"The Spirit of the Old South Can Never Die": Postbellum Middle Florida and the Elite Struggle for Social Hegemony, 1850-1942

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“THE SPIRIT OF THE OLD SOUTH CAN NEVER DIE”:
POSTBELLUM MIDDLE FLORIDA AND THE
ELITE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL HEGEMONY, 1850–1942

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts
History

by
Alexander J. Bowen
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Accepted by:
Dr. Orville Vernon Burton, Committee Chair
Dr. Abel Bartley
Dr. Joshua Catalano
Dr. Rebecca Stoil
Abstract

The Lost Cause is an ideology that falsely portrays the antebellum South as an idyllic, agrarian society, the Confederacy’s cause as a just defense of states’ rights, and slavery as a benevolent institution. Historians of the U.S. South rightly attribute much of the Lost Cause’s creation to the South's prewar elite, particularly women from the planter class who led Confederate memorialization efforts. As the Lost Cause celebrates an antebellum slave society and Confederacy controlled by elites, it is clear the ideology also celebrated the South's prewar elite. However, previous studies of the Lost Cause fail to seriously question what benefit the Lost Cause brought the planter class, nor have scholars seriously examined how the ideology developed in states that experienced significant economic change after the Civil War.

By examining the planters of Leon County, Florida, and one of the class’s descendants who later contributed to the Lost Cause in Florida, this thesis studies the structural reality of Middle Florida’s antebellum elite to understand what role postbellum Confederate memorialization played for that class. Chapter One calculates the persistence rate of Leon County's planter class using land and slaveholding figures from tax and census data to determine that the planters persisted at about the same rate after the Civil War as they did in the antebellum era. Chapter Two analyzes elites’ attempt to reassert social hegemony through the Florida Constitution of 1865 and the “Black Codes,” a campaign that failed when Congressional Reconstruction began. Chapter Three reviews the background and pro-Confederate narratives of Susan Bradford Eppes to explain how Confederate memorialization meant to reclaim the elites' social authority in a Florida economy that quickly evolved past cotton by the turn of the century.
To my parents, Paul and Tina Bowen, and my partner Allie —

without your endless support and love, I would not be where I am today.
Acknowledgments

A special thanks and my unending gratitude are due to everyone who supported me and made the completion of this project possible. First and foremost, I must thank my advisor, Dr. Vernon Burton. Under your direction and guidance, I cannot measure how much I feel I have grown personally and professionally in my time at Clemson University. You are not only a great mentor, but you and Ms. Georganne have been great friends and have treated me with the utmost kindness and hospitality throughout my time in South Carolina. Many thanks to Dr. Joshua Catalano who helped me maneuver the complicated art of quantitative historical analysis. Without your assistance in devising Excel formulas for my Leon County Database, I truly do not believe my project could get off the ground. Special thanks go to Dr. Rebecca Stoil who served as my supervisor, my professor, and as a member of my thesis committee in the past three years. Not only could we talk endlessly about the field of history, but we talked just as much about sports and life. Many thanks also to a fellow Florida State alumnus and Floridian, Dr. Abel Bartley. I so appreciated your insights into my research questions and our discussions about FSU sports, especially being so far from home.

I must thank my external readers for this thesis. To my former professor and friend, Dr. Katherine Mooney, thank you so much for your continued support. You have been an unflinching champion of my study of how the Lost Cause has influenced Southern culture, whether through public memorials or college football. I so appreciate your advice about my scholarship and your willingness to speak in moments of crisis. To Dr. Peter Eisenstadt, you have provided me with critical advice on how to push my research and writing forward in my time here in Clemson. Whenever I felt stuck on an issue, my walks with you and Dr. Burton never failed to keep me moving forward and inspire me as a historian.
Many thanks as well to the professionals at Clemson University Libraries and the State Archives of Florida. Anne Grant is a blessing to us all in the History Department. When all else failed as I tried to uncover particular publications or materials for my research, Anne worked her librarian’s magic and found a trove of relevant information that pushed my research even further. To the staff at the State Archive of Florida, every one of you deserves special thanks as your helpfulness before and during this awful pandemic made the continuation of my research possible.

Last but certainly not least, I want to extend a special thanks to all of my family and friends. I am especially grateful to my parents, Paul and Tina Bowen, who me pushed at a young age to explore my curiosities, instilled in me their own hard work ethics, and always reminded me how much they loved me and how proud they were of my accomplishments. Special thanks also to my girlfriend, Allie, who has been my best friend and companion since we met many years ago. Without your love and support, none of my success in graduate school would have been possible. To my dear friends, James McGuire and Tyler Pilet, thank you for always lending an ear when I needed an outside opinion on my work. I firmly believe the perspectives of fellow Southerners are just as important as the opinions of the greatest scholars. Thanks also to my roommates, Josh Johnson and John Brightwell, who willingly acted as sounding boards when I felt my thoughts were unclear. Sorry for monopolizing the kitchen counter for the last six months.
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Introduction

“Yes, the Old South was slowly but surely dying; that is to say, the Old South was dying politically, financially and socially, but the spirit of the Old South can never die,” Susan Bradford Eppes wrote in *Through Some Eventful Years*. “So long as a loyal son or daughter of the Old South remains, they will recall with pride the glorious deeds of the armies of the Southern Confederacy; they will speak with tenderness of the war work of the Southern women…”¹ Eppes was describing the revolutionary change she witnessed in Florida soon after the Confederacy’s defeat in the American Civil War: the emancipation of African Americans as forced laborers, the fading importance of cotton to the Florida economy, and the freedom of Black Floridians to walk about the streets of Tallahassee without showing deference to whites. Despite the South’s crushing defeat and the widespread change in the immediate postwar years, Eppes was right to say the spirit of the “Old South” was not dead. For decades, white southern women of the Ladies’ Memorial Associations (LMAs) and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) publicly mourned the Confederate dead and celebrated the legacy of the antebellum South to pass the sentiment of the “Old South” on to future generations of southerners. Because of the work completed mainly by the “Daughters,” as they called themselves, to glorify Confederate memory and teach younger generations of southerners a romanticized version of Southern history, Eppes’s statement was just as true in 1926 as it was in 1866. Even as the center of Florida politics shifted further southward in the 20th century, the state economy depended on citrus and northern tourism, and as women could vote in elections, the spirit of the “Old South” lived on. Monuments to the Confederate dead and Confederate victories in Florida stood in every corner of the state, young children revered Confederate veterans as

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heroes, and the “stars and bars” were flown by indoctrinated Floridians who believed the symbol represented states’ rights, during the years of the Civil Rights Movement.

Even today, many Floridians are still invested in the mythology of the Lost Cause, an ideology founded by white southern women that views the antebellum South as an idyllic society ruined by Northern aggressors who defeated a just Confederacy defending states' rights. Throughout the Sunshine State you can see memorials to the Confederacy in large and small scales. A Confederate battle flag still flies next to the welcome sign for rural Dixie County along the Nature Coast; towns from Jacksonville to Perry still proudly display monuments to the Confederate dead; and, natives and tourists alike can view the massive replica of the national flag of the Confederate States of America at the junction of I-4 and I-75 in Hillsborough County. The efforts of the Daughters of the Confederacy to rewrite Southern history were both powerful and enduring in Florida. But what did the Daughters gain from mythologizing and memorializing the Confederacy? What reward awaited these women in a society who looked back fondly on the Confederacy and its failed cause?

One answer is rather clear. White southern women’s dedication to vindicating the memory of the antebellum South and the Confederacy is intrinsically tied to class and gender expectations. Caroline Janney and Karen L. Cox have identified that the Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the United Daughters of the Confederacy were almost entirely comprised of women of the southern elite, i.e., the planter class. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued, elite families held the arduous task of honoring their forefathers by preserving the status of their family name, especially since antebellum southerners firmly believed bloodline passed down

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both positive and negative character traits. While white Southern women were nearly incapable of personal honor, according to Wyatt-Brown their actions and reputations within their communities reflected the honor of their families, therefore women could make or ruin a family’s name and the honor of their male relatives by association. Under the culture of Southern honor, the duty of an honorable woman of an elite family was to defend the family’s honor against internal and external threats. Military defeat, especially in a war fought for immoral reasons, was a grave threat to Southern honor.

As a class who built their wealth on the backs of enslaved laborers, seceded from the United States in defense of slavery, and caused the death of at least 620,000 Americans, the southern planter class was bound to be denounced as a selfish and immoral people, so elite white southern women intervened. Initially, the Ladies’ Memorial Associations coordinated modest dedications to the Confederate dead in the men’s place as women and their humble efforts were viewed as non-partisan by occupying federal troops during Reconstruction. These early actions laid the foundation for a greater commemoration of the Southern cause without drawing the ire of non-southerners. After President Hayes removed federal troops from the ex-Confederate states when Reconstruction ended in 1877, white southern women grew more militant in their celebration of a mythologized Southern past. The Daughters of the Confederacy commissioned grander monuments to key Confederate figures, organized ceremonies with fiery speeches from community leaders, educated southern children in Lost Cause myth through the Children of the Confederacy and UDC-written school textbooks, and opposed any histories or historians that were critical of the South. St. Augustine, Florida’s, Anna Dummett Chapter of the UDC understood their mission well: “Members of the Anna Dummett Chapter, forget not that your

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most magnificent inscription to the Southern dead cannot be written on marble or parchment alone, though these should not be wanting; but the most enduring memorial of all that the South holds dear and scared must be written on the fleshy tablets of the hearts and minds and memories of her people. Elite white women of the South undoubtedly saw their mission to pass off their revisionist southern history as truth to preserve class and family honor, but why? If the southern planter class dominated antebellum society, what changed after the war for the women of this group to believe the glorification of their members was necessary?

By examining the planter class of Leon County, Florida, and Susan Bradford Eppes, one of the class's descendants who later contributed to the Lost Cause myth in Florida, this thesis studies the structural reality of Middle Florida's antebellum elite to understand what role postbellum Confederate memorialization played for the class. First, a persistence study of Leon County's planters among the non-elites of the county landholding class reveals these elites not only persisted after the Civil War at a similar rate as in antebellum decades, but the class expanded its control of the county's real estate wealth to the detriment of non-elite landholders. Therefore, emancipation was not the root of the planter class's decline. Second, the sources of the Middle Florida planter class's lost authority in Florida are twofold: 1) citrus and tourism surpassed cotton as Florida’s economic driving force by the end of the 19th century and the planter class failed to sufficiently acknowledge or capitalize on this development, instead stubbornly committing to cotton or not realizing profit in these new industries; and, 2) Middle Florida elites failed to retain their antebellum social hegemony through the codification of white supremacy in Florida's Constitution of 1865 and "Black Codes," a campaign that failed when

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Congressional Reconstruction began. Finally, by using Susan Bradford Eppes as a case study, this thesis concludes that Confederate memorialization meant to preserve the honor of elite families who supported the Confederacy and its defense of slavery, and whose social authority was diminished by their financial decline at the turn of the century. In Eppes’s case, Confederate memorialization was designed to preserve her families’ honor and draw additional income as she struggled financially at the end of her life.

Leon County, Florida, serves as an excellent case study for this thesis. As the center of the five-county plantation belt in Middle Florida characterized by rich clay soil, Leon attracted many migrant planters from the Upper South seeking a return to wealth through cotton planting after Florida's annexation by the United States in 1822. As host to Tallahassee, Florida's territorial and state capital, Leon County drew greater attention than the other Middle Florida counties for migrant elites' potential to seize political power. This allowed Leon County to rapidly develop a strong plantation culture that facilitated its growth into antebellum Florida's most valuable and profitable county. This makes Leon a suitable community for studying planter persistence and experience in Middle Florida as the county is similar to other communities of the Deep South for its dependence on cotton and dissimilar given the quick transition of Florida's economy away from the commodity following the Civil War.

This study uses an array of quantitative and qualitative historical materials to uncover the planter’s experience before and after the Civil War. To calculate the persistence rate of Leon County planters, this study compiled agricultural and population census schedules with county tax records for the years 1850, 1860, and 1870 retrieved from the State Archives of Florida into a Leon County Landholder Database alongside statewide agricultural product summaries by the U.S. Census Bureau for context. In its examination of the campaign to codify white supremacy in
Florida’s Constitution of 1865 and “Black Codes,” this thesis makes use of Florida constitutional
correspondence between
Florida officials and President Andrew Johnson, and relevant secondary literature to confirm that
white Floridians sought a return to antebellum custom in their first Reconstruction government.
In researching the financial backgrounds and Civil War service records of constitutional
convention delegates and the members of the DuPont-Peeler Committee, this study combines
population and slave census schedules, Florida Civil War service rosters published by the
National Park Service and David W. Hartman’s and David Coles’s *Biographical Rosters of
Florida’s Confederate and Union Soldiers, 1861-1865*, and biographies of former officials by
Florida’s government agencies. Lastly, in the study of Susan Bradford Eppes’s life and how she
became involved in Lost Cause mythmaking, this thesis works with Eppes’s pseudohistorical
narratives, *The Negro of the Old South* (1925) and *Through Some Eventful Years* (1926), to
analyze how her romantic views of the southern past were informed by her present reality, the
Leon County Landholder Database to trace the financial development of her families from 1850
onward, and personal correspondence and effects in the Pine Hill Plantation Papers, Susan
Bradford Eppes Papers, and the Bradford-Eppes Family Papers located in Florida State
University’s Special Collections and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s Wilson
Center.

A major debate among historians of the U.S. South surrounds the question of whether the
southern planter class was ruined by the Civil War and its consequences, but no significant study
of Leon County’s or any Florida planters has been completed. C. Vann Woodward first argued in

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5 David W. Hartman and David Coles, *Biographical Rosters of Florida's Confederate and Union Soldiers, 1861-
Origins of the New South (1951) that the large plantations of the antebellum South were replaced by small farms after the war based on his examination of census records. In subsequent decades, other historians refuted Woodward’s claim that a “revolution in small farming” swept the postbellum South, positing instead that the small farms were tended to by tenant farmers contracted with large merchant or planter landowners. Jonathan Weiner argued further in Social Origins of the New South (1978) that the planter elite not only survived the threats of the war and the immediate postwar years but expanded their wealth and hegemony in the late 19th century based on his study of planters in the western Alabama Black Belt. Later historians who studied other southern communities, including Steven Hahn with the Georgia upcountry and Robert C. Kenzer with Orange County, North Carolina, concurred with Weiner’s planter persistence thesis. Nevertheless, no historian to date has seriously studied the persistence of planters in Leon County, Florida. This thesis determines that the planters of Leon County persisted immediately after the Civil War at a similar rate as in antebellum decades. Moreover, this thesis shows that planter persistence occurred in a state that quickly transitioned away from cotton as its major economic factor in the postbellum era.

Among most historians of the Reconstruction era, Florida is not researched as a serious participant in the ex-Confederate states’ efforts to codify white supremacy in their postwar governments under Presidential Reconstruction despite major historians of the genre singling out Florida for vehemently racist statutes. Theodore B. Wilson, in The Black Codes of the South (1965), claimed the 14th Assembly of the Florida Legislature was “the most bigoted and short-

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sighted of all southern legislatures of 1865 and 1866.”

10 Jerrell Shofner claimed in Nor Is It Over Yet (1974) that Florida was the only state legislature after Congress rebuked Mississippi’s and South Carolina’s first Reconstruction governments that failed to adopt milder "Black Codes" in response. Shofner believed that Florida’s refusal to water down the racial discrimination in its laws was due to white Floridians’ “belligerence and defiance” of the Republican-controlled Congress. 11 Eric Foner, in The Second Founding (2019), also singled out the Florida Legislature for its harsh vagrancy laws that allowed those convicted to be involuntarily sold as laborers as criminal punishment. 12 In its study of the creation of Florida's first Reconstruction government, this thesis argues that white Floridians were united under a common mission to abolish slavery and award Black Floridians what whites believed were the minimum requisite rights under the Constitution and Andrew Johnson's guidelines for the new ex-Confederate state governments. This study's quantitative analysis of the delegates to Florida's constitution convention of 1865 identifies them as a planting, ex-Confederate majority who sought both the codification of antebellum white supremacy and smooth readmission to the Union, not a protest of Congressional Republicans contrary to Shofner’s argument.

Leon County has generally been ignored by non-resident historians despite its similarity to other Deep South communities for its cotton planting culture, and atypicality for Florida’s quick transition away from the fibrous commodity. Historian Jerrell H. Shofner examined Leon County for its political importance, shifts in the plantation economy’s labor source, and majority-Black population during Reconstruction in Nor Is It Over Yet, but Shofner’s scholarship looked

at the Capital County as one component in a statewide phenomenon. Tallahassee newspaper journalist, Clifton Paisley, extensively researched Leon County and the Middle Florida plantation belt in *From Cotton to Quail* (1968) and *The Red Hills of Florida, 1528-1865* (1989). From *Cotton to Quail* traced the evolution of Leon County agriculture from intensive cotton planting just before the Civil War to the conversion of antebellum cotton plantations into northerner-owned quail hunting plantations in the 20th century. While the book provides a magnificent study of antebellum cotton and postbellum quail plantations, including maps with their locations, Paisley’s narrative looks at Leon’s agriculture broadly and only focuses on the large planters, not the lesser members of the class or non-elite landholders. *The Red Hills of Florida* is an excellent regional history of the Middle Florida plantation belt from its inhabitance by indigenous peoples to the end of the Civil War, but, like *From Cotton to Quail*, provides a general history of the area and its society instead of a detailed study of Leon County or the entire planting and landholding classes. To date, historian Edward E. Baptist’s *Creating an Old South* is the most robust history of antebellum Leon County and its inhabitants. In his community study of Leon and Jackson counties, Baptist focuses intently on the relationships between migrant elites, yeoman whites, and enslaved African Americans to explain how southern planters often rewrote history to wash away the struggles and challenges of the cotton frontier. Baptist not only provides a deep analysis of Leon County's antebellum community but challenges the notion of a static "Old South" fabricated by planter elites and their descendants. In many ways, this thesis is a continuance of Baptist's previous study. Where *Creating an Old South* examines the

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reality of elites within the antebellum white settlement of Florida and their mythmaking before the Civil War, this thesis examines the reality of elites after the devastation of the war, how Florida’s societal changes slowly washed the planters away, and how elite descendants added their false narratives of the Civil War and Reconstruction to existing narratives of a static “Old South” to romanticize the southern past and reassert their hegemony in new forms.

In the past fifty years, historians of the Lost Cause have acknowledged the role gender played in the mythology’s development, but have failed to question what role the Lost Cause played for antebellum southern elites or how the myth developed in Florida. Charles Reagan Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood* (1980) examined the correlation between southern Christianity and the creation of the Lost Cause as a “civil religion,” a celebration of the Confederacy and its figures completed with near-religious rituals and commitment. As groundbreaking as Wilson’s study of the Lost Cause was, *Baptized in Blood* is rather narrow in its examination of key figures in the Lost Cause as it focuses intently on the influence of southern religious officials and less on members of Confederate memorialization organization, especially the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Later, Gaines Foster looked at how southerners reasoned with and overcame the devastation of defeat through Confederate memorialization in *Ghosts of the Confederacy* (1987). Although Foster explains the phases of the Lost Causes development during and after Reconstruction and the essential roles of the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Daughters are viewed as one part of a greater memorialization program instead of the crucial organization that sustained the Lost Cause into the 20th century. More recent scholars of the Lost Cause have studied the importance

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of women in the myth’s development. In *Dixie’s Daughters* (2003), Karen L. Cox studied the monumental efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to create the Lost Cause myth as it is understood and how the Daughters promoted its pseudohistorical narratives as fact through public memory and southern public school history curriculums. Caroline Janney researched the Daughters' predecessor organization, the Ladies' Memorial Association, who orchestrated the majority of Confederate memorialization rituals and monument constructions during the Reconstruction era and in the years before the UDC's creation in 1892 in *Burying the Dead but Not the Past* (2008). Nevertheless, neither Cox nor Janney adequately addresses what motivated the elite white women of these pro-Confederate organizations to create and promote Lost Cause mythology despite making clear connections between class and gender expectations of these women. Additionally, no historian of the Lost Cause has seriously studied the myth's creation and dissemination in Florida, instead, historians have focused almost exclusively on Virginia and other states with significant Civil War battles. This thesis seeks to fill both historiographical gaps by analyzing the personal reasons for women of the Ladies’ Memorial Associations and United Daughters of the Confederacy chapters in Florida for participating in Confederate memorialization.

"'The Spirit of the Old South Can Never Die:' Postbellum Middle Florida and the Elite Struggle for Social Hegemony, 1850-1926" explores the correlation between the slow class failure of Middle Florida's plantation elites and how the elites' descendants used the Lost Cause as a means to revive the planters' social authority and romanticize their history. Chapter One, "Where Cotton Wasn't King: Postbellum Planter Persistence," uses the Leon County Landholder Database to calculate the persistence rate of Leon County, Florida, planters from 1850 to 1870 within the context of the county's landholding population. Despite the planters' significant loss of
personal property wealth with the emancipation of Black Floridians, Leon County's planter class persisted as in antebellum years during the war decade while the county’s non-elite landholders dropped in numbers and overall real estate wealth. Chapter Two, “‘Made and Executed by the White Race:’ Florida’s Constitution of 1865 and ‘Black Codes,’” examines the campaign to create a new state government under Presidential Reconstruction that codified antebellum white supremacy. Florida’s constitutional convention and legislatures severely discriminated against Black Floridians to maintain the population as a laboring class for white agriculturalists and believed their white supremacist state government met Andrew Johnson’s guidelines for readmission and were not overly offensive to a Republican-controlled Congress. Chapter Three, “Susan Bradford Eppes (1846-1942),” traces the antebellum upbringing and postbellum experience of Susan Bradford Eppes, a descendant of the Bradford, Branch, and Eppes families of Leon County, to comprehend why she participated in Confederate memorialization efforts and contributed to the Lost Cause’s development in Florida through her many narratives. Ultimately, Eppes’s decision to romanticize the southern past stemmed from her childhood in honor-bound antebellum Leon County that expected her to defend her families’ honor, especially as supporters of a defeated Confederacy and members of planter families who declined by the end of the 19th century, and as an effort to draw additional income as she struggled financially in the final decades of her life.
Chapter One:
Where Cotton Wasn’t King: Postbellum Planter Persistence

Introduction

The question of whether the South’s antebellum planter class survived the Civil War is one of intense debate among Southern historians. In addition to natural deaths, at least 258,000 southerners died supporting the Confederacy, the abolition of slavery cost slaveholders billions in personal wealth, and the devastation of the southern landscape and economy was widespread. But did these and other factors ruin the Southern planter class? In Origins of the New South, C. Vann Woodward theorized that the Southern planter class collapsed after the Civil War, and from its ashes rose a "revolution in small farming" based on his analysis of census records. Historians have since responded to Woodward's thesis, arguing instead the "revolution in small farming" was the division of large estates, whether planter- or merchant-owned, into plots for sharecropping. Several historians in recent decades further opposed Woodward's thesis that the planter class failed. Jonathan Wiener, Woodward's first significant opponent, examined the planter class of the western Alabama Black Belt from 1850-1885 and determined the planters, though temporarily threatened by merchants in the crop lien system, survived and expanded their wealth to the detriment of the lower classes.¹ Other historians of the U.S. South concurred with Wiener’s persistence thesis in their community studies. Steven Hahn in The Roots of Southern Populism revealed that planters in the Georgia Upcountry persisted at the same rate as in antebellum decades despite living in a yeoman-dominated region outside the cotton market.²

Planters in Orange County, North Carolina, persisted at antebellum rates in a tobacco-

¹ See Wiener, Social Origins of the New South.
cotton-growing region, according to Robert C. Kenzer in *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community.*

Although historians have shown that the Southern planter class was generally stable, no historian has studied the persistence rate of planters in Leon County, Florida. While the planter class of Leon County was similar to elites in other regions of the Deep South in that their wealth was derived from cotton planting, this group’s postbellum experience diverges from most of the South’s. After the Civil War, Florida's economy slowly moved away from intensive cotton planting as the state's peninsula further developed, uncovering wealth in timber, citrus, and eventually tourism with the introduction of Henry Flagler's and Henry Plant's coastal railroads at the end of the nineteenth century. By the 1880s, it is clear the antebellum elite suffered some loss of social authority. One editor in Palatka, Florida, remarked in 1884 that Tallahassee, Florida’s capital located in Leon County, had become “a sleepy city of the past,…perhaps proud of her noble childhood, but hopeless of the future and drawing sustenance which keeps death from her pillow out of the remains of a bygone system…”

This study seeks to address two questions. First, what was the persistence rate of the planter class in Leon County? Was there a drastic decline in membership for the county’s elite after the war compared to antebellum decades, or did membership remain stable? Second, if Leon County’s planter class diminished significantly, what prompted this change? Was it emancipation or the diversification of Florida’s economy?

To uncover the persistence rate of the Leon planter class in the postbellum era, this study first determines the planters' persistence across the 1850s, a time when Southern elites were unquestionably stable. This is accomplished by analyzing data from the U.S. Censuses of 1850 and 1860, paying close attention to the censuses of agriculture and population, and county tax

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3 Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community*, 102.
records for the same years. The definition of a planter in this study is any county resident or family who owns twenty or more bond persons AND 500 or more acres of land according to both census and tax data. The intention behind this double authentication to confirm planter status is an effort to circumvent estimates voluntarily provided by respondents to the census enumerator. Tax records, conversely, were required by law to be accurate to ensure taxpayers were taxed at the appropriate rate. For 1870, given the Thirteen Amendment abolished slavery in 1865, planter status will not include slaveholding figures. Instead, a planter in 1870 will be defined as any Leon County resident or family who owned 500 acres of land or more according to the 1870 U.S. Census. Persistence rates are calculated by dividing the number of elite individuals and families who remained in the planter class across the decade of study by the total number of planters in the previous class. For example, if thirty planters remained elite across the 1850s and the total number of planters in 1850 was sixty, then the persistence rate of planters for the 1850s would be fifty percent.

Leon County, 1850

The 1840s were a tumultuous time for Middle Florida. The decade began in recession as the shockwave from the Panic of 1837 reached the South. European and New York financiers called in debts, pressing Leon County landholders into bankruptcy, dependence on more affluent residents for a financial bailout, or, for slaveholders, exile west to states such as Texas to avoid the repossession of their enslaved laborers. The 1840s were especially challenging to planters who remained in Leon County. The recession caused the collapse of most southern credit sources, like the Union Bank in Tallahassee, forcing borrowers to turn to New York for operational loans. Beginning with the 1838 St. Joseph Convention, Florida's campaign for
statehood brought popular elections and enfranchised all white males over twenty-one. Leon County elites thereafter had to cooperate on the poorer classes of whites to maintain their political authority. The Second Seminole War heightened pre-existing fears of insurrection, leading slaveholders to adopt paternalistic reforms in their relationships with enslaved laborers instead of relying on violence to force laborers into subservience. Planters in Leon County were no longer able to rule the state through federal patronage and brutality as they had in the early years of territorial Florida. The 1850s nevertheless promised greater prosperity as cotton prices rebounded.

Despite the damage to cotton growers wrought by the recession, Florida’s economy remained centered on the short-staple crop and Leon County was its greatest producer. Out of over 45,000 cotton bales produced in the state according to the 1850 Census, Leon County contributed over a third of Florida’s total with over 16,000 bales, more than any other Florida county and all but three counties in neighboring Georgia.\(^5\) Cotton also made Leon the most valuable county in Florida; of the $6.3 million value of all Florida farms, Leon accounted for over a quarter of the total with $1.7 million.\(^6\)

\(^6\) U.S. Census Bureau, Farms, 1850, prepared by Social Explorer (accessed October 11, 2021). Neither the U.S. Census Bureau nor any Florida historians have quantified the economic value of cotton in Florida in 1850. In the absence of such data, the cash value of Florida farms listed in the 1850 Census offers a suitable alternative for gauging cotton’s importance to the state economy similar to Charlton W. Tebeau’s analysis of Florida in 1860 in *A History of Florida*, 184. My continued analysis of Florida’s cotton production will yield better results in the future.
### Table 1.1: Landholding Values by Class, Leon County, 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Unimproved</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Land (Acres)</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>77,262</td>
<td>94,992</td>
<td>172,254</td>
<td>$1,671,413</td>
<td>15,266</td>
<td>140,632</td>
<td>$1,491,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>28,891</td>
<td>41,050</td>
<td>69,941</td>
<td>$508,719</td>
<td>5,284</td>
<td>42,818</td>
<td>$516,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite %</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>48,371</td>
<td>53,942</td>
<td>102,313</td>
<td>$1,162,694</td>
<td>9,982</td>
<td>97,814</td>
<td>$975,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: 1850 U.S. Census, Leon County; 1850 Property Tax Books, Leon County*

![Graph of Table 1.1](image)

### Table 1.2: Landholding Percentages by Class, Leon County, 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Unimproved</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Land (Acres)</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
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<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Non-Elite % & Planter %*

### Table 1.3: Slaveholding Totals, Leon County, 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Tax Rolls</th>
<th>Pop. Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Bond Persons</td>
<td>Bond Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>5,481</td>
<td>6,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>1,576</td>
<td>2,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite %</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>3,905</td>
<td>4,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: 1850 U.S. Census, Leon County; 1850 Property Tax Books, Leon County*

![Graph of Table 1.3](image)

### Table 1.4: Slaveholding Percentages by Class, Leon County, 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bond Persons</th>
<th>Tax Rolls</th>
<th>Bond Persons</th>
<th>Pop. Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite %</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Non-Elite % & Planter %*
Leon’s cotton wealth supported a planter class of sixty-six families and individuals in 1850, equal to 18 percent of the county’s landowning population. The planters controlled the majority of the county’s real estate with collective possession of between 97,000 and 103,000 total acres, or 59-70 percent of Leon’s total acreage; the elite possessed nearly two-thirds of all improved, arable lands with over 48,000 acres; the sum of the planters’ real estate was equal to between $975,000 to $1.2 million, or between 65-70 percent of the total real estate value of Leon County; and, planter lands produced 65 percent of the county’s cotton for 1850 with almost 10,000 bales. (Table 1.1). Land alone did not create the planters’ wealth; for cotton to be sellable required sizable labor forces. Leon planters owned anywhere from 3,900 to 4,500 bond persons, or between 65-71 percent of the entire enslaved labor force in the county. (Table 1.3).

By contrast, the non-elites of Leon County’s landholding class owned a minority share of the county’s wealth. The remaining 287 non-planter landholders, over four-fifths of the landholding class, owned between 42,000 to 70,000 total acres, or 30-41 percent of the available land in Leon County; the non-elites held 37 percent of the arable land with under 29,000 acres; the total value of non-elite real estate was between $508,000 to $516,000, equal to between 30-35 percent of the total real estate value of Leon County; and, the non-elite landowners produced just over a third of the total cotton with around 5,250 bales. As a group whose members owned few enslaved persons, if any, the non-elites owned between 1,500 to 2,500 bond persons, a total that ranged from 29-35 percent of the county total. Comparing the total land and slave ownership of the two groups of landholders shows most of Leon County’s wealth was concentrated at the top, but a comparison of the size of the two groups’ average holdings reveals how stark the inequality was.
With a class average exceeding the traditional definition of a large plantation (1000+ acres), the mean property values of Leon County’s elite reveal how great their wealth was. The average plantation was between 1450 to 1550 total acres with over 700 improved acres; the average cotton output of Leon’s plantations was 150 cotton bales; and, the mean real estate value of a planter was from $17,500 to $20,500. (Table 1.5). Leon County plantations averaged enslaved labor forces of between 59 to 68 people. (Table 1.6). The mean property values of Leon’s non-elite landholders suggest their farms provided subsistence instead of large profit. The average non-elite farm was between 150 to 250 total acres with just over 100 acres of arable land; non-elite farms produced a mean of 18 cotton bales; and, the mean real estate value of non-elite landholders was between $1800 and $2700. Non-elites possessed an average enslaved labor force between 5 and 9 people. In every category, the planters owned seven to twelve times the property of the average non-elite.
Leon County, 1860

The 1850s proved to be prosperous for the South’s planters and the elites of Leon County were no exception. As the national debate over slavery heated up, the southern economy expanded through elevated cotton prices following the recession of the 1840s.

Florida’s economy expanded significantly over the 1850s due both to cotton and the development of the state’s peninsula. Florida’s cotton output grew, culminating in the production of over 60,000 bales, according to the 1860 Census. Leon County’s cotton production also expanded, increasing to nearly 17,000 bales by 1860, maintaining Leon’s title as the greatest cotton-producing county in Florida. The total value of Florida farms skyrocketed over the decade, more than doubling to $16.4 million. Leon County remained the state's most valuable county as its farms’ total value increased to $2.84 million. Although Leon remained the most productive and valuable Florida county, census returns indicate that Leon’s dominance was slowly declining. Leon County’s 1860 cotton crop was only a 500-bale improvement on its 1850 crop; Leon’s share of Florida’s cotton output dropped from a third to a quarter of the state total; and, Leon’s share of Florida’s total farm value declined to less than 20 percent.7 Growth in the peninsula explains the decline in Leon’s share of Florida’s cotton production and farm value as other counties developed cotton industries of their own, especially in Marion and Alachua Counties. The source of the dwindling expansion of Leon’s annual cotton output is less apparent, but the likeliest cause was poor farming practices by county residents. Without sufficient crop rotation to replenish the soil in Leon’s intensive cotton industry, arable land would eventually be depleted and unsuitable for farming. The failure to adequately care for the soil led agriculturalist

Solon Robinson to chastise Leon Countians in 1851 for their harmful practices, calling them “real land destroyers.”

### Table 1.7: Landholding Statistics by Class, Leon County, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Agricultural Census</th>
<th>Tax Rolls</th>
<th>Pop. Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>Unimproved</td>
<td>Total Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>106,970</td>
<td>186727</td>
<td>293697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>44,085</td>
<td>115486</td>
<td>159571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite %</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>63,125</td>
<td>71,521</td>
<td>134,646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Sources: 1860 U.S. Census, Leon County; 1860 Property Tax Books, Leon County_

### Table 1.8: Landholding Percentages by Class, Leon County, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Unimproved</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Land (Acres)</th>
<th>Value ($)</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Census</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Rolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pop. Census</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1.9: Slaveholding Totals by Class, Leon County, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Tax Rolls</th>
<th>Pop. Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bond Persons</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>6,095</td>
<td>$3,270,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>1,468</td>
<td>$779,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite %</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>4,649</td>
<td>$2,505,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Sources: 1860 U.S. Census, Leon County; 1860 Property Tax Books, Leon County_

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If Leon County’s economic performance was slowing, it did not severely impact either class of landholders. In 1860, the planters owned 46 percent of Leon’s total acreage with between 127,000 to 135,000 acres; elites maintained their control of the county’s arable land with 59 percent of the improved acreage at over 63,000 acres; elite cotton production dropped slightly to 63 percent, but real cotton output increased to over 10,500 bales; and, the elites’ total real estate value stood between 60-81 percent of the county’s total real estate wealth with $1.2 to $1.5 million. Elite control of Leon County’s total acreage did decline, but this was due to the non-elite landholders’ significant gains in unimproved acreage. Leon planters increased their enslaved labor force to 4600 to 4900 enslaved persons, equal to 63-76 percent of the county total and valued from $2.5 to $3 million.

Non-elite landowners also witnessed gains in real and personal wealth during the high times of the 1850s. The non-elites’ share of Leon County’s total acreage grew to 54 percent with nearly 160,000 acres due to the class’s purchase of over 74,000 acres of unimproved land over the decade for a total of over 115,000 non-arable acres. However, the non-elites’ 44,000 improved acres only produced 38 percent of the county’s cotton with roughly 6300 bales. Wide gaps additionally remained between elite and non-elite real estate wealth. The combined value of all non-elite farms was slightly over $950,000 while the class’s total real estate wealth was
estimated at around $1.2 million. Slave ownership for non-elites too was dwarfed by the planter class's; with a collective total between 1400 to 3000 enslaved people, the non-elites controlled a little over a third of Leon County's total enslaved population. County tax rolls value the non-elites' human capital near $780,000 while the population census appraises the class's total personal estate at $2.5 million, but personal estate includes other valuables such as jewelry or furniture.

Table 1.11: Landholding Averages by Class, Leon County, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Unimproved</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Land (Acres)</th>
<th>Value ($)</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>1490</td>
<td>1,646</td>
<td>$3,645</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>$1,097</td>
<td>$4,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>1,844</td>
<td>$20,154</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>$12,500</td>
<td>$19,432</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1860 U.S. Census, Leon County; 1860 Property Tax Books, Leon County

Table 1.12: Slaveholding Averages by Class, Leon County, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Bond Persons</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Personal Estate</th>
<th>Bond Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>$9,677</td>
<td>$16,865</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$2,965</td>
<td>$9,738</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>$26,000</td>
<td>$42,717</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1860 U.S. Census, Leon County; 1860 Property Tax Books, Leon County

Average land and slaveholding figures for 1860 affirm the interclass dynamic between the two landholding classes. The common plantation in Leon County for the year was still a traditional large plantation with an average total acreage between 1300 to 1850 acres, of which over 850 acres were arable based on census estimates; the mean cotton production for Leon planters was a slightly lower 145 bales; and, the mean real estate value of the planters was anywhere from $12,500 to over $20,000. Leon elites averaged an enslaved labor force between 64-67 people, valued between $26,000 and $43,000. Mean property ownership figures for the non-elite follow the same trends as the class's total. Although county tax rolls for the year
estimate the average total acreage of non-elite farms at nearly 230 acres, the agricultural census argues the class's average total was closer to 1600 acres. The gap between the county tax rolls and census data was over unimproved acreage that was likely untaxed and therefore uncounted by the tax assessor. Due to the class's purchases of unimproved lands, non-elite farms averaged close to 1500 acres of non-arable land with only 170 arable acres and produced a minuscule 24 cotton bales annually compared to the planters. The mean real estate value of non-elite farmers was from $1000 to $5000. The slaveholding average for non-elites was between 6-11 enslaved people worth between $9500 and $17,000.

Table 1.13: Composition of Leon Landholding Class, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of Leon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>338</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>78.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planters</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>21.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Leon County Landholders Database*

Aside from shifts in slave and landholding values among landholders, the composition of Leon County’s landholding class itself changed over the decade. With a total of 353 individuals or families in 1850, landholding class membership declined by fifteen members for a total of 338 individuals or families in 1860. The non-elite class shrank by twenty-two members, dropping from a total of 287 to 265. Conversely, the planter class gained seven members, rising from a total of 66 members to 73 by the end of the decade. In 1860, almost 22 percent of Leon’s landholding class was elite while the remaining 78 percent were non-elites.
The planter class not only expanded its membership over the 1850s, but its existing members persisted at a significant rate. With a persistence rate of nearly 47 percent, Leon County's 1850 planter class persisted at a similar rate as the planters in western Alabama. Most persistent elites came from the Upper South, namely Virginia and North Carolina, where a strong plantation culture existed before the American Revolution and where elites who settled in Florida could access credit from wealthy family members in the absence of banks or during a crisis. Of no surprise, the persistent elite were immensely wealthy. Persistent planter estates ranged in size from Fred R. Cotten’s 6300-acre plantation to the 520-acre plantation of John Branch, Florida's final territorial governor who owned several other plantations in Florida and North Carolina. Persistent labor forces ranged in size from Fred Cotten’s 274 enslaved persons to William D. Bloxham’s twenty enslaved persons. In short, Leon County’s persistent elite were very wealthy residents who could access credit even after the failure of southern banks after the Panic of 1837.
Leon County, 1870

The 1860s brought revolutionary change to Florida. White Floridians responded to the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860 by calling a “Convention of the People” that concluded with the state’s secession on January 10, 1861. The declaration of causes drafted by the secession convention denounced the northern states as an existential threat to the institution of slavery. When Tallahassee formally surrendered to Union forces in April 1865, it was clear to white Floridians that their rebellion against the United States was slavery’s ultimate undoing. The Confederacy’s defeat freed over 62,000 enslaved persons statewide resulting in massive losses in personal wealth for Florida’s slaveholders. Emancipation temporarily granted Black Floridians freedom to travel and work where they pleased. By June 1865, most freedmen returned to their former plantations or were rounded up by the Freedmen’s Bureau and shuttled to the countryside to labor. This did not appease Florida’s planters who believed emancipation would be their downfall and sought a firmer grip on Black labor through contract labor and eventually tenant farming. Data from the 1870 Census indicates otherwise as Leon County’s elite persisted at a similar rate as they did in the 1850s. It was the non-elite landowners who suffered the most after the war.

Due to the war’s aftermath, the labor revolution, and growth in the state’s timber and citrus industries, cotton’s centrality to Florida’s economy was slowly diminishing. By 1870, Florida’s cotton output shrank by nearly 30 percent to under 40,000 bales compared to its 1860 crop. Leon County’s share of the state total dropped significantly to sixteen percent with 6,500

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9 Letter, Convention of the People of Florida, "Florida Declaration of Causes" (1861), Series 577, Carton 1, Folder 6, Gov. Madison Starke Perry - Constitutional Convention 1861 Collection, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, FL.
bales. Though it remained the leader in Florida’s cotton production, the cash value of neighboring Jefferson County’s more diversified farm production surpassed Leon County’s cotton-intensive product for the state’s most valuable at over $900,000 compared to Leon’s $892,000. Additionally, Leon’s total farm value of $1.2 million was surpassed by cotton, sugar, and wool-producing Alachua County’s $1.6 million total.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Table 1.15: Landholding Totals by Class, Leon County, 1870}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Unimproved</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Production Value ($)</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
<th>Personal ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>16,753</td>
<td>16,358</td>
<td>33,111</td>
<td>$188,856</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>$185,159</td>
<td>$192,993</td>
<td>$91,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite %</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>69,963</td>
<td>66,492</td>
<td>136,455</td>
<td>$1,029,657</td>
<td>4,755</td>
<td>715,824</td>
<td>$732,680</td>
<td>$342,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter %</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Source:} 1870 U.S. Census, Leon County

Despite elite fears of emancipation’s influence on Florida’s economy, the planters actually expanded their control of Leon County’s real estate after the Civil War to the detriment of the non-elite. According to census data for 1870, the planter class owned over 136,000 total acres, equal to 80 percent of the county total; the elites’ nearly 70,000 improved acres produced over 4700 cotton bales worth over $700,000; the value of all Leon County plantations was over $1 million, equal to 85 percent of the county total, while the total real estate value of the county’s planters was estimated at around $730,000, or 79 percent of the county total; and, elite personal wealth did drop after emancipation from $2.5 million to over $3 million down to just over $340,000, but this constituted nearly four-fifths of the county’s total personal estate value.

Non-elites suffered greatly in the immediate aftermath of the war. Where the elite witnessed large gains in their share of the county real estate, non-elites’ share of Leon County’s wealth dropped to its lowest level in decades. The total acreage of the non-elite fell by over 125,000 acres to just over 33,000 acres by 1870, a mere twenty percent of the county total; non-elite unimproved acreage dropped significantly to nearly equal the class’s improved acreage for the year above 16,000 acres, around twenty percent of the county total; cotton production for the class fell to around 1300 bales, or 21 percent of Leon’s production, and brought the non-elite $185,000; the total value of non-elite farms was nearly $189,000; the class’s real estate value was almost $193,000; and, non-elite personal estates were valued at just over $91,500.
Table 1.17: Landholding Averages by Class, Leon County, 1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Unimproved</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Wages Paid ($)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Production Value ($)</th>
<th>Population Census Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Real Estate ($)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Elite</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>$1,131</td>
<td>$613</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>$1,115</td>
<td>$1,664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1,421</td>
<td>$10,726</td>
<td>$2,991</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7,457</td>
<td>$8,935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1870 U.S. Census, Leon County

Landholding averages for both classes demonstrate how class-wide trends influenced individual landowners. While the planters suffered meager losses in real estate wealth over the 1860s, such losses were marginal compared to the non-elite and the mean plantation still constituted a large plantation by the traditional definition. The average plantation held over 1400 total acres, of which over 700 acres were improved; cotton production averages for the elite dropped by nearly 60 percent over the war decade to 50 bales per plantation worth almost $7500; and, the mean value of a Leon County plantation dropped by nearly 50 percent by 1870 to an average just below $11,000 while the planters’ average real and personal estate values dropped to below $9000 and $4000, respectively.

Non-elite landholding averages dropped to levels lower than those seen in 1850. The average total acreage of a non-elite farm dropped by nearly 90 percent to just under 200 acres, of which only 100 acres were improved land; non-elites averaged production of nine cotton bales per farm valued at $1100; the average value of a non-elite farm was a little over $1100; and, non-elite farmers averaged around $1600 in real estate and $700 in personal estate.
The substantial loss of landholders in Leon County reveals how destructive the war decade was. From 1860 to 1870, the county landholding class shrank by 75 individuals or families to a total of 263 members. The non-elite suffered the greatest losses, dropping from 265 to 167 members, a loss of 98 individuals or families. The planter class witnessed gains in membership over the 1860s, increasing by 23 individuals or families to an 1870 total of 96 members. The likeliest cause of the increased membership of the planter class is the change in classification. Since emancipation abolished chattel slavery, planter status after the Civil War is defined solely by the amount of land county residents owned. However, this is not the only explanation for the class’s growth as the Leon County planter class did experience significant persistence as it had over the 1850s.
Despite the loss of life and the economic turmoil associated with the Civil War, Leon County’s elite persisted at a similar rate as they had in the 1850s. With a persistence rate of 41 percent, thirty members of the 1860 planter class remained elite across the war decade. As with the persistent elite of 1860, most of the persistent elite in 1870 were born in the Upper South, although there was a noticeable increase in Florida-born planters as a result to inheritances. Still marked by wealth, persistent plantations ranged in value from $80,000 for Charles A. Chaires, Jr.’s, 8000-acre estate in the eastern portion of the county to $3500 for Robert G. Shepperd's 2100-acre plantation. In place of enslaved labor, contract labor with Leon County's freedmen proved a sufficient alternative as persistent elites harvested cotton at a similar rate as before the war. The productivity of persistent plantations in 1870 ranged from J. J. Williams’s 6500 acres spread across multiple plantations that produced 500 cotton bales with $70,000, to Alex Cromartie’s 600-acre plantation that produced three bales worth $600.

Conclusion

Contrary to the Woodward thesis, Leon County’s planter class was not swept away after the Civil War by a “revolution in small farming.” With a persistence rate of 41 percent for the 1860s, only six percentage points lower than the class’s rate of 47 percent for the 1850s, Leon County planters survived the war decade at a similar rate as they had in the antebellum era despite natural deaths, casualties from the war, and the loss of at least $2.5 million invested in formerly enslaved beings. The elite not only enjoyed stability in their land ownership, but expanded their control of Leon County’s land from 1850 to 1870 in all but one category. Conversely, the non-elite landholders were the ones ruined by the war as the class owned a
smaller total acreage in 1870 than it had in 1850 and lost over a third of its members from 1860 to 1870.

Table 1.20: Leon County Planter Landholding Totals, 1850-1870

Table 1.21: Leon County Non-Elite Landholding Totals, 1850-1870
Table 1.22: Leon County Landholding Class Composition, 1850-1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Planters</th>
<th>Non-Elites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,905</td>
<td>4,649</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,982</td>
<td>10,595</td>
<td>4,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.23: Leon County Planter Slaveholding and Cotton, 1850-1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bond Persons (Tax)</th>
<th>Cotton (bales)</th>
<th>Bond Persons (Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9,982</td>
<td>10,595</td>
<td>4,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,494</td>
<td>4,888</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,295</td>
<td>4,081</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0  100  200  300  400  500  600  700  800  900  1000  1100  1200
1850  1860  1870
From 1850 to 1870, Leon’s planter class expanded its ownership of every category of land in each decade except for a loss of little more than 5,000 unimproved acres from 1860 to 1870. Elite gains in real estate were not as great in the war decade as in the 1850s, but the class’s ability to avoid losing land, let alone expand its holdings, demonstrates its financial perseverance. In the same timeframe, the non-elite landholders of Leon County enjoyed considerable gains amid the economic prosperity of the 1850s, particularly through their exponential increase in unimproved land ownership, but lost said gains and more over the 1860s. By 1870, non-elite total landownership was over 50 percent less the class’s total in 1850. The changes in land ownership of the two classes is reflected in the group’s shifts in membership over the two decades of study. Planter class membership grew from sixty-six total members in 1850 to ninety-six by 1870, whereas the non-elite landholding class shrank from 287 members in 1850 to 167 by 1870. Shifts in landowning and class membership between the two groups,
combined with the emancipation of all enslaved laborers in Leon County, help explain the change in cotton production over twenty years. Elite cotton production increased slightly from 1850 to 1860, before dropping by nearly 55 percent from 1860 to 1870. Meanwhile, non-elite cotton production grew at a greater pace over the 1850s before nosediving by over 80 percent from 1860 to 1870.

Nevertheless, commentary about the Middle Florida planter class near the turn of the century indicates the antebellum elite lost some social prestige in the state as residents in East and West Florida ridiculed them as a static fixture of a bygone era in which cotton was king in the Sunshine State. This raises additional questions. First, what was the source of the planters’ lost hegemony? Was it solely the decentralization of cotton in Florida, a weakening political hegemony in state politics, or some other factor? Second, how did the planters seek to reassert their authority in Florida? Did the prewar elite try converting to different industries, did they attempt to manipulate state politics in their favor, or was the class’s participation in the Lost Cause their only recourse? One notable attempt by Middle Florida’s antebellum elite to return to former glory was their participation in Florida’s Presidential Reconstruction proceedings in which they and other white Floridians sought to codify white supremacy and cement African Americans as a peasant laboring class.
Chapter Two

“Made and Executed by the White Race:” Florida’s Constitution of 1865 and “Black Codes”

A common metric in confirming a state’s Southern identity is its commitment to white supremacy, what U.B. Phillips argued was the “central theme of Southern history.”¹ Florida was the third state to secede on January 10, 1861; white residents readily enacted Jim Crow segregation and disenfranchised African Americans after Reconstruction; and, from 1877 to 1950, Florida ranked first in the southeast in lynchings per capita.² The Floridian commitment to white supremacy was endemic in the state’s constitution of 1865 and in the “Black Codes” passed early on during Reconstruction, making Florida’s first postwar government one of the harshest and most reactionary of the ex-Confederate states. As this study examines, the public debate over how the civil government should treat African Americans, the rhetoric and resolutions of the constitutional convention, and the language of the Florida Constitution of 1865 are evidence of white Floridians’ desire to constrain Black Floridians’ citizenship. The Dupont-Peeler report, which comprised the bulk of Florida’s “Black Codes,” built on the state constitution’s effort to make Black Floridians a subservient laboring class through stringent vagrancy laws and involuntary servitude as a punishment for crimes. Florida lawmakers’ attempted maintenance of white supremacy stems from the fact that the majority of the Constitutional Convention of 1865 and the DuPont Peeler Committee were ex-Confederates and former slaveholding planters dependent on cheap Black labor for survival.

Historians of the U.S. South typically point to Mississippi’s and South Carolina’s constitutions and “Black Codes” as the most discriminatory, given they were the first to be rejected by Congress. Fewer historians have identified Florida’s Constitution of 1865 and

subsequent “Black Codes” as equally racist. Florida historian Jerrell H. Shofner noted in *Nor Is It Over Yet* that “All states except Florida whose legislatures met after the criticism was expressed adopted milder ‘black codes’ than those of Mississippi and South Carolina.”³ Other historians argue Florida’s actions during Presidential Reconstruction were the worst of any Southern state. Eric Foner singled out the Florida Legislature’s vagrancy laws passed in its 1865 Regular Session for selling involuntary laborers as a criminal punishment, laws Charles Sumner denounced as “semi peonage” for Black Floridians.⁴ Theodore B. Wilson, referring to Florida’s “Black Codes,” stated, “Everything considered, it appears the 14th Assembly of Florida may have been the most bigoted and short-sighted of all southern legislatures of 1865 and 1866.”⁵ Despite the determination to codify white supremacy in its proposed postbellum government, white Floridians were not acting out of “belligerence and defiance” as Jerrell Shofner argued; the Florida Constitution of 1865 and “Black Codes” were a good-faith attempt by white Floridians seeking readmission to the Union as the framers believed they were proud of, followed Andrew Johnson’s guidelines, and would not agitate Congressional Republicans.⁶ As this study will further demonstrate, though Florida’s actions in Presidential Reconstruction were contradictory to the demands of the Republican-controlled 39th Congress, white Floridians were confident their new government was a reasonable system. Andrew Johnson’s requirements for readmission, the select anti-Black, anti-democratic actions of Northern voters highlighted by Southern newspapers, and similar good-faith efforts by the Mississippi and South Carolina constitutional conventions, despite their histories of non-cooperation and devotion to antebellum slavery, was justification to framers of Florida’s proposed postbellum government.

³ Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 50.
⁵ Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1965), 143.
⁶ Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 50.
The Civil War-era marked a period of increased white anxiety toward Florida’s Black population due to whites’ fears of insurrection and crime. As early as November 1860, rumors abounded of servile insurrection as many recollected the large-scale uprisings of the Second Seminole War. In Middle Florida, where over half of the state’s enslaved population lived, white residents increased the number of slave patrols (although Confederate volunteerism and conscription typically undermined such efforts) and doled out crueler punishments to fugitive slaves.\(^7\) In town centers especially, the reported increases in thefts, arsons, and assaults horrified local whites, leading one Tallahassee newspaper to write “there was a time when a man might go to sleep and leave his house open with impunity in the city, but we fear that time has passed away.”\(^8\) The fighting’s end did little to alleviate white concerns; fears of insurrection continued until after Christmas of 1865 and, as emancipation was complete, many freedmen left the plantations and intense white supervision, by extension.

The opportunities available for Black Floridians in Union-occupied territory further exacerbated white concerns as fugitive slaves and freedmen enjoyed the fruits of freedom. Fernandina, a coastal town north of Jacksonville in Nassau County, was a haven for fugitive slaves by early 1862 after its capture by the Union. By 1863, Fernandina was home to two schools with a combined attendance of three hundred students. From 1863 to 1865, some Fernandina freedmen briefly owned property confiscated from Confederates for unpaid taxes until the Johnson administration voided the sales. In May 1865, freedmen in Fernandina helped elect a Northern teacher, Adolphus Mot, the town mayor.\(^9\) Historian Leon F. Litwack remarked

\(^{9}\) Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 15-16; 32-33.
on the importance of Fernandina, stating the city served a similar role to Black Georgians and Floridians “much as Beaufort did for South Carolina slaves.”\textsuperscript{10} Elsewhere along the Union-occupied northeast coast, freedmen enjoyed similar opportunities. St. Augustine boasted an operating school for freedmen and also held a land auction that temporarily redistributed Confederate lands to some in 1863. In 1864, Jacksonville had a school for freedmen that additionally taught local white students until white attendance gradually evaporated to zero.\textsuperscript{11}

The war’s end freed the remaining Black population that did not manage to escape to Union territory. While most freedmen remained on their former owners’ plantations, some tested their new freedom by traveling about Florida without white permission, often congregating in towns like Tallahassee, Jacksonville, or Gainesville. The migratory fervor of transient freedmen only lasted an average of four to eight weeks. Those wandering the state by June were apprehended by the U.S. Army and returned to their former plantations or otherwise dispersed from cities and military posts.\textsuperscript{12} Nevertheless, white Floridians remained disgruntled by freely moving African Americans and fearful of the population’s alleged unreliability as an agricultural labor force. Beyond the immediate loss of slaveowners’ capital with the emancipation of nearly 62,000 Black Floridians, white residents struggled to see African Americans as anything more than field laborers and servants, believing their place in the post-emancipation future was still one of subservient field labor, whether paid or unpaid.

Beyond their contempt for Florida’s Black population, whites were outraged by the presence of the U.S. military. The Freedmen’s Bureau, an agency of the Department of War created by Congress to aid newly-emancipated freedmen, incensed whites for its protection of

\textsuperscript{10} Litwack, \textit{Been in the Storm So Long}, 52.
\textsuperscript{11} Shofner, \textit{Nor Is It Over Yet}, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{12} Richardson, \textit{The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida}, 11-12.
freedmen and its rations policy and whites accused the Bureau of encouraging idleness. Leading white Floridians questioned why freedmen received federal assistance when white families throughout the South were also destitute after the war. In reality, poor white people also benefitted from the Bureau’s rations program, but facts did not seem to matter.

Posing the most visible threat to antebellum racial hegemony were the United States Colored Troops in the state. Tallahassee’s *Semi-Weekly Floridian* lambasted colored troops as a “drain on the public treasury” and a “source of…social disturbance at the South” for stirring “insolence and idleness among the freedmen.”

In her recollection of life in Leon County after the war, Susan Bradford Eppes, wrote about a meeting led by U.S. Colored Troops in the Centerville community. She blamed the troops for disobedience among local African Americans, recounting “When a large crowd had assembled Lieutenant Zachendorf proceeded to announce, in the name of President Johnson, the freedom of the entire negro race. They were told that they must show their appreciation of the great boon bestowed upon them by refusing to work any longer for those who had formerly held them in slavery.” Eppes also stated that the lieutenant proclaimed racial equality and promised their former owners’ land to the freedmen: “He proclaimed to those poor ignorant creatures the perfect *equality* of the races. He told them they were at liberty to help themselves to any property to their former masters. ‘You made it,’ he said. ‘It is all yours.’” Eppes typified the concerns of white Floridians: “This is outrageous. What outcome may be none can know. Already we see a change in the demeanor of those around the house; a sullen air they have not had before.” She likened the developments in postbellum

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Florida to those that preceded the Haitian Revolution, “If this goes on, and we have no way to stop it, what will be the end? The terrors of San Domingo rise before our eyes.”

To the delight of Susan Bradford Eppes and her peers, President Andrew Johnson’s proclamations in the late spring of 1865 gave most whites throughout Florida hope that a semblance of antebellum society might persist in a post-emancipation world. Johnson’s amnesty proclamation of May 26th, 1865, provided most ex-Confederates amnesty if the individuals took an oath of loyalty to the United States and pledged support for all legal actions passed during the war. On July 13th, President Johnson issued a proclamation enunciating Florida’s path for complete readmission to the United States. The order appointed William Marvin provisional governor. A Unionist and federal judge for Key West during the Civil War, Marvin was no believer in racial equality, and he found favor among Florida’s ex-Confederates and former slaveowners. This did not diminish his early popularity amongst Unionists in either section as Pres. Johnson received praise for his appointment. Once he arrived in the state, he began a speaking tour where he explained to white audiences the necessity of nullifying secession, abolishing slavery, repudiating state debts incurred in support of the rebellion, recognizing U.S. laws, and admitting African American witness testimony in court proceedings. President Johnson’s Florida proclamation furthermore required an election for a constitutional convention and constrained the electorate to that of the previous federal election, meaning all eligible loyal

white men, and excluded freedmen. On August 23, 1865, Marvin set an election for convention delegates for October 10th. In his proclamation, Marvin reenforced President Johnson’s requirements for readmission and confirmed the electorate as white male citizens of twenty-one years of age who were Florida residents for at least a year, residents of their county at least six months, and had taken the amnesty oath before voting. However, county residency requirements were not in place for office seekers, according to Marvin, meaning candidates could be elected a convention delegate for a county that was not their own. Such requirements and Johnson’s leniency towards ex-Confederates opened the door for the recreation of a white man’s government in Florida.

Andrew Johnson is a confusing figure. A former slaveowner and Democrat before the Civil War, Johnson became the preferred leader for Radical Republicans after Lincoln’s assassination for his staunch Unionism and symbolic emancipation of Tennessee’s slaves as its military governor. However, the man who proclaimed himself a “Moses” for Black Americans did not support a Southern Reconstruction program that ensured civil or voting rights for African Americans. While Johnson’s racism, frustration with what he believed to be a hypocritical call by Northerners for universal manhood suffrage in the South, and wishes for a quick reunification likely contributed to a lax Presidential Reconstruction program, as historian Robert S. Levine argues, Johnson’s philosophy on secession was his greatest influence. Believing secession was an impossibility under the Constitution and that the states were perpetually members of the United States, Johnson believed the ex-Confederate states never relinquished their ties to the

18 Shofner, Nor Is It Over Yet, 34.
19 William Marvin, “Proclamation of William Marvin, Provisional Governor, for the Election of Delegates to a Convention,” Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention of Florida (1865), 126-130
Union, therefore a Reconstruction program beyond nullifying secession, repudiating war debt, and abolishing slavery was not required and the executive branch was the sole authority over Reconstruction.\(^\text{22}\)

White Floridians were optimistic about Reconstruction under Pres. Johnson’s leadership. They approved of his willingness to re-enfranchise ex-Confederates, his pronouncement of minimal requirements for new Southern governments, and his land policy of returning confiscated Confederate lands, even those already in the hands of freedmen. The largest question was African American suffrage and Florida voters celebrated Johnson’s philosophy on the matter. Before Florida’s election for delegates, the *Florida Times* reported President Johnson as arguing “‘Why cannot you do as Massachusetts does? If a negro can read the Constitution and write his own name, let him vote. There are not 500 in Louisiana who can answer that test, but it will be doing justice all around, and stop this Northern clamor.’”\(^\text{23}\) Above all, white Floridians seemed to have faith in Johnson as a Tennessean, believing he understood and sympathized with the South’s position. The *Florida Union*, in its appreciation for the president, wrote “Here Andrew Johnson touched us to the core – here, in very deed and truth, fired the Southern heart – for here it was that he vindicated the aspersed honor of a people whose enforce patience and silence, when wrong was done them, have been too long trumpeted as the very ear marks of poltroonery and fraud.”\(^\text{24}\)

Despite their faith in Andrew Johnson, white Floridians were concerned about angering Republicans in Congress. With the absence of representatives from the ex-Confederate states, Republicans in the 39\(^{\text{th}}\) Congress held supermajorities in both houses, meaning the party could

\(^{22}\) Levine, *The Failed Promise*, 56-57.

\(^{23}\) “President Johnson’s Views,” *The Florida Times* (Jacksonville, Florida), October 5, 1865.

\(^{24}\) “President Johnson,” *The Florida Union* (Jacksonville, Florida), October 7, 1865.
override a presidential veto. Therefore, if Republicans were displeased with Florida’s proposed
government, Congress could impose their harsher Reconstruction program against President
Johnson’s wishes. Given this reality, white Floridians understood that Florida’s new constitution
needed to fulfill President Johnson’s requirements for readmission and reform state laws
concerning African Americans without agitating Congressional Republicans. In the weeks before
the constitutional convention met, the New Era argued that bestowing freedmen with too much
social responsibility would “prove pernicious in the extreme and would result in no real good to
those who it is intended to benefit. On the other hand, the negro should have full justice done
him, not only for the sake of justice, but that there may be no collision between the State and
United States authorities in the coming Congress.”

Aside from the occasional outlier, such as one Alachua County candidate who advocated
for the colonization of south Florida by freedmen, candidates and newspapers editors were in
consensus on the goals of the new Florida government. Most of Andrew Johnson’s requirements
for readmission, namely the abolition of slavery, ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, and
rescinding the Ordinance of Secession, went unquestioned. The Florida Times went as far as
claiming republican government was "no longer an experiment," denounced slavery as an
"antagonistic element" keeping the United States from "peace and unexampled prosperity," and
stated "'Secession' is rebellion, and treason is a crime."

The greatest debate concerned how the new Florida government would define Black
citizenship. Charles Dyke, an editor for the Semi-Weekly Floridian and a future leader of the
Conservative Democrats, articulated the white consensus on Black citizenship, stating “By ‘legal
rights’ we understand the right of enjoying the fruit of one’s labor – the right of protection of

26 “Introductory,” The Florida Times, October 5, 1865.
person and property – the right of access to courts of justice, and the free, unrestrained privilege of mental and moral improvement in common with others.”27 Of course, white landowners were still concerned with keeping freedmen as a reliable labor force, and their concept of fundamental rights did not conflict with their goal of legally tying Black Floridians to white-owned fields. Most freedmen returned to labor on their former masters' plantations by June 1865, but whites continued claiming that African Americans were a transient, idle people. There was some discussion of importing European immigrant labor into Florida as a replacement for Black labor, but by autumn most employers agreed the freedmen were the South's best option for a labor force and the opportunity would keep them from idleness. To ensure Black Floridians labored for whites, landowners advocated for vagrancy laws to remove supposedly idle freedmen from the cities and relocate them to plantations.

Despite their willingness to throw aside slavery and acknowledge African Americans’ freedom, no leading white Floridian was willing to support Black voting rights. Floridians knew that Radical Republicans deemed universal male suffrage a requirement for readmission; both Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner openly championed voting rights for freedmen and land reform to ensure slavery was not abolished in name alone.28 This attitude was abhorrent to white supremacy. The table below, Florida’s 1860 population data, shows why Black voters were threatening to a white man’s government. Just before the Civil War, nearly half of Florida’s population was Black. Moreover, the two most populous regions, Middle and East Florida, held Black populations of 54 and 40 percent, respectively.29 Therefore, although Black Floridians

27 “State Convention – Importance of the Work Before It,” The Florida Times, October 5, 1865. This column was a reprint of an earlier piece in the Semi-Weekly Floridian.
28 “Sumner and Stevens on Reorganization,” The Florida Times, October 5, 1865.
29 My definitions of Florida’s regions follows the traditional definition used among Florida historians with the exception of Jackson County, whose economy and population was more similar to Middle Florida’s. West Florida comprised all counties west of the Apalachicola River, minus Jackson County. Middle Florida comprised the
were not the majority in the state, their inclusion in Florida politics could significantly stymie white Floridians’ ability to constrain freedmen in labor and politics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>57,744</td>
<td>34,700</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>23,044</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>63,409</td>
<td>28,925</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34,484</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>19,271</td>
<td>14,121</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>5149</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>140,424</td>
<td>77,746</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62,677</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1860 U.S. Census, Florida.

Determined as they were to exclude African Americans from state politics, white Floridians wanted to avoid Congress’s ire. They needed a public justification. To Northern voters, members of the ex-Confederate states emphasized their willingness for reconciliation and begged for a return to self-government. In a letter to the New York Times, reprinted by a Gainesville newspaper, an anonymous “Georgian” said Southerners acknowledge their position as “a conquered people” and their dependence on “the mercy of others for justice or equity.” The “Georgian” then asks the Northern people to allow the South the freedom to regulate its electorates or “Keep her where she is, if you choose, but you cannot force her by suffering to give the right of suffrage to four millions of people who are just emerging from barbarism.”

White Floridians additionally called out the supposed hypocrisy of the North by lambasting Connecticut voters’ rejection of universal male suffrage while demanding the same of the ex-Confederate states. “How far the north are honest in the requisition that we shall bestow upon the

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ignorant, newly emancipated blacks a political privilege which they withhold from the enlightened colored men among themselves, may be determined on a moment’s reflection.”

In Florida, whites justified the exclusion of Black voters through white supremacy. Newspapers throughout the state boosted rumors of insurrection and widespread crime to demonstrate how unfit African Americans were as citizens. The Florida Union doubly proposed the exclusion of Black voters from politics and the prohibition of land ownership for African Americans. The Union claimed that after the emancipation of Jamaica, the country’s Black population quickly purchased lands for subsistence farming and devolved into a state of idleness. If the same happened in the South, “The negroes, on land of their own, would be nearly lost to the community as laborers; and would relapse steadily towards barbarism.” The refusal to enfranchise Black Floridians went as high as Provisional Governor Marvin who assured white audiences in his earliest speaking tours that universal male suffrage was not a requirement for readmission, according to President Johnson.

Black Floridians did not allow their voices to go unheard. On September 18, 1865, a meeting of Black soldiers and citizens at a Jacksonville Baptist church called for complete equality among the races and universal manhood suffrage. In addition, they committed themselves to obedience to the new state constitution and praised the protections offered by the military authority. The Jacksonville meeting ordered the circulation of petitions in all Florida counties in support of its resolutions before being presented to the constitutional convention in October.

31 “Negro Suffrage,” The Florida Times, October 5, 1865.
33 “Freedmen in Council,” The Florida Times, October 5, 1865.
The October 10th election for constitutional convention delegates occurred without issue. Newspapers around the state reported no incidents of violence or coercion at the polls. To facilitate the oath-taking process and ensure the highest voting population possible, Governor Marvin authorized election inspectors to administer the amnesty oath at polls on election day. Marvin additionally cooperated with Department of Florida commander Major General John Foster in distributing poll books, helping civil officials administer the amnesty oath, and transporting election returns to Tallahassee in the absence of mail facilities. The joint efforts of the military and civil authorities in Florida resulted in over 7,000 potential voters reciting the oath before election day, and over 1,400 more recited the oath on October 10th. Election results revealed that 8,512 white Floridians, over sixty percent of the 1860 electorate, were eligible to vote. In total, 6,707 white Floridians, nearly half the state’s 1860 electorate, cast ballots in the election for delegates, meaning a considerable percentage of Florida’s white males appeared willing to participate in the new Florida government.34

Based on data from the 1860 Population Census, compiled in the table appended to this essay, the average delegate to the constitutional convention was previously a slaveholder engaged in agriculture and an ex-Confederate. Of the 49 delegates with available census records, over two-thirds were recorded as having owned enslaved persons in 1860. Out of all 55 delegates to the convention, nearly half were recorded as either a planter, farmer, or overseer, though this does not mean that more members were not involved in agriculture. The slaveholding and agriculturally-engaged majorities in the constitutional convention help explain why delegates owned real estates valued at over $6000 on average, and personal estates averaging over $11,000 before the Civil War. Additionally, data from the National Park Service’s Civil War Soldiers and

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Sailors System (CWSS) and *Biographical Rosters of Florida’s Confederate and Union Soldiers* shows that the majority of the convention’s delegates, thirty of fifty-five, were ex-Confederates.\(^{35}\) Of the thirty, four participated in the secession convention or served in Florida’s Confederate government: Thomas Baltzell as a Florida House representative, D. P. Hogue as a State Senator, James T. Magbee as a secession convention delegate, and S. L. Niblack as a probate judge during the war. Only one delegate was a former Union soldier: James D. Green of Manatee County who served as a captain in the Second Florida Cavalry.\(^{36}\) This convention of ex-Confederates and ex-slaveholders would create a white supremacist government seeking to curtail freedom for Black Floridians.

Convening at the capital on October 25\(^{th}\), the delegates of the constitutional convention reaffirmed their commitment to a white supremacist government. Provisional Governor Marvin opened the proceedings with an address reiterating the requirements for readmission: the abolition of slavery, ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, and the repudiation of Confederate debts. Marvin further reiterated that readmission did not require freedmen be equal to white men; African Americans' rights were fundamentally comprised of the right to property, the pursuit of happiness, and protection under the Constitution, but suffrage and public officeholding were privileges freedmen could be excluded from. Speaking directly to white employers concerned about Florida's labor force, Marvin clarified that the new state constitution had limits to its protection of Black rights. As he defined freedom and protection under the law, he also recommended involuntary servitude as a punishment for vagrancy. In Marvin’s words,

\(^{35}\) See Hartman and Coles, *Biographical Rosters of Florida’s Confederate and Union Soldiers, 1861-1865*. Thirty delegates were listed on Confederate service rosters, equal to 55 percent of the members of Florida’s constitutional convention.

\(^{36}\) Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 47.
freedmen might then become “the best free agricultural peasantry…the world has ever seen.”

Shortly after the convention began, S. L. Niblack of Columbia County as chair of the Committee on Taxation and Revenue proposed the following ordinance:

The people of the State of Florida in General Convention assembled, do ordain and declare, that while we recognize the freedom of the colored race, and are desirous of extending to them full protection in the rights of person and property, and in our legislation to secure their elevation and improvement in all is calculated to promote human happiness, we declare it the unalterable sentiment of the Convention, that the laws of the State shall be made and executed by the white race.

In additional actions, the convention unanimously passed a resolution requesting that Gov. Marvin petition the military to remove all U.S. Colored Troops from Florida. Before closing on November 7th, the convention approved the creation of a three-man committee to analyze and report on “General Provisions including all objects connected with the Colored Population of the State” for the next session of the Florida Legislature.

The Florida Constitution of 1865 was a strong foundation for the continuity of the white-dominated society the convention sought. Article I, the "Declaration of Rights," delineated the inalienable rights of Florida citizens, carefully outlining them to avoid language which might conflict with discriminatory clauses in later articles. Art. I, Section 4 stated that "no property qualification for eligibility to office, or for the right of suffrage, shall ever be required in this State." But the first instance of the constitution developing into two separate legal statutes based on race appears in Article IV where, regarding the legislative branch, Sec. 4 stated "no person shall be a representative unless he be a white man…" and "…a citizen of the United States…" Sec. 5 set the same qualifications the state senate. Article VI, Section 1 codified the exclusion of

38 Ibid, 80-81.
African Americans from enjoying suffrage, ascribing voter qualification to "every free white male person of the age of twenty-one years and upwards."  

Article IX, "Census and Apportionment of Representation," defined in Sec. 1 the population of the state as "the total whole number of white inhabitants" added to "three-fifths of the number of colored people." The aim of Article IX was twofold. First, the continuation of the infamous three-fifths clause embedded within the U.S. Constitution communicated the views of the convention delegates that, although African Americans might be free, they were not equal to the white race. Second, while Congress had not passed the Fourteenth Amendment or any legislation guaranteeing suffrage to freedmen, the Florida convention’s decision demonstrates a fear of such a possibility. By limiting the real number of the Black population, which at the time of surrender surpassed the white population in six counties, white Floridians could curtail any future political power for African Americans.  

Article XVI, "General Provisions," contained the most clauses discriminating between the races. Sec. 1 formally abolished slavery and involuntary servitude except as a punishment for a crime and stated all inhabitants shall enjoy the rights of person and property without distinction of color. Sec. 2 permitted the testimony of African Americans in criminal proceedings related to the injury or rights and remedies of an African American, but in all other cases, African Americans shall be excluded from providing testimony unless deemed credible by a jury. Sec. 3 defined the jurors of the state as only qualified white men.  

Where the Constitution of 1865 served as the foundation of a white supremacist government, the subsequent session of the Florida Legislature codified the ferociously racist 

40 Florida Constitution (1865) art. 1, sec. 4; art. 4, sec. 4-5; art. 7, sec. 1.  
41 Florida Const. (1865), art. 9, sec. 1.  
42 Florida Const. (1865), art. 16, sec. 1-3.
statutes known as the “Black Codes.” Following an election for state offices on November 29th that elevated Unionist and wartime Florida Supreme Court justice David S. Walker to the governor’s mansion, the legislature convened on December 18th. After his formal inauguration, Gov. Walker addressed a joint session of the legislature where he echoed the sentiments of white Floridians leading up to the constitutional convention. Walker discussed the misfortunes of emancipation, the supposed inferiority of African Americans, and the need for a labor contract system. “Considering their ignorance and liability to be imposed upon, I think it would be well for you to provide that they shall be bound by no contract to labor, unless the same be reduced to writing and acknowledged before some judicial officer…” Walker articulated Florida’s stance on African American suffrage, stating “we will never accede to the demand for Negro suffrage…” and Florida would rather remain a subjugated province of the United States and wait until Congress “thinks better of the matter.” Although the legislature proceeded to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment in both houses, the remainder of the session codified the “Black Codes” outlined in the Dupont-Peeler report.

45 House Journal (1865), 96-98.
For the committee ordered by the constitutional convention to consider how best to revise Florida statutes pertaining to the newly-emancipated freedmen, Provisional Governor Marvin appointed Leon County’s Anderson J. Peeler and Mariano D. Papy, and Gadsden County’s Charles H. Dupont before the November 29th election. As seen in the above table, the committee was all ex-Confederates; Anderson Peeler and Mariano Papy both served in the Florida Infantry while Charles Dupont continued his prewar service as the Chief Justice of the Florida Supreme Court. All three men were lawyers by profession and well-equipped to bring Florida law in line with federal requirements, but the men were also former slaveholders or came from slaveholding families. The members of what became the Dupont-Peeler Committee owned, on average, over $35,000 in real estate and over $71,000 in personal property, according to the 1860 Census. These men, all hailing from the Middle Florida plantation belt, drafted Florida’s “Black Codes.”

The main objective of the Peeler report, distributed on December 12, 1865, was to advise the Florida Legislature on a series of statues maintaining the antebellum slave codes wherever it felt justifiable to the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress. Section I presented “an act to establish and organize a county Criminal Court” to receive the expected increase in minor criminal cases by the extinction of the household tribunal characteristic of the slave plantation. The report charged that the necessity of a lower court stemmed from the incapacity of the circuit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
<th>Personal Estate ($)</th>
<th>Bond Persons</th>
<th>Confederate Service</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Charles DuPont</td>
<td>Chief Justice</td>
<td>95,000</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>Chief Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson J. Peeler</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cpl., 1st FL Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariano D. Papy</td>
<td>Planter/Lawyer</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Pvt. 2nd FL Infantry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

court to rule over the myriad of petty offenses by freedmen “the commission of which this class of population was addicted.”\textsuperscript{46}

Section II advised the state to abolish most instances of legal discrimination between the races with exceptions. Of the exceptions, the report recommended the passage of "an act prescribing additional penalties for the commission of offenses against the State, and for other purposes" authorizing the pillory or whipping as alternative punishments in cases where punishment was limited to a fine or imprisonment. Although the act made corporal punishment available for both races, the report advised juries to continue charging white offenders with a fine or imprisonment while punishing Black offenders with the pillory or whipping for the same crime. The report justified such discrimination on the belief that “to degrade a white man by punishment is to make a bad member of society and a dangerous political agent. To fine and imprison a colored man in his present pecuniary condition, is to punish the State instead of the individual.” The act furthermore restricted firearms ownership to Black Floridians of an “orderly or peaceable character” for the “protection of our wives and children…” and “the prevention of scenes which may cost the extinction of an entire race.”\textsuperscript{47}

Section III addressed vagrancy, the issue of greatest concern to Provisional Gov. Marvin, and proposed the passage of "a bill to be entitled an act to punish vagrants and vagabonds." The act defined a vagrant as an able-bodied person with "no visible means of living" or unemployed by "some labor to support himself or herself." Upon conviction by the county criminal court, the punishment for vagrancy ranged from imprisonment up to twelve months, whipping not to exceed thirty-nine stripes, placement in the pillory for a stint not to exceed one hour, or involuntary labor not to exceed twelve months by which the "Sheriff or other officer of the Court

\textsuperscript{46}House Journal (1865), 58-59.
\textsuperscript{47}House Journal (1865), 59-64.
shall hire out such person for the term to which he or she shall be sentenced, …and the proceeds shall be paid to the county Treasury." The proposed law was designed to prevent vagrancy, stimulate the idle to labor, and diminish the crime's impact on the civil government. The report stated the bill's provisions applied to all offenders regardless of race, but Section II's statute established the vagrancy law as a freedman-policing mechanism by threatening African Americans onto plantations or permitting white local governments to legally enslave guilty parties.48

Section IV addressed gaps in interracial marriage statutes and advised the state legislature to close them while expanding the legal definition of a bastard in aiding future apprenticeship laws. The report first recapped existing statutes outlawing all interracial marriages, making children of such a relationship bastards incapable of receiving an inheritance. Additionally, the report stated existing statutes criminalized relationships between white men and "negro, mulatto, quadroon, or other colored" women but did not penalize relationships between white women and colored men. Section IV recommended the Legislature to amend the existing statute originally passed in 1832 to invalidate all interracial relationships and marriages.49

Section VI outlined regulations regarding labor contracts in "an Act in relation to the contracts of persons of color." The law stipulated labor contracts must be written agreements between employer and employee whereas the contract is signed in the presence of two credible witnesses, the employee is made aware of the agreement being made, and two duplicate copies are drafted for the employer's and government officer's records. The legislation established punishment for an employee convicted of violating their contract with the same punishment for vagrancy, which considering the act directly mentions African Americans it is assumed guilty

48 House Journal (1865), 64; Shofner, Nor Is It Over Yet, 50-52.
49 House Journal (1865), 64.
parties would face the pillory, whipping, or involuntary servitude. Additional clauses authorized law enforcement to evict employees from their employer's premises once a contract has expired, offered protections for employees for lost wages in a successful wrongful termination suit, and penalized anyone enticing a laborer away from an existing contract with another employer. Although the language of the law seemingly creates a just climate for labor relationships, for employees to receive redress for injury by an offending employer in any case, they must successfully sue in courts in which every jury is composed solely of white men. Furthermore, before enunciating the language of the proposed act, the Dupont-Peeler report engaged in a lengthy address on the Christian mission of former masters to be paternalistic guides for freedmen in their “pitiable condition” of freedom. In other words, this contract law was designed to develop the “agricultural peasantry” Provisional Gov. Marvin promised of Florida’s Black population.50

In its conclusion, the Dupont-Peeler report addressed questions of social welfare concerning the African American population of Florida. Section XI stated the committee found no reason to provide any freedmen unable to provide for their livelihood with state support believing former masters and employers would permit such persons to remain on the plantation and receive care. The committee furthermore believed "only the idle, lazy and insolent" would suffer without public assistance. Section XII announced the committee found it unwise to provide African Americans with a publicly-funded education as “the first lesson to be taught them is, that their new-found liberty is no license, and that labor is ordained by God, and a necessity of their condition.” The report states the freedman’s important struggle in the coming

years was providing sustenance for themselves and the South would educate them to become a productive race.\textsuperscript{51}

Each of the proposed acts by the Dupont-Peeler Committee were passed by the Florida Legislature during the 1865 regular session. “An act to punish vagrants and vagabonds” and “an act in relation to the contracts of persons of color” were passed unanimously by both houses of the legislature.\textsuperscript{52} The legislature additionally elected an ex-Confederate, Wilkinson Call, to the U.S. Senate and passed a resolution requesting Pres. Johnson to let the U.S. Army take over the Freedmen’s Bureau.\textsuperscript{53} In his letter to Johnson communicating the legislature’s request, Gov. Walker wrote that the Bureau “has ‘not been conducted with good judgement or economy…”’ and its agents were misleading the freedmen into believing “‘the lands of their former owners, will, at least in part be divided among them…,”’ thereby hampering labor contracting efforts in the state.\textsuperscript{54}

The Dupont-Peeler report’s justifications for Florida’s most discriminatory policies assumed foundation in a long line of legal precedent: an 1833 Connecticut law prohibiting the establishment of schools for the education of African Americans; the legal opinion of James Kent stating nowhere in the country did African Americans enjoy equality with whites; the \textit{Dred Scott v. Sandford} decision of 1857 denying anyone of African descent whose ancestors were brought to the United States as slaves U.S. citizenship; and, no prior complaints by Northerners of discriminatory statutes dealing with free African Americans in the antebellum period.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{House Journal} (1865), 68.
\textsuperscript{52} For the votes Florida’s vagrancy law, see \textit{House Journal} (1865), 167, and \textit{Journal of the Senate}, Florida Senate, 14\textsuperscript{th} Session, Tallahassee (1866), 149. For the votes on Florida’s contract law, see \textit{House Journal} (1865), 166, and \textit{Senate Journal} (1866), 161.
\textsuperscript{53} Bergeron ed., \textit{The Papers of Andrew Johnson}, Vol. 9, 549.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, 599.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{House Journal} (1865), 59-64.
Northern and Western presses responded to Florida’s new civil government with general positivity. Newspapers in Baltimore, Oregon, and Indiana reported early on that delegates elected to Florida’s constitutional convention were supporters of Andrew Johnson’s Reconstruction plan and eager to rejoin the Union. Among them, the *Evansville Daily Journal* (Evansville, IN) celebrated the “practical, moderate” men of the convention who annulled secession. In Ohio, *The Cleveland Daily Leader* was initially pessimistic on Florida’s convention, believing its delegates would not meet the minimum requirement for Black civil rights set out by Provisional Governor Marvin given the men “were elected as unequivocal opponents of granting any privileges whatever to the negroes.” Later on, the *Daily Leader* praised the Florida delegates as “practical experienced men” with an “earnest desire” to conform to the requirements of Andrew Johnson and who granted Black men to testify in court. In New York, the *New York Herald*, seen by white Floridians as the mouthpiece of the Republican Party’s conservative wing, published reports from its Tallahassee correspondent that the convention was acting in good faith with the federal government, fostered less animosity than most Southern states, and that there was less difficulty between whites, freedmen, and the U.S. Army. After the convention’s closing, the *Herald* again praised the work of the convention in creating the new Florida constitution. In Vermont, the *Burlington Free Press* approved of the new constitution and argued that, like South Carolina, Florida would shortly be readmitted to the Union. The *Daily Ohio Statesman* of Columbus, Ohio, went as far as stating that, although

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Florida met Pres. Johnson’s requirements for Reconstruction, the Radical Republicans in Congress would refuse to readmit the southernmost state as a ploy to maintain their supermajority in the legislative branch.60

Conversely, abolitionist and African American presses rejected Florida’s new government. The Vincennes Weekly Western Sun (Vincennes, IN) denounced Florida’s constitutional convention, rightly claiming that most of the delegates held rebel tendencies like those of Mississippi and North Carolina.61 The National Anti-Slavery Standard wrote that despite early optimism surrounding his New York upbringing, the civil rights championed by William Marvin promised Black Floridians that “outside of naked chattelism itself, they are to be really as much slaves as ever solely on the ground of their color.” The Standard also published the correspondence of Liberty Billings, a Republican from Fernandina, stating that Southern Unionism in Florida was “but skin deep,…” and “…you will find the rebel beneath.”62 The Liberator, after praising Prov. Gov. Marvin’s speeches before the constitutional convention as “replete with enlightened sentiments, and sound, sensible advice” would come to denounce the actions of Florida politicians for simply annulling secession, initially leaving the question of the Confederate debt to a popular vote, and deeming children of unrecognized Black marriages illegitimate.63

Ultimately, the Florida Constitution of 1865 and “Black Codes” that followed were rewarded with the very situation white Floridians hoped to avoid: Congressional Reconstruction that fought to guarantee racial equality, suffrage for Black Floridians, and Republican control of

60 “Not Satisfactory,” Daily Ohio Stateman (Columbus, OH), November 23, 1865.
61 Vincennes Weekly Western Sun (Vincennes, IN), October 28, 1865.
63 The Liberator (Boston, MA), December 8, 1865; “Unutterable Meanness,” The Liberator, December 29, 1865.
the state government. Though President Johnson approved of Florida’s new government for meeting all his requirements, it was rejected by Congress and other federal authorities. Commanders of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Florida, under orders from Congress to ensure the equality of African Americans, denounced the legalization of corporal punishment and laws limiting the ability of freedmen to possess firearms. In cases where African Americans received unjust sentences by white jurors, Assistant Commissioner Thomas W. Osborn applied directly to Gov. David S. Walker for executive clemency; when Walker provided no aid, the Bureau stepped in and administered fair punishments when possible. In Washington, the egregiousness of the state’s “Black Codes” and refusal to disenfranchise a greater portion of the ex-Confederate population met the ire of Congress. Senator Charles Sumner, regarding the state election of 1865, voiced his displeasure with Florida’s new legislature, saying “The legislators are four-fifths rebel officers. The people of Florida are more hostile than they have ever been. They were surrendered too soon.” Southern defiance to racial equality, sectional rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment, and frustration with Andrew Johnson and Presidential Reconstruction convinced Congressional Republicans the South needed a firmer authority. Republicans expanded their majorities in the U.S. House and Senate in the 1866 midterms, and the 40th Congress passed the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. This series of legislation divided the South into five military districts, reestablishing martial law until the states could draft a new constitution assuring universal manhood suffrage and ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment. For Florida, as with other Southern states, Congressional Reconstruction enraged the majority of the state’s white populace as most elected Democrats were now disenfranchised and the door opened for a Republican government

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operated by northern Republicans ("carpetbaggers"), southern Republicans ("scalawags"), and African Americans.  

In the years after the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, Congressional Reconstruction overturned the 1865 Constitution and replace it with the Florida Constitution of 1868. The new state government framework, drafted by a biracial delegation of Republicans, codified universal male suffrage for all men of twenty-one years and older, provided public assistance for the physically and mentally handicapped of all races, and established a uniform tax burden. Although the 1868 Constitution was the most liberal government established to that point in Florida history, the document was more conservative than post-Reconstruction, Democratic narratives argue. After bitter contention between the Republican Party’s radical and moderate factions resulted in the creation of two potential state constitutions, the moderates triumphed. The conservative aspects of the 1868 Constitution strengthened the executive branch by increasing the number of appointment-based positions, required a simple oath for the re-enfranchisement of ex-Confederates after the Fourteenth Amendment’s prohibitions expired, and ensured white control of the Florida House of Representatives by capping voting districts at four representatives, limiting the power of predominately-Black districts. The subsequent government led by Gov. Harrison Reed promoted the economic potential of Florida in search of Northern capital, prioritized moderate white involvement in future government operations, and cared little of the political future of African Americans in the state. In short, although Congressional Reconstruction in Florida overthrew the 1865 Constitution and the “Black Codes,” guaranteed universal male suffrage under the 14th Amendment, and witnessed the election of the state’s first

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Black politicians, the remainder of the Reconstruction-era subjected African Americans in Florida to oppression by the state’s white inhabitants on the path towards Democratic “white home rule” in 1877.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
<th>Personal Estate ($)</th>
<th>Bond Persons</th>
<th>Civil War Service</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Junins L. Taylor</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2nd Lt., 5th FL Infantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Troup Maxwell</td>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>25000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Col., 1st FL Cav.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Baltzell</td>
<td>Lawyer/FL Court Justice</td>
<td>KY</td>
<td>20000</td>
<td>14000</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>FL House Rep. (1862-1863)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.P. Hogue</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>State Senator (1862-1864)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George K. Walker</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>KY</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>D.S. Walker a unionist, but wartime court justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. H. M. Davidson</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lt. Col., 6th FL Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur (A. J.) Forman</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>40000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. Capers Bird</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>7500</td>
<td>14000</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Col., 1st FL Infantry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. B. Cooper</td>
<td>Babbit Minister</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>4300</td>
<td>5800</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asa May</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>William J. J. Duncan</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>GA</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>9000</td>
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<td>likely Pvt., 3rd FL Infantry</td>
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<td>1700</td>
<td>1000</td>
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<td>Collector</td>
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<td>1000</td>
<td>16000</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>13700</td>
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<td>Felix Leslie</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. H. Bush</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
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Chapter Three  
*Susan Bradford Eppes (1846-1942)*

Susan Bradford Eppes, a lifetime resident of Leon County and the descendant of esteemed planter families, was one of the most influential figures of the Confederate memorialization movement in Florida. From the end of the Civil War when she was nineteen to her death in 1942, Eppes spent the majority of her life as a member of Confederate memorialization organizations including the Southern Women’s Memorial Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). In her pro-Confederate activism, Eppes helped erect a monument to the Confederate victory at the Battle of Natural Bridge near Tallahassee, Florida, served an important role as historian of the Anna Jackson Chapter of the UDC, and was elected President of the Florida Division of the UDC in 1920. In the literary world, Eppes authored numerous pseudohistorical narratives steeped in the mythology of the Lost Cause, the most famous of which were *The Negro of the Old South* (1925) and *Through Some Eventful Years* (1926). *The Negro of the Old South* conveyed Eppes’s recollection of her life on an antebellum southern plantation where she portrayed planters as benevolent paternalists, the family’s enslaved peoples as happy members of an extended family, and argued that slavey was forced on the South due to its climate and to satisfy the North’s and Britain’s need for consumer goods. *Through Some Eventful Years* reaffirms Eppes’s perspective of plantation life and prewar race relations to offer an image of an idyllic “Old South” ruined by the North’s refusal to acknowledge states’ rights, leading to a horrific Reconstruction era ended only by the just actions of the Ku Klux Klan. But what motivated Eppes to write these false narratives of Florida in the Civil War era? First, Eppes's upbringing in honor-bound antebellum Leon County shaped her conservative perspective on gender roles and her fierce defense of family honor. Second, her family's wholehearted support for the slaveholding South as members of the planter elite
established her commitment to the Confederate cause. Lastly, her experience of financial ruin and death in her family fed her hatred for the North as the root of southern misfortune and pushed Eppes to publish books for additional income late in her life. By the 1940s, Eppes’s publications did elevate her’s and her family’s prestige in Florida, particularly among the women of the UDC and Confederate sympathizers, but did little to ease her financial struggles.

Susan Eppes was a product of the antebellum South and its honor culture. According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, one's honor in the South was defined by their authority (their command over their surroundings), one's family (living and deceased), and one's self-esteem. An honorable southerner held sway over their home and the greater community, lived up to the family name and provided for their progeny, and was confident of their place in society. To achieve each element of Southern honor required significant wealth, and when colonial Virginians first codified racially-based slavery in the seventeenth century to create a stable labor force for planting tobacco, the primary mode of accruing wealth in the antebellum South was planting cash crops with the assistance of enslaved labor. Eventually, slave ownership itself constituted an element of Southern honor as a reliable source of labor and as a physical representation of the owner’s wealth and social authority. Although women in the South were primarily extensions of their husbands’ or family’s honor, Susan Eppes was well aware of her integral role in preserving family honor was in the South.

Born in Leon County, Florida, in 1846, Susan grew up in a region ruled by migrant elites concerned with honor. After Florida’s annexation by the United States in 1822, migrant planters from Virginia and North Carolina rapidly settled Middle Florida, the region north of Florida’s

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Big Bend characterized by rich, red clay soil. These elites moved southward with hopes of profit through cotton planting as climate change and soil exhaustion in the Upper South threatened the stability of their wealth.² By taking advantage of cheap land prices, their existing enslaved laborers, and funding from their wealthy relatives back home, these new Florida planters quickly stabilized themselves and cemented their dominance over the environment and lower-class white and Black migrants.

Not only did Susan experience honor's importance in her community, but she also experienced its importance within her own home. Her father, physician-planter Dr. Edward Bradford, ventured to Florida in 1832 from Enfield, North Carolina, with his three brothers and his father-in-law, John Branch. Bradford purchased approximately 3000 acres near Lake Iamonia in northern Leon County where he founded Pine Hill Plantation on the southern end of his estate and Horseshoe Plantation on the northern end near the lake’s horseshoe bend.³ Before the Civil War, Edward Bradford’s plantations stretched continuously for four miles along Thomasville Road. Bradford’s plantations and a large enslaved labor force helped make him a major cotton producer. From 1850 to 1860, Pine Hill Plantation and Horseshoe Plantation produced no less than 225 bales of cotton combined and were manned by no fewer than 105 bond persons. In this timeframe, Bradford was within the fourth percentile for cotton production and within the fifth percentile for slaveholding among Leon County landholders.⁴ Given his respected position as a community physician and his enormous wealth, Edward Bradford established himself as one of Leon County’s premier residents. Through her father’s status combined with the esteemed

² Baptist, Creating an Old South, 11, 22-24.
³ Paisley, From Cotton to Quail, 5, 12.
⁴ Leon County Landholder Database.
lineage of both sides of her family, Susan Eppes enjoyed a position atop Florida’s social hierarchy that came with great expectations for continuing the family’s honor.

Under the code of Southern honor, family legacy was thought to predict one’s character as southerners believed temperament was genetic. This belief served as an inspiration to later generations, but also came as a formidable challenge for descendants to live up to the family name and prestige.\(^5\) Although Susan Eppes was a woman, her actions still spoke to her families’ honor and she was equally expected to preserve the honor of her forefathers.\(^6\) This was an arduous task for Susan as by all accounts she was well-born. Through her father, Susan was a distant descendant of William Bradford, the multiple-term governor of Plymouth Colony who came to present-day Massachusetts on the *Mayflower* in 1620. She was also a descendant of Col. John Bradford of Halifax County, North Carolina, who earned a military commission through distinctive service during the Revolutionary War.\(^7\) Through her mother, Martha Lewis Branch Bradford, Susan was the granddaughter of John Branch, a wealthy planter who served terms as North Carolina’s governor, as one of its U.S. Senators, as one of its U.S. House representatives, as the 8th Secretary of the Navy under Andrew Jackson, and as the final territorial governor of Florida.\(^8\) By her marriage to Nicholas Ware Eppes shortly after the Civil War, Susan was also a relative of Thomas Jefferson and a daughter-in-law to Francis W. Eppes, a two-time mayor of Tallahassee and a founding trustee of the State Seminary West of the Suwannee River (now Florida State University).

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5 Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, 63-65.
Susan Eppes’s defense of her families’ honor occurred publicly in her memorialization efforts and privately within her family. Her most notable effort at preserving family honor came in *Through Some Eventful Years* through her biased portrayal of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the return of white home rule. In it, Edward Bradford was celebrated as a scientific planter, a gracious host to elite party guests of the community and surrounding states, and a healer of soldiers from both sides after converting Pine Hill into a hospital; John Branch’s political positions were listed, he was referred to as “Governor Branch” throughout the work, and Eppes spoke to antebellum southerners’ admiration for equestrianism in describing Branch as “an athlete, fond of all exercises of that nature and especially fond of horseback riding. He had ridden an Arabian from North Carolina to Florida…;” and, Nicholas Ware Eppes was said to be “the very best marksman in the company [Howell’s Guards],” having commanded the only artillery batteries able to hit and sink the U.S.S. *Pennsylvania* at Evansport, Virginia.

Susan Eppes also published “Francis Eppes (1801-1881), Pioneer of Florida” in honor of her father-in-law where she emphasized Francis Eppes’s relationship with his grandfather, Thomas Jefferson, and painted him as a martyr for selling his plantation on Lake Lafayette for Confederate money and dying a poor man in Orange County, Florida.

Outside of literary praise, Susan Eppes worked both independently and in cooperation with others to glorify her relatives. With her distant cousin, Burton Craig, Susan Eppes ensured the installation of a tablet in honor of John Branch in the University of North Carolina-Chapel

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11 *Ibid*, 169. The *Pennsylvania* was destroyed by the Union in 1861 to avoid capture as Confederate forces threatened the Norfolk Naval Yard, therefore Nicholas Eppes was not responsible for the ship’s sinking. See “Pennsylvania I (Ship-of-the-Line),” Naval History and Heritage Command, U.S. Navy, August 19, 2015, [https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/p/pennsylvania-i.html](https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/p/pennsylvania-i.html).
Hill’s Hall of Fame as the first alumnus to hold his various political offices.\textsuperscript{13} The same cousins also solicited historians to vindicate Branch for his participation in the Petticoat affair, a political scandal within Andrew Jackson’s cabinet that concerned the circumstances of John and Peggy Eaton’s marriage, that led to his resignation as Secretary of the Navy. It is clear, however, that Eppes and Craige were only concerned with producing a glowing record of John Branch with no mention of his faults. In one letter between the pair about historian Marquis James’s willingness to research the Petticoat affair, Craige writes “I am so anxious to have him say something truthful and complimentary of Governor Branch…I have told him, that, if this controversy had been left to Governor Branch, he could have settled it better than Jackson did.”\textsuperscript{14} As a guest for a meeting of the Plutonic Debating Society’s Tallahassee chapter, Susan Eppes began debate over Thomas Jefferson by positioning the former president as an early supporter of Confederate political sentiment, emphasizing his support for strict interpretations of the Constitution (including protections of all forms of property) and the separation of church and state (to prevent fanaticism's involvement in government).\textsuperscript{15}

Within her family, Susan Eppes honored her forefathers by continuing naming practices characteristic of southern elite and impressing the duty of protecting family honor upon her grandchildren. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown noted, the names of elite southerners often included an homage to the forefathers of both families with the mother's maiden name as the middle name and the father's family name as the last name. The inclusion of both families' names was


\textsuperscript{14} Letter to Cousin Susan from Burton Craige with attached letter to Mr. Craige from Marquis James, September 19, 1934, FSU_MSS0204_B03_F07_10, Bradford-Eppes Family Collection, Special Collections & Archives, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida, https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A3A374865.

designed to honor the forefathers of both families and make the children identifiable to the community as descendants of said families.\textsuperscript{16} Susan Eppes’s full name, Susan Branch Bradford Eppes, paid homage to the legacy of the Branches, Bradfords, and Eppeses. Susan Eppes continued this practice with her own family with some amendment, naming her children after her father, her father-in-law, her mother, and her brother-in-law, Captain Amos G. Whitehead, who died of wounds suffered during the Civil War in 1874, while honoring the Branches, Bradfords, Eppeses, and Wares through the children’s middle names.

Susan Eppes communicated the status of the Eppes family and the need to live up to the name in a history of the Eppeses. According to Susan’s history, the Eppeses descended from the “Eppes, of Epping, Kent, England” who were landed gentry in medieval England after the Norman Conquest. The Eppeses came to North America in 1620 when Francis Eppes VI used funds from his father to purchase a plantation in Virginia. Susan claims the Eppeses resided in the commonwealth until Francis Eppes VII (Susan’s father-in-law) relocated the family to Leon County amid ongoing conflict with indigenous tribes in Virginia. In reality, the Eppeses moved to Florida because tobacco planting was no longer profitable for the family by the early 1800s.\textsuperscript{17} Susan concludes her history by stating “there had been abundant wealth in every branch of the family, but wealth had taken wings, and left them to struggle on…,” but “The name is very dear to me, and dearer still are the boys who bear it.”\textsuperscript{18}

Family honor was the basis on which Susan Eppes committed herself to valorizing Confederate memory, but this would not have been necessary without her family’s dedication to

\textsuperscript{16} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Honor and Violence in the Old South}, 65.
\textsuperscript{17} Baptist, \textit{Creating an Old South}, 23. In a letter to her cousin in 1827, a year before the Eppeses’s migration to Florida, Mary Randolph Eppes, Francis Eppes’s first wife, identified her family’s difficulty in tobacco planting as “gullied worn out fields.”
the Confederacy’s cause. Eppes made this connection in one of her narratives: “I was a girl of
nineteen when the South surrendered, belonging to a family who had much to do with the affairs
of state…”19 Despite what Eppes or any other participant in the Lost Cause might say, slavery
was the cornerstone on which the Confederacy was founded; Alexander H. Stephens said as
much and Florida’s secession convention did the same in its Declaration of Causes that cited the
North as an existential threat to institution and the financial welfare of slaveholders.20 The
Bradfords, Branches, and Eppeses understood this reality and supported the South’s cause
through their political ideologies and their active support of the Confederate war effort, all to
preserve the institution that helped bring them wealth.

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<td>Edward Bradford</td>
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<td>Wm. H. Branch</td>
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<td>Francis W. Eppes</td>
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21 Leon County Landholders Database
Susan Eppes's immediate and extended family were deeply committed to the perpetuation of slavery based on their slaveholding values alone. Although the degree to which men of the Bradford, Branch, and Eppes families owned enslaved people varied, no member owned less than nine enslaved people or grew less than thirty cotton bales in 1860. Each of the surviving Bradford brothers who settled their families in Leon County, Edward, Thomas, and Richard, owned greater than sixty bond persons valued at no less than $32,000 and produced a minimum of eighty cotton bales. The younger Bradfords, John and William, were sons of Richard Bradford and, though they owned fewer enslaved people than their father and uncles, would expectedly inherit portions of their father's estate upon his death. John and William Bradford owned no less than sixteen bond persons valued at a minimum of $8,000 and produced at least thirty cotton bales. Similarly, the slaveholding values of Leon County's Branch family members ranged from 9 to 71 bond persons worth between $6,300 and $35,000 and produced between 70 and 120 cotton bales per person. In 1860, Francis Eppes recorded ownership of at least 91 bond persons valued at $54,600 and grew 220 cotton bales on his plantation. The ten members of the three families owned from 401 to 561 bond persons valued between $214,000 and $319,000 and produced a total of 1,105 cotton bales. The families' attachment to the wealth and status slavery afforded them drove them to support the Confederacy's mission militarily and professionally.

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<td>John R. Bradford</td>
<td>Pvt., 5th Florida Infantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Bradford (son of Henry)</td>
<td>1st Sgt., 1st Florida Infantry, Company A</td>
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<tr>
<td>William H. Bradford</td>
<td>Pvt., 2nd Florida Cavalry, Company D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicholas Ware Eppes</td>
<td>Sgt., 2nd FL Infantry, Co. M (&quot;Howell's Guards); 2ndLt., 1st FL Infantry, Co. H.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amos G. Whitehead</td>
<td>Capt., 2nd Florida Infantry, Company M</td>
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</table>

Source: National Park Service, “Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Database”
During the Civil War, the members of the Bradford, Branch, and Eppes families stepped forward to serve the Confederate war effort however they could. Six of the younger men of the three families answered the call for volunteers and enlisted in various Florida regiments. The sons of Richard Bradford, Sr., answered Florida's call for volunteers and enlisted within the first two years of the war. In the spring of 1861, Richard, Jr., and Edward Bradford enlisted in the 1st Florida Infantry where they served as a captain and sergeant, respectively; John Bradford joined the 5th Florida Infantry in 1862 as a private; and, William Bradford joined the 2nd Florida Cavalry when it organized in 1862, also serving as a private. None of the children of Susan Eppes's father, Edward, served in the Confederate armed forces as he raised only daughters to adulthood. However, Edward's daughter, Margaret Bradford Whitehead, married Amos G. Whitehead of Leon County who joined the 2nd Florida Infantry as a captain. Nicholas Ware Eppes was the most eager to support the South's cause. Eppes enlisted as a sergeant in the 2nd Florida Infantry, Company M, also known as "Howell's Guards." After being discharged in January 1862 and temporarily serving as a drill sergeant in the Florida State Service, Eppes returned to northern battlefields with his enlistment in the 1st Florida Infantry where he left service as a lieutenant upon his parole from Confederate service upon Florida's surrender in 1865. Edward Bradford’s defense of slavery began before the creation of the Confederacy. Edward, in addition to other members of the Bradford, Branch, and Eppes families, was a founding member of the Southern Rights Association of the community of Centerville whose objective was “the protection of Southern interests and the vindication of Southern rights…” and defined the Constitution as a “compact,” meaning the organization supported southerners’ rights to own and transport enslaved people as they wished and set the legal basis for secession.22 When the war began,

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Edward Bradford tried to join the Confederate service as a surgeon, but was rejected given his ability to supply the Confederacy as a large planter. He later converted Pine Hill into a hospital while his wife joined the Ladies’ Soldiers Friend Sewing Society to send garments to Confederate soldiers. Despite the contributions of Susan Eppes's families during the war, the Confederacy and its mission to defend slavery were defeated in 1865. The southern economy was devastated, resulting in a steady financial decline for Susan Eppes's immediate family that fueled her animosity for the North.

### Table 3.3: Francis Eppes’s Financial History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Cotton Bales</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
<th>Personal Estate ($)</th>
<th>Real Estate Taxes</th>
<th>Tax Value ($)</th>
<th>Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>$28,800</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>$30,800</td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1860</td>
<td>-15.28%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>-4.35%</td>
<td></td>
<td>-6.49%</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.88%</td>
<td>27.78%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>$24,400</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>$28,800</td>
<td>$54,600</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>$54,600</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-1870</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-98.61%</td>
<td>-99.08%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870 (Orange)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-1880</td>
<td>-79.51%</td>
<td>95.83%</td>
<td>99.55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880 (Orange)</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leon County Landholders Database

The war’s end did not immediately ruin the planters of Susan Eppes’s family but set in motion a gradual decline over the remainder of the 19th century. Only Francis Eppes was instantly ruined by the Confederacy's defeat. In the decades before the war began, Francis Eppes owned enough land and enslaved laborers to support his status as a persistent planter in Leon.

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County. With nearly 2,000 acres in 1860, Eppes might have survived the immediate postwar years by hiring free labor. But, Eppes's decision to sell his plantation near Lake Lafayette for Confederate money during the war left the former mayor of Tallahassee to sell the remainder of his possessions to settle his debts and restart as an orange grower in Orange County, Florida. After moving to a farm near Orlando in 1867, Eppes never realized the profits he expected in citrus before his death in 1881. According to the 1880 Census, Eppes's farm was only 80 acres worth $5,000, produced a single bale of cotton worth $170, and held zero orange-bearing trees in his grove.

Table 3.4: Dr. Edward Bradford’s Financial History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Farm Value ($)</th>
<th>Total Acres</th>
<th>Cotton Bales</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Real Estate ($)</th>
<th>Personal Estate ($)</th>
<th>Taxes</th>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850-1860</td>
<td>-4.00%</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>-19.64%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>28,800</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>74,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860-1870</td>
<td>-77.43%</td>
<td>-59.38%</td>
<td>-95.56%</td>
<td>Planter</td>
<td>-48.28%</td>
<td>-97.30%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leon County Landholders Database

Edward Bradford fared better than Francis Eppes but lost the majority of his antebellum wealth before his passing. Like Eppes, Edward Bradford's 3,200 acres that comprised Pine Hill and Horseshoe plantations sustained his status as a planter in the decades before the war. Even as Reconstruction began, Bradford held onto enough land to maintain his planter status by 1870. Nevertheless, the consequences of Confederate defeat took their toll on the Bradford estate. By 1870, he had lost nearly 60 percent of his land, dropping from 3,200 to 1,300 total acres; Bradford's plantations depreciated by over 75 percent, dropping from $28,800 to $6,500 in value.
and the cotton production of his lands plummeted by over 95 percent from 225 cotton bales in 1860 to a mere ten in 1870. In addition to his property losses, Bradford struggled to obtain liquid assets. In 1867, Edward Bradford and N. W. Eppes entered into a loan with Bradford's nephew, Richard H. Bradford, Jr., for $225.24 While Edward Bradford was able to pass Pine Hill on to Susan and Nicholas Eppes upon his death in 1873, his fortune had greatly diminished in his final years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Agricultural Census</th>
<th>Population Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farm Value ($)</td>
<td>Total Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870-1880</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>58.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>$3,400</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leon County Landholders Database

For Susan and Nicholas Eppes, the final decades of the 1800s were kinder to them than their kin, though the couple was not without their financial troubles. In the 1870 Census, the Eppeses reported owning a 600 acres farm worth $3,000 that produced 26 cotton bales and other products worth $4,200. With their inheritance of Pine Hill in 1873, the Eppeses’s estate grew by 1880 to 950 acres valued at $3,400 that produced 48 bales of cotton and other products worth a lower $2,400. The land the Eppeses owned and their cotton production would have firmly cemented their planter status and wealth before the Civil War. However, Florida’s transition from a cotton-centric to a citrus-centric economy combined with the couple’s financial worries diminished the status previously guaranteed by plantation ownership. Leon County was

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surpassed as the most profitable and most valuable Florida county in 1870 by small margins. By 1880, Leon County was second only to neighboring Jefferson County in total profit off of its traditional cotton crop, but Leon was sixth in total farm value as it was passed by Orange, Putnam, Duval, Alachua, and Marion counties, all counties that featured more diversified and more citrus-centric economies.\(^{25}\) This trend continued into the 1900 Census where Leon County dropped to tenth in total farm value, again losing out to more diversified, citrus-centric counties. Leon also became the eighth most profitable county the same year, dropping down six places.\(^{26}\)

The Eppeses’ finances soured in the early 1870s and their problems continued even after the couple’s sale of Pine Hill in the early 1900s. In 1874, Nicholas and Susan Eppes mortgaged Pine Hill for $340 at five percent per month with fellow Leon Countian, Benjamin C. Lewis.\(^{27}\) The Eppeses then entered into another mortgage with New Yorker C. W. Bailey for $2,100 in March 1884 with Pine Hill as collateral.\(^{28}\) The couple entered into another mortgage with Bailey in May 1886 for $320.\(^{29}\) Each of the Eppeses’s loans were eventually paid off, but the family’s worries continued. From 1892 to 1894, Nicholas Eppes was served receipts for unpaid taxes until a portion of the family land was sold to state treasurer C. B. Collins in 1894 for $4.98 in tax debt.\(^{30}\) Sometime between 1903 and 1904, the Eppeses sold Pine Hill and their other lands to


\(^{27}\) Mortgage for Pine Hill Plantation, February 26, 1874, FSU_MSS0204_B01_F01_06, Pine Hill Plantation Papers, 1832-1926, Special Collections & Archives, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida, [https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A369532](https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A369532).

\(^{28}\) Mortgage against land holdings, March 1, 1884, FSU_MSS0204_B01_F01_10, Pine Hill Plantation Papers, 1832-1926, Special Collections & Archives, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida, [https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A369551](https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A369551).


\(^{30}\) Collection of Tax Certificates signed by R. A. Shine regarding unpaid taxes in Leon County, April 4, 1892 to June 4, 1894, FSU_MSS0204_B01_F10_07, Pine Hill Plantation Papers, 1832-1926, Special Collections & Archives, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida, [https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A370387](https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A370387).
Clement A. Griscom, a Philadelphia business magnate who converted the plantations south of Lake Iamonia into a quail hunting plantation in the early 1900s. It is unclear as of now what factors motivated the Eppeses to sell the family plantation to Griscom, but one indication is that farming was not sufficient enough to sustain the families’ finances given their 50 percent decrease in profit from 1870 to 1880. Whatever the circumstances, Nicholas Eppes made a transition from farming to county politics as he was listed as the democratically-elected County Superintendent of Public Schools in 1900. While Nicholas’s salary as county superintendent afforded a home near downtown Tallahassee, the family’s finances were again thrown into disarray in 1904 after Nicholas was assassinated for what the Eppeses believed to be his knowledge of state political corruption.

After her husband's death, Susan Eppes struggled to make ends meet for the rest of her life. Her son, Edward Bradford Eppes, helped the family by winning his father's vacant seat as county superintendent in 1904, then assuming positions as a county tax assessor and a lawyer until he died in 1934. Susan's daughters, Susan B., Elizabeth, and Alice, helped too with jobs as grocery merchants, bookkeepers, and various other clerical positions. Susan also supported the family through a short stint as a grocery merchant before relying on other income. The other income Susan Eppes reported in the 1940 Census likely included Nicholas's $120-a-year Confederate pension which she applied for in 1909. Although Susan reported owning over 500 acres of land in Florida and Georgia as a part of her pension applications, it appears she never realized any significant wealth from opening the lands to tenant farming. In 1927, her relative,

31 Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail*, 79-80.
33 State Board of Pensions, EPPES, Nicholas Ware, 1907, a00688, Confederate Pension Applications, Florida Memory, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida, [https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/173479](https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/173479).
Robert Williams, requested Edward Eppes sell his share of the family land for cost as he believed it to be unprofitable despite having built a home on it a year before. As an unreconstructed Confederate, there is little doubt Susan Eppes wrote her two narratives in the 1920s to romanticize the antebellum South and glorify the Confederacy, especially with her families' attachments to both subjects, but it is equally likely she saw writing as another source of income. With relatively little acknowledgment besides Florida historians, members of Confederate memorialization organizations, and a few Confederate sympathizers outside the South, Susan's books never drew sufficient money to meet her needs. By the mid-1930s, Susan Eppes sought public support to use lotteries to fund Social Security, what she called "Old Age Pension," for retirees who did not pay into the system before its passage. Years later, Susan sold family heirlooms to accrue some cash. Susan’s longtime financial troubles fed her animosity for the North. In Through Some Eventful Years, she attacks the North for ruining the Southern economy and attempts to redeem the antebellum planter class, writing “There were things our parents never discussed in our presence; one of these was money. Never had we heard it intimated that wealth made one better, or poverty made one less desirable; personality was the criterion; personality and family with great stress laid upon the latter qualification…That wealth does make a difference, we learned in later years.”

Eppes may not have profited from her books as much as she wished, but she did revive her family's reputation within social circles she respected. Among the Daughters of the

37 Eppes, Through Some Eventful Years, 26-27.
Confederacy, Eppes was celebrated as a former statewide division president, as one of the last surviving women of the 1860s, and as a fierce opponent of critical histories of the South through her writing. Recognition within the UDC was significant as the organization wielded sizeable influence in Florida politics and society. A pamphlet from a Confederate combat veteran to women of Florida's UDC chapters in 1912 demonstrated the power of the organization as the veteran campaigned for his son seeking the Democratic nomination for Commissioner of Agriculture before beginning an account of his Civil War service.38 Susan Eppes understood the strength of the UDC as well; in 1925, she wrote a letter to the Florida Division of the UDC requesting the organization use its influence in the state legislature to make Florida universities hire southern-born history professors and adopted southern history curriculums after voicing her displeasure with the curriculum and foreign-born professors at the Florida State College for Women.39 Eppes did receive praise from Floridians not affiliated with the UDC for her work in The Negro of the Old South and Through Some Eventful Years. In 1926, a former Baptist minister from Miami wrote Eppes to express his appreciation for her description of “the old planter class, the most misunderstood, misrepresented, most calumniated and lied about people in the world.”40 A librarian for the University of Florida wrote Susan Eppes in 1932 to communicate her admiration of Eppes's description of plantation life and race relations and to

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39 Letter to The Legislative Committee of the United Daughters of the Confederacy from Mrs. Nicholas Ware Eppes, October 16, 1936, FSU_MSS0204_B03_F03_01, Special Collections & Archives, Florida State University Libraries, Tallahassee, Florida, https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A373339.

purchasing copies of her books for the university library. Susan Eppes's importance was great enough to catch the attention of presidential candidates. Campaign officials for Alfred E. Smith requested Eppes to write a comment in favor of the 1928 presidential candidate in return for a charter, citing Eppes's previous comments supporting Smith and her relation to Thomas Jefferson.

Susan Bradford Eppes dedicated her adult life to vindicating the Confederacy after its defeat. Because of the Bradfords’s, Branches’s, and Eppeses’s participation in the Confederate war effort, Susan Eppes understood her mission to memorialize a romantic memory of the Southern past was equally one to revive and preserve the prewar status of her families in an evolving postbellum Florida society. Her relatives’ and her immediate family’s financial struggles until her death in 1942 intensified Eppes’s hatred for the North as destroyers of an idyllic “Old South” and motivated her to author numerous false narratives in opposition to “critical histories” of the South and to bring in additional income. In the end, Eppes’s narratives did little to improve her financial position but did bring her acclaim from circles she respected, such as sympathetic Floridians and women of the UDC, and draw some influence recognized by political hopefuls.

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Conclusion

Today, if a traveler drove north on US-19 along Florida’s Gulf Coast, they would eventually encounter Perry, Florida, a small town in Taylor County still committed to logging timber and that features only a few fast-food restaurants on its main street. As the traveler reaches the north side of Perry, they would notice a Confederate battle flag flying above a large stone marker in front of the Taylor County Sports Complex, the only county park in the area. If the traveler pulled over and walked up to the stone marker, they might presume the stone was a modest monument to the Confederate dead erected sometime in the late 19th century or the early 20th century; they might believe the marker was funded by the efforts of the local United Daughters of the Confederacy chapter decades ago. Instead, the marker features the emblem of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) and is dedicated to the living memory of local residents’ Confederate ancestors by the Perry chapter of the SCV and the Order of Confederate Rose, a pro-Confederate organization founded in the early 1990s. Underneath the dedication is inscribed a message to descendants of Confederate veterans encouraging them to be proud of their “heritage” in the face of intimidation and fear, for the Confederate spirit of their ancestors remains with them. The marker was erected in 2007.

Over 150 years after the Confederacy’s defeat in the Civil War, the influence of the Lost Cause is still powerful in Florida. Although Florida has developed exponentially since the 1860s and grown more diverse as Latinx, Caribbean, and non-southern whites migrate to the state, support for the Confederacy and the revisionist southern history of the Lost Cause is still strong in Florida’s rural spaces. And like the original women of the Confederate memorialization movement, recent defenses of the antebellum South and the Confederacy’s cause are loudest in the face of questions over the region’s history with race. In the Sunshine State, debates over the
United States’ troublesome record on race following the election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 prompted contemporary Confederate sympathizers to recite the common tenets of Lost Cause myth: that the Confederacy participated in the Civil War as a just defense of states’ rights; that slavery was not the critical motivation for the “War Between the States;” that southern slaveholders were paternalist caretakers to contented, happy slaves who were a part of one large plantation family; and that the Northern states were the true aggressors who sought to reshape the Southern way of life and installed corrupt Reconstruction governments until the program’s end in 1877. The recitation of Lost Cause myth is intended to oppose questions of the South’s historical morality and honor. All told, it appears the public commemorations and revisionist Southern history curriculums advocated for by the Daughters of the Confederacy fruitful. With the success of these memorialization missions, the honor of a militarily-defeated, financially-ruined planter class is preserved within the minds of Lost Cause sympathizers.

This thesis argues the Lost Cause and other celebrations of a romantic Southern past benefitted the elites who promoted it by preserving their honor after social and economic failure. In researching this argument, this thesis calculates the persistence rate of Leon County, Florida’s planter class to determine that those elites of Middle Florida persisted at a similar rate in the Civil War decade as they had in antebellum decades. Middle Florida’s planters and other elites throughout Florida then attempted to codify their social hegemony in Florida’s first Reconstruction government by enacting a constitution and “Black Codes” that relegated Black Floridians to the status of an agricultural peasantry with minimal civil rights, but failed when Congressional Reconstruction rejected most governments created by the ex-Confederate states under Andrew Johnson’s direction. By the turn of the century, Florida’s economy left cotton
behind as its key driving force for the more profitable citrus and tourism industries while elites in Leon County generally failed to capitalize on these economic shifts and slowly died financially. Finally, through a case study of Susan Bradford Eppes, a descendant of the esteemed Bradford, Branch, and Eppes families, it is clear most contributors to Florida’s Lost Cause myth sought to revive their families’ antebellum honor as an essential duty of elite Southern women while, in Eppes’s case, drawing in additional income.

In the process of researching and writing this thesis, additional questions came to light. First, in tracing the movements of Leon County planters after the Civil War, many families relocated to other areas of the state in attempts to grow other crops, such as sugar and citrus. Some popular spots for former Middle Florida elites to settle included Levy County, along the state's Big Bend, Orange County, where orange groves quickly sprang up near Orlando, and Taylor County, where the timber industry is still active to this day. In the 1920s, each of these counties or their surrounding areas played host to different race massacres: the Ocoee Massacre of 1920 that resulted from conflict around that year’s elections, the Perry Massacre of 1922, and the Rosewood Massacre that occurred near Cedar Key in 1923. Was it possible that relocated Middle Florida families influenced race relations in their new homes decades later? Second, what influence did Lost Cause myth hold in the racial violence around Florida in the 20th century? Were the myth's claims that African Americans were inferior serve as a justification for white Floridians who brutally attacked Black communities? Lastly, how did Black Floridians respond to the Lost Cause and racial violence throughout the state? If this topic is further pursued in a future research project, these questions will be addressed and greater attention will be given to the experiences of Black Floridians.
Appendix

Persistence Study Methodology

The planter persistence study of Chapter One was designed to calculate the persistence rate of planters in Leon County, Florida, from 1850 to 1870 using available census and county tax records compiled in the Leon County Landholders Database to determine what influence the Civil War and emancipation had on that class of elites. The study beings by calculating the persistence rate of Leon County’s planters across the 1850s to establish the persistence rate of the antebellum era, a time when the planter class was undoubtedly stable. Then, the study calculates the persistence rate of the county’s planters across the 1860s to determine how the class responded to the developments of the Civil War decade. The definition of a planter in this study was devised to overcome the shortfalls of previous persistence studies and the difficulties posed by government records in the 19th century.

Prior historians of the U.S. South and Middle Florida alike lack any consensus on how a planter is defined. One school of historians that includes Roger L. Ransom based its definition of a planter on slaveholding alone, commonly defining a planter as an individual or householding owning twenty or more bond persons.¹ A second school of historians including J. William Harris defines planter status by landholding, typically adopting the traditional definition of a plantation as a farm of 500 or more acres and the owner of a plantation as a planter.² Among historians of Middle Florida, there is no common definition at all. Clifton Paisley, the Tallahassee journalist who studied both Leon County and the Middle Florida region, chose to define a large planter as the owner of a plantation that produced fifty or more bales of cotton. Edward E. Baptist, who

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² J. William Harris, Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1985).
studied Leon and Jackson counties as a part of the cotton frontier in the Deep South, defined a planter using the traditional definition: an individual or household owning twenty or more bond persons. Given the intimate connection between landholding and slaveholding as sources of wealth and honor in the slaveholding South, this persistence study of Leon County defines as a planter as an individual or household owning twenty or more bond persons AND 500 or more acres of land in 1850 and 1860, while a planter in 1870 must only own 500 or more acres of land.

To be defined as a planter in this Leon County persistence study, an individual or household must hold the requisite amount of property in both census and tax records. In terms of land qualifications, a Leon County planter in 1850 and 1860 is an individual or household that owns at least 500 or more acres of land according to both the agricultural census schedules and the county tax records. Similarly, a Leon County planter in 1850 and 1860 is a person or household who owns at least twenty bond persons according to both the slave schedules of the population census and the tax records. In 1870, given emancipation eliminated personal property in enslaved persons, a planter is defined as an individual or household who owns at least 500 or more acres of land in the agricultural census schedules as the county tax records for that year are too fragmented to glean any useful data. This multilevel validation process aims to overcome possible inaccuracies in census data given such records depend upon the honest responses of residents. Although tax records are by no means perfect, such data would presumably be more accurate given dishonest taxpayers could be penalized by an increased tax burden if they overvalued their property values or face criminal penalties for false responses or unpaid taxes.

Persistence in this study is calculated by dividing the total number of individuals or households who retained their status as a planter in the first and final years of the decade of study by the total number of planters in the first year of the decade of study. For example, if one were
attempting to calculate the persistence rate of a planter class from 1850 to 1860 using this methodology and the total number of elites who retained their planter status across the decade of study was thirty of an 1850 planter class of sixty, then the persistence rate for the 1850s would be 50 percent.

Problems with Nineteenth-Century Government Records

For historians studying the United States in the nineteenth century, government records are the closest one can get to obtaining objective primary source materials. The U.S. decennial census presents valuable enumerations of the country's population, agricultural, and social compositions among other genres of information based on respondents' answers to census enumerators. The population census provides a close approximation of the total number of inhabitants, families, and households within a given state or territory, county, or municipality through population schedules. As a category of the population census, the slave schedules offer historians the most accurate enumeration of enslaved Black peoples in the United States before the 1870 Census. The social census included data such as the occupational composition of a given area, the area's level of education, its total real and personal estate values, as well as annual taxes of the studied area, its intellectual holdings, i.e., schools, libraries, and newspapers, and its religious composition. The agricultural census calculated each farm’s improved and unimproved acreage, cash value, the value of the farm’s implements, livestock and their worth, production output, and, in later censuses, the total cash value of a farm’s production. Lastly, tax records provide a more accurate enumeration of a county’s population and their taxable products to

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3 Census Act of 1850, 31st Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Globe, ch. 11: 428-436. Real estate values were not enumerated by the Census Bureau until the 1850 Census. Personal estate values were first recorded in the 1860 Census. Neither statistical categories were recorded in the Census of Population after the 1870 Census.
efficiently tax citizens. The increased accuracy of tax assessments was due to respondents answering the tax assessor’s questions under oath, therefore invoking a legal penalty for verifiably inaccurate estimates.\textsuperscript{4} Historians nevertheless must account for and overcome some issues with government records, many of which were encountered in this thesis's persistence study of Leon County planters.\textsuperscript{5}

Most issues encountered in government data are those due to human error, especially when comparing data over multiple records with different enumerators. The most common problems are the misspelling or misunderstanding of a respondent's name or answers that create varying entries for subjects under study. In a mild incident, a respondent's name could be slightly misunderstood and recorded incorrectly, but easily sorted out by comparing entries in other sets of data. For instance, Leon County resident Robert Butler's name was recorded correctly in tax records for 1850, but his name was written as "Robert Butter" in census documents for the same year. In extreme cases, data entries can be so widely different across government records that a historian might be unable to determine to whom such entries belong or what the true value of an entry was even by comparison. In 1850, an "L. H. Branch" was observed in the agricultural census and slave schedules, but the same name was not present in the population census schedules or tax records for that year. As a result, "L. H. Branch" was unable to be confirmed as a census enumerator's error, a tax assessor's error, or as a possibly deceased resident.

Other errors in government records are the result of an official’s instructions. Census enumerators were instructed to collect data by soliciting responses from either the heads of households or "the best and most reliable sources." Respondents were questioned about the

\textsuperscript{4} Instructions to the Tax-Assessor and Collector, 1848, Series 28, Box 91, Monroe County 1848, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida.
\textsuperscript{5} For more on historians’ use of census records, see Orville Vernon Burton, \textit{In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions: Family & Community in Edgefield, South Carolina} (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1985), 326-332.
household, the farm, or whatever institution they owned or operated. Census enumerators were not instructed to make personal assessments of the respondent's household or property, therefore all information collected in U.S. Censuses was information willingly given to the census enumerator. In most cases, inaccurate responses were due to the respondent's ignorance, but others might have held more malicious intentions. In the culture of Southern honor, respondents might have inflated their wealth or slaveholding figures to impress the census enumerator or other members of their community. Inflating the value of one's estate was possible given the census enumerator was entirely dependent on the voluntary responses of the respondent and census schedules were sealed away as confidential material for seventy years. With county tax records, tax assessors' instruction in the 19th century required a more stringent analysis of residents’ taxable property as these assessments determined a resident’s tax burden. Tax officials were instructed to administer an oath to respondents before questioning them, meaning intentionally inaccurate responses could incur a legal penalty or an improperly high or low tax burden. Additionally, many antebellum Middle Floridians used federal patronage to secure positions in county tax offices to then undervalue their taxable property and the taxable property of their allies to ensure lower tax burdens. Entries in county tax records tended to be lower than similar entries in other government records as a result.

Missing entries across census and tax records further complicate the ability of the historian to compile a uniform database for community studies. In some instances, a resident may be absent when the census enumerator visited and therefore not recorded in census records, but present when visited by the tax assessor and therefore present in tax records for the same year. This particular inconsistency could be explained by the agricultural census's emphasis on recording farms with three acres or more while tax records account for any resident paying
county or state taxes. Where an individual is missing from tax records but present in the census, the explanation is more ambiguous. One possibility is that a respondent served as an agent for another county resident, paid their taxes in their place, but did not notify the tax official that they were serving as the true resident's agent. This was the case of Benjamin and Martha Chaires in Leon County’s 1850 tax records. Benjamin Chaires deeded a 900-acre plantation to his infant daughter, Martha Chaires, and served as her undisclosed agent for the tax official but communicated that Martha was the owner of the plantation to the census enumerator.

In other cases, county residents might be listed multiple times in various census schedules. While there might be many explanations in this circumstance, one possibility is that a resident might own multiple properties that the census enumerator visited separately over the course of their duties. In this case, the individual would be listed multiple times in the agricultural census schedules and the slave schedules if they were a slaveowner. Although this particular inconsistency can be answered by a simple explanation, multiple properties owned by a single resident provide the census enumerator multiple opportunities to record inaccurate data. The enumerator might encounter agents or overseers at the property owner's other lands and record the agent as the rightful owner. In Richard K. Call's case, in 1850 he owned three properties listed in separate lines of the agricultural census that totaled nearly 3,700 acres. In the tax records for the same year, Call was listed as owning only 1,281 acres. This large discrepancy could be due to an error by the census enumerator or an inaccurate response by Call, another possibility could be Call's agent(s) for his other properties reported Call's property as their own.

Unsettled estates can also complicate research using government records. Agricultural census schedules and county tax records are riddled with entries listing an individual as the executor, administrator, agent, or other authority over another resident's property. As from
entries where the resident is listed as an heir, most legal titles do not denote ownership over the estate or property in question. It was not historically uncommon, however, for someone serving as the trustee of another resident's property to leech the true owner's holding or claim the property in question as the trustee's own. Some instances where this occurred are benign, as was the case of Benjamin Chaires claiming Martha Chaires’s property as his own to pay taxes on her property, or when George T. Ward claimed ownership of both his and his wife’s estate. Other instances of wrongfully claimed property might be the result of one’s selfish endeavor to procure great wealth, power, or status within their community.

U.S. government records present a variety of difficulties for historians researching quantitative materials whether due to a government official’s human error, the intent of the assessment in question, such as census enumeration versus tax assessment, or malicious intent by a resident seeking greater honor or wealth within the community. Despite these numerous complications, government records are oftentimes the most objective primary source material available to historians and typically survive longer under the protection of government agencies.
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