

Nataly Kelly

John Horse An African-Native American Interpreter

On a recent trip to the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian, one of my favorite museums, I saw an amazing exhibit called "IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas." The exhibit draws attention to the many individuals who lived during the 1800s and were of both African and Native American descent. During this time period, many Africans and Native Americans were enslaved and lived in the same quarters. Many people are not even aware that this group of people existed, and the exhibit seeks to make their lives and stories visible.



To my amazement, after doing more research, I learned of an African-Native American interpreter by the name of John Horse, who lived from 1812 to 1882. He was a Seminole-Hispanic-African American who served as an interpreter for the U.S. army -- but he also fought previously against the U.S. army in the Seminole Wars. He spoke Seminole, Spanish, and English.

He moved to what is now Oklahoma during the Indian Removal, and was freed in 1843. When the Black Seminoles faced threats from slave raiders, he led a group to Mexico, where they achieved freedom in 1850. He also served as a captain in the Mexican army. He died while trying to obtain more rights for his people. Many descendents of Black Seminoles still live in Coahuila, Mexico, today.