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John Missall, Mary Lou Missall. *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004. xxii + 255 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2715-9.

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Seminole Wars or American Wars?

The Seminole Indian resistance to American expansion into Florida in the nineteenth century and the interaction of African Americans and Seminoles has long fascinated scholars and the general public. Consider, for example, that the second of the three "Seminole Wars" from 1835 to 1842 killed over 1,500 American soldiers and dozens of civilians and Indians, resulted in over 3,000 Seminoles being removed to Indian Territory, and cost the national government over "$30 million, a sum that was greater than the entire federal budget for just one of those years" (p. xv). Apparent parallels between the tropical fighting in Florida and that of later American combat in the Pacific and Vietnam, and against other Native populations around the world, probably have also worked to fuel interest in the "Seminole Wars." In the last couple of decades a major new monograph on some aspect of Seminole history has appeared nearly every year. Seminole history, and Southeastern Indian history generally, have benefited in recent years from a new ethnohistorical focus that takes Indian motivations and Indian culture seriously in an attempt to more accurately explain Indian actions and relations with Euro-Americans. This scholarly movement is forcing a revision of many longstanding notions about Indian-European contact, including the labels that we Americans have long ascribed to events and peoples. Though it is definitely not the intention of John and Mary Lou Missall's book to be revisionist, a strong case, based on their presentation of the evidence, can nonetheless be made that we should no longer call the wars between the Seminoles and the United States the "Seminole Wars," which strongly suggests that the Seminoles are to blame for the hostilities and that Americans were innocent. Instead, it is clear that the U.S. government and Americans of varying backgrounds were the aggressors and that they sought nothing less than either the banishment or the extermination of the Seminole people and their African-American relatives and allies. For the Seminoles forced to respond to these pressures, the ensuing wars against the United States are more accurately termed the "American Wars against the Seminoles," for it was the Americans who made unreasonable demands that led to foreseeable conflict.

The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Indian Conflict is a largely descriptive work with no unifying thesis, except an inadvertent one stating that American aggression forced the Seminoles to defend their lives, families, and land with violence. It does provide a useful accounting of the American officials and military commanders, and the overall military aspects of the wars, however; and it supplies a chronological base line for understanding events in the three wars and between the wars. The first "Seminole War," in Missall and Missall's words, was "a punitive excursion into the Spanish colony of La Florida in 1818, led by Andrew Jackson" (p. xv). The second "Seminole War" (1835-42) was caused by American attempts to remove the Seminoles to Indian Territory in the early 1830s, despite having promised the Seminoles a reservation of land in central Florida in the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek. Deceit, or at least confusion, characterized the 1832 Treaty of Payne's Landing and the subsequent written agreement of seven Seminole leaders at Ft. Gibson, Arkansas in 1833. The U.S. government insisted that the Seminoles had agreed to removal west of the Mississippi River while the Seminoles and their African-American counterparts largely rejected that notion and refused to be placed under the control of the Creek Nation in Indian Territory. Violent resistance soon began. American General Thomas Sidney Jesup added to Seminole distrust during the second war when he instituted a policy of arresting Seminoles who had been invited to peace talks. The third "Seminole War" (1855-58) also resulted from increasing pressures put on the remaining Seminoles to leave the state. Seminoles under leaders like Billy Bowlegs finally fought back in a protracted guerrilla war. A Seminole delegation from Indian Territory traveled to

Florida and helped convince Bowlegs to stop fighting and emigrate west. Most, but not all, remaining Florida Seminoles joined him.

In all of these wars, the authors astutely note that white American fears were driven as much if not more by the actions of run-away African-American slaves than by Indian resistance to white settlers. Since the late-seventeenth century, Florida had provided refuge for slaves escaping British or American plantations in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Alabama. This reviewer longed for more context and detail about the Black Seminoles, and American response to them, especially after the authors seemed to discount General Jesup's remark in 1837 that the second war "is a negro, not an Indian war" (p. 126). The seven maps of the Florida campaigns and Seminole Indian movements are very useful and professionally produced. Although the book includes endnotes and utilizes selective primary document sources, it is written with a general audience in mind and tries to tell a complicated story in a simplified manner. There is a place for such works in the publishing world, but this book's weaknesses outweigh its strengths.

One of the advertised strengths of this book is that it places the events of the "Seminole Wars" within the larger stream of American history. In some ways, the authors are successful in this effort as they highlight how other U.S. government concerns, such as the war with Mexico, other conflicts with Indians, the financial panic of 1837, and personality disputes among American officials and military commanders, impacted how Americans viewed and prosecuted war against the Seminoles. Frustratingly, though, there were times when the authors either got aspects of general American history wrong or confused issues with imprecise terminology. President Thomas Jefferson is labeled a Democrat on page 48 but then correctly called a Democratic-Republican on page 80. The authors implicitly follow Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s interpretation (now more than half-century old) of the Jacksonian-Democrats as composed of "western liberals," but do not consider the outpouring of revisionist scholarly work on Jackson, his party, or the Market Revolution since then. Whigs are equated with "conservatives" and Democrats with "liberals" (p. 132), but depending on how those labels are employed the opposite was just as true. St. Augustine is deemed the "nation's oldest city" (p. 140) when Indian pueblos in the Southwest have been permanently occupied far longer.

Colonial American history is portrayed, in this book, in antiquarian terms with the authors explaining that "Americans had seen themselves as part of a providential grand plan" since the time of the "Pilgrims and Puritans," and that Americans supposedly believed that "God had provided [America] as a place where Christian reformers could establish the perfect society" (p. 15). While there is no doubt that seventeenth-century New England Puritans and some later Americans, infused with notions of Manifest Destiny, thought in those terms and used it as a public justification for why Indians must be removed from the land, as historians we must seek more complete explanations. Puritan New England was not the typical English colonial experience in North America; areas like the Chesapeake were. Outside of early New England, and even there in various ways, the primary motive for European settlement was profit or subsistence, not religious freedom.[1] Acknowledgment of this fact by Missall and Missall would have led them to more thoroughly consider other explanations of American behavior in the "Seminole Wars" besides the working out of "God's Plan," such as greed, profit, imperialism, and racism. Curiously, these more relevant motives for American behavior towards the Seminoles are mentioned by the authors briefly (pp. 67-68), but are never explored in enough depth to counter the book's more pervasive argument of Americans acting out some divine plan of expansion.

More egregious for a work with southeastern Indians as a principal topic, the discussion of Indian Removal and the famous Marshall Supreme Court decisions in the Cherokee cases is too brief and simply wrong. The authors assert that Chief Justice John Marshall "effectively put the welfare of the Indians in Jackson's hands" by deeming them wards of the national government (p. 82). In fact, Marshall ruled against the state of Georgia and in favor of Cherokee sovereignty in the *Worcester v. Georgia* case in 1832 (a legal action the authors do not mention), finding Georgia's extension of state jurisdiction over Cherokee lands unconstitutional. That decision brought into legal question the whole notion of state jurisdiction over Indian land and Indian Removal, since the federal Indian Removal Act of 1830 was instigated, in President Jackson's words, by a need to solve the "crisis" of state-federal jurisdictional conflict. Nevertheless, Georgia ignored the decision and President Jackson refused to abide by the executive branch's constitutional obligation to enforce it; astonishingly, the authors call Jackson "a staunch defender of the [U.S.] Constitution" (p. 27). It was Jackson acting in an extralegal manner, not Marshall or the Supreme Court, who delivered up the Cherokees and other Indian groups for banishment to the west.

While this book was explicitly written in "an at-

tempt to understand why the United States government and certain of its citizens acted as they did" (p. xviii), and therefore Seminole motivations are secondary or ignored, an incorporation of works by scholars–such as J. Leitch Wright Jr., Jane F. Lancaster, Daniel Littlefield, Kenneth W. Porter, and Bruce Edward Twyman, among others–who have studied the Seminoles and the Black Seminoles could have contributed significantly to this book's usefulness as a comprehensive history of these wars.[2] The authors do include a brief further reading section but fail to mention the publications of most of these scholars. The authors also forthrightly state that "those who are familiar with the [Seminole Wars] will find little [in this book] that is new" (pp. xvii-xviii), but by leaving out much of the newer scholarship they make their work seem even more dated. Consideration of scholarship about the Seminoles may have helped the authors avoid incorrect statements as, for example, that run-away African-American slaves "were generally more accepting of an agricultural life than their [Seminole] Indian counterparts" (p. 12). As the authors' own descriptions make clear, the Seminoles, like most other Southeastern Indians, practiced horticulture continually, with women being the primary farmers. Throughout the book, the authors speculate about what the Seminoles may have felt or how they may have perceived some action by the Americans, yet they made no attempt to understand Seminole culture on its own terms as other authors have tried. Moreover, modern works that privilege the Indian side of history within their titles (such as *The Seminole Wars* of this book) should not, in my thinking, only be histories of the American prosecution of that conflict with little explication of the Indian side of the story. Related to this one-sided focus is an annoying habit of the authors to explain away as inevitable what happened to the Seminoles, such as when they say that "white Americans should not feel guilty" and that banishment or killing of Indians was a "natural occurrence" (p. 225). I can appreciate the authors not wanting to enter into a slippery blame game, but responsibility for historical actions and ideas must be explained and not sugar-coated. Governments and persons in positions of authority made decisions that impacted real people, and they should be held accountable for those decisions. If the authors had included a counter narrative comprised of Seminole voices and perspectives, they could have produced a fuller story of what happened and why.

Notes

[1]. The literature about the centrality of the Chesapeake and the aberrance of New England to the English colonial experience is extensive but should start with Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[2]. J. Leitch Wright Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Jane F. Lancaster, *Removal Aftershock: The Seminoles' Struggles to Survive in the West, 1836-1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles: From Removal to Emancipation* (1st ed. 1977; Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001); Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); and Bruce Edward Twyman, *The Black Seminole Legacy and North American Politics, 1693-1845* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1999).

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