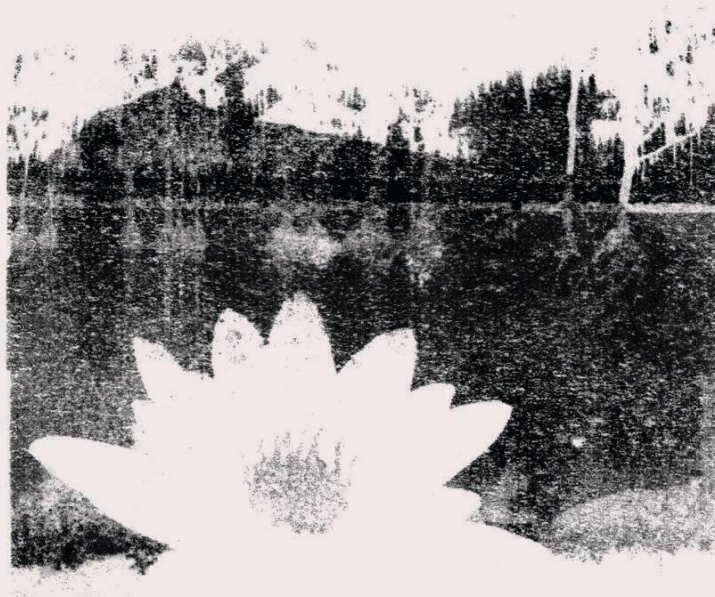


● July 27, 1816: American troops attack Negro Fort, a stockade in Spanish Florida established by the British and left to the Black Seminoles, a Native American nation of Creek refugees, free black people and fugitives from slavery. Nearly all the soldiers, women and children in the fort are killed.



They weren't headed north to freedom —  
They fled away from the North Star,  
turned their back on the Mason-Dixon line,  
put their feet to freedom by fleeing  
further south to Florida.  
Ran to where 'gator and viper roamed  
free in the mosquito swarm of Suwannee.  
They slipped out deep after sunset,  
shadow to shadow, shoulder to shoulder,  
stealthing southward, stealing themselves,  
steeling their souls to run steel  
through any slave catcher who'd dare  
try stealing them back north.  
They billeted in swamp mud,  
saw grass and cypress —  
they waded through waves  
of water lily and duckweed.  
They thinned themselves in thickets  
and thorn bush hiding their young  
from thieves of black skin marauding  
under moonlight and cloud cover.  
Many once knew another shore  
an ocean away, whose language,  
songs, stories were outlawed

on plantation ground. In swampland,  
they raised flags of their native tongues  
above whisper smoke  
into billowing bonfires  
of chant, drum and chatter.  
They remembered themselves  
with their own words  
bleeding into English,  
bonding into Spanish,  
singing in Creek and Creole.  
With their sweat  
forging farms in  
unforgiving heat,  
never forgetting scars  
of the lash, fighting  
battle after battle  
for generations.  
Creeks called them *Seminole*  
when they bonded with renegade Creeks.  
Spaniards called them *cimarrones*,  
runaways — escapees from Carolina  
plantation death-prisons.  
English simply called them *maroons*,  
flattening the Spanish to make them

seem alone, abandoned, adrift —  
but they were bonded,  
side by side,  
Black and Red,  
in a blood red hue —  
*maroon*.  
Sovereignty soldiers,  
Black refugees,  
self-abolitionists, fighting  
through America's history,  
marooned in a land  
they made their own,  
acre after acre,  
plot after plot,  
war after war,  
life after life.  
They fought only  
for America to let them be  
marooned — left alone —  
in their own unchained,  
singing,  
worthy  
blood.

By Tyehimba Jess