

SEMINOLE WAR: THE LONG WAR

American historians recorded three Seminole Wars in the first part of the 19th century. The First Seminole War that began with Andrew Jackson's invasion of Seminole Florida began in 1817 and ended with the Treaty of Moultrie Creek in 1823. The Second Seminole War, referred to at the time as "The Florida War" began with the Dade battle and ended ambiguously in 1842 when America declared victory despite the Seminole presence still in Florida. And the Third Seminole War, also called Billy Bowlegs War despite his efforts to avoid it, was the last act of removal, beginning in 1855 and ending in 1858 when Bowlegs agreed to go west. This is the experience for the United States, marking the periods where Congress officially declared and funded military action.

For the Seminole people there was only one war. They came under armed and organized attack from America in 1812, five years before Jackson led his army into Florida. The "Patriot War" was an effort by militia groups in Georgia to try to take Saint Augustine and Spanish

Florida, attacking the Seminole when they refused to aid the 'Patriot' militias. From that time until Billy Bowlegs and the other captive Seminole were taken from Florida nearly half a century later, the Seminole were at war. While there were negotiations and times when the military did not directly lay siege, Indigenous Floridians faced regular aggression and violence from American settlers, militias, slave catchers, and even lawmen in a steady campaign. Native resistance or retribution was cast as aggression and used to drive calls for open war. If you were an Indigenous Floridian it didn't matter if the enemy was in uniform or not, it was still a war. In 1842, shortly after America called their 2nd war to an end, Congress signed the Armed Immigration Act, a law specifically designed to send armed settlers into Seminole lands and pressure them to leave under the threat of violence. Multiple generations of Seminole grew up in a state of war, always needing to be ready for when the soldiers would arrive to take them away. There was never truly a peace for the Seminole during this time, only one long war.



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Painting "Three Seminole Scouts" by Noah Billie
Courtesy Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum

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