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Seminole Voices

Indians of the Southeast

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Seminole Voices

Reflections on Their
Changing Society,
1970–2000

Julian M. Pleasants and
Harry A. Kersey Jr.

University of Nebraska Press • Lincoln & London

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Pleasants, Julian M.

Seminole voices : reflections on their changing society,
1970–2000 / Julian M. Pleasants and Harry A. Kersey, Jr.

p. cm. — (Indians of the Southeast)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8032-2986-0 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Seminole Indians—Social conditions. 2. Seminole
Indians—Education. 3. Seminole Indians—Religion.
4. Seminole Indians—Medicine. 5. Seminole Indians—
Housing. 6. Seminole Indians—Rites and ceremonies.
7. Seminole Indians—Ethnic identity. 8. Social change—
Florida. 9. Florida—Social conditions—20th century.
I. Kersey, Harry A., 1935– II. Title.

E99.S28.P54 2010

975.9004'973859—dc22

2009041201

Set in Dante by Kim Essman.

For Rod, Steve, and Jessica—JMP

For Shaina, my favorite
granddaughter—HAK

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Series Preface

The Seminoles were among the pioneers of Indian gaming, and today they own one of the most successful gaming enterprises in the country. The Seminoles are also the most culturally conservative of the South's Native peoples. They continue to live in the Everglades, where their ancestors took refuge during the Seminole wars. Although Seminoles no longer live in open-sided chikees located on hammocks or depend on hunting and subsistence farming for their livelihood, the memory of such an existence is fresh. Many Seminoles speak their own language, and, for many, the traditional Green Corn Ceremony is central to their lives. At the same time, gaming revenues have sparked economic development, a renewed emphasis on education, an increase in family incomes, and an expansion of tribal services. How can Seminoles seize the opportunities at hand and still hold onto the beliefs and practices that defined them as Seminole? In *Seminole Voices*, distinguished historians Julian Pleasants and Harry Kersey give the Seminoles an opportunity to describe how the changes brought by gaming have affected their lives. The authors have constructed the narrative by focusing on specific topics—economic change, education, religion and medicine, family structure and living conditions, language, and culture—but they draw heavily on interviews, conducted under the auspices of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida, to allow Seminoles to explain how they are coping with change in each of these areas. We are pleased to have this work join the Indians of the Southeast series.

Theda Perdue
Michael D. Green
University of North Carolina

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Preface

This book project had its origins many years ago when Dr. Samuel Proctor, then director of the University of Florida Oral History Program (subsequently renamed the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program in his honor), was awarded a grant of \$170,935 from the Doris Duke Foundation to help compile an oral history of Indians in the southeastern United States. Beginning in 1971, Dr. Proctor supervised the collection of some 900 interviews with Cherokees, Choctaws, Catawbas, Creeks, and Lumbees. For our purposes, the most important part of this academic enterprise was the 200 interviews (roughly 3,800 transcribed pages) with members of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

The original Seminole interviews were done in 1969, 1970, and 1971, although a few were completed in the mid-1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. We appreciate the efforts of those academics who conducted the majority of the initial interviews, especially Sam Proctor, John Mahon, Harry Kersey Jr., Billy Cypress, William Boehmer, and Jean Chadhuri. Tom King lived among the Seminoles in 1972 and 1973 and provided several insightful and significant interviews. Dr. King used much of this information in the compilation of his dissertation at the University of Florida, “The Florida Seminole Polity: 1858–1977.”

In 1998 and 1999, the Proctor Oral History Program, with the assistance of two grants totaling \$20,000 from the Division of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State, began a series of new interviews to document how the Seminoles had changed or preserved their culture over the last generation. We wanted to compare the views and comments of our most recent interviews with those of the earlier interviews. In both cases, we interviewed individuals who exhibited a wide range

of ages, gender, religious beliefs, occupations, and socioeconomic background. The grant from the Division of Historical Resources enabled the program to add forty-seven “new” interviews to the project. The second group of interviewees included a few tribal members (James Billie, Joe Dan Osceola, Billy Osceola, Mary Frances Johns, and Betty Mae Jumper, among others) who had discussed their history and culture with us during 1969, 1970, and 1971.

The Proctor Oral History Program formally proposed a series of new interviews with Tribal Chairman James Billie in a letter of January 16, 1998. In mid-February 1999 the director of the Proctor Program, Dr. Julian Pleasants, accompanied by James Ellison and Rosalyn Howard, traveled to the Big Cypress Reservation and met with Billy Cypress, director of the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, and with museum employees Carol Cypress, Ruby Hamilton, and David Blackard to discuss the project and get advice from the tribe regarding whom to interview and what questions to ask. We then sent Billy Cypress a preliminary list of interview questions and a list of possible interviewees grouped by categories. Based on feedback from Billy Cypress and other members of the tribe, we then revised and modified the questions. We agreed to transcribe all the interviews and send the unedited transcript back to the interviewee for additions and corrections. We would take the final edit of the transcript, put it into our collection, and provide both the interviewee and the museum a copy. We explained our Deed of Gift, which would be signed by each person participating in the interview. This document gave the Proctor Oral History Program the legal ownership of the interviews. In addition, we included an informed consent document, which explained about confidentiality and indicated that participation was voluntary.

We agreed to allow the Seminole Tribe to use the interviews in any way they chose—teaching, research, preservation, museum exhibits, and so forth—except for compiling a volume

that would overlap the project that resulted in this book. We also agreed to pay all costs in compiling the interviews, such as transcription and editing (around \$800 for a three-hour interview) and all travel, food, and housing expenses. The project did not cost the tribe any funds. We agreed to hire a consultant from the tribe, Daisy Jumper, for \$1,000, to assist in arranging the interviews and in modifying the questions. We obtained approval of the project and the questions from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Florida in March 1999.

By the end of March 1999, Tribal Chairman Billie had approved the project after the discussion and changes made at the request of Billy Cypress and the other museum employees. At the suggestion of the chairman and others, we expanded and revised the list of possible interviewees. Chairman Billie brought the matter up before the Tribal Council, indicated he was satisfied with the changes, and encouraged tribal members to speak with the interviewers. Rosalyn Howard, who holds a doctorate in anthropology and has extensive experience in oral history, did a majority of the second group of interviews. Rosalyn, an African American and part Indian, brought expertise in the field, as she had written her dissertation on the black Seminoles. James Ellison, at the time a doctoral student in anthropology, did an excellent job in arranging the interviews, acting as a liaison with the tribal authorities, and conducting some of the interviews. Neither of these interviewers was Seminole, but the tribe largely determined the questions they asked and their choice of subjects.

Our initial purpose was to compare the earlier interviews with the 1999 interviews to determine how the tribe has changed from 1970 to 2000. More importantly, we wanted to learn how tribal members themselves perceived what had occurred. However, there were not enough individuals who provided tapes in both 1970 and 1999 for a true pre- and post comparison. Moreover, the earlier tapes did not always address the tribal issues that

were deemed pertinent nearly thirty years later. Therefore, we decided to meld the old and new tapes to provide the broadest perspective possible on the period. Most of those interviewed were in their mid- to late forties and early fifties at the time of the interviews in 1999. The average age of those interviewed was 47.5 (we were unable to determine the ages of several of the interviewees), so most of those who participated in this study grew into adulthood during the period from 1970 to 2000. Many were teenagers or in their early twenties in 1970 but were adults with families by 1999, and several held leadership positions in the tribe. These Seminoles lived through the dramatic changes and were in the best position to describe how these changes affected them and the tribe. Sometimes in historical research serendipity trumps good planning to yield an even better result.

The director of the Proctor Oral History Program, with assistance from James Ellison, chose the forty-six interviews to be used in this book. There are more than two hundred interviews in the Proctor Collection, but some of the interviews did not have a Deed of Gift and others did not contain information relevant to our study. The areas emphasized included a personal history of the interviewee, tribal education, economic changes, government, medicine and religion, preservation of culture and language, and housing and family values. In essence, the book chapters are organized around these topics, which the Seminoles considered most relevant. We therefore chose the forty-six participants based on their knowledge of the above categories.

In the earlier interviews there are conversations with non-Indians such as Virgil Harrington, who was the superintendent of the Seminole Indian Agency; William Boehmer, who taught for sixteen years at the Brighton Reservation school; Ivy Strahan, a confidante and supporter of the tribe; and Bob Mitchell, part Mohawk Indian and a close friend and observer of the Seminoles since 1916. All of these individuals had a close working or personal relationship with the Seminoles, and we thought

it instructive to get the viewpoint of some whites, especially for the pre-1950 period. Otherwise, most interviews are with members of the Seminole Tribe. Eighteen of the interviewees are female. Seminole society is matrilineal, and all of these women had a unique perspective about how they dealt with the changes that affected them and their families. We wanted the women's view on how family values, housing, the status of women, and cultures changed, so we included Daisy Jumper, Louise Jumper, Sadie Cypress, Marie Phillips, Mary Frances Johns, and Nancy Shore. Alice Johns Sweat worked with the elderly members of the tribe and had a unique insight into their issues. Betty Mae Jumper was the first female chairman of the Tribal Council. In education, Louise Gopher, the first female university graduate, was a counselor at the Brighton Reservation. Two non-Indian leaders in education were also interviewed: Vivian Crooks had a college degree and directed the tribe's Learning Resource Center, and Dr. Sharon Byrd-Gaffney supervised school operations.

The remainder of the selected group were males and came from varied backgrounds, ages, and interests. James Billie and Mitchell Cypress were chosen because of their leadership positions as chairman of the Tribal Council and president of the Seminole Tribe, respectively. Jim Shore served as the tribe's general counsel for many years and commented on legal matters. Sonny and Josie Billie had a vast knowledge of medicine men and healing. Many males expressed a traditional view of the place of women in the tribe.

The authors chose some tribal members for the specific information they could supply about life on the reservation. Victor Billie worked at the Swamp Safari, while Lorene Gopher, Paul Bowers Sr., and Stanlo Johns were experts on the cattle business. Billy Cypress, Brian Billie, and Jeannette Cypress worked at the museum and as such had a vast understanding of the tribe's history and cultural heritage. Richard Bowers Jr. and Don Robertson had valuable information on natural resources, while Andy

Buster's work in the rehabilitation program and Helene Johns Buster's career as a nurse gave them an intimate familiarity with the tribe's current medical problems. We selected other subjects because we found their comments to be both interesting and instructive.

Once we had decided on the interviews to use, we began the long and complicated process of selecting the most usable and relevant material from each interview. We put any cogent or insightful comment in the appropriate category, that is, medicine or religion or education.

Finally, we cobbled the most enlightening comments together in the proper chapter, omitting similar material to avoid redundancy. For the most part, we have used quotation marks for comments by individuals, but we have frequently summarized their opinions.

The 1999 interviews, when examined alongside those of an earlier period, suggest that the changes over the last generation created unique dilemmas for tribal members by combining unprecedented opportunities (primarily through gambling revenue) to achieve a higher standard of living with the increased likelihood of the loss of language and culture. The various ways Seminoles have explained their attempts to assimilate these changes while trying to preserve their heritage have provided us with new insights and unique perspectives on cultural evolution among Indians of south Florida. We have tried, with the use of archival resources and secondary materials, to situate these interviews into a broad socioeconomic and historical context and to provide some conclusions about the meaning of the changes over the period from 1970 to 2000 for the Seminole Tribe.

We decided it would be prudent to bring the history of the tribe up to the present since there was a series of dramatic changes and events during the final completion of the manuscript. The wealth and economic influence of the tribe increased significantly during those years, and there were major reforms

in tribal government and leadership. We do not have any oral history interviews with the Seminoles for the period after 1999, but we relied on the *Seminole Tribune* and others newspapers and articles for up-to-date information.

We are extremely grateful to all the interviewees who took the time to share their history and life experiences with us. James Billie and the late Billy Cypress graciously supported the project. Without their help and support, this project would not have come to fruition.

In compiling the final version of the book, we are grateful to a large number of individuals who provided good advice and helped with transcribing the interviews and editing the book. First among these is James Ellison, who conducted some of the interviews, collected research materials, helped organize all the interviews, and created an outline for the book. Rosalyn Howard visited the reservation several times and produced valuable interviews. Jennifer Langdale wrote the initial grant, went to Tallahassee for the presentation to the Division of Historical Resources, and helped with setting up interviews. Alan Bliss worked on the second grant. Ann Smith, one of our valued and valuable volunteers, transcribed several of the interviews, and Gerrit Blauvelt helped with research. Diane Fishler indexed and wrote summaries of all the Seminole interviews, and Dan Simone, coordinator of the Proctor Oral History Program, assisted with various duties. As always, office manager Roberta Peacock provided expert technical help and excellent advice and helped organize the manuscript.

Dr. Theda Perdue, editor of the *Indians of the Southeast* series along with Michael D. Green, read the manuscript twice, and her suggestions improved the manuscript considerably. We also appreciate the valuable comments made by three other readers. Finally, thanks to Matthew Bokovoy, Elisabeth Chretien, Sabrina Stelrecht, Alison Rold, and Jonathan Lawrence of the University of Nebraska Press for their help and support.

We have worked diligently to enable the Seminoles to tell their own story. Too often in the past the Seminoles have been seen through white eyes, and their culture and history have been interpreted by non-Indians. We not only present the perspectives of a few tribal members, but we have, in essence, added our interpretation by choosing and editing the interviews. We had initially considered taking ten or twelve members of the tribe and allowing each one to give a more comprehensive analysis of how the tribe had evolved in the last forty years. These interviews would have had to be edited for space, and we would have had a smaller sample to draw from. We decided to use the current format and organize by topics so that more members could contribute to the telling of their story. Although interviews were conducted by whites and the writing and editing were done by non-Indians, this book does give tribal members a long-overdue opportunity to express their unique points of view.

When quoting individuals, we have used ellipses to indicate where material was omitted from the original transcript. When summarizing comments by the interviewee, we have tried to reflect accurately the meaning and context of the statements. Some observations have, of necessity, been presented out of sequence to support a theme or to solidify comments on specific topics. Any factual material supplied by the authors is in brackets. On rare occasions we have changed the tense of a verb or added a word to clarify the meaning of the quoted material, but never at the cost of changing the meaning or the context of the interviews.

The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, the coordinating and organizing unit for this project, was founded in 1967. The repository at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida, currently has more than 4,000 interviews and close to 100,000 pages of transcribed interviews, making it one of the major collections in the country. Some of the material has been digitized and is available online. These transcribed materials are avail-

able for use by students, research scholars, journalists, genealogists, and other interested groups. The purpose of the program has always been to preserve for future generations these “spoken memories,” which provide a firsthand account of the social, economic, political, religious, and intellectual life of the state of Florida.

Both authors have been closely associated with the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program virtually since its inception. Julian Pleasants served as director from 1996 to 2007. Harry Kersey, one of the original field operatives gathering interviews in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, has used its archival materials in several award-winning books on the Florida Seminoles.



Seminole reservations in Florida. Created by Mapping Specialists Ltd., used by permission of Jessica Cattelino, and reprinted from *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

Introduction

During three tumultuous decades between 1970 and 2000, the Seminole Tribe of Florida underwent a dramatic transformation that affected virtually every aspect of the people's lives. Within a little more than one generation the tribe moved from relative obscurity to unimaginable notoriety, primarily as a result of the wealth derived from its highly successful gaming and other business ventures. This ended decades of endemic poverty for Florida Indians extending back well before the Great Depression. The Seminoles had been marked for "termination" in the early 1950s and only narrowly escaped that fate with strong support from Florida's congressional delegation. Although the Seminole Tribe of Florida received federal recognition in 1957 and operated with a constitution and business charter, neither the tribal government nor individual Indians were considered economically successful prior to gaming. The Tribal Council depended heavily on funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to conduct its health, education, and social programs as well as for maintenance of infrastructure on the three Florida reservations. At that time most tribal members lived at the Brighton Reservation (northwest of Lake Okeechobee), the Big Cypress Reservation (near Alligator Alley), and the Hollywood Reservation (southwest of Fort Lauderdale), which was also the seat of tribal government.

In 1970 the tribe realized its major source of independent income for tribal government from a tourist village and handicrafts shop at the Hollywood Reservation, and that was highly seasonal. A few individual Seminoles were successful cattle owners who grazed their herds on tribal pastureland. Members of the Cattlemen's Association formed an economic and political

elite within the tribe in the late 1960s, and their interests dominated tribal government deliberations. Cattle owners were the only group within the tribe approximating financial self-sufficiency; most others either worked for the tribe or BIA in low-skill jobs or engaged in agriculture-related labor.

Things changed rapidly following passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975, which gave both form and substance to President Richard Nixon's pronouncement five years earlier shifting federal Indian policy from paternalism to one allowing maximum tribal independence. Taking their lead from the Colville Tribe of Washington, the Seminoles soon exercised the right to operate "smoke shops" on the reservations, selling tax-free cigarettes. Officials of Broward County (Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood) challenged the tribe's ability to sell cigarettes by the carton without collecting Florida sales tax, but state courts ruled that sales on the reservations were not taxable. Later, the Florida Legislature enacted a law specifically exempting the Seminoles from collecting the tax.

Buoyed by that initial success, the Seminoles opened the nation's first tribally operated high-stakes bingo hall at the Hollywood Reservation in 1979. This enterprise was immediately challenged by the sheriff of Broward County, and the case made its way forward in federal court. In *Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Butterworth* (1981), the Fifth District Court of Appeals found that Seminole bingo activities were not subject to state regulation and that the tribe could operate a gaming enterprise. The federal courts thus freed the Seminole Tribe of Florida to compete in the lucrative world of gaming. By 2006 the tribe operated six casinos in Florida, and gaming revenues had reportedly reached \$1 billion. The following year the Seminoles became major players on the worldwide gaming/entertainment scene when they purchased Hard Rock International for \$965 million.

Numerous historians, anthropologists, journalists, and government officials examined the economic, political, and social

dynamics of this transformative era, and a substantial literature emerged. Those publications range from caustic newspaper exposés by the *St. Petersburg Times* and *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* of alleged individual and governmental corruption brought on by new wealth, to scholarly assessments of gambling's impact on the tribe such as Jessica Cattellino's *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming, Sovereignty, and the Social Meanings of Casino Wealth* (2008). Unfortunately, many accounts lacked any real attempt to explore the personal dimension. While tribal leaders came under intense scrutiny, few writers bothered to ask ordinary Seminole people how they felt about the ways their lives were changing. Therefore, the goal of this book is to recount the story from a Seminole perspective by utilizing oral histories of individuals who lived through the period and experienced these events firsthand. The information culled from these interviews answers an essential question: What impact did these social and economic developments have on the everyday life of tribal members?

The most salient result was an explosive increase in both tribal and individual wealth. The Seminole tribal government effectively employed the new largesse to expand its casinos and other commercial ventures as well as to improve living conditions on the reservations. However, this immediate increase in disposable income had a variety of unanticipated outcomes for individuals, families, and the Seminole community as a whole. Many interviewees expressed concern that the new wealth would diminish the motivation of school-age youngsters to complete their education or to pursue gainful employment. By 2000 many of the older adults had not radically altered their lifestyle—most bought new trucks or other high-end vehicles and upgraded their homesteads—but they were still not accustomed to being wealthy. However, younger adults (primarily those in the under-thirty cohort) began to take windfall profits for granted and were engaged in conspicuous consumption; moreover, they were passing this attitude down to their children. This led Seminoles to

ask: What is the motivation for an Indian child to attend school and work hard if he or she already has a trust fund?

Ironically, one positive tangible result of the tribe's newfound wealth was the upgrading of educational opportunities for Seminole youngsters. Shortly after World War II, children from the Brighton and Hollywood reservations began attending public schools, while the BIA operated an elementary school on the isolated Big Cypress Reservation. But for the most part, the result was low achievement, poor attendance, and only a handful of Indian high school graduates. Many of those interviewed provided striking accounts of being members of an Indian minority in white school systems. The Seminoles who seized political control of tribal government in the late 1970s made education a priority. The Tribal Council took control of the Indian school at Big Cypress Reservation in 1982, built a state-of-the-art facility, and instituted far ranging curricular and personnel changes. A tribal education department began close liaison with public schools and also made scholarships available for Seminole children attending private K–12 schools and for higher education. These advances in education and their impact on a generation of Indian children are documented in the interviews.

The appearance of substantial new homes on the reservations—some belonging to tribal leaders and bordering on gaudy excess—was the logical extension of a process that the government began in the 1960s to move Seminoles into modern housing with electricity and indoor plumbing. At that time most Seminole families on the outlying reservations still occupied thatched-roof structures known as chikees, which had been their primary shelter for well over a century. First, a number of concrete-block structures were constructed for cattle-owning families who could afford to assume mortgages for their improved accommodation. Then a turnkey housing project from the Department of Housing and Urban Development provided chikee-inspired wooden structures for less-affluent families. The transition in how peo-

ple lived was not achieved without a social cost, however. Most adult Seminoles, especially those from the Big Cypress region, were accustomed to life in the traditional matrilineal clan camp, headed by the *posi* (clan matron) and surrounded by their close relatives. These extended-family camps were a culturally unifying factor in Seminole life, and when they disappeared, the task of raising children became more difficult, especially for single mothers. The reservation communities that emerged following the move to modern housing were decidedly more stratified by class and less egalitarian. Many of the interviewees decried the loss of a close-knit family structure and the individualism that replaced traditional camp life.

Religious divisions within the tribe were exacerbated during this time, with those who accepted Christianity—mostly members of the Baptist Church—strongly condemning individuals who attended the Green Corn Dance. From the time the first Creek/Seminole Indian Baptist missionaries arrived from Oklahoma in 1907, there was a struggle between the forces of Christianity and traditional Seminole beliefs represented by the Green Corn Dance and medicine men. Much of this acrimony existed because over the years the ceremony became identified with alcohol consumption and raucous behavior. Nevertheless, many Seminoles interviewed who professed to be Christians also attended the Green Corn Dance, which they viewed more as a cultural artifact rather than a religious observance. The retention of both language and ritual played a particularly important role in the formulation of Indian identity in an age of Red Power and self-determination.

The political leadership that took the Seminole Tribe on its unprecedented economic expansion in the 1970s was more secular in outlook than the men and women who led during the early years of organization. For the first twenty years of tribal government the elected leaders were predominantly Baptist ministers or devout church members. They, in turn, had supplanted the

medicine men as political leaders acknowledged by the people. Then a younger, generally well educated generation of Seminoles, some of them Vietnam War veterans, came to the fore as both businesspeople and elected leaders. The Seminole Tribe became actively involved in local and state politics, formed a political action committee, and aggressively defended its rights in the courts and legislative halls. Assessments of various tribal political leaders figure prominently in the interviews.

It is fitting that Seminole voices will now be heard. Like most other Indian tribes, the Seminoles have a rich oral tradition for transmitting their history and culture in their native language. Until the late nineteenth century, the small remnant group of Seminoles, who survived three wars with the United States and eluded removal to Indian Territory, secluded themselves in the vast Everglades and avoided contact with the outside world. There the medicine men conducted the Green Corn Dance and associated ceremonies in the tribal languages. Even when Seminole men began to learn English to facilitate trade and legal negotiations with white settlers, women of the tribe remained cultural conservators charged with passing along the language and lore to the young.

Apparently, women did a good job of retaining and transmitting historical knowledge. A white boy whose family befriended the Indians in the early twentieth century recalled that his father took the son of a medicine man on a visit to Fort Marion in St. Augustine, where Osceola had been held prisoner, and discovered that “*Leek-a-lee* knew the story and more about the fort than we did.”

The two languages spoken by Seminoles—most speak Mikasuki, but the people of the Brighton Reservation use Muskogee (Creek)—establish a strong link with the past and reaffirm their cultural origins in the Creek Confederacy. The Creek Confederacy was a polyglot collection of semi-autonomous towns that gradually coalesced into a nation beginning in the late eighteenth

century. Each town was a ceremonial and political center with associated outlying villages. By the 1700s there were some sixty Creek towns in Georgia and Alabama. These were divided into Upper Towns and Lower Towns according to their location relative to the main trading route from Charleston. The language of the politically dominant Upper Towns, located along the Alabama River and its tributaries, was Muskogee (Creek), while some Lower Towns, sited near the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers in Georgia, were Mikasuki-speaking.

The inhabitants of those towns, which collectively became known as Seminole, either drifted into Spanish Florida to take advantage of economic opportunities or fled there in the aftermath of the Creek War of 1813–14. Like the Creek Confederacy, the Seminoles at the time of their southward migration were a people who spoke two distinct languages, so they established separate towns. Even ensconced in Spanish territory, the Seminoles were not safe, as General Andrew Jackson's forces attacked them there during the First Seminole War (1817–18). After Florida became a territory of the United States in 1821, the Seminoles were confined to a huge reservation in the interior of the peninsula, while the territorial legislature and federal officials placed great pressure on them to leave. Then Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, requiring all Indian tribes living east of the Mississippi River to move to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma and Kansas. The Seminoles refused to yield to that mandate, and the Second Seminole War (1835–42) ensued. Some four thousand Indians were killed or removed west during the conflict, but a few were never defeated. A third conflict (1855–58) further reduced the Indian population to several hundred individuals who secluded themselves in the wild interior wetlands of southern Florida.

Following the wars and removal, most of the survivors who remained in Florida were Mikasuki-speakers, with a small minority retaining the Muskogee language. Even though most Semi-

noles who use a native language today speak Mikasuki, it is notable that the Green Corn Dance ceremonial is still conducted primarily in Muskogee, as it was in the Creek Confederacy—another significant link to their cultural past. Moreover, both the Muskogee and Mikasuki languages are taught to youngsters formally in tribal schools and to some extent informally by families at home. A number of the adult Seminoles interviewed are fluent in one or both of the languages and encourage efforts to perpetuate them among the young people.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century the Seminoles evolved a unique culture in the Florida wetlands. This transition from the prewar lifestyle they had known in north and central Florida required an adaptation to the semi-tropics. Rather than living in villages with wooden cabins and cultivating large communal fields, they established extended-family camps on fertile tree islands known as hammocks where they planted family gardens of corn, squash, beans, and bananas. If the corn crop failed they could gather the wild *zamia* plant to make *coon-tie*, a flour that was the key ingredient in their staple food *sofkee*. Gone were the large cattle herds of Spanish origin that roamed the prairies of north Florida; the largest animals found on the hammocks were generally pigs and dogs. These, along with household goods, could be transported from camp to camp in long canoes fashioned from cypress logs that Seminoles poled along watery trails through the tall saw grass. There were different types of canoes used in hunting, transporting goods and families, or rigged for sailing over open water. The *chikee*, an open-sided structure of saplings topped with a thatched roof made of palm fronds, provided the Seminoles' basic housing. There were different types of *chikees* in a camp. Some had raised platforms for storing goods and also served as sleeping quarters. Within a cooking *chikee* the traditional log spoke fire was set on a dirt floor and allowed women to work sheltered from rain

and sun. There were even birthing chikees where women went to deliver their children.

The Seminoles also adapted their clothing to the climate and ecosystem. Instead of long trousers, flannel shirts, and buckskins that they wore in north Florida, Seminole men adopted a lightweight knee-length “big shirt” that allowed them to enter the shallow Everglades water to push their stuck canoes or dispatch alligators, otters, and other objects of the hunt. Indian women also created a new dress fashion that included a light cape and bare midriff to provide relief from the stifling south Florida heat. When the Indians began trading at frontier stores in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Fort Myers, they bought yard goods such as gingham and calico, and by the turn of the century, hand-cranked sewing machines appeared in most camps. Both Indian men and women learned to sew, and around 1917 the elaborate “Seminole Patchwork” items were being sold to tourists who came to Florida for the winter season. A number of the interviewees in this study stressed the importance of preserving and wearing Seminole clothing as a manifestation of their “Indianness.”

In addition to providing the Indians’ main source for processed foods and manufactured goods, the frontier trading posts proved to be their key point of cultural contact with the outside world. There Seminole men interacted with whites on a basis of economic equality, as the commodities they brought to sell, such as alligator hides, otter pelts, and bird plumes, were prized in the international fashion industry and thus highly profitable to the storekeepers. The Indians did not “trade” in the sense of bartering their commodities for manufactured goods; rather, they sold pelts and hides to merchants for cash, then purchased the items they wanted while saving the surplus to spend later. Lasting friendships were formed between some of the merchants, such as Frank Stranahan and William Brickell, and their Seminole clients, and a few even adopted their anglicized names.

There was also a degree of social parity in the frontier contact communities that grew around the trading posts. Indians frequented these small settlements selling huckleberries, bananas, venison, and handicrafts and were generally well accepted by the residents. They were often present at community gatherings as well as church meetings, and many visited in private homes. This cross-cultural acceptance began to wane with the rapid growth of white population after the Florida East Coast Railway arrived at Miami in 1896. Nevertheless, the residue of goodwill developed during this era carried over into the twentieth century to resurface when the Seminole Tribe was threatened with termination during the 1950s.

The Seminole hunting-trapping-trading economy collapsed in the early twentieth century for three reasons. First, the rapid growth of population in south Florida forced the Indians to abandon their hunting grounds and campsites near the Atlantic Coast. Therefore they had to range farther afield to find game. Second, in 1905 the state initiated a project to drain the Everglades and convert it into a vast agricultural area. This lowering of the water table was disastrous for the wildlife of the region and made it difficult for Indians to sustain their hunting. Third, the outbreak of World War I brought a temporary cessation for the international fashion industry centered in Europe. The Audubon Society and federal anti-plumage laws ended the traffic in bird feathers from Florida, and when the market for pelts and hides resumed in the 1920s, white hunters with better equipment worked the Everglades, and Indians were no longer a major factor in the trade.

By the time the nation entered the Great Depression, Seminoles were a destitute minority. Most traditional Mikasuki-speakers kept to their chikee camps in the Everglades near the Tamiami Trail, where they survived by hunting, fishing, and subsistence agriculture and followed the political and religious leadership of the old medicine men. They rebuffed all government efforts to

have them included in programs for the reservations. A few Indian families became itinerant agricultural workers who lived on or near the farms where they were employed. However, nearly two-thirds of the nine hundred Seminoles had taken up residence on one of the three federal reservations. There they learned to work with a beef cattle herd provided by the federal government, or worked on Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps programs. The families also received medical care from government contract doctors, and some permitted their children to attend the government day schools. A large number of the reservation residents also accepted Christianity and attended the Baptist churches. The Brighton Reservation became the home for Muskogee-speakers, while the Big Cypress Reservation was predominantly populated by Mikasuki-speakers who had moved there from the Tamiami Trail area when their medicine man converted to Christianity. The small Dania Reservation (renamed Hollywood in 1966) became the site of the Seminole Indian Agency in 1926, and its small population worked primarily for federal or tribal programs. In many respects there were three different Seminole communities with more agendas (linguistic, cultural, economic, and political) that divided them than united them as a tribe. Thus many of the issues that still faced the Seminole people in the 1970s were pre-figured some forty years earlier.

Understandably, the Seminoles' interpretation of their history reflected in the interviews, particularly among the older people, is often strikingly different from that of Western historians. As the late Tewa scholar Alfonso Ortiz reminds us, the Indian view of time is predominantly cyclical and repetitive rather than irreversible and linear. For Indians, the time that has elapsed between an event and its recurrent manifestation is less important than the event itself. For example, a historian who worked on the reservation several years ago and returns today is likely to be greeted by his Indian friends as though he had never left.

From an Indian perspective, what is important is not the passage of time between visits but that a friend had returned. Likewise, Indians measure events in terms of their impact on preserving language and religion. Thus they viewed the contemporary religious conflict between Seminole traditionalists and Christians not as something new, but as the repetition of a problem from five decades past and beyond. A few of the Indians interviewed found it irrelevant that three decades had passed since the tribe first began to earn money from “smoke shops” and bingo, and the current distribution of huge dividends; unexpected wind-fall profits, regardless of the source or amount, led to the same social problems. Their criticisms of language loss and culture decline, as well as a lack of personal initiative first voiced in the 1970s, were only magnified in 2000. Therefore, Indians continually return to the historical origins of issues for a clearer understanding of contemporary options.

Unequivocally, the most important point arising from this body of interviews is the Seminoles’ perception of themselves as a people who, although they have radically altered their social and economic condition, retain their core values. When Mary Jene Coppedge, having offered a candid assessment of issues within modern tribal life, concluded by saying, “And my values, to me, are still there,” she articulated the sentiments of most Seminole adults of that day. The Seminole people are by nature survivors; historically they evinced an unparalleled ability to adapt to changing conditions and to turn adversity to their advantage, from adapting to life in the Everglades, developing a hunting-trading economy, and when that failed, moving to reservations and taking up cattle herding. The tribe’s entry into high-stakes gaming should be viewed as just the latest stage in a long developmental process. Yet, despite the inevitable dislocations brought about by the rapid introduction of great wealth, the Seminoles have retained a communal spirit

and have used their wealth for both individual advancement as well as the common good.

This unifying tendency is verified in anthropologist Jessica Cattelino's recent study on the fungibility of monies through a case study of Seminole gaming revenue distribution in the form of per capita dividends. Cattelino contends that in the fiscal politics of indigeneity, the Seminoles use money to structure their relations internally as well as with the larger society, but always in ways that reinforce indigenous political authority and autonomy. The availability of seemingly ever increasing gaming revenues allows the Tribal Council to allocate substantial sums, free of federal constraints, to run the tribal school and myriad social services and programs that virtually all tribal members utilize. Furthermore, there is a profound commitment to retaining tribal history and culture by funding the state-of-the-art Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum plus associated historical/archaeological research and preservation units. All of these activities promote the cohesiveness of the Seminole polity.

The distribution of per capita dividends "for the general welfare" further maximizes the tribal government's autonomy under provisions of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, while at the same time promoting individual and household autonomy through discretionary spending. Seminoles were accustomed to receiving per capita distributions from the cattle program or BIA, so gaming dividends are a natural extension of that process. Moreover, some Seminoles claim that the act of allocating dividends is itself consistent with their tradition of hunting and then distributing meat to clan camps at the time of the Green Corn Dance. There are other signs of indigenous value loading in the process. Rather than using available direct bank deposit, most Seminoles prefer to receive their distribution checks in person on "Dividend Day," which has taken on aspects of a festival or social gathering at the reservations. Therefore, the Seminoles use gambling wealth to reinforce their indigeneity

and cultural distinctiveness, thus challenging the widely held assumption among non-Indians that gambling is antithetical to retaining “Indianness.” While some individuals remain concerned that gambling is the source of their income stream, most are indifferent to gaming; it is just a way to make money and escape poverty. Nevertheless, the Seminoles are keenly aware that it is “our money,” not federal largesse, additionally reinforcing the concept of “The Tribe.”

In retrospect, then, Coppedge’s words from 1999 were hauntingly prescient. Indeed, the Seminoles of Florida have once again found a way to survive in the white man’s world by adopting economic strategies that are congruent with their own value system. This book offers them an opportunity to relate how that happened in their own way. It is a tale well worth recounting.