



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS FE 4383

# Songs of the Seminole Indians of Florida

Originally recorded 1931-33 by Dr. Frances Densmore

From the Densmore-Smithsonian Collection of the Archive of Folklore, Library of Congress

M  
1669  
S28  
S698  
1972

MUSIC LP



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS FE 4383

SIDE 1

- Band 1. Calusa Corn Dance Song (1:40)
- Band 2. Cypress Swamp Hunting Dance Songs (2:20)
- Band 3. Cypress Swamp Buffalo Dance Songs (3:00)
- Band 4. Cypress Swamp Corn Dance Songs (1:40)
- Band 5. Bird and Animal Dance Songs (14:20)

SIDE 2

- Band 1. Snake Dance Songs (4:00)
- Band 2. Two Songs for the Story of the Opossum  
and Her Baby (1:50)
- Band 3. Bird Dances - Buzzard and Chicken (3:55)
- Band 4. Songs for Treatment of the Sick (8:00)
- Band 5. Songs Concerning the Removal of the  
Seminole to Oklahoma (4:05)

# Songs of the Seminole Indians of Florida

Originally recorded 1931-33  
by Dr. Frances Densmore

From the Densmore-Smithsonian  
Collection of the Archive of Folklore,  
Library of Congress

© 1972 by Folkways Records & Service Corp.,  
701 7th Ave., NYC, USA

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANCES DENSMORE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS FE 4383



# SONGS OF THE SEMINOLE INDIANS OF FLORIDA

M  
1669  
S28  
S638  
1972

MUSIC LP

Recorded 1931-1933 by DR. FRANCES DENSMORE  
Collaborator, Bureau of American Ethnology,  
Smithsonian Institution

29 examples from the Densmore-Smithsonian Collection  
deposited in the Archive of Folklore, Library of  
Congress, Washington, D. C.

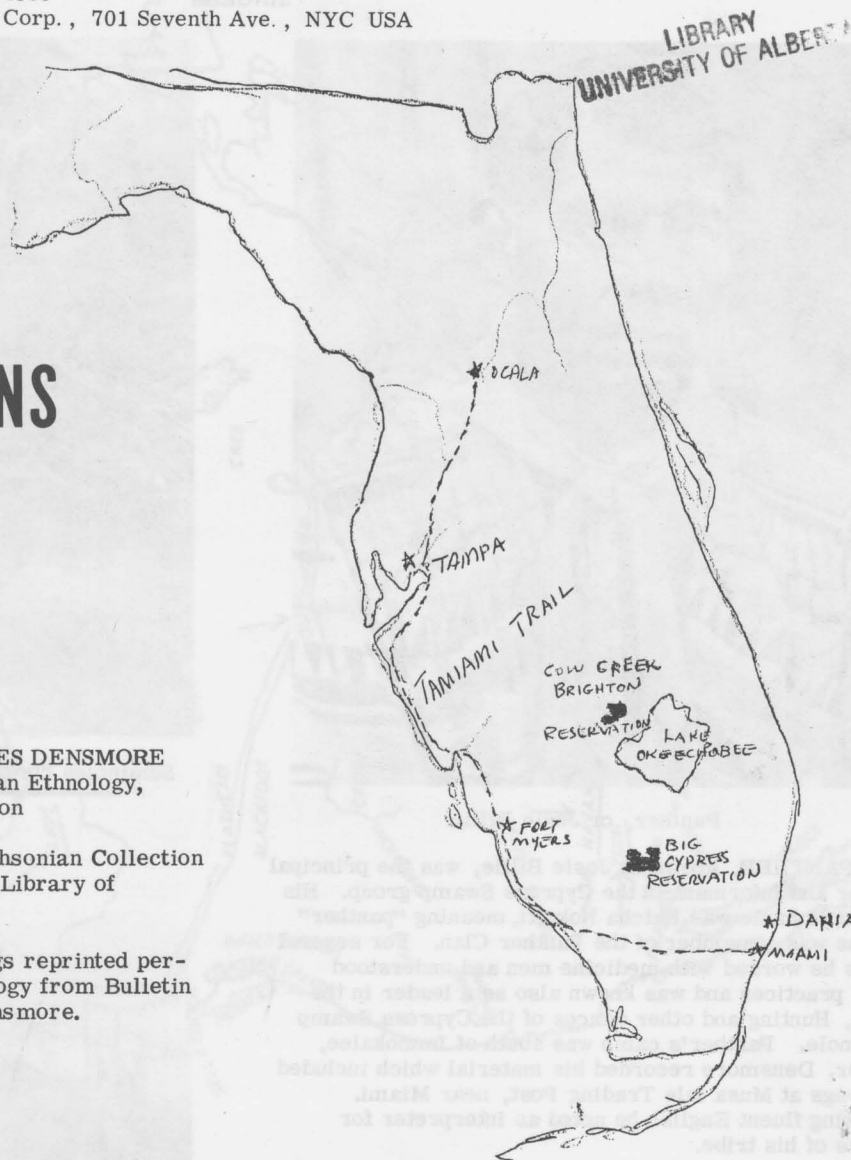
Photographs and transcriptions of songs reprinted per-  
mission of Bureau of American Ethnology from Bulletin  
161 SEMINOLE MUSIC by Frances Densmore.

All photos by Dr. Frances Densmore.

Edited with notes by Charles Hofmann

The songs of the Seminole Indians of Florida pre-  
sented in this album were recorded during three field  
trips made by Dr. Frances Densmore for the Bureau of  
American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, during  
1931-1933. The original recordings made on cylinders,  
are deposited in the Archive of Folklore, Library of  
Congress. Descriptions and notes for the material will  
be found in Dr. Densmore's monograph SEMINOLE  
MUSIC published in 1956 as Bureau Bulletin 161. Tran-  
scriptions of the 29 songs in this album will be found in  
the Bulletin.

Dr. Densmore's first trip to the Seminole was in  
January 1931, with the Indians from the Big Cypress  
Swamp group. The second visit, begun in November  
1931, continued until March of the following year, the  
study including both the Cypress Swamp and Cow  
Creek groups of the tribe. In February 1932 a trip was  
made to the interior of the Big Cypress Swamp and five  
camps were visited and photographed, followed by work  
of the Cow Creek group near Lake Okeechobee and  
south into the cabbage palm country. A third trip was  
made in 1933 to the Cow Creek group with songs re-  
corded at Brighton, Florida. Several hundred songs  
were recorded with over 200 being sung by Billie  
Stewart of Cow Creek. 243 songs are shown and  
analyzed in Dr. Densmore's monograph.



## SIDE 1

- Band 1: Calusa Corn Dance Song (Billie Stewart)
- Band 2: 4 Cypress Swamp Hunting Dance Song  
(Charlie Billie)
- Band 3: 4 Cypress Swamp Buffalo Dance Songs  
(Panther)
- Band 4: 4 Cypress Swamp Corn Dance Songs (Panther)
- Band 5: Bird and Animal Dance Songs -
  - (a) Bird Dance Song (Billie Stewart)
  - (b) Turkey Dance Song (Panther)
  - (c) 3 Alligator Dance Songs (Panther)

## SIDE 2

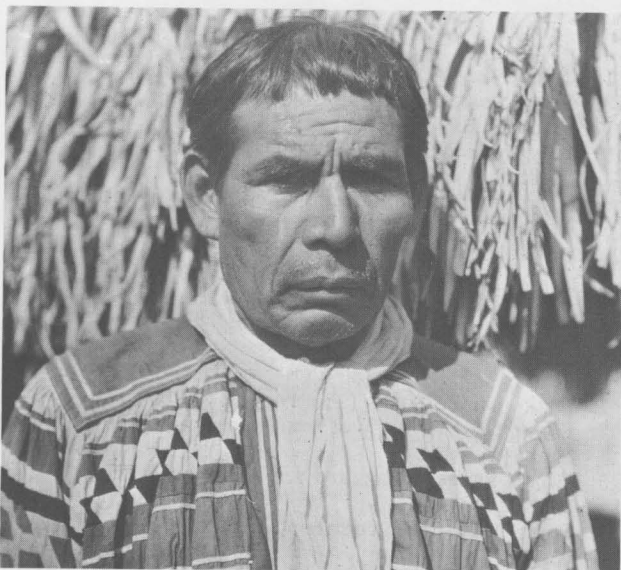
- Band 1: Snake Dance Songs (Panther)
- Band 2: Songs for the Story of the Opossum and Her  
Baby (Panther)
- Band 3: Bird Dances - Buzzard and Chicken  
(Billie Stewart)
- Band 4: Songs Used for Treatment of the Sick  
(Susie Tiger)
  - (a) Treatment of Lumbago
  - (b) Song for the Dying
  - (c) Song for Childbirth
  - (d) Song for Sick Baby
- Band 5: Songs Concerning the Removal of the Seminole  
to Oklahoma (Susie Tiger and Billie Stewart)

SINGERS



Panther, or Josie Billie.

PANTHER, known as Josie Billie, was the principal singer and informant in the Cypress Swamp group. His Seminole name was Katcha Nokofti, meaning "panther" and he was a member of the Panther Clan. For several years he worked with medicine men and understood their practices and was known also as a leader in the Corn, Hunting and other dances of the Cypress Swamp Seminole. Panther's camp was south of Immokalee, but Dr. Densmore recorded his material which included 63 songs at Musa Isle Trading Post, near Miami. Speaking fluent English he acted as interpreter for others of his tribe.



Charlie Billie.

CHARLIE BILLIE, an older man of the Cypress Swamp group, adhered rigidly to the old way of Seminole life and knew most of the early history and customs. He is also a leader of the Corn and Hunting dances



Seminole cooking; typical arrangement of logs.



Billie Stewart.

BILLIE STEWART, a leader in the Corn, Hunting and other dances in the Cow Creek group, recording



more than 200 songs, the largest number of songs that Dr. Densmore has obtained from one Indian. 153 of Billie Stewart's songs are given in Dr. Densmore Bulletin 161. Stewart had a remarkable memory and recorded in 1931 and 1932. Recording in 1932 he began to sing a certain song, then hesitated, saying, "I sang that for you a year ago, so I won't sing it again." His Seminole name was Ga tçayeho la, the first two syllables meaning "Tiger" and the rest of the word having no remembered meaning.



Mrs. John (Susie) Tiger.

**SUSIE TIGER**, the wife of Billie Stewart, her Seminole name O mala gi, meaning "Let us all go." She was born at the time the Seminole were going to Oklahoma, 1936-40, and her grandfather felt that everyone had gone, so she received this original name. Susie Tiger treated the sick in the native manner and she recorded songs connected with that treatment. She also recorded songs that are "taught to the children as soon as they are old enough to appreciate them." She spoke less English than her husband and her material was interpreted.

**BILLIE BOWLEGS**, a prominent member of the Cow Creek group and a descendant of the famous chief of that name. He recorded his songs in 1933 at Brighton, even though he lived near Okechobee City.

#### MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

**RATTLES:** the oldest instrument of the Seminole, usually made from coconut-shell. The shell is pierced by a stick and containing seeds (*Canna fladdica* Roscoe). The women who take part in the Corn Dance and the

Stomp Dance wear rattles tied around each leg, below the knee. Small turtle shells were formerly used for rattles, a series of them tied together, being filled with mud pellets hardened by exposure to the sun. Later tin cans were used as dance rattles, usually worn tied at the knee.

**DRUMS:** are small hand types used to accompany the songs of the Corn Dance. It is an ordinary drum, with one head. Dr. Densmore reported the use of the water-drum used with songs of the ball game, and a "cypress-knee drum" used as accompaniment with songs of the Stomp Dance.

**FLUTES:** are rare among the Seminole. Many of the Indians remember hearing them in the old days but do not know how they were made. Billy Stewart made one example for Dr. Densmore (exhibited at U. S. National Museum, Washington), and used a piece of cane, with four fingerholes burned with an iron.

#### CORN DANCE

The only tribal gatherings of the Seminole are the Corn Dance in June and the Hunting Dance in September. Certain dances are given by the Cypress Swamp and Cow Creek groups on these occasions as well as a large number of social dances. The leaders who sang and described the Corn Dance were Charlie Billie and Panther of Cypress Swamp and Billie Stewart of Cow Creek. In both groups the leaders were said to fast for a day before the ceremony, which opened with the Buffalo Dance.

The Corn Dance, is held in June "after the corn is ripe and when everyone can get together." No one eats any of the new corn until after the ceremony. Cory Osceola said "We always have the Corn Dance for our Thanksgiving." The dance is held in a place that is accessible only to the Seminole. In order to reach the place (as described to Dr. Densmore 1931-1933) it is necessary to go up a shallow stream and walk in the water part of the way. The duration of the dance is from four to eight days. The leader of the singing and dancing is chosen, the position not being hereditary. He wears no ceremonial garments or articles but is well dressed, probably having some new clothing made for the occasion. Charlie Billie also recorded four songs and a fifth that is used in general dancing. "When singing these," he said, "I do not eat that day nor the night after," indicating that they belong to the period of fasting which precedes the ceremony. The songs are sung only on that day. When leading the songs of this dance, leader and helper pound on small hand drums which have one head. The leader sings the song once, then his helper sings it with him, and then everyone joins, dancing in a circle.

The Corn Dance is the time for the trial and punishment of offenses that have not been tried and punished by the families of the offenders. The punishments are said to consist of whipping and cutting gashes in arms and legs.

For three or four days, while the people are gathering for the Corn Dance, those who wish to dance may do so for two or three hours in the evening. During the Corn Dance there is dancing most of the day and part of the evening, and on the night before the people disband they dance until morning. The dance lasts from four to eight days, according to the time that the people can remain together.

On the morning before the Corn Dance, the medicine men begin a fast which continues until the next morning. The usual number of medicine men is four or eight. In the early evening of this day a "sacred bundle" is opened and the contents exposed to view for about ten minutes. The medicine men are

seated in a row, the bundle in front of its owner. A fire, with a kettle of medicine, is in front of them, and beyond is another fire around which the people move in the Buffalo Dance, after the opening of the sacred bundle. The man who owns the bundle "sings and talks about long life" when the bundle is opened. No women are allowed to see the contents of the bundle, spread on a white deerskin in which the sacred articles are wrapped. These articles include four or five sorts of herbs and an ear of corn on the end of a stick. Neither the ear of corn nor the stick is decorated, and the same ear of corn is used year after year. While the bundle is open, the stick with the ear of corn is placed in the ground, pointing toward the east.

After the bundle has been closed, the men and women dance the Buffalo Dance which continues about ten minutes and has only four songs. Panther reported that the dance originated when "a great many young men had been sent out to hunt and get food for the people. They returned with buffalo, bear, deer and tiger, and then the people 'figured out' the dance. The head men of the Wing and Panther clans 'worked together' and led the dance." The singer leads the dance wearing a belt of panther hide with the tail hanging down behind. He has a drum, which is usually slung over one shoulder, and this is the only accompaniment to the songs. He sings the songs, and everyone joins in the vocalizations that precede and follow the songs. Carrying the drum, he leads a double line of singers, two men being followed by two women, and couples alternating in this manner. They move around the fire, in a counterclockwise direction. The songs are four in number, and are very old, the meaning of the words being unknown.

No. 1. Buffalo Dance Song (a)  
Recorded by PANTHER (Catalog No. 2080)

♩ = 84

Introduction Song

No. 2. Buffalo Dance Song (b)  
Recorded by PANTHER (Catalog No. 2081)

♩ = 100

Fine

No. 3. Buffalo Dance song (c)  
Recorded by PANTHER (Catalog No. 2082)

♩ = 66

Fine

No. 4. Buffalo Dance Song (d)  
Recorded by PANTHER (Catalog No. 2083)

♩ = 66

Fine

No. 5. Corn Dance Song (a)  
Recorded by PANTHER (Catalog No. 2084)

♩ = 84

Fine

No. 6. Corn Dance Song (b)  
Recorded by PANTHER (Catalog No. 2085)

♩ = 112

Fine





Seminole Dance.

#### HUNTING DANCE

The second gathering of the Seminole is the Hunting Dance which is held in October. Its purpose is to secure success on the hunt. It resembles the Corn Dance in ceremonial aspect, and numerous social dances are held, as on that occasion. The Snake Dance, also called the Horned Owl Dance, is given only at the Hunting Dance. In earlier days the Hunting Dance was held only every four years. The principal animals hunted by the Seminole are the alligator, deer, bear, turkey, raccoon, and bobcat.

In the Hunting Dance the custom differs from the Corn Dance in that only the leader and his helper sing, the people not joining with them. The opening songs of this series are probably ceremonial, but the third appears to be a variant of a Bird Dance Song which was recorded by Panther.

#### SOCIAL DANCES

The social dances given at the time of the Corn and Hunting Dances are very old and are generally connected with birds and animals. Panther said, "A long time ago all the animals talked like people. The alligators made up a dance at that time. There is an old story that when the people all die maybe the animals will come back again as they were before, talking like people." The Alligator Dance is the most important of these incidental dances and was given at night. Other dances include Turkey, Buzzard, and Chicken.

#### STORIES AND LEGENDS

Two songs are presented related to the story of "The Opossum and Her Lost Baby." The story was told to Panther as a boy, 4 to 6 years of age.

An opossum had a little baby. She was going somewhere and carried the baby along, all the time. The opossum found some wild potatoes and put the baby down while she dug the potatoes. She went away a little distance and every little while she called the baby, and it answered. When the opossum came back she found that someone had stolen the baby and taken it away. The answer had come from a frog, put where the baby had been.

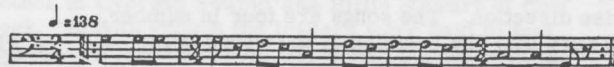
Then the opossum looked around and found somebody's tracks. She followed the tracks. She was lonesome and sang a song. She sang it four times, once with each of the stops that she made on her way to find

the baby. There is only one word in the song and that is I-ya-ta-wa-kits-ko-tie, which was the baby's name.

No. 229. The opossum calls her lost baby

(Catalog No. 2139)

Recorded by PANTHER



She came to a house. Somebody was there and she asked if they had seen the baby. The person in the house said "Yes." The opossum went in the direction indicated and on the road she met two people and asked them the same question. Then she had been to two places and met two people, and sang her "lonesome song" twice.

After a while she came to another place. In that place the baby had been hidden. There were four or five houses, some occupied and some empty. The opossum asked her question and somebody pointed to a house saying, "They got the baby in there." She went over, opened the door and found the baby inside. Somebody had killed a rattlesnake, cooked it, and given it to the baby to eat. The mother was angry and told them to take it away. She took the baby and started home. She killed a little fawn, ate some of the meat, and gave some to the baby. They stayed there a while. That made three times she sang the song.

A wolf came to that place and smelled the meat. The opossum lied and said she had no meat, but the wolf smelled the meat. The wolf got a bow and arrow. Then the opossum was afraid she would be killed. She went up a big tree, took the baby with her and stayed up in the top of the tree. The baby died up there in the tree. That was the fourth time she sang the song.



Typical Seminole house.

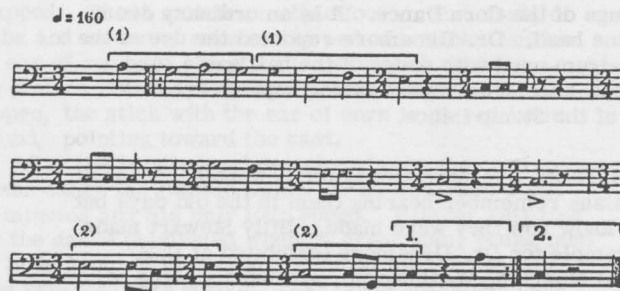


The old opossum came down and walked away. She found a skunk who was her friend and went home with the skunk. They lay down together and sang. They sang another "lonesome song" and then they both died. This is their last song.

No. 230. The opossum dies

(Catalog No. 2140)

Recorded by PANTHER



Other stories with songs, recorded by Panther, included "Why the Rabbit is Wild," "The Rabbit Who Stole the Fire," "Legend of the Flood," and several others.

#### SONGS CONNECTED WITH TREATMENT OF THE SICK

The Seminole medicine man treats the sick with remedies revealed to him in dreams, these being nocturnal dreams and not visions induced by fasting. Some of these remedies are believed to act by their presence and are worn in little bags on the person. Thus a child, suffering from a cold, had several little bags of medicine around its neck, though it did not wear these at other times.

The Seminole sing while treating the sick. There are certain definite melodies for certain ailments or conditions, and people sing when they dig medicinal roots and also put tobacco in the ground at that time.

Many details of treatments and the songs related are described by Dr. Densmore in Bulletin 161.

The removal of the Seminole to Oklahoma took place in 1836-1840. The songs concerning that event were recorded.

They are taking us beyond Miami,  
They are taking us beyond the Caloosa River,  
They are taking us to the end of our tribe.  
They are taking us to Palm Beach,  
coming back beside Okeechobee Lake,  
They are taking us to an old town in the west.

\*\*\*\*

We are going with (George) Washington.  
Which boat do we get in?

#### Additional Readings

Edwin C. McReynolds: The Seminoles.  
(University of Oklahoma Press, 1957)

R. S. Cotterill: The Southern Indians: The Story of the  
Civilized Tribes Before Removal. (University of  
Oklahoma Press, 1954)

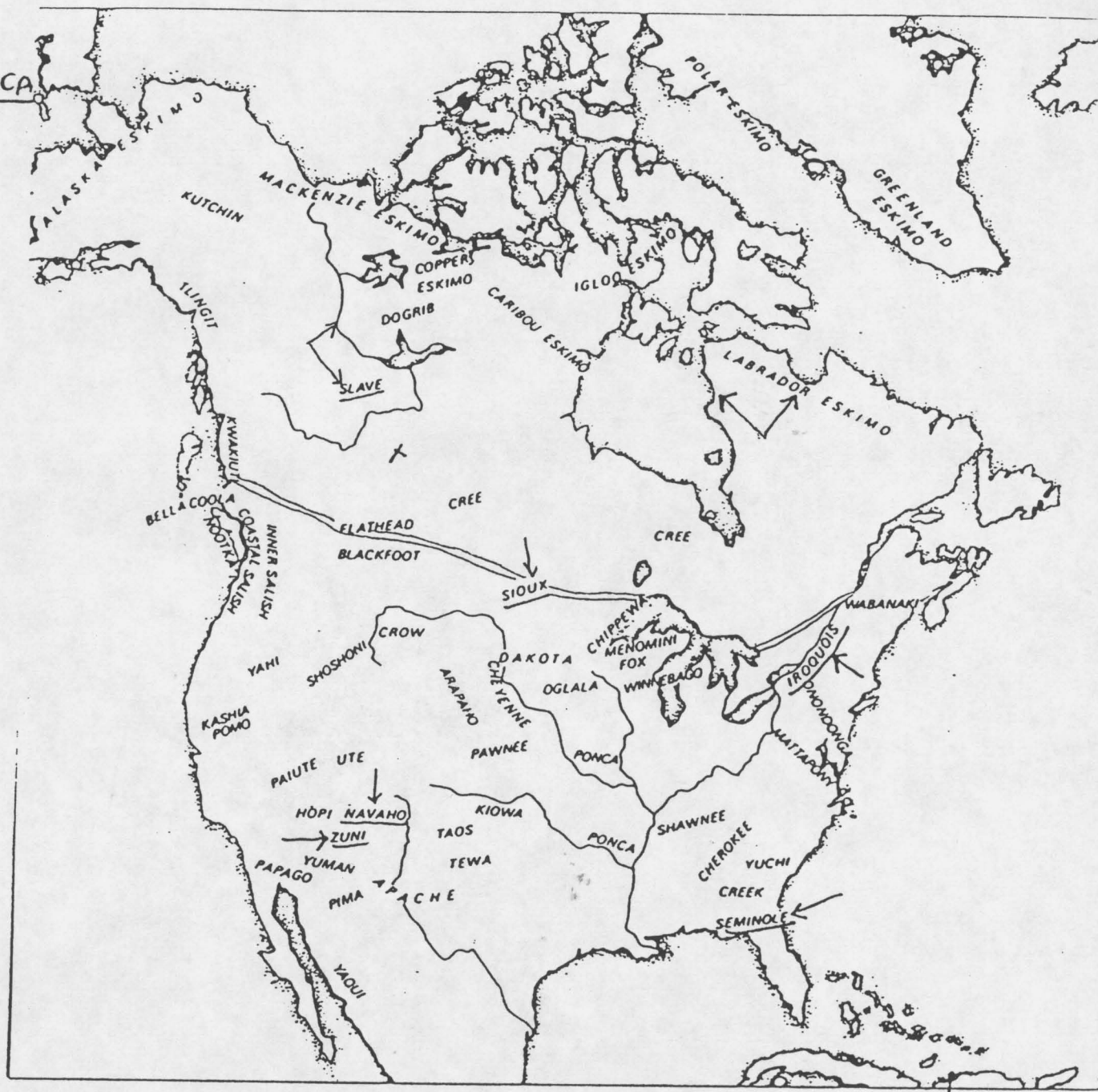


Seminole Village.

LITHO IN U.S.A.



II NATIVE NORTH AMERICA  
Location Map



1. Map of North America showing the location of those Indians discussed