

TRIBAL ANCESTORS: THE CALUSA

The Seminole Tribe are the descendants of the Indigenous people of Florida, a continuous line of those that have lived in the peninsula for over 12,000 years. The ancestors were a diverse group, towns and cultures that interacted with each other in trade, competition, marriage, and battle. A great deal of knowledge on the Ancestors was lost due to the impacts of colonization but through the histories and culture passed to their descendants, they are not lost.

The Calusa are one of the best-known Ancestral groups. Making their homes along the southwest of the Florida peninsula, they were masterful sailors and fishermen, drawing enough food from the waters and trade to support their towns without farming the land. The ancestors of the Calusa came from the Caribbean, moving up the island chains from South America. The Calusa maintained trade and diplomacy with the Taino and other Indigenous people of Cuba.

These connections became crucial when Spanish colonizers arrived in the region. Refugees from Cuba warned the Calusa of the threat, and when Ponce de Leon landed his invading force on their shore the Calusa were prepared, driving the Spanish off and dealing the conquistador a mortal blow. They successfully kept the Spanish from colonizing their territory or establishing successful Missions, while also maintaining diplomatic relations and trade.

While the Calusa were able to keep from being colonized, they could not stop the other threats that came to Florida. European diseases dealt lethal blows to Calusa towns. Northern tribes allied with the English drove far into Florida on slave raids, targeting the Calusa and other tribes seen as Spanish allies. When Britain took control of Florida, some Calusa joined the Spanish in fleeing to Cuba. Others around this time were close with the Spanish fishing towns along the coast, and these groups would grow together to become known as the "Spanish Indians." Still others pulled back into the Florida swamps. When the Seminole War came, these now much smaller populations joined with the Seminole and other Indigenous people of Florida. The Calusa were adopted into the Bear Clan, and their descendants thrive today as part of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.



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