

H-Net Reviews

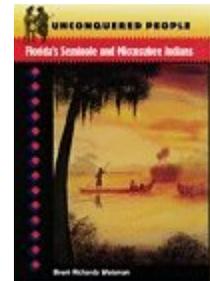
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Jerald T. Milanich, Jay I. Kislak Reference Collection (Library of Congress). *Florida's Indians from Ancient Times to the Present*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998. xi + 194 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-1598-9; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-1599-6.

Brent Richards Weisman. *Unconquered People: Florida's Seminole and Miccosukee Indians (Native Peoples, Cultures, and Places of the Southeastern United States)*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999. x + 170 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-1662-7; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-1663-4.

Reviewed by Paul E. Hoffman (Department of History, Louisiana State University)
Published on H-Florida (January, 2004)



These two volumes are part of a series, *Native Peoples, Cultures, and Places of the Southeastern United States*, edited by Jerald T. Milanich. They are intended for general audiences but provide excellent syntheses of and introductions to current knowledge on their topics for scholars unfamiliar with the history of Native Peoples in the present state of Florida. The illustrations are chosen to enhance understanding of materials in the text. Milanich uses sidebars (set as indented text rather than true sidebar text) quoting various archaeologists and his own experiences with Florida sites and excavations. Weisman uses a less personal style and no side bars. The bibliographies of both works will be useful for the non-specialist. Weisman adds a reversed chronology, starting with the most recent events and working backward to 10,000 years ago. It is focused on the Seminoles and their ancestors but has some value for Milanich's work as well. The language of both books is generally free of jargon, although some technical terms appear when appropriate to discussions of ceramics, for example. Too, each author (Milanich especially) is careful to explain basic archaeological and anthropological concepts and terms.

Milanich traces the successive cultural groupings recognized in the archaeological literature from the earliest artifacts (ca. 12,000 BCE) to the modern groups. At least until the arrival of the Spaniards, this is a story of increasing populations and separation of groups into distinctive regional cultures, shown mostly in pottery styles. It is also a story of interaction with and adaptation to a chang-

ing environment as the age of glaciers ended. Although many people think that Florida has abundant water, in fact water sources were critical to where Native Americans settled throughout history. The introduction of maize marked a major transformation, allowing groups outside of Florida to develop the complex chiefdoms of the Mississippian tradition, best known for its mound building. Florida societies, faced with a less favorable ecology (in particular, poor soils), could not develop the population densities needed for the Mississippian-style chiefdoms. Still, some Florida societies in the Tallahassee hills area and in North Central Florida (Gainesville-Lake City area) did attempt to imitate at least some aspects of those chiefdoms.

The coming of old world peoples from the sixteenth century onwards brought about adaptations to the new cultural environment and the destruction of native societies by old world diseases, and some exploitation by the intruders. By the eighteenth century, almost no Indians native to Florida survived. Mostly they were replaced by Creek, who in time became the Seminole and Miccosukee.

To give the story concreteness, Milanich uses particular archaeological sites as illustrations of the various cultural groupings and attributes. Most were chosen because the sites are in some way accessible to the public or at least in familiar places (but you need a map of Florida to find most of them!).

Weisman argues that a desire for independence from other Creek and the Second Seminole War created the historic peoples, the Seminole and the Miccosukee. Both arose from among Creeks who migrated into Florida in the eighteenth century or fled there after Andrew Jackson's attacks on the Red Stick Creeks in 1814-15. Weisman is careful to note that the origins of both groups among the Creek (a label the English put on peoples they found on the "creeks" of northern and central Georgia) is uncertain, although the emergence of the "Seminole" in the historical record and the development of the unique culture of the two groups are better documented. The Seminole emerged as a distinctive people when Cowkeeper did not join Lower Creek chiefs when they and the British negotiated the treaty of Moultrie Creek in 1765. Waiting a few months, he struck his own deal, in effect declaring that his people were independent of the Creek. The Second Seminole War, 1835-42, seems to have brought about a cultural revival, with traditions such as the Green Corn Dance or busk and medicine bundles gaining new importance as means of strengthening community. At the same time, the former ceremony underwent a simplification from its eighteenth century form, itself perhaps a variant(s) of much earlier ceremonies of purification. Weisman concludes his account with discussions of the current differences between the groups. He speculates that in time they will lose their distinctive culture as pressures from the larger American

culture eventually overwhelm them.

These are such excellent syntheses that I am reluctant to pick at the few flaws I noted in Milanich's work. He labels De Soto's expedition as a conquest expedition (p. 142) when it was in fact an exploratory one prior to conquest, a distinction that perhaps would have been without meaning had he found societies worth subjugating while on his peregrination. Milanich repeats the idea current at the time he wrote that Coosa's population had declined by the 1560s (p. 148). As I have shown elsewhere it had probably not done so.[1] Too, he asserts that the mission Indians were Christians (p. 166). There is equivocal evidence on that subject; that some knew the Catholic liturgy and attended church often cannot be doubted. What they actually believed died with them. But these are minor matters in only a small part of the book. They are more than offset by his use of recent excavation information and a careful noting of points of dispute and controversy and changed interpretations. Weisman also is careful on these points. In sum, both a general reader and an historian wishing a quick introduction to the history of Native Peoples in Florida will find these volumes of value.

Note

[1]. Paul Hoffman, "Did Coosa Decline Between 1541 and 1560?" *Florida Anthropologist* 50 (1997): pp. 25-29.

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