

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

1991

## Review of The Seminole

Susan A. Miller

*Texas Tech University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Miller, Susan A., "Review of The Seminole" (1991). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 627.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/627>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Seminole*. By Merwin S. Garbarino. Indians of North America, edited by Frank W. Porter III. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. Maps, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, glossary, index. 111 pp. \$15.95.

The series *Indians of North America*, intended to introduce various U.S. Indian groups to an audience of young adults, features eye-catching design, tough construction, short bibliographies, boxed treatments of appealing topics, and short four-color photo essays. Although the Florida Seminoles merit such a study, *The Seminole* is too flawed to fill that niche.

One perplexing feature of the series' editorial conception is the use of "ethnic singular" volume titles, the preferred referent of the American Anthropological Association, that at worst is racist and at best a tired literary device. Even taken as plural, "*The Seminole*" misrepresents the book's scope, which disregards three-fourths of the Seminoles, who live in Oklahoma. This volume is also vulnerable to the recurrent complaint that the series uses illustration inappropriately. Authors had no control over the publisher's selections. How, for instance, is the Choctaw pipe bowl pictured on page 19 more appropriate to this book than a Seminole-made object would have been?

The first three chapters survey Seminole history and culture through the nineteenth century. A discussion of precontact Seminole cultures focuses on two Florida groups whose remnants were absorbed into the population who became the Seminoles, but overlooks the Yamassees and other Creek-type groups that comprised the dominant element. The survey of Seminole history from contact through the nineteenth century fails to penetrate its white sources and delivers instead a history of white people's interactions with Florida Indians.

Three chapters on the Florida Seminoles in the twentieth century, the most original and

useful material in the book, discuss the changing population distribution; the integration (especially economically) of Seminoles into white culture; the founding of the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe; and some standard ethnographic factors, such as family organization, residence patterns, and housing. Even here, however, much of the information is drawn largely from interactions that occurred within institutions where Seminole culture articulates with white culture: schools, state and county agencies, economic institutions of tourism, and tribal governments. To view the Florida Seminoles thus from the vantage of institutions readily available to whites is much like viewing the Everglades from those boardwalks that extend from paved roads a few hundred feet into the swamps.

Threaded through the book is a perplexing perception of the Seminoles of Oklahoma. "These Seminole [sic] . . . are not a recognized tribe, and they have retained little of the traditional Seminole culture," states the author on page 81. On the contrary, except by the author and the occasional opposition cadre within its own ranks, the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma is a recognized tribal organization, the Green Corn observance is alive among its members, and, as Richard A. Sattler concludes from his recent fieldwork [Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1987], their culture resembles pre-removal Seminole culture more closely than does that of the contemporary Florida Seminoles.

In view of the volume's problems, general readers might search more widely to understand the Seminoles, and instructors seeking supplemental texts for their courses might instead assign selections from other published works, including works on Oklahoma, where many prerule Seminole practices persist.

SUSAN A. MILLER  
Texas Tech University