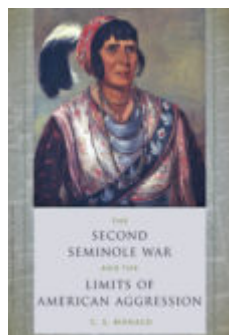




Author C.S. Monaco calls it the most dramatic event to take place in 19th century Florida. But it's one that is largely unknown - not just by those in the U.S. and abroad - but even to many who live in the state where it happened.



(Courtesy image)

The event is the Second Seminole War, which took place largely in areas of central Florida from 1835 to 1842. Even though 177 years might seem long ago, Monaco argues that it's really only a handful of generations past.

Monaco said this last major conflict fought on American soil before the Civil War is significant for a number of reasons.

For one, he said, the early battlefield success of the Seminoles would greatly unnerve U.S. generals. They worried the Seminoles would ignite a rebellion among Indians who had been displaced by President Andrew Jackson's removal policies.

There was also the presence of black warriors among the Seminoles who would agitate southerners who were wary of real and potential slave revolt.

Monaco said the war would tarnish the U.S. Army's reputation at home and abroad. This was sped up after the capture of Seminole chief Osceola under the pretense of a truce.

Further, there were few decisive victories for the U.S. Army, and bad decisions were made along the way, Monaco said. Fifteen percent of soldiers died in Florida, out of a standing army of just 10,000 men.

Even though there was desertion and troops dealt with the harsh conditions in the Florida wilderness, the losses for the Seminoles were disastrous. By the war's end, only a few hundred would remain in the state.

Monaco's recently published book, his second, is "The Second Seminole War and the Limits of American Aggression," which analyzes the impact of the war in society and the impact it made in Jacksonian America. He writes about the war through the lenses of race, media, public opinion, American expansion and military strategy.

Monaco is a courtesy professor of history in the Department of History at the University of Florida in Gainesville. He and his wife live in nearby Micanopy.

He spent 15 years in New York as a television executive before returning to Florida in 1995.

Book's origins - a war that 'loomed'

Monaco's first book is "Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer." He wrote

it after a neighbor who was a professor at UF sparked his interest in the character. Levy, who lived from 1782 to 1854, was the father of David Levy Yulee, a big name in Florida as the first person of Jewish ancestry to be elected to serve as a U.S. senator.

"[Moses] Levy was totally ignored in history. He was a true individual of the Atlantic world. The British were fairly impressed with Levy, where the Abolitionist Movement is a big deal," Monaco said. "He was the first to disallow slavery, and a Jew from Florida showing up in London and making such an impact was unheard of."

Monaco said during his research, the Second Seminole War always loomed in the background.

"Levy's plantation was burned by the Seminoles. I was tempted to start a history of the Seminole War, but I knew I needed a breadth and scope of the study," Monaco said.

His interest peaked; Monaco would go on to earn his doctorate degree in England at Oxford Brookes University. He'd continue to research the Seminole War and its importance during the Territorial Period.

"I went back to the study of the war itself, to place it in perspective with the other wars," he said.

Why it's important

Monaco said a lot of history books are written through a strictly military lens. He set out to write his book with a broader perspective and to present both sides as equally as possible.

"Not to know [about the Seminole Wars] would be to sever oneself from the past, and that's to live a life that's diminished," Monaco said. "Culture heritage and history has become more important over the years, the sense of continuity, what came before, your place in it, a psychological place of wellbeing."

Monaco said this yearning for historical context, intuitive but often subtle, is why people want to visit old places.

"It's important to one's psychology; and more and more in today's society, with technology, [it's] vital to our spiritual wellbeing - to get the story straight, the truth, not some kind of hype," he said.

The sentiment was reinforced in a recent op-ed Monaco wrote for the Gainesville Sun - "Shed the amnesia, embrace the past."

"If you ask any stranger in Gainesville, as I did recently, if they are familiar with the Second Seminole War, chances are that the reply will be a rather brisk, if somewhat mystified,

'No,'" Monaco wrote.

"If one persists and mentions that this seven-year, \$40 million military conflict actually started in Alachua County, then, an embarrassed laugh might ensue, as if such a thing defied all comprehension. If people remember anything about the war, it is usually vaguely connected to the Everglades; certainly not in this area."

Seminole connection

Monaco gives a lot of credit to Paul Backhouse as a key contact in the process of writing the book. Backhouse is the director of the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum and officer at the Tribal Historic

Preservation Office in Big Cypress, a clearinghouse for Seminole history.

During the course of his research, Monaco also organized a Second Seminole War day of commemoration in Micanopy in 2015 and invited Seminole Tribal members and members of the U.S. Army to attend.

He said it was a day he'll not soon forget, as about 700 people came - including Seminoles, U.S. Army veterans and members of the public.

"It's a big thing to me and it should be to everyone who lives in Florida," he said. "We owe the Seminoles something. We took part in this ethnic cleansing, a removal of a Native population from the land in the most brutal way possible."

Monaco said the Seminoles had a heroic vision that was almost completely obliterated, and yet today the Tribe thrives like few other.

"It's worthy of respect and has to be known in our modern day culture in Florida," he said.

Monaco said he has formed a steering committee to explore the possibility of a Seminole Wars Museum.

"Should educators and historians simply put our hands up in dismay and accept the general decline in historical knowledge and leave it at that?" Monaco said in his op-ed.

The book is available through Johns Hopkins University Press or Amazon.

Originally Printed by The Seminole Tribune



C.S. Monaco is the author of 'The Second Seminole War and the Limits of American Aggression.' (Courtesy photo)

Please follow and like us:

