Surviving, Negotiating, Resisting: John Horse's Leadership of the Black Seminoles in the Nineteenth Century

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Introduction

"Just so, *mi presidente,* are the Mexicans and the white men pushing the Seminoles - they want us not merely from a divan but from the earth itself!"
- John Horse to Don Porfirio Diaz, 1882[1]

This excerpt originates from an encounter between John Horse, a man of mixed African and Seminole descent, and Don Porfirio Diaz, president of Mexico. The purpose of this meeting was to ask for federal aid in protecting the lands of the Seminole/Mascogo and Kickapoo tribes in the face of settler colonialism and the accompanying violence. This encounter proved fruitful for John Horse because on March 7th 1884, president Diaz ordered the lands in the region of Nacimiento in the state of Coahuila to be divided between the aforementioned tribes and offered them legal and federal protection from other claims.[2] Why did two indigenous tribes send someone of mixed heritage to represent their claim in this important ordeal? Why would a feared and respected Mexican general and president not only agree to meet with this seemingly random Native man but also heed his words and agree with his plea? One of the main reasons offered in the literature on this is because the name John Horse held a reputation that extended past the borders of Mexico to present-day Oklahoma, Florida and regions beyond them.[3]

John Horse, also referred to as Juan Caballo, John Cowaya or Gopher John, was part of an ethnic group originating from an unlikely partnership between African ''freedmen'' and Seminoles also known as the Black Seminoles. The Black Seminoles find their roots in the late seventeenth century in the wetlands of Florida where escaped slaves and displaced Natives were brought together as a result of fleeing colonial oppression. The relation between the two parties has varied over the years from a slave-master dynamic to a more symbiotic cooperation and eventually some attempts at complete assimilation.[4] The Black Seminoles had experienced mass migrations before the nineteenth century, but the period between 1805

[1] Riley Aiken, "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers,* 1942, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.
[2] "El Nacimiento, index number 5, informe primera parte". Congressional Documents. 17 June 1895. Library of Congress, *60th Congress, 1st Session, S.D. 215 93-103*. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-GP3-0520c9e5ad672ae80e8c1c9d7d8d1e8c/pdf/GOVPUB-GP3-0520c9e5ad672ae80e8c1c9d7d8d1e8c.pdf (accessed April 15, 2025).
[3] Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (University Press of Florida, 1996), 210.
[4] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 119.

and 1882 is where most of them occurred. The origins of some members are found in the West African river deltas where they were captured and shipped towards the Americas to work on plantations in the Lowcountry.[5] Escaping towards the swamp and marshes in lower Florida meant creating a new home out of unknown terrain. The Seminole Wars between 1817 and 1858 saw some Black Seminoles fleeing their Floridian homes for the Bahamas but most accompanied their indigenous brethren towards assigned Indian Territory in Oklahoma.[6] This was not the final destination of their journey however as tensions once again flared up between the government and other tribes on this new reservation and the Black Seminoles fled to Mexico looking for freedom. They were expelled from the country and into Texas due to conflicts between the United States and Mexican governments but they successfully crossed the border again later on and settled on land in the state of Coahuila where the group has been living since 1880 until the present day.

A recurring element between these migrational movements is the shifting place and identity of the Black Seminoles. They are at times perceived as slaves or possessions but also as free men or leaders of their community.[7] Their constant change of scenery combined with the tumultuous politics of the nineteenth century caused a conflict within the Seminole tribe that complicated their struggle for freedom. Their dual identity of being both African and Native also muddled their legal claims to ownership and opportunity in the eyes of the American government while also excluding them from communities that were decidedly African or Native.

Navigating these problems required tenacity and a sense of community within the Black Seminoles that could only be bolstered by strong leaders who could create a tight-knit bond in the group. These leaders would not be of mixed or partial descent during the early years of Seminoles and African companionship but the advent of the Seminole Wars brought change in this dynamic.[8] It was suddenly expected of the Black Seminoles to fight for their tribe and in order to maximize the potential of the troops they appointed leaders from within to organize their military efforts. This paved the way for numerous leaders to gain influence and renown amongst the Seminoles while also growing the agency of the Black Seminoles

[5] Tiya Miles, Sharon P. Holland and Joy Harjo, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Duke University Press, 2006), 22.
[6] Kathleen A. Deagan and Darcie A. MacMahon, *Fort Mose: Colonial America's Black Fortress of Freedom* (University Press of Florida, 1995), 25.
[7] Daniel F. Littlefield, *Seminole Burning: A Story of Racial Vengeance* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 22.
[8] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 82.

within the tribe. The most prolific leader that originated from this period was John Horse, who rose to prominence as a leader during the Second Seminole War. His mixed upbringing made him an excellent communicator who could speak multiple languages and his skill in fighting combined with his tactical insights made him the figurehead of Black Seminoles for a large part of the nineteenth century.[9] His life story and work for the Black Seminole community highlights the complex intersections of race, resistance, and migration in U.S. history.

This research will focus on how the leadership of John Horse helped the Black Seminoles navigate their community's survival and resistance to U.S. expansionism from 1812 until 1882. The answer to this question will also reveal some ideas on the intersection of African-American and Indigenous struggles for freedom during this time period. While other indigenous tribes share similar stories of displacement with the Seminoles, the Black Seminoles occupy an interesting position within U.S. history by having the longest known history of Black Indians in the U.S. while also having a higher degree of assimilation comparatively.[10] This makes them the ideal group for conducting this research as their uniqueness is also what makes the research more broadly applicable as the time period encompasses all other groups of Black Indians and their cohesiveness is at a more advanced stage. The leadership of John Horse is chosen as the main topic of interest within this subject because the relatively small size of the Black Seminole community, fluctuating around 500 but never spanning more than 2500, meant that the decisions of the leader had a greater impact on the community as a whole.[11] Multiple sources point to John Horse being the de facto leader of the group so his perspective is the most important in this research, however some voices of other indigenous leaders are also taken into account.[1213] The chosen timeframe provides the most complete history of the struggles of John Horse and the Black Seminoles, starting from his birth in 1812 until his death in 1882. It is in this period where a direct correlation can be found between the sequence of migrational events and the actions of the Black Seminole community. The research will also briefly cover the period after the death of John Horse in 1882 to signify his legacy within the community.

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[9] Philip T. Tucker, "John Horse: Forgotten African-American Leader of the Second Seminole War." *The Journal of Negro History* 77, no. 2 (1992): 74–83. 74. https://doi.org/10.2307/3031484.
[10] William L. Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (Atheneum Books, 1986), 41.
[11] John Missal and Mary L. Missal, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* (University Press of Florida, 2006), 38.
[12] Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 61.
[13] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, IX.

Historiography

Historical analysis of the Black Seminoles and especially the leadership of John Horse had until recently largely eluded the attention of scholars. Previous research on the interactions between Native Americans and African Americans were more focused on their contacts with colonial forces instead of the relations between the two groups. The book *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* by William Loren Katz provided a springboard for historians to dive further into these connections, including research on the Black Seminoles.[14] *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* by Kenneth W. Porter and *The Seminole Freedmen: A History* by Kevin Mulroy, published in 1996 and 2007 respectively, represent the two most comprehensive and prominent contributions to the field and will therefore be heavily utilized in this research.[15][16] While Porter's book does describe the life and events of John Horse, his work mostly focuses on the effects of the migrational movements on the group instead of the leadership of the Black Seminoles.[17] Kevin Mulroy explicitly refers to the Black Seminoles as 'Seminole Freedmen', arguing that this distinction more accurately represents their role in indigenous society.[18] 'Black Seminoles' is still the preferred nomenclature in most other academic works and has also been adopted by some members of the tribe itself, therefore this research will stick to referring to this group as Black Seminoles. Other noteworthy titles relevant to the subject are *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict* by John & Mary Lou Missal and *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* by Daniel Littlefield.[19][20] The first contains a very detailed account on the Seminole Wars in which John Horse was a prominent figure and the latter provides important context for the state in which the Black Seminoles are at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

While the academic world is slowly finding its footing in the subject of Black Seminoles, they have a lot of debates and different interpretations regarding the agency of the Black Seminoles themselves. Mulroy and Missal argue consistently throughout the book that the Black Seminoles held their own separate meetings and were represented by leaders during

[14] Katz, *Black Indians*.
[15] Porter, *Black Seminoles*.
[16] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*.
[17] Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 15.
[18] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, *XX*.
[19] Missal and Missal, *The Seminole Wars*.
[20] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*.

tribal gatherings.[2122] Therefore they held a moderate amount of power in deciding their own fate separately from the larger Seminole community. Porter argued however that the Black Seminoles were assimilated in Seminole culture to such a degree that any Seminole decision would automatically become a Black Seminole mandate.[23] Having representation in such an assimilated group would be futile, meaning a specific Black Seminole leader would not influence Seminole actions that heavily. This research seeks to prove that the answer is more nuanced and that it was the leadership of John Horse especially that aided in navigating Black Seminoles and their personal wishes and demands within Seminole society. Another point of contention among scholars in this field is the agency of the Seminole group as a whole. Advocates for their lack of influence point to the aftermath of the Second Seminole War and the relatively unceremonious departure to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. Littlefield claims on numerous accounts that the Seminoles were largely at the mercy of colonial forces and had little tribal sovereignty in their migrational movements and the keeping of land.[24] Opponents of this argument, like Porter and Mulroy, state that the diplomatic ties upheld between the U.S. government and the Seminoles are proof that both parties relied on negotiations and dialogue rather than strict warfare or oppression to acquire their needs.[2526] This research adds to this claim by zooming in on the role of John Horse within those diplomatic talks. By highlighting his input in the mediation process this research aims to change the academic perspective on the agency of the Black Seminole's agency in the tribe. This agency is often attributed to the indigenous Seminole leadership but John Horse is the most prominent example of the Black Seminoles taking an active role in deciding their fate.

Considering that the Black Seminoles are still an obscure topic within the historical debate, the leadership of John Horse is also underrepresented in academic work. He has a leading role in Kenneth W. Porter's *Black Seminoles* but is often treated as a minor side character in other academic works. This presents an interesting opportunity for this research to fill an academic void in a historical period that has been chronicled extensively. Contemporary friends and adversaries of John Horse like Seminole War Chief Osceola and U.S. Army Officer Thomas Jesup have had numerous research projects and biographies dedicated to them yet no such work exists for Horse. Illustrating and clarifying the effect of

[21] Missal and Missal, *The Seminole Wars*, 25.
[22] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 51.
[23] Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 146-147.
[24] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 17.
[25] Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 95-98.
[26] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 38.

John Horse's leadership on the survival and resistance of the Black Seminoles would therefore not only add to an existing historical debate on the Seminole Wars but also include a new African-Indigenous perspective to the discussion that has previously been downplayed or ignored.

Methodology

In order to demonstrate the extent of John Horse's leadership in shaping the Black Seminoles' resistance and survival against U.S. expansionism during the nineteenth century, this research will utilize a number of different methods of analysis. The first of which is a paradigmatic approach with John Horse as a central figure, analyzing his thoughts on Seminole leadership and his actions in the military and diplomatic field. This research will be conducted using the plethora of primary sources John Horse has left behind including diaries, letters, and oral histories passed on through the descendants of his people. Most of this correspondence is located in the Florida Historical Society and U.S. National Archive. A qualitative analysis of the material suits these sources best as they are from a single viewpoint and small in scope. This analysis will inspect the language and rhetoric he uses as well as the frequency and results of his communication efforts. In order to highlight the importance of his leadership however, this research will also focus on the broader crises that the Black Seminoles faced by applying modern theoretical frameworks to older primary source material. Theoretical frameworks like double identity, migrational trauma and settler colonialism have been used in the context of the Black Indian but not specifically in the case of Black Seminoles. Double identity is related to the dual perspective of black people in America as both American and black but this research introduces the third perspective of an indigenous identity in this theory. Migrational trauma refers to the study on the impact of mass movements on a population and the lasting effects it can have. Settler colonialism is a concept of oppression that aims to displace and replace a population with a new settler group. These theories will prove helpful in deciphering military records from the Seminole Wars, records from the Negro Fort and other personal accounts of this time period. One such account was written by historian and soldier John Titcomb Sprague who had frequent encounters with the Black Seminoles and their leadership during his time stationed in Florida and Texas. It should also be of note that this research has tried to incorporate as many indigenous Seminole voices as possible as they are most relevant to the research while also

undervalued in the larger historical debate. These sources are scarce however as the Seminoles did not leave behind many written documents meaning a lot of this primary source material is derived from the oral tradition passed through descendants. These descendants have been interviewed and recorded in an academic fashion but some degree of romanization or mythologizing is inevitable as the subjects are biased. In order to verify the authenticity of the claims made in these sources, they will be supplemented by archival records that can confirm the events. This research understands the concept of 'leadership' as 'the ability of an individual or a group of people to influence and guide followers or members of an organization, society or team'. This influence can be found in words, commands and actions and should be reciprocated meaning the influenced group acknowledges the leader and his position. U.S. expansionism will be defined as 'the policies and practices of invading foreign lands to expand territory, political influence, or ideology' also known as 'Manifest Destiny' as this is the broadly accepted academic term.

The first chapter will center around the involvement of the Black Seminoles and their leadership in the Seminole Wars between 1817 and 1858, with a specific focus on the Second as John Horse had a determined leadership position in these events. The First Seminole War and its leadership structure will serve as a benchmark from which a pattern in leadership change can be determined. This analysis will utilize mostly military records by both U.S. forces as well as Seminole soldiers and will delve into the subjects of land claims, border transgressions and settler violence between the U.S. government and the indigenous group.

The main topic of the second chapter will be the diplomatic dialogue surrounding the removal of the Seminoles from their land in Florida and their travels to the newly appointed Indian Territory in Oklahoma. This process of removing Native Americans from their lands is also known as the Trail of Tears. This chapter will analyze the impact of John Horse on the negotiations with the U.S. government and other groups and how he leveraged his diplomatic skills against other members of the Seminole leadership. It will also cover the preparations and logistics behind this mass migration and how that shaped the Seminoles skill and talent for exploration and scouting.

The third chapter will build on the second chapter chronologically and will dissect the new social and political situation in the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The presence of other indigenous tribes on the reservation combined with harsh new living conditions meant a change in perspective and social standing for Black Seminoles. This part of the research will document that change and identify key factors in the leadership of John Horse that helped his

community build resilience against it. An important component in this analysis will be the internal conflicts within the Seminole tribe as they have been documented extensively.

The fourth and final chapter of this research revolves around the journey to the Mexican border and John Horse's work as a U.S. military scout and indigenous ambassador. It will concentrate on his, and by extension the Black Seminoles', position as a diplomatic lynchpin between the U.S. Government, the Mexican Government and the various indigenous tribes inhabiting the area surrounding the border. Crucial to this period in the Black Seminoles story is the Mexican-American war and the later abolishment of slavery in the U.S. in 1865.

Chapter 1: Seminoles at War and the Rise of John Horse

While the history of Seminoles and Black Seminoles predates the 19th century, it is the advent of the Seminole Wars that started John Horse's involvement in shaping his community. The Seminole Wars were the military culminations of a longer period of rising tensions and violent conflicts between 1811 and 1858, largely held in the Floridian Peninsula. This chapter will focus on how the involvement of the Black Seminoles, with John Horse in particular, influenced the build-up and events of the First and Second Seminole War in the fight against colonial forces. The analysis of the First Seminole War serves as a benchmark for discussion on the Second Seminole War as this is the conflict in which John Horse had a prominent leadership role. Official documents on the Seminole Wars are stored in U.S. military archives and are therefore largely from the perspective of American soldiers and leadership. While the Seminoles and Black Seminoles did have written documentation of the conflict, it was not as extensive as their colonial counterparts. In order to avoid a one-sided analysis of the events and highlight the indigenous voice, interviews with the descendants of Black Seminoles will be used to supplement the available records. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, some of these interviews are with people from within the Black Seminole community and therefore subject to bias. Archival primary sources will be used to confirm or deny the details presented in these interviews in order to circumvent this possible bias.

Seminoles in Spanish Florida

The Floridian Peninsula was a hotbed for military activities at the turn of the nineteenth century and the Seminoles were involved in a power struggle between two colonial empires. Spain had regained control of the area as ratified in the Peace of Paris Treaty of 1783 but border disputes between them and the newly-formed United States were a constant topic of contention. The land was mostly of strategic concern to the Spanish Empire, it was used as a military buffer to protect the colonies in the Caribbean and South America as Florida had

little in terms of valuable natural resources.[27] The Spanish also held a different attitude towards slavery and escaped slaves than their British and American counterparts, welcoming fleeing slaves from other countries into the empire. While this official policy ended in 1790, Spanish Florida still saw large groups of escaped slaves from Lowcountry plantations cross their unguarded border and settle in their land.[28] These lands were also occupied by numerous settlements of the Seminole tribe who were on good terms with the Spanish Empire. There was little reason for the Spanish Crown to remove the settlements as the trade network established with the Seminoles allowed for new resources and higher profits of the colony while they also functioned as a deterrent for potential American attacks.

The Seminole settlements in Florida had been welcoming escaped slaves into their territory for about roughly a century at this point in time. There were two major reasons for this immigration policy. The first reason has to do with the ethnic make-up of the Seminole group in Florida. Most of them were descendants of the Lower Creek tribes in Georgia who fled their ancestral lands because of the threat of colonial violence.[29] The Floridian Peninsula still housed a small number of Miccosukee tribes who did not flee to the Appalachian Mountains. These two tribes fused together and called themselves *simano-li*, a word derived from the Spanish term *cimarrón* which means to be 'wild' or 'runaway' men, which would later turn into the Seminoles.[30] The survival of their own community was built on cooperation and the disregard of cultural differences so they essentially extended that concept to escaped slaves looking for sanctuary. They saw the African-Americans as a group of refugees from colonial violence, much like themselves. The second reason for their immigration policy is related to the slavery system that the Seminoles employed. The tribe did acknowledge slavery like almost every indigenous tribe in this time period, but they did not emulate the chattel slavery found in colonial lands. While colonial slavery was built on the idea of maximizing profit for economic gain, Seminole slavery was designed to provide for the community. The labor was still forced, as it was on the plantations, but the African-Americans were allowed to have personal belongings, leisure time and representation within the tribal leadership.[31] The Seminoles demanded a tribute that could be given in the form of food, livestock or military

[27] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 32.
[28] Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*, 24.
[29] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 8.
[30] Brent R. Weisman, *Unconquered People : Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians* (University Press of Florida, 1999), 7.
[31] "Unknown Black Seminole Diary", Manuscript/Diary, 1821, Willie Frank Memorial Library, Tribal Library Program, Clewiston, Florida.

contributions to the warband. Allowing the refugees into their territory gave them a much stronger labor force which meant that the native Seminoles could focus on protecting their land. The refugees benefitted from this protection as the Seminoles could defend them against raiding parties by American settlers. These settlers still viewed the escaped slaves as their property and saw it as within their rights to retrieve them from the Seminole community, often relying on violence to do so.[32]

The First Seminole War

Scholars in the field point to three immediate causes leading up to the start of the First Seminole War, the first one pertains to the owner-slave dynamic described above. With Spain employing a more lax policy on slavery in their territory and the Seminoles allowing refugees to work within their community, word of better opportunities and living conditions spread quickly on American soil. The number of escape attempts by slaves in the area was increasing and plantation owners saw the presence of Spanish Florida as a threat to their economic system.[33] They organized raiding parties to not only retrieve the escaped slaves but also to halt this process of migration to the area. The existence of emancipated Seminole slaves threatened the established racial hierarchy of the United States. This combined with the lack of Spanish military presence in the borderlands emboldened the American slave owners in their efforts to raid the Seminole settlements. This also fueled what was to be the second immediate cause of the First Seminole War: cross-border strikes by Seminole warriors. As the Seminoles were not interested in negotiating the position of escaped slaves, seeing as they were an important factor in their labor and warfare force, the raids by American settlers were seen as attacks against the entire Seminole community. They would organize warbands to strike back against American trading posts and settlements across the Florida border to retaliate against the colonial violence. In documents produced by the United States government it even states that a number of attacks were not retaliatory in nature but spurred by economic motives. Evidence for these attacks is not provided in the documents however, so the current scholarly consensus assumes that most attacks were directly correlated to raids by American settlers.[34] The third and most significant cause of the First

[32] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 55.
[33] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*. 22.
[34] William E. Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire (*University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 119.

Seminole War was the manifestation of expansionist ambition under the rule of president James Monroe and executed by General Andrew Jackson. The troubling colonial situation for the Spanish Empire combined with the civil unrest in the Florida borderlands provided the Monroe presidency with an excellent target for territorial expansion. The Spanish military force was depleted due to continued aggression in their Latin American colonies, meaning that resistance against the annexation would be slim. James Monroe appointed Andrew Jackson to launch a military campaign with the goal of acquiring the territory of Florida for the United States.

General Andrew Jackson was very ambitious with his interpretation of the task given and exceeded presidential orders by declaring a war on Spain. He captured a number of strategic landmarks during an incursion into Spanish land, including the city of Pensacola and Negro Fort. Negro Fort was a military construction built and abandoned by the British army which was taken over by a group of fugitive slaves who had armed themselves with the weapons in the fort. Jackson destroyed the fort and its inhabitants in what would later be seen as the first battle in the First Seminole War. He angered the Spanish, Seminole and maroon population, causing them to lead a counter-offensive against the American troops. While the Seminole and maroon communities were sizable in population, their military force was small and ill-equipped to deal with the tactics and weapons deployed by the American army. The Spanish Empire could not respond adequately to this military aggression and officially signed over the control of Florida to the United States in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819. The United States government was eager to make use of the newly acquired territory and ordered Andrew Jackson to eradicate any resistance of remaining Seminole and other indigenous or maroon settlements on the peninsula.[35] The disappearance of Spanish forces meant that the Seminole resistance bore the brunt of the American army, which the military organization behind the tribal warband was not ready for.

The Black Seminoles were also active in this conflict, usually making up their own military regiments and engaging in guerilla-style combat alongside their Seminole neighbors. Some evidence even suggests that the combat training that the Black Seminoles underwent at Fort Negro made them more formidable combatants than their indigenous counterparts.[36] Their participation and prowess in battle drew the attention of senior officials in the American Army, who were concerned that losing at the hands of armed African Americans

[35] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 51.

[36] Frederick T. Davis, "United States Troops in Spanish East Florida, 1812–1813." *Florida Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1930): 4-22, https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol9/iss1/4. 7.

might provoke unrest outside of Florida. Brigadier General Thomas Flournoy even called for the specific treatment of Black Seminoles, stating: “every negro found in arms will be put to death without mercy”.[37] Indigenous warriors were often captured to serve as prisoners or war or leverage in negotiation deals, but this excerpt shows that Black Seminoles were not designated to be captured. While there was some degree of teamwork and cooperation between the Black Seminoles and Seminoles, they were mostly separated throughout the war; only joining forces in defense against assailants when time to prepare was scarce. Black Seminole warband leaders were informed by tribal envoys about the military plans and were ordered to assist as part of their tribute to the tribe. These leaders were fit to choose their own tactics and organization of their warriors but most evidence suggests that they mimicked the style of the Seminoles and local militia.[38] The addition of Black Seminoles and other freedmen still proved no match for the American Army however as Andrew Jackson had requested additional military support and far outnumbered and out-armed the Seminole resistance. The First Seminole War did cause a lot of casualties on the side of the Americans which opened the door for diplomatic talks with the indigenous tribes as they were not keen on suffering more losses. These talks resulted in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek in 1823: an agreement between the United States government and the indigenous tribes still residing in Florida. This treaty ratified the removal of all indigenous and Black Seminoles settlements along the Florida coast and established a reservation in the center of the peninsula. The indigenous tribes, led by Miccosukee chief Neamathla, agreed to this removal under the condition that the United States protected their land claim as long as they remained peaceful and that they supplied rations and supplies for the tribes to settle themselves.[39] This was the first time that the Seminole tribe were removed from their lands by the American government through diplomatic ways, effectively ending the First Seminole War.

John Horse in the Second Seminole War

This marked the third relocation in the life of the young John Horse. He was born somewhere early in 1812 as the son of a black woman who was living among the Seminoles and an

[37] Patrick W. Rembert, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border, 1810–1815* (University of Georgia Press, 1954), 231.
[38] Seminole Chiefs, “Seminole Chiefs to Unknown”. Manuscript. 1817. Library of Congress, *Florida Seminoles.* <www.loc.gov/item/maj007473/> (accessed April 14, 2025).
[39] Missal and Missal, *The Seminole Wars,* 71.

indigenous, albeit unknown father. Some oral recordings point to Charles Cavallo, a Seminole tribesman, as his paternal father seeing as John later adopted his surname but conclusive evidence of this has not been found.[40] The Adams-Onís treaty forced them to live closer to the Seminole settlements in the borderlands, raiding parties by American settlers forced them to move further South and the Treaty of Moultrie Creek had once again relocated them to a new home. The conditions of the treaty also made for another danger for the freedmen in their new reservation. They had agreed to be law-obeying to the American Government which included the return of escaped slaves to their owners. Under the threat of withholding provisions, almost all recently acquired slaves were returned to American authorities by the Seminoles. The black people that had been living with the Seminoles for generations, including John and his mother, did not have a direct link to an existing slaver and were therefore largely exempt from this retrieval. This condition was fragile however, as property claims by settlers were not thoroughly checked and Seminole leadership did not want to break the rules of the treaty in exchange for a few Black Seminoles.[41]

Living conditions within the reservation were tough and animosity towards the Americans grew because they did not hold up to their end of the bargain. The Americans pointed to a few fringe indigenous communities on the coast line that did not sign the treaty as examples of disobedience and resistance, denying the natives in the reservation their food provisions.[42] Trading with roaming merchants and local settlers was necessary to provide more than the bare minimum. John Horse had the advantage of being of mixed heritage, having learned English from his mother and Hitchiti (a Seminole dialect) from his community. This bilingual skill helped him establish relationships with soldiers from the local military camp and allowed him to earn money as a translator and messenger.[43] His knowledge of the land that he learned from the Seminole community made him an excellent marksman and a desired hunting guide for people less familiar with the territory. While the young John Horse was strengthening the bond between indigenous and American communities, the appointment of Andrew Jackson as the next U.S. president would strike a heavy blow to that coalition. On May 28, 1930, he signed the Indian Removal Act: a law that would remove all indigenous people east of the Mississippi river and relocate them to a new

[40] George McCall, "Negroes who surrendered to General Taylor". Consolidated Files. 1837. Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General*. https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/092.html#top (accessed April 15, 2025). RG75, M234.
[41] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 60.
[42] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 32.
[43] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 37.

territory in present-day Oklahoma and Arkansas. This Act was in direct violation of the promises made in the Treaty of Moultrie Creek and the Seminoles felt angered by this betrayal. Many tribes refused to cooperate with the removal and took up arms against the Americans, thus starting the Second Seminole War.[44]

This conflict had much higher stakes for John Horse and the other Black Seminoles compared to the First Seminole War. There was no Spanish sanctuary to flee to and cooperating with the removal meant a relocation to a reservation with the Creek Nation. The Creek Nation, from which the Seminoles seceded when they went to Florida, still employed a traditional and harsher method of slavery when compared to the Seminoles.[45] Fearful sentiments arose amongst the Black Seminoles that a relocation to Oklahoma and Arkansas also meant a return to slavery. Their participation in the conflict was therefore not just a method of paying tribute anymore, but also an autonomous act of resistance against U.S. expansionism. The interethnic alliance they shared with the indigenous Seminoles would become apparent in the functions they fulfilled during the Second Seminole War. John Horse and other Black Seminoles were used mostly as scouts and spies because of their multilingual and multicultural background.[46] This allowed them to broker deals and relay information between Black Seminole communities, Seminole tribes and U.S. officials. These Black Seminole scouts required a degree of power or insurance in order to negotiate properly, calling for a shift in the power dynamic between Black and indigenous Seminoles.

Seminole leadership was largely based on matrilineal hereditary succession, meaning chiefs were chosen based on their clan inheritance on their mother's side. Since John Horse's mother was not born into a Seminole clan, he was excluded from this process. Seminole culture did allow for flexibility in this process during wartime and had previously given preference to merit-based leadership instead of purely hereditary.[47] The decentralized nature of the different Seminole tribes in Florida made it only logical to have multiple leaders who would gather sporadically to discuss tribe-encompassing issues. This meant that it was definitely possible for Black Seminoles to reach authoritative positions within the Seminole tribe and to establish some degree of autonomy for their community. Most of this merit-based

[44] Missal and Missal, *The Seminole Wars*, 91.

[45] William C. Sturtevant, *Creek into Seminole: in North American Indians In Historical Perspective* (Random House, 1971), 25.

[46] "Report from the secretary of war in compliance with a resolution of the Senate of the 29th December, with statements of the number of troops employed in the war with the Seminole Indians". Printed Material. 1838. Library of Congress, *United States War Department*. https://www.loc.gov/item/08033596/ (accessed April 16, 2025).

[47] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 36.

system of chieftainship was based on the prowess that an individual exhibited in combat. The marksmanship and knowledge of the land that John Horse acquired during his teenage years helped him become an influential figure in his warband. While he was not a full-time warrior, he focused his efforts more on counterintelligence and diplomacy, there is proof of him being present at the Battle of Lake Okeechobee and the Dade battle near Fort Brooke.[48] He did not have a commanding function similar to that of Osceola or Chief Neamathla during these battles but he did acquire some adoration from his fellow Black Seminoles through his courage and skill.[49] Kenneth W. Porter remarks that the prowess exhibited by Black Seminoles during the war made them ideal candidates for the role of war chief and not so much a communal leader during periods of relative peace. While this would certainly be the case in the more tranquil 18th century, the 19th century saw little time for peace and prosperity for the Seminole people. This meant that war chiefs and their second-in-command were the de facto leaders of the community and Black Seminoles who proved themselves could rank high in the authoritative ladder in the Seminole community.

The Second Seminole War did still end with a victory for the American army but the number of casualties and the time it took to siege Seminole settlements was greater than during the First Seminole War.[50] Some scholars point to the difference in military strategy employed by Andrew Jackson and his colleague Major Francis Dade, while Kevin Mulroy argues that it was the lack of motivation by top U.S. officials to conquer the area that accounted for this difference in results.[51] This argument definitely holds merit as the conquering and removal of Spanish forces proved fruitful for the career of Andrew Jackson and a second conquest against indigenous tribes did not garner the same fame or adoration. This debate does isolate the difference between the First and Second Seminole war as something purely decided by the American military approach, ignoring the agency of the indigenous and Black Seminoles. Tribal records show that the number of tribe meetings that were called upon drastically increased during the Second Seminole War, indicating a greater demand for a centralized strategy.[52] There were also a greater number of Black Seminoles who were willing to

[48] Thom Hatch, *Osceola and the Great Seminole War* (St. Martin's Press, 2012), 167.
[49] John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (University Press of Florida, 1985), 107.
[50] "Seminole War muster rolls of Florida militia, 1836-1841,1856-1858". Manuscript. 1858. State Archives of Florida, *Florida Office of the Adjutant General*. https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/collection/data/32413888 (accessed April 16, 2025).
[51] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 61.
[52] Thomas Sidney Jesup, "Diary, 1836-1837". Manuscript/Diary. 1837. State Archives of Florida, *Florida Memory Collection M86-12*. https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/252864 (accessed April 21, 2025).

participate in warfare and had acquired more combat-experience, adding to the conclusion made by Porter.[53] Their active participation in almost every crucial battle during the Second Seminole War showcases their commitment and loyalty to both the indigenous cause for freedom as well as their own. These factors combined can lead to the conclusion that it was, at least partially, the increased cohesion and resistance of the Seminoles that led to a closer battle. While it is hard to argue that the leadership of John Horse has had such a definitive impact in this process, given that he was still relatively young and unknown, there are definitely elements of Black Seminole leadership present during the Seminole Wars. The collectivization of both indigenous and Black Seminole groups highlights the connection between the black and native struggle for freedom against expansionist policies of the U.S. government. Survival of the community meant stepping over cultural gaps and forming an interethnic alliance to resist settler violence and large-scale Indian removal.

[53] Sarah Daniels and Molly Perryman, "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers*, 1942, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.

Chapter 2: Negotiating Removal

The events of the Seminole Wars created a rift between the interests of Seminoles, Black Seminoles and the American government. This chapter will answer how the diplomatic and military efforts of John Horse and his Black Seminole contemporaries assisted in navigating this space for the survival of their community, with special attention for the power structures visible in this rift. The prospect of Indian removal also brought with it a number of logistical and political problems that needed to be resolved within the Seminole communities, including the role that Black Seminoles played within that. This chapter will also analyze the part that John Horse played in organizing the journey itself, as such a long migration had a sizable impact on everyone involved. The primary sources used for this analysis are largely made up of records and notes made during these negotiations by both Seminoles and the American military officials. These records come from multiple biased perspectives within this conflict as language and cultural barriers often created dissonance between the parties. This analysis will therefore strive to incorporate all of the views to create the most complete picture of the power dynamics between the groups. The theoretical concepts of migrational trauma and double identity, both of which will be explained later in the chapter, will be used to complement this analysis and highlight the perilous and unique position of the Seminoles while centering around their resilience in the face of this situation. This particular phase in the existence of the Black Seminoles during the 19th century is especially crucial to this research, as it is this point in time where the influence and agency of the group is most apparent and visible to historians. Uncovering the extent of Black Seminole leadership in the diplomatic processes between a colonial force and indigenous resistance will reveal the interconnectedness of Afro-American and indigenous struggles for freedom during this time period.

Consequences of the Second Seminole War

The Second Seminole War did not end with a conclusive peace treaty between both parties like the First Seminole War did. Analysis shows that the three primary reasons for this difference in result are the change of approach by the American Military, the shift of U.S.

political priorities and the infighting of the Seminole community. General Andrew Jackson had assigned Quartermaster General Thomas Jesup to be his second-in-command during the war and he advocated for the capture and detainment of Seminole and Black Seminole warriors as opposed to mass elimination. His reasoning was that he could influence imprisoned Seminole leaders to surrender their troops and expedite the process of total removal.[54] The threat of complete annihilation was often severe enough for indigenous chiefs to give in to the demands in order to protect their vulnerable tribe.[55] This change of approach by the military is linked to a greater shift in U.S. policy as the Seminole Wars were a costly endeavor for the American government. The increase in casualties as described in chapter 1 had politicians doubting the fruitfulness of the war and they wanted a quicker and more decisive resolution. According to Littlefield, negotiating a peace treaty that would involve all parties was seen as too much of a diplomatic effort and the Indian Removal Act was primarily put in place to bolster the economic productivity of the American South.[56] The third reason for the disparity in conflict resolution was the increasing divide between Seminole tribes. The harsh conditions of the war had weakened Seminole resistance and tribal leadership was split on a conclusive solution to this problem. Some leaders, including John Horse, intended to surrender to the enemy and even cooperate with certain American military operations to garner favor and minimize Seminole losses. They argued that the war was destined to end with complete eradication of the tribe and saw this option as a way to create the best negotiating position.[57] Other chiefs, including Osceola, saw this cooperation as treason and rallied against the idea by turning on the communities that the deserting leaders represented.[58] This fragmenting of a Seminole front made it easy for the American government to broker individual deals with Seminole tribes instead of an all-encompassing peace treaty.

The divisiveness of the Seminole tribe also had significant consequences for the Black Seminole population. Due to the split tribal structure of the Seminole organization, many Black Seminoles were expected to follow the lead of their particular chief. This was difficult for many of the higher-standing Black Seminoles to do however, as the treatment of Black

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[54] Thomas Sidney Jesup, "Message to Jones, 21 October 1837". Letters. 1837. State Archive of Florida, *Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General.* Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/092.html#top (accessed April 20, 2025).

[55] John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (University Press of Florida, 1964), 136-137.

[56] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 40.

[57] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 97.

[58] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 98.

Indians by Americans and other tribes was different than that of 'regular' indigenous people. While refusing subjugation and continuing the fight posed the same threat of annihilation for both Native Americans and Black Seminoles, cooperation with potential treaties and peace talks was also a hazardous affair. The threat of re-enslavement was a constant factor in discussion of potential migration or remaining in Florida. The U.S. government was actively encouraging white settlers to claim land in Florida and were granted permission for the individual removal for any and all indigenous people on those lands.[59] Any Black Seminoles caught in the crossfire could get captured and sold back into slavery as the U.S. government considered their resistance enough reason to void the claim that the Seminoles had over them.[60] Migration to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma meant living side-by-side with other tribes that still treated every black person as a slave, potentially risking friction with re-enslavement as a result. While Seminole leadership had promised protection from this scenario on multiple occasions, the Creek tribes present in the territory far outnumbered the Seminoles and a potential conflict would not be favorable.[61]

There was also another option available for Black Seminoles looking for freedom: fleeing to the Caribbean. The British Empire was still in control of most of the islands in the Caribbean Sea and had abolished the practice of slavery in 1833. In a similar effort as the Spanish attempt to destabilize the Southern American slave economy, British authorities offered sanctuary to fleeing slaves and African-Americans who reached the islands.[62] The Bahamas were seen as the most logical destination for escape attempts due to their relative close proximity to the Floridian coast. While this seems like a solid opportunity at first glance, few Black Seminoles successfully made the journey towards the Caribbean islands and their freedom. The two most prominent reasons for this were the logistical problems of the journey and their strong ties to the Seminole community. Crossing the waters between Florida and the Bahamas was a dangerous endeavor that required extensive preparation. Access to boats and the skills to operate them and navigate to the islands were in short supply and the dangers of the open sea and unfavorable weather proved a daunting obstacle. While the Bahamas were relatively close, they still needed to traverse almost 90 miles across dangerous water while evading American authorities.[63]

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[59] Missal and Missal, *The Seminole Wars*, 121.
[60] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 31.
[61] Sturtevant, *Creek into Seminole*, *41*.
[62] Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 50.
[63] Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolution*, 22.

It was also difficult for many Black Seminoles to abandon their indigenous Seminole partners due to their military and familial alliance. Generations of living together had caused many interethnic relations to spawn and the children of these relationships, like John Horse, felt conflicted between both sides of their ethnicity. Philosophers W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon have popularized the idea of a 'Double Consciousness': a concept defined by the struggle between the white and black perspective of an individual's identity.[64] According to this idea, the identity of a black person is always split between their own perception and that of the (white) world around them.[65] Black Seminoles faced this conundrum with an extra layer: the presence of an indigenous identity. Fleeing to the Caribbean meant relinquishing the part of their identity that is Seminole and that idea proved to be a deterrent for many. Indigenous Seminoles had little interest in a potential refuge to the Bahamas as their ties were to their ancestral homeland on the continental mainland and the British Empire did not offer sanctuary to indigenous tribes. Some scholars like Rocío Gil and Larry Rivers have proposed a third reason for the lack of more escape attempts to the Caribbean: a supposed lack of information about the possibility. While there is certainly reason to believe that not all Black Seminoles were updated on current affairs, Landers argues that most of them did speak English and interacted with groups outside of their community on a regular basis.[66] The abolishment of slavery by the British Empire would be big news for their community so one could logically assume that this information would spread quickly within the group. There had previously been similar escape attempts during the interbellum between the First and Second Seminole War so the Black Seminoles were aware of a possibility of escape towards the Caribbean. Some of these attempts were successful and there are still active communities of Black Seminoles in places like Andros Island although these groups do not consider themselves part of the larger Seminole tribe anymore.[67]

The Role of John Horse

Since all of the options available to the Black Seminoles presented substantial challenges, it was important for them to have a say in the decision-making process. John Horse realized that in order for the Black Seminoles to have real negotiation power they needed to prove

[64] W.E.B. Du Bois and Brent H. Edwards, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
[65] Frantz Fanon and Azzedine Haddour, *The Fanon Reader : Frantz Fanon* (Pluto Press, 2006) 40.
[66] Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*, 64.
[67] Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*, 112.

their worth to the American military as to not be lumped in with the indigenous Seminoles and risk re-enslavement. He used the connections that he gained when he was living next to the military camp to reach out to army officials with an offer of assistance.[68] These U.S. officers were, as mentioned earlier, keen on individual deals that would prevent more casualties on their side and accepted his help. John Horse would be contracted to remedy territorial disputes between settlers and individual Seminole communities by functioning as scout, translator and diplomat for the U.S. Army. John Horse was paid a military salary and his community would not be bothered by the army in exchange for his service. Thomas Jesup valued his presence in diplomatic negotiations because of his linguistic skills and his in-depth knowledge of indigenous cultural differences.[69] The service of John Horse and his fellow Black Seminoles to the American army was valued to such an extent that Jesup signed for the freedom of all indigenous blacks who cooperated with the army as part of John Horse's plea in 1838.[70] According to Fairchild, Jesup offered this proclamation to John Horse and his community as a strategy to drive a wedge between the black and indigenous groups within the Seminoles, hoping that this division would lead to a total surrender. He knew that the Seminoles would only capitulate if the Black Seminoles surrendered en masse and the only way to make that happen was to offer them their freedom.[71] This partly succeeded as some indigenous communities were angered by the alliance that John Horse had forged and factions against cooperation were formed. These factions discussed the re-enslavement of all Black Seminoles as a strategy to appease the transition to Creek leadership in the new territory and made an attempt on the life of John Horse to eliminate the prominent Black Seminole leader. This assassination failed as John Horse managed to escape and fled to his family and community.[72]

It must be understood that although this factionism was a result of cooperation with the U.S. government, most Seminole communities were in favor of a peaceful resolution at this point. The battles of the late 1830s had caused devastating losses for the Seminoles and Jesup's new strategy of focusing and capturing Seminole chiefs had left many communities

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[68] John Cowaya alias Gopher John, "Letter to Jesup". Letter. March 24, 1849. State Archive of Florida, *Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General.* Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/092.html#top (accessed April 20, 2025).

[69] Thomas Sidney Jesup, "Letter to Poinsett". Letter. April 9, 1837. Library of Congress, *Thomas Sidney Jesup Papers January - May 1838*. https://lccn.loc.gov/mm78027789 (accessed April 20, 2025).

[70] Jesup, "Letter to Poinsett".

[71] Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 89.

[72] Jane F. Lancaster, "The First Decades: The Western Seminoles from Removal to Reconstruction, 1836–1866." (PhD diss., Mississippi State University. 1986), ProQuest Dissertation. 70.

without a leader and guidance. The attempt on his life had made John Horse realize that this power vacuum needed to be filled and diplomatic talks would be the only way of ensuring the survival of himself and his community. When a proposed conference between the U.S. officials and Seminole leadership near Fort Lauderdale in 1838 turned out to be a trap orchestrated by Thomas Jesup with the intent of capturing multiple resisting chiefs, John Horse seized the opportunity to declare himself the leader and spokesperson of the Black Seminoles.[73] It is unclear whether the trap set by Thomas Jesup was of his own design or given to him as an order from higher-up but the capture of most of the rebelling chiefs effectively made the Black Seminoles the largest group of potential resistance to further attempts of removing the indigenous communities. Complying with the terms of his earlier proclamation to the Black Seminoles provided the path of least resistance towards a complete removal of Seminole presence in Florida and as such Jesup invited John Horse to talk about the terms for a peaceful resolution.[74]

The new position that John Horse had earned for himself made him the spokesperson for the Black Seminoles but not for the Seminoles as a whole. The greater plans for the migration of all Seminoles to the Indian Territory were discussed in diplomatic talks with indigenous tribal chiefs, both those held in custody as well as some who were still free. John Horse was there to represent his own community and protect the interests of the Black Seminoles that had complied with American terms and potentially served in U.S. army service. His stance in this negotiation was centered around two demands: the protection of the legal status of all Black Seminoles as free men and the assistance of the U.S. military in the convoy towards Indian Territory.[75] The first demand was crucial for preventing the re-enslavement of the Black Seminoles in Florida and the new territory and the second demand was necessary to prevent the same thing from happening during the journey through Southern slave states. John Horse was careful as to not overstep his privileges and interfere with the talks between Seminole chief and the U.S. government as his position within the Seminole community was tenuous after his alliance with the military.

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[73] Robert Smith, "Letter to Thomas Sidney Jesup". Letter. April 8, 1838. University of Florida, *P.K. Yonge Memorial Library of Florida History.* https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00017193/00003/citation (accessed April 22, 2025).

[74] Thomas Sidney Jesup, "Letter to Smith". Letter. March 6, 1838. Library of Congress, *Thomas Sidney Jesup Papers January - May 1838*. https://lccn.loc.gov/mm78027789 (accessed April 20, 2025).

[75] John Horse, "Message to Jesup". Consolidated Files. January 8 1838. Bureau of Indian Affairs Archive, *Special Files 1807–1904*. Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/indian-reorganization-act (accessed April 21, 2025).

The Removal

The Treaty of Moultrie Creek and other agreements made between the U.S. government and the Seminole tribe always ended with the latter getting deceived or betrayed by the former. This made the Seminoles especially wary of all the details of the removal to the Indian Territory, frequently asking for advice and assistance from other chiefs within the tribe. John Horse offered to help in these discussions and translated some of the more complicated language written down by U.S. officials.[76] While Thomas Jesup was relatively lenient in his compromises for the Seminoles, he was ultimately bound to the rules of the Indian Removal Act and he could not breach its core tenets. This included a demand for a separate stretch of land away from the Creek tribes present in the territory, much to the dismay of the Black Seminoles. The journey itself also presented a few problems for the Seminole tribe. The Seminoles had been familiar with large-scale migrations up until this point but the journey towards Oklahoma would be the largest in the history of the tribe. According to Mulroy, trauma was still embedded deeply within the community from previous movements and tribal leaders feared that the voyage would extract a heavy toll from all Seminoles, especially the women and children of the tribe.[77] This trauma was exacerbated by the lack of connection to the land in Oklahoma. Not only did the Seminoles lack agricultural and livestock skills to properly harness the arid plains of Oklahoma but there was also an absence of a spiritual connection with the land.[78] The Seminoles, much like other indigenous tribes, valued a deep connection with nature and the land that they inhabited, often relying on it for cultural and religious ceremonies.

The removal of the Seminoles in captivity started near the end of 1838 and almost all major Seminole communities would be living in the new Indian Territory by 1843. They did not all travel together at once as organizing such a large scale operation was logistically impossible for the community. Instead, tribes would split up into smaller groups of around fifty people which made it easier to travel by boat or in caravans.[79] A group of chieftain emissaries was sent first to scout out the land and they would report about its condition and where each group would be able to settle. Cross-country communication was still slow and messages often took weeks to arrive at their destination. When a warning from the emissaries

[76] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 114.
[77] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 98.
[78] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 101.
[79] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 126.

claiming that the land was unfit for their typical settlement structure arrived back in Florida, multiple groups had already packed and started the journey. They also claimed that the allotted land was larger in size than their previous reservation in Florida but that they had to share it with more people as well.[80] These messages instilled even more suspicion and animosity in the Seminole community, who became increasingly hesitant to leave. John Horse led the first band of largely Black Seminoles to a military fort near New Orleans.[81] They would travel by ferry up the Mississippi River and be escorted by a military convoy for the rest of the way there. Excerpts from a diary held by a U.S. soldier that escorted the Black Seminoles remarked the restless nature of John Horse, who was constantly scouting out the next part of the journey and checking on all members of the convoy. His experience as a trained guide and scout had made him proficient at lengthy expeditions but the groups also included many inexperienced women and children. These two groups were especially susceptible to illness and the harsh conditions of the journey and many perished along the way. The military convoy had strict instructions given to them by General Zachary Taylor which prohibited the soldiers from sharing rations or other goods with the Seminoles. The agreement was for protection and transportation but the U.S. officials did not see the loss of life during the jury as their responsibility.[82] John Horse invested a lot of his time in the more fragile members of his community and sometime during the journey to Oklahoma he met a woman named Susan, who would later become his wife.

Most of the groups that left early for Indian Territory were part of the faction that was pro-emigration within the Seminole community. Some of the more militant and rebellious tribes stayed behind and plotted a massive retaliation against the U.S. army. A big prison break in 1854 saw many members of these tribes flee to the inhospitable Everglades.[83] Attempts made by the U.S. army to drive them off the land resulted in the short-lived Third Seminole War. Very few Black Seminoles, less than 100, were active during this war as almost all of them had joined John Horse and the other migrating groups.[84] The Seminoles would constantly be forced to move into deeper and more isolated parts of the swamp until very few traces remained of them. All the natives that were captured during this war were

[80] Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 322.
[81] Grant Foreman, "Report of the Cherokee Deputation into Florida." *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 9 (1931): 423–38. 426. http://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3355&context=fhq.
[82] Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 255.
[83] James F. Jennings, "Military Operations in Southwest Florida in the Third Seminole War, 1855–1858." (PhD diss., California State University, 2000), ProQuest Dissertation. 54.
[84] Jennings, "Military Operations in Southwest Florida in the Third Seminole War," 57.

sent on so-called ‘death marches’ to Oklahoma with the casualty percentages being noticeably higher than the groups that went in accordance with the U.S. government. Seminole presence in Florida was reduced to a near-negligible amount and the survival of Seminole and Black Seminole community and culture was largely in the hands of those that arrived in the Indian Territory.

The end of the Seminole Wars and the process of large-scale removal towards Oklahoma marked a new chapter for the Black Seminoles. The Seminole Wars had increased the agency of Black Seminoles within their tribe and the diplomatic resolutions and peace negotiations saw that agency leveraged into leadership positions that were recognized by both the U.S. army and Seminole chiefs. John Horse capitalized on this shift in the power dynamic by securing some necessities for his own survival and that of the Black Seminole community. While the academic debate largely characterizes this historical period by the violence between Seminoles and the U.S. government, it was the presence and actions of Black Seminoles and their leaders that influenced the outcome of the conflict. It is difficult to judge whether the choices made by John Horse and his contemporaries were the most ideal, but it was their decision-making and unifying capabilities that kept their community together given the circumstances. Threats of annihilation, re-enslavement and re-migration signified the continued struggle of the Black Seminoles in the 19th century but it was also a period in which they carved out an existence for themselves and legitimized that. They had achieved a legal declaration of the ‘free men’ status for their community and proven their worth and merits to Seminole leadership.

Chapter 3: Life in the Indian Territory

The previous two chapters have shown how the Seminole Wars and the diplomatic period that followed changed the social standing and agency of the Black Seminoles as relating to the Seminole tribe and the U.S. government. Life in the Indian Territory in Oklahoma meant another shift in societal rules and conventions that affected the Black Seminoles, meaning they would once again have to adapt to the people and their surroundings. The two primary problems that the new territory brought with them were the presence of slave-holding tribes and the growing tensions surrounding slavery that led up to the American Civil War. This chapter will argue how the leadership of John Horse helped to steer the Black Seminoles towards freedom in a slave society and navigated them through the new problems of a post-slavery America. Given the presence of many other tribes of substantially larger size than the Seminoles, all with their own population of Black Indians or slaves, many authors have written about the life of black people in the Indian Territory. This analysis will introduce the theory of self-determination, which will be explained later in the chapter, while focusing on how it applied to the Black Seminoles specifically. Tribes like the Cherokee and Chickasaw that were also present in the territory held more complete records of political struggles and societal events, allowing for a more indigenous-centered perspective in handling these theories. Finally, this chapter will delve into the internal conflicts of the Seminole community and how the influence of John Horse eventually led to a distinct split between Black Seminoles and their indigenous tribesmen.

‘Civilized’ and ‘Uncivilized’ Tribes in the Indian Territory

The Indian Territory was divided between what is referred to by the U.S. government as the “Five Civilized Tribes”: Choctaw, Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw and Seminoles. This term was applied to them by the U.S. Department of Interior because of their relative compliance with U.S. expansionism and their, again relative, acceptance of white settler culture.[85] The U.S. government had little concern for the discrepancies between communities and split the available land between the five tribal nations, which caused friction between rivaling

[85] Alaina E. Roberts, *I’ve Been Here All the While : Black Freedom on Native Land* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 18.

communities. These five tribes were not the only indigenous presence in the area, however, as the territory had been used as hunting grounds for Osage, Apache's and Comanches.[86] These tribes perceived the migrating tribes from the southeast as intruders, and as such initiated attacks and raids on their settlements. While these tribes did not necessarily outnumber the newly arrived tribes from the east, their expertise in horse riding and mounted combat proved effective against the feeble defenses of the newly built settlements.[87] The 'Five Civilized Tribes' called upon the agreements made with the U.S. government who had promised them a secure location. Some of these earlier claims for protection fell on deaf ears however, as U.S. officials felt like they did not have the legal responsibility to secure the communities themselves but rather the perimeter.[88] Later appeals for a military alliance were more successful, as a few regiments were dispatched to the Territory starting in 1842.[89] The common consensus amongst scholars regarding this shift in domestic policy points towards a revitalized expansion drift and a renewed interest in the areas surrounding the Great Plains.[9091] The primary focus of this policy and the main instigator behind the Indian Removal Act had been to maximize the profit and production in the South. The large economic boost that this provided the American economy with opened up new possibilities for industries in the American West. Since Native American presence was still large in this area, any option to curb their dominance seemed lucrative even when it involved supporting other Native American Tribes.

In order to better understand the position of Black Seminoles in the Indian Territory, it is important to understand the fragile alliance between the newly placed tribes and the American government. The military aid described earlier was partly due diligence for the American government on the basis of agreements made with the tribe but was largely spurred by an economic incentive to prepare the area for further settlement. The idea of the 'Five Civilized Tribes' hinged on the fact that these tribes had been conquered in the past and were familiar with the consequences of refusing cooperation. While some historians frame the

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[86] Porter, *The Black Seminoles*, 113.
[87] Wendy St. Jean, *Remaining Chickasaw in Indian Territory, 1830s-1907* (University of Alabama Press, 2011), 24.
[88] Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 53.
[89] "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs". Government Record. 1842–43. New York Public Library, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs.* https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081678967&seq=1 (accessed April 25, 2025). 77.
[90] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 72.
[91] Sturtevant, *Creek into Seminole*, 80.

alliance between the five tribes and U.S. officials as one forged out of necessity, it is largely based on a controlling position of the United States and the subjugation of the tribes in question.[92] This is not to discredit the agency of these tribes however as they had acquired some degree of tribal sovereignty and were free to designate and fulfill their lives within the Indian Territory as they pleased. The removal and replacement towards an unknown and strange land simply made them more dependent on government assistance. U.S. officials, realizing their dominant economic and political position, lent them this assistance on the condition that they adopted European-American customs such as literacy, Christianity and perhaps most centrally: slavery.

Free Men amongst Slaves

John Horse and most of the other Black Seminoles settled near the military encampment of Fort Gibson, next to a river that separated them from Creek land.[93] After two missions in Florida as an intermediary between military officers and resisting natives, John Horse was once again a free black man under Seminole rule. The nearby presence of Creek tribes meant that this hard-fought freedom was still precarious and members of his community were fearful for the future. The Seminoles had split from the other Creek tribes a century earlier, the main reasoning behind their split was a disagreement on the ethical application of slavery.[94] Seminoles did acknowledge and practice slavery to an extent, but the Creek system was much closer to the American model. This model of chattel slavery was, as described in chapter 1, threatened by the existence of free blacks as this could instigate ideas of freedom within the slave communities. The proximity of the Black Seminole settlements so close to their slave-holding society impelled Creek leadership to protect their own system of labor with retaliatory action. William Armstong, the designated supervisor of the Western part of the Indian Territory, described the position of the Black Seminoles as followed:

> *In many cases the Creeks claim negroes which are the property of the Seminoles. These negroes the Creeks allege ran away from them before and during the Florida war, and*

[92] Lancaster, "The First Decades," 75.
[93] John Horse, "Message to Jesup". Consolidated Files. July 4 1844. Bureau of Indian Affairs Archive, *Special Files 1807–1904*. Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/bia (accessed April 21, 2025).
[94] Roberts, *Black Freedom on Native Land*, 82.

> *were either captured with the Seminoles or came in under a proclamation from some of the commanders in Florida.*[95]

This excerpt highlights that Creek leadership used legal loopholes and the peculiar status of the Black Seminoles as a veil of ambiguity to stage kidnapping actions. Nightly raids into Black Seminole territory were frequently exercised by the Creek and since written documents of their allegiance to the Seminole tribe were either vague or simply non-existent, Black Seminoles had little option to defend themselves through governmental process. John Horse recognized the danger and uncertainty that his community faced and organized nightly guard shifts to resist the raids.[96] It was only a temporary solution as the Creek increased pressure on Seminole leadership and some feared that certain chiefs would budge and conform to the Creek slavery model. John Horse had allies in the Seminole leadership such as Chief Micanopy and Wild Cat who had fought alongside him in the U.S. army and they respected his intellect and loyalty. Together they embarked on a diplomatic mission towards Washington with the request of another land designation further away from the Creek tribes. They arrived on May 16th 1848 and hand-delivered a petition to General Thomas Jesup, who had since become the Quartermaster General of the entire U.S. Army.[97] Jesup had grown sympathetic to the Seminole tribe after the Seminole Wars as many tribesmen and Black Seminoles had fought alongside him in the U.S. Army. He supported their request and extended his safeguarding of the Black Seminoles by writing to the secretary of war with the explicit request to protect them from kidnappers. He would personally join the diplomatic mission back to the Indian Territory and oversee the designation of a new location for Seminoles settling. With new houses for the Black Seminoles built near the Deep Fork River and away from the Creek tribes, John Horse once again used his negotiating skills to protect his community.[98]

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[95] "Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs". Government Record. 1842–43. New York Public Library, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs.* https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081678967&seq=1 (accessed April 25, 2025).

[96] John Horse (John Cavallo), "Message to Jesup". Consolidated Files. January 8, 1845. Bureau of Indian Affairs Archive, *Special Files 1807–1904.* Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/bia (accessed April 21, 2025).

[97] Thomas Sidney Jesup, "Letter to William Wilkins". May 30, 1844. Oklahoma Historical Society Archive, *Roll 807.* https://www.okhistory.org/research/dawesresults.php?lname=Foreman (accessed April 22, 2025).

[98] Foreman, "Report of the Cherokee Deputation into Florida," 242-243.

Division in the Seminole Tribe

Another threat to their freedom loomed for the Black Seminole community, this one originating from within their own tribe. Adapting to the Oklahoma land proved hard for Seminole farmers who were accustomed to the wetter and more fertile lands of Georgia and Florida. The arid climate and cold winters were harsh on the crops and harvests of potatoes and wheat would often get ruined because of bad weather.[99] Bad harvests would mean no food and little economic profit for a vulnerable community, so they had to invest into other agricultural forays. Because the other tribes in the Indian Territory had a stricter form of slavery, their intensive labor force was much greater than that of the Seminoles and could therefore limit the economic damage that a bad harvest would cause. Seminole leadership was not blind to this problem as voices within the tribe started to seriously weigh the possibility of adapting to the chattel slavery system to ensure their survival. There were two other reasons for changing their system that were deemed advantageous for the Seminoles aside from the economic benefit. The first being the decrease of tensions between them and the more military-imposing Creek tribes. The tribes were culturally similar apart from the 'slavery question' and strengthening the bond between them would increase their dominance over the other tribes in the Territory and leave them with a better negotiating position with the U.S. government. The raids and kidnappings of Black Seminoles by Creek tribes would cease as every black person would be seen as a slave in the Territory. The other reason for changing the system would be to better their position in the eyes of the U.S. government as it would show a degree of cultural assimilation. Aid for tribes was conditional and further assistance was provided to the communities that displayed the interest in adapting European-American customs.[100]

There was also a legal precedent for the reintroduction of slavery in the Seminole tribe. While Thomas Jesup had given his word for the protection of the rights of Black Seminoles, actual legal records of the Black Seminole population designated them as property of the tribe.[101] While this definition used to be advantageous for the group as it enshrined them within the same tribal community, it was now being leveraged as an

[99] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border*, 120.
[100] Roberts, *Black Freedom on Native Land*, 78.
[101] Charles J. Kappler, "comp. 1903–41. Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties." Government Record. 1846. Oklahoma State University Archive, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. Volume 4. https://dc.library.okstate.edu/digital/collection/kapplers/id/24163 (accessed April 22, 2025).

argument for re-enslavement. General Zachary Taylor had said: "The Seminole Indians that surrendered and agreed to emigrate would be secure in their property, including their slaves".[102] Thus confusingly it was possible for a Black Seminole to be proclaimed both 'free' by Jesup and a 'slave' by Taylor at the same time, depending on the circumstances of their arrival in the Territory. Creek natives, white slave-catchers and factions of Seminoles would use this uncertainty surrounding the Black Seminoles legal status to plead for their case of re-enslavement. John Horse requested a clarification of their status from Thomas Jesup but as he still answered to a proslavery president he could not provide much resistance in the matter.[103] John realized that both outside and inside forces were plotting on the re-enslavement of him and his community and that the institutions and agreements made to prevent that were fragile and untrustworthy, meaning action was required to ensure their survival. As the foremost leader of the Black Seminoles he would encourage his brethren to aid their indigenous tribesmen as much as possible and strengthen tribal ties to prevent the creation of factions within the Seminoles.[104] He would personally convene with other Seminole chiefs and U.S. officials on a daily basis to offer the complete cooperation of his people in return for their freedom. It proved a hard battle with many opponents as another attempt on his life was made by a member of his tribe in 1846.[105] Details on how he survived the encounter are lost in time but the assailant was identified as a Seminole sub-agent under Alligator's banner who had sympathetic connections with the Cherokee and Creek tribes.

Correspondence between John Horse, Jesup and Seminole tribal chiefs shows a willingness to cooperate by all three parties based on the previous efforts of the Black Seminoles to appease the other two.[106] As these efforts like fighting in the Seminole Wars or their diplomatic role in the Indian Removal were spear-headed by John Horse it is logical to assert that his involvement in the negotiations was critical for Black Seminole survival. John Horse now had a wife and offspring that needed to be protected, which fueled his determination for the freedom of all Black Seminoles. While this cause had always been

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[102] Porter, *Black Seminoles*, 118.

[103] John Horse (John Cavallo), "Message to Jesup". Consolidated Files. January 8, 1845. Bureau of Indian Affairs Archive, *Special Files 1807–1904.* Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/indian-reorganization-act (accessed April 21, 2025).

[104] "Writ of attachment against John Horse". Court Document. October 1845. Records of the District Courts of the United States, *RG21, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War*. https://www.archives.gov/findingaid/stat/discovery/21 (accessed April 22, 2025).

[105] Lancaster, "The First Decades," 60.

[106] John Horse, "Letter to Mason". Letter. July 8, 1844. Bureau of Indian Affairs Archive, *Special Files 1807–1904.* Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/indian-reorganization-act (accessed April 21, 2025). B 2452.

important to him, the freedom he enjoyed as a result of his military efforts were only granted to him personally and were not applicable to his other tribesmen. He used the money that earned for his army service to fund another diplomatic mission towards Washington to personally represent the plight of his people to the president of the United States. There are no official records or documentation that prove that an encounter between the two really happened but John Horse himself alleges that president James K. Polk assured him that the Black Seminoles would be treated like the other tribesmen. James K. Polk makes no mention of this happening in his diary and his lack of action after the meeting regarding this issue shows that he had no intention of protecting the community. However, in a report written by Thomas Jesup in 1846, it states that John's return from Washington indicated that the fate of the Black Seminole community was in the hands of Jesup and in his extension the President of the United States.[107] Given the relative small size of the Black Seminole group and the dubious legal status they had, it is remarkable that the diplomatic work of one man from that community managed to reach the upper echelons of the U.S. government.

Isolation of the Black Seminoles

Despite John Horse's diplomatic efforts, the latter years of the 1840s were especially harsh on the Black Seminoles. The governmental process to clarify their legal status and assign them their rights was slow and their opponents refused to wait for resolution. Kidnappings and attacks on black settlements increased in number and protection from other Seminole tribes dwindled. Violence was the universal language in the Indian Territory and the Black Seminoles did not have the means to defend themselves against it. In a rather desperate attempt to safeguard the group, John and two of his allies applied for sanctuary within the walls of Fort Gibson for the most vulnerable in their society. In a surprising turn of events, this sanctuary was granted to at least 87 Black Seminole family units and they were even provided rations in 1848.[108] Thomas Jesup and his colleague Lieutenant Colonel Gustavus Loomis had grown fond of the community, in part due to their friendship with John Horse, and were willing to wait until an official presidential decision would arrive from Washington.

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[107] Thomas Sidney Jesup, "Message to Arbuckle". Letter. April 8, 1846. State Archive of Oklahoma, *Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General.* Requested via https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/092.html#top (accessed April 20, 2025). M574.

[108] B.L. Bonneville, "Message to Flint". Letter. April 14, 1848. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Special Files, 1807–1904, Microfilm Publication*. https://www.archives.gov/files/research/native-americans/m574.pdf (accessed April 23, 2025).

There was not enough room inside the military encampment for all of the Black Seminoles, meaning those still left outside became even more vulnerable to raiding parties.

As sanctuary inside of Fort Gibson was only provided to Black Seminoles, certain factionist Seminole tribes grew resentment towards the group. The Seminole had their own border disputes with neighboring tribes and the bad harvests had thinned their population. Since their representatives had to go through different diplomatic routes, same as the other 'civilized' tribes, treatment similar to that of the Black Seminoles was out of the question. Moving inside the walls of the party responsible for the Seminole Wars and the Indian Removal was seen as an offense of tribal unity and a mistrust of Seminole leadership. Communication between Black Seminoles and indigenous Seminoles decreased and many of the settlements outside of the wall moved closer to the proximity of Fort Gibson. John Horse, being the foremost representative of his community, tried to keep the dialogue open by invoking his friends Alligator, Wild Cat and Micanopy who still had good standing within the Seminole community.[109] However, these leaders were also bound to their function by the support of their people and with tensions rising it was unsure whether the protection of Black Seminoles could garner the support of a majority. This marks the first moment in the history of the Black Seminoles where their tribal connection was in danger since their inception a century before. John Horse realized that while the Seminole part of their communal identity was a massive reason for their survival up until this point, they were always considered to be black even within that context. The self-determination theory dictates that all humans have three psychological needs in order to grow and sustain themselves: autonomy, competence and relatedness.[110] John Horse had secured a certain level of autonomy for his community through his actions and the rewards for their competence had given them a degree of freedom. The relatedness need had previously been covered by the unspoken and unwritten bond between Seminoles and Black Seminoles but with that link disappearing, a new sense of connection had to be formed in order to sustain the community. John Horse and the Black Seminoles had learned that the Seminoles, Thomas Jesup, nor the U.S. government were capable and ready to protect them and true self-determination could only be acquired by themselves.

This sentiment was proven true when the answer to the legal question surrounding the Black Seminoles arrived on June 28, 1848. U.S. Attorneys had ruled that: "Negroes should be

[109] Porter, *Black Seminoles,* 113.

[110] Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, *Self-determination theory: basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness* (The Guilford Press, 2017).

restored to the condition in which they were prior to the intervention by General Jesup".[111] The freedom that was granted to them a decade ago was suddenly revoked and they were once again considered property of the Seminoles under U.S. law. Greater political movements had turned the country into two camps, one opposing and the other promoting slavery, and president Polk was firmly in the latter. Evidence previously provided could lead to the assumption that this decision was made as part of a universal policy applying to all Black Indians, ignoring the history and position of fringe cases such as the Black Seminoles. As had happened so frequently to him and his community, John Horse once again faced the threat of annihilation or re-enslavement and the prospect of a future in the Indian Territory had faded. While his diplomatic efforts and leadership had put the Black Seminole cause on the forefront in American politics, it was the combined antagonization of other native tribes, the Seminoles and pro-slavery politicians that proved too much of a foe.

[111] "Official Opinions of the Attorneys General of the United States Advising the President and Heads of Departments, in Relation to Their Official Duties. 1852–70." Government Record. 1852-1870. Congressional Committee Materials, *Congressional Series Set 3697*. https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-03697_00_00-001-0554-0000/summary (accessed April 23, 2025).

Chapter 4: The Last Journey to Freedom

To truly grasp the importance of John Horse's leadership for the survival and resistance of the Black Seminole community during the nineteenth century it is key to look at his last actions and the ultimate fate of the group. This chapter will focus on those two aspects by analyzing the escape from Indian Territory towards Mexico and his last diplomatic voyages with leaders of his old and new home country. The main difference as compared to the previous three chapters will be the role of John Horse as a community leader without peers. Where the presence of other Seminole leadership had influenced his decision making and actions, this chapter of their story sees him as the sole commander of the Black Seminoles. This chapter will therefore seek to answer how he used this new position of power to achieve the most crucial goals for the Black Seminoles: freedom and sovereignty. As this chapter covers a larger timeframe than previous chapters, spanning from the escape in 1848 until his death in 1882, a broader summary of events will be given. This larger period also allows for some broader reflection on the political movements happening in the United States and Mexico as well as the meaning of those movements for the position of the Black Seminoles. The broader scope of this chapter also provides an opportunity to include some more well-known sources in the analysis, such as governmental documentation or presidential declarations. These sources, combined with interviews with descendants of the Black Seminoles, yield key answers regarding the influence of John Horse on his community as well as showcase the tenacity of issues like expansionism and settler violence. Theories introduced earlier like the self-determination theory and the migrational trauma theory will return in this analysis with special attention paid to the evolution of these concepts on the Black Seminole community.

Planning the Escape

The government's decision to reinstall the Black Seminoles as property of the Seminole tribe was not executed immediately. In order to determine which Black Seminole belonged to which chief, extensive paperwork needed to be done. John Horse's freedom was not under scrutiny as the Seminole council had declared his personal freedom a year prior, but his wife

and children were to be divided among different owners.[112] General Arbuckle was appointed as the successor of Jesup and therefore responsible for the distribution of Black Seminoles, but much like his predecessor he was fond of the group and provided leniency in the process. The decision by the U.S. government had increased tensions between the tribes in the Indian Territory and Arbuckle did not want to spend more of his men to expedite the process of re-enslavement.[113] This left a period of about six months, between the decision in June 1848 and December 1849, for John Horse and his compatriots to come up with an alternative. There were not many options available to them as fleeing the Indian Territory would mark them fugitive slaves and vulnerable in every other state. Remaining in the Territory but avoiding authorities was possible but very difficult as the other tribes were eager to lay their claim on the Black Seminoles.

There was another option available but opinions differed on its feasibility: Mexico. Mexico had completely abolished slavery a decade before and there was precedent of fugitive slaves being granted land and protection there.[114] The American annexation of Texas had triggered the Mexican-American War, providing an incentive for the Mexican government to welcome slaves onto their lands. This was the same mechanism that the Spanish Empire used in Florida and the Seminoles did in the Indian Territory and here it once again applied to the Black Seminoles. Crossing the border into Mexico would be the most dangerous migration of the Black Seminoles yet. While their journey towards Oklahoma saw them being protected by the U.S. Army, this time they could be pursued by them. The army was not their only potential opponent as factionist Seminole tribes claimed them as property and would certainly hunt them, as well as the large number of slaver gangs and Comanche tribes living in Texas[115]. Because of the tenuous state of Texas as an American state, U.S. military presence in the region was high and they tried to prevent the crossing of the border by fugitives at all cost. All of these opponents had to be avoided at a fast pace as U.S. authorities would pursue them as soon as they left the Territory and the 800-mile journey to the Rio Grande border

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[112] William L. Marcy, "Message to Arbuckle". Letter. August 5, 1848. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War*. https://www.archives.gov/files/research/native-americans/m574.pdf (accessed April 23, 2025).

[113] Flint, "List of negroes turned over to the Seminole Chiefs at Fort Gibson". Manuscript. January 2, 1849. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Fort Gibson Letter*s. https://www.archives.gov/files/research/microfilm/m1466.pdf (accessed April 23, 2025).

[114] Marcellus Duval, "Letter to Brown". Letter. May 30, 1850. Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Fort Gibson Letter*s. https://www.archives.gov/files/research/microfilm/m1466.pdf (accessed April 23, 2025). D392.

[115] Molly Perryman and Julia Payne, "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers,* 1942, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.

gave them ample time to catch up. Some of the military connections that John Horse had cultivated during his time in the U.S. army had told him about the captured slaves found trying to cross the border and the dangers that this undertaking would contain.[116][117]

John Horse knew that the Black Seminoles did not stand much of a chance in crossing the border on their own and that they needed an ally that would help them. Jesup and Arbuckle were ruled out as they needed to comply with official U.S. legislation and other bands of blacks in the Indian Territory were not as organized as they were. A few Seminole chiefs still held onto their stance on slavery prior to the Indian Removal, one of them being John Horse's long-lasting friend Wild Cat. His activist work for the cause of the Black Seminoles had antagonized some of the higher-ups in Seminole leadership, locking him out of the position of chief.[118] Angered by this decision, he gathered his people and joined John Horse in his plan to escape the territory. Wild Cat was a renowned warrior and military strategist responsible for many successful battles during the Seminole Wars, meaning his assistance against possible assailants would be of great value.[119] While it was not unheard of for Seminole tribes to split off of the main chief band, denouncing the official stance of the tribal council and fleeing the repercussions was heavily frowned upon. By joining forces with John Horse Wild Cat had effectively branded himself and his people as deserters, meaning their survival was also contingent on the success of the escape plan.

Race for Freedom

All Black Seminoles whose legal status was deemed property under the new decision were called to assemble at Fort Gibson on December 22 1848.[120] The announcement of this assembly was the signal for John Horse to round up his community living inside the fort and the settlements near Deep Rock River. Defying the orders of the U.S. government, he led his people to an area near Wewoka Creek where they met up with Wild Cat and his group. Their inventory contained a number of horses and some provisions but there was not much for

[116] Perryman and Payne, interview.
[117] Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1971). 262.
[118] "Congressional Documents" Government record. 1854. Congressional Committee Materials, *Serial Set 33d Congress, 2d Sess., H.D. 15.* https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/cdoc/033-1853-1855/hedoc/[0%20-%2099] (accessed April 23, 2025).
[119] Susan A. Miller, "Wild Cat's Bones: Seminole Leadership in a Seminole Cosmos." (PhD Diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1997), ProQuest Dissertation. 373.
[120] Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 252.

cargo as they had to mind both the length and the speed of the journey. The original number of Black Seminoles destined for redistribution written in the register was 286 but there is no written source to confirm whether this is the same number that joined John Horse.[121] The Black Seminoles and Wild Cat's group rode separate from each other to avoid suspicion, but Wild Cat's previous position as a chief marked him the voice of authority in the endeavor. They crossed the border of the Indian Territory into Texas in the spring of 1849 and headed south towards the Rio Grande.[122]

The presence of Wild Cat as a disgraced Seminole Chief made conferring with other tribes in Texas easier. The Black Seminoles could pose as slaves of the indigenous Seminoles while journeying through the land and tribal leadership respected the authority of an actual chief above that of someone like John Horse. Texas was home to a number of powerful indigenous tribes, most notably the Kickapoo, who had their own troubles with U.S. authority and the increased military presence as a result of the Mexican-American War.[123] They collected provisions and money from the U.S. government as long as they did not interfere with military operations. Wild Cat, despite officially being a fugitive at this point, also applied for these provisions but was deemed ineligible because he did not belong to the Kickapoo nation of tribes[124]. John Horse and Wild Cat's plan to settle in Mexico and claim their own land enticed some Kickapoo leaders to pursue a similar goal and a band of about fifty warriors joined them in their journey and provided assistance. This increase in size of the group made it harder for slaver gangs to single out the Black Seminoles amongst them and aside from a few confrontations they were largely untroubled by bounty hunters.

John Horse also used the presence of Wild Cat and the Kickapoo as a contingency plan in case of government interference. U.S. military policy dictated the prevention of fugitive slaves from crossing the border into Mexico as that would encourage other slaves from doing the same.[125] The policy did not entail the stopping of Native American emigrants as reduced indigenous presence in Texas was deemed a positive thing. The only governmental organization investigating the matter of the missing Black Seminoles were the

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[121] Flint, "List of negroes turned over to the Seminole Chiefs at Fort Gibson".
[122] Duval, "Letter to Brown".
[123] Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, 69-70.
[124] *Texas State Gazette*, "A Proclamation". June 21, 1851. The Portal To Texas History, *Texas State Gazette Archives*. https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth80984/m1/1/ (accessed April 24, 2025).
[125] Brian Delay. "The U.S.-Mexican War: Forgotten Foes," *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies* Fall (2010). 15. https://clacs.berkeley.edu/publications/berkeley-review-latin-american-studies/fall-2010.

Texas Rangers but they were not considered a military organization.[126] Similar to the situation in the Indian Territory, military officials and soldiers did not care to strictly enforce policies aiding tribal leadership as it could lead to unwanted confrontation. This made inevitable interactions with the U.S. military much easier as officials were keen to assist friendly natives journeying towards Mexico. The most poignant example of this happening during the journey of John Horse is when they encountered a military convoy led by Mayor John T. Sprague.[127] The older Seminole warriors in the group, including John Horse and Wild Cat, recognized Sprague as they fought against him and his troops during the Second Seminole War. While they fought against each other just two decades prior, Sprague did not treat them as enemies. The soldiers offered food and liquor and John Horse, Wild Cat and Sprague drank throughout the night reminiscing on the events that led them to this moment.[128]

According to a legislative document from the Mexican authorities, the crossing of the Rio Grande by the Seminole group took place in July 1850, a year and a half after their departure.[129] They applied for sanctuary and as they had expected the Mexican Officials were keen on assisting them. Wild Cat described his demands in the Seminole language, John Horse translated those into English and a Kickapoo tribe member converted that into Spanish. The officer in charge granted them a temporary arrangement for supplies and land while they waited for a confirmation from the central government in Mexico City. This arrangement was signed by all four parties, with John Horse signing on behalf of the 'Mascogos'. The term 'Mascogo', possibly derived from the Muscogee tribe, was used to differentiate between John Horse and the free blacks and the Seminoles that Wild Cat brought along.[130] They would be referred to as such in all legal documents procured by the Mexican government, granting them special acknowledgement that had not been the case previously. News of the successful journey reached back to the Indian Territory where some of the Black Seminoles and indigenous slaves had remained in fear of the dangerous trip. Realizing that the foolhardy plan by John Horse and Wild Cat was indeed possible, many attempted to recreate their

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[126] Duval, "Letter to Brown".

[127] Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (University of Illinois Press, 1965). 42.

[128] Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusions of the Florida War*, 187.

[129] John Horse, "Jauregui to Ministro de Guerra y Marina". Letter. July 18, 1850. Porter Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708 (accessed April 21, 2025).

[130] Rocío Gil, "The Mascogo/Black Seminole Diaspora: The Intertwining Borders of Citizenship, Race, and Ethnicity." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2014). 24. https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/toc/rlac20/9/1

achievement by fleeing the Indian Territory. While it is hard to claim that none of these attempts were successful as there is a possibility that fleeing groups had other destinations, all documentation on the following endeavors ended with the Black Seminoles being killed or re-enslaved.[131] John Horse and his people were lucky, but they also harnessed every option available to them and prepared extensively to guarantee the best odds for success. A remarkable aspect of John Horse's approach to this was the lack of violence during the journey. It had previously been a crutch or last-minute plan for him during the Seminole Wars but his negotiating skills and peaceful attitude prevented any conflict from escalating.

Adapting to Mexico

Approval for permanent residence from the Mexican president arrived on the 16th of October in 1850. An area between the Rio Grande and the San Antonio river in the state of Coahuila was designated to both the Mascogos and Seminoles in exchange for their compliance with Mexican law.[132] They were also not allowed to seek out any hostile action with the United States with an exception made for self-defense. This clause was added as the Mexican government did not want another conflict with their neighbors so soon after the Mexican-American War and the proximity of the free blacks to the slave state of Texas could ignite new disputes. This foresight of the Mexican government was also fueled by the notoriety that the names John Horse and Wild Cat had gained with the U.S. government. The story of their successful escape had reached the top of U.S. government and their newfound freedom was seen as proof of governmental failure[133]. It did not take long for the Seminoles and Mascogos to agitate their previous country as they started hunting across the Rio Grande on U.S. soil. After three confrontations with Texan settlers, the Mexican government intervened and proposed a new settlement.[134] This new settlement was further away from the Mexican-U.S. border near the town of Múzquiz and would later be known as Nacimiento de los Negros. Wild Cat and John Horse helped settle their communities separate from each other but made sure not to move too far apart in case of hostile attacks. The land in Mexico was suitable for a

[131] Laurence Foster, *Negro Indian Relationships in the Southeast* (AMS Press, 1978), 42-43.
[132] Curly Jefferson, "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers,* 1941, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.
[133] General Brooke, "Letter to Jones". Letter. November 21, 1850. Records of the Adjutant General Office, *B707.* https://dp.la/item/f23643d64a90137bb039bd30b0f135f3 (accessed May 12, 2025).
[134] Julius Froebel, *Seven Years' Travel in Central America, Northern Mexico, and the Far West of the United States* (Richard Bentley, 1859). 351.

number of agricultural traditions that both the Mascogos and Seminoles were familiar with like corn, wheat and rice. They did have to learn new irrigation methods for growing the crops as the climate in Nacimiento was drier than that of Florida or the Indian Territory.[135] While the Mascogos still used their own Creole language or the Seminole dialect, communication outward was done in Spanish in order to appease their new neighbors. They adopted Spanish names through baptism, often using direct translations of their English names. John Horse became known as Juan Caballo and Wild Cat turned into Gato del Monte for example.[136] Although baptism in Mexico was largely a Catholic ordeal, the Mascogo baptized their newborns into rivers in a similar fashion to their ancestors. Some members of the community eventually embraced Catholicism as their preferred denomination but the majority simply incorporated some Catholic customs into their own cultural experience. These adaptations made settling in the new land easier and improved the bond of trust between the Mascogos, Seminoles and the Mexican government.

Although new life in Mexico was more peaceful than the events that made it happen, the Black Seminoles were still faced with hostilities in their new home. While they had established a definite autonomy in Mexican land, and their skills in providing competence had not deteriorated, establishing a sense of relatedness remained a difficult task. Although the Mexican government had provided a cordial welcome to the emigrants, most of their direct neighbors were not keen on the Mascogo settlement. The relative lull of agricultural life did not suit the preferred lifestyle of most of the male Mascogo population, as they had been warriors for the largest part of their life. Hunting expeditions by the Mascogo and Seminoles frequently ventured into land not belonging to them and accusations of stolen cattle and horses were levied against the communities.[137] They were also still the target of raids by Apache and Comanche tribes who lived in the area. The Mascogo and Seminole settlements did not offer the same protection as a traditional Mexican town due to their habit of spacing out their houses, making them easy prey for horseback warriors. John Horse saw that the restlessness of the Mascogo warriors could be used as a weapon against these raids but the Mexican government had prevented them from engaging in hostile action. He came

[135] Ramón Múzquiz, "Letter to Sr. Alcalde 10. de Múzquiz/Complaint of the Seminoles". Letter. September 13, 1858. Muzquiz Records, *Mexico records, 1553-1889 (bulk 1800-1899)*. https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/archiveComponent/702135642 (accessed May 12, 2025).
[136] Garza Gonzales, "Message to 1a. Autoridad Política de Múzquiz" Letter correspondence. March 25 and April 21 1857. Muzquiz Records, *Mexico records, 1553-1889 (bulk 1800-1899)*. https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/archiveComponent/702135642 (accessed May 12, 2025).
[137] Garza Gonzales, "Message to 1a. Autoridad Política de Múzquiz".

up with a solution: signing up for the Mexican army and organizing a frontier defense.[138] Mexican military officials were impressed by the combat and scouting capabilities of the community and registered them into two separate regiments, one led by Wild Cat and the other by John Horse. They now had the mandate of the government to actively search out and defeat the tribes that had been plaguing their settlements and their military service provided a steady income for the community. John Horse and Wild Cat had fought together as members of the Seminole community, as soldiers in the U.S. army and now under the Mexican flag against other tribes.

The military service brought peace and financial growth to the Mascogo and Seminole community for the next two decades. With the Civil War in the United States abolishing the practice of slavery in 1865, waves of migrants started to arrive in Nacimiento. The arrival of these new people made for a distinction between three different groups according to Black Seminole oral history.[139] The first were the Black Seminoles who had originally traveled with John Horse and Wild Cat. The senior members of this group were still active warriors but focused most of their attention on the upkeep and counseling of the tribe. The second group was made up of individuals who had joined the community on their own terms, usually arriving from within Mexico or Texas. The largest part of this group was black although some Native Mexicans are suspected to have joined. This group often intermarried with the first group and eventually fully assimilated into the Black Seminoles. The last group is the offspring of the first two groups and is considered the first generation of Black Seminoles native to Mexico. They continued the tradition of serving in the Mexican Army under their own banner but gradually adapted to the customs of their Mexican homeland. The quick population growth of this community made them valuable to the Mexican government and a long-standing alliance of trust and acceptance fostered further growth for the Black Seminoles.

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[138] "Muster roll of Detachment of Seminole Negro Indian Scouts". Military Records. August 16, 1855. Military Division of the Missouri, *Special File, Seminole Negro Indians, 1872–76, Records of Army Continental Commands*. https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/393.html RG393:107 (accessed May 14, 2025).

[139] Interviews with Sarah Daniels and Julia Payne, "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers*, 1942, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.

The Last Ride of John Horse

John Horse reached the age of 70 in 1882, and his continued efforts for his community had taken a toll on his body. Most of the interviews conducted with Black Seminole descendants about this period describe him as a patriarchal leader but not as a warrior. He was still the de facto leader of the Black Seminole people in Mexico but he was no longer capable of joining the Mascogo warband.[140] His duties were confined to the day-to-day management of the tribe and the providing of advice to younger chiefs. Although his age prevented him from physical action, his spirit remained dedicated to the protection and survival of his community. He continued his diplomatic efforts via correspondence with Mexican and U.S. military officials and any official documentation regarding the Mascogo had to be signed by him personally.[141] This was still very necessary as the Mexican Civil War had elevated the danger in the region. The Mexican government could not adequately protect the Mascogo community anymore and raids by government opposition and indigenous tribes increased in frequency. A territorial dispute once again arose when a group of white settlers 'bought' the land on which the Mascogo resided and threatened them with eviction. A Coahuila official with whom John Horse had formed a friendship advised him to take the matter to court but John Horse decided against this as he thought that justice would rule in favor of the white settlers. His plan was simple in premise but difficult in execution: personally present the issue to the president of Mexico.

An elderly John Horse climbed in the saddle to defend the right of freedom and a home for his community, accompanied by a few other representatives. After the entire tribe had expressed their gratitude and waved them goodbye, they rode for a week until they arrived in Mexico City. The president of Mexico in 1882 was Manuel Gonzales but he was installed by Don Porfirio Diaz and it is widely assumed that he controlled the government at the time.[142] While details of the meeting are subject to the oral history tradition of the Black Seminoles and could therefore be exaggerated in order to provide a better story, there is conclusive proof that a meeting between John Horse and Diaz took place. According to the oral history John Horse remained silent for the first few moments of the encounter until he

[140] Dindie Factor, Rena July, and Bill Daniels, "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers,* 1943, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.
[141] Dolly July "Black Seminole Descendants" interview by Kenneth W. Porter, *Kenneth W. Porter Papers,* 1941, transcription, https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708.
[142] Riley Aiken, interview.

said: “Just so, *mi presidente,* are the Mexicans and the white men pushing the Seminoles - they want us not merely from a divan but from the earth itself!”.[143] The presence of this elderly chief and his plea for freedom resonated with Diaz as he ordered the protection of the Mascogo, Seminole and Kickapoo land claim in 1884.[144] This declaration enshrined the full ownership of the territory in the hands of the Mascogo and prevented future claims by outsiders.

John Horse did not experience the result of his hard-fought diplomatic and military battles for his community. He never returned from the trip to Mexico City and died sometime after the meeting with Diaz. There is no conclusive answer as to what killed him exactly but he was buried according to Mexican customs in a cemetery close to the city.[145] Some members of the Mascogo tribe journeyed to investigate the circumstances of his death but no evidence of misconduct or foul play was discovered.[146] His death was mourned by his community, the Seminoles of Wild Cat, the Kickapoos that had joined him in Texas and his family. His journey as leader of the Black Seminoles had taken him from Florida to the Indian Territory and from there through Texas into Mexico. Although he had faced many dangers and adversaries during this journey, the survival and resistance of his people remained his motivation until his death. The legacy he left behind is one of freedom and sovereignty for the Mascogo people of Nacimiento, a community that is still alive and thriving in the 21st century. While hardships against them still persist, the figure of John Horse remains as an inspiration for the fight against colonial violence, discrimination and expansionism.

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[143] Riley Aiken, interview.

[144] “El Nacimiento, index number 5, informe primera parte”. *Congressional Documents.* 17 June 1895, 60th Congress, 1st Session, S.D. 215 93-103. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-GP3-0520c9e5ad672ae80e8c1c9d7d8d1e8c/pdf/GOVPUB-GP3-0520c9e5ad672ae80e8c1c9d7d8d1e8c.pdf

[145] “Death certificate of John Horse”. Death Certificate. Porter Papers, *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.* https://archives.nypl.org/scm/20684#c647708 (accessed 20 April, 2025).

[146] Kenneth W. Porter, "Freedom Over Me: A Folk -History of the Wild Cat & -John Horse Band of Seminole Negroes, 1848–1882," Porter Papers.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted four distinct elements in the leadership of John Horse, who I argue helped to navigate the Black Seminole community throughout the nineteenth century and helped shape their survival and resistance against U.S. expansionism. These four elements are: unity, independence, mediation and resilience. These four elements together form the toolset that John Horse utilized to protect his vulnerable community against outside forces. While it is impossible to attribute the survival of the entire Black Seminole community on him alone, his presence as the most prominent leader of the group during the largest part of the nineteenth century places him as the most important figure in this process. Each of these elements is manifested in some form throughout the events that transpired between 1812 and 1882 and the legacy of his leadership extends beyond that.

Four elements

The first element of John Horse's leadership was his focus on the unity of the Black Seminole community. The Black Seminoles had a largely passive role in the decision-making process of the Seminole tribe prior to the Seminole Wars. They lived in separate settlements apart from their indigenous brothers but they were still subject to the ruling of their appointed tribal chief. John Horse took advantage of the power vacuum created by the Second Seminole War and used it to unite his people under one spokesperson. This quest for unification benefitted the Black Seminoles throughout the process of removal as John Horse made sure that all members of his group were included in treaties and agreements. The Black Seminoles went from a collection of fragmented groups with the same ideals of freedom and sovereignty to a community that was united under one banner, a movement spear-headed by John Horse. While a lot of the Black Seminoles had different roots and stories, he played into the shared Seminole and Black heritage to shape the group into a distinct unit. He emphasized cultural continuity throughout the many migrations of the tribe by maintaining traditions and practices from the Florida territory in Oklahoma and Mexico. This unifying element is also very visible during the time in Indian Territory where John Horse made sure that all members of his community were taken care of and listened to, regardless of whether they agreed with his

methods. There were multiple instances throughout his life where it would be in his own self-interest to focus on his personal and family life, especially after the multiple assassination attempts, but he insisted on fighting for the united cause of the Black Seminoles.

The second element of John Horse's leadership was his continued focus on the sovereignty and independence of the Black Seminoles. He recognized the importance of an independent legal status and sought to differentiate the Black Seminoles from the indigenous Seminoles through negotiations. The unfulfilled promises and broken agreements of both the U.S. government and the Seminole tribe had provided John Horse with the harsh lesson that these groups could not be trusted completely. He separated the Black Seminole warriors from the native indigenous warriors in order to secure special treatment during the removal to Oklahoma, where he once again made sure that agreements were in place for them specifically. This striving for independence and sovereignty is most visible in chapter four as he disconnects the Black Seminoles from the main Seminole leadership by fleeing to Mexico. While he did rely on Wild Cat as a companion and voice of authority during and after the escape, he did so because of his strategic importance and the bond they had fostered over multiple decades. An important factor of this independence is also the nurturing of an independent militia in which every able-bodied man was taught to fight. John Horse himself had grown up in a time where Black Seminoles were largely tasked with agricultural duties but he realized the importance of self-preservation as he harnessed his military gifts as both a direct form of protection against violence and a tool to be used in negotiations.

The third element of John Horse's leadership was his consistent attempts at mediation and negotiations with other parties. While the shaping of an independent community was important, John Horse understood that friendly alliances with the U.S. government and Seminole leadership were necessary for the Black Seminoles to survive. Their small size and dubious legal status made them an easy prey for slaver gangs, rivalling tribes and other threats and they needed some sort of external protection by other parties. John Horse used his linguistic and diplomatic skills throughout the Seminole Wars and the process of Indian Removal to temper the growing tensions between the U.S. and the Seminoles and helped translate to ensure communication went smoothly. He continued these efforts in the Indian Territory as he upheld communications with Thomas Jesup and others while involving himself with local politics as often as possible. A more militaristic stance in this matter was not feasible for the Black Seminoles as they lacked the manpower and weapons to fight against titans like the U.S. military so this diplomatic stance helped foster peaceful resolutions. It also positioned John Horse as a trustworthy figure in the eyes of government

officials as his personal visits to Washington and Mexico City showed his willingness to help and peaceful intentions. His focus on mediation and his cooperative mindset directly led to the Black Seminoles being granted a stretch of land in Mexico as his meeting with Don Porfirio Diaz shows the impact of his story on the president. He also tried to uphold friendly relations with all his neighbors throughout the many migrations of the Black Seminoles, even if those efforts were not reciprocated.

The fourth and final element visible in John Horse's leadership is his resilience towards set-backs and new threats. The four chapters have shown that the danger for Black Seminoles was multi-faceted throughout the nineteenth century and mistreatment, discrimination and violence was a risk at all times. John Horse's ability to adapt to these problems made him a fierce leader who earned a reputation of not backing down from a conflict. This concept works in tandem with the third element where the U.S. Officials and other external leaders saw John Horse as a well-willing but formidable political figure who could not be underestimated. This resilience is also seen in the many adaptations the Black Seminoles had to make to accommodate their new homes via agricultural innovations or cultural practices. John Horse has risked his own life and liberty for his community and his actions inspired the Black Seminoles to consistently challenge the status quo through any means necessary, but always preferring a peaceful resolution above a violent one. This element is especially noteworthy when you consider the lack of education that John Horse enjoyed during his life. The political and legal obstacles thrown in front of the Black Seminoles were nuanced and difficult for experienced officials and leaders but John Horse navigated them through autodidactic practice and a network of allies.

Agency and Interethnic Struggles

These four elements place John Horse as a central figure in the survival and resistance of the Black Seminoles during the nineteenth century, but they also reveal an intersection between African-American and indigenous struggles for freedom. The time between the Seminole Wars and the eventual escape to Mexico saw John Horse acting not only as a spokesperson for the Black Seminoles but also as a prominent figure within the general Seminole tribe. His cooperation and bond with chiefs like Wild Cat, Alligator and Osceola show that there was a significant overlap in the issues facing the Black Seminole and Seminole community. The threat of annihilation by the U.S. government was continual for both parties and the search

for freedom and sovereignty was also shared. Mulroy and Mahon draw the same conclusion but do not elaborate on why that meant that the two groups would cooperate.[147][148] The Seminole tribe had organized their society around a largely mutually beneficial system in which the Black Seminoles enjoyed a relatively good standing in the group and the indigenous Seminoles benefitted from a stronger and reliable workforce. This societal structure was of great importance to them as evidenced by their refusal to comply with the Creek or American model of chattel slavery. Scholars researching the Black Seminoles have made attempts at classifying the "indigenousness" of the group by focusing on the difference in treatment and cultural practices between them and indigenous Seminoles. Littlefield remarks that the separate dialect and religious practice of baptizing prove that the cultural bond was meager.[149] While it is apparent that there is a certain degree of separation between them, especially after they settled in Mexico, the similarities are what had brought them to that point. The history of the Black Seminoles and Seminoles is interconnected through a common enemy in the United States government, communal cultural and religious beliefs and a shared goal of a peaceful, free and sovereign future.

The central figure of John Horse within the Black Seminole community also challenges the perception of black, mixed and indigenous people within the historical context. The lack of widespread secondary source material on the subject highlights a gap in the dynamics between the Black Seminoles and other parties, suggesting that they played a passive part in the events of the nineteenth century. Kenneth W. Porter's work is the sole exception in this field as his perspective of the events through the eyes of John Horse shows a lot of agency and active participation in changing the status quo.[150] John Horse's adaptive leadership and the many actions he performed in this period show that the Black Seminoles did in fact have some degree of agency in the events that happened. The act of resisting removal in Florida and fleeing Indian Territory in Oklahoma indicate that the Black Seminoles had a very active role in challenging the status quo of the nineteenth century and the success of these actions signifies that they had an impact on changing that situation. The rather unique legal and cultural situation of the Black Seminoles makes it difficult to draw broader conclusions about the agency of Black Indians as a whole, but this research proves that even minor forms or acts of resistance can influence broader movements and create an

[147] Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border,* 180.
[148] Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War,* 153.
[149] Littlefield, *Seminole Burning*, 131.
[150] Porter, *Black Seminoles*. II-X.

impact. In the case of the Black Seminoles this resistance culminates itself into the figure of John Horse but other groups of Black Indians undoubtedly had similar figures that filled that role.

Perhaps the simplest argument for the effects of John Horse's leadership of the Black Seminoles during the nineteenth century is found in his legacy. The many interviews with descendants of John Horse and his community that were utilized in this research paint the picture of a revered leader whose actions still inspire members of the Black Seminoles. Porter's work in collecting these testimonials has been crucial for protecting the cultural and indigenous perspective of the Black Seminoles in the academic field. While the Black Seminoles currently reside in Florida, the Bahama's, Oklahoma or Nacimiento and no longer call themselves Black Seminoles, John Horse is still seen as an important figure in their history and as a celebrated man in their culture. The Black Seminole, Mascogo and Seminole people are currently still under legal scrutiny, facing border issues and pressure from larger governments. Discussions about the legal identity of the Black Seminoles by the U.S. government and the Seminole tribe are still going on and the threat of exclusion or erasure is a constant factor. While the nineteenth century was a crucial time period for the survival and resistance of the Black Seminoles and John Horse was the main character for most of those chapters, their story is far from over and deserves to be documented.

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