IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES there were not many people living in Florida. The land seemed difficult to farm, the mosquitoes and flies were awful, and they kept settlers away. Because Florida did not have many people, it seemed to be a good place for runaway slaves to escape from plantations in Georgia and South Carolina.

They joined another group of runaways: Native Americans who were escaping the Creek Native Americans and heading to Florida to begin a new life; these Native Americans called themselves “Seminoles,” which meant “runaways.” The slaves and Seminoles joined forces, and a new people was born: the Black Seminoles.

In the early 1700s there were more than 100,000 such Black Seminoles. The white plantation owners in Florida did not like to see the joining of the runaway slaves and the Native Americans because that might encourage more slaves to escape from their owners. The African Americans turned out to be good friends of the Seminoles because the former slaves knew the weaknesses of the whites who had once kept them as slaves. They also acted as interpreters.

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**DISCUSSION TOPICS:** As you read this chapter, think about the answers to these questions: 1. Why do you think the runaway slaves and the Seminoles got along so well? 2. What words would you want placed on your gravestone? 3. What methods do you think slave catchers used to capture runaway slaves?

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**VOCABULARY**
- Seminoles
- interpreters
- scouts
- Medal of Honor
- gravestones
between the whites and the Native Americans. One interpreter was Abraham, sometimes called Negro Abraham.

Many times the African Americans married Seminoles and raised their children together. In 1818, General Andrew Jackson entered Florida to attack the Seminoles. That action pushed the Native Americans and their African American friends further south and east. Jackson's action also led to Florida being taken over from Spain by the United States in 1821. After that many Americans entered Florida to settle down and raise their families. The Seminoles and the African Americans fought many battles with the new settlers and the army sent by officials in Washington, D.C.

When the U.S. Army entered Florida to destroy the Seminole villages and help more white settlers move in, the Second Seminole War began. It continued from 1835 until 1842. The soldiers wanted to defeat the Seminoles and return the African American runaway slaves to their former owners.

When Andrew Jackson was president of the United States, he wanted the Seminoles in Florida to move west to places like Oklahoma. Abraham, the African American interpreter, went with a group of Seminole chiefs to inspect the land west of the Mississippi River that the U.S. government wanted the Native Americans to move to. Nearly 500 African Americans joined their friends, the Seminoles, in the long trip to Oklahoma between 1838 and 1843. They would never see Florida again.

Once there, the Black Seminoles continued to be troubled by slave catchers, men who wanted to catch the African Americans and make them slaves. About 300 Black
Seminoles left Oklahoma and went to Mexico, where they worked as scouts and as patrols along the border between Mexico and the U.S.

After the Civil War ended in 1865, many of those Black Seminoles returned to the United States. There they worked as scouts for the U.S. Army until 1914. From 1873 to 1881 those Black Seminole scouts fought hostile Native Americans in 25 battles, but not a single man of their unit was killed or seriously wounded, and four of them received the Medal of Honor for bravery.

One of those who received the Medal of Honor was Adam Paine. Although little is known of his life, he seems to have been one of those who joined the Seminoles when they went west from Florida. In a battle with the Comanche Native Americans in Texas, Adam Paine showed his courage. On September 20, 1874, a huge band of Native Americans attacked Paine and his group of soldiers. His commander later mentioned how brave Paine was in fighting off the Native Americans. Paine was the first Floridaborn Black Seminole to win the very important Medal of Honor from the U.S. government.

Today in southwestern Texas near the Mexican border one can see gravestones of Seminoles that say “Born in Florida.”

Further reading: