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Review of Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas

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Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas. By Kevin Mulroy. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993. Introduction, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. x + 246 pp. \$29.00.

The 1992 Festival of American Folklife, held in Washington, D.C., featured an exhibit entitled "Maroon Culture in the Americas," in which members of maroon communities from the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America exhibited their crafts, foodways, and music and dance. Included among these representatives was a contingent from the United States—the Texas Seminole Maroons—whose display proudly emphasized their historical relationship with the Seminole Indians and the crucial role played by their forebears in the opening of the southwest to white settlement.

Kevin Mulroy tells the fascinating story of these unique African-American people whose communities are also found in Mexico, the Bahamas, and Oklahoma. Their ancestors were primarily escaped slaves (maroons) who, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, established communities on the Florida frontier and formed alliances with the Seminoles. Whites often described their relationship as one of masters and slaves, but the Indians and maroons were bound by a mutual need for protection, and maroon communities were largely autonomous and often far removed from the settlements of their nominal owners. Maroon leaders based their decisions upon what was best for their people, in some cases running afoul of their Indian allies. Indians and blacks fought together during the Seminole Wars, and only after the security of their people was promised did the maroon leaders agree to remove to Indian Territory.

This pledge was not upheld, and in 1849, a party of maroons and Seminoles led by John Horse and Wild Cat left the Indian Territory for Mexico, where they were granted land in exchange for their military services against the raids of the so-called "wild" tribes. By 1861 the majority of the Seminoles returned to the

Seminole Nation, but the blacks chose to remain. In 1870 the United States Army recruited a number of the Mexican maroons to form the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts who, between 1870 and 1914, distinguished themselves in expeditions against the resistant tribes of western Texas, earning four Congressional Medals of Honor. Despite their many years of faithful service, the Scouts and their families became pawns in an intra-government game of pass-the-buck. Officials made many recommendations as to what should be done about the maroons (who were often destitute), but no agency wanted to accept responsibility for granting them land in Texas or facilitating their return to the Seminole Nation. The Texas maroons eventually established a community at Brackettville, directly opposite the Scouts' base at Ft. Clark, where their descendants continue to live today, keeping alive their distinguished history and traditions through the Seminole Indian Scout Cemetery Association.

Mulroy incorporates oral histories into his narrative, thus enriching and enlivening the documentary record, and brings an important dimension to his analytical perspective through comparison with other maroon societies. This book is a significant contribution to Native American and African-American history, but it is also a tribute to the tenacity of all of the Seminole Maroons, who continue to fight for their rights as proud and distinct people.

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