at least ten-to-one, but he insisted, “this whole affair was honorable to the men not on account of the number of Indians killed but the bold manner in which they charged.” The Second Seminole War offered ample opportunity to display one’s bravery, the extent of their courage not being determined by the risk of death, but by how one stood.²¹

As a group, the volunteers were keenly aware of the mythology surrounding their service. They readily shaped the narrative of their adventures, contrasting themselves with the military professionals whom they scorned. In each state’s militia, many of the

²¹ William Trousdale to Mary Trousdale, October 9, 1836, William Trousdale Papers, Tennessee Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee. September 30, 1836, Josephus Conn Guild Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives. Dickson Bruce argued that Southern martial spirit was largely a rhetorical illusion and that Southerners were hesitant to join future wars and usually advocated peace over violence in the national realm. However, during the Second Seminole War, numerous citizen committees reported turning away dozens, if not hundreds of volunteers. Dickson Bruce, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 165-180.

officers had political ambitions, believing, rightly, they would return home to the acclaim of their peers. In South Carolina, masses of avowed Nullifiers volunteered and argued, implicitly and explicitly, that their sacrifice proved their loyalty to their nation, if not to prevailing interpretations of the Constitution. The volunteers' own accounts invariably stressed their gentility and disinterestedness, in the most admirable sense of the word. No less than three South Carolina volunteers wrote of their time in Florida and each described their group as well-bred, urbane, and worldly. One writer asserted that his fellows consisted entirely of chemists, philosophers, politicians, moralists, and philosophers, detailing endless nights in Florida spent arguing over philosophical questions on the nature of coercion and freedom under the Constitution of the United States.²²

In truth, the volunteers were not the idealistic lot they claimed to be. One recent emigrant to Florida who volunteered for service multiple times wrote to his sister, "You say that I am trying to get a name ... I am and I will get it and I will get a grave – no. I came here to make money and to get fame." He was dead within six months. In Tennessee, the volunteers believed they had signed on to police the Creek frontier and, fearful of Florida's harsh climate, rebelled against their officers at the news that they were headed to Florida. Only by manipulating their insecurities and reminding them that to desert would bring dishonor did the officers succeed in motivating their men to persist. In Louisiana, partisan politics stood in the way of the war effort as the state's Whig

²² Cohen, *Notices of Florida* 116, 118. For more on the relationship between the Second Seminole War and the politics of Nullification within South Carolina, see James Denham and Canter Brown, "South Carolina Volunteers in the Second Seminole War: A Nullifier Debacle as Prelude to the Palmetto State Gubernatorial Election of 1836," *America's Hundred Years' War: U.S. Expansion to the Gulf Coast and the Fate of the Seminole, 1763-1858*, ed., William Belko (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 209-236.

governor cast about in search of a reliable Whig to place in charge of an overwhelmingly Democratic state militia. Local politics influenced each brigade deeply. Amongst the South Carolinian militia, members debated whether Nullifiers or Jackson loyalists comprised the majority of the volunteers, while two feuding Tennessee officers confronted each other during the first weeks of the war months before they would compete for election to the House of Representatives. Serving in Florida allowed many young men to make powerful friends and pledge their allegiance to powerful patrons. David Campbell, the governor of Virginia, wrote often to his nephew William Bowen Campbell, a future governor of Tennessee, urging him to seek out powerful generals, earn the trust of his men, and cultivate a reputation for integrity, to aid his future political career. Florida, however, was not the place to safeguard one's reputation.²³

Impartial observers tended to puncture their idealized image. Alabama newspapers trumpeted the refinement of their men, but reports from citizens in St. Augustine derided them as uncouth and only barely more civilized than the Seminoles. One army officer reported to his superior that the Alabama volunteers, after being momentarily questioned by one St. Augustine guard, seized his sentry box and threw it into the river, waited, and when the guard emerged, pelted him with mud. After a single look at the South Carolina volunteers, one soldier dismissed them as a group of weak and contemptible boys, most between the ages of 14 and 17. In a moment of honesty, one

²³Captain Mason to Sarah Mason, September 18, 1839, James Mason Letters, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Journal, John Preston Watts Brown, John Preston Watts Brown Papers, Tennessee State Archives, Nashville Tennessee; Hollingsworth, "The Tennessee Volunteers" 272, Canter Brown, "Persifor F. Smith, the Louisiana Volunteers, and Florida's Second Seminole War," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 34.4 (Autumn, 1993), 392; Jackson Morton to George Morton, May 15, 1837, Papers of the Related Morton and Dickinson Families of Orange and Carolina Counties, Va., 1727-1978, Accession #9755--9755-b, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.; David Campbell to William Bowen Campbell, August 29, 1836, David Campbell Papers, Duke University Special Collections.

South Carolina volunteer allowed that his fellows were not entirely patriotic heroes and instead were “mostly adventurers willing to fight Indians.” He went on to admit that the men who volunteered did “put a little money in their pockets,” but judged that given their military acumen, they were worth it. In fact, the volunteers tended to go out of their way to deny any mercenary motives, but bystanders often had suspicions. Alabama newspapers advertised volunteer service by prominently displaying the \$50 salary, a decent amount for a month’s work, especially in winter months for farmers whose livelihood depended on the seasons. It was, for all concerned, a fortuitous convergence of material and idealistic interests.²⁴

As the volunteers stake in the war was much personal as national, they seldom identified with the war’s wider implications - that the United States had unleashed them in pursuit of the Seminoles was sufficient. Success was personal, not collective. Jackson Morton, an early leader of the Florida militia, refused federal requests to re-assemble his command and explained, “I have no wish to enter a field where no laurels are to be gotten, honor or glory to be won, which is not to be done in Florida hunting Indians.” The aforementioned Tennessee volunteers, who signed contracts assuming they would join the Second Creek War, threatened mutiny at the news that they were headed to Florida, preferring easier service closer to home. One volunteer described his fellows as being irate after hearing the news and writing in his journal that “the men became excited against their officers ~~and cursed them and everything connected with it~~ saying that they were not legally bound to go to Florida.” The obsession with legality and compulsion was

²⁴ On Alabama pride in their militia, see *Montgomery Commercial Register*, May 21, 1836. On their behavior in Florida, see “Soldiers in Peace and Citizens in War,” *Morning Herald*, February 7, 1838; *Georgia Messenger*, January 18, 1838; Unsigned to Fanning, December 1837, National Archives Record Group 94, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, 1780s-1917, General Jesup’s Papers, Letters Received from Officers; Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketches of the Seminole War* 119.

more akin to the concerns of an enlisted man than to the idealized image of a volunteer in the service of this country. The reality of the war - the months of searching for an enemy in vain, disease, and death – only exacerbated their dissociation from the war’s avowed aims.²⁵

Both Jackson and the volunteers themselves viewed their service as an extension of a basic mythology integral to their conception of the nation. Like their forefathers, the volunteers would happily risk their lives to advance the tide of civilization against the Seminoles, who represented their continent’s atavistic past. This image of dispassionate soldiery served them well. It reinforced their standing as individualized, masculine citizens dedicated to the future of their communities. That vision crumbled in Florida. They believed that their race and gender, as they understood them, would lead to victory, but instead their upbringing often hampered their success. Contrary to the example of Jackson’s own career, the systematic war against Indian autonomy could not be won by individualized citizens in the service of their country. It would take all of the resources of the state.

The Volunteers’ War against the Army

Following their service, when the volunteers came to grips with the reality of the Second Seminole War, they searched for reasons to explain their defeat. They had expected, as one senator had argued, that their presence would simply “overawe” the

²⁵ Jackson Morton to Leo Morton, July 19, 1836, Papers of the Related Morton and Dickinson Families of Orange and Carolina Counties, Va., 1727-1978, Accession #9755--9755-b, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA; John Preston Watts Brown Journal; John Erwin [alternatively Irwin in some accounts], *Account of the Tennessee Volunteers in the Florida War* [unpublished memoir], Tennessee State Archives, 4; William Campbell to David Campbell, December 4, 1836, Campbell Family Papers, Duke Special Collections; *New York Spectator*, August 8, 1836; Publicola, *New Orleans Commercial-Bulletin*, January 13, 1836.

Indians, their force of arms being so evident that the Seminoles would retreat rather than face them in battle. Once the Seminoles established that they could defeat American forces, launch widespread attacks on the Florida frontier, and frustrate the designs of three generals, volunteer enthusiasm for service dropped precipitously. Consequently, the volunteers projected a curious stance: the more the country needed their help, the less interested they became in helping.²⁶

This left them with a quandary. Failure may have humbled the officers and generals of the regular army, but members of the army were professionals. They had signed a contract to serve their country to the best of their ability and had fulfilled their obligation on those terms. Though they had failed to win the war quickly and decisively, they characterized their failure as a tactical one of supply lines, cartography, and climate. When the army failed, it was a national problem with pragmatic solutions - the United States would either have to pour more resources into Florida or devise new strategies and tactics until they finally won. When the volunteers failed, it was necessarily personal. Their mythology of heroic sacrifice foreclosed rational evaluations of the difficulty of winning a guerilla war against a well-supplied enemy. If, as they had argued at the outset, bravery and sacrifice alone won wars, then a lack of resources could not explain their failure.

In place of crediting the Seminoles with resisting their attacks, the volunteers settled on a nearly unanimous theory: military officers had held the volunteers in check, restraining their martial spirit and preventing them from engaging, and thereby defeating, the Seminoles. Their explanation had a basis in reality. Commanding officers tended not

²⁶ Aaron Ward, "Services of Volunteers," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 402.

to march as rapidly as the volunteers believed possible. When one volunteer complained in his diary, “Oh! It does sicken my very soul to have to remain inactive and feed upon my own thoughts,” one can easily imagine the vast amounts of logistical planning taking place while he glowered. Accustomed to a society in which public officials seldom regulated the use of violence, the volunteers often bristled at officers who enforced, what seemed to the Southern volunteers, unnecessary and ritualistic military discipline.²⁷

The errors of the army appeared omnipresent. It was army quartermasters who failed to fully stock expeditions. It was army tacticians who marched in circles and failed to confront the main body of the Seminole force. It was army officers who at times seemed to sympathize with the Seminoles’ plight rather than recognize their savagery. The volunteers returned home with their faith in their martial spirit and superiority over the Seminoles undiminished. In their struggles against an army ossified by rules and regulations, however, they believed they had had no defense.

No conflict better exemplified the clash between the Southern volunteers and the regular army than that between Leigh Read and Winfield Scott. A budding public figure at the forefront of a Southern culture predicated on domination and violence, Read had already participated in several duels as a young man, both as primary and second. He married well and gradually earned the respect of his peers as an able leader and a wise businessman. When he learned of the Dade ambush, he immediately contacted his friend, Governor Richard Keith Call, and took the command of a volunteer battalion. There he reported directly to Winfield Scott, a man who stood for everything Read detested.

²⁷ October 3, 1836, John Preston Watts Brown Journal, Tennessee State Archives.

Where Read wanted to act, Scott tarried. Where Read tore at his bit, Scott carefully waited for his moment.²⁸

After several weeks of waiting, Scott ordered Read and his men to scout the Withlacoochee River, the Seminoles' stronghold during the first months of the war. There, Scott intended for Read to measure the depth of the river to judge its feasibility as a supply line. At the Withlacoochee, however, Read found evidence that Indians had overrun a nearby fort and were setting siege to a detachment of soldiers up the river. At that point, Scott and Read's accounts diverge. Read contended that Scott sent orders expressly forbidding him from deviating from his mission, forcing the subordinate officer to obediently return to camp. Read feared he had consigned dozens to death. One of Scott's supporters contradicted Read's claims in the press, insisting Scott allowed Read leeway to calculate the risks himself, and implying that Read's own cowardice had left the men to their fate. Whatever the case, and whether he had authorization or not, Read soon returned to the Withlacoochee, reinforced with 98 men to relieve the fort. They ascended the river in boats, rescued the men, and returned unobserved by the Seminoles in the area.²⁹

To the Florida populace, Read returned a hero for acting where Scott had faltered. Immediately upon his return, Leon County officials held a public dinner in honor of the men who, in their words, "stepped forward like Americans in defence of their rights, and

²⁸ James Denham, "The Read-Alston Duel and Politics in Territorial Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 68.4 (Apr., 1990), 427-446; Edward Baptist, "The Migration of Planters to Antebellum Florida: Kinship and Power," *The Journal of Southern History*, 62.3 (Aug., 1996), 545-547. Read was an avowed Nullifier, see Governor Eaton to Andrew Jackson, April 10, 1836, in Clarence Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States: Territory of Florida*, (Washington, DC: National Archives and Record Service, 1962), 15: 269.

²⁹ "General Scott," *The Floridian*, May 28, 1836; Truth, "To the Public," *The Floridian*, May 28, 1836; Leigh Read, "Relief of the Wythlacochee," *Niles Weekly Register*, July 9, 1835, 50, 1294, American Periodical Series Online, 322.

voluntarily immured themselves for the protection of our defenceless frontier.” Though some questioned whether volunteers who snuck past the enemy were deserving of such lofty praise, Read’s supporters insisted to the contrary that “the enemy seems to have been astonished, and paralysed by the audacity of the attempt,” transforming the Seminole failure to detect Read’s men into further evidence of his courage. Those rescued from the fort publicly thanked Read and heaped scorn upon Scott, who they believed had doomed them to a grisly fate. Over the next several years, Read enjoyed the cheers and toasts of his fellows in Florida: “A true defender of the democratic principles in Florida, and the lion of the South.” “The time is not so distant when Florida will call him to represent her in the Councils of Nation.” “As every American says of the Father of his country, so should every Floridian say of him, ‘first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen.’” The paeans to Read conflated his martial manhood with political judgment, as Read had proven able to kill Indians, he likewise would prove an able governor, perhaps even president.³⁰

Read himself distilled his adventure into a political message: Florida could no longer rely on the federal government to solve its problems. Surveying the situation on the embattled frontier, Read insisted that a thousand hardened Floridians could actively patrol the interior and postulated new war aims, transforming Indian killing into military strategy: “their towns must be burnt down, their provisions destroyed, their growing crops cut down, and lastly, their women and children must be sought and captured.” He hoped to adopt the tactics of slash-and-burn Seminole raids against the Indians themselves. He wanted the United States to demolish the very foundations of Seminole

³⁰ “Glorious Achievement,” *The Floridian*, June 4, 1836; “Public Dinner,” *The Floridian*, June 4, 1836; “Maj. Read and Gen. Scott,” *The Floridian*, June 4, 1836; “Public Dinner,” *The Floridian*, June 18, 1836; “Celebrations at Centreville,” *The Floridian*, July 11, 1840.

autonomy, even in the domestic space. If his countrymen waited for federal support, he warned they may as well wait for a Seminole invasion, because the latter was far more likely to arrive than the former. If Florida failed to muster the necessary men, Read instead hoped they could recruit frontiersmen from the West, where, free from the influence of a corrupt federal government and full of verve to fight Indians, men might retain the necessary hardihood for savage warfare. Scott, he argued, was a dinosaur in the new era of conquest who tried to remain relevant by insulting either Read's "own honor as a gentleman or his reputation as an officer."³¹

Read's two-pronged approach to the crisis resonated with many concerned bystanders in the South. They identified with Read and believed him to be fighting for home and family – for him, defeat meant fire, rapine, and death. Scott seemed to treat the conflict dispassionately, willing to wait out the Seminoles, rather than sacrifice men and supplies in a risky attempt to drive them from the wilderness. To Read, such decisions smacked of cowardice: frontier war was not a matter of resources and supply lines. It was no time for attrition.

Throughout Florida, volunteer companies bristled under the command of regular officers. Among the first militia groups to reach Florida was a brigade of 750 men from Alabama under the command of Colonel William Chisholm in March 1836. Their timing was fortuitous, as Winfield Scott had already formulated his complex strategy of sending three separate wings into the wilderness and converging on the Withlacoochee River with the hope of forcing a confrontation with the Seminoles. The Alabama volunteers were a necessary component of his strategy. They would comprise the majority of the strength of

³¹ Leigh Read, "Relief of the Wythlacochee," *Niles Weekly Register*, July 9, 1835, 50, 1294; American Periodical Series Online, 322; "Maj. Read and Gen. Scott," *The Floridian*, June 4, 1836.

the center wing, which would number only 1250 men. Marching north from Fort Brooke, they fought a series of small battles, erected a blockhouse closer to the Withlacoochee River, Fort Alabama, and returned to Fort Brooke following the failure of the three wings to converge at the appointed time and place. They marched for only fourteen days, but they were a tumultuous fourteen days.³²

The Alabama volunteers detested their commanding officer, Colonel William Lindsay. Their relationship began poorly. Upon setting out into the wilderness, Lindsay issued his men only four rounds of ammunition. The volunteers, ostensibly fearing they would be defenseless in the event of an ambush and, more pressingly, feeling disrespected, verged on mutiny. With tempers still running high several days later, an army officer stationed with the Alabama volunteers, Major Richard Sands, struck one of the volunteers with a small cane following a heated argument. Once word spread, a large group of volunteers went searching for Sands. The major locked himself away in a fortified building, but volunteers threatened to storm it until Sands desperately ordered cannons aimed through every porthole. Only the arrival of Colonel Lindsay momentarily calmed the situation, but even he could not enforce military discipline. In the aftermath of the skirmish, when one volunteer spoke impudently to Lindsay, the colonel placed the volunteer under arrest. Refusing to submit, the volunteer insisted he would only surrender if Lindsay could subdue him physically. After Lindsay backed off, the volunteer declared that rather than being aghast at his insubordination, “the crowd were greatly excited and

³² Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 153-154.

all applauded my conduct.” The men prized cocksure individualism far more than they mourned the breakdown of military discipline.³³

Over the coming days, Lindsay further alienated the volunteers by refusing them alcohol of any kind, even prohibiting a dying man from taking a last glass of wine on his death bed. This, wrote one Louisiana volunteer, was “carrying his ideas of temperance a little too far.” Days later, retroactively providing the justification for Lindsay’s initial stringency with ammunition, a group of volunteers haphazardly let lose a volley of fire upon a herd of passing deer and accidentally wounded a volunteer in the crossfire. Looking for the guilty party, the mob seized an allied Indian as the culprit (he almost certainly had not fired a shot) and threatened to throw him in irons. Only the passionate defense of Lindsay kept the man out of the stocks, and the commander left the scene crying out “that it was a mob” arrayed against him. It was said that over the remaining week of the campaign, he surrounded himself with trusted men - de facto bodyguards - so greatly did he fear the volunteers’ ire.³⁴

Though intemperate, Lindsay’s characterization of his troops as a mob was not inaccurate. Always obstinate and often mutinous, the volunteers displayed no interest in military discipline throughout their service. When the last company of Alabama volunteers arrived in Florida a year later, they stunned Florida citizens with their base and uncouth behavior. Upon arriving outside St. Augustine, according to one denizen, the

³³ Lindsay’s relationship with the Alabama volunteers was not helped by the presence of Leigh Read. Commanding a battalion of 250 Florida volunteers, Read served under Lindsay alongside the Alabama volunteers and, like them, detested his superior officer. Within weeks, he refused to communicate with Lindsay altogether. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 153.

³⁴ Alexander B Meek, "The Journal of A. B. Meek and the Second Seminole War, 1836," ed., John K. Mahon, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 38.4 (April 1960), 309, 312-313; Phillip E. Koerper and David T. Childress, "The Alabama Volunteers in the Second Seminole War, 1836," *Alabama Review* 37.1 (Jan 1984), 3-12; John Clisby to Friend, February, 1884, Montgomery True Blues Collection, LPR54, Alabama Dept. of Archives and History; James Barr, *A Correct and Authentic Narrative of the Indian War in Florida* (New York: J Narine, 1836), 5-6.

men “committed almost every crime except murder ... paraded in our streets, grossly insulted our females, and were otherwise extremely riotous in their conduct.” They treated their military service as a holiday, a means of burnishing one’s masculine credentials and experiencing the thrill of action on the frontier. For many volunteers, then, heroism was independent of advancing the war effort. When one of the Alabamians mistook some Florida volunteers for Indians, he proceeded to sound the alarm and let bullets fly at his friends. Rather than chastise him for his error, in the words of an observer, “everyone applauded [his] conduct. He did not leave his post when he fired, but reloaded and stood like a man.” Better poor judgment than weak nerves.³⁵

The Tennessee volunteers arrived in September 1836, to serve General Richard Keith Call’s ill-fated expedition. The campaign was disastrous, hamstrung by Call’s decision to prioritize rapid movement over securing his supply lines. The Tennessee volunteers comprised the bulk of Call’s force and they, along with the rest of the brigade, suffered through nearly ten days without rations following logistical miscommunications and were repulsed multiple times at the Withlacoochee. All agreed it was a miserable experience.

The Tennessee volunteers themselves were not blameless for the disasters that beset them. Before the arrival of the volunteers, Call had failed to gather adequate supplies during the summer months, but was forced to march by the impatient volunteers. Already reluctant to make the journey to Florida, the volunteers had grown further disenchanted with the Florida Territory. Arriving in Tallahassee, in the words of one volunteer, “big with expectation of being met by the Governor and staff and hailed with

³⁵ Meek, “The Journal of A.B. Meek” 310, 315; “*Save Us From Our Friends*,” *Georgia Messenger*, January 18, 1838.

exclamations of joy by a crowded populace,” they entered the city to empty streets, feeling “disappointment on penetrating the town and finding ourselves unnoticed!” As Call was both their commanding officer and the governor ostensibly responsible for receiving the volunteers in style, he began his command having already alienated a significant portion of his force. With the volunteers in such a state of unrest, Call likely decided that he had no choice but to march at the earliest opportunity before their frustrations could fester.³⁶

By the time they embarked, one of the men was already recording in his journal that Call “has treated the Tennessee Volunteers in an outrageous manner,” and their morale sank further at finding no rations at the expected posts. Though only four days by steamboat from the markets of New Orleans, the men were stranded with minimal rations for both them and their horses. Within a week, their packs contained only rotten beef, green in color, which one volunteer disdained as “unwholesome and pernicious to life.” Without feed, the horses wasted away to near-death. Disease swept through the ranks. The hyper-masculine culture of the brigade worsened the effects of sickness. One volunteer remembered how his diseased friend, a major, should have remained behind in the fort and rested, but bowed to pressure and marched the next day. He did not survive the following night. As early as the fourth day of their march, one volunteer predicted in his journal, “should we suffer much, the low but universal murmurs which now run through the whole crowd, will increase into a wave that will overwhelm [Call]. So he had better be on the lookout.” All of the pent-up aggression in the company demanded release, and Call was the closest target at hand. Another volunteer contrasted the

³⁶ “The Seminole War,” *United States Telegraph*, November 26, 1836; Hollingsworth “The Tennessee Volunteers in the Seminole Campaign” 347-348.

beginning of their journey, when the men spoke of Florida in reverent tones with their mindset after several days when they talked “of nothing but going home. Mutiny, burning in effigy, etc. etc.” They even began to lose faith in their own commander from Tennessee, General Robert Armstrong, for his steadfast loyalty to Call.

Belatedly engaging the enemy failed to salve their fury. Engagements were alternatively inconclusive, illusory, and unproductive. Nevertheless, in the midst of their drudgery, they retained their romantic view of themselves. One volunteer, without a hint of irony, wrote of a charge against the enemy in which “we came down with all the fierceness of northern hoards. Baggage of every description was thrown heedlessly aside the only aim appeared to be for a fight. Much to my pride and gratification I this day commanded the brave Highland boys and I never in my life felt so completely certain of success.” His bombast described a descent onto a deserted Indian camp.³⁷

The relationship between Call and the volunteers deteriorated further as the campaign dragged on. According to one volunteer, during a later engagement Call appeared in the grips of insanity, ordering a cannon trained on a hammock where his troops still engaged in combat. After a volunteer informed him not all men had come out, Call paused and, according to the volunteer, ordered his men to fire. Only the timely appearance of some trusted lieutenants convinced him to stand down. Another volunteer asserted that on another occasion, Call chose to keep three hundred volunteers out of an engagement to provide himself with personal protection in the event of an attack on his body, risking the lives of his men engaged in battle. And more discontent bubbled

³⁷ October 1, 1836, John Preston Watts Brown Journal, Tennessee State Archives; Henry Hollingsworth, “The Tennessee Volunteers in the Seminole Campaign of 1836: The Diary of Henry Hollingsworth,” edited by Stanley Horn, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 1.2 (Dec., 1943), 351, 359, 2.1 (Feb., 1944), 16; Erwin, *Account of the Tennessee Volunteers* 13, 17; September 28, 1836, Josephus Conn Guild Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

underneath the surface. One volunteer, knowing his brigades' horses would soon die of starvation, drew up a resolution urging his comrades to mutiny if Call forced the volunteers to march home on foot, an act he found degrading. The prospect of returning in tattered rags, exhausted from the march, was almost too awful to contemplate. Still another volunteer wrote that he was convinced that Call was a drunk and, if their own leader Robert Armstrong was sober, it was only for want of liquor. It was no surprise, then, that when one of their superior officers in the army, Lieutenant John Lane, committed suicide, no fewer than three volunteers doubted the official finding of temporary insanity. They theorized that, like them, Lane had reached the brink of despair over the decrepit conditions and poor organization of the campaign.³⁸

On the eve of the expirations of their terms of service, the Tennessee volunteers came full circle. Months before, General Armstrong had preyed on their insecurities and shamed them into serving in Florida rather than Georgia. With his men on the verge of leaving Florida, he again managed the same trick and convinced them to serve in Florida a few more days. Some volunteers saw through his pleas to remain rather than risk damaging their reputation, but nevertheless the men served out an extra two weeks before leaving. Once their term had finally expired in December 1836, Call and Armstrong lined up the men to shower them with praise. Call was effusive, praising their conduct even as he disclaimed responsibility for the deplorable conditions. He recalled the devastation of the frontier several months ago and praised the volunteers for restoring it to civilization. Listening to this, one volunteer characterized it as "pathetic." When Call went on to

³⁸ October 13, 1836, John Preston Watts Brown Journal, Tennessee State Archives; Hollingsworth "The Tennessee Volunteers in the Seminole War" 68-69, 71-73; Brown, Erwin, *Account of the Tennessee Volunteers* 29; William Campbell to David Campbell, October 23, 1836, William Campbell to David Campbell, December 4, 1836; David Campbell Papers, Duke University Special Collections; November 21, 1836, November 25, 1836, Josephus Conn Guild Diary, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

absolve himself of blame for the lack of supplies, he was no less successful. Not fooled by the general's kind words, another volunteer dismissed his address as "a mere farce played off to still the voice of censure and to catch the approbation of the thoughtless and unsuspecting of the brigade."³⁹

The Tennessee volunteers left Florida regretting not their failure to rescue Florida from the Seminole threat, but instead ruefully dreaming of the laurels they failed to seize for themselves. As one volunteer explained, the villain was clear: "Governor Call, the curse of all honest light upon him ... will ever be regarded by Tennesseans as the man who cast a blight upon the most alluring prospects and nipped their brightest hopes in the bud." Within the interior of the territory, the volunteers were alone with themselves and their worries - they had come to Florida certain of victory and left as abject failures. They dreaded their reception in Tennessee.⁴⁰

In the end, they worried for nothing. They returned to Tennessee as heroes, celebrated in public meetings across the state for their "unmurmuring constancy in every trial and privation to which they have been subjected in one of the most arduous campaigns ever performed by troops of the U. States since the days of our Revolution." Their embattled general, Robert Armstrong, published a letter to his men that was reprinted in newspapers across the nation. After referring favorably to General Call, Armstrong assured him, "Tennessee was perfectly secure when she committed her military character to your keeping, and that the spirit which animated her sons on the plains of New Orleans still glows brightly in your bosoms." The Tennessee volunteers'

³⁹ Hollingsworth, "The Tennessee Volunteers in the Seminole War" 245-246, 252; Erwin, *Account of the Tennessee Volunteers* 46. For an alternate perspective on the last days of the campaign, see Benjamin Franklin Baldwin, *Notices of the Campaign of the TN Volunteers* 29.

⁴⁰ October 8, 1836, John Preston Watts Brown Journal, Tennessee State Archives.

fondest wishes had come true, their names were associated with Washington, Lafayette, and Jackson in the annals of American military history. In the aftermath of their blundering travails in the wilderness, near-mutinies, and unfulfilled dreams, their reputation was assured. Over the next decade, the ranks of the Tennessee volunteers produced two governors, one failed gubernatorial candidate, and two congressmen, not a bad return for a brigade that had nearly mutinied.⁴¹

Florida and Beyond

The volunteers were men who would not stop to question the morality of their actions. In an editorial calling for the formation of a New Orleans group, one newspaper explicitly cleaved judgments of the morality of the policy that had led to war from the war itself, promising “our citizens will not stop to discuss the rights of the Indian tribes . . . residing within the jurisdiction of Florida, nor will they procrastinate actions to debate the correctness or not, of measures from time to time adapted by the General Government . . . no, they will act, and act promptly.” Indian killing could not be arrested. “Let those false and hollow hearted Philanthropists,” one Georgia newspaper proclaimed, “contemplate and reflect on” the war while Georgia volunteers marched, burned, and murdered. The volunteers arrayed themselves as much against the philanthropic tradition as against the Seminoles themselves. They fought to make Indian killing obsolete.⁴²

⁴¹ “Public Meeting – The Volunteers,” *Gallatin Union*, January 20, 1837; Robert Armstrong, “The Tennessee Volunteers,” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, Jan 26, 1837, 4.4, American Periodical Series Online, 63. William Campbell served three terms in the House of Representatives and later unseated his former commanding officer in the militia, William Trousdale, to become governor of Tennessee. Robert Armstrong returned to Tennessee to find there were limits to his popularity – he lost the gubernatorial election of 1837. William Haskell served one term in the House of Representatives.

⁴² Florida, *New Orleans Commercial Bulletin*, January 25, 1836; “Important from Florida,” *Daily Georgian*, January 18, 1836.

Against such a savage threat, what was required was not mere service, but what one Georgia volunteer characterized as “patriotism with vengeance.” They confronted Indians who infuriated them by scalping the bodies of fallen soldiers, motivating the volunteers to swear revenge using any means. Yet they also disdained Seminole tactics, labeling ambushes of unarmed volunteers as murder rather than legitimate acts of guerilla warfare. To one Tennessee volunteer, to fight as the Seminoles did, “a war of ambuscades and invisibilities, sudden attacks and retreats – a warfare in which resolution withered, perseverance became useless and valor almost contemptible,” removed all that made war a worthy endeavor. The volunteers, so obsessed with unbridled violence, resented the Seminoles for prioritizing strategy over destruction. They wanted to fight like the Seminoles, so they wanted the Seminoles to resemble them.⁴³

The fought an evil subtle, yet profound. One South Carolina volunteer wrote with disgust of a Seminole band who had retreated in haste, leaving a solitary ox tied to a tree at the base of a steep hill, dehydrated and nearly starving. Believing that the Indians should have liberated or killed it outright, the volunteer proudly cut the animal free and led him to water, an event he remembered as “no trifling pleasure,” for he had long “thought the incident worth recording, as holding up a light wherewith to peruse a passage in the volume of Indian character.” Savages and, worse, poor husbandmen, the Seminoles well deserved their retribution. “We gladly cut him loose, and quickly let him roam where he will,” concluded the volunteer, proudly reliving the incident. That desire, to roam where one will, lay at the heart of the volunteers’ project, and it could only be

⁴³ Lieutenant of the Left Wing, *Sketch of the Seminole War* 200; CM Macardell, “Florida.,” *Georgia Messenger*, March 17, 1836; “Extract of a Letter from a Young Member of the Irish Volunteers,” *Georgia Messenger*, March 21, 1836; Cohen, *Notices of Florida* 152-153; Baldwin, *Notices of the Campaign of the Tennessee Volunteers* 25.

accomplished, they concluded, through the use of overwhelming, eradicating force, unrestrained by the bounds of military oversight.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Notices of Florida* 143-144.

Chapter 4

The “War-Whoop in the Doors of Your Capitol”: The March of Empire in the Halls of Congress

In the halls of Congress, debates over the Second Seminole War were marked by ferocious arguments, fisticuffs, and a fatal duel. Yet, throughout the entire course of the war, a conflict in which the United States spent tens of millions of dollars over seven long years to appropriate Indian land and re-enslave their African-American allies, few politicians of either party articulated a full-throated denunciation of the war’s objectives. In marked contrast to the General Thomas Jesup’s ruminations, they seldom questioned the viability or the morality of removing the Seminoles, though only a few years before, Anti-Jacksonians had nearly defeated the passage of the Indian Removal Act. The war played an essential role in the Whig critique of Democratic rule, but their main contention was that Whigs themselves could remove the Seminoles more efficiently than their rivals. Of the subjugation of alien peoples and the seizure of their land, few protested. Rather than hold fast against Jackson’s crusade of conquest, they chose to criticize its most trivial aspects.

The lack of opposition to the war was not without motive. In 1827, eight years before the war, Robert Trumbull published “The Crisis,” a pro-slavery polemic in 33 parts, in the *Charleston Mercury*. He warned his readers that any discussion of slavery was so threatening, so hostile to the interests of their state, that he urged their leaders to assure that a “vote NEVER shall be taken in Congress, on any subject connected with slaves, without its being followed by an immediate dissolution of the Union.” By the end of 1835 and the beginning of the Second Seminole War, politicians across the nation faithfully followed his advice. Congress was silent. Gag rules in the House of

Representatives and the Senate outlawed the reading of antislavery petitions and choked off outright discussion of slavery. In contrast to 1830s England in which antislavery activists bombarded Parliament with abolitionist pamphlets to great effect, the Congressional elite of the United States effectively quarantined their chambers from abolitionist thought. When Joshua Giddings violated the House's gag rule in 1841 with a condemnation of the Second Seminole War, he nearly incited a literal legislative riot.¹

Though the voluntary silence over slavery was not absolute - the disputes over the Nullification Crisis and the *Creole* Affair which bookended the decade were certainly consequential - it did preclude discussion over a series of less prominent incidents inextricably linked to slavery, in ways that scholars have missed. Too often, historians have read forward debates over Indian removal and assumed that the defense of Indian rights was an integral aspect of Whig ideology. In truth, their opposition did not extend far beyond the borders of the Cherokee nation. That evangelical reformers would sympathize with the plight of the "civilized" Indians like the Cherokees in 1831 was a natural outgrowth of their worldview, which privileged self-advancement and societal

¹ Robert Turnbull, *The Crisis: Or, Essays on the Usurpation of Government* (Charleston, SC: A.E. Miller, 1827), 132. On the absence of slavery and its implications from antebellum debate, see Richard McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966); Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition, 1780-1849* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 237; Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 210-273. On the gag rules, see Robert Ludlum, "The Antislavery 'Gag Rule': History and Argument," *Journal of Negro History*, 26.2 (April 1941), 203-243; James M. McPherson, "The Fight against the Gag Rule: Joshua Leavitt and Antislavery Insurgency in the Whig Party, 1839-1842," *Journal of Negro History*, 48.3 (July 1963), 177-195; Daniel Wirls, "'The Only Mode of Avoiding Everlasting Debate': The Overlooked Senate Gag Rule for Antislavery Petitions," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 27.1 (Spring 2007): 115-138. On English abolition, see David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991); Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1975); J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1986). For more on Joshua Giddings, see chapter 5.

progress. From that perspective, the debate over the Indian Removal Act was as much a debate over the place of reform movements in antebellum political culture as it was over Indian rights in the abstract. The Seminoles, who were entirely uninterested in cultural assimilation, attracted few defenders among the politicians who had recently so vociferously defended the Cherokees' right to remain in Georgia. By 1839, despite their nation having wasted millions of dollars and sacrificed over a thousand lives in the Florida wilderness, few Whigs questioned the efficacy or the morality of Indian removal.²

In some respects, the silence that enveloped the war was unremarkable. Certainly instances in which a political party declared itself on the side of Indians in the midst of a frontier war were quite rare. It was, however, a silence born entirely of that historical moment. Fifteen years earlier, Andrew Jackson's first foray into Florida against the Seminoles and their black allies had engulfed the capital in controversy. Fifteen years later, debates over national expansion and the role of slavery on the frontier would bring the Union to the brink of dissolution. Yet in 1835, there was nothing.

This was not to say that these congressional debates were bereft of historical interest. Among Jacksonians, it was nearly unanimous - for the United States to win the war, the Indians had to be, as they put it, overawed, whipped, and chastened. They did not couch their words in lofty rhetoric, nor were there paeans to an expansive empire of liberty. They spoke plainly, and without obfuscation of racial dominance and unalloyed American power. They believed they learned a lesson through their long and bracing struggle with the Seminoles: the flaw of their policies was not the embrace of subjugation but their inability to pursue it with overwhelming force.

² For an example of reading forward Whig support of Indian rights, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 40-42.

By the end of the war, leading Democrats did come to grips with the limits of American power and with the reality that the United States, as General Thomas Jesup had tried to make his superiors understand, could not impose its authority on its borders through force alone. In the latter stages of the war, Thomas Hart Benton solved Jesup's conundrum by fully integrating the logic of unending national expansion into American policy through the medium of Democratic ideology. His Armed Occupation Act, a homestead policy that transformed common settlers into an organized, bureaucratized arm of expansionistic America, putatively marshaled the independence of the frontier settler as a means of geographic consolidation. Benton intended to utilize settlers' boundless capacity for violence as a cudgel against the nation's enemies, clearing the path for expansion.³

This chapter details three significant aspects of antebellum congressional debate over the Second Seminole War. In the first section, it will contextualize the conflict within the wider political currents of the era, explain the implications of Democratic rhetoric, and identify the active collaboration of numerous Whig legislators. The second section examines the difficulty of three prominent Whigs in articulating coherent critiques of the war effort. Though each of the three had significant misgivings about the war, none could envision any alternative aside from the total removal of the Seminoles and the imposition of white authority over the whole of Florida. The final section argues that by the time of the 1840 presidential election, Whigs and Democrats had largely converged on a single frontier policy in which the federal government would permit or

³ For the Jesup quotation, see General Thomas Jesup to Brigadier General Roger Jones, February 7, 1836, *House Document 78*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 68. On Benton's ambivalence toward slavery, see Elbert Smith, "Thomas Hart Benton: Southern Realist," *American Historical Review*, 58.4 (July 1953), 795-807.

empower settlers to stamp out nonwhite autonomy on the nation's frontiers in order to better integrate those regions into the rest of the nation.

Profound Insecurity and the Democratic Embrace of Conquest

In November 1835 as Major Dade gathered his forces in Florida, Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren likely gazed over Washington satisfied with theirs. Seven months earlier, Van Buren had won the Democratic nomination for the presidency unanimously, and, given his unparalleled command of contemporary politics, felt confident of his ultimate success. He faced a nascent Whig party too inchoate to hold a convention or unite behind a single candidate. Instead, a motley crew arrayed against him: the pro-Jackson/anti-Van Buren Tennessee Senator Hugh Lawson White, the Massachusetts candidate Senator Daniel Webster, the token Nullifier for the South Carolina ballot Willie Mangum, and a newcomer, General William Henry Harrison. There were only two truly national politicians in the United States, and they were both Democratic.⁴

Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren could count on a phalanx of legislators in the House of Representatives. Over the past year, the national economy had grown at a tremendous rate and, following Jackson's successful war against the Bank of the United States, the Democratic Party had reaped the benefits. Following the 1834 elections, Jacksonians controlled 143 seats in the House and faced a coalition of 99 Anti-Jacksonians, Anti-Masons, and Nullifiers. Among the 143 Democrats was a new breed of politician, less concerned with their social bearing than their predecessors, expressly

⁴ White may have had some appeal on a Democratic ticket, but he was ideologically incongruous with the Whig Party and served the role of a foil to the Northern Van Buren in the South. Mangum's Nullification ideology was a fringe belief in the 1830s. See Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36-45.

partisan, and deeply committed to advancing Democratic interests. Like Jackson, they tended to value the independence of white settlers and believed national expansion to be imperative for the nation's future. Though Jacksonians ruled the House, they did not control the Senate. State legislatures, in whose elections Whigs had done very well in the early 1830s, still controlled the appointment of Senate seats. Consequently, Whigs and Nullifiers controlled a slim majority of the body, at least until four Jacksonians from newly minted western states took office in the fall and winter of 1836, a year into the Second Seminole War. Democratic rule, then, would not be entirely unchallenged during the final year of Jackson's second term.⁵

Following his war against the Bank of the United States and the successful passage of the Indian Removal Act, Jackson believed he had achieved considerable domestic success, but remained troubled by the nation's precarious international position. The final years of his presidency were marked by a series of bitter disputes, incidents of brinkmanship, and nearly catastrophic wars. At the start of the Second Seminole War, the United States and France remained embroiled in a diplomatic stalemate over spoliation claims arising from the Napoleonic Wars thirty years prior. France had demanded a personal explanation from Jackson for his fire breathing rhetoric and rumors coursed through Washington that Jackson intended to ask for Congressional authorization to grant letters of reprisal against France. Similarly, a disagreement with Great Britain over the Maine/New Brunswick border had festered since the 1783 Treaty of Paris and much of New England anticipated a renewal of conflict with the nation's oldest rival. The

⁵ For why party affiliation and not sectional origin should be the preeminent unit of analysis, see Joel Silbey, *Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841-1852* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967). As this chapter will argue, sectionalism often tempered or intensified rhetoric, but had little effect on votes themselves. See also, Jeffrey Pasley, "Minnows, Spies, and Aristocrats: The Social Crisis of Congress in the Age of Martin Van Buren," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 27 (Winter 2007), 599-653.

South, only a few years removed from Nat Turner's rebellion, remained ever vigilant against the prospect of an organized slave rebellion. Perhaps the greatest threat lay to the west. There, Americans perceived twinned threats from the burgeoning Mexican state with its bellicose leader Santa Anna and growing masses of Indians, their ranks swelling as a result of Indian removal. Worst of all, many suspected the British had designs on either Mexico or Texas, a prospect that, if realized, would constitute a national crisis. Though each of these conflicts ended without the involvement of the United States' military, political leaders and everyday Americans had good reason to fear numerous enemies of the state, both foreign and domestic.⁶

In late 1835, then, one could hardly fault politicians inside and outside the Jackson administration for ignoring the situation in Florida. Over the previous few years, Indian removal had proceeded smoothly throughout the southeast. The Choctaw, the Creeks, the Seminoles, and the Chickasaw had all signed treaties promising imminent relocation, and the Cherokees were on the verge of signing their own. Already, troops were marching to Georgia, Alabama, and Florida to escort Indian populations to their new lands in the West. In his 1835 report to the Secretary of War Lewis Cass, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Elbert Herring evinced confidence in the process, writing that though there were "indications of a contumacious and hostile spirit on the part of the Seminoles," a military force had intimidated the disaffected and calmed the impassioned. Thankfully, he informed Cass, the Seminoles had "seen their interest and obligation in a clear light," and were faithfully preparing to emigrate. Accepting his commissioner's

⁶ On the diplomatic and domestic crises of the 1830s, see John Belohlavek, *Let the Eagle Soar: The Foreign Policy of Andrew Jackson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 93-113; George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 166-167; Howard Jones and Donald Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington: University of Delaware Press, 1997).

assessment, Secretary of War Lewis Cass expected the Seminoles to be gone within the year.⁷

The administration's plans were proceeding apace until more than a hundred soldiers led by Major Francis Dade were ambushed by Seminole warriors and killed on December 23, 1835. The reaction was swift and sure. Lewis Cass immediately requested an appropriation of \$80,000 to place troops in Florida and, with reports that 1500 Indians were in the field against only a few hundred soldiers, members of Congress gladly assented. When Representative Samuel Vinton, an Ohio Whig, signaled his intention to make a motion that would bind the nation to the terms of the Treaty of Payne's Landing, Churchill Cambreleng, a New York Democrat, urged him to keep silent and address the matter later. Fearful that the Jackson administration would use the money to circumvent congressional authority, John Quincy Adams slipped in an amendment to the appropriation dictating that it be spent by the secretary of war, "comfortably to law." The House then agreed to the bill and laid it aside. Adams's request, though subtle, was significant. A keen observer of political language, Adams hoped to establish in writing the principle that even in matters of internal expansion against Indian enemies, the rule of law would hold sway.⁸

⁷ Elbert Herring, "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 13-14; Peter Force, *The National Calendar and Annals of the United States* (Washington, DC: Pishey Thompson and Franck Taylor, 1836). For more on Cass and his treatment of Indians, see Francis Paul Prucha, *Lewis Cass and American Indian Policy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967); Willard Carl Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 85-90; Frank Woodford, *Lewis Cass, the Last Jeffersonian* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 182-183; Andrew McLaughlin, *Lewis Cass* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 159-164. For more on Herring, see Ronald Satz, "Elbert Herring, 1831-36," *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977*, Robert Kvasnicka and Herman Viola, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 13-16.

⁸ Samuel Vinton was not related to John Rogers Vinton, who had served under Jesup. *Register of Debates*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 2138-2140, 2358-2360. On John Quincy Adams's evolving stance toward Indian

The debate in the Senate occupied considerably less floor time. Daniel Webster, the great orator from Massachusetts, introduced the appropriation as a member of the Committee on Finance. His preeminent rival for leadership of the Anti-Jacksonians, Henry Clay, rose to speak and claimed that he was bewildered that a war “of most rancorous violence” had erupted, yet Congress was altogether uninformed as to both the cause of the war and whether Indians or settlers were at fault. Webster proffered his understanding that the war originated in a dispute over Indian removal and was not due to settler bellicosity. Further, it was of no significance, he explained, for “the war rages, the enemy is in force, the executive Government has asked for the means of suppressing these hostilities,” and therefore passing a bill was imperative. Missouri Democrat Thomas Hart Benton, advanced his own understanding of the war, based on his service on the Committee of Indian Affairs. The Seminoles, he explained, were “a bad race,” even among Indians. Worse, in the massacres of the past months, the Seminoles had the aid of fugitive slaves, people of merciless ferocity who “traversed the fields of the dead, and cut the throats of those who were expiring.” Benton remembered that just a few weeks before he had castigated abolitionists, whose agitation he was sure would cause the deaths of whites and blacks. Yet, compared to the depths of the current violence, their past agitation “was as a drop to the ocean, and as a grain of sand to the mountain.” The bill swiftly passed.⁹

The first true legislative debate over the Second Seminole War began several weeks later over the treatment of whites rather than over Indian policy. During the first

affairs, see Lynn Parsons, “‘A Perpetual Harrow upon My Feelings’: John Quincy Adams and the American Indian,” *New England Quarterly*, 46 (Sept. 1973), 339-379.

⁹ “Indian Hostilities in Florida,” January 27, 1836, *The Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 144; “Suppression of Indian Hostilities,” January 27, 1836, *Gales and Seaton Register of Debates*, Senate, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 290-291.

month of the war, before General Edmund Gaines launched his brazen offensive, Joseph White, the nonvoting delegate from the Florida Territory, submitted a bill requesting federal support for displaced Florida families on the frontier. Politicians of both parties discussed its constitutional implications, but the debate shifted when Francis Granger, a New York Whig, rose and became the first man to openly criticize the administration's handling of the war. From his perspective, Granger must have believed he stood on the verge of a great career. Though just 44 years old, he recently had scored his greatest political coup, securing the nomination to become William Henry Harrison's running mate a month earlier. As one of the most powerful politicians in New York City and one of the nation's most prominent Anti-Masons, Granger had deftly sized up the dynamics of Harrison's candidacy and recognized no one was better suited than he to welcome the general into the North's political sphere. Now, with the election looming, Granger brazenly tried to outflank Andrew Jackson on the question of who could kill Indians with more fanfare. He did not object to the war itself, instead he accused Jackson of not fighting it forcibly enough. Why had Jackson barreled to the precipice of a war with France, he wondered, yet now when "the tomahawk glitters in the sunbeam ... every department of this administration is as dumb as the bleeding victims of this inglorious contest?" A Harrison presidency, he implied, would kill Indians with significantly greater alacrity.¹⁰

In the ensuing debate, several Democrats reproached Granger for his calumny upon the administration. Amos Lane of Indiana pronounced himself shocked that anyone

¹⁰ Richard P. McCormick, "Was There a 'Whig Strategy' in 1836?," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 4.1 (Spring, 1984), 63-69; Donald J. Ratcliffe, "Antimasonry and Partisanship in Greater New England, 1826-1836," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 15.2 (Summer, 1995), 199-239; *Register of Debates*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 2438-2448.

would question the president's commitment to the frontier, but allowed that the passions of partisan intrigue may have clouded Granger's judgment. Thomas Glascock of Georgia, one of the nation's most ardent supporters of Indian Removal, wondered whether Granger and his fellow Anti-Jacksonians were truly committed to protecting the country, but predicted the outcome of the vote would let him know for sure. A cavalcade of Democrats then urged immediate passage of the bill and castigated Granger for using the opportunity for partisan purposes. Their words were certainly effective. Whig James Harper closed down the discussion, declaiming, "he was astonished that anything like party discussion should have grown out of such a subject as this. He would not stop to inquire who was right or who was wrong." In part, Harper, a prominent freemason in Pennsylvania was undercutting his Anti-Mason colleague Granger, but he was also supporting expedience over constitutionality in the current crisis. Harper predicted an immediate vote and unanimous passage. He was nearly correct. Only 14 Representatives opposed the measure, an unlikely combination of Whig and Democratic politicians concerned with constitutional procedure and Nullifiers. Granger voted for passage as well.¹¹

Over the coming months, as the Whigs obligingly assented to a series of appropriation bills for the war, the Jackson administration and its allies instituted a novel Indian policy. To them, the uncertain condition of the frontier reflected the fundamental inconsistency of Indian removal policy in the past. Previously, administration officials had assumed that Indians would voluntarily sign treaties and obey their terms. If they did

¹¹ Amos Lane's son, John Foote Lane would briefly serve in Florida before committing suicide in his tent. See chapter 2. On Harper's Masonic ties, see Norris Barratt, *Freemasonry in Pennsylvania, 1727-1907, As Shown by the Records of Lodge No. 2, F. and A. M. of Philadelphia, from the Year A. L. 5757, A, Volume 3* (Philadelphia, 1919).

not, then certainly the martial strength of the United States could easily compel them to do so. If compulsion failed, however, and the United States lacked the resources to wage extended frontier wars while it safeguarded the eastern seaboard from the possibility of European invasion, the nation would need to deploy its military in novel ways.

In the midst of the war, Lewis Cass identified a solution, declaring the military necessary for the purpose of, in his words, “overawing” the Indians. No longer would the army serve as the first line of defense. Instead, it would act as a preemptive force to discourage attack altogether. Reflecting the basic lacuna of Jacksonian Indian policy, Cass theorized that the Second Seminole War reflected that “the Indians are totally ignorant of their own relative strength and that of the United States” and that the United States need only “demonstrate” to the Indians their relative weakness to convince them to submit to American directives. It was a dubious conclusion given that the Seminoles were winning every battle. Nevertheless, Cass and the Jacksonians believed they had isolated the problem. The Seminoles had revolted not owing to the inconsistencies of the Treaty of Payne’s Landing, but because the United States had not enforced those inconsistencies with all of the violence at its command.¹²

Cass’s pronouncement amounted to a declaration that nonwhite autonomy was a threat to national security. Writing in the aftermath of General Edmund Pendleton Gaines’s disastrous offensive against the Seminoles, Cass attempted to diagnose the flaws of the war well before it had reached a conclusion. In transforming the army into an invasive force designed to compel obedience from those excluded from the body politic,

¹² Lewis Cass, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, Document 661, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 6:156-158. On the relationship of the army to the frontiers, see Robert Wooster, *The American Military Frontiers: The United States Army in the West, 1783-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); .

he reformulated the basic relationship of the army to nonwhites on the frontier. The need to “overawe” Indians was paramount, the pursuit of American interests no longer sufficient. It was, for Cass and many other Democrats, an article of faith that victory over Indians was determined not by strategic success, but by the demonstration of American superiority. Success lay in crushing effective Indian sovereignty and representing to the Seminoles that they were dependent subjects of the American state, not apart from it.¹³

The Democratic obsession with expressions of American power was rooted in equal parts nationalistic fervor and abject fear. Given the United States’ fraught position in relation to the rest of the world and the long history of collaboration between the nation’s enemies and nonwhites on the continent, they had good reason to eye Indians on the frontier suspiciously. As the Jackson administration had chosen to side with the priorities of boisterous settlers over the recognition of Indian property rights, they had foregone the possibility of a conciliatory Indian policy that would bind Indians to the United States through affection rather than intimidation.¹⁴

Representative Abijah Mann, a New York Democrat, took Cass’s proposals to their logical conclusion. Speaking in the aftermath of Winfield Scott’s initial, futile offensive against the Seminoles, Mann was deeply concerned that the rest of Congress had resolved to return an unprecedented federal surplus to the states, distributing the money directly to their constituents. He wondered how his fellow Congressmen could pass such a bill with a clear conscience when, at that very moment, he said “defenseless

¹³ That the Treaty of Fort Gibson forced the Seminoles to largely reincorporate themselves into the Creek nation, spoke to the importance American officials placed on “instructing” the Seminoles of their transience and dependency. On the controversial nature of treaty-making, see the discussion of Edmund Gaines in chapter 2.

¹⁴ On the anxiety which underlay boisterous expansionism, see Thomas Hietala, *Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

women and children of our southern brethren were now suffering under the merciless tomahawk of savage war.” Responding to one of his colleague’s investigations into the causes of the war, Mann complained that his peers were choosing to “hesitate and debate about the causes of these Indian wars,” rather than move to overwhelm and conquer the Seminoles. Anyone privy to the workings of the human heart, Mann contended, could understand the roots of racial warfare - they were written into the very fabric of Indian-white relations. While Representatives wasted their time fussing out the whys and wherefores, Indians were laying waste to the frontier.¹⁵

In his remarks, Mann connected the abstract logic of Cass’s position directly to national security. In his mind, the country faced a choice. On one hand, it could pursue the approaches of the past, the pursuit of Indian negotiations with the purpose of mutual accommodation along with a minimal standing army - in other words an idealized vision of early republic Indian policy. According to Mann, that path amounted to suicide and worse, to the Indians sounding their “thrilling war—whoop in the doors of your Capitol.” The other path, Cass’s path, institutionalized subjugation and expansion as the twin poles of United States frontier policy. Mann understood what Cass had not explained - that the initial failures of the Second Seminole War had devastating implications for national defense. It was not the Seminoles, but the United States which had grievously miscalculated its military strength. His speech revealed a deeply paranoid and despairing Democratic worldview, one in which, should his countrymen falter, miscalculate, or show weakness, the republic could fall.

¹⁵ “Suppression of Indian Hostilities, Remarks of Abijah Mann,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session 370-371. Mann was, in fact, referring to the brief Creek War of 1836 in his remarks, but his prescriptions resonate with the futility of the concurrent war in Florida.

That paranoia infused Democratic talking points over the coming months as the debate over the size of the army expanded into one of the central disputes of the congressional term. At first, the debate surrounded the institutionalization of volunteer groups under executive direction. Generally made up of “hardened” frontier men in the popular imagination, volunteer groups were universally believed to be especially suited for frontier conflict. And with the Texas Revolution in progress, the frontier was far from pacific. Though most doubted Mexico would pose an immediate threat, frontier Indians were an entirely different matter. Albert Harrison, a Missouri Democrat, ably explained the root of their fears. Holding up a map of Missouri and Arkansas, he pointed to the numerous Indian nations living on the frontier and urged his colleagues to “see what your wretched policy has done to Florida” and imagine that fate befalling the western frontier should the nation not summon thousands of soldiers to defend it. To Harrison, it was a “disgrace” that United States leaders had failed to intimidate hostile Indians into “realizing” their subordinate status. As his fellow Democrat from Missouri, William Ashley, attested, there were likely over one thousand times more Indian warriors in the west than in the east, and preventing a widespread rebellion was vital to national security.¹⁶

Francis Granger, Whig vice-presidential candidate, rose and agreed wholeheartedly. Obsessed with the best method of “controlling” Indians who he believed treacherous by nature, Granger celebrated the use of volunteers who moved with alacrity, endorsing Jacksonian Indian policy in every important respect. Ransom Gillet, a New York Democrat, provided the capstone for the debate. Fully articulating the Jacksonian

¹⁶ “Acceptance of Volunteers,” April 22, 1836, *Gales and Seaton Register of Debates*, 24th Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives, 3330-3354.

conception of the frontier, he argued for overwhelming force as imperative because the nation's "authority will not be respected, unless we exhibit before them a power which can chastise them into obedience." He swore that no appropriation, no matter how large, could convince his constituents (who were a thousand miles away from the Florida frontier) that such a cause was not just. When he challenged Granger on his support of Indian Removal, an issue Gillet had thought settled, Granger claimed he had been misunderstood and that he offered no objection to the policy. During the course of the debate, only two Congressmen expressed real reservations. Both feared overreaching executive power, they did not object to the subjugation of enemy peoples.¹⁷

The Indian policies that underlay the Second Seminole War sprung from a deep anxiety over the nation's security. Representatives believed there was always another nemesis, somewhere waiting to strike. To them, the defeat of that enemy trumped any constraint on action, be it moral or constitutional. Consequently, Florida delegate Joseph White could express with exasperation that the members were "in this Hall called upon to decide whether 'our quarrel be just,'" reject "misplaced and sickly sentiment," and warn that "if we are to abandon this whole frontier and sea-coast to this miserable gang of desperadoes, there is not a power on earth that will not despise us for our impotence and pusillanimity" and remain entirely consistent with the prevailing discourse. The only just policy was a forcefully expansive one. It was pragmatic in that it would end the Seminole

¹⁷ Abijah Mann also opposed the bill on its merits as he had long supported an independent and vigorous military. He likely viewed the acceptance of mounted volunteers as necessarily diminishing the autonomy of the army. Mann and future president Zachary Taylor (then a colonel) had also corresponded for several years and Taylor's dim view of citizen soldiers may have influenced Mann. See William Holt, "Zachary Taylor on Jackson and the Military Establishment, 1835," *American Historical Review*, 51.3 (April 1946), 480-484. On Taylor and the volunteers, see Phillip Thomas Tucker, "A Forgotten Sacrifice: Richard Gentry, Missouri Volunteers, and the Battle of Okeechobee," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 70.2 (Oct 1991), 150-165. Ransom Gillet would leave Congress in 1837 to serve as an agent with various Indian nations in New York. See *Indian Treaties 1815 to 1865, Vol. IX – Winnebago*, ed., Larry Watson (Yuma, AZ: Histree, 1993), 41-52.

threat, symbolic in that it would gain the respect of the rest of the world, and honorable in that women and children were suffering.¹⁸

The Whigs and the Absence of Opposition

The Whigs fared better than they might have expected in the 1836 elections. Though their tactic of running a different candidate for president in each region of the country failed utterly, they did make significant gains in some respects. Part of their success was due to Martin Van Buren's limitations as a political candidate compared to his predecessor, but it also reflected impressive achievements by Whig activists in transforming their loose coalition of interests into an institutional force, as they cut deeply into the Democratic majority in the House. Unfortunately for the Whigs, several years of Democratic triumphs on the state level finally allowed them to seize decisive control of the Senate, winning 11 of 17 elections. Martin Van Buren pledged to rule as his predecessor had, and he would enjoy the same advantages.¹⁹

Members of the Whig Party returned to Washington with a dilemma. As itinerants warning against a tyrannical Jackson administration, their political philosophy was relatively simple. They castigated Democratic overreach and pledged themselves to

¹⁸ On the anxiety which underlay boisterous expansionism, see Thomas Hietala, *Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). "Removal of the Florida Indians – Speech of Jos. White of Florida," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 1430-1434.

¹⁹ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 453-454; Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party* 45-49; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 486-488. The Democrats' success in the Senate came at a fortuitous moment. Due to a quirk in the rules of the electoral college and the defection of the Virginia delegation from the Democratic nominee, Richard M. Johnson failed to secure enough votes to win the Vice Presidency outright, throwing the election to the Senate. Though historians have seldom noticed it, considering the partisan distribution of the 24th Senate, the aforementioned Francis Granger likely would have prevailed and formed a rather uncomfortable administration alongside his old Empire State rival, Martin Van Buren.

defend the institutional superstructure that would protect and extend liberty into the future. The election of 1836 and, as the term continued, the Panic of 1837, transformed the Whigs from a dissenting voice into a potent electoral force. Their success left them with a vital pragmatic question to address. What position would the party take on issues of expansion and Indian relations? They had made their most significant inroads against the Democrats in the South and the West, the two regions most invested in both issues. The bumbling of the Second Seminole War had likely contributed to their success, not due to their vocal opposition, but as an alternative to a Democratic administration that seemed incapable of defeating scattered bands of starving Indians in the Florida wildernesses.

The circumscribed nature of language concerning the war in the summer of 1836, after Winfield Scott's reassignment and Richard Keith Call's humiliation, must be contextualized in light of the information available. On June 6, at the request of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Lewis Cass's War Department delivered a bundle of correspondence to the House of Representatives. It consisted of two hundred pages that promised to explain the "causes of hostilities of the Creek and Seminole Indians in Florida." Though the quantity of information was massive, an attentive reader could easily have traced themes that clearly laid out the causes of the Second Seminole War. There were two primary motivations for war. First, as most politicians realized, factions in the Seminole nation were violently opposed to removal. With the deadline for emigration looming, they had ambushed Dade's command rather than submit to the will of their enemy. The second motivation was far less prominent, but present throughout the assembled letters. Throughout the reams of correspondence, time and again, the doomed

Indian Agent Wiley Thompson warned his superiors that the Black Seminoles, who Thompson believed enjoyed “a controlling influence” over their masters, were terrified of being seized by whites and condemned to a life of chattel slavery. Should the Black Seminoles have reason to fear enslavement, he warned, war would be the result. And the documents offered ample reasons for them to fear. Throughout the assembled correspondence, Florida slaveholders pressed Thompson to support dubious claims on Seminole slave property, the federal government flirted with violating the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834 by allowing the Seminoles to sell their slaves to interested white buyers, and the Seminoles volubly protested settling adjacent to the Creeks, who themselves held tenuous claims on many of the Black Seminoles. Reading the correspondence with a modicum of empathy for the Seminoles revealed an Indian nation with real suspicions of slaveholder designs on their own slaves and a federal government that consistently justified their apprehensions.²⁰

These letters were only the most immediate evidence of slaveholder culpability for the onset of war. Careful readers would have found complaints from Florida and Georgia slaveholders that the Seminoles offered a sanctuary to runaway slaves and hysterical warnings of an island where bands of Indians and fugitive slaves hid from

²⁰ This narrative has escaped few historians who have read these documents. See, for example, John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1985), 76-85; Ross Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 324-326; Ronald Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 102-103. For a partial listing of letters identifying the politics of slavery as a primary cause of the war, see General Wiley Thompson to Governor William DuVal, January 1, 1834, 453-455; General Richard Keith Call to President Andrew Jackson, March 22, 1835, 464; Thompson to Indian Commissioner Elbert Herring, July 20, 1835, 470; Thompson to Acting Secretary of War Carey Harris, June 17, 1835, 470-471; Thompson to Herring, May 6, 1834, 480-482; General Duncan Clinch to Secretary of War Lewis Cass, August 24, 1835, 494-495; Harris to Thompson, July 11, 1835, 512-513; Thompson to Cass, April 27, 1835, 533-534. All from “Causes of Hostilities of the Creek and Seminole Indians in Florida, and Instructions to and Correspondence with Agents and Other Persons Relative to Their Removal to the West,” *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 6:450-573.

white justice, robbing and murdering whites on the mainland with impunity. They would have found that Andrew Jackson, after reading the pleas of Alachua County slaveholders, demanded the War Department investigate their charges and, should they prove correct, immediately take steps to carry out the long-delayed Treaty of Payne's Landing and remove the Seminoles. Should anyone have grown even more suspicious of the links between the origins of the war and the interests of slaveholders, the War Department itself held a treasure trove of documents describing the events leading up to the treaty. They would have read of Indian Agent Gad Humphrey's desperate attempts to protect Seminole slaves from white slave catchers and the ensuing outcry in which those same slaveholders complained to the Jackson administration of the Seminoles' willingness to protect fugitive slaves. Horace Everett, a Vermont Whig, used many of those documents to cast imputations upon the origins of the war in Congress in early 1836, though his arguments were muted since, in the words of Joshua Giddings, "he was careful to say nothing exceptionable to the slave interest." Though few followed in his tracks, for the interested, the true origins of the Second Seminole War were evident.²¹

²¹ Petition of Alachua Country Slaveowners to Andrew Jackson, January 1834, *House Document 271*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 30-33; John Winslett, December 21, 1833, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 453. *House Document 271* was released three days after the aforementioned communication located in *American State Paper: Military Affairs*. These documents were not invisible to contemporary Americans. Joshua Giddings relied on many of them for his famous speech violating the gag rule in 1841 (detailed in chapter 6) and Joseph Sprague had unearthed information on the Treaty of Payne's Landing by 1848. See Joshua Giddings, "Speech of Mr. Giddings of Ohio," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, February 9, 1841, 26th Congress, 2nd Session, 346-352; Joseph Sprague, *The Origin, Process, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1848), 44-71. I have made the decision to examine Everett's speech in chapter 6, grouping it with abolitionist conceptions of the war. This is an arbitrary decision as Everett did not consider himself antislavery until the onset of the Mexican-American War. Nevertheless, his critique utilized the same discourses as those of antislavery activists and was of the same tradition. Moreover, contemporary Americans grouped them together as well. See Joshua R. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida: The Crimes Committed by our Government against the Maroons who Flew from South Carolina and Other Slave States* (Columbus, OH: Follett, Foster, and Company, 1858), 190. On the role of slaveowners in the removal debate, see George Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Removal Debate, 1821-1835," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 68.1 (July, 1989), 55-78.

The most vocal Whigs, again with the exception of a handful of antislavery reformers, instead pursued three lines of attack against the war. The largest faction followed the example of Francis Granger and attacked not the war itself, but Martin Van Buren's handling of it. Doing so implicitly supported the nascent yet powerful Democratic obsession with conquest and effectively argued that Martin Van Buren was a bad president because he was not a capable enough subjugator of nonwhites. A second contention, usually enunciated by politicians such as Henry Clay who identified with the ideals of the early republic tradition, offered an alternate vision of relations with Indians which recalled a past era in which Americans made a real commitment to offer Indians the "fruits" of civilization. In the context of the late 1830s as a bulwark against removals which had already occurred, such rhetoric was no more than a mirage. Aside from the Seminoles and factions of obstinate Cherokees, forced emigration was already a reality. In practice, given their focus on the plight of the Cherokees, the objection to Indian removal on the basis of assimilation was merely a debate over the legitimacy of the Treaty of New Echota, a vitally important subject for thousands of Cherokees, but only a glancing blow against the Democratic project of conquest and subjugation. The third approach was that of antislavery leaders such as John Quincy Adams and Joshua Giddings, who linked expansion to oppression, oppression to slavery, and slavery to tyranny. It was a lonely position.²²

The myth of the vanishing Indian greatly circumscribed the language that Whigs used in describing the war. For decades, amateur anthropologists among the American

²² Again, see chapter 6 for the role of the Second Seminole War in antislavery discourse. Aside from the speeches of Horace Everett referred to in this chapter, himself of the tradition but not vocally antislavery until decades later, abolitionist sympathizers had very little impact on Congressional debates before the inauguration of William Henry Harrison in 1841.

elite had, using all of the clunky and arbitrary analyses at their disposal, contended that the trajectory of the globe's history portended certain doom for Native Americans. They found evidence in the world outside their windows, ignoring centuries of appropriation and instead seizing on the diminished population of Indians east of the Mississippi River. The myth's implications for United States Indian policy were especially pernicious. Any argument against expansive war would be extremely constricted if the Indians' only alternative was death by another means. Consequently, Whigs constrained their opinions on the war to Democratic conduct and wastefulness. Nothing more.²³

In late 1836, Senator Henry Clay, as the guest of honor, addressed the Woodford Festival in his home state of Kentucky. He spoke about two hours and one newspaper reported he was "fervent, solemn, sometimes pathetic, sometimes playful." The election of 1836 was imminent and he, though resentful of Harrison's nomination, feared a continuation of Jackson's presidency. So he spoke at length, addressing the promise of America's present state and closing with a denunciation of Democratic Indian policy. Having been raised in frontier Kentucky, Clay had long held a dim view of Indian character and, like most, believed their extinction to be inevitable. Nonetheless, Clay spoke against the Treaty of New Echota, arguing that the mass of Cherokee people had risen against it, and declared himself opposed to Indian removal, against which he had campaigned in 1832. Now, however, with the Indians long since removed, he offered no prescription for the future. Clay closed with the Second Seminole War, then entering its ninth month with Richard Keith Call in command and floundering even to organize his

²³ On the rhetoric of the vanishing Indian, see Lora Romero, "Vanishing Americans: Gender, Empire, and the New Historicism," *American Literature*, 63.3 (September 1991), 385-404; Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Verso Books, 1991), 153-154.

campaign. Clay railed against the administration's military failures, wondering at their causes. In his words, the Second Seminole War was a "disgrace," as "four or five hundred wretched outcast Indian warriors had baffled the skill of three or four Major Generals." Nevertheless, Clay had a solution. For the past month, he had discussed the possibility of "offering to the administration to contract, in behalf of the State of Kentucky, to capture and deliver West of the Mississippi every Seminole Indian." For over a million dollars less than the government had already paid, Clay believed he could win the war in a matter of months. He did not enunciate a noble vision of justice, but rather a plan to remove Indians in a more cost effective way.²⁴

Other Whigs imitated Clay's pragmatism, but channeled it more directly against the war effort. Few received more criticism for their opposition than Whig Representative Henry Wise of Virginia. A Southerner to his very core, Wise had defeated his original opponent for Congress twice, once in an election and once in a duel. He famously spent hours haranguing abolitionists on church steps in his home district and was one of the leading proponents of the gag rule. Differentiating himself from Horace Everett and the rest, he loudly averred that "I am myself a southern man ... and I have much the same feelings toward the black or the red skin" as any other person from the region. Yet, he feared that the war was materially harming the interests of the United States. Looking west, he imagined there was already "more than one Ocoola beyond the Mississippi,"

²⁴ "Remarks Made by Mr. Clay at the Woodford Festival," *Indiana Journal*, September 3, 1836. On Clay's stance toward Indian rights, see Ronald Satz, *Jacksonian Indian Policy* 40; David Heidler and Jeanne Heidler, *Henry Clay: The Essential American* (New York: Random House, 2010), 230-231. Heidler and Heidler argue that in the years following the Indian Removal Act, Clay expressed greater empathy for their plight. See also "Suppression of Indian Hostilities," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 373. In his private correspondence, Clay occasionally expressed his discomfort with the war. See Henry Clay to Salma Hale, January 7, 1838, *The Papers of Henry Clay, Volume 9: The Whig Leader, January 1-December 31, 1843*, ed., James Hopkins (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 122. Also, see subsequent discussion of the Armed Occupation Act.

leaders who might unite the disparate nations against the United States. Speaking in the fall of 1837 in the aftermath of Jesup's deceptive capture of Osceola, Wise found the war both ineptly managed and "morally wrong." He vowed not to appropriate another dollar unless Congress approved a full-scale investigation into both its origins and the root causes of American failures. Going further, he attacked the foundations of the conflict and urged the Floridians to allow the Seminoles, "a people who have forced us to respect them," to remain there, in peace.²⁵

Though emphatic, Wise's opposition to the war in Florida was, at best, nominal. As with Clay, his greatest concerns were over the conduct of the war, specifically whether corrupt government officials had wasted taxpayer money, inept generals had bungled the operation, or unprincipled officers had acted to tarnish the honor of the United States. Wise did urge Florida citizens to allow the Seminoles to remain, but not out of any concern for Indian rights or opposition to national expansion. Instead, Wise referred to the Indians of Virginia who the Commonwealth had long allowed to remain on their land. Today, according to Wise, they were just a remnant of a once great people. Should the Floridians leave the Indians in peace, he assured them "they will gradually molt away and disappear before the white population." He did not, as Washington and Jefferson had, imagine the southeastern Indians blending as one people with their white neighbors nor did he defend Indian sovereignty. Instead, he argued for the use of racial destiny in place of military might. For all of his laudable rhetoric, Wise, like Clay, was

²⁵ Clement Eaton, "Henry A. Wise, A Liberal of the Old South," *Journal of Southern History*, 7.4 (Nov., 1941), 484-494; Barton Wise, *The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, 1806-1876* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1899), 37-41; "Florida War," *Register of Debates*, 25th Congress, 1st Session, 640-644; "Debate on the Seminole War," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 536-538.

merely offering another avenue to forward expansion, a more efficient means of removal.²⁶

Wise envisioned, though hazily, a means of replicating the early republic approach to dealing with hostile Indians, in essence defeating them not with bullets but with reason, progress, and peace. In yoking the early republic rhetoric of progress with overt calls for expansion, Wise manifested significantly more empathy for the Seminoles' struggle than the vast majority of his peers, but merely echoed the form if not the substance of Jacksonian expansion. Moreover, in reserving the nation's mercy - he quite clearly found the Seminoles' situation unique rather than universal among Indians - for a nation as steadfast as the Seminoles, he highlighted the failure of the army to sufficiently "overawe" them, in the Democratic parlance. Less martial Indian nations remained, in Wise's view, victims waiting to be swept aside by history.²⁷

For all of his equivocating, Wise faced intense criticism. He shook off accusations of excessive partisanship. It was within the bounds of debate when an Ohio newspaper accused Wise of belonging to a "vile and violent faction" who will "harass and oppose" any administration policy. Accusations of abolitionism, however, were risible. Following Wise's speech, Florida delegate Charles Downing accused Wise of sympathizing with the Seminoles and wondered if his feelings extended all the way to the abolitionists who vocally defended them. Francis Blair, the editor of *The Globe*, compared Wise's position

²⁶ It should be noted that after Wise swore not to appropriate another dollar to the Seminole War, the subsequent bill passed with only two votes against. Roll call was not taken, so Wise may or may not have been one of the two.

²⁷ The contrast between the plans of Wise and Jesup to allow the Seminoles to remain in Florida is instructive. Wise justified allowing the Seminoles to remain because they were destined for extinction, a means of removal that would cost the United States nothing. Jesup instead articulated a vision in which the Seminoles and the United States lived adjacently well into the future, and implicitly argued that Seminole autonomy was not a threat to national security. Jesup believed the war to be "morally wrong" due to the principles upon which it was founded. Ironically enough, Wise believed the war to be "morally wrong" only due to Jesup's actions in fighting it.

to that of Horace Everett and found little daylight between the two as both urged the government to leave the Seminoles in Florida. That Wise imagined Seminole extinction to be the culmination of his policy whereas Everett envisioned revitalization was lost on the editor. Finally, Jonathan Cilley, a Democratic Representative of Maine, openly pondered on “this sympathy for the dark red man which seemed to be akin to that expressed in some quarters for the man of yet a darker hue.” This comment, Wise did not forget. Exactly one month later, after an escalating series of accusations, slights, misunderstandings, and affirmations of honor, Wise faithfully stood second as Congressman William Graves of Kentucky, on the third exchange of shots, fatally felled Cilley in a duel in Bladensburg, Maryland.²⁸

Of all the members of Congress, few were as linked to the passage of the Indian Removal Act as Representative John Bell of Tennessee, who had authored a parallel bill and helped shepherd the original to passage. However, following disputes with the Jackson administration over patronage appointments and banking policy, Bell fell out with the Democratic Party and migrated to the Whigs who welcomed him with open arms. On June 1, 1838, having heard that Bell had offhandedly excoriated the conflict as “inglorious” in a Hartford speech, his Tennessee colleague, Democrat Hopkins Turney, inquired about the basis of Bell’s criticism on the floor of the House. Seeing as how Bell had authored the very law the army was then enforcing and had faithfully voted for

²⁸ The duel, though partially instigated by the aforementioned debate, arose as well from Cilley’s disputes with a newspaper editor friendly to Graves and Wise. See Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 38-41; Pasley, “Minnows, Spies, and Aristocrats” 631-650; “Debate on the Seminole War,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 536-538; “Remarks of Mr. Cilley,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, 78-80; “The War Party in Peace, The Peace Party in War,” *The Globe*, January 25, 1838; “The Extraordinary Character of the Opposition,” *Daily Ohio Statesman*, September 25, 1837.

several appropriations on the war, Turney concluded Bell must secretly hold antislavery views, as only an abolitionist could oppose the war given, he said, that it gave “strength and importance to the slaveholding interest of the Union.” Outraged at the accusation, Bell dismissed Turney as a “mere instrument of other men’s malice – a *tool of tools*.” Turney turned and confronted Bell. In response, Bell struck Turney in the face, bringing chaos to the House. Henry Wise, no stranger to political violence, calmed the participants and urged the Speaker to resume the proceedings, calmly and with dignity. After a spell, Bell resumed his defense and declared the war inglorious not for its aims, but for the mismanagement of the Van Buren administration. Such was the prevailing argument of the Whigs: violently partisan and exceedingly circumscribed.²⁹

That these two incidents, the Cilley/Wise dispute and the Turney/Bell rivalry, led to physical violence was unusual, though not unique in the antebellum congress. More notable was the utter vacuity of their references to abolition. Neither Cilley nor Turney offered the slightest justification for the association of their enemies with antislavery, only that both abolitionists and their political opponents alike denounced the war sufficiently justified their comparison. At no point did anyone in the debate allude to fugitive slave sanctuaries or disputed claims on the Black Seminoles. The closest anyone came to linking slavery to the war was Turney’s brief speculation that abolitionists opposed the war in hopes that should another slave rebellion erupt, the Seminoles might remain in Florida to assist. In all other respects, the connection was unspoken. Cilley and

²⁹ On Bell’s links to the Indian Removal Act, see Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* 30, Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whigs* 42. “Suppression of Indian Hostilities,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, May 31, 1838, 357-360; “Speech of Mr. Bell of Tennessee,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, May 31, 1838, 558-563; “A Disreputable Scene in Congress = A Personal Rencontre,” *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, June 4, 1838. Turney believed Bell accused him of being the tools of Tennessee Senator Felix Grundy and future president James K. Polk.

Turney brandished the prospect of abolitionism as a weapon, using it as a means to intimidate their enemies into silence.³⁰

Of the diehard foes of Indian removal remaining in Congress, the most faithful to the tradition of the early republic was Whig Representative Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts. Unlike many of his colleagues, Cushing acknowledged what should have been a cause for despair: due to relentless public and institutional pressure, Indian Removal was a reality and, worse, he said, “we know, we must know, that the process of removal cannot be arrested.” What, then, remained of the old dream of civilizing and assimilating Indians? Cushing concluded that it was the mission of the Whigs to protect and redeem the Indians in the West. To forestall an inevitable war on that frontier, it was imperative to formulate another message to the Indian nations there. Where Jackson and his subordinates spoke to the Indians through the language of domination, he hoped a Whig administration would not just “speak to them only as conquerors . . . , but conjoin the justice that shall command respect, and the clemency that shall conciliate affection.”³¹

Cushing’s opposition to the war went further than that of Wise and Clay. Where the two southern Whigs assumed the establishment of white supremacy in Florida to be inevitable and desirable, Cushing dismissed Florida as a “desert tract of country, utterly useless to any but” the Seminoles. Nevertheless, in following old ideals blindly, Cushing found himself lost in the contradictions of the Florida War. Though he believed deeply in the values of the civilizing project, Cushing concluded that the policies had failed.

Unwilling to declare that whites had proven unfaithful in their promises, Cushing

³⁰ On the frequency of violence in Congress, see Eric Uslaner, “Comity in Context: Confrontation in Historical Perspective,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1991), 45–77.

³¹ “Indian Appropriation Bill,” *Register of Debates*, 24th Congress, 2nd Session 1525-1538; “Florida War,” *Register of Debates*, 25th Congress, 1st Session, 640-644.

tortuously concluded the fault lay with the Indians to whom, he asserted, “the Word was preached, ... civilization was offered; they refused it, and they died in their unbelief.” Logically, then, he proceeded to denounce the war as “a rotten point; a blot, a shame on the national reputation,” while at the same time, without contradiction, disclaiming the millions spent on assimilating Indians as “water spilled on the ground.” As Cushing believed that Indians had failed to match Jefferson’s lofty ideals, he would not stand in the way of their conquest. By the summer of 1839, Cushing was defending removal as an outright benefit for both northern and southern farmers and ignoring its effects on Indian nations. Cushing would attack Van Buren’s conduct; he would not defend the Seminoles.³²

Cushing’s inability and eventual disinclination to articulate a coherent critique of the Second Seminole War pointed to the bind in which northern Whigs had placed themselves. If they would not or could not popularize and criticize the role of slaveholder interests in causing the war or argue in defense of Seminole autonomy, they closed off any means by which they might have attacked its underpinnings. That Cushing could not marshal early republic language to enunciate a policy that might replace Indian removal, pointed toward their intellectual bankruptcy. Instead, the great bulk of Whigs chose not to protest at all. Doing so would not have required an embrace of abolition. But it would have required a concerted effort to reorient the priorities of a misshapen republic.

Convergence and the Election of 1840

³² John Belohavek, *Broken Glass: Caleb Cushing and the Shattering of the Union* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2005), 82-85.

The presidential election of 1840 pitted the man who had mismanaged the Second Seminole War against a man who steadfastly refused to address it. One represented a party committed to subjugation and conquest with no prescription for how to achieve them, and the other represented a party with no official position on the war altogether. Defeat did not chasten the Democrats. As the election neared, Van Buren's political ally, Thomas Hart Benton, offered a new approach to frontier warfare, proposing a break from the failures of the first years of the conflict, while still fulfilling fundamental Democratic priorities. Where Van Buren trumpeted a new frontier strategy, in the brief time left to him, William Henry Harrison seldom addressed the war. However his past, his choice of cabinet, and a single, rich lecture on Indians delivered in 1839, offered clues that he, too, intended to enforce the complete submission of the Seminoles.

The Democratic Party entered 1839 reeling from its first electoral catastrophe. The Panic of 1837 had animated Whigs critiques of Jacksonian economic policy and propelled them to near parity in the House of Representatives in 1838. Moreover, the Whigs enjoyed a massive upsurge in voter enthusiasm as turnout rose during the midterm election, compared even to the presidential election two years earlier. Given Martin Van Buren's failure to effectively address the Panic of 1837, the high costs of the Second Seminole War threatened to reinforce the already prevalent narrative of the Democrats' fiscal inanity.³³

Looking south from Washington in late 1838, the war's prospects appeared increasingly bleak. Thomas Jesup had been reassigned. The capture of Osceola had changed little. Even successful alliances with the Black Seminoles had weakened, but not

³³ All told, the war cost the nation somewhere between 30 and 40 million dollars. Given that annual federal expenditures hovered around 25 million, the conflict was a serious drag on the nation's coffers.

ended, the Seminole threat. In his annual message to Congress, Secretary of War Joel Poinsett admitted that negotiations with the scattered bands of Seminole warriors were impracticable and unreliable; the only remaining option was a long, drawn out war against the remnants of an Indian nation that was proving ever more resolute as its numbers dwindled. He offered a plan, however. Poinsett ordered Zachary Taylor to invite displaced settlers to return to their homes on the frontier, help them surround their houses with stout pickets, organize defensive battalions, and prepare them to provide the nation's first line of defense. Though Poinsett doubted the settlers would be a sufficient deterrent, he announced he would request that Congress pass legislation to authorize the War Department to offer free land and supplies to any settlers who pledged to defend their homestead against all enemies of the state. The army had failed. There remained but one hope left and, providentially, it was the Democracy's greatest weapon, the people.³⁴

Poinsett's proposal dovetailed with Thomas Hart Benton's priorities. Deeply engaged with frontier issues, Benton adroitly judged the efficacy of using settlers to transform, pacify, and consolidate the nation's borders. Over the past forty years, settlers throughout the South had tirelessly improved the land, forcibly ejected Indians, and formed a makeshift, yet homogenously nationalistic front on the nation's borderlands. Throughout the 1820s, as the market revolution further integrated their frontier communities into the national fabric, white Americans on the frontier imagined themselves arrayed against rebellious slaves and savage Indians intent on choking off their paths to prosperity. An avowed expansionist yet deeply suspicious of internal improvements, Benton had long championed the distribution of public lands to settlers as

³⁴ Joel Poinsett, "Report of the Secretary of War," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 1.

a means of benefitting his constituents and furthering territorial expansion. In this instance, Benton envisioned that internal expansion, through the appropriation of land and resources, would lead to the gradual subordination and removal of Indians. A cheaper means of expansion, his proposal offered an ideologically consistent and effectively practical means for resolving the conflict.³⁵

As Benton conceived it, removing the Seminoles from their intractable positions in the wilderness was a task for which the army was ill suited, but, he argued, “unarmed occupation and settlement of the territory is the true way of expelling the Indians.” Having long urged the sale of public lands at discount prices, Benton applied the policy to Florida and suggested withdrawing the army and offering 320 acres of land free to settlers on the frontier. According to Benton, the settlers would bloodlessly expel Indians by gradually transforming the untamed wilderness into the site of a yeoman community of free white men and women. Settlers would be under only three obligations: to live, to cultivate, and to defend their lands. Offensive expeditions would be strictly optional. Benton rooted his policy in his sense of history, and his certainty that generation after generation of European settlers had gradually, yet irrevocably, removed Indians through the invisible workings of progress. Americans would do the same.³⁶

³⁵ On public lands, see Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 62-75; John Otto, *The Southern Frontiers, 1607-1860: The Agricultural Evolution of the Colonial and Antebellum South* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Craig Friend, *Along the Maysville Road: The Early American Republic in the Trans-Appalachian West* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005); Daniel Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 18700-1840*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997). On Benton, see Elbert Smith, “Thomas Hart Benton: Southern Realist,” *American Historical Review*, 58.4 (July 1953), 795-807; “Armed Occupation of Florida,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, January 12, 1840, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 96.

³⁶ For more on the bill, see Michael E. Welsh, “Legislating a Homestead Bill: Thomas Hart Benton and the Second Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 57.2 (Oct, 1978), 157-172. “Remarks of Hon. T.H. Benton,” February 5, 1839, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 162-165.

In wedding early republic ideals to unapologetic conquest, Benton accomplished what others could not. A Neo-Jeffersonian of sorts, Benton trusted the capacity of independent whites to extend the path of liberty beyond the nation's frontiers. Though he replicated Jefferson's logic of independent settlement, Benton marshaled his language in ways that directly conflicted with Jefferson's own vision. In reiterating that conquest would be bloodless, Benton consciously ignored the past few decades of white-Indian relations, whose violence gave lie to his assertion. Throughout the South, and with great fanfare, settlers had deceived, robbed, assaulted, and murdered neighboring Indians whenever they had the opportunity. Given that settler violence had touched off monumental Supreme Court Cases and numerous political controversies, Benton was hardly unaware of the consequences of his bill. By proposing the government utilize settlers as an armed front, then, Benton stripped early republic ideals of their ideological meaning and transformed independent freeholders into mercenaries in the service of the federal government. For all of his promises that his bill was a novel solution to the problems of expansion, he simply offered domination and subjugation through other means.

Though Benton's proposal retained the war's original goals, his proposal did significantly shift the nation's priorities. By 1839, the Van Buren administration had abandoned almost all of the objectives that Lewis Cass had laid out for Winfield Scott three years earlier to re-enslave the Black Seminoles and force the complete submission of the Indians. With the Black Seminoles largely out of the reach of covetous slaveholders and the domination of the Seminoles no longer assured, Democratic legislators were willing to settle for other, ostensibly gentler, means of expansion. By his

own logic, Benton's proposal would not ensure the subjugation of the Seminoles for years, if not decades. It was a formulation to which Benton would cling. Five years later, in the debate over the annexation of Texas, Benton and other diehard Van Burenites would oppose any treaty that did not recognize Mexican rights and a careful definition of national boundaries, to the consternation of ardent southern expansionists such as James K. Polk and John Calhoun. In Mexico, as in Florida, Benton prioritized orderly progress over the goals of maximal expansion.³⁷

Benton's bill faced opposition from two factions in the Senate. The first, led by Henry Clay, objected to the expense of the plan. Clay argued that few settlers would be reckless enough to flock to the Florida frontier given the alarming reports emanating weekly from the frontier, and that enticing families would cost many millions of dollars. Inching toward a more comprehensive critique of the war, Clay went further, reasoning that since Congress had been so willing to pass every bill the administration requested, any neglect of duty on the part of Congress had been in its readiness to "grant all the means asked for by the Executive, . . . without any investigation into the causes or conduct of this inglorious War." The second faction speaking out against Benton was a faction of one, Thomas Morris. An Ohio Democrat, Morris had grown increasingly critical of the influence of slavery on the Union and frustrated by the veil protecting it in the Senate. By 1836, he had become an early critic of the gag rule and the popularizer of the term, "the Slave Power." A lame duck in 1839 having lost renomination to his seat, he chose to be silent no more and attacked Benton's plan as designed to lure slaveholders to Florida, furthering slave interests and risking a repeat of the ravages of the Haitian

³⁷ On Benton and Texas, see Joel Silbey, *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83-87; Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 149-157.

Revolution. The efforts of Morris and Clay were for naught as the bill passed the Senate 25-18. Ironically, four days after his speech against Benton's bill, Morris gave his most famous oration, excoriating Henry Clay for his prominent anti-abolition views.³⁸

The Armed Occupation Act, however, was defeated in the House. The final vote against the bill was not recorded, though an earlier vote on whether to table the bill offered a window into the cause of its defeat. For the most part, the House voted along party lines, with the exception of a number of southern Representatives of both parties who broke ranks. Likely, several southern Democrats voted against the bill in hopes of preserving the land for friendly speculators and facilitating the implementation of a large plantation-style economy in East Florida. Conversely, several southern Whigs from frontier areas likely voted for the bill, hoping to please their constituents, ambitious yeoman farmers desiring land for themselves.³⁹

One year later in January 1840, Benton offered his bill again. He offered the same set of rationalizations: "It is a good plan; I may call it a master plan ... It is a plan which REVERSES the position of the parties in Florida – which makes US the possessors of the country, and leaves it to THEM to expel US." In his final defense of the bill, Benton

³⁸ Clay's more fiery denunciation of the war likely resulted from the controversy over rumors that the War Department intended to import Cuban bloodhounds to Florida. See chapter 7. His desire for investigations ended with William Henry Harrison's election. Clay's speech was not recorded, but a draft was present in his papers. See "Draft Fragment of Speech for Senate," February 18, 1839, *Papers of Henry Clay* 9:288. Benton's counter offered a clear picture of the nature of Clay's objections as well (they do not appear to differ from the draft): "Armed Occupation of Florida," February 18, 1839, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 233-234. For more on Morris, see Thomas Mitchell, *Anti-Slavery Politics in Antebellum and Civil War America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 11-27; John Neuenschwander, "Senator Thomas Morris: Antagonist of the South, 1836-1839," *Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin*, 32 (Fall 1974), 122-139. Morris's speech also went unrecorded, but its contours can be glimpsed from Benton's response as well, see "Remarks of Hon. T.H. Benton," February 5, 1839, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session, 162-163.

³⁹ James Covington suggested the lobbying of large southern landholders and speculators defeated the bill. James Covington, "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 40.1 (July 1961), 42.

reiterated his belief in the effectiveness of settlers as a means of removal. Responding to accusations in the abolitionist press that he merely hoped to cement Florida as a slave state, he pointed to the large number of free-state Democrats supporting the bill. He concluded that any argument against the bill arose not from actual disagreement, but from Whig fears that admitting Florida to the Union would inaugurate a reliably Democratic state, nothing more.⁴⁰

Once again, the bill passed the Senate on a nearly party line vote. Nevertheless, the bill died in the House, likely because slaveholders wished to retain the land for themselves. The future strategy of the Seminole War, then, would hinge on the election of 1840. If the Democrats could increase their margin in the House by a few seats, Benton's bill would pass. If they did not, the war policy would devolve back to the president. The choice would be Benton's land policy or whatever William Henry Harrison might propose.

To a certain extent, historians have over-emphasized Harrison's silence during the election of 1840. Throughout the campaign, he clarified his stance on Masonry in an aim to shore up his anti-Masonic credentials and pronounced his support for Clay's American System of national banks, tariffs, and internal improvements loudly, though occasionally with muddled clarity. Harrison's preferred frontier policies, however, were a complete mystery. Though he offered few hints as to his current stance on national expansion and Indian removal, Harrison's past was littered with clues. As the governor of Indiana thirty years before, Harrison had faithfully executed the will of his white constituents and used all of the resources at his command to coerce neighboring Indians into giving up their

⁴⁰ "Armed Occupation Act," January 7, 1840, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 71-75; "Armed Occupation of Florida," January 12, 1840, *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 26th Congress, 1st Session, 94-100.

land. He was, as all knew, the hero of Tippecanoe and the conqueror of Tecumseh. Few believed that Harrison might pursue a more moderate Indian policy than his opponents.⁴¹

In early 1838, however, Harrison did offer a small glimpse into his views on Indian removal. In a widely reprinted speech to the Historical Society of Ohio, Harrison presented *A Discourse on the Aborigines of the Ohio Valley*, a brief treatise detailing the conquests of the Iroquois nation in the seventeenth century. As a history it was at times subpar - imagining that the Aztecs had once settled Ohio centuries before - and at times insightful - correctly casting doubt on the extent of Iroquois control in the Ohio valley prior to the French and Indian War. Most of all, this history had a clear, if convoluted, ideological bent. Primarily, Harrison hoped to explain how his own history as an Indian remover could be distinguished from Jackson's relentless, institutionalized directives. To do so, Harrison relied on two arguments. In the first, Harrison noted his presence at the 1795 Treaty of Greenville and explained, through his long historical narrative, that he had acted to deprive the Northwest Indian nations of land which was theirs only by conquest, rather than by right. Second, he enunciated a more traditional view of early republic Indian policy, arguing that the treaties to which he was a party always required the United States to act as "sole protectors" of the Indians and, if the country failed to honor its obligations, it was the fault of local agents acting independently of their superiors. Harrison, who had defeated Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh, signaled himself to be an Indian sympathizer, the last true believer in the dreams of his predecessors. Nevertheless,

⁴¹ For an examination of Harrison's silences, see Robert Gunderson, *The Log-Cabin Campaign* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957). For a divergent view see Holt, *Rise and Fall of the Whig Party* 89-121; Norma Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989). For his career in Indiana and his involvement in the most exploitative aspects of Jefferson's Indian policy, see Robert M. Owens, *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer: William Henry Harrison and the Origins of American Indian Policy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

though he regretted that the Indians had their land and mourned their eventual extinction, he felt no guilt for his own actions. The appropriation of Indian lands and the subjugation of Indian peoples were a perpetual fact of North American history. He was not the man to reverse that trajectory.⁴²

According to Harrison, there once lived in the valley an Indian people with whom his audience would have identified. They were “numerous,” living in “considerable cities,” “agricultural,” and in “possession of domestic animals.” These peaceful Indians lived happily, in Harrison’s words, “in the full enjoyment of all that peace and liberty can give,” until the arrival of the Iroquois nation. In the face of overwhelming force, the villagers of the valley resisted bravely and left no plunder for the conquering Iroquois, but perished nonetheless. After establishing their claims to the valley, the Iroquois sporadically allied with the British against the nascent American state, until their decisive loss at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. He ended with a paean to Indian character and by reminding his listeners that the United States may have defaulted on some of its promises to its Indian neighbors, but any misrepresentation was not the fault of Jefferson, Madison, or Monroe, but that of Indian agents on the ground.⁴³

By implication, Harrison offered a truly hands-off federal Indian policy. His final affirmation of Indian character had the air, not of a commendation but of a eulogy. He imagined a continent best by cycles of invasion and appropriation. As the Iroquois had displaced the peaceful, civilized Indian nations of the Ohio valley, the United States would do the same. As it was common knowledge that the Seminoles had arrived in

⁴² William Henry Harrison, *A Discourse on the Aborigines of the Ohio Valley* (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1883). For the limits of Iroquois control, see Fred Anderson. *The Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A, Knopf: 2000).

⁴³ In his narrative, Harrison made no mention of his often pivotal role in these events.

Florida a century before, the implication of Harrison's speech was that their hold on to Florida land was no more legitimate than that of the Iroquois on Ohio. American appropriation was natural and just. Taken as a whole, Harrison's history served as tacit approval for Jackson's policies and foreshadowed that he would not, indeed by his telling could not, arrest the march of aggressive expansion.

Following Whig success in the statewide elections of early 1840, Harrison's victory appeared increasingly assured and his campaign took on the appearance of a victory march. Perhaps the greatest celebration took place at the old Tippecanoe battleground. There, 10,000 Harrison supporters gathered to celebrate their candidate. In his honor, delegations from across Indiana and neighboring states crafted elaborate floats and performed a lengthy parade. According to one report, the most elaborate of the group was a float from Cambridge City, Indiana. On one side, it displayed a beautiful landscape with an eagle holding in its beak the names of the Whig ticket. On the other side, it displayed Martin Van Buren and a Seminole chief, Van Buren begging and begging for peace on any terms, but being rebuffed by the intransigent chief. In the foreground, bloodhounds lay bleeding and castigated Van Buren for his failure of leadership. This was not the float of a campaign intent on conciliation. Numerous newspaper articles compared the records of William Henry Harrison and Martin Van Buren as Indian killers, finding, as one might expect, Harrison's credentials far outpaced those of Van Buren. Even Florida's delegate to the House, necessarily the biggest war hawk in Congress, switched his allegiance from Van Buren to Harrison. The general had earned his fame at Tippecanoe and proudly bore that legacy. It was in that spirit that William Henry

Harrison won the election of 1840.⁴⁴

As Harrison took office, the political fault lines of the Second Seminole War were set. With a few exceptions, Democrats had coalesced around Benton's proposal, finding it an efficient means of winning the war and seizing Florida. They did not turn their backs on conquest - the Second Seminole War remained predicated on appropriating Seminole land and consolidating United States authority - they seized upon the use of settlers as another means of achieving it. All of the nation's most influential Whigs save John Quincy Adams, including Harrison, Clay, Webster, Granger, Cushing, Wise, and Bell, had come out in favor of incorporating Florida into national fabric under the aegis of white expansionism. In Washington, the only avowed opponents of Indian expansion were a diverse group of reformers and abolitionists who connected the consolidation of Florida with the expansion of slavery. A fringe group, they nonetheless utilized the Second Seminole War as justification to oppose national expansion and support a federal government predicated on moral rectitude in place of the language of force. They toiled largely in obscurity until the last years of the war.

Prior to the rise of war-inspired antislavery, the interregnum between Harrison's election and the fateful day of his inauguration was a quiet one. The newly crowned leader of his party, the general consolidated the support of his allies in Congress and cast his gaze forward, to the next four years as the leader of his nation. In Florida, the army entered a waiting game, months of dull, monotonous service as soldiers awaited action from the Seminoles or commands from their new commander in chief. Across the

⁴⁴ During his brief time in office, Harrison did demonstrate significant ambivalence toward the war, belying the implications of his campaign. See chapter 7. "Tippecanoe Battle-Ground Convention," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, June 13, 1840; *New Hampshire Statesman and State Journal*, April 11, 1840; "Another Important Change," *Virginia Free Press*, July 9, 1840; "Mr. Webster's Speech on Long Island," *Boston Courier*, September 28, 1840; *Morning Herald*, August 11, 1840.

country, representatives of both political parties made vital decisions. For his part, Harrison offered the first clue of his Indian policy. For his cabinet he chose John Bell, the author of the Indian Removal Act, to lead the War Department and oversee his relationship with dozens of Indian nations.⁴⁵

Throughout the first four years of the war, many Americans dissented from the war policies of Jackson and Van Buren. The Democratic insistence on the obliteration of nonwhite sovereignty and the re-enslavement of the Black Seminoles was, in some circles, highly contentious. Generals attempted to conciliate with their enemies absent orders, officers requested reassignment away from the front and resigned their commissions, and antislavery writers railed against the injustice of the war. In the Congress of the 1830s, at the dawn of the highly partisan second party system, the air was comparatively still. Nearly every member considered Seminole removal, whether by violence or through more passive means, necessary and welcome. Five years before, prominent politicians had castigated Jackson for repudiating the idealism of early republic Indian policy, but confronted with those actions in practice, they refrained from criticism. In the face of the slave power, the most influential Whigs in the country remained silent. In 1830, Henry Clay had declared his predecessors' pledge that the Indians were secure in owning the land upon which they lived a "solemn annunciation" of principle. In 1836, he, and many others, faithfully endorsed the underlying principles of Jackson's Second Seminole War.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 282.

⁴⁶ Henry Clay, "Address to the Colonization Society of Kentucky," *National Intelligencer*, January 12, 1840.

Chapter 5

*“The Very Obscurest of the Obscure”:
The Second Seminole War and the Future of Antislavery in the United States*

In 1858, sitting Representative Joshua Giddings of Ohio decided to write a history. A newly minted Republican, he had served for twenty years and outlived three of the political parties to which he had once belonged, the Whigs, the Free Soilers, and the Opposition Party. As one of the nation’s most prominent antislavery voices, he had weathered the decades with few political allies and countless foes. Now, after the Mexican-American War, after the enactment of the fugitive slave law, after Bleeding Kansas, after Dred Scott, his supporters were legion. It was fortunate, for recent events filled Giddings with dread. Filibusterers with southern ties had conquered Nicaragua, recent Democratic administrations had launched wars against both Mormons in Utah and Seminoles in Florida, and proslavery partisans had recently succeeded in passing their Lecompton Constitution in Kansas to the applause of the president himself. The boundaries of slavery’s empire appeared to stretch far over the horizon. When Giddings wrote his history, then, he chose the Second Seminole War as his subject for good reason. Identifying a persistent and perfidious plot to re-enslave the Black Seminoles twenty years before, Giddings warned his readers that “many of the scenes which were enacted in Florida, will most likely be again presented on our southwestern frontier . . . and the same effects will be likely to follow.” The roots, and the wounds, of the proslavery empire were deep.¹

¹ Joshua R. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida: The Crimes Committed by our Government against the Maroons who Fled from South Carolina and Other Slave States* (Columbus, OH: Follett, Foster, and Company, 1858), 338. For more on Giddings, see James Brewer Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970); Robert Ludlum, “Joshua Giddings, Radical,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 23.1 (Jun., 1936), 49-60; Richard Solberg, “Joshua Giddings,

Two decades before, Giddings was not alone in opposing the Second Seminole War. Other antislavery activists, ranging from members of Congress like John Quincy Adams to outsiders like William Lloyd Garrison, had made the same logical leap as Giddings, connecting Indian removal to national expansion and, inexorably, to the extension of slavery. Together they crafted an alternate account of the Second Seminole War, their critique the only coherent and truly oppositional narrative emphasizing and condemning the conflict's roots in the appropriation of Indian territory and the re-enslavement of African-Americans. Though many of these leading antislavery reformers were Whigs, unlike the vast majority of their colleagues and allies, they did not criticize Democratic handling of the war, but instead imagined an America that did not fight wars of expansion at all. Seemingly astray in the wilderness in the 1830s – Waddy Thompson, a Whig representative from South Carolina, dismissed Giddings and his allies during debates over the Second Seminole War as “*the very obscurest of the obscure* members of the Whig party” - there they first perceived the links between expansion, slavery, and their nation's destiny. And, just seven years after Giddings publicly launched the most intense attack on the war yet heard in 1841, a denunciation of slavery so vigorous Giddings' fellow representatives censured him, Democratic congressmen proposed the Wilmot Proviso, abolishing slavery in all lands seized during the Mexican-American War. Though David Wilmot and Joshua Giddings had precious little in common in manner or ideology, the Wilmot Proviso would have been unthinkable without the tireless agitation of antislavery activists throughout the 1830s. In forcefully

Politician and Idealist,” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1952); Douglas Gamble, “Joshua Giddings and the Ohio Abolitionists: A Study in Radical Politics,” *Ohio History*, 88.1 (Winter 1979), 37-56; William Miller, *Arguing about Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 339-501.

demonstrating the inextricable connection between the expansion of slavery and the expansion of the nation, reformers made possible the widespread adoption of all manner of antislavery positions, from free soil to abolition.²

The Second Seminole War united disparate activists by recasting the terms of the slavery debate as an appeal to Northerners' self-interest rather than their empathy for the enslaved. Instead of debating the most effective means of uprooting slavery, reformers criticized what they identified as the maneuverings of the Slave Power and the allocation of Northern resources for Southern priorities. In criticizing the Second Seminole War, reformers drastically constricted their attacks on the immorality of American society, but concomitantly presented goals more palatable to a wider populace by connecting the reach of slavery to concrete government policies that imperiled them. Though they evoked a chimera - a nefarious cabal of slaveholders subverting the democratic institutions of their nation - some reformers glimpsed a more terrifying truth: government officials had so internalized the interests of slaveholders that there was no distinction between the two. The government was itself the Slave Power.³

² The divide among Whigs between more mainstream Whigs and those who opposed the Second Seminole War as a war to entrench slavery in the territories lingered. Among the Whigs who supported the war (tacitly or otherwise), were many of the most prominent voices of compromise following the Mexican-American War, including Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John Bell, and Caleb Cushing. The opponents, almost all of whom were antislavery to one degree or another, nearly unanimously migrated to the Republican Party. *Louisville Public Advertiser*, March 5, 1841. On the rise of the antislavery movement, see Leonard Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Frederick Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: WW Norton, 2008); John McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997); Merton Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 1974).

³ The arguments against the Second Seminole War were not fully unifying for abolitionists. Likely feeling alienated by the shift of focus from "American" blacks suffering in the South to the tribulations of Black Seminoles whose persecutions seemed distant from the fate of millions of slaves, most free black abolitionists ignored the war, hardly commenting on its significance in the battle against slavery. See

The United States was on the precipice, of this, many abolitionists were sure. History, from the Romans to the Spanish, tinged with their own evangelical perspective, led them to fear the general curve of the nation's destiny. They understood the impulses behind Thomas Cole's opus of the mid 1830s, *The Course of Empire*, a five-part series of paintings



depicting the rise of a great civilization from the pastoral landscape and its eventual ruin. Similarly, they reflected William Apess' subversive 1836 re-interpretation of King Philip's War, *Eulogy for King Philip*, in which the Indian writer transformed the British into vandals and Philip into George Washington himself. Only in his telling, this Washington died on the Delaware. From the perspective of many abolitionists, in its aggression, the United States faced those two dire fates: a moral reckoning with the almighty over the curse of slavery or corrupted prosperity, only further proving Apess's aspersions correct.⁴

An examination of the abolitionist response to the Second Seminole War reveals that by the late 1830s, their critique of Indian removal was deeply ingrained into their

Linda K. Kerber, "The Abolitionist Perception of the Indian," *Journal of American History*, 62.2 (Sep 1975), 279. For example, *The Colored American*, the most prominent African-American-owned newspaper in the country, hardly mentioned the Second Seminole War throughout its run. For studies on the interests of Jacksonian antislavery activists in Indian Removal, see Linda K. Kerber, "The Abolitionist Perception of the Indian," *Journal of American History*, 62.2 (Sep 1975), 271-295; Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *Journal of American History*, 86.1 (1999), 15-40; John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War,' and Abolitionism, 1796-1865," *Journal of Southern History*, 72.2 (May 2006), 259-302.

⁴ On Thomas Cole, see Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 27-34. On Apess, see Andy Doolen, *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 145-184.

ideology. Their opposition to the Second Seminole War was inseparable from their opposition to slavery, not merely parallel to it. As William Jay argued in writing for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, “the Seminoles have been goaded into their extraordinary and desperate resistance, *by the frauds and robberies of slaveholders,*” American aggression on the frontier serving as further proof of the iniquity of the Slave Power. For antislavery activists, the extent to which slaveholders, in and out of the federal government, pursued the destruction of the Seminoles provided one of their first warnings of the strength, organization, and immorality of their foe. These tidings, fearful in their implication, united antislavery congressmen in the fight against the repressive gag rule that stifled debate over slavery in Congress, agitated countless antislavery activists against the prospect of further expansive war, and prepared them to recognize and combat the excesses of Manifest Destiny.⁵

Reformers identified Indian removal with slavery so easily because, in the case of the Seminoles, the connection was readily apparent. Northern reformers came to know the texture of Seminole culture, especially the relative integration of enslaved African-Americans into Seminole families and society. Those versed in history (and abolitionists, if nothing else, memorized their history), knew of the Negro Fort and the American expedition that had crushed the last vestige of independent black autonomy in the southeast. They read of the survivors and their descendants, along with the dozens of runaway slaves and hundreds of slaves whom the Seminoles had purchased legally, and knew they represented an African-American community largely isolated from the rigid

⁵ William Jay, *A View of the Action of the Federal Government in Behalf of Slavery* (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 166. On the links between opponents of Cherokee removal and abolition, see Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women’s Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). On Cherokee assimilation, see William McLoughlin, *Champions of the Cherokees: Evan and John B. Jones* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

racialization of the Deep South of the 1830s. When the war began, they, like most white Americans, considered the climate south of St. Augustine to be so inhospitable as to approach noxiousness. If the land itself was worthless, they concluded, the government had launched the war at the behest of slaveholders with the intention of re-enslaving hundreds of Black Seminoles, potential fomenters of rebellion and themselves worth a fortune in human capital.⁶

Glimpses and Conjectures

Antislavery reformers cared deeply about the fate of Florida as it stood alone among United States territories as a potential slave state. Following Arkansas' entrance into the Union in 1836, the rigid logic of the Missouri Compromise was clear. Based on the current boundaries of the United States if, *if*, the nation did not expand further, then the only territories eligible to enter the Union as slaves states would be Florida and Oklahoma. The latter, given its status as an Indian territory and lack of institutional organization, was unlikely to apply for statehood in the near future. Consequently, abolitionists in the 1830s offered a litmus test to politicians based on three criteria - outlawing the interstate commerce of slavery and abolition in both the District of

⁶ On the Black Seminoles, see Kenneth Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People*, ed., Alcione Amos and Thomas Senter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: the Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993); Anthony Dixon, "Black Seminole Involvement and Leadership during the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842," (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2007); Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Kevin Kokomoor, "A Re-assessment of Seminoles, Africans, and Slavery on the Florida Frontier, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 88.2 (Fall 2009), 209-236; Bruce Twyman, *The Black Seminole Legacy and North American Politics, 1693-1845* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1999); Brent Weisman, "Labor and Survival among the Black Seminoles of Florida," in *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration*, ed., Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 64-85.

Columbia and Florida. The Second Seminole War represented the frontlines in the war to expand or contain slavery's reach.⁷

Throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s, the Second Seminole War was one of a number of events that inspired the nascent anti-expansionism of the movement. With the legal termination of the international slave trade, they understood, as did their opponents, that the future of the institution lay beyond its present borders. Consequently, as early as 1837, abolitionist William Ellery Channing's writings took the form of jeremiads, warning national leaders that "the annexation of Texas . . . would be more than rashness; it would be madness" and imagining a dark future in which his country would "enter on a career of encroachment, war, and crime" against its neighbors.⁸

By the beginning of the war, antislavery reformers worried that all had already been lost. On May 25th, 1836, John Quincy Adams took his customary seat in the House of Representatives. He was an old man, but at the age of 68 he still retained vestiges of his youthful vigor. That day, he spoke for an hour, and without notes. Ostensibly he commented on a resolution offering aid to displaced settlers during the ongoing Creek War, yet as he spoke, Adams wandered back to topics that had long troubled him, topics deeply enmeshed with the growing chaos on the nation's frontiers. He touched upon the importance of the war powers of Congress and crafted a logical proof necessarily linking them to the regulation of slavery. He wondered at the insecurity of mass bondage as the nation waged Indian wars throughout the southeast. He worried that, even as he spoke,

⁷ Forbes, "Circular of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women," *The Liberator*, July 26, 1839.

⁸ On the links between expansion and slavery, see Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Frederick Merk, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas*, (New York: Knopf, 1972); Reginald Horsmann, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). William Ellery Channing, *A Letter to the Hon. Henry Clay, on the Annexation of Texas to the United States*, (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1837), 23.

chauvinistic Anglo-Saxons were pressuring his nation into war with Mexico, a war that would further intertwine the interests of the nation with the interests of slavery. He recalled earlier in the same session of Congress, when he had joined in the rush for national expansion by voting along with the majority to appropriate nearly one hundred thousand dollars to enlarge the standing army and recruit tens of thousands of volunteers to fight the Seminoles. He remembered his own role in the annexation of Florida and a brief conversation nearly twenty years ago with Andrew Jackson, then a brash young general with many glories in front of him, in which both agreed it was in the nation's interest to annex Florida. He remembered an even earlier time and an earlier frontier policy in which Washington and Jefferson dealt with Indians fairly, through a system of treaties and laws, and had sincerely offered land to the displaced, civilization to the savage, and peace to the war torn. Now, he saw only land hunger, disregard for the law, and the unrelenting use of force. Taking it all together, the slave in chains, the Indian at war, and a country with a greedy eye on every border, Adams wondered how the cacophonous regions of the country could possibly unite as one to support, what he termed, a "nation starting upon a crusade of conquest."⁹

Adams stood alone. With the removal of the Cherokees nearly assured, most reformers were rapidly losing interest in defending the concept of Indian sovereignty in the abstract. Compounding their withdrawal, the great voices of opposition to Indian removal had themselves been silenced. Jeremiah Evarts, the nation's most prominent advocate for Christian republicanism who had agitated tirelessly in defense of the

⁹ "Indian Hostilities – Speech of Hon. John Q. Adams of Massachusetts," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, May 25, 1836, 447-451; John Quincy Adams, "Rubbish II," diary and miscellaneous entries, 20 May 1820 - June 1843, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2004), 48:581.

Cherokees, had passed away five years before. Former Senator Frederick Frelinghuysen, the evangelical who had unremittingly led the parliamentary fight against the Indian Removal Act, left the Senate nine months before the start of the Second Seminole War. As for their colleagues, most had predicated their opposition to removal explicitly on the basis of assimilation. If the Cherokees adopted enough of the conceits of American culture, they argued, their removal would be inimical to American values. In that discourse, there was no space to defend the rights of the Seminoles, who were manifestly uninterested in adopting either Southern culture rooted in chattel slavery or converting to Christianity in any form. Catherine Beecher, for example, defended the Cherokees because individual members of the nation had the potential to be bright, brave, honorable, and, above all, Christian. Some Seminoles, by her lights, would have been honorable and many brave, but few would be considered bright and none Christian.¹⁰

Despite the differences between Seminole and Cherokee culture, some reformers did oppose the Second Seminole War on the same grounds as they had in the past. In that vein, a writer for the *Providence Journal* proposed that the nation undertake in place of physical violence, “Quaker fighting,” and use all the money wasted in the war to civilize, educate, and elevate the Seminoles, an strategy he believed would be both cheaper and more humane than warfare. It was in that spirit that Representative Horace Everett, a Whig from Vermont, uttered the first full-throated condemnation of the war in the halls of Congress. Everett, one of the leading defenders of Cherokee claims in Georgia,

¹⁰ John Andrew, *From Revivals to Removal: Jeremiah Evarts, the Cherokee Nation, and the Search for the Soul of America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak*; Kathryn Sklar and Gregory Duffy, “How Did the Removal of the Cherokee Nation from Georgia Shape Women’s Activism in the North, 1817-1838?,” *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000*, 8.2 (Jun., 2004).

recapitulated the arguments others had mustered against the 1830 Indian Removal Act, transposing his previous support for the Cherokees to the Seminoles.¹¹

In his speech, Everett questioned not whether the Seminoles should be removed, but the means used to compel them to do so. If the Seminoles were party to a freely negotiated treaty, he claimed he would happily assent to their removal, but, given the numerous inconsistencies surrounding the Treaty of Payne's Landing, he could not do so. Everett admitted that in the past he had assumed the majority of the members of Congress agreed with him, but recent debates had disabused him of that notion. To his astonishment, it seemed to him that the majority of his peers assumed "we cannot, consistently with our national honor, hold treaties, or even attempt a pacification of hostile Indians." With disgust, he repeated his colleagues' new enunciation of principle: "they must be *whipped* before they can be removed." In light of the pathetic progress of the war effort, Everett countered that it seemed his opponents believed their nation would find more honor in military defeat than a negotiated victory.

Given the ways in which government agents had compelled, prodded, deceived, and coerced the Seminoles into signing away their land, Everett wondered why the United States had gone to so much trouble to defraud the Seminoles out of a swamp-filled and disease-ridden peninsula. Everett provided two reasons. First, and most conspicuously, whites desired Seminole land. Second, Everett hypothesized that Southerners eyed more than just land; they wanted the Black Seminoles as well. Everett argued that given the land hunger of settlers on the frontier, the avarice of slaveholders,

¹¹ "Quaker Fighting.," reprinted in *The North American and Daily Advertiser*, November 16, 1841. Peleg Sprague another outspoken opponent of the Indian Removal Act left the Senate by 1835 as well.

and the resulting hostility of both Seminoles and Black Seminoles, the chances of a war of conquest approached inevitability.¹²

This crushing fear of the future, of a war machine that might prove unrelenting, animated many abolitionists. David Lee Child, a Massachusetts lawyer, and his wife Lydia Maria Child, wrote extensively on the evils of slavery and the threat of its imminent amalgamation with national expansion. Recoiling against news that Edmund Pendleton Gaines had called forth volunteers from the Deep South to march against Mexican Indians, Child wondered at the morality of a country that so casually would invade a friendly nation. No, Child concluded, “this nation has grown too familiar with unlawful violence and unpunished usurpations.” As proof, Child referred to the Second Seminole War and to an unnamed northern senator who had proposed an appropriation of half a million dollars for, as Child put it, “slaughtering the persecuted and helpless children of the forest.” When the senator was asked of the cause of the war, he replied “that really he did not know what was the cause of the war – but he knew that war existed and must be prosecuted!”¹³

If Northern politicians would not question the origins of the war, it would fall to others. Child and other abolitionists uncovered a series of reports that, taken together, expanded on Everett’s initial contention that slavery lay at the root of the Second Seminole War. Child himself asserted that the war originated from “an order from the President to *kidnap* Indian babes and make slaves of them.” The *New York Journal of*

¹² Horace Everett, “Indian Annuities,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, June 3, 1836, 573-578.

¹³ On David and Lydia Maria Child, see Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). *The Liberator*, August 13, 1836; David Lee Child, “Texas,” *Philanthropist*, May 27, 1836, 1.22, 2. Given the size of the appropriation and the date of Child’s claim, the unnamed senator to whom Child referred was likely Daniel Webster. See “Indian Hostilities in Florida,” January 27, 1836, *The Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 144.

Commerce, the newspaper of the famed abolitionist Arthur Tappan, relayed the story of Econchattimico, an Indian chief allied with white settlers in northern Florida.

Econchattimico had dutifully ordered his warriors to aid the Americans against the Seminoles and, after raising the ire of his white allies, had freely surrendered his own firearms. That presented white ruffians from Georgia with an opportunity. After floating down the Chattahoochee River, they accosted the chief and seized his slaves, claiming they were fulfilling the orders of the president. Having already surrendered his arms, Econchattimico had no choice but to surrender his slaves in turn. Abolitionists argued that word of such slave-kidnapping had spread throughout Florida prior to the war, convincing many wavering Seminoles that to lay down their arms would be tantamount to forfeiting their property.¹⁴

At the start of 1837, their rhetorical attacks intensified following reports of a more prominent Indian victim. In the aftermath of the Battle of the Withlacoochee, Osceola had already distinguished himself as one of the most capable military commanders on the continent. By 1837, his fame had spread to the point that an editor of a horse racing digest declared he would no longer register horses as “Oseola,” the name being already so prevalent that it made distinguishing between its owners impossible. Always considered, rightly or wrongly, the leading military commander among the Seminoles, Osceola was likely the most famous living Indian in the country.¹⁵

And he was a wronged Indian. Many newspapers had taken to reprinting a brief excerpt concerning Osceola from Meyer Cohen’s recently published narrative of the war.

¹⁴ “More Perfidy to the Indians,” *Vermont Chronicle*, August 4, 1836. The story of Econchattimico was largely true, see, for example, “Decision of J.A. Cameron,” *House Document 271*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, 35-36.

¹⁵ “Turf Register,” *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*; 8.6, (Feb., 1837), 285.

To the excerpt a number of abolitionist papers appended a short note relating an extraordinary story: Osceola's wife had been born the daughter of a runaway mixed race slave and, a year before the outbreak of the war, had been claimed as the property of her mother's former owner. Osceola



THE NATION ROBBING AN INDIAN CHIEF OF HIS WIFE.

raged at the slaveowner and, as the note stated, tried to free her by force. In his rage, he was restrained and imprisoned by federal Indian agent Wiley Thompson, indirectly causing the war. By the end of 1838, the event had entered accepted abolitionist lore, earning a prominent place in the *American Anti-Slavery Almanac*. There, under a heading reading “the nation robbing an Indian chief of his wife,” was a lithograph depicting Osceola chained to a log watching helplessly as slave catchers dragged his wife away. His daughter clung to him fearfully as another Indian woman in the distance raised her arm in distress. Osceola's expression was one of helplessness and pain, not vengeance. The caption of the engraving asked rhetorically, “what marvel that an Indian Chief, as he looked on his little daughter and thought of his stolen wife, vowed vengeance on the robbers?”¹⁶

Though the veracity of the account remains highly suspect, one can hardly blame abolitionists for endorsing it. Antislavery newspapers had widely circulated the truthful story of Econchattimico, making Osceola's plight seem all the more realistic. Moreover,

¹⁶ For the Cohen excerpt with the appendage, see, for example, “Slavery a National Curse,” *Philanthropist*, 1.50 (January 27, 1837), 3. *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1839*, ed., David Child, Lydia Maria Child, Nathaniel Southard (New York: S.W. Benedict: 1839), 25. Meyer Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston: Burges & Honour, 1836).

abolitionists needed little imagination to believe stories of slaveowner cruelly cleaving families in two and restraining enraged parents at the point of a gun. Such scenes occurred with regularity throughout the Americas. Given the numerous intermarriages between Seminoles and Black Seminoles, the very real possibility that Osceola himself had a black wife, and the evident interest of dozens of powerful slaveowners throughout the Deep South in the Seminoles' black allies, if the story of Osceola's wife was a misattribution or an outright fabrication, it was false only in that it was not the original sin of the Florida War. Certainly, slaveowners had committed dozens of similar crimes and far worse along the Florida frontier. The story of Osceola's daughter represented a host of crimes, real yet unrecorded, shrouded yet consequential.¹⁷

The focus on the forced dissolution of Indian-black families especially resonated with female reformers, who often highlighted slavery's destructive effect on slave families in their discourse. Throughout the duration of the war, female anti-slavery societies inundated Congress with scores of anti-slavery petitions, all of which were suppressed by the longstanding gag rule which forbade the discussion of slavery within the chamber. In contrast, their public voices only rose in volume. When she addressed the Massachusetts State Legislature in 1838 and became the first woman in the history of the United States to address a legislative body, Angelina Grimke moved her male audience through an allusion to the Second Seminole War, urging them to picture a family with an Indian father and a fugitive slave mother. Then, she told them, imagine a slaveholder

¹⁷ Regarding the veracity of the story of Osceola's wife, there is much room for doubt. Kenneth Wiggins Porter, the preeminent historian of the Black Seminoles could find no evidence of it. Patricia Wickman, author of the most detailed biography of Osceola's life, believed it to be unreliable as well. To the best of my knowledge, no one has uncovered a primary document from Florida that offers direct evidence to support the anecdote. See Kenneth Porter, "The Episode of Osceola's Wife," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 26.1 (Summer 1947), 92-98; Patricia Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 58.

coming to the Indian's home and demanding possession of the Indian's wife. Then, after receiving payment for the wife, the planter returned, this time demanding possession of her children. "Do you blame the Indian, that he keenly felt this cruelty and wrong?," Grimke asked, momentarily forsaking her commitment to pacifism. "Do you wonder that, rather than yield his children to the slaveholder, he dug up the hatchet and stood forth to die!" Writing in gendered terms, an observer reported that in the faces of the men in attendance, a sudden glow entered their face, "a flush of mingled shame and enthusiasm; the eyes of gray-haired men filled with unwonted tears." The crimes of the Second Seminole War were not abstract; they were of a piece with an evil some in the North knew all too well.¹⁸

In her 1837 book, *Society in America*, Harriet Martineau became the first reformer to fully grasp the implications of United States expansion policy by aligning the Second Seminole War with the Louisiana Purchase and the ongoing Texan Revolution. Though others, such as David Lee Child with his theory that slaveholder ambition to seize mixed-race babies instigated the war, had connected the Florida War to slavery, Martineau prominently offered a more coherent connection between slavery, nationalism, and expansion. A social theorist from England, Martineau was a prolific writer whose best work, in the eyes of many, stands behind only De Tocqueville among travelers' accounts of American society. During her travels, Martineau had befriended several likeminded abolitionists, attended the Boston Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in 1835, and financially

¹⁸ Grimke flouted gendered norms as well; her sympathy and tacit approval for Seminole violence conflicted starkly with the usual image of the pious female evangelical. M.W.C., "Angelina E. Grimke," *The Liberator*, March 2, 1838; Julie Jeffry, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For more on Grimke, see Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Katherine Henry, "Angelina Grimke's Rhetoric of Exposure," *American Quarterly*, 49.2 (1997) 328-355.

supported William Lloyd Garrison's work. Her evaluation of the Second Seminole War, broke new ground by grasping the implications of Indian warfare and indentifying how Southern slaveholders had wed white supremacy to nationalism.¹⁹

Martineau expanded on Child's offhand remark that the war originated in slaveholder claims over mixed-race children of Seminole fathers and runaway slave mothers. According to Martineau, the Seminoles' refusal to surrender their children, along with the fear of Deep South slaveholders that Seminole territory in Florida offered a sanctuary to runaway slaves, explained a war in which "many fine young men have gone down into Florida, and lost their lives in battle, without being aware that they were fighting for oppressors against the oppressed." She regretted that "in the eyes of those of the people who do not yet see the whole case," rather than blame slaveowners they instead "breathe an intense hatred against the Seminole Indians" and subsist on a "perpetual boast" that celebrated national expansion.²⁰

To Martineau, the Florida War represented the second of three violent expansions that would come to redefine the United States, each subsequent event more unjust than the last. First the peaceful purchase of Louisiana and, with it, acres of virgin soil for slavery. Second, a war launched against Indians to protect and extend slavery. Third, a future grand campaign against Mexico that would seize Texas and deliver new land to slaveholders, further cementing their hold on the United States Congress through increased representation. She detected a clear pattern. White settlers would set their eyes

¹⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (New York: Unders and Otley, 1837), 1:321-332; Susan Belasco, "Harriet Martineau's Black Hero and the American Antislavery Movement," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 55.2 (Sep., 2000), 162. For more on Martineau, see Robert Kiefer Webb, *Harriet Martineau; a Radical Victorian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); Deborah Anna Logan, *Harriet Martineau, Victorian Imperialism and the Civilizing Mission* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010).

²⁰ *St. Joseph's Times*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, October 10, 1837.

on nonwhite property, United States leaders would extinguish sovereign nations to acquire it, and the victims would be absorbed into the nation as subordinate members.

In a similar manner, William Jay, son of John Jay and one of the most prominent and conservative abolitionists of the 1830s, painstakingly connected the Florida War to the desperate maneuvers of the Slave Power. Jay seized on Thomas Jesup's admission that the United States had "committed the error of attempting to remove [the Seminoles] when their lands were *not* required for agricultural purposes; when they were *not in the way* of the *white* inhabitants, and when the greater portion of their country was an *unexplored wilderness*." To Jay, only slavery could explain the paradox of a nation declaring war on an isolated group of Indians to possess the backwaters of a continent. Jay mined the letters of public officials, marking down every slaveholder petition that urged the consolidation of American control over the frontier, every slave catcher who agitated the Seminoles, every attempt to pressure Indians into selling their slaves. He concluded that the Florida War resulted from the will of a slave empire made manifest.²¹

Ideologically, Jay had inherited the Federalism of his father and it led him to believe in federal institutions as the engines of social progress so long as citizens were willing to sacrifice their personal interest for the good of their nation. Slavery, due to the penumbra of legal protections necessary to safeguard it and the physical force necessary to enforce it, violated that equilibrium by subsuming the interests of the nation beneath the priorities of a subset of its citizens. Though his beliefs derived from an entirely antiquated political tradition, they helped Jay explicate the sectional tensions inherent in the Second Seminole War. In the introduction to his book, *A View of the Actions of the*

²¹ William Jay, *A View of the Action of the Federal Government* 150-166. Joshua Giddings credited Jay for first bringing to light the plight of the Black Seminoles and giving notice to government officials that their crimes would not go unnoticed, see Joshua Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida* 275.

Federal Government on Behalf of Slavery, Jay warned that should antislavery reformers falter, Texas, then the Mississippi Valley, then finally the Atlantic states, in turn would fall to slavery's dominion. The Second Seminole War impacted the North, not merely because its citizens were dying in the Florida wilderness, but because, as the war expanded the reach of slavery, it furthered the agenda of slaveholders intent on undermining free-state culture. A writer for Tappan's *The Emancipator* simplified his contentions, wondering, "will the people of the North any longer consent to such an unrighteous war, for the avowed benefit of southern slavery?"²²

Jay opposed the Second Seminole War out of a belief it clashed with Northern moral values. He ignored Indian rights altogether, ironically aside from their right not to be defrauded out of their slaves. Indeed, the best thing Jay had to say of the Seminoles was that they were kinder masters than their white neighbors. In attacking the Second Seminole War, Jay articulated rationales aside from the attempts at moral suasion that dotted traditional reformer critiques of Cherokee removal. By identifying the actions the federal government had undertaken in defense of slavery, Jay dispassionately pointed out the practical effects of slaveholder control over the federal government. He understood the power of what Martineau had labeled the "intense hatred" of the Seminoles to transform racial enmity into a nationalistic policy that prioritized slaveowner interests. By disassociating expansion from nationalism and rejecting the Second Seminole War as a plot of the Deep South, Jay made a persuasive case against the war.

²² William Jay, *A View of the Action of the Federal Government* viii; Stephen P. Budney, *William Jay: Abolitionist and Anticolonialist* (Westport: Praeger, 2005); Bayard Tuckerman, *William Jay and the Constitutional Movement for the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Negro University Press, 1893); G, *The Emancipator*, April 12, 1838.

Through the army's use of bloodhounds in Florida, a number of reformers found another medium through which to cast doubt on the character of national expansion. Bloodhounds, who many Americans already associated with violence against slaves following the maroon wars of the Caribbean, provided a clear linkage between the violence of a war against Indians and the violence inherent within America's slave system. The use of the dogs offered the abolitionists a simple morality tale: slaveholders had begun the war in perfidy, and now the federal government would go to any length to win it. In dismay, a writer for *The Liberator* cursed that "enlightened, republican, christian America" had now imported bloodhounds "to measure out destruction to a people whose crime is, that their chief sought to regain his stolen wife." James Birney's *Philanthropist* connected the dots: "the proposition to use bloodhounds against the Indians, could never have originated in a country where it was not rather a common practice to use them, for hunting down slaves." Activists inundated Congress with petitions, 162 by one historian's count, remonstrating against the use of the hounds. Primed by four years of conflict to view the war through the prism of slavery, reformers argued that the bloodhounds further demonstrated the entanglement of federal Indian policy and slavery.²³

Abolitionist attacks on the bloodhounds repeatedly invoked the use of the dogs by the Spanish against Indians in the distant past. Notoriously, Spanish conquistadores had

²³ John Campbell has extensively studied the abolitionists' use of bloodhound imagery during and after the Second Seminole War. He argued that by capitalizing on the army's brief utilization of bloodhounds, abolitionists successfully wielded the image against the South while expanding their critique of American racism to include violence against Indians as well. John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War,' and Abolitionism, 1796-1865," *Journal of Southern History*, 72.2 (May 2006), 259-302. H.A.F., "The Slaughter of the Seminoles," *The Liberator*, December 20, 1839; "Blood Hounds," *Philanthropist* in *The Liberator*, January 24, 1840; John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War' and Abolitionism, 1796-1865," 274-275.

loosed ferocious dogs of war against the Aztecs in Mexico during the conquest of Tenochtitlan in the sixteenth century. Bartolomé de Las Casas, the first and most prominent critic of Spanish imperialism, had himself decried the terrible beasts who had torn their enemies to pieces. The use of the bloodhounds, together with stories of Indian enslavement, massacre, and torture, had convinced Anglos and Americans to view the Spanish empire as one of domination and subordination, one that sunk to lower depths than England's own slave empire. References to Spain offered an incisive commentary on the moral bearing of the United States. In that vein, *The Emancipator* wryly suggested that "if our slaveholding republic is in such hot haste to exclude itself from the communion of civilized nations . . . perhaps the best thing they could do would be to emulate the cruelty of Cortez and the early Spaniards." A poem for the Philadelphia paper *The North American* made the comparison even more explicitly: "Rise up old Spain! and send thy warning voice / Across the waves. To save a nation rise, / (Who young in years but old in tyranny / Steps in the bloody foot-prints left by thee)." ²⁴

To abolitionists, the Florida War revealed an empire in decline. Setbacks marked the declension of American morals. For northern reformers, most of whom were devout Christians, every defeat served as further proof that the United States traveled an ominous path. The importation of the bloodhounds, a barefaced act of both desperation and immorality, further confirmed their fears. Thus, when the *New-Yorker* complained that "it would not seem that the aboriginal Floridians are not to be destroyed without leaving a

²⁴ For more on the legacy of Spanish dogs of war, see Campbell, "The Seminoles" 263; María DeGuzmán, *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Joseph Sánchez, *The Spanish Black legend: Origins of Anti-Hispanic Stereotypes* (Albuquerque: Spanish Colonial Research Center, 1990). "The Florida Army," *The Emancipator*, October 24, 1839; Philasteon, "Blood Hounds," *The North American and Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1840.

blot and a stigma upon our national character,” or Nathaniel Southard, an abolitionist editor, printed a lithograph depicting the bloodhounds’ bloody assault upon defenseless Indians, they reflected as much on the decrepit state of the nation’s conscience as on the war effort. Antislavery critics thought themselves to be under no delusions. They fully believed that the Seminoles’ extermination, though unjust, was imminent. They were sure that the bloodhounds, by all accounts ferocious beasts, would make short work of their prey. The true national dilemma lay in the future – if the people of the United States further countenanced the institution of slavery, they would surely invite further retribution from above.²⁵

If the Second Seminole War manifested their fears, many abolitionists nevertheless believed that the central confrontation between the Slave Power and national interest lay in the future, with Texas. The two frontiers, Florida and Texas, were linked in the eyes of many, the Texas Revolution beginning only months before the ambush of Dade’s command. In both cases, abolitionists thought the root cause of violence to be the same: unscrupulous, land hungry, and slave-amassing whites had trampled laws and invaded foreign territory. They considered the Florida War and the possible annexation of Texas to be radical alterations of American policy, terrible portents of a war-torn future. With despair, William Ellery Channing, contemplated the annexation of Texas in light of

²⁵ The Southard print was described in “The Bloodhound War,” *The Liberator*, March 20, 1840; *New-Yorker* article reprinted in “Hounding Floridians,” *The Liberator*, January 24, 1840. On the propagandistic belief that the bloodhounds were ferocious and invincible see Campbell, “The Seminoles” 277-280; Sara Johnson, “‘You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat’: Waging Inter-American Wars of Torture and Terror,” *American Quarterly*, 61.1 (Mar., 2009), 65-92.

the Seminole War and imagined constant warfare: “Is the tragedy of Florida to be acted again and again in our own day, and in our children’s?”²⁶

That slavery was one of the primary motivations for the annexation of Texas was plain to see, plainer even than in Florida. State legislatures across the north passed resolutions against annexation while petitioners garnered hundreds of thousands of signatures, plainly stating, as one Pennsylvania broadsheet did, “the recognition of Texas and its annexation to the United States is a grand scheme of the slave holding party in this country to extend their power and perpetuate the atrocities of their oppressive system.” Abolitionist newspapers constantly updated their readers on the threat Texas represented, and, in 1837 alone, two of the most prominent abolitionists in the country, Channing and Benjamin Lundy, published extended tracts warning of the imminent crime against Mexico. Given that both Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren refrained even from recognizing Texan independence and that only state legislatures in the Deep South publicly campaigned for Texas’ incorporation, the level of abolitionist activism was remarkable.²⁷

²⁶ One can hardly overestimate the importance of Texas to many abolitionists following the Texas Revolution. On August 8, 1837, for example, *The Liberator*, published no fewer than nine articles protesting annexation. William Ellery Channing, *A Letter to the Hon. Henry Clay, on the Annexation of Texas to the United States*, (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1837), 69. That Channing espoused his opposition toward the annexation of Texas through an open letter to Henry Clay, the ostensible leader of the Whig Party was significant. No one was better positioned, politically and ideologically, to serve as a leading voice against empire. As Clay had long recognized slavery as a moral abomination, though one he was largely powerless to do anything about, publicly or privately, and had long expressed concern with the disruptive nature of rapid expansion, Channing chose a wise recipient. However, Clay would prove manifestly unwilling to take a clear stance against either the Second Seminole War or the annexation of Texas over the next decade.

²⁷ Though many antislavery activists opposed the war partially out of concern for the future of the Union (this being Jackson and Van Buren’s fear as well), their arguments usually focused on the connection between Texas and slavery. “Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Convention,” *The Emancipator*, February 16, 1837. For references to widespread opposition in the North, see John Quincy Adams, *Speech of John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, upon the Right of the People, Men and Women, to Petition on the Freedom of Debate in the House of Representatives of the United States; on the Resolutions of Seven State Legislatures and the Petitions of More than One Hundred Thousand Petitioners, Relating to the Annexation*

As was the case with their opposition to the Florida War, abolitionists castigated the legal and cultural mores which obscured the causes of the potential war. Calling to mind Harriet Martineau's assertion that over-attenuated nationalism blinded Americans to the true nature of the Second Seminole War, Lundy complained that "the real objects of this war are not understood by ... the honest, disinterested, and well-meaning citizens of the United States." He insisted the public mistakenly believed that the revolutionaries contended for "the sacred principles of Liberty, and the natural, inalienable Rights of Man," but in reality they fought to extend the dominion of slavery. Likewise, Channing explained that while many considered the Texas Revolution to resemble the American Revolution, in reality, "the Texas revolt, if regarded in its causes and its means of success, is criminal." When, in 1838, the House of Representatives moved to vote on a joint resolution for annexation, John Quincy Adams staged one of the most drawn-out quasi-filibusters in American history, intermittently devouring floor-time over the course of three weeks to forestall debate. He focused intently on the role of the gag rule, believing that "the systematic smothering of all petitions against his measure ... could have no other intention than to disarm the resistance against it which was manifesting itself throughout all the slaveless States of the Union." The silence of slavery had been written into the fabric of Congress.²⁸

Taken together, both frontier conflicts had dire implications for America's future relationship toward the rest of the world. In the pages of a Boston newspaper, a writer

of Texas to this Union (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1838). See also, David Lee Child, "Texas," *Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine*, 1.1 (1836), 193-205.

²⁸ A Citizen of the United States [Benjamin Lundy], *The War in Texas; A Review of Facts and Circumstances, Showing That This Contest Is a Crusade against Mexico, Set on Foot and Supported by Slaveholders, Land-Speculators, &c. in Order to Re-Establish, Extend, and perpetuate the System of Slavery and the Slave Trade*, (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1836), 2-3; Channing, *A Letter to the Hon. Henry Clay* 6; John Quincy Adams, *Speech of John Quincy Adams* 129.

penned a remarkable letter tinged with sadness and regret to Mexico's ambassador to the United States. He warned that "our Indian wars and our acquisition of slavery must have taught you, that neither the laws of God nor of nations, nor the sanctity of treaties can restrain us ... We are a stronger people than you, and we want Texas." His desperate counsel echoed John Quincy Adams, who, in 1836, envisioned a future war with Mexico, and bleakly asked, addressing his pro-war colleagues, "what will be your cause in such a war? Aggression, conquest, and the re-establishment of slavery where it has been abolished." A hollow republic, his country deserved only scorn.²⁹

Joshua Giddings and the Crime against Congress

When Joshua Giddings launched the most public denunciation of the war to date, he did much to combat the political influence of slavery, but little to defend the sovereignty of the Seminoles. The legislative battle against the Second Seminole War did defeat the gag rule and convert thousands to the cause of antislavery, but it also extricated the fate of the Seminoles from the center of the debate. Antislavery critics did much to reform the institutions to which they belonged, but little to aid the Seminoles.³⁰

As they agitated against the presence of slavery in the territories and the District of Columbia, antislavery activists chafed against the institutional silence which bound them. Following the 1840 elections, in which Adams, Giddings, and William Slade of Vermont were joined by fellow antislavery Whigs Francis Andrews of Ohio and Seth Gates of New York, the dissidents concluded they had the necessary momentum to

²⁹ "To the Mexican Minister at Philadelphia or Washington," *Boston Morning News*, reprinted *The Liberator*, November 10, 1837; "Indian Hostilities – Speech of Hon. John Q. Adams of Massachusetts," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, May 25, 1836, 449.

³⁰ *Journal of Commerce* reprinted in "The Way to End the Florida War," *The Liberator*, September 11, 1840.

challenge the gag rule. As any attempt to confront the issue of slavery directly would be immediately defeated by parliamentary rule, the congressmen decided that their best hope lay in introducing the subject obliquely, while addressing a bill already before the floor. As no other tangential event drew on slavery so directly, the Second Seminole War seemed an ideal opportunity.³¹

In February 1841, Joshua Giddings seized his chance. Giddings represented the Western Reserve in Ohio, a region dominated by evangelical politics, and he disdained slavery as anti-republican, a powerful special interest which undermined the intent of the Founders. Giddings would grow more radical in later years, but, at the time of the Second Seminole War, he claimed to have no intention of threatening Southern slavery. Nevertheless, though his climatic speech against the Seminole War was constrained by his ideology, it made national waves for more than its tactical brilliance. Marshaling letters, petitions, treaties, committee reports, and constitutional theory, Giddings launched the most prominent, well-researched, and wide ranging assault against the entanglement of slavery and national expansion in United States history to that point. Between the passing of the Indian Removal Act and the close of the Mexican-American War, perhaps no one more persuasively questioned the underlying assumptions that guided the violent expansionism of the United States. Printers ran off thousands of copies of his speech and it was distributed throughout the North.³²

³¹ Robert Ludlum, "The Antislavery 'Gag Rule': History and Argument, *The Journal of Negro History*, 26.2 (April 1941), 203-243; James M. McPherson, "The Fight against the Gag Rule: Joshua Leavitt and Antislavery Insurgency in the Whig Party, 1839-1842, *The Journal of Negro History*, 48.3 (July 1963), 177-195; Russell B. Nye, *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860* (East Lansing, MI, 1963); Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2000).

³² James Brewer Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western University, 1970); James Brewer Stewart, "Joshua Giddings, Antislavery Violence, and Congressional Politics of Honor," in John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, ed., *Antislavery Violence:*

In his speech, Giddings built on the narrative other antislavery activists had constructed over the past five years. He told his peers that he intended to trace out a single strand of the war, one the current bill had overlooked - an aspect of a war, he said, in which "our army has been defeated, and I fear that our national honor has not remained altogether untarnished." Briefly touching upon the deficiencies of the various treaties with the Seminoles, he moved forward to the central problem which confounded him, the problem that other abolitionists had wrestled with over the past half-decade: why did the United States need, at great expenses of blood and treasure, this one remote, miserable tract of land? The answer, of course, was slavery. Citing a letter from Indian Agent Wiley Thompson written a year before the outbreak of the war, Giddings noted that the Seminoles' main objection to emigration was the United States' demand that they amalgamate with the Creeks, whose acceptance of chattel slavery would threaten the Black Seminoles, with whom many Seminoles had intermarried. The Seminoles were left with a choice: emigrate and allow the Creeks to seize their wives and children or remain in Florida to deal with the overwhelming might of the United States. Forcefully, Giddings cast down the gauntlet: "With them, sir, it was war on one side, and slavery on the other ... This interference of the Federal Government on behalf of slavery ... appears to have been the origin of all our Florida difficulties." With this, two Georgia representatives, both Whigs, jumped to their feet and moved to quiet him, but were overruled.³³

Giddings was no fire breather. He denied that Congress had the authority to regulate slavery in the slave states. Nevertheless, he declared the assault on the Seminoles

Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 167-192.

³³ Joshua Giddings, "Speech of Mr. Giddings of Ohio," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, February 9, 1841, 26th Congress, 2nd Session, 346-352.

a clear abuse of federal power. Quoting the words of former Florida Governor William Duval, Giddings asserted that it became the policy of the government that the Seminoles' "slaves were made to fear for themselves." Initially citing the example of the bloodhounds, Giddings found other examples of "negro stealing," from the plight of Econchattimico to Disbursing Agent Joseph W. Harris' recommendation that the United States fund the war by selling captured slaves. Testing his boundaries, Giddings reminded his listeners that "among the people of the free States, nothing is regarded with so much disgust and abhorrence as the buying and selling of men, women, and children." Citing slaveholder letters and petitions, Giddings noted that they had opposed every attempt to end the war that did not ensure them ownership of the Black Seminoles, placing their economic interest above the safety of Florida. Having persuaded Jesup to imprison captured slaves, they had transformed the government itself into a corporate slaveowner. His prescription for ending the war was exceedingly circumscribed. Chase the Indians from Florida he said, but allow anyone, black or Indian, who surrendered peacefully free passage to the West and a federal guarantee to safeguard his life, liberty, and family.³⁴

Given his passionate language urging the immediate end of an Indian war, Giddings evinced very little concern for the Seminoles themselves, outside of faint regret that they would soon be murdered in the name of slavery. As an abolitionist tract, Giddings' speech left much to be desired as well. Comfortable within the moderate wing of antislavery, Giddings merely hoped to denationalize slavery and isolate the free states

³⁴ Giddings's prescription for ending the war was far disruptive than that of Henry Wise and other Whigs, who were willing to allow the Seminoles to remain in Florida with certain conditions. Giddings's speech was effective in critiquing the origins of the war, not in preserving Indian sovereignty. Much of Giddings' accusations were covered in chapter 4. John Campbell pointed out that Giddings, when citing Jesup, omitted his reference to Indians when he threatened to send bloodhounds after Osceola and his allies. See Campbell, "The Seminoles" 286.

from its influence. If the Slave Power agreed not to involve the North in the perpetuation of slavery then Giddings would happily accept that truce. Audacious as it may have been, Giddings' speech reflected the most moderate of antislavery positions and, in its nominal opposition to the war, was largely indistinguishable from other mainstream Whig critiques.

Where his assault on slavery was merely glancing, his view of his nation's destiny could not be dismissed. As David Lee Child, Harriet Martineau, and John Quincy Adams had grouped together Indian Removal and the Texas Revolution as categorically identical, Giddings marshaled reams of evidence to do the same, adding factual dimensions to their largely circumstantial associations. Giddings was not merely debating slavery in the halls of Congress. What made his speech so bracing was its implicit argument that slavery and the problems of national expansion could not be unraveled, that the central issue of the coming decades would be slavery's influence on the nation.

In the days following Giddings' speech, abolitionist papers celebrated his rhetoric, not as a bold violation of the gag rule, but as evidence of the perfidy of the slave power in Florida. In his report to *The Emancipator*, correspondent Joshua Leavitt, one of the founders of the Liberty Party, wrote breathlessly of Giddings's charges but mentioned the gag rule only obliquely. Throughout the country, Giddings received far more attention for the substance of his argument than the mere fact that he had flouted congressional procedure. One of Giddings' local newspapers argued that slaveholders had caused the government to spend tens of millions of dollars to recover a few thousand dollars worth of human property and concluded "this is to us a most weighty proof of the blinding, hardening, and ruinous tendency of the system of negro slavery." *The Philanthropist*

worried that the nation had spent millions to “support a grand slave-catching enterprise” all to “lose something in its swamps, more precious than money.” In laying out reasons to vote for the Liberty Party, Tappan’s *Emancipator* explicitly referred to Giddings’ speech and promised that the new party would end the war and prevent the country from “commencing any more wars for the defence of slaveholding.” The public understood Giddings to be anti-war and anti-expansion as much as he was anti-slavery. The genius of his argument was that there was no distinction between the two.³⁵

Fittingly, the day following his speech, Giddings faced withering criticism from Representative Mark Anthony Cooper, a Georgia Whig. Cooper had served as a volunteer officer in the Second Seminole War, where his passionate states-rights views led him into conflict with Winfield Scott. Cooper and his colleague Edward Black of Georgia were serving out their terms in Congress as lame ducks, each having lost elections several months before. Frustrated due to their defeats and furious at Giddings’ accusations, they responded to his speech on the floor of Congress. Black was merely rage personified - he spoke for two hours, but reporters only jotted down his threat to Giddings: “come to Georgia and avow such sentiments. Let him come to my Country and talk this strain, and we will show him the mercies of Lynch Law. We will [give] him an elevation such as he had never dreamed of. We will give him blood and thunder, wounds and wonder.” According to reports, the House broke out in reams of laughter at his buffoonery, a contrast to Black’s deadly serious words.³⁶

³⁵ J.L. “Letter from the Editor – No. 7,” *The Emancipator*, February 18, 1841; “The Florida War,” *Ohio Observer*, April 8, 1841; “The Florida Slave-Hunt,” *The Philanthropist*, reprinted in *The Liberator*, April 9, 1841; “The Necessity of a Liberty Party,” *The Emancipator*, November 11, 1841

³⁶ For more on Cooper’s service in the Second Seminole War and his feud with Winfield Scott, see chapter 4. As an article in *The Liberator* pointed out, laughter was perhaps an inappropriate response to one

Cooper spoke as violently, but with more ideological heft. In response to Giddings's annunciation of values, he bound together martial violence, nationalism, and white supremacy to offer principles of his own. Where Giddings and his allies sympathized with blacks and Indians even in the midst of war, Cooper asserted that he and his neighbors would never hesitate to repel Indian attacks against women and children. Though Northerners complained of the cost, Cooper asserted that he would never tarry: if the nation went to war with Britain over the Canadian border or, as Cooper characterized it, a strip of land "fit only for firewood," Georgians would "hold it to be our country's cause, and for her cause and her honor we would bleed and die." Pivoting from the "negro-stealing" with which Giddings charged Georgia, Cooper asserted that the true thieves were Northerners who both aided runaway slaves and obstructed wars of subjugation, including the Second Seminole War, whose purposes were to safeguard slave property. At the midpoint of his speech, he turned his glare directly to Giddings and asserted his opponent had claimed that slavery was the cause of the Florida War, a calumny against his region. Giddings, icily returned his gaze and held, "the gentleman is right."

Following their brief confrontation, Cooper held forth his own solution for the war. It was to follow the example of Major William Harney, who was famous for summarily executing his Indian enemies. According to Cooper, the fatal error of his nation's strategy was "that those who managed the war did not make it a war of extermination from the beginning." Then, overcome with bitterness, Cooper railed at Giddings' fellow Whigs who had refused to disavow his abolitionist rhetoric, accused

Congressman threatening to publicly execute another. "A Funny Affair!," *The Liberator*, February 19, 1841.

Giddings of betraying William Henry Harrison and all who voted for him by supporting abolition, and announced that his political career had come to an end. He closed by urging his fellow southerners to take heed. In Europe and New England, in churches and local societies, among men and among women, abolitionists were massing their strength and the South must be ready to confront them.³⁷

Cooper's plea, certainly not isolated, reverberated beyond the immediate debate, as did Giddings's speech. Over the coming decade, Southern leaders, increasingly aware of antislavery mobilization in the North, demanded their Northern allies explicitly endorse proslavery measures, regardless of the political effect in their home districts. With the triumph of Tennessee's James K. Polk in securing the Democratic nomination for president over New York's Martin Van Buren, northern Democrats found themselves increasingly isolated from the faction in power. Rather than strengthen their bonds of interest with the Northern half of its party, the Polk administration instead took its loyalty for granted and launched the Mexican-American War, a second expansionary war on the frontiers of their nation. He would be the last southern president who could be assured of northern support.

The war wound down in abolitionist circles as it did for the rest of the country, quietly, and largely without incident. Following the debate over Giddings's speech, Congress passed another appropriation to fund the war over nominal opposition, though fighting remained sporadic. When John Tyler finally announced his intentions to bring the war to a close in 1842, abolitionists welcomed the news, though they opposed Thomas Hart Benton's Armed Occupation Act as a proslavery measure. Despite fierce

³⁷ For more on William Harney, see chapter 7. Mark Anthony Cooper, "Speech of Mr. Cooper, of Georgia," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 22, 1841.

abolitionist opposition both in and out of Congress, the bill passed, dealing them another defeat. There were, however, wider successes to come.³⁸

By casting the debate over Florida in such stark terms and in such a public moment, Giddings had helped to inextricably link slavery and expansion in the minds of Northern audiences. In the aftermath of the Texan Revolution, a decade of antislavery rhetoric had focused on the frontiers, and Giddings's oratory was the most prominent demonstration of that connection. A few years later, the Mexican-American War appeared suspiciously familiar. Mobilized by the unquenched nationalism of Manifest Destiny, many initially supported the war, but their enthusiasm did not persist, the link between slavery and expansion too explicit. The Second Seminole War was just one of a number of issues in which antislavery reformers identified the connection between expansion and slavery, but it helped them learn a series of lessons, ones all too applicable over the coming decades.³⁹

When David Wilmot, along with other Democratic Congressmen allied with Martin Van Buren, advanced the Wilmot Proviso, they responded as much to Joshua Giddings and a decade of abolitionist agitation as to James K. Polk and John Calhoun. A legion of antislavery activists, newspaper writers, Congressmen, and signers of petitions, had successfully highlighted the relationship between slavery and national expansion. The Second Seminole War, a war fought largely by slaveholders against an Indian nation bound together with runaway slaves and free African-Americans, provided the best and

³⁸ D.L.C., "The Florida War," *The Liberator*, July 1, 1842; "The Armed Settlement Bill," *The Emancipator and Free American*, August 4, 1842; James W. Covington, "The Armed Occupation Act of 1842," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 40.1 (July 1961), 41-52

³⁹ Eric Foner, "The Wilmot Proviso Revisited," *Journal of American History*, 56 (1969), 262-279; Michael Holt, *The Fate of the Country* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004); Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

most persuasive evidence of that link. Though his critique did little to directly defend the rights of the Seminoles, in uncovering the actions of the Slave Power, Joshua Giddings and his allies explained to the North that they had two options: to ignore slavery's evident influence and follow meekly in its wake or demand a thorough reexamination of national priorities. In their obscurity, they continued to struggle.

Chapter 6

“We Do Not Live for Our Selves Only”: The Competing Strategies of Seminoles and Black Seminoles amidst a Crusade of Conquest

In October 1837, when Thomas Jesup deceived Osceola, others were caught up in the trap as well. One of them, a Black Seminole named Titus, quickly demonstrated his worth to his captors. He recounted that during a council of chiefs a few weeks before, Osceola and chief Coa Hadjo, who had recently reached an agreement with Jesup to surrender many fugitive slaves to their nominal white owners, had clashed with Abiaka, a Seminole religious leader, by insisting that the Seminoles could not maintain the war for another year. Abaiaka steadfastly insisted that he would not leave Florida and would survive there by any means, subsisting on game until his bullets ran out, fishing until his lines frayed, and then weaving new ones with horsehair. Abiaka was resolute - if the cause seemed lost, he would escape to the remotest parts of the Everglades and live there until his dying days. The United States officer who recorded Titus's account in his own correspondence added his opinion that Titus would soon prove an excellent guide in the service of the United States.¹

Within these tangled narratives lay vital details about Seminole and Black Seminole politics during the Second Seminole War. Titus, the Black Seminole, likely believed himself to be a man without a country. Trapped between the white supremacists of the United States and Seminole leaders like Coa Hadjo who cast aside the Black Seminoles to further their own interests, his only refuge appeared to lay with Abiaka, a leader of a religion in which Titus held no faith and who promised a hardscrabble future

¹ Samuel Forry, "Letters of Samuel Forry, Surgeon U.S. Army, 1837-1838, Part III," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, 7.1 (Jul., 1928), 94.

of privation and flight in the mires of southern Florida. Little wonder, then, that Titus might willingly lead United States officers against his former allies. Coa Hadjo, one of the leaders of his people, was not a craven man. As he resisted emigration, he saw the members of his band nearly starving, swaddled in rags. To him, the status of African-Americans like Titus must have seemed exceedingly abstract and increasingly expendable. Unlike Coa Hadjo, Osceola was a war leader, not a hereditary chief. According to most white accounts, he had long argued that the fate of the Seminoles and Black Seminoles were intertwined and it was his intervention that had prevented Coa Hadjo from fulfilling his half of the agreement with Jesup. Yet Osceola, too, was not blind. His reserves were dwindling, his own health was fading, and the enemy appeared as irresolute as ever. Abiaka, motivated by his faith, was deeply rooted in the Florida soil. However, he was not a blind zealot, and he had a realistic strategy of resistance and flight designed to frustrate his antagonists. The interaction of these four men, Titus, Coa Hadjo, Osceola, and Abiaka, and their understanding of their common enemy demonstrated the limits and possibilities of opposition to Andrew Jackson's crusade of conquest.²

Throughout the Second Seminole War, the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles fought protracted struggles against a foe they could not defeat. They did not lose on the battlefield. When United States soldiers and Seminole warriors exchanged fire, the soldiers were repulsed more often than not. By any accounting, the United States suffered dramatically more casualties in the conflict - more white soldiers died during the war than there were Seminole warriors at its outset. However, faced with the nearly inexhaustible

² For more on Osceola, see Patricia Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Mark Boyd, "Asi-Yaholo or Osceola," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 33.3/4 (Jan., Apr., 1955), 249-305; Kenneth Porter, "Osceola and the Negroes," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 33.3/4 (Jan., Apr., 1955), 235-239. For more on Abiaka's belief system, see Susan Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones: A Seminole Saga* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 1-31.

resources of the United States, the Seminoles could not win by depleting their enemy's reserves of men. Instead, as they likely understood it, their only means of achieving victory lay in extending the war over time and space, forcing the United States to waste money and lives to the point that its leaders might find it prudent to moderate their absolute insistence on removal. When formulating their strategy, the Seminoles did not understand that United States officials would pursue the extension of white supremacy and the consolidation of its authority without regard for the cost in money or lives. For the vast majority of Seminoles, it was their downfall.³

The Seminoles' decision to go to war in 1835 could not have been an easy one. Less than two decades before, the Seminole leadership, comprised of many of the same men as in 1835, had decided to retreat in the face of General Andrew Jackson's invasion of Spanish Florida, an offensive that commanded many fewer men. They had dealt directly with Indian agents like Wiley Thompson and governors like William DuVal who made it clear, repeatedly, that the United States was firmly committed to their removal. When confronted with the same dilemma, most of the other southeast Indian nations negotiated their own removal, rightly calculating that to defy Andrew Jackson would be to risk their own annihilation. However, not only did the Seminoles fight, they continued fighting for seven long years. Hundreds of them fought until United States leaders themselves grew weary of fighting, and the Seminoles succeeded in securing territory in southern Florida that remains there to the present day.

The Seminoles fought because they had few other options. Their culture and identity inveighed against compromise in the face of United States bellicosity. Faced with

³ This interpretation is indebted to Samuel Watson, "Seminole Strategy, 1812-1858: A Prospectus for Future Research," in William Belko ed., *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), 155-180.

United States demands to subsume their nation within that of the Creeks, to agree to emigrate on their enemy's terms might have meant their obliteration. Having rooted their identity in opposition to United States geographic and cultural expansion, Seminole leaders were predisposed to resist American overtures. Those leaders were further prodded by influential young warriors like Osceola, whose influence were augmented by the decentralized nature of Seminole self-government. Osceola himself made clear the price of capitulation when he found and murdered Charlie Emathla, the leading voice of removal among their people, in the months before the war.

The calculation made by leaders like Abaika that victory remained within their grasp was not irrational. Viewed from the perspective of Washington, DC, the possibility that nonwhite resistance might force a Democratic administration to moderate its demands appeared exceedingly unlikely, but the Seminoles were not dealing with Andrew Jackson or Martin Van Buren. The representatives with whom they interacted, generals like Thomas Jesup and Edmund Pendleton Gaines, portrayed themselves as being willing to allow the Seminoles to remain in Florida, given certain concessions. Having dealt with United States officers over a period of years who were, at best, ambivalent proponents of Indian removal, many Seminole leaders reached a reasonable conclusion that if they held out another season, raided a few more homesteads, ambushed another soldier on patrol, their enemy's resolve might weaken.

Faced with that same intransigence, the Black Seminoles came to a different conclusion, forgoing their alliance with the Indians. With their roots in United States slave society, the Black Seminoles better understood the unyielding constraints in which they were bound and, as Titus did, cleverly set their enemy's primary objectives of Indian

removal and re-enslavement against one another. In prioritizing their own freedom over their residence in Florida, they found that their antagonists placed regional hegemony ahead of the re-enslavement of hundreds of African-Americans. Their agreements with United States officials often required their assistance as scouts and interpreters against the Seminoles, directly undermining their former allies, but having concluded the war was unwinnable, most Black Seminoles believed that bringing their former Indian allies to terms would be for the common good.

The Second Seminole War pitted two nations with decentralized political systems against one another. The exigencies of the war, which exiled United States army officers to a far flung corner of the continent and dispersed Seminole bands across the peninsula, necessarily isolated leaders of each group. Even as the attacks of the United States forced disparate factions of Florida Indians to act with some measure of unity, the pressures of the war prevented them from making collective decisions throughout the conflict. Similarly, circumstances left army officers, many of whom were largely hostile toward Indian removal, with the primary responsibility for enacting that policy. Given those circumstances, the Seminoles fought largely in vain. Unable to coordinate their attacks and misled by army officers who did not accurately represent the interests of their superiors, the Seminoles were unable to convince United States leaders that removal and conquest were not the most cost-effective means of securing their interests.⁴

This chapter will recast the events of the Second Seminole War from the perspectives of the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles. Through the use of fragmentary documentary evidence, it will examine the dynamics of Seminole and Black Seminole

⁴ On the limitations of Seminole strategy, see Watson, "Seminole Strategy, 1812-1858" 163-164. On the effects of United States' officers' attitudes, see chapter 2.

politics throughout the course of the war, with a focus on two pivotal incidents. First is the decision to attack Dade's command, which provided a window into the various factions that dominated the Seminole leadership. The second half will be dedicated to the effects of Thomas Jesup's decision to compromise with the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles. Once Jesup applied pressure at specific weaknesses, the intensity of the United States' offensive strained and eventually shattered the linkages between the two groups. The main body of the chapter ends with the Battle of Okeechobee, in which the Seminoles dealt the United States heavy casualties yet failed to advance their interests in any meaningful way. The concluding passage examines the decision of Coacoochee, perhaps the greatest Seminole warrior, to emigrate, and exactly why he announced on his departure, "the whites are too strong."

Seminole Unity and the Ambush of Dade's Command

During the final months of 1835, the Seminoles were faced with a problem that likely appeared nearly insoluble. With the United States' deadline for removal rapidly approaching, the Seminole leadership confronted an enemy commanding overwhelming resources and what must have seemed like an implacable will. Their own nation, a grouping of polyglot bands of Indians with different heritages stitched together by a common interest, had few institutional or material resources upon which to draw. In contrast, given the bellicosity of Indian Agent Wiley Thompson, Governor Richard Keith Call, and the hoards of white settlers on the frontier, they were certainly aware of the depth of their antagonists' commitment to removal. Bound to their land by history and religion, however, the Seminoles were strongly opposed to emigration, even though their

own recent history counseled against violent resistance. Two decades before, Andrew Jackson's invasion had demonstrated their relative weakness compared to their enemy. Yet, they were likely aware of the Cherokees' inability to forestall removal nonviolently through institutional channels in the United States. The Seminoles' own solution, an overwhelming show of force and then constant harassment of their enemy, was designed to obviate their own weaknesses and leverage whatever cracks might exist in their opponents' political system. Their tactics could not have succeeded more wildly, nor been less effective at achieving their overarching goals.

On December 23, 1835, 180 Seminole warriors ambushed two companies under the command of Major Francis Dade. Of the 110 United States soldiers who marched that day, only three survived the night. In stark contrast to their actions during the First Seminole War, the Seminoles demonstrated a clear intention to confront the United States with all the resources at their command. That same day, Osceola's assassination of Indian Agent Wiley Thompson delivered a similar message – removal would not be decided through diplomacy, but through spilt blood amidst the Florida swamps. In the aftermath of the battle, the Seminoles concentrated much of their population near the cove of the Withlacoochee River and launched periodic raids against settlers along the Florida frontier. They were prepared for a long, drawn-out war.⁵

One Seminole account of the collective decision to attack Dade's command was recorded and translated into English. According to the renowned warrior Halpatter Tustenuggee, Osceola, Ote Emathla, and he had advocated forcefully for the attack.

⁵ For more on the Dade ambush, see John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1985), 104-106; Frank Laumer, *Dade's Last Command* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995); Ransom Clark, "Ransom Clark," in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 4.24 (June 15, 1837), 369-370; Watson, "Seminole Strategy" 161.

Micanopy, the hereditary head-chief, had been reluctant, “timid” in Tustenuggee’s words, until Ote Emathla had addressed the massed Indians and announced that he was marching that day and those “with faint hearts” could remain behind. Micanopy recognized the implicit challenge to his leadership and declared himself ready to depart. In a group, 180 Indians marched to the designated location, waited for the arrival of Dade’s companies, and, at the fateful moment, Ote Emathla gave the signal. Micanopy fired the first shot, felling Dade. The war, with Micanopy’s active participation, had begun.⁶

The Dade ambush made a wider war inevitable. For leaders like Micanopy, older, wealthy men hesitant to go to war, the ambush effectively forced their hand. He could not oppose the war outright, lest he risk alienating influential warriors and forfeiting his already unsteady hold on power. Though Micanopy was likely shielded by his hereditary chieftaincy, Osceola’s assassination of Charley Emathla made the consequences of appearing to acquiesce to the demands of the United States all the clearer. This was not an idle threat – just three years later, Cherokee warriors would murder the Indians responsible for signing the Treaty of New Echota. Despite his familial lineage and active involvement in the Dade ambush, as a non-war leader Micanopy was necessarily out of step with the rest of his nation following the declaration of hostilities. Nevertheless, Micanopy had no choice but to stand by his people. Enraged at what they perceived as Seminole perfidy, United States officials were hardly in the mood to differentiate between “friendly” and “militant” Seminoles, especially a friendly Seminole leader who had personally assassinated a major in the United States army. Following the April

⁶ Halpatter Tustenuggee and Ote Emathla’s names were often translated by whites as Alligator and Jumper, respectively. A recording and translation of Tustenuggee’s account can be found in Joseph Sprague, *The Origin, Process, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1848), 90-91.

departure of Seminole bands who had already sought refuge at army posts in the aftermath of Charley Emathla's death, it would be over a year before any Seminole leaders considered surrendering to United States forces.⁷

Not only did the Dade ambush forestall compromise, it solidified the alliance between the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles. The account of Ransom Clark, the only United States soldier to survive the ambush long enough to recount the ordeal, made clear that the Black Seminoles were an integral part of the attack, firing along with the Indians, executing the wounded, and looting the dead. According to several white accounts, Osceola, Halpatter Tustenuggee, and Ote Emathla had strongly advocated that they resist the United States almost as much to protect their African-American allies as to prevent removal. They would not allow hesitant Seminole chiefs to barter away the freedom of the Black Seminoles, regardless of what concessions they might have received in return.⁸

The Seminoles followed their initial success with a focused assault against the institution of slavery in Florida, a highly combustible strategy. If the Dade massacre committed hesitant Seminole leaders to the Black Seminoles, a series attacks against plantations along the St. Johns River committed the Black Seminoles to their cause. Launching a full-scale campaign against the institution of slavery within the Florida Territory, the Seminoles liberated friends and family of their allies and made the alignment of their interests with those of the region's African-Americans explicit. As

⁷ On the initial removal of Seminole bands, see Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Removal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 332-336. On Micanopy in the aftermath of the Dade ambush, see Sprague, *The Florida War* 93.

⁸ On Osceola and the Black Seminoles, see Kenneth Porter, "Osceola and the Negroes," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 33.3/4 (Jan., Apr., 1955), 235-239; Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* 46; Halpatter Tustenuggee was closely allied with one of the most influential Black Seminoles, John Cavallo. See Anthony Dixon, "Black Seminole Involvement and Leadership during the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842," (PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2007), 152-163. Jumper gave a forceful speech to United States agents refusing to hand over the Black Seminoles no matter the consequence, Sprague, *The Florida War* 50-51.

there numbered only about 1200 Seminole warriors at the beginning of the war, Florida's slave population, nearly 25,000 in all, represented the most viable means of augmenting their ranks. The Seminoles could hardly hope to build on their battlefield victory against the United States unless they harnessed the latent hostility of the masses of African-Americans in bondage in Florida and throughout the South. With the counsel of the Black Seminoles, the Seminole leadership was certainly well aware of the potential of mass rebellion, especially just two decades following the 1811 uprising in the Orleans territory, well within contemporary Seminole communication networks.⁹

The focused assault on Florida slavery had its drawbacks as well. If the Seminoles had predicated their strategy upon convincing United States elites that the cost of emigration would far outstrip its benefits, their offensive was counterproductive, fully committing Southern whites to the dispossession of the Seminoles. The cost of the war could not outpace the benefits of what became a regional imperative. As African-Americans streamed to the Seminoles' cause, some 400 by one detailed count, Southern volunteers flooded the state. Their service itself did not set back the Seminole war effort. Utterly ineffective as soldiers, jarringly disruptive to their battalions, and disproportionately expensive compared to enlisted men, the volunteers were a drain on the United States' campaign. Their commitment, however, indicated something of the dilemma into which the Seminoles had placed themselves. For their enemy, no price was

⁹ For more on the volunteers, see chapter 3. Larry Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Expansion* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), Jacob Rhetta Motte, *Journey into the Wilderness: An Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field during the Creek and Seminole Wars, 1836-1838*, ed., James Sunderman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1963), 277-279. On the Orleans uprising, see Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 115-116.

too high to secure white supremacy within the territorial boundaries of the United States¹⁰

It was a serious miscalculation, one to which Black Seminole leaders might have contributed. Circumstantially, the Black Seminoles benefited greatly from the assault against the St. Johns River plantations, liberating family members, augmenting their population amongst the Seminoles, and cementing the Seminoles' resistance to the white planters who held illegitimate claims upon them. In the long term, they were the primary beneficiaries of the effects of the raids upon the strategy of United States leaders as well. As removal seemed more urgent, secondary objectives, like the re-enslavement of the Black Seminoles, no longer seemed so pressing. To assert that Black Seminole leaders like Abraham anticipated this course of events would be to credit them with remarkable but not implausible foresight.

As the Dade ambush committed the Seminoles and Black Seminoles to the conflict, to the north an entire nation rushed to war in lockstep. Duncan Clinch immediately marched to the Withlacoochee, Edmunds Gaines set off from New Orleans at the earliest opportunity, Secretary of War Lewis Cass dispatched Winfield Scott from Washington, Florida's legislative council expanded its militia, Congress appropriated funds for the war, and volunteers in Southern cities across the region signed up for an adventure. The Seminoles were well prepared for the onslaught. Whipped into a rage by the Dade ambush, successive United States battalions sped headlong into battle lacking knowledge of Florida topography, adequate supplies, and a developed strategy. They were lucky to make it out of Florida alive. Just after Christmas day in 1835, Duncan

¹⁰ For a detailed accounting of the number of African-Americans who joined with the Seminoles during the first months of the war, see "Tally of Plantation Slaves in the Black Seminole Slave Rebellion, with Sources," viewed October, 2, 2011, <http://www.johnhorse.com/toolkit/numbers.htm>. On the relative expense of the volunteers, see Sprague, *The Florida War* 102.

Clinch led 750 men to the Withlacoochee to confront the Seminole force. Inexperienced in warfare, Clinch avoided a Seminole ambush only because he was unaware of the easiest location at which to ford the river. Even so, after 250 of his men crossed the river via the only means available, an old leaky canoe, they came under heavy fire, suffering 60 casualties. To similar effect, two months later in February 1836, General Edmund Pendleton Gaines barreled through the Florida wilderness to the Withlacoochee, where he, too, was surrounded by a larger Indian force. Had Clinch not come to his aid, Gaines and his 980 men might have suffered the same fate as Major Dade.¹¹

The events on the Withlacoochee likely contributed to the Seminoles' mistaken belief that the United States might moderate its position. Having trapped Gaines's outmanned force in the makeshift Fort Izard, the Seminoles must have thought themselves on the verge of another great victory. Their assumption would only have been confirmed by Gaines's decision to welcome negotiations after several days of bombardment. When Gaines did not unilaterally reject the offer of the Seminole leaders to abrogate the Treaty of Payne's Landing and remain south of the Withlacoochee, explaining that he would have to submit their terms to his superiors, that small opening might have misled the Seminoles into thinking that Gaines's superiors were malleable. Being skeptical of Indian removal himself, Gaines could hardly have conveyed the true circumstances in which the Seminoles now found themselves.

In the aftermath of the battles near the Withlacoochee, the Seminoles dispersed into smaller bands and secreted themselves in central and southern Florida. It was a wise choice. By May 1836, Winfield Scott had entered Florida at the head of an overwhelming force buttressed by legions of Southern volunteers, a coalition the Seminoles could not

¹¹ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 108-11.

defeat on the open battlefield. In dividing themselves into smaller bands of a few hundred warriors and noncombatants, the Seminoles effectively countered Winfield Scott's complex plans to encircle his quarries between the three massive wings of his army. Instead, the Seminoles utilized the spring and summer to plant crops and prepare for further conflict. Having interacted with white officers at trading posts for over a decade, the Seminoles knew that their enemies detested the Florida climate and thought the summer months miasmatic. They would not have to fear a summer offensive and could prepare for renewed engagements in the fall.¹²

After dispersing into smaller groups, Seminole society fell back into its traditional forms of localized leadership and autonomous communities. The conflict with the United States had forced increased political unity upon the disparate groups that made up the Seminole nation, broadly defined. Faced with the common United States threat, distinct bands were willing to set aside societal, cultural, and historical distinctions to act in concert against the United States. If, once dispersed, these decentralized Indian bands could not coordinate their actions according to a broad strategic plan, they nonetheless would resist the invading Americans in defense of their homes. National leaders, like Micanopy, Osceola, and Ote Emathla, could trust isolated bands to strike at United States forces without their active participation, knowing that their allies were ideologically committed to the same cause.¹³

The Seminoles' decision to disperse into small bands may have aided them in

¹² For more on the Second Creek War, see John Ellisor, *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Brian Tucker, "Forgotten Struggle: The Second Creek War in West Florida, 1837-1854," in William Belko ed., *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), 237-260. On Winfield Scott's campaign, see chapter 2.

¹³ On the most pivotal instance of Florida Indians acting without regard for the agreements of Seminole leaders, see the discussion of the ambush on Harney's command in chapter 7.

cluding Winfield Scott and Richard Keith Call, but having separated themselves by dozens of miles, they could no longer make effective, collective decisions. Some Seminole bands continued to harass the frontiers in East and West Florida, while others remained in the central part of the territory, gathering their resources and preparing for the coming violence. Having instigated the war, the Seminoles had no option other than to wait for the inevitable counteroffensive. With the United States having reinforced the peninsula, there was likely no more they could accomplish beyond frustrating their antagonists.

It did not appear a futile strategy. Through their intermittent contacts with white officials and the experiences of Black Seminoles who had only recently escaped white owners, the Seminoles knew that some whites were more committed to their removal than others. They were probably aware of the upcoming 1836 presidential election and, given their relatively favorable relationship with John Quincy Adams's appointees, might have believed that a Jackson defeat would end the war. Though isolated, the Seminoles were not entirely quarantined from knowledge of white culture. Osceola, for example, demonstrated a keen sense of racial politics in the United States when, a few months before the war, he protested against an action of Indian Agent Wiley Thompson utilizing contemporary white racial discourse: "Am I a negro? A slave? My skin is dark, but not black. I am an Indian – a Seminole. The white man shall not make me black. I will make the white man red with blood; and then blacken him in the sun and rain." Before the war, Osceola and other Indians often spent time at frontier forts, Osceola himself becoming renowned for his skill with a ball, and he had reportedly formed a strong friendship with at least one officer. Given the number of Seminoles and Black Seminoles who interacted

with whites, for the Seminole leadership to piece together some idea of the contours of United States political culture was certainly possible.¹⁴

Through the first year of the war, the Seminoles weathered, and beat back, the campaigns of three separate generals. In the process, they demonstrated an unprecedented sense of Seminole nationhood, uniting elder chiefs and younger warriors, binding Black Seminoles to their cause, and bridging societal gaps between bands. Fifteen years before, they had scattered in the face of Andrew Jackson's offensive, but during the first half of 1836, they won every important battle. Through their assault on slavery in East Florida, they struck the United States at its most vulnerable point. Thousands of soldiers and volunteers streamed into Florida, hundreds died, and the Seminoles remained in Florida, undeterred. Having dispersed into small parties onto lands unmapped by whites, they were beyond the grasp of their antagonists. The United States military establishment was in disarray - Gaines and Scott were sniping at each other in the press, Jackson had accused Call of cowardice, and Jesup was in the midst of surreptitiously undermining Scott's command. The Seminole coalition had never been stronger, the United States military never so fractured. And yet, even at that early point, they could not win. Unable to coordinate larger attacks, dwarfed by the size of the United States army, having failed to spark a wider slave rebellion, and isolated from other Indian nations, the Seminoles could only hope to evade the enemy, antagonize its forces, and wait in vain for its leaders

¹⁴ There were reports that Osceola regularly read Florida newspapers. Though Osceola was almost definitely illiterate, it was certainly possible, even likely, that there were literate Black Seminoles among the Seminoles with intermittent access to some Florida newspapers. On Osceola and newspapers, see "From Florida," *New York Spectator*, September 19, 1836. Watson, "Seminole Strategy" 163. For Osceola's protestation, see Sprague, *The Florida War* 86. On Osceola's friendship with Lieutenant John Graham, see John Bemrose, *Reminiscences of the Second Seminole War*, ed., John Mahon (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1966), 21; Meyer Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston: Burges and Honour, 1836), 237-238.

to set aside the consolidation of white supremacy as its overwhelming objective in Florida. However, Jackson's vision of the United States was characterized most of all by the dogged pursuit of securing white supremacy within his nation's borders. The United States would not relent.

Distinguishing Race and Removal

If the United States and the Seminoles were similarly fractured by race and politics, only the United States was in a position to leverage its opponent's weaknesses. As the war stretched into its second year, the Seminoles remained in a holding pattern, avoiding Thomas Jesup's patrols, harvesting their crops, and waiting in vain for the United States to falter. Jesup was much more proactive. Insightfully perceiving the cleavages in Seminole society, Jesup manipulated them to his advantage, moderating his most extreme objective – the re-enslavement of the Black Seminoles – to secure his primary one, the removal of the Seminoles. With his revised war plan, Jesup targeted the groups within the Seminole coalition least opposed to emigration, the Black Seminoles and older chiefs, leaving them a choice between the security of the West and a harsh, nomadic existence in Florida. The Black Seminoles who, whatever the nuances of their status, were slaves amongst the Seminoles, cast their lot with Jesup and freedom. Several older Seminole chiefs, leaders of their people, attempted to do the same, but were not secure enough in their power amid the influence of younger, more determined warriors, chiefs, and religious leaders. The threat of overwhelming violence was corrosive, weakening the bonds between and among various Seminole bands and the Black Seminoles. If United States coercion had made the Seminole alliance of Florida Indians

possible, it also eventually led to its destruction. As the conflict dragged on, their schisms widened while the United States remained fixated on its goals.¹⁵

At the end of January 1837, Jesup sent a prisoner of war into the wilderness with an offer to negotiate. He received his answer in the person of Abraham, the most influential Black Seminole among his people and Micanopy's chief interpreter. In 1837, Abraham was about 45 years old, having been born into slavery and probably serving his youth as a household servant in Pensacola in Spanish West Florida. As a young man, he seized on the British offer of emancipation during the War of 1812 and most likely was present during Richard Keith Call's destruction of the Negro Fort. In the aftermath, he made his escape south, to Bowlegs' town on the Suwanee River, where he first encountered Micanopy. By all accounts an intelligent man, Abraham must have struck Micanopy as an ideal interpreter, well acquainted with white culture and possessed of a sagacious intellect. By 1835, Abraham was married, liberated from slavery, and had fathered several children. According to white observers, Abraham had risen in Seminole politics to become Micanopy's chief advisor and it was his insistence that the Seminoles safeguard the relative freedom of the Black Seminoles that had instigated the war. Once the war began, Abraham was especially prominent in the hostilities, taking warriors into battle against enemy battalions and often leading the charge. In 1837, Abraham met with Jesup and agreed to organize a meeting between the general and Micanopy within days.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jesup did not arrive by his strategy easily, nor was it simple to implement. See chapter 2.

¹⁶ For more on Abraham, see especially Kenneth Wiggins Porter, "The Negro Abraham," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 25.1 (Jul., 1946), 1-43. White observers likely overstated Abraham's influence upon Micanopy and, by extension, the instigation of the war itself. Though attempting to weigh the relative intensity of competing racial biases is a fool's errand, white observers often credited Black Seminoles with authority in Seminole politics entirely out of line with their status as slaves. Certainly several Black Seminole leaders, especially Abraham, were instrumental in forming Seminole policy, but the vehemence with which whites credited the Black Seminoles was likely due to their own fears of African-American autonomy and the antipathy of Seminoles toward white political and cultural forms.

An able leader of the Black Seminoles and a trusted confidante of Micanopy, Abraham's interests and those of the chief likely aligned at their March meeting with Jesup. Micanopy had never been fully committed to war and the long year of conflict would have done little to assuage his doubts. The Second Seminole War had had a debilitating effect on Seminole society as deprivation, starvation, and privation wracked Indians across the territory. At the meeting, with Abraham interpreting, Micanopy's representatives - mostly close allies and family members, along with the Black Seminole leader John Cavallo - reached a deal with Thomas Jesup to end the war and emigrate west in return for compensation for their physical property, one year of subsistence, and a guarantee that their African-American slaves would accompany them. The agreement represented a decisive victory for the vast majority Black Seminoles, sparing them from the ravages of the United States chattel slave regime. Only the status of fugitive African-Americans who had joined the Seminoles after the ambush of Dade's command remained ambiguous, all others were safe from being reincorporated into the Deep South. Micanopy would no longer have to vie with ambitious young warriors to establish his authority over his people, but he was not blind to the threats that remained. The agreement with Jesup mandated that Micanopy himself would travel to Jesup's camp and serve as a hostage to guarantee his peoples' surrender. For Micanopy, who knew that his rivals would almost certainly resent his agreement, living in a United States outpost as a hostage might have been more secure than returning home.¹⁷

Micanopy had reason to believe he now occupied a precarious position. Some of

¹⁷ "Treaty with the Seminoles," *Army and Navy Chronicle* 4.14, April 6, 1837, 215; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 200; Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles: From Removals to Emancipation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 18-19; Major Thomas Childs to Thomas Jesup, April 3, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers.

his most prominent rivals had acceded to his agreement, including Ote Emathla who signed it, but Osceola and Abiaka remained conspicuous in their absence. By May, Micanopy, Ote Emathla, and even Halpatter-Tustenugee had brought their bands to the designated posts near Tampa Bay, but Osceola, Abiaka, and Coacoochee, another military leader, sent only assurances that they would come along shortly. With 700 Seminoles and Black Seminoles isolated and nearly committed to emigration, the situation was highly volatile as malaria swept through the Indian camps and slave catchers, some with the permission of Jesup, identified Black Seminoles who had been claimed by white masters. Further undermining the agreement he had made with Micanopy, Jesup struck a deal with the Seminole chief Coa Hadjo, who agreed to surrender every enslaved African-American who had joined the Seminoles since the start of the war. Betraying dozens of African-Americans who faced a bitter homecoming to hostile masters, Coa Hadjo alienated both Black Seminole leaders and Seminole warriors who identified with their interests. The delicate situation collapsed at the beginning of June when Osceola and Abiaka, leading 200 warriors, swept into the post and left with nearly all of the Indians and African-Americans who had gathered there.¹⁸

The exact chain of events that led to Osceola and Abiaka destroying Jesup and Micanopy's agreement was never laid out clearly. Certainly, the two hardliners believed that the Seminoles could still win the war, Abiaka perhaps inspired by his faith and Osceola his military successes. Several white observers were convinced that Osceola and Abiaka had acted in defense of their African-American allies. The two leaders had long been closely aligned with leading Black Seminoles and they may have been reacting

¹⁸ Coa Hadjo blamed the Black Seminoles for the delay in reaching a peace as well. Major William Harney to Jesup, May 18, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 204-205. For a summary of these events from Jesup's perspective, see chapter 2.

against Jesup's dalliances with local slaveholders. Osceola himself claimed that the Seminoles and Black Seminoles gathered at Tampa Bay had acted on their own volition, fearing that malaria might further spread through their settlements. Regardless of the precise thinking of Osceola, Abiaka, and the 200 warriors under their command, they reignited the war believing victory possible. Not having had to elude United States patrols throughout the duration of the agreement had allowed several bands to plant sizable crops and, with the oppressive Florida summer imminent, United States troops would remain in their quarters, fearful of the climate.¹⁹

Abiaka and Osceola forced Micanopy, Abraham, and their followers to make even more difficult decisions. Confronted with Osceola's arrival, the two men chose differently. Micanopy returned to the wilderness with his band while Abraham remained behind in Jesup's custody. For Micanopy to remain at Tampa Bay likely would have meant the end of his chiefdom – for the remainder of the war, he followed Osceola, Abiaka, and Coacoochee's lead. The next year, when Micanopy was again in United States custody, he explained he had only abandoned the agreement because he had been kidnapped by Osceola under the threat of violence. Regardless of whether Osceola had overtly threatened Micanopy, the warrior had proven more than willing to kill chiefs who submitted to United States compulsion and the threat had almost certainly hung in the air that night. That Micanopy never attempted to surrender again and, in fact, rebuffed offers to negotiate despite often being geographically separated from his rivals, suggested that younger, more militant leaders like Osceola, Coacoochee, and Abiaka held considerable

¹⁹ Osceola and Abiaka may also have been motivated by the upcoming Green Corn ceremony, the most important annual religious event in Seminole cosmology. See Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones* 39.

political influence beyond their capacity for violence.²⁰

Abraham and several other Black Seminoles reacted differently to Osceola and Abiaka's arrival. Abraham had lobbied heavily for the agreement, spending months contacting hesitant chiefs and convincing them to emigrate. It was possible he believed Osceola and other warriors would never overlook the degree of his collaboration with Jesup. With his family living at Tampa Bay, Abraham decided to remain with Jesup and cast his lot with the United States. Unlike other Black Seminoles who had gained renown throughout the Seminole nation for their prowess in battle, Abraham was primarily a political leader whose influence was rooted almost entirely in his relationship with Micanopy. Where Micanopy was protected by his familial history and hereditary authority, Abraham would have no such safeguards. By all accounts a pragmatic man, he likely understood, as Abiaka and Osceola did not, that the possibility of success in the Second Seminole War was remote. In remaining at Tampa Bay, Abraham made a conscious choice to forgo his ties to the Seminoles and offer his services to the United States, which he had spent the past decade urging Micanopy to rebuff.

He had good reason. An able interpreter with intimate knowledge of Seminole government and culture, he, like other Black Seminoles, had much to offer to the army as guides and scouts. It was a service that he correctly calculated might be rewarded with a guarantee of freedom. Twenty-five years before, Abraham had escaped life as a slave in West Florida and joined with the British, embracing a future whose shape he did not

²⁰ On Micanopy being coerced, see Sprague, *The Florida War* 180; Covington, *The Seminoles of Florida* 90-91. Some scholars have suggested that Seminole leaders effectively deposed Micanopy at some point during the spring of 1837 (see Wickman, *Osceola's Legacy* 22-24), but events over the coming months clearly demonstrated that he retained significant authority over many members of his nation, especially given his personal reception of the Cherokee delegation of 1837. See Gary Moulton, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 53.3 (Jan., 1975), 296-305.

know. Isolated at Tampa Bay, he made the same decision and, once again, there was no turning back. Jesup had learned, and was happy to tell Abraham, that Seminole leaders had already tasked twenty warriors with the mission of assassinating the Black Seminole leader.²¹

Abraham understood the bind in which Osceola, Abiaka, and Coacoochee had placed wavering chiefs. Several months later in September 1837, Abraham transmitted a message to Coa Hadjo, who had escaped along with his fellow chiefs, warning him that to hold out against the United States would be his downfall. Though Abraham was almost certainly aware that Hadjo had struck a deal with Jesup to surrender African-American slaves who had joined the United States after the start of the war, he nevertheless urged the chief to come in peacefully. His interests, Abraham argued, no longer aligned with those of the warriors. Reminding him that years ago they had spoken in Arkansas as two members of the Seminole delegation that had inspected the territory, he recalled Hadjo comparing the relative lushness of the Arkansas countryside to the bitter deprivations of the barren reservation set aside by the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. According to Abraham, the last time they had talked Hadjo “did not know who would kill you first, the whites or your own people.” With defeat nearly assured, he warned Hadjo not to “sacrifice yourself to the advice of crazy men.” Abraham insisted that he still sympathized with Micanopy, Coa Hadjo, and Ote Emathla, all of whom he believed desired peace. Counseling him against the threats of Abiaka and his band of Micasuki Indians, Abraham reminded him that Abiaka did not speak for the traditional hereditary leadership and that only the events of the previous decade had bound their people together. Loyal to Micanopy’s faction, Abraham argued that surrender did not betray the Seminole nation but would instead

²¹ Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles* 21; Jesup to Taylor, October 27, 1837, Jesup Papers.

preserve it in the west.²²

Other Black Seminole leaders, including John Cavallo who signed the agreement with Jesup, chose differently. Cavallo had been born the son and property of Seminole Indian Charles Cavallo, his mother being one of Charles Cavallo's African-American slaves. In his early 20s at the start of the war, Cavallo distinguished himself for his prowess in battle and was a close ally of the warrior Coacoochee, a chief's son who was earning acclaim for his leadership under fire. Though he was likely a leading member of the faction of Seminoles and Black Seminoles committed to war, Cavallo was married to a relative of Micanopy, leading him to go along with Micanopy and Abraham's agreement with Jesup. Whatever the case, he actively joined Osceola and Abiaka on their march to Tampa Bay and was instrumental in convincing the people gathered there to renew the conflict. More thoroughly integrated into the military command of the uprising than other Black Seminoles, Cavallo chose to forgo the alliance with Jesup that Abraham had welcomed.²³

The schisms that separated Seminoles and Black Seminoles in the wake of the agreement with Thomas Jesup sparked a chain of events that critically wounded the Seminole war effort. Following the peaceful summer months as United States soldiers remained indoors safe from the blinding Florida sun, detachments again trudged through the Florida wilderness in search of their enemy. One officer, Brigadier General Joseph Hernandez, had a stroke of luck. On the morning of September 8, a Black Seminole named John belonging to Chief Philip, the father of Coacoochee, came into camp with his

²² Abraham to Coa Hadjo, September 16, 1837, James David Glunt Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

²³ For more on Cavallo (often identified as John Horse), see Phillip Thomas Tucker, "John Horse: Forgotten African-American Leader of the Second Seminole War," *Journal of Negro History*, 77.2 (Spring, 1992), 74-83.

wife and surrendered. According to John, he and his wife had tired of the hardships of war and he threw himself on the mercy of Hernandez. To prove his loyalty and to safeguard his wife from re-enslavement, John offered to direct Hernandez to Chief Philip's encampment. That night, a United States force swept through the settlement and captured Philip, the most influential Seminole captured to that point in the war.²⁴

Through Philip, Jesup shattered the militant faction that had dominated Seminole politics. Likely utilizing the threat of force, he ordered Philip to send out messengers to bring in his son for a parley. Once Coacoochee arrived, Jesup detained him and several other leading warriors, violating the implicit promise of the white flag that protected wartime negotiators. He imprisoned several warriors in a nearby fort, only allowing Coacoochee to leave as a messenger because he held his father as a hostage. In October 1837, Jesup repeated the deception, meeting with Osceola, Coa Hadjo, and John Cavallo under a white flag and again taking the leaders into custody. In swift succession, Jesup had captured several of the most influential Seminole warriors and, with Abiaka the only prominent proponent of war remaining in the field, critically undermined the Seminoles' war leadership. Jesup had so much success utilizing the white flag as a means of deception that he would repeat it multiple times, in the most prominent instance, seizing Micanopy, Ote Emathla, and several other chiefs following their meeting with Cherokee mediators in December, 1837.²⁵

With success in their grasp, however, army officials made a critical mistake.

²⁴ Motte, *Journey into the Wilderness* 116-120; Hernandez to Jesup, September 16, 1837, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 7: 849-850; Captain Harry Brown to Thomas Jesup, February 28, 1837, Jesup Papers, Letters Received from Officers.

²⁵ It was likely that Micanopy privately welcomed Jesup's deception. Few circumstances could have better extricated him from a war he found increasingly hopeless while still allowing him to save face with his countrymen by not surrendering.

Jesup confined his most famous prisoners in Fort Marion where Coacoochee, John Cavallo, Philip, Osceola, about 20 warriors, and several women were locked into a room measuring eighteen feet by twenty feet, with a hole about eighteen feet above the floor to provide light. Over the course of several days, the prisoners formulated a plan of escape, prying the bars off the lone window and weaving blankets into ropes. On the appointed night, 20 of them were hoisted up about 13 feet to a ledge underneath the window, squeezed out through the tiny opening, and made their way to freedom. Philip and Osceola chose to remain behind, Philip being an old man and weary of war and Osceola then suffering from the quinsy that would soon kill him.²⁶

With the Seminole and Black Seminole leadership decimated – Micanopy, Ote Emathla, Osceola, Philip, Coa Hadjo, and Abraham all were still in United States custody – the escape of Coacoochee and John Cavallo was instrumental in extending the war. Coacoochee was a young man, renowned for his courage and able to unite disparate clans through his hereditary claims to leadership. No one else could have inspired the remaining Seminole bands to continue their resistance. Similarly, John Cavallo, who had proven himself an able commander over the previous two years of the war, could best rally the remaining Black Seminoles to his cause. With Micanopy, Coa Hadjo, and several other older chiefs still in captivity, Jesup's opportunity to settle the war peacefully was over. Coacoochee and his men fled directly to Halpatter-Tustenugee and Abiaka who had gathered their forces near Lake Okeechobee.²⁷

In some respects, for the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles who massed at Lake

²⁶ For more on the escape, see Kenneth Porter, "Seminole Flight from Fort Marion," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 22.3 (Jan., 1944), 113-133.

²⁷ Porter, "Seminole Flight," 128; Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones* 42; Sprague, *The Florida War* 98; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 227.

Okeechobee, carving notches in trees to steady their guns while they awaited the coming United States storm, the calculus of the war had been greatly simplified. Jesup had successfully captured many of the older chiefs, mostly men of an earlier generation who had not welcomed conflict with the United States. Those who remained at Okeechobee relished the fight. Zachary Taylor, marching for their location at the head of a thousand men, might have ended the Seminole resistance had they been overcome. The Seminoles and Black Seminoles remaining in the field had little choice. Victory over the United States army in a direct confrontation would reignite their prior strategy of wearing down their enemy's patience beyond all endurance.²⁸

Taylor's men came in waves at the Seminoles' position and were rebuffed. 26 whites died in the attack and over 110 lay wounded. The Seminoles suffered comparatively minor losses. The victory at the Battle of Okeechobee represented the last gasp of effective Seminole resistance. The Seminoles melted away into the wilderness, Taylor being unable to follow because he had to care for the wounded.

The Battle of Okeechobee was almost an overwhelming success for the Seminoles. In its aftermath, Jesup wrote to his superiors and made a serious proposal to allow the Seminoles to remain in Florida. They had whittled away at the general, undermined his faith in the war effort, and shaken his resolve. His superiors, however, were unyielding. After the Seminoles dispersed into the Florida wilderness and the Van Buren administration rejected Jesup's overtures, the course of the war trudged forward in

²⁸ Conversely, the Seminoles might have been aware of the controversy over the capture of Osceola and thought that defeating Taylor at the Battle of Okeechobee would convince sympathetic United States leaders to forgo their insistence on removal. Indeed, though this seems unlikely, had the Seminole leadership a perfect understanding of United States reaction to the war in late 1837, the battle at Okeechobee might have been designed to disabuse Jesup of his faith in an imminent victory over the Seminoles and empower Northern whites outraged over the general's treatment of Osceola.

a grinding process of attrition.²⁹

If the aftermath of the Battle of Okeechobee revealed how far the Seminoles were from victory, it justified the Black Seminoles' involvement in the war. In early February, as Jesup appealed to his superiors to allow the Seminoles to remain in Florida, he sent a message through African-American messengers to John Cavallo telling him that should Cavallo and his people surrender, he would guarantee them their freedom from both white and Indian owners and protect them from Seminole reprisals. For the Black Seminoles, many of whom were claimed by white owners and the vast majority of whom were actually owned by Seminole Indians, the offer amounted to an emancipation proclamation. Jesup had only one demand of the Black Seminoles. Radicalized by the Seminoles and unbound by white overseers, they would have to remove themselves from Florida and go west, to Indian country.³⁰

The vast majority of Black Seminoles seized on Jesup's offer. By March, he had sent nearly every Black Seminole in his custody to Fort Pike in Louisiana to begin the journey to Arkansas. In April 1838, John Cavallo led 27 other Black Seminoles to an army outpost and surrendered. Though most embarked immediately, some Black Seminole leaders including Abraham remained in Florida, receiving pay from the army in return for their service as interpreters. For his work, Abraham earned a daily wage of \$2.50, a sizable sum for the time.³¹

As a scout and interpreter, Abraham did not take up arms against the Seminoles. He continued to advocate for peace among the Indians, persisting in his belief that the

²⁹ For these events from the perspective of Jesup, see chapter 2.

³⁰ Jesup to William Marcy, April 3, 1848 and July 1, 1848, Jesup Papers; Mulroney, *The Seminole Freedmen* 49.

³¹ May 18, 1838 entry, Thomas Jesup Orders Book, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

Seminoles could not hope to survive in Florida with the United States committed to their removal. His council was instrumental in convincing Halpatter-Tustenugee to surrender and it was his emissaries who had reached John Cavallo and convinced him to come in, secure in he and his band's freedom. As Jesup prepared to leave Florida, Abraham sent him a letter, attesting to his faithful service and requesting written confirmation that he would be protected against slavecatchers and hostile Seminoles. Reminding the general that he and his fellow Black Seminoles "do not live for our selves only, but for our wives & children who are as dear to us as those of any other men," he hoped Jesup would repay him for his aid in bringing the war closer to a conclusion. With his last act as commander of the Florida War, Jesup complied, recognizing Abraham and other Black Seminoles' contributions in writing and pledging to protect their freedom in the west. With Jesup relieved of command, the vast majority of Black Seminoles having surrendered, and much of the traditional Seminole leadership captured, the war moved on to another phase. Among the most influential Seminoles, only Coacoochee and Abiaka remained in the field.³²

By the third year of the Second Seminole War, the alliance of the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles had become even more splintered by the competing interests of coherent factions. These divides did not follow strict racial lines. Rather, some Black Seminoles and some Seminoles favored removal given certain guarantees from the United States while other Seminoles and Black Seminoles prioritized resisting removal. When individual leaders – first Micanopy and Abraham, then Halpatter-Tustenugee and John Cavallo – concluded that the cause was hopeless, they approached Thomas Jesup

³² Abraham to Jesup, April 25, 1838, James David Glunt Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, transcribed in Porter, "The Negro Abraham" 38-39.

and accepted emigration. For the Black Seminoles who achieved their emancipation, this chain of events justified their participation in the war and protected them from the worst ravages of the slave society they abandoned. They did not betray the Seminoles.

Abraham had counseled conciliation, as both chief advisor to Micanopy and as a United States interpreter. John Cavallo had remained in the field, fighting beside Coacoochee and many hundreds of other Seminoles, until he made the same calculation and surrendered. In all, the African-Americans who survived the war had benefitted from it greatly, aiding the Seminoles until their cause war appeared lost and gaining significant concessions from their enemy when they laid down their arms. For the faction of leaders like Micanopy and Coa Hadjo who advocated conciliation, the war fundamentally undercut their authority. When the Seminoles arrived in the Indian Territory, they would not enjoy the influence they once had. The militant Seminoles who had led the fight against the Americans suffered as well. With the exception of Abiaka, they were forced to confront a bitter truth: no matter how convincing the logic, the United States could not be dissuaded.

“The Whites Are Too Strong”

Over the final years of the war, Coacoochee and Abiaka fought lonely battles against the forces arrayed against them, still determined to elongate the war beyond the endurance of the United States. Their strategy remained the same as it had been during the first years of the war. They and their followers hid in the wilderness, moving further south, away from United States patrols. When Major General Alexander Macomb arrived in Florida to sign a peace, Abiaka readily agreed when he believed it might allow his

band to remain on their land. When he found out he was being misled, he reignited the war by having his allies launch an attack against an unprepared military trading post, killing dozens of whites. In the aftermath, they again dispersed, unwilling to confront the enemy en masse. With their ranks of warriors diminished and the Black Seminoles having abandoned the field, the Seminoles no longer had the capability to defeat concentrated United States forces in a pitched battle.³³

Faced with the intractability of his enemies, Coacoochee accepted emigration as well. Personally, he was willing to bear any sacrifice to remain in Florida, but would not ask the men and women who followed him to do the same. With the departure of Coacoochee's band and in the aftermath of John Tyler's inauguration, removing every Seminole down to the last man, woman, and child no longer appeared so urgent. In 1842, Tyler, the last commanding officer of the Florida campaign Colonel Worth, and Senator Thomas Hart Benton, arrived at a series of policies that they believed would secure United States regional hegemony in the southeast. Worth sent a message to Abiaka and Holata Micco, the leader of another band of Florida Indians, and informed them of an informal arrangement. So long as the remaining Indians, numbering about 300, remained south of the Pease River in the southern part of the peninsula, they would be allowed to remain in Florida undisturbed. After seven years of fighting and amidst the decimation of Seminole society, the Florida Indians had finally worn down the United States.³⁴

A year before, prior to his emigration, Coacoochee had struggled to comprehend how the Seminoles had won every major battle and lost the war. Upon the warrior's surrender, Colonel William Worth had held him captive and threatened his life unless he

³³ For much more on the treaty between Halleck Tustenuggee and Alexander Macomb as well as the attack on the army trading post, see chapter 7.

³⁴ Again, for these events in far more detail, see chapter 7. Sprague, *The Florida War* 297.

sent messengers into the wilderness who could convince the rest of his band to come in. The message Coacoochee sent was a wrenching one, with a bitter admission at its core: “I have turned my back and closed my eyes upon our land and the graves of the Seminoles. The whites are too strong.” And from Coacoochee’s perspective, his enemies must have appeared unfathomably strong. They had persevered through lost battles, ambushes, strategic setbacks, and month after month of futile searching for an enemy they could not pin down. The United States commanded vast resources – innumerable soldiers, river boats, ocean vessels, endless stocks of weapons, inexhaustible ammunition. And yet, the United States had fought for seven years and withdrew with hundreds of Seminoles remaining in Florida. The war had begun when Andrew Jackson scribbled a brief order on the back of a letter sending a few hundred troops to quell the Seminole uprising and by its end his party was two years out of power.³⁵

The whites may have been too strong, but it was a peculiar kind of strength. It was rooted not in their tremendous resources or some fount of inexhaustible courage, but in a dogged preoccupation with the consolidation of national authority in Florida and, with it, the regional hegemony of white supremacy. It was an unyielding focus, one that allowed intelligent actors like Abraham and John Cavallo to manipulate United States officials and secure their emancipation. For the Seminoles, the fight was not entirely in vain. Chastened by seven years of humiliating defeats, the United States surrendered many of its most stringent demands, even if it would not allow a critical mass of Seminoles to remain in Florida under any circumstances. Yet, Coacoochee was right, the whites were too strong. Not too strong to defeat the Seminoles, but too weak to admit they could lose to them, which, at a cost of tens of millions of dollars and over 1500 lives, amounted to

³⁵ Sprague, *The Florida War* 297.

the same thing.

Chapter 7

The “Mock-War Spirit”: The Unsteady Path from Conquest to Imperialism

On June 1, 1839, the words “Shame!!! Shame!!! Shame!!!” would have drawn the eyes of any reader of the Tallahassee newspaper, *The Floridian*. In the unlikely event they did not, seven hands pointed downward and, from below, an additional seven hands pointed upwards, themselves bracketed by an additional chorus of “Shame!!! Shame!!! Shame!!!” The occasion: Major General Alex Macomb had concluded a treaty with the Seminoles that allowed them a small reservation in the southwestern tip of Florida, far from the frontier on lands that few whites had ever seen. Prior to the treaty’s signing, the vast majority of the territory’s population considered the land literally uninhabitable. Nevertheless, many recoiled at ending the war on any grounds aside from total victory. “We fear we shall be laughed at, the next 4th of July,” protested a writer for one Mississippi paper. Over the coming weeks, Democratic newspapers scoffed at Macomb for presuming Indians would abide by their treaties and citizen committees in Florida dashed off ever more urgent appeals to Washington to abrogate the agreement. The war did not end.¹

A little over three years later, on August 14, 1842, the final commanding officer in Florida, Colonel William Worth, announced an end to the Florida War through the medium of an informal declaration. The terms of his peace were largely the same as those of Macomb’s. Indians who were willing to go west would be given land, supplies, and transportation, while those whose wished to remain in Florida could do so, provided they

¹ “Shame!!! Shame!!! Shame!!!,” *The Floridian*, June 1, 1839; “Florida War,” *Woodville Republican*, June 29, 1839; “The Florida War.,” *The Raleigh Register and North-Carolina Gazette*, June 8, 1839; “Public Meeting,” *The Floridian*, June 8, 1839; E.C. Cabell, *The Floridian*, June 29, 1839.

confined themselves to a strip of land in southern Florida of little value to white settlers. Once again, many Florida citizens complained. They argued that frontier violence had not wholly abated and, regardless, they could not countenance living in such close proximity to the Indians who had haunted them over seven years. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. The end of the Second Seminole War passed quietly, occupying brief stories on the third pages of newspapers across the country, occasioning minor debate in the House of Representatives, and fading away, largely out of the national consciousness.

Though there were few battles and fewer breakthroughs, the three years between Macomb and Worth's agreements were not uneventful. In their struggles to ease the tensions of national expansion, subjugation, and republicanism, several influential leaders experimented with both pacifistic and violent solutions to end the war. Macomb's treaty briefly experimented with the principle of dealing with Indians as a sovereign people under international law until his peace was shattered by the massacre of Major William Harney's command several months later. Harney's brutal counter offensive, along with Colonel Zachary Taylor's controversial tactic of importing bloodhounds from Cuba, galvanized despondent Jacksonians across the country. Their provocative repudiation of moral constraint in Indian warfare seemed to fulfill Jackson's vision of the nation even while they discarded his insistence on protecting Indians from the worst excesses of settler violence. Yet those methods failed as well, unable to overcome the Seminoles' insurmountable tactical advantages and defeated by brief, voluble protests of national Whigs and anti-slavery leaders.

The politicians and officers who ended the Second Seminole War overcame unyielding constraints. Criticism from partisan papers, appeals from southern planters,

and the cries of Florida settlers prevented them from signing any treaty with the Seminoles. Yet both the exigencies of the battlefield and a long tradition of moral restraint inveighed against extermination as well. The preceding several years of political wrangling had inexorably led to a single conclusion - Indians would not be allowed to remain on land east of the Mississippi River against the wishes of the white populace. Indian removal, by one means or another, would remain the settled law of the United States. The solution upon which politicians and officers converged - armed occupation - was the only means by which they could mediate the tensions of contemporary political culture and the undeniable reality that some Seminoles could not be removed.

The war itself ended slowly, in fits and starts. Over a period of years, William Henry Harrison defeated Martin Van Buren, Vice President John Tyler succeeded Harrison, and several commanding officers entered Florida, flailed in the wilderness, and requested transfer. Finally, in 1842, Tyler, Secretary of War John Spencer, and commanding officer Colonel William Worth began the slow process of ending the war on terms satisfactory to themselves and the public. Worth neutralized as many Indians as possible using every tactic, violent and peaceable, available to him. At the same time, Spencer seized on Benton's Armed Occupation Act as the most effective means of securing the Florida frontier. The two campaigns were inextricably linked. On August 4, 1842, Thomas Hart Benton shepherded his bill through Congress and eight days later Worth wrote to Tyler, unilaterally declaring the war at an end.

The terms of the Armed Occupation Act laid bare the implications of a war against Indian sovereignty. It appropriated hundreds of thousands of acres that had once belonged to the Seminoles and conveyed them to white settlers, at no monetary cost. The

newly arrived settlers had to make only one payment, a pledge to police their homesteads against the trespasses of the Indians who had once lived upon their property. Though Worth's peace and Benton's homestead bill forced the Seminoles to emigrate dozens rather than thousands of miles, they nonetheless erected a new status quo in Florida, one in which whites were legally empowered to seize Indian land and specifically marked Seminoles, who lacked legal, bureaucratic, and institutional relationships with the United States, as enemies of the state.

Three years after the end of the Second Seminole War, the United States welcomed Florida into the Union. It took its place alongside its neighbors, Georgia and South Carolina, fully integrated into the cultural and political fabric of the Deep South. Plantation slavery, which had once only been predominant in Middle Florida, slowly spread into East Florida, enveloping the ground upon which the Seminoles had once trod. If a few hundred Seminoles remained in southern Florida, if the war lasted seven years amidst multiple humiliating setbacks, if the Democratic Party had lost its hold on the presidency in some small part due to its failure there, the southern slaveholders who had provoked the war and demanded its perpetuation nevertheless emerged victorious. It was more a material victory than an ideological one, but they had fulfilled their goals nonetheless.

The Perils of Treaty Making

In the spring of 1839, Major General Alexander Macomb departed for Florida. Like a generation of military officers, Macomb had risen to prominence during the War of 1812, defeating the British in the Battle of Plattsburgh and earning promotion to the

rank of general. When Major General Jacob Brown passed away in 1828, Macomb had the good fortune to be less personally combative than his peers, Edmund Gaines and Winfield Scott. Not wishing to exacerbate their feud, John Quincy Adams elevated the less-accomplished Macomb to the rank of commanding general of the entire United States army. Like Scott and Gaines, Macomb belonged to an earlier era of frontier relations. Born in Detroit during the Revolutionary War, he retained a romantic view of Indian character and infamously, just a decade before, had published a play, *Pontiac*, commemorating the life and death of the famous chief to a resounding dearth of acclaim. A man out of time, in testing the boundaries of the United States' nascent expansionistic culture, Macomb would learn the limits of both his romanticism and the earlier ideals of Indian relations to which he clung.²

Following the calamitous events of the previous few months - Jesup's failed treaty, the controversial ambush of Osceola, and Osceola's death in captivity - in March 1839, Secretary of War Joel Poinsett dispatched Macomb to Florida with orders as muddled as the ones that had hamstrung previous commanders. At once, Macomb was to protect the settlers, vigorously prosecute the war, and convince the Seminoles to accede to the terms of the Treaty of Payne's Landing. In no way did Macomb's mission represent a change in United States policy; his orders were identical to those of Gaines, Scott, Jesup, and Taylor. However, Poinsett did leave Macomb a loophole. While the

² Macomb dedicated his play to Lewis Cass, then governor of Michigan. Alexander Macomb, *Pontiac, or, the Siege of Detroit: A Drama in Three Acts* (Boston: Samuel Colman, 1835). For more on Macomb, see George Richards, *Memoir of Alexander Macomb, the Major General Commanding the Army of the United States* (New York: McElrath, Bangs, & Co., 1833); John Jenkins, *Daring Deeds of American Generals* (New York: A.A. Kelley, 1856), 295-322.

final details of removal were arranged, Macomb could offer the Seminoles land in the southern tip of Florida, as they awaited transport.³

When Macomb arrived at Fort Heilmann to meet with the commanding officer in Florida, Zachary Taylor, he found the men station there in a state of abject depression. Taylor immediately volunteered his opinion, one he said was nearly universal among his officer corps, that the war could not be won unless the government allowed the Seminoles to remain in Florida. However, he warned Macomb that even negotiating with the Seminoles would be difficult. Having witnessed many of their fellow chiefs being captured deceitfully under a white flag, the remaining Seminole leaders were understandably reluctant to meet with Macomb. Nevertheless, the major general sent several messengers into the wilderness and waited for responses. When he finally earned an audience with several Indian chiefs from Abiaka's band, though not Abiaka himself, Macomb made a surprising offer. Misleading either Poinsett or the Seminoles, Macomb informed the Seminoles of Poinsett's offer of a temporary reservation in Florida while they awaited further arrangements for removal. However, in his words, not thinking "it politic ... to say any thing about their emigration," he allowed the Seminoles to think the situation permanent. Whether he intended to challenge Poinsett to undermine a peaceful resolution of the conflict or to trick the Seminoles onto a small piece of land to facilitate their capture, he did not say.⁴

³ Secretary of War Poinsett to Commanding General Macomb, March 18, 1839, *Territorial Papers*, 25:597-599. For details on Macomb's mission, see John Sprague, "Macomb's Mission to the Seminoles: John T. Sprague's Journal Kept during April and May 1839," edited by Frank White Jr., *Florida History Quarterly*, 35.2 (Oct., 1956), 130-193.

⁴ Sprague, "Macomb's Mission to the Seminoles" 144-45, 178-187; Major General Macomb to Joel Poinsett, May 22, 1839, in John Sprague, *The Origin, Process, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1847), 229-232.

Whatever Macomb's plan, it stood little chance of success. Of the four remaining hostile Seminole bands, he had only managed to make contact with one. The other three roamed the Everglades unbound by their agreement. Accordingly, Taylor continued to militarize the frontier, extending posts along rivers and at checkpoints in hopes of choking off further Seminole escape routes. His actions could hardly have convinced the other three groups of hostile Indians to abide by a peace treaty of which they had learned only through rumor. Further north, Florida citizens were in a panic. Terrified at the prospect of sharing the peninsula with the Seminoles, many young men petitioned Governor Richard Keith Call for permission to revive the Florida militia and march on the Seminoles themselves.⁵

If Macomb's treaty was tactically limited in the field, it was even more of a political disaster. Van Buren never commented upon it. Poinsett quickly sent letters to members of the Florida elite assuring them that removal remained the war's overarching objective. Within days, excerpts of letters in which Poinsett implicitly declaimed responsibility for Macomb's actions reached newspapers and further isolated the commanding general. Over the preceding several years, nearly every prominent American who had spoken of the war had written the Seminoles out of Florida, whether through violence or through negotiation. By countervailing that trend, whatever his intentions, Macomb had embraced the unconscionable. It was likely of little comfort to

⁵ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 258; "Florida," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, July 11, 1839, 8:26.

him, but he was given the benefit of the doubt: newspapers tended to refer to him as a dupe for trusting Indians at their word rather than as a coward afraid to fight.⁶

Macomb's critics were sure it was only a matter of time before the Seminoles struck again. Skepticism ran high among army officers in Florida, who agreed that by failing to strike bargains with each of the four belligerent Seminole bands, Macomb's peace was doomed to failure. Nationally, the criticism of Macomb turned on less pragmatic concerns. For the most vocal detractors, peace on any terms save removal was itself a chimera. They argued that with Seminole bands to the south, Florida settlements would suffer the constant threat of massacre. In the event of a foreign invasion, the new reservation would serve as a ready-made beachhead for onrushing troops. In short, they reiterated the underlying rationale of the war itself. Absent both a pragmatic justification for Florida's continued security alongside Seminole settlements and an ideological defense of treaty making as a viable aspect of United States frontier policy, Macomb's treaty fell victim to the same political realities that had instigated the war in 1835.⁷

With the truce still in place, however tenuously, during the summer of 1839, Taylor instructed Lieutenant William Harney to organize a trading post at Fort Van Buren, near Tampa Bay. Along with twenty-two dragoons, Harney opened the store and Indians came and went peacefully, abiding by the terms of Macomb's peace. On July 22, 1839, Harney returned exhausted to his camp late at night from hunting swine on a nearby island and collapsed in his tent, neglecting to check his camp's defenses. He awoke to chaos. Nearly 160 warriors had invaded his post, and his men, caught unawares,

⁶ "Latest from Florida," *Indiana Journal*, June 29, 1839; "For the Floridian," June 22, 1839, *The Floridian*; "From Florida," *Albany Journal*, reprinted in *Daily Herald and Gazette*, May 15, 1839; "Florida.," June 24, 1839, *Arkansas Times and Advocate*; "The Florida War," *The Scioto Gazette*, June 6, 1839.

⁷ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 257-258; "The Florida War.," *Baltimore Chronicle*, reprinted June 6, 1839, *Virginia Free Press*; "The Seminole War," *St. Augustine Herald*, June 6, 1839.

were largely unarmed. Harney ran for the nearby woods, darkened his face with mud, and walked to the coast. By nightfall, he had connected with ten of his men and, upon returning to camp, discovered eight bodies. In all, the Indians had killed sixteen soldiers and civilians stationed at the fort.⁸

In some respects, it was as Macomb's critics had feared. He had made his peace with chiefs who lacked the authority to command every Seminole remaining in Florida. The band who had led the massacre, the so-called "Spanish Indians," was a loosely organized group of Indians who had lived in southwestern Florida for several years. Their ties to the rest of the Seminoles were weak, and they almost certainly did not consider themselves bound by Macomb's treaty. Led by a warrior named Chakaika, the band was attracted by the frontier post's abundant trade goods and its lax defenses, a dangerous combination amid the chaos of war. Casting Macomb's treaty in a worse light, many accused Abiaka, with whose band Macomb had struck his peace, of helping to plan the attack. Further implicating the chief, after Abiaka promised to apprehend those responsible, he invited several officers to his camp only to have several warriors open fire upon their approach. As Taylor restocked his battalions, Seminole bands attacked isolated outposts, small parties, and passing steamships. Macomb's peace was over.

Whether Abiaka was responsible for the attack or not, the Harney ambush demonstrated the impossibility of peace in Florida in 1839. Through their strained, though not yet shattered, relationship with the Black Seminoles and Florida's African-American population, the Seminoles were not wholly isolated from the white press. They might have been aware of Macomb's public protestation that peace was only temporary,

⁸ For more on what became known as the "Harney Massacre," see George Rollie Adams, *General William S. Harney: Prince of the Dragoons* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 71-73; Sprague, *The Florida War* 233-236; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole*, 259-262.

giving lie to all that Macomb had promised during the negotiations. At the very least, the Seminoles knew of the hostility of vocal whites throughout the country and within Florida who would not accept their survival in Florida at any price. Along with Jesup's exploitation of the white flag, the thrust of white strategy had all but discredited treaty making by the war's fourth year. Once the Harney Massacre shattered that peace, the resumption of war was inevitable. Even if Abiaka had dissembled from the start and never intended to honor his peace with Macomb, he reflected the same dishonesty as those with whom he dealt. No moral chasm separated Osceola's white flag, Macomb's silence over emigration, and the Harney ambush.⁹

William Harney and War to the Rope

During the summer of 1841, one New England newspaper castigated General Walker Armistead for signing a minor treaty with one band of Indians. Victory "must be effectual to be permanent," the author wrote, "and to be effectual it must be either entire extermination or complete subjection." Throughout the eighteen months following the Harney ambush, the United States experimented with extermination. Where Jackson had launched the Second Seminole War ostensibly to bring "progress and civilization" to both Florida and the Seminoles, military officers in 1840 employed tactics that demonstrated a callous disregard for Seminole personhood, the accepted norms of warfare, and the long-standing identification of United States war aims with the spread of liberty. Thomas Jesup's seizure of Osceola was deceptive and shameful, but it paled in comparison to the actions of Governor Richard Keith Call, General Zachary Taylor, Lieutenant William

⁹ For a summary of the evidence of Seminole duplicity in the summer of 1839, see Missall and Missall, *The Seminole Wars*, 165-167; "Florida War," *St. Augustine Herald*, September 26, 1839, reprinted "Florida War," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, October 10, 1839, 9:15, 235.

Harney, and scores of others who forcefully cast aside moral restraint in their war against the Seminoles. Call and Taylor's decision to import bloodhounds from Cuba and Harney's murderous rampage through the Florida wilderness represented a radical shift in tactics, embracing Indian eradication in place of Indian removal. Hailed in some quarters and castigated in others, their actions clarified the stakes of United States frontier policy. The alternative to Indian removal might not have been the ideals of assimilation that had animated early republic Indian policy. It might have been annihilation.¹⁰

For several years, Florida citizens had lobbied for the importation of bloodhounds as the easiest, most effective means of winning the war. The dogs had earned a reputation from their service in the Caribbean. Able to track enemies, invariably nonwhite, through swamps and wildernesses, they possessed heightened senses that neutralized the natives' knowledge of the environment. Implacable, untiring, and unmoved by empathy, they appeared the ideal corrective to a United States army that many derided as merciful, languid, and overly compassionate. The dogs' capabilities were infamous, colonial states having employed them against nonwhites in both the Haitian Revolution and the Second Maroon War in Jamaica. The dogs were bred to be beasts. Prior to the Haitian Revolution, French officials had sacrificed imprisoned black men to the dogs, holding showcases in which the bloodhounds literally devoured their victims. Weapons meant to be unleashed against the subhuman, the bloodhounds seemed fitting predators against the Seminoles.¹¹

¹⁰ "The New Administration," *The New England Weekly Review*, February 20, 1841.

¹¹ On the use of bloodhounds against foes perceived as subhuman in this era, see Sara Johnson, "'You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat': Waging Inter-American Wars of Torture and Terror," *American Quarterly*, 61.1 (Mar., 2009), 65-92; John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War,' and Abolitionism, 1796-1865," *Journal of Southern History*, 72.2 (May 2006), 259-302.

Though many Florida elites and United States officers had considered utilizing Cuban bloodhounds in the past, they had decided it unwise. Thomas Jesup had infamously suggested and disclaimed their use in the same letter, believing the public unwilling to countenance such an extreme tactic. Despite Jesup's public reluctance, Secretary of War Joel Poinsett claimed to have received numerous letters from military officers in Florida and, as he put it, from "the most enlightened citizens of that Territory" urging their adoption. In 1838, Poinsett himself endorsed their use following a request from Zachary Taylor, but neither chose to make the arrangements for their importation, likely not wanting to be held responsible for their use. However, following the Harney ambush, public outcry within Florida for their importation mounted steadily.¹²

Governor Richard Keith Call took the initiative by sending an emissary to Cuba who returned with thirty-three of the notorious Cuban bloodhounds and four trainers in tow. Upon their arrival, Call's successor, Robert Reid, offered the dogs to Zachary Taylor, who accepted them readily. In the field, the fabled bloodhounds amounted to nothing. Several decades before, they had effectively brought the decades-long Maroon War in Jamaica to an end, but in Florida, the bloodhounds wandered aimlessly, unable to track the Seminoles through the Florida wilderness. In trial runs, when military officers sent captured Indians off into the woods and loosed the dogs on their trail, the trainers watched dumbfounded as the dogs showed little interest in pursuing them. Either the bloodhounds' reputation had been overblown or the skill of their trainers had atrophied

¹² Poinsett described the acquisition of the bloodhounds in a memorial to the Committee of Military Affairs, published as "The Bloodhounds.," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, February 20, 1840, 10.8: 114-117.

over the previous decades. Whatever the case, the bloodhounds added two thousand dollars to the cost of the war and contributed nothing to its conclusion.¹³

Though the bloodhounds produced few results on the battlefield, advocates and critics of the war nevertheless seized upon them as emblematic of the conflict.

Abolitionists believed the use of the dogs demonstrated the war's perfidiousness, the army acting as no more than a motley group of slave catchers. Proponents of the use of dogs were equally passionate in defense. The Seminoles had violated the norms of civilized warfare, they argued, and the only solution was pure, unrestrained bloodshed.¹⁴

For their defenders, the use of bloodhounds was exhilarating. Finally, the United States was dispensing with the petty moral restraints that had hamstrung the war effort and recognized instead what one Florida newspaper described as the Seminoles' true nature: "They should be hunted out, as felons are hunted out – as murderers and fugitives from justice are hunted out . . . and hunted *down as the wild tiger* is hunted down." A letter-writer to a Washington newspaper decried the Seminoles as "wolf-like," reminded the editors that they would not bind themselves by any treaty, and asked why "should they not be pursued and destroyed by dogs, as are other beasts of prey." Those who supported the dogs could imagine no other end to the war save through pools of blood. Though some officials protested the bloodhounds were meant to corner Indians not rend their victims limb-from-limb, those who embraced the dogs thought the ameliorative efforts counter-productive. In an oft-reprinted article, one writer castigated the

¹³ Some historians have claimed that Taylor bears no responsibility for the importation of the bloodhounds (the stain of which plagued his presidential ambitions a few years later), as territorial officials acquired the dogs. However, Taylor had requested their use a year earlier and, when offered, readily accepted their service. Had the bloodhounds lived up to their reputation and torn their prey limb from limb, it was Taylor who would have borne the responsibility for putting them into the field. See Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 165-167.

¹⁴ For the abolitionist protest against the use of the bloodhounds, see chapter six.

government for muzzling the bloodhounds before sending them after their prey. The use of muzzles was absurd, he argued, akin to soldiers who “have been directed *shoot blank cartridges*.”¹⁵

The proponents of the bloodhounds celebrated their use not merely as an alternative to allowing the Seminoles to remain in Florida, but as embodying the very principles that underlay Indian removal. Though at times some authors demurred, the implication of their arguments was clear: the Seminoles were too savage to survive. They did not insist that abject fear of the dogs would motivate the surrender of Indian bands, nor did they imagine that the dogs might force Indians to climb trees in which they would be easily captured. Rather, the use of the dogs allowed proponents to fantasize about the violent deaths of the Seminoles, enemies they explicitly and implicitly argued lacked the compassion of fully rounded human beings. The bloodhounds were a tool of extermination, not removal.

The proponents of extermination were even more animated by William Harney’s return to the field. Since the massacre that bore his name, Harney had waited over a year, biding his time as Zachary Taylor and his successors gradually extended patrols throughout the Florida wilderness. He had seethed, still haunted by the sight of the bodies of his men strewn about his camp. Finally, in December, 1840, General Walker Armistead authorized Harney to lead ninety-six men and a young African-American guide, John, against the Spanish Indians who had massacred his command.¹⁶

¹⁵ “Blood Hounds,” *The Floridian*, December 7, 1839; “The Florida War.,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 19, 1840; *Apalachicola Gazette* reprinted in *The North American and Daily Advertiser*, April, 6, 1840.

¹⁶ Armistead’s son, General Lewis Armistead, fought for the Confederacy and died in Pickett’s Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Harney, a life-long military officer, earned distinction throughout his career for both his service and his ruthlessness. Born on the Tennessee frontier, Harney proved himself to be especially capable in Indian conflict, leading successful expeditions against various Indian nations over several decades, including the Seminoles, Sauk, and Sioux. Fifteen years after the end of the Second Seminole War, once again on a punitive mission, Harney would lead several hundred men into battle against a Sioux village, leaving dozens of men, women, and children dead. Among the relatives of his victims, he became known as “Squaw Killer.” Against the Seminoles, Harney was no less violent. As he exclaimed in a letter to Zachary Taylor, “our humane efforts to save a portion of the Indians from extermination have only led to another exhibition ... of malice and disregard of their pledges ... There must be no more talking – they must be hunted down like so many beasts ... Let every one taken be hung up in the woods to inspire terror in the rest.”¹⁷

Harney took his men deep into the Everglades, traveling terrain where, as one Florida newspaper put it, “us white men have never been.” Directly ignoring an explicit order from Armistead, Harney and his men disguised themselves as Indians, hoping to come upon their prey unaware. Two days into their expedition, they encountered the enemy: two warriors and their families traveling in canoes. Fulfilling his promise to Taylor, Harney and his men captured the Indians and, with their families watching, hung the two warriors from the tallest tree they could find. In the aftermath, when his African-American guide momentarily lost his bearings, Harney turned to the captive Indian

¹⁷ For more on Harney, see Adams, *General William S. Harney*. For details on how he earned the nickname, “Squaw Killer,” see R. Eli Paul, *Blue Water Creek and the First Sioux War, 1854-1856* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). Harney to Taylor, August 15, 1839, quoted Adams, *General William S. Harney* 73.

women and threatened to hang their children if they did not lead them to the Spanish Indians' camp. To his credit, when they refused, Harney decided not to carry out his threat and waited for his guide to regain his sense of direction. Several days later, still disguised as Indians, Harney and his men crept into their enemies' camp soon after sunrise and launched an ambush of their own, shooting and scalping the unarmed chief of the band, Chakaika, and, after a fierce firefight, killing nearly every Indian combatant. In all, the troops captured several dozen Indian women and children and three warriors. Harney ordered his men to retrieve Chakaika's body, had his men hang two of the captured warriors that night and, before the chief's captured wife, mother, and sister, hanged Chakaika's bloody body from the same tree. Harney and his men returned, proudly, to Key Biscayne about a week later with thirty-six captives.¹⁸

More significant than Harney's violent actions were the extent to which they were celebrated. Harney, alone among the officer corps, personified the all-consuming Indian-hatred that animated the war's most ardent supporters. Upon the major's return, newspapers throughout the South lionized his campaign. Naturally, his first admirers hailed from Florida. The day after an 1841 New Year's party, the people of St. Augustine threw a second festival, publicly commending Harney's service and displaying a banner bearing the words "Lieut. Col. Wm. S. Harney," "Everglades!," "No more treaties," and "War to the Rope!" It marked a raucous celebration with music and spontaneous cheers from the assembled town, punctuated by the firing of cannon. Overlooking the revelry, the organizers raised a man-sized replica of an Indian and suspended it from a tree. At

¹⁸ *St. Augustine Herald*, December 31, 1840. For an account of Harney's expedition, see Adams, *General William S. Harney* 74-77; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 282-284; William C. Sturtevant, "Chakaika and the 'Spanish Indians': Documentary Sources Compared with Seminole Tradition," *Tequesta* 13 (1953), 50-54.

once, they cheered Harney, the execution of Indians, the repudiation of treaty making, and the violent affirmation of white supremacy. Not to be outdone, the territorial legislature of Florida quickly passed a resolution applauding Harney. The resolution argued that as the Seminoles “had forfeited all claims to the usages of civilized warfare,” Harney’s summary execution of the “males and warriors” was wholly justified. The lives of every male Seminole, regardless of their level of engagement in the war, were declared forfeit.¹⁹

Terror and violence animated Harney’s defenders. The correspondent of one Georgia newspaper wrote that he was like the commanders of old, “the *bible* in one hand, and the *halter* in the other – one teaching them they will never die, and the other in a moment bringing them to an end.” Others argued that the value of Harney’s tactics transcended the visceral. By invoking terror in his enemies he would more quickly bring about the end of the war, regardless of how many men he hanged. According to a Baltimore newspaper, there would be no more temporizing: the Indians would have to surrender or die, and most likely they would wither in the face of Harney’s resolve.²⁰

The ranks of Harney’s defenders did not entirely consist of the bloodthirsty. As the St. Augustine banner that had forsworn treaties had implicitly argued, in the context of the controversy over Macomb’s treaty and the long trajectory of United States Indian policy, Harney’s offensive was a political statement. Consequently, when one Alabama newspaper argued that Harney had finally discovered the most expeditious means of removing Indians west (“fanatics will *rail*, never fear; an ‘express’ for *males* – *through*

¹⁹ “Late from Florida,” *Virginia Free Press*, January 21, 1841; *A Journal of the Proceedings of the Senate of the Territory of Florida, at Its Third Session* (Tallahassee: C.E. Bartlett, Printer Star Office, 1841), 7, 22-23.

²⁰ “Later from Florida,” *Georgia Messenger*, April 15, 1841; *Southern Pioneer*, March 6, 1841; “Late from Florida,” *Baltimore American*, quoted “Late from Florida,” *Louisville Public Advertiser*, January 22, 1841.

by light – no *halfway* house – places *airy* and *elevated* – passengers allowed their own swing – all *settling* done without calling at the ‘captain’s office’ – no *charges* at the *bar*, *slings gratis* – we trust the new *line* will be everywhere encouraged”), they argued not only against treaty-making as the foundation of United States policy, but even against Jackson’s policies of institutional subordination. Applause came from all over the country. One Connecticut newspaper argued that Harney’s “energy and enterprise” had done more to bring the war to a conclusion than “half a dozen of the Generals who have endeavored to effect the same object by means of treaties.” At stake was the future of United States Indian policy and whether removal or extermination would predominate. Treaties, and the ideals that had been the bedrock of an earlier era, were barely a consideration.²¹

In lauding Harney’s conduct, his advocates lumped together proponents of Indian removal, United States commanding generals, and critics of removal as all being similarly empathetic toward the Seminoles, obliterating the chasms that separated those groups. To the bloodthirsty, all three groups imagined the Seminoles and, by extension, Indians generally, to have a place in American society, in the most literal sense. Where Washington, Jefferson and, to a very limited extent, Jackson wrestled with the question of Indian fitness for republican society, those who idealized Harney believed Indians had no right to life. Their Indian-hating spanned several levels of consciousness: visceral hatred, pragmatic self-interest, and nationalistic fervor.

Despite the volubility of his most ardent supporters, Harney’s actions did not inspire the same volume of protest as the bloodhounds. In part, that was because the

²¹ *Tuscaloosa Flag of the Union*, February 10, 1841; “Presentation of a Sword,” *The New England Weekly Review*, February 20, 1841; *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 4, 1841.

imagined viciousness of the bloodhounds was far more horrifying than the actual execution of Seminoles, the rending of bodies being as rare as hanging was common. Moreover, Harney's violence was as much personal as political. Few doubted his right to avenge himself against the Indians who had massacred his command. In contrast, the use of the bloodhounds had been condoned, even endorsed, by some of the most powerful politicians in the country. For all that his supporters tried to galvanize his violence into a political movement, Harney remained a man apart, in both the extent of his fury and the circumscribed nature of his symbolism.

Harney's fury and the calculated importation of the bloodhounds were born of vastly different historical legacies as well. Where violence was endemic to the American frontier, the importation of bloodhounds was intimately associated with the brutal enforcement of slave society. The chance that extermination would become the official Indian policy of the United States was remote. By 1840, support for Indian removal was nearly universal among political elites. Though no Whig nominees for national office ever campaigned for its reversal, neither did any anyone argue for Native American annihilation, whether individual or tribal, until well after the Civil War. In contrast, northerners required only the slightest familiarity with southern culture to understand the implication of the bloodhounds. It was far more realistic and therefore far more troubling to imagine plantation owners loosing dogs after fugitive slaves than military officers routinely lynching Indians.

Regardless of Harney's success in the field, he failed to meaningfully influence the army's campaign tactics. After inheriting his command in the aftermath of Thomas Jesup's controversial pacifistic appeal to the secretary of war, Zachary Taylor had

instituted a policy he described as “squares,” dividing Florida into adjacent squares, each twenty miles on a side. Within each square, he assigned a garrison of 21 men to search its environs, hoping to root out Seminole bands and drive warriors further south, away from the territory’s more densely populated regions. After Taylor requested transfer from Florida, his successor, General Walker Armistead, capitalized on Taylor’s plan, utilizing Taylor’s infrastructure to launch offensives even in the sickly summer season. The Seminoles, weakened by the gradual attrition of warfare and the severe dislocations of the previous five years, proved far easier prey than in the past. Armistead successfully captured dozens of Indians and compelled several influential chiefs to consent to removal. Though some of the most intractable chiefs remained in the field, Armistead estimated that his expeditions had reduced the number of Seminole warriors remaining in Florida to around 300. In May, 1841, Armistead requested and was granted transfer from Florida.

Armistead’s departure roughly coincided with William Henry Harrison’s brief term in office. The former Indian fighter and frontier governor authored few changes in the war, though he did reappoint Richard Keith Call as governor of Florida, the erstwhile general having switched parties following his falling out with Andrew Jackson. It was reported that just prior to taking to his deathbed with a chill, Harrison had informed his advisors that he intended to bring the war to a close, but he never had an opportunity to either decisively recalibrate United States policy or actively perpetuate Van Buren’s strategy. With his death, the presidency passed to John Tyler, a lifelong politician who had rarely demonstrated any interest in frontier issues throughout his long career. He inherited Harrison’s cabinet, including Secretary of War John Bell, who as a senator

during the Van Buren administration had criticized the handling of the war, but implicitly endorsed its perpetuation.²²

Tyler and Bell named Colonel William Jenkins Worth the new commander of United States forces in Florida, the first military officer below the rank of general to command United States troops in the theater. A protégé of sorts to Winfield Scott, Worth was an able soldier who had served his country with distinction since the War of 1812. He was a late arrival to Florida, having come with his brigade only in late 1840, but Worth was determined to perpetuate the strategies of his predecessors. In practice, he built on the successes of Armistead while adopting Harney's tactics.

In March 1841, Coacoochee, one of the most influential Seminoles remaining in the field, agreed to surrender to Armistead's forces. Upon his assumption of command, Worth learned that some of his officers suspected Coacoochee might renege on his agreement. He immediately had the chief seized, chained, and transported to New Orleans. Upon reflection, however, Worth ordered Coacoochee returned to Florida and met the chief on the bow of the ship that had returned him. There, he professed admiration for Coacoochee's bravery and respect for his patriotism. He spoke of Coacoochee as a peer, another war leader dedicated to the defense of his people, and set for him a simple task. The chief was to name several representatives and then decide how many days they would need to locate their band, convince them to emigrate, and return. The consequences of failure were simple as well. If Coacoochee's messengers failed, he

²² For information on Harrison's stance toward the war see, "President Harrison," *Cleveland Daily Herald*, April 12, 1841.

and the rest of his men, still manacled, would be hung by their necks from the masts of the ship on which they stood.²³

Choked with emotion, Coacoochee agreed to Worth's demands. As the general and the chief waited several long months for their answer, Worth continued Armistead's strategy of sending out small, quick raids upon remote locations. When he successfully captured individual Indians, Worth again offered them the same choice he had offered Coacoochee: bring in your fellows or die. By August 1841, the vast majority of Coacoochee's band had surrendered to Worth, sparing the chief's life. When Coacoochee himself went into the wilderness and brought back the renowned eighty-five year-old chief Hospetarke and fifteen warriors to parley, the Indians walked onto the ship only to find themselves surrounded by soldiers and thrown in irons, a reprisal of the same ruse by which Jesup had captured Osceola. In October, Worth shipped 211 Indians, including Coacoochee, west. Only a few Indian leaders remained in the field, including, by reputation, the most intransigent of all, Abiaka.²⁴

Six year before William Harney and William Worth had risen to prominence in Florida, Winfield Scott had chafed against his orders, charging it was nearly unprecedented to deprive a military commander of the "diplomatic faculty" to initiate treaty deliberations. In the aftermath of the Macomb fiasco, in a vivid demonstration of

²³ W.W. Bliss to General Hitchcock, March 3, 1841, James David Glunt Collection, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Lieutenant John Sprague, the author of the first comprehensive history of the Second Seminole War and future son-in-law of William Worth, was clearly tormented by the negotiations between Worth and Coacoochee. The two leaders commanded the longest entries in his book's index and their relationship dominated much of his narrative. Ruminating on Worth's terrible demands which he nevertheless considered the turning point of the war, Sprague mournfully wrote, "Here was a chief, a man whose only offence was defending his home, his fireside, the graves of his kindred, stipulating on the *Fourth of July*, for his freedom and his life." Sprague wrote these words while married to Worth's daughter and utterly dependent on his superior officer in his professional life. Sprague, *The Florida War* 286-294.

²⁴ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 300-303; Sprague, *The Florida War* 294-303, 319-330.

Scott's complaints, Harney and Worth acted out the inevitable consequences of those orders. Harney was the product of a political culture that actively denied the Seminoles individual and collective rights. If Worth's transgressions were more pragmatic in nature, they nevertheless reflected a forceful refutation of Seminole humanity. The crimes they committed in the service of their country were set in motion years before and many were complicit.

The Imperial Synthesis

Following President John Tyler's May 1842 instructions to Secretary of War Bell to bring the war to a close, both Worth and Senator Thomas Hart Benton worked separately toward a single goal. Desperately hoping to secure an armistice with Abiaka, Worth suspended all active operations and redirected his resources toward securing the white settlement of northern Florida, prioritizing the consolidation of white supremacy over the removal of nonwhite enemies. In this, he was matched by the lobbying of Benton, who reintroduced his plan for Florida, the Armed Occupation Act, as a means of institutionalizing white yeoman settlement as the foundation of Florida society. Benton's vision, in which the federal government would offer land, arms, and supplies to white settlers in return for their solemn promise to defend their land against Indian attack, would be passed by both houses of Congress and signed into law mere days before Worth declared an end to hostilities that allowed the remaining Seminoles to stay in Florida.

The results of Worth and Benton's contradictory initiatives to recruit white settlers to the frontier, even as the Seminoles gained a foothold to remain there, brought about a new status quo in Florida and enshrined a nascent imperial ethos as the

underlying principle of United States frontier policy. It was a cultural, not a legal, policy as Worth elided the pratfalls of both Macomb and Harney by pursuing an informal armistice rather than a treaty. As the bands of both Abiaka and Holatta Micco proved too intractable to be cowed into surrender and too well concealed to be found, Worth grasped for a peaceful solution that would nevertheless earn the approval of the most bellicose members of the federal government and the Florida public. He found it by informally allowing the Seminoles possession of land in the southern tip of the territory, ending the war without recognizing in writing any Seminole claim to property or collective sovereignty.

Benton's Homestead Act functioned in harmony with Worth's strategy. The federal government organized the land it had seized from the Seminoles, divided it, and offered it to any white family who pledged to defend it against Indian attacks. Through the dispossession of the Seminoles, the law enriched white settlement as a means of protecting the frontier from future Seminole invasions. The implications of Benton's plan were stark. Under its terms, the United States formally identified the stated objectives of their war policy: the seizure of foreign territory, its transformation into a resource to benefit white settlement, and the eradication of any tie between native peoples and their former land. Though the effect was not codified into law, the Seminoles became a colonized people, denied the right to be ruled by the consent of the governed and policed by white settlers tasked with compelling their subordination.

It took Worth, Bell, Benton, and Tyler one long year to bring the war to a conclusion. During the interim, the military hierarchy experienced another upheaval. At the end of June 1841, while sitting for a portrait in his War Department office, Alexander

Macomb suffered a stroke and passed away. In the aftermath, Tyler bypassed General Edmund Gaines for his own nominal political ally, General Winfield Scott, appointing the latter general-in-chief. As Scott was Worth's patron, his promotion secured greater influence for the colonel. In the fall of 1841, as Worth gradually reined in offensive maneuvers to secure his armistice with the Seminoles, the Tyler administration underwent a seismic shift following Tyler's second veto of Henry Clay's prized banking act, as John Bell resigned as Secretary of War along with the rest of the cabinet. To replace him, Tyler appointed John Spencer, a New York lawyer who had served in state government for thirty-five years. He was a prominent Anti-Mason, but had demonstrated no expertise in military strategy, Indian policy, or the rules governing army conduct. In office, he deferred to Scott and Worth, his more experienced colleagues.²⁵

With the surrender of Coacoochee and his band, Worth faced the daunting project of locating the remaining three hundred Seminoles in the dense tangles of the Everglades. If anything, the mission had only grown harder - with fewer Indians to find, operations were even more difficult to carry out. Frustration was widespread, one of Worth's officers complaining in his diary, "Col Worth's orders is to exterminate or capture – no chance." The despondency of some officers, however, was matched by the bellicosity of others. Though William Harney, complaining of ill health, had left Florida in 1841, there remained dozens of officers and soldiers who preferred to actively take the fight to the enemy rather than wait for the signing of an armistice. Worth, however, believed an agreement to be the only viable means of ending the war and would do nothing to endanger one. Writing to his superiors, Worth made clear his dilemma: "the operations since June conclusively demonstrate ...the utter impracticability of securing them by

²⁵ *New York Herald*, June 28, 1841; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 301.

main force. The object must be attained by pacific and persuasive measures, or not at all.” The problem, he explained, was that if he were to pursue a pacifistic end to the war, the public would flay him relentlessly.²⁶

Worth’s solution was exceedingly elegant. He wrote to Scott and suggested that the United States draw down its army in Florida by over eighty percent. At once, the withdrawal would demonstrate his sincere commitment to peace to the remaining Seminoles in Florida, dramatically lessen the expense of the war, dampen the urgency of the war in Washington, and take the war out of the public’s eye by effectively terminating hostilities, laying the groundwork for an enduring Seminole presence in the southern tip of Florida. Worth had made the same pragmatic calculation Jesup had advanced years before – the costs of removing the remaining Seminoles far outpaced the benefits. The administration would risk an immediate uproar in Florida, whose citizens clamored for more protection, but would ensure a long-term solution to a conflict that, with the Seminoles decisively weakened by several long years of war, no longer offered any tangible benefit to the United States save the affirmation of its pride.²⁷

It was a sensible proposal, but Tyler and his leading military generals responded negatively. National pride, however defined, was a goal still worth fighting for. Secretary of War Spencer convened a council of senior military leaders in Washington to discuss Worth’s proposal. Winfield Scott, though he held Worth in high esteem, dissented from his protégé. Following Scott’s lead, the council rejected Worth’s plan, but granted him extensive leeway in prosecuting the war. It was reported that only General Thomas Jesup,

²⁶ Captain Collinson Gates Diary, January 6, 1842, Edward T. Keenan Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida; Worth to Scott, February 14, 1842 [mistakenly transcribed February 14, 1841], Sprague, *The Florida War* 442.

²⁷ Worth to Scott, February 14, 1842 [mistakenly transcribed February 14, 1841], Sprague, *The Florida War* 441-444.

who knew all too well the futility of extended campaigns, had supported Worth's plan in every respect.²⁸

Worth responded with a final campaign that encompassed the full range of tactics that had marked the Second Seminole War. He sent lightly provisioned detachments into the wilderness, moving quickly in search of the remaining Seminole bands. They were led by African-American guides, former Black Seminoles who had gained their freedom in return for their service. Soldiers were spurred on by the promise of a bounty, one hundred dollars for every warrior killed or captured. In April, they finally found one of the last remaining bands of Seminoles, led by Halleck Tustenuggee near Lake Ahapopka. The Indians repeated the tactics that had been so successful at Okeechobee, whittling notches into trees to steady their rifles as they secreted themselves in dense hammocks. The battle was inconclusive with few casualties on either side, but the attrition of seven years of warfare proved too much for the chief. Soon after the battle, he returned to Worth in hopes of signing a peace. In the midst of the negotiations, upon one of Halleck Tustenuggee's visit to his fort, Worth recapitulated Jesup's duplicitous entrapment of Osceola, seizing Tustenuggee and about one hundred men, women, and children. Giving him about a thousand dollars, he sent the chief into the wilderness and urged him to spread the word among the remaining Seminoles. If they remained in the southern tip of Florida, they would be allowed to remain in the territory. There was no treaty, and Worth

²⁸ Scott's plan can be read in his endorsement upon Worth's letter, Worth to Scott, February 14, 1842, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 26: 438-440. Documentation of the results of the council was exceedingly slight. The War Department likely did reject Worth's plan for the time being, as they did not adopt it until May, 1842. However, given the brief interval between the rejection and adoption of his plan, it could not have been particularly controversial within the Tyler administration. Sprague, *The Florida War* 445.

had no explicit authorization from his commanders. He simply had no other means of ending the war.²⁹

By May, 1842, Tyler and his administration had come to agree. Writing to Winfield Scott, Secretary of War Spencer informed the commanding general that Tyler had decided to end the war. His message was bracingly non-ideological. Laying out the terms of the withdrawal, Spencer explained that some 240 Seminoles would be allowed to remain in Florida unmolested, Worth would continue to peacefully lobby them to emigrate, and the administration would urge Congress to pass Benton's Armed Occupation Act. There would be no declaration of victory, no insistence that the war had achieved its goals. His message lacked even an enunciation of what those goals might have been. In practice, Tyler's armistice was identical to that of Macomb. They erected the same borders for the new Seminole reservation and were dependent upon the same decentralized leadership structures of the Seminoles to function. Nevertheless, the reception to Worth's peace differed markedly from that of Macomb's.³⁰

Spencer's announcement of the end of the war sparked neither celebration nor debate. One Boston newspaper likely spoke for many when it titled its story on the end of the war, "The Florida War Ended Again!" implying, of course, that it had not. In Congress, Florida Territorial Delegate David Levy Yulee railed against the president for "claiming before the nation the *éclat* of an achievement which has not been performed, when the consequences, however agreeable to himself for a time, may be so fatal to the country." Yulee then drew on a series of newspaper reports detailing recent attacks by

²⁹ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 307-309; Worth to Jones, April 10, 1842, *House Document 262*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 20-21; Worth to Jones, April 29, 1842, *House Document 262*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 26; Worth to Jones, May 6, 1842, *House Document 262*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 30.

³⁰ Spencer to Scott, May 10, 1842 in Sprague, *The Florida War* 477-479.

Indians in Florida and insisted that even if the United States intended a ceasefire, the Seminoles did not. His stance provoked a response from Caleb Cushing, who first mocked the idea of “the United States, an enlightened nation of 17,000,000 inhabitants, declaring war against 80 Indians,” then followed with defense of the Armed Occupation Act.³¹

It was a fitting evasion of the fact that the Armed Occupation Act was itself an act of war against 80 Indians and that Cushing, like so many of his peers, had so rigorously ignored the implications of the United States’ setbacks against a small nation of Indians on its frontier. Politicians and activists of both parties seized on the Armed Occupation Act as an enduring solution to the chaos of Florida. The passage of time had made Benton’s vision more palatable. Compared to an endless war of removal, Benton cast “armed occupation, with land to the occupant” as “the true way of settling and holding a conquered country.” His plan would offer 160 acres of Florida land to any young male who pledged to settle and improve the land, live in residence for five years, and defend his homestead against Indian attacks. President Tyler, in his May letter to William Worth authorizing a ceasefire, endorsed Benton’s plan. Six days later, Benton brought the bill to the floor once again.³²

³¹ “The Florida War Ended Again!,” *Boston Courier*, May 12, 1841. The author of the article was reacting to the capture of Halleck rather than Butler’s letter to Scott, but weariness with the war’s lack of conclusion was prevalent by 1842. “House of Representatives,” *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 503-504.

³² Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years’ View; or, a History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, from 1820 to 1850* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1873), 2: 167-168. For more on the legislative history of the Armed Occupation Act, see Michael E. Welsh, “Legislating a Homestead Bill: Thomas Hart Benton and the Second Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 57.2 (Oct., 1978), 157-172; James W. Covington, “The Armed Occupation of 1842,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 40.1 (Jul., 1961), 41-52. For more on the effects of the law, see Joe Knetsch and Paul George, “A Problematical Law: The Armed Occupation Act of 1842 and Its Impact on Southeast Florida,” *Tequesta*, 53 (1993), 63-80; John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* 314.

Speaking in favor of the 1842 bill, Benton replicated the arguments of several years before. He stated that there remained too many Indians in Florida to justify the risk of settlement, but not enough to necessitate a military campaign. Several recent attacks on white homesteads had furthered Benton's conviction that only armed settlement could defend the territory. According to Benton, settlement and defense remained linked, and that link was the very principle of the bill.³³

Notwithstanding Benton's logic, the resurrected Armed Occupation Act bore several vital changes from the version that had died in the House several years before. The original document was plainly born of military necessity. It elaborated on the martial duties of each settler at length and essentially inducted him into the military hierarchy, specifying that upon arrival he would report to a particular officer, who would report to the commander of the troops in Florida, who would report directly to the Secretary of War. Each settler, then, was only two steps removed from the head of the War Department. The emigrants were required to bring guns and farming equipment, while the army would provide ammunition and supplies. In return, officers would survey settlers periodically, ensuring that their guns and ammunition were in sufficient condition to patrol the countryside. In contrast, the 1842 version of the bill was a true Homestead Act. Unlike the volunteers who had streamed into the territory with no intention to remain in 1836, the bill hoped to attract settlers who would occupy Florida space permanently. Rather than task the army with the administration of the bill, Benton relied upon the General Land Office to oversee the transfer of property. Similarly, save for its own title and an initial reference to the settlers being able to bear arms, the bill was silent

³³ "Florida Armed Occupation and Settlement Bill," *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, June 13, 1842, 618-619.

over the matter of ammunition and firearms. Instead, it focused on the vital details of settlement: the surveying of land, the duties of each homeowner, and the criteria by which settlers might attain unqualified title to their newly acquired land. It was of a piece with the evolution of the legislation. Where the first bill was pitched as a means of winning the war, the second, in practice, was intended to consolidate the fruits of victory.³⁴

The stakes of the second debate, then, were considerably lower than in 1839, when the war seemed unending and Martin Van Buren was drifting toward defeat. It occurred in the context of Tyler's stated intention to end the war and his implicit decision to do so absent a treaty with the Seminoles remaining in Florida. With neither a declaration of war to resolve nor an armistice to pass, Congress's authority over the end of the Second Seminole War was minor. The conflict's conclusion was inevitable, the proposal no longer pivotal.

³⁴ Benton's initial 1839 draft of the Armed Occupation Act can be found in "Plan for the Armed Occupation of the Territory of Florida.," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, 8.3 (January 17, 1839), 39. The 1842 statute can be found in "Chap. CXII., - An Act to Provide for the Armed Occupation and Settlement of the Unsettled Part of the Peninsula of East Florida," *Statutes at Large*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, 502-504. There was a second crucial difference between the two documents. The original explicitly stated that land was available to the "first white settlers" who applied. The version that passed into law made no reference to the race of the beneficiaries. As Benton left no details of the editing process of the bill, the reasons for the change can only be speculated. In part, the word "white" grew to be superfluous: certainly no one expected an Indian or an African-American to apply for a homestead (if any did, they have vanished from the historical record). Moreover, the omission of any mention of race from the final version was another result of the different circumstances of the two bills. In the context of the Second Seminole War, settlers were defined by their race. Whites were at war with Indians and the emigrants were unofficial soldiers in that war. The removal of the whiteness from the 1842 law, consciously or not, served to cement the United States' victory in the Second Seminole War. The Seminoles, having been removed in theory if not in reality, no longer defined the identity of the new Florida landowners. In 1842, as opposed to 1839, they could safely be referred to as settlers, not white settlers. That the law did not need to explicitly exclude free African-Americans from applying likely also resulted from the Florida Territorial Constitution of 1838, which authorized the state to prevent "free negroes, mulattoes, and other persons of color" from immigrating to the state. It was the only reference to a nonwhite race in the document. Francis Newton Thorpe ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 664-682.

Amidst the squabbling over minor details of the bill (whether the settlers would be provided ammunition, whether married men would get more land, whether an official survey was necessary), two men opposed the bill forthrightly. John Quincy Adams and Horace Everett had been the two most prominent critics of the war in 1836 and they would be its most prominent critics in its last months. They had not staved off the removal of the vast majority of the Seminoles, obstructed Florida's path to becoming a slave state, or prevented Indian removal from being enshrined as the consensus frontier policy of the nation. Nevertheless, at its close, Everett and Adams dissented again.

Horace Everett argued that the bill served to enrich land speculators rather than advance the war effort. He remembered the ideals that had once animated a nation and suggested that persuasion, negotiations, and bribery could best offer security to the people of Florida. Adams spoke briefly, near the end of the short debate over the bill. Likely, he knew that its passage was assured. In the face of defeat, Adams questioned why Congress was moved to address the protection of the people of Florida against the remnants of the Seminoles as opposed to, for example, the people of Massachusetts against the possibility of a foreign invasion. Though he agreed that it was the duty of the federal government to defend its citizens, he insisted it would cost less money to secure peace through a proper treaty negotiation, arguing diplomacy might induce the few remaining Indians to remove at a much cheaper price. Thinking of the options available to the federal government in Florida, Adams concluded, "this bill was not calculated to answer the purpose contemplated."³⁵

³⁵ *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, July 18, 1842, 764-766; John Quincy Adams, *John Quincy Adams Diary* 43, January 1, 1842 – July 8, 1843, 570. Original manuscript from the Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Adams did not require a spectacular leap of deduction to understand the full implications of the bill: Florida Territorial Delegate David Levy Yulee explained them quite well. After praising the bill for helping to rid the territory of Indians, Yulee argued passionately that it authorized “the acquisition of five millions of acres heretofore abandoned to the Indians, and ten millions more which were now unsettled because of the hazard of settling them. It would also add much to the productive wealth of the country by facilitating the settlement and cultivation of the rich lands of Florida.” The numerous amendments to the bill belied the focus on the “rich lands of Florida.” Horace Everett offered several amendments linking the bill directly to the course of the war effort, requiring settlers to perform a tour of duty with the army and appropriating money to negotiate removal with the remaining Indians. Another delegate offered an amendment to require settlers to live four miles away from military outposts rather than two as a means of enlarging the defended area. A third delegate suggested furnishing arms to settlers too poor to purchase them. All four proposals were defeated. Its supporters envisioned the bill as a means of distributing property, not of removing Indians. That work had been done.³⁶

In contrast to the previous bill, the reintroduced Armed Occupation Act passed both Whig-dominated Houses of Congress with relative ease. In the Senate, Southern Whig opposition evaporated. Sectionalism, not partisanship, dominated the vote. Every Democrat voted in favor as did every Southern Whig, save one Kentucky senator. Assuming the House vote mirrored that of the Senate, the attitude of Southerners toward the bill had evolved greatly over the previous years. One of the senators who changed his

³⁶ The bill had a second benefit beyond the distribution of the public land to settlers. If war should recommence, both Tyler and members of Congress would at least have the option of pointing to the Armed Occupation Act as a means of forestalling war. They could not be accused of ignoring the conflict.

vote, South Carolina Whig William Preston explained the shift. Two years before, he had believed it would require “more active and effective measures” to win the war, but given the relative success of removal, he now believed armed occupation prudent. Preston declared he knew that many young men throughout the South would gladly acquire free land from the government, and, as he said, “move there with their families and with their slaves.” Florida, having been made safe for settlement, was now safe for slavery as well. Preston, who had remained largely ambivalent toward the war while it persisted, now was ready to revel in its peace.³⁷

The bill attracted exactly whom Benton had expected. The vast majority of applicants migrated either from within Florida or from neighboring Georgia. They brought with them a deep commitment to slavery, a healthy fear of Indians, and a sufficient capacity for labor that transformed the Florida frontier.³⁸

The Armed Occupation Act implicitly justified the Second Seminole War on the basis of racial difference. In practice, it institutionalized racialism into the Florida landscape by redistributing once contested land into the hands of white settlers in return for their commitment to the perpetuation of white rule in the territory. The Indians who remained were shut out of the emergent society, the new emigrants being explicitly tasked with the mission to defeat the Seminoles’ claim to the land that had once been theirs. The Armed Occupation Act branded the remaining Seminoles as enemies of the state, denying them any legal standing within, or institutional relationship with, the

³⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, August 1, 1842, 818. Voting rolls for the House bill were not recorded and, given the large number of abstentions or absent voters, reconstructing it is not possible. *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, August 1, 1842, 818.

³⁸ On the effects of the law, see Knetsch and George, “A Problematic Law” 76-78. Knetsch and George argued that the law failed to offer long term development to Florida as the emigrant settlers proved indifferent farmers and worse guardians against Indian invasion.

United States, their resources appropriated and redistributed to those deemed members of the body politic. By omitting nearly every reference to the war effort, the text of the bill divorced the new status quo of Florida from the Second Seminole War. Instead, it argued for the enrichment of white settlers at the expense of nonwhite claimants as a universal good on its own terms.

In tandem with Tyler's decision to forgo a treaty with the Seminoles, the Armed Occupation Act accomplished what six military commanders had not. Where military campaigns failed, Benton's act effectively wrote the Seminoles out of Florida and deprived them of all legal standing in the territory. The new status quo of Florida exiled them to its southern environs. On their northern border, they were surrounded by a new population of white settlers, men and women who feared and hated Indians and were still committed to absolute removal. As the territory remained unbound by any written treaty, the Seminoles lacked any guarantee that the legislature would not unilaterally extend its jurisdiction over the Indian reserve. They had survived seven years of war within the borders of one of the most powerful nations on the planet. They had witnessed their land given to white settlers whom they despised, the vast majority of their people forcefully driven to the west, and their own confinement to the least arable stretch of the territory. They endured nonetheless.

Ten days after Tyler signed the Armed Occupation Act, William Worth declared the Second Seminole War to have reached its conclusion and took his leave of the territory. Though sporadic violence persisted in the coming months, Worth did effectively end the Second Seminole War. The three hundred Seminoles remaining emigrated to their unofficial reservation in South Florida where they would be allowed to

remain, unmolested and unbowed. It did not go entirely smoothly. In the weeks that followed the declaration of peace, a few chiefs and their bands obdurately refused to move to the reservation. Worse, a Seminole band who had refused to leave the environs of Tallahassee had murdered a white family on the frontier, leaving only one child alive. Immediately, following the lobbying of outraged Florida citizens, the War Department sent a message to the field contravening the terms of Worth's armistice and demanding that those responsible be brought to justice.³⁹

In response, the War Department dispatched a seventh commanding officer to Florida, Colonel Josiah Vose. Vose, the son of a general, hailed from Massachusetts. Like many of his peers, he had earned renown in the War of 1812 and slowly moved up the ranks of the army. Upon receiving his orders from his superiors, however, Vose distinguished himself from many of his predecessors. He sat down and wrote two letters. In the first, he explained, patiently and exactly, the quandary in which he found himself. The great majority of Seminoles had obeyed the terms of the treaty. They had moved slowly, but he insisted they had no knowledge of the murders and had instead pledged to prevent further violence. Vose noted that he had personally promised the chiefs that he would abide by the agreement and they had done nothing to violate its terms. So, he explained, "it was with no less astonishment than mortification that I suddenly found myself instructed by the Secretary of War to forfeit every pledge I had made to the Indians & pursue a course which in the present state of affairs ... would incite the entire Indian population to acts of retaliation and revenge." It was a heavy

³⁹ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 315-317; Jones to Vose, September 12, 1842, *Territorial Papers*, 26:538-530.

burden and, after careful consideration, he delicately informed his superiors that he had decided to suspend his orders, in the name of justice and peace.⁴⁰

Two days later, Vose wrote again. He regretted to report that a “vagabond class of citizens” in Florida had exhibited “a spirit of implacable resentment towards the Indians.” These men, whom he accused of having displayed abject cowardice during the war, now urged their fellows to seize this new moment of Seminole weakness and march on their enemies, removing them from the territory through extermination rather than removal. He worried that their actions might upset the delicate balance of power that his predecessors had achieved, especially as he had no legal standing under which he could restrain the settlers. He finished the letter and, apparently at the last second after having endorsed it, added a postscript on its outer edge: “would not the shameful interference of white men, as herein reported, require some executive action – some public admonition and warning against such lawless & selfish mock-war spirit?”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Albert Kendall Teele, *The History of Milton, Mass., 1640 to 1887* (Boston: Press of Rockwell and Churchill), 441; Vose to Jones, September 12, 1842, *Territorial Papers*, 26:548-550.

⁴¹ Vose to Jones, September 12, 1842, *Territorial Papers*, 26:551-553.

Conclusion

The Second Seminole War wound down quietly in 1842, but the fragile silence that hung over issues of slavery and expansion ended with an explosion eighteen months later. Following the resignations of the cabinet he had inherited from William Henry Harrison, President John Tyler turned to an old friend, Virginian Abel Upshur, to succeed Daniel Webster at the State Department. Upshur was a proslavery radical who had volubly defended nullification a decade before. Seizing on sensationalized reports from Duff Green, a newspaper editor who Tyler had sent to England to gather intelligence, Tyler and Upshur feared that the British might use outstanding debts to extort the independent Texan government into emancipating its slaves. Covertly, the Tyler administration planned to annex Texas to forestall that prospect. With an agreement nearly in place, on February 28, 1844 Upshur boarded the USS *Princeton* for a demonstration of its outsized weaponry. At the climatic moment, the gun exploded and Upshur perished in the blast. To replace Upshur, Tyler called upon John Calhoun, the leading ideologue of slavery in the United States. Within a month, Calhoun had submitted an annexation treaty with Texas to the Senate and, alongside it, a letter to Britain's minister to the United States explaining that the United States had annexed Texas to prevent Great Britain from spreading abolition in the southwest. At so public a proslavery measure, the old guard revolted. Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren announced their opposition to annexation on the same day. The treaty failed to receive even half of the votes it needed to pass the Senate. In his 1854 memoir, Thomas Hart

Benton likened annexation to “a clap of thunder in a clear sky. There was nothing in the political horizon to announce or portend it.”¹

In 1836, at the start of the Second Seminole War, John Quincy Adams had predicted a war with Mexico was imminent and assured his proslavery colleagues that the “banner of freedom will be the banners of Mexico, and your banners, I blush to speak the word, will be the banners of slavery.” The annexation of Texas, the excitement of the Mexican-American War, the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act all represented attempts to blunt that insight, to somehow mediate the now inescapable tensions of aggressive expansionism, republicanism, and the institution of slavery. Those attempts, of course, were wildly unsuccessful.²

Yet the Second Seminole War was nothing like the Mexican-American War. Andrew Jackson had never intended for Florida to be a stepping stone toward a culture of conquest. He believed the dispossession of the Seminoles to be instead part of a gradual process in which Indians would be displaced and land parceled out to white settlers. The interests of slaveholders ensured that the war would be fought to its conclusion, but the roots of the conflict lay in Jackson’s conclusion that Indian sovereignty and the republican project were mutually exclusive, a conception that came to be widely shared among political elites of the era. In casting off the ideals of an earlier generation of

¹ Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years View; or a History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years ...* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1856), 2: 581. On the events leading to the annexation of Texas, see Joel Silbey, *Storm over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Charles Sellers, “Election of 1844,” *History of American Presidential Elections*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (New York: Chelsea House, 1971), 1:758-588; Michael Morrison, “Westward the Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 10.2 (Summer, 1990), 221-249.

² “Indian Hostilities – Speech of Hon. John Q. Adams of Massachusetts,” *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 24th Congress, 1st Session, May 25, 1836, 449.

Americans who had advanced expansion through the language of freedom and liberty, they instead embraced geographic expansion, racial supremacy, and the annihilation of nonwhite autonomy on the American continent. Unwilling to defy the collective might of slaveholders, that formulation went unchallenged.³

Others perceived the true implications of the Second Seminole War. As General Thomas Jesup pleaded with the Van Buren administration to moderate its insistence on removal, he came to understand what his subordinates had tried to tell him – their superiors prioritized national honor, defined by the triumph of white supremacy, above moral right. British traveler Harriet Martineau had come to the same conclusion, finding that the combination of nationalism and white supremacy was leading inexorably toward conquest. As she described that relationship, the volunteers came to personify it, flocking to Florida and identifying the protection of the frontier with the destruction of the Seminoles. William Harney and his men, as they strung up the body of Chakaiaka before his mother and children, carried Jackson’s campaign against nonwhite autonomy to its logical conclusion. By the time William Worth held Coacoochee in irons and flatly held his life hostage unless his people surrendered, the unconscionable had become routine. In 1819, Henry Clay had reproached General Andrew Jackson by reminding him that “we are fighting a great moral battle, for the benefit not only of our country, but all of mankind.” In the wildernesses of Florida, that battle was lost.

The Armed Occupation Act served to institutionalize a crusade of conquest within Florida. White settlers would make the territory, and the region, safe for settlement and, concomitantly, safe for slavery. The end result, in which the United States encouraged

³ Michael Morrison, “Martin Van Buren, the Democracy, and the Partisan Politics of Texas Annexation,” *Journal of Southern History*, 61 (1995), 695-722.

white settlement as a means of neutralizing the autonomy of nonwhites who remained within its territory, was not the one that Jackson had envisioned. As a means of mediating the tensions of frontier policy, however, it proved well suited to its task. With absolute removal judged to be impractical in Florida and, given the limited geographic space even of the vast North American continent, impossible to repeat iteratively as the nation expanded west, a combination of military outposts and white civilian settlement proved an effective means of extending the nation's borders while curtailing the autonomy of nonwhite residents. Through the constant threat, and occasion imposition, of force, the United States marched across the continent seizing Indian land and confining Indian nations onto smaller and smaller reservations of limited agricultural value. Throughout the 1850s, filibusterers threatened to repeat the process throughout the Americas, launching illegal invasions of countries throughout the hemisphere. As Southern nationalists, the filibusterers offered a glimpse of what might have been the foreign policy of an enduring Confederate States of America - a global assault on nonwhite sovereignty.⁴

Even in the aftermath of the Confederacy's defeat, the legacies of Jacksonian expansion remained. Over the coming century, once the United States had broken the military strength of its Indian neighbors and isolated them from one another on disparate reservations, Congress passed the Dawes Act, which dissolved Indian nations,

⁴ On Indian relations in the post-removal west, see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None My Own": *A History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 85-118; William Hagan, *United States-Comanche Relations: The Reservation Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); 462- 916; Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005).

encouraged the adoption of white cultural forms, and opened significant amounts of Indian land to white settlement. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States began codifying the dependent relationship of noncontiguous territories into law. Rooting its legal justification in the conquest, submission, and assimilation of North America's Indian nations, the United States extended its sovereignty over a host of once independent nations, legislatively, military, and judicially. The *Insular Cases* demarcated Puerto Rico as a possession of the United States that had not been fully incorporated into the whole, excluding its people from the rights recognized by the Constitution. In the Philippines, the United States imposed its rule, demanding the subordination of the Filipino people until they embraced "civilization" in the form practiced by their new rulers. Gilded Age United States leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Mahan rooted their faith in aggressive expansion on the long relationship between the United States and its Indian neighbors. Judging that the United States could best advance the spread of republicanism through the annihilation of nonwhite sovereignty, the new imperialists embraced the ideals that underlay the Second Seminole War. Distilled to their essence and applied across vast geographic distances upon subject peoples, they were plainly imperial.⁵

Fifty years before the Spanish-American War, the Seminoles were left to deal with the repercussions of expansive warfare. In 1839, upon their arrival at Fort Gibson in Arkansas, the emigrating Seminoles found Creek bands living on the lands that had been promised to them. Weary of conflict, Micanopy and many other Seminoles agreed to live

⁵ On the *Insular Cases*, see Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of United States Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1-12; Christina Burnett and Burke Marshall, eds., *Foreign in a Domestic Sense: Puerto Rico, American Expansion, and the Constitution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). On the Philippines, see Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1989); David Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); H.W. Brands, *Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

among them, but the more militant Indians and Black Seminoles refused. Within Arkansas, the Creek leadership lobbied local military officers to enforce Seminole subordination, arguing that the terms of the Treaty of Fort Gibson clearly dissolved the Seminole nation and subsumed its members within the Creek polity. By 1843, within the Seminole leadership, factions arose that were alienated by the Black Seminoles' collaboration with the United States and influenced by the Creeks. They embraced chattel slavery. The conflicts of the past ten years had not ended.

In 1844, with the fraying of the Seminole coalition that had fought the Florida War and faced with hostility from Indians within and outside the nation, Coacoochee and John Cavallo led a delegation to Washington to plead for a separate Seminole territory. There, they met with General Thomas Jesup who, upon hearing their pleas, met with the Secretary of War and pledged that he could not "remain passive and witness the illegal interference with the rights of those people." He requested protection for all who had appealed to him. By 1845, the Seminoles and Creeks had signed a new treaty that provided land specifically marked for the Seminoles, though it remained within the jurisdiction of the Creek nation. It was of little respite. By the end of the decade, slave kidnappers sent by the Creeks had seized dozens of Black Seminoles while Indian agents under James K. Polk conspired to claim ownership of hundreds of Black Seminoles. Compounding the crisis, Polk's Attorney General John Mason, a staunch proponent of slavery, had ruled that Jesup's 1838 promise of freedom was illegal, imperiling the status of all of the Black Seminoles. In 1849, Micanopy passed away and tribal leadership passed to Jim Jumper, the leader of a pro-Creek, pro-slavery faction. Within several

months, claims to over two thirds of the Black Seminoles had been sold to anxious slaveholders. The Black Seminoles' freedom hung in the balance.

In November, Coacoochee and John Cavallo hatched a plan. They knew that Mexico, which had abolished slavery two decades before, had offered land and supplies to any settlers who pledged to defend its northern frontier against Indian raids. One night, Coacoochee and Cavallo, along with two hundred Indians and African-Americans, began the journey south. Two years later, the parties reached their destination and formed separate communities. Making contact with local officials, Coacoochee succeeded in securing a deal with the Mexican government. In return for their service against the aggressive Indian nations of the region, both communities received land, farming tools, munitions, and livestock. Whether intended or not, the settlements of Coacoochee and John Cavallo were a political statement, a multiracial alliance that demonstrated the endurance of nonwhite autonomy in the Americas, if outside the borders of the United States. However, in 1857, smallpox broke out among the Seminoles, and Coacoochee, along with over 50 others, fell victim to the epidemic. Political disunion wracked the remaining Indians in Mexico and, having learned that Seminole leaders in Oklahoma had secured recognition of their independence from the Creeks, they began the long trek back to the United States. The Black Seminoles, secure in their freedom and autonomy, remained behind in Mexico. When the last of Coacoochee's group reached Seminole territory, it was 1861; much of the Seminole leadership had declared for the Confederacy and its troops were pursuing dissident Indians who had fled north, toward Kansas and the Union.⁶

⁶ For more on Coacoochee, John Cavallo, and postwar Seminole politics, see Susan Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones: A Seminole Saga* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2003), 89-197; Kenneth Porter, *The*

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