



Our Land Before We Die: The Proud Story of the Seminole Negro

By Jeff Guinn

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"A remarkable story brilliantly told." (Bill Bryson)

"In *Our Land Before We Die*, Jeff Guinn embarks on a personal quest to explore the heartbreaking--yet ultimately inspiring--legacy on the Seminole Negro Indians in their search for freedom. The result is a triumph of oral storytelling, thwarting past efforts to erase these people from the land and history itself." (Iris Chang, author of *The Rape of Nanking*)

"Jeff Guinn recounts an important American story here that has long needed telling, and he tells it with passion, skill and humor." (James McBride, author of *Miracle at St. Anna* and *The Color of Water*)

Every September the Seminole Negro Indians hold a tribal gathering in the town of Brackettville, Texas. After a short parade down Brackettville's four-block main street, one hundred or so men, women, and children gather in the one-acre Seminole Scout Cemetery and tell the story of their people. In *Our Land Before We Die*, Jeff Guinn echoes their voices as he traces the little-known history of the runaway slaves who fled to the Florida Everglades to live beside the Seminole Indians.

Deeply rooted in oral tribal history and based upon extensive interviews with descendants, *Our Land Before We Die* describes the incredible circumstances of a people who sought shelter in the shadow of a tribe whose land and welfare already hung in the balance. And yet in their tireless journey--from Florida to Indian Territory in Oklahoma; on the seven-hundred-mile flight from persecution that took them across the Rio Grande into Mexico; and then back across the Rio Grande to Texas--they never surrendered the hope of one day attaining land of their own.

Our Land Before We Die brings to life the largely forgotten history of a courageous people and the descendants for whom this story is their only legacy.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Working with two tellers of the tribal history, Miss Charles Emily Wilson and Willie Warrior, Texas journalist Guinn interviewed more than two dozen people to produce a compelling narrative of the Seminole Negro (pronounced "Nay-gro") tribe's origins and history. In the 18th century, escaped African slaves fled south into Spanish-held Florida and allied themselves with the Seminole Indians, in effect making themselves into a separate tribe. When the Americans under Andrew Jackson invaded Florida, the Negro Seminoles fought side by side with Indian allies to defend villages and land. After the bloodletting of the Seminole Wars of the early 19th century, the Seminole Negroes were removed from Florida and settled in the Indian Territory of what is now Oklahoma. Miserable and alone, most of the tribe walked off the reservation and migrated to Mexico. After the American Civil War, the U.S. government needed troops to help defend the Texas border against Comanches and Apaches, and the group returned and enlisted as scouts to help "pacify" Texas. Four Seminoles earned Medals of Honor for their brave deeds, and the tribe was promised a land of its own. Instead, the Seminoles Negro tribe was disbanded in 1914, and its families were evicted from government-owned land. To this day, their descendants still cry for justice and for a land to call their own. The tribe gathers yearly in Brackettville, Tex., to tell stories to their young people, maintain a cemetery and keep alive their heritage. Guinn depicts all of this clearly and without sentiment, and includes his own involvement with the tribe as part of the narrative, making this an authoritative story of the pursuit of truth.

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From [Booklist](#)

Guinn tells the hidden story of America's deep conscious denial of the complex relationship between blacks and the various indigenous Indian nations in the founding of this country. The numerous Indian nations early in the territory known as Florida, held at various points by the British, Spanish and the French, became places of refuge for runaway slaves. Given the oppression faced by black slaves and that faced by the Native Americans, the alliances they forged were complex. Some Indians sought to return the runaways to their slave masters; others allowed the slaves to live as allies; others permitted the slaves to settle into semi-independent settlements close by. When the U.S. finally won control of Florida and sent the nations on the legendary Trail of Tears to the Oklahoma territory and beyond, many Seminole Negroes accompanied them. Guinn's interviews with descendants who still hold fast to the promises of the U.S. government provides a compelling look at a troubling part of American history and continued disappointing policy regarding Indians, blacks, and entitlement to land. *Vernon Ford*

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Review

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lucas Florio:

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