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NORTHERNERS IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY FLORIDA: CARPETBAGGERS OR SETTLERS?

by MAURICE M. VANCE

INTERPRETATIONS, both popular and professional, of the influence of Northerners on the history of Florida have been characterized by two major concepts. Today the subject of northern immigration brings first to our minds the thought of the tourist and the settler, persons whose constructive roles in the development of the state need no affirmation. As we think of northern immigration in the late nineteenth century, however, our attitudes are colored by another label - that of the carpetbagger. The carpetbagger was of course a Yankee scoundrel up to no good, a corrupting element in southern society from the Old Dominion to the Lone Star State. The use of the term may be limited strictly to the northern born political opportunists who lived in, or moved into, the South at the end of the Civil War, but the term is often used with the implication that this blanket would cover about all of the Yankees to be found in Dixie during the postwar period.

These two characterizations are quite diverse - in many respects flatly contradictory. One dominates the present, the other dominates the period immediately following the Civil War; and both, in some degree, may be applied throughout the intervening century. One might ask, when did Yankees cease being primarily carpetbaggers and become primarily settlers? Although this question is susceptible to a great deal of individual interpretation, there are, as usual, certain facts pertinent to its consideration. It is the purpose of this paper, chiefly through a study of the vocations represented by northern immigrants into Florida, to examine this balance of settler vs. carpetbagger, especially in the decades immediately following the Civil War.¹

This study is to be considered against the broad background of the makeup of Florida's population, illustrated in Table I. Certain points are readily apparent.

1. Any definition of "Northerner" must be somewhat arbitrary. In this paper I have not considered border states as northern, but have considered as "Northerners" those persons born in the United States north of the Mason-Dixon line, north of the Ohio River, or west of the states of Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas.

TABLE I
Northern born and foreign born residents of Florida, 1860-1950

	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950
Total population	140,424	187,748	269,493	391,422	528,542	752,619	968,470	1,468,211	1,897,414	2,771,305
Percentage increase in preceding decade		33.7	43.5	45.2	35.0	42.4	28.7	51.6	29.2	46.1
Northern born	2,010	3,177	8,503	20,518	21,664	37,046	98,458	191,158	284,594	597,090
Per cent of total	1.4	1.7	3.2	5.3	4.1	4.9	10.2	13.1	15.0	21.6
Percentage increase		58.1	167.6	141.3	5.6	71.0	165.8	94.2	48.9	109.8
Foreign born	3,309	4,967	9,909	22,932	23,832	40,633	53,864	69,747	77,839	131,065
Per cent of total	2.4	2.7	3.7	5.9	4.5	5.4	5.6	4.8	4.1	4.7
Percentage increase		50.1	99.5	131.4	3.9	70.5	32.6	29.5	11.6	68.4

We sometimes hear Florida referred to as "the northernmost of the southern states." There is considerable evidence to support this description, both today and in the nineteenth century. The censuses of 1870 and 1880 showed that Northerners were proportionally more numerous in Florida than in any other state of the former Confederacy. Nevertheless, the northern born population, while increasing steadily in numbers over the last century, was never more than 6 per cent of the total until the decade of World War I.

During the 1860's Florida's northern born population increased from 2,010 to 3,177, a net increase of 1,167. From 1870 to 1880 the net increase was 5,326, and during the eighties (after Reconstruction) the net increase was 12,015. This continued increase suggests that something other than *political* opportunity was providing the strongest inducement to bring Northerners to Florida. In any case, the end of the Civil War did not touch off a large scale migration from the North to Florida. An influx of Northerners great enough to change appreciably the balance between northern born and southern born residents in Florida was not to materialize until well into the twentieth century.

Chiefly for purposes of comparison, the percentage of foreign born residents in Florida has also been recorded in Table I. It will be noticed, first, that this group has for many years represented about 5 per cent of the population of the state, and, second, that until the second decade of this century - the decade which marked the beginning of a significant increase in the northern born element in Florida - the foreigners outnumbered the Yankees. Although the consistent concentration of Bahamans, Cubans, and others of foreign birth in Key West accounted for from 30 to 50 per cent of this group, it was quite common before 1900 for the northern born residents in any community to be outnumbered by the persons of foreign birth.

To provide a closer study of the Northerners whom the census takers found in Florida in the late nineteenth century, an analysis was made of the population of nine counties on the basis of data from the censuses of 1860, 1870, and 1880.² The

2. The bulk of the data for the following paragraphs was obtained from the original enumerators' records for these censuses, which have been microfilmed by the National Archives.

counties which were examined in detail were Duval, Escambia, Hillsborough, Leon, Monroe, Orange, Putnam, St. Johns, and Volusia. These counties were not typical; rather, they were chosen because (1) they represented several sections of the state, (2) together they included most of the important cities of nineteenth-century Florida, and (3) together, they accounted for over half of Florida's Northerners. More typical were such counties as Gadsden, which in 1880 had 33 Northerners, or Polk, which had five; but when one is studying the habits of a species, there is a certain advantage in concentrating one's attention on the locale where the largest number of specimens are to be found.

Who then was the Northerner, this new Florida man? To begin with, he was not as likely to be a farmer as might be expected. Two-thirds of the gainfully employed Floridians throughout the decades under study were engaged in agriculture. But despite the predominantly rural characteristic of Florida, and of the entire United States, during this period, the Florida Yankees were not found primarily on farms. In the agricultural portions of the counties studied, and throughout other, more rural counties, one can turn page after page of the census enumerators' records without encountering anyone born north of Virginia. For example, in Tallahassee, whose population rose from 1,932 in 1860 to 2,494 in 1880, there were 67, 93 and 96 persons of northern birth in 1860, 1870 and 1880 respectively. But in the rest of Leon county, with a population which ranged during the same period from 10,411 to 17,168, the census takers never recorded encountering more than 41 Northerners. As Tables II-A-B-C show, the 1870's brought a recognizable group of Northerners into the new citrus cultivation in the northeastern part of the state, and a decade later they could be seen moving on downstate, for example into Manatee county. But the generalization may still be made that Florida's Northerners were not primarily agriculturists.

Were they politicians? Yes and no. In 1860, in these nine counties, 13 of 48 holders of public office, or 27 per cent, were northern born. Besides several lighthouse keepers and a few others whose offices were not political in the usual sense, this group included the judge of the Probate Court in Jacksonville, an assayer in the United States Land Office in Tampa, the judge and clerk of the United States District Court in Key West, and

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TABLE II-A
Occupations of northern born residents in nine Florida counties, 1860

	Duval	Escam- bia	Hills- borough	Leon	Monroe	Orange	Putnam	St. Johns	Volusia	Totals
Law enforcement	1	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	3
Lawyers	5	1	1	2	—	—	1	1	—	11
Govt. service	—	—	1	—	6	—	—	1	2	10
Editors	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Teachers	2	4	1	2	—	—	1	3	1	14
Physicians and Dentists	5	2	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	10
Clergy	1	—	—	1	1	—	2	2	—	7
Farmers	13	1	8	7	1	8	1	5	8	52
Artisans	36	62	6	14	33	1	7	10	7	176
Laborers	16	17	1	—	3	—	3	2	—	42
Merchants	32	23	4	21	11	—	9	5	2	107
Clerks	7	6	—	9	7	—	2	—	—	31
Engineers	1	5	—	3	1	—	—	—	—	10
Mariners and fishermen	14	30	5	—	56	—	—	—	1	106
U.S. Armed Forces Dependents and miscellaneous*	—	59	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	63
	84	136	8	26	36	—	17	71	7	385
Totals	217	346	36	85	161	9	44	101	28	1027

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*The term "miscellaneous" represents a small number of adults for whom no occupation was given, plus an occasional person whose occupation seemed difficult to classify: a few cemetery keepers, lamplighters, prisoners, actors, etc.

TABLE II-B
Occupations of northern born residents in nine Florida counties, 1870

	Duval	Escambia	Hillsborough	Leon	Monroe	Orange	Putnam	St. Johns	Volusia	Totals
Law enforcement	6	2	1	1	3	—	—	—	—	13
Lawyers	9	5	—	2	—	—	—	5	1	22
Govt. service	4	5	1	20	10	—	1	2	2	45
Editors	1	2	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	4
Teachers	4	3	—	2	1	—	1	1	—	12
Physicians and Dentists	6	4	3	2	3	1	2	4	1	26
Clergy	9	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	12
Farmers	45	5	8	4	4	13	37	7	26	149
Artisans	112	47	4	13	30	3	13	14	2	238
Laborers	38	41	—	2	17	—	12	1	1	112
Merchants	75	28	10	17	12	1	6	16	2	167
Clerks	32	6	—	3	4	—	—	—	—	45
Engineers	6	7	—	—	—	—	3	—	3	19
Mariners and fishermen	29	8	—	—	20	—	4	1	—	62
U.S. Armed Forces	1	68	—	—	163	—	—	—	—	232
Dependents and miscellaneous	533	164	27	37	51	16	66	81	25	1000
Totals	910	396	54	103	318	34	147	133	63	2158

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TABLE II-C
Occupations of northern born residents in nine Florida counties, 1880

	Duval	Escam- bia	Hills- borough	Leon	Monroe	Orange	Putnam	St. Johns	Volusia	Totals
Law enforcement	7	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	10
Lawyers	21	6	—	1	1	3	—	1	3	36
Govt. service	14	4	3	4	2	1	3	6	3	40
Editors	3	1	—	1	1	4	—	—	—	10
Teachers	12	3	1	2	—	3	4	1	7	33
Physicians and Dentists	29	1	3	2	—	9	7	3	7	61
Clergy	12	—	1	—	—	4	5	5	4	31
Farmers	85	2	57	12	11	180	180	30	124	681
Artisans	173	55	12	14	20	39	35	15	42	405
Laborers	94	48	18	5	11	18	5	13	32	244
Merchants	198	21	13	14	25	17	18	12	20	338
Clerks	93	15	5	10	12	8	12	6	14	175
Engineers	18	8	2	—	2	7	3	2	1	43
Mariners and fishermen	49	19	5	—	8	—	4	2	5	92
U.S. Armed Forces	—	5	—	—	4	—	—	40	—	49
Dependents and 1090 miscellaneous	—	150	198	76	84	374	387	153	405	2917
Totals	1898	340	318	142	181	667	663	289	667	5165

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TABLE II-D

Occupational distribution by percentage of northern born residents in nine Florida counties, 1860, 1870, 1880.

	1860	1870	1880
Law enforcement	0.3	0.6	0.2
Lawyers	1.1	1.0	0.7
Govt. service	1.0	2.1	0.8
Editors	0.0	0.2	0.2
Teachers	1.4	0.6	0.6
Physicians and Dentists	1.0	1.2	1.2
Clergy	0.7	0.6	0.6
Public professions (subtotal)	5.5	6.3	4.3
Farmers	5.1	6.9	13.2
Artisans	17.1	11.0	7.8
Laborers	4.1	5.2	4.7
Merchants	10.4	7.7	6.6
Clerks	3.0	2.1	3.4
Engineers	1.0	0.6	0.8
Business groups (subtotal)*	35.6	26.6	23.3
Mariners and fishermen	10.3	2.9	1.8
U. S. Armed Forces	6.1	10.8	0.9
Dependents and miscellaneous* *	37.4	46.6	56.5
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

*This subtotal is only a rough approximation to represent the group involved in business. Some of the laborers (included in this subtotal) were agricultural workers; some of the mariners (not included) might reasonably have been included in the business group. The editors might have been included in this group, and some of the lawyers and governmental officials were engaged in business. Altogether, these subtotals probably err in underrepresenting the Northerners engaged in business rather than in overestimating their importance.

**One interesting feature of the northern immigration to Florida, reflected in these figures, was the steadily increasing proportion of wives and children of northern birth in the group under study. Apparently, in the earlier days, the Northerner who moved into Florida was more apt to be a young unmarried man in search of his fortune, who married and raised his family after he had settled down in Florida. But increasingly by 1870 and 1880 whole families were moving into Florida from the North. The increasing appeal which this state had, not only for the adventurous youth, but also for the more mature family man, probably reflected the gradually increasing entrepreneurial possibilities which accompanied the increasing settlement of the state.

Justice W. A. Forward of the State Supreme Court. Since Northerners made up only 2.8 per cent of the total population of the nine counties studied, it appears that they were, proportionally, more active in politics than their more numerous southern neighbors. On the other hand, since the thirteen office holders represented only about 1 per cent of the northern born residents of these counties, the label of "politician" was apparently not applicable to the group as a whole.

By 1870 the picture was noticeably changed. Harrison Reed, a former Wisconsin editor, was the governor. The lieutenant governor, William H. Gleason, and six of the eight cabinet officials were northern born, as were 13 of the 76 legislators and three of the eight state judges.³ Some Northerners, both before and after their arrival in this state, had clearly hoped and planned to gain control of Florida politics.⁴ But it is easy to overemphasize the significance of these northern politicians, both in relation to the political structure of the state and in relation to the total northern born element in Florida's population. Among 173 county officials, 134 were southern born and 39 were Northerners. Various contemporary observers estimated that in the elections by which these officials had been chosen there had been from 300 to 500 white Republican votes cast, a large proportion no doubt by Northerners.⁵ At this time there were about 3,200 northern born persons in the state. With adult males running 40-55 per cent of the total in various samples, there were perhaps 1,500 northern born adult males from whom these 300-500 votes could have been drawn. Thus, even in 1870-high noon, carpetbagger time—we do not get a picture of the northern born Floridians as a homogeneous group, actively engaged in politics or even united behind any one political party or program.

One group directly representing the federal government whose presence made a profound impression on the attitudes of Southerners in general was the military. In 1870 there were two

3. William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913), 529, 534-35. Davis examined the makeup of the 1868-1870 legislature and Governor Reed's political appointments,

4. Robert L. Clarke, "Northern Plans for the Economic Invasion of Florida, 1862-1865," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXVIII (April, 1950), 262-270; George W. Smith, "Carpetbag Imperialism in Florida, 1862-1868," *FHQ*, XXVII (October, 1948, and January, 1949), 99-130, 260-299.

5. Davis, 479, 525.

military installations in Florida, one at Key West, the other at Fort Barrancas near Pensacola. Their combined personnel numbered slightly over 500 men, of whom census records indicated that 232 were northern born. (Fifty were Southerners by birth, and the remainder were foreign born, mostly Germans and Irishmen.) However, in assessing the total resentment which developed among Floridians as a result of the presence of federal troops, we can probably disregard the fact that not all of the men in uniform were technically Northerners.

By 1880 the northern influence in politics and government had declined. There were no occupation troops, and the only military post was Fort Marion, near St. Augustine. Its complement of one hundred-odd officers and men would typically have been about half Northerners; at the time of the enumeration of the census there were forty Northerners stationed there.

Among Florida's government officials, such federally appointed persons as postmasters, United States marshals, collectors of internal revenue, and customs officials were apt to be Northerners. The chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court, E. M. Randall, was a native of New York. In Jacksonville, the mayor and the captain of the police force were Northerners, as were the mayor of St. Augustine and the judge of Escambia County. But state elective offices, from the governor on down, and local offices such as mayor, sheriff, county judge, and county treasurer were predominantly in southern hands. In 1880 the Northerners were even less able than in 1870 to unite to dominate the state.

Florida's schools experienced a considerable expansion during the 1870's, but the number of northern teachers employed in the state increased much less rapidly than the number of teachers of southern birth. The attitude which eliminated Northerners from public offices may have affected the teachers also, though the evidence here is less conclusive. In 1880, 12 of Duval County's 34 teachers were northern born, but in Leon County there were only two Northerners to 26 Southerners. Only in one other county (Volusia) do the census records show more than three or four northern born teachers. However, neither in 1860 nor in 1870 had the census takers enumerated more than four northern teachers in any of these counties.

Henry L. Swint, in studying northern teachers in the post-war South, found records of over one thousand such persons, but

only 32 of them taught in Florida.⁶ Nearly all of the 32 taught in Fernandina, Jacksonville, or St. Augustine, some apparently quite briefly. The fact that there were so few northern born teachers in Florida in 1880 does not, therefore, clearly show a cut back, and may have reflected the choice of the communities, or of the teachers, or both. In any case, it is clear that the northern migration to Florida during the period under discussion was not weighted heavily with Yankee schoolmasters or schoolmarms.

Florida's Northerners included even fewer ministers than teachers, a fact which probably more accurately reflected the unwillingness of Southerners to have a Yankee preaching at them in church than it supported their conviction that the Yankees were a godless lot. Physicians, dentists, and lawyers, however, moved in from the North in somewhat larger numbers. In most of the counties studied, in any of the three decades, one could have his pills rolled from the North or from the South, his teeth pulled from the South or from the North, or his case argued in court in a drawl or a twang. In most instances the northern born physicians, dentists, and lawyers found themselves outnumbered by their southern born colleagues, often greatly so. Probably the most meaningful comments here are that (1) at least in the urban centers, from 10 to 50 per cent of the members of the medical and legal professions had come from the North, and (2) this proportion varied more from city to city in any given year than from prewar to postwar times in the same city, or, apparently, in the state as a whole. All in all, as Table III shows, the Northerners had consistently higher representation in fields of public leadership than did either their southern born or foreign born neighbors.

The largest group of northern born breadwinners, in each of the areas and each of the census years studied, were occupied in business and the trades. Bookkeepers, butchers, carpenters, clerks, druggists, engineers, fishermen, grocers, masons, painters, sailors, saloonkeepers, seamstresses, shoemakers, tinsmiths, wheelwrights—these and many others were to be found. A few minor patterns could be observed: telegraph operators, engineers, insurance men and real estate agents were apt to be Northerners, while cigar

6. Henry L. Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South, 1862-1870* (Nashville, 1941), 175-200.

TABLE III

Southern born, northern born, and foreign born persons in certain fields of public leadership in nine Florida counties, 1860-1880, as compared with the numerical strength of each of these groups in the total population of the same counties.

	1860			1870			1880		
	S	N	F	S	N	F	S	N	F
Law enforcement	8	3	3	24	13	10	40	10	12
Lawyers	49	11	2	54	22	11	89	40	8
Govt. service	16	10	8	29	45	6	43	40	4
Editors	3	0	2	3	3	1	6	10	2
Teachers	34	14	19	42	12	23	122	33	17
Physicians and Dentists	59	10	4	73	26	12	92	60	24
Totals	169	48	38	225	121	64	392	193	67
Per cent*	66	19	15	55	29	16	60	30	10
Total population	33,751	1027	2196	47,364	2158	4052	75,150	5165	8396
Per cent*	91	3	6	88	4	8	85	6	9

*Thus, for example, in 1860 southern born persons made up 91% of the total population of the nine counties studied, while southern born persons held 66% of the positions of public leadership cited.

makers seldom hailed from the North. But on the whole, a cross section of the northern born population closely resembled a cross section of the trades-and-business-and-professional portion of the southern born population.

This resemblance was marked in Pensacola and Key West, and especially in Duval County. Here the influx of Northerners made such an impression, on both natives and visitors, that one travelogue reported in 1874, "Fully half of the resident population of Jacksonville is northern, and has settled there since the war."⁷ This was a little exaggerated; both in 1870 and in 1880 the correct proportion was less than one in seven. The proportion of Northerners in such counties as Nassau, Duval, Putnam, Volusia and Orange stirred another writer to report in 1881 that "Florida is rapidly becoming a northern county."⁸ As far as could be learned from his account, he did not visit Taylor County, where the census takers of the preceding year had discovered ten Northerners, or Calhoun or Liberty or Walton Counties, in any of which the northern born residents could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

In 1902 Rowland H. Rerick published his *Memoirs of Florida*,⁹ one interesting feature of which was a series of biographical sketches of nearly one thousand leading citizens of Florida at the turn of the century. In a period when one Floridian in twenty was of northern birth, among Rerick's group, 196, or almost exactly one-fifth, were northern born. Without knowing something of Rerick's background and method of defining a leading citizen, we cannot accept at face value the implication that one fifth of Florida's significant citizens, were of northern birth, but the contrast between 5 per cent and 20 per cent cannot be ignored. In politics and government service the Northerners accounted for 16 of 141 persons and offices reported, or 11 per cent. The legal profession was also strongly dominated by Southerners, but in the fields of business nearly 25 per cent of Rerick's "leading Floridians" were Northerners. There were variations here, too, of course. The lumber industry had attracted few Northerners, but 40 per cent of the bankers and insurance agents listed were northern born.

7. Edward King, *The Southern States of North America* (London, 1875), 382.

8. George M. Barbour, *Florida for Tourists, Invalids and Settlers* (New York, 1881), 225.

9. Rowland H. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida* (2 vols., Atlanta, 1902).

Although the samplings of Florida population which have been discussed here are not, individually, susceptible to very definite generalizations, it seems significant that they all point in the same direction, and here we can find at least four conclusions.

First, the census records show that, while Florida did have a higher proportion of northern born citizens during the late nineteenth century than other states of the deep South, the group was small-about 5 per cent of the total.

Second, the influx of Northerners into Florida during the late nineteenth century was not limited to, or even dominated by, the period of Republican control, but increased markedly in the 1880's.

Third, the largest number of the Northerners in Florida were artisans and businessmen. By the end of the century this group held a considerably stronger position in Florida business than their numbers would have suggested. That this represented a continuing trend seems apparent.

The hiatus of Reconstruction, in which northern persons and policies played a leading role, has had a lasting influence on southern sensibilities. However, in view of the relative strength of the trades-and-business element within the group of northern immigrants and its increasing influence in the state as a whole, and since the Yankee was to a considerable degree pushed out of Florida politics after 1877, it seems that his role in the development of Florida, even in the decades immediately following the Civil War, could more meaningfully be regarded, not primarily as political, but as economic.