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The Rise of Radicalism in Antebellum Florida Politics: 1845-1856

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THE RISE OF RADICALISM IN ANTEBELLUM FLORIDA POLITICS: 1845-1856

BY

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ABSTRACT

The political culture of the 1850’s was largely dictated by emotional rather than rational thought. Nowhere was this closer to reality than in the Deep South. Florida, while largely insignificant on the national level, underwent a transformation during the 1850’s from a conservative society to a fire eating haven dominated by the South Carolina School of Politics.

This thesis examines the metamorphosis that took place within the state from Florida’s admission to the Union as the twenty-seventh state in 1845 through the collapse of the two party political system in 1856. Antebellum Florida politics was dominated by the region of Middle Florida, known as the black belt because its economy was driven by the institution of slavery. This region, except for Jefferson County, was staunchly Whig in the early years of statehood. The radical element of society, mainly the fire eating Democrats led by David Levy Yulee, John C. McGehee, James E. Broome, and Madison Starke Perry, wanted to ally the state with extremist South Carolina but could not do so as long as the planter aristocracy felt a strong allegiance to the conservative Whigs. The security felt by the planter class within the Whig party began to erode during the Crisis of 1850 and, once this powerful group defected to the Democratic Party the state was ready to follow South Carolina in breaking the bonds of Union.
Noted Civil War diarist and South Carolina “fire-eater” Mary Boykin Chesnut proclaimed on a visit to Florida late in 1860 that “no-one could live in this state unless he were a fire-eater”.\(^1\) This feeling was not far from reality among the state’s white citizens. Florida’s wartime population was 140,424, however, of this population, only 77,746 were white; forty-four percent of the inhabitants of the state were slaves.\(^2\) The plantation system dominated Florida despite the fact that there were only 5,152 slave owners in the state in 1860. Florida shifted to reactionary politics in the 1850’s, sealing its fate as a conspirator in an armed insurrection against the Union. This transformation within the political culture of the state is the key factor to the understanding its path to secession. The planter aristocracy of the black belt of Middle Florida held the political and economic power during the antebellum period. The course the state would take in the future was tied to the perceived security of this class. By the mid-1850’s, it was apparent that only under Democratic leadership could they be reassured that the peculiar institution and Southern way of life was safe and could survive and prosper.

Previous scholars have chosen to focus their attention on specific political factions as well as various individuals from both the conservative and extremist camps in order to explain the reason for Florida’s transformation into a fire eating ally of South Carolina in the 1850’s. Their contention was that these individuals or political parties and organizations were directly responsible for leading Florida towards secession. For the most part, however, these works have not focused on the vital role played by the

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\(^2\) Eighth Census of the United States---1860---Florida
economic system of slavery that drove Florida and the way in which it was closely linked to the state’s political culture.

Charlton Tebeau and Michael Gannon, in their respective works A History of Florida and Florida, A Short History, both tackled the question of secession but only as it conformed to the larger, sweeping context of the state’s history. Tebeau’s book examined both political and economic aspects of Florida in the decades leading up to secession and the Civil War but failed to make a connection between the two. Over the past century several scholars compiled more focused studies on the political culture of Florida during this era. One of the first was William Watson Davis whose groundbreaking work, Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida, was the first major scholarship that looked at this time period. Davis had studied under William Dunning at Columbia University in the first decades of the twentieth century. While Davis’ research was infallible, he was a member of the Dunning school of literature and this text, first published in 1913, was laced with racist sentiment. In addition, Davis’ work was not an in-depth study of a specific sector of Florida but rather a general overview of the period. Dorothy Dodd was another twentieth century historian who dealt with early Florida politics. Although she contributed numerous articles to the field as well as serving as the first state archivist in Florida, Dodd, like Davis, was openly sympathetic to the South albeit not at the same level. Her numerous articles, therefore, present us with a partisan understanding of the time period.

The first scholar to analyze the two-party political system in antebellum Florida was Herbert J. Doherty. His 1959 work The Whigs of Florida, 1845-1854, explored the rise and fall of the Whig Party. His work also dealt with the Democratic Party and touched on the planter aristocracy but did not delve into the way the political transformations in Florida cleared the path for the rise of extremism which, in turn, allowed the fire eaters to guide the state towards secession in January of 1861. One of the most recent books dealing with antebellum Florida, Edward E. Baptist’s Creating an Old South: Middle Florida’s Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War, analyzed and in great detail explained Florida’s transformation into an archetypal Southern society modeled on its Deep South neighbors. This work studied two counties in the black belt of Middle Florida and how the planter aristocracy was influential in the development of
the state from statehood through secession. The book did not, though, investigate the political culture of Florida and how it related to the growing disunion sentiment in the state in the 1850’s.

It is easy to draw a parallel between the demise of the Whigs in Florida and the death of the national party but secession in the state cannot be fully understood until an adequate study of the state itself is produced. Numerous works have studied and debated the various events that led to the Civil War on the national level. Eric Walther surmised in *The Shattering of the Union, America in the 1850’s* that the Whigs collapsed due to fear of a growing anti-Southern and seemingly abolitionist faction in the North led by William H. Seward. He also placed credence on the ineptitude of Millard Fillmore’s presidency. David Potter, along with Walther, did not feel that the defection of Southerners from the Whigs into the welcome arms of the Democrats in the early to mid-1850’s was fueled by the growing sense of insecurity felt by the elite planters within the Whig Party. Both historians felt that the Whig party was dead long before this exodus took place. Potter’s 1976 work *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* studied the decade leading up to the firing on Fort Sumter. He illustrated that the Democrats’ disunion sentiments intensified until reaching a near boiling point on the national level during “bleeding Kansas”.

Florida, as this thesis will show, was closely linked to South Carolina and began to see a shift away from conservatism during the Crisis of 1850. The “civil war” in Kansas minutely affected Florida. The radical Democrats met very little resistance after 1852 as the Know Nothing and Constitutional Union Parties were not able to generate major followings in Florida.

Lacy K. Ford is another historian who dealt with change in political and social culture in the antebellum period. Ford’s 1988 book, * Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1861*, focused on white unity. According to Ford, secession was not possible until the yeomanry allied themselves with the powerful planters who dominated the political landscape of the Palmetto State. In spite of the fact that Florida was closely linked to South Carolina and that many of the state’s leaders were originally from the Palmetto State, Florida did not have a substantial yeoman class that wielded much if any political clout. In South Carolina, the planter aristocracy was

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ready to secede in 1850 but, in Florida, the bulk of the planters were not inclined towards extremism until the middle of the decade.

The use of the term radical needs clarification before one can undertake an accurate study of antebellum Florida politics. Eric Walther questioned whether radical and fire eater could be used interchangeably in his 1992 work, The Fire Eaters. Walther stated that there was, in fact, a difference between the two. Radicals advocated Southern rights but not necessarily secession while fire eaters were keen to break the bonds of Union. He rationalized that “all fire eaters, therefore, were radicals, but not all Southern radicals were fire eaters”\(^4\). Walther abandoned this distinction twelve years later when he used the two terms interchangeably in The Shattering of the Union.

The term radical in this thesis will be used to describe Southern rights advocates and secessionists in Florida such as David Levy Yulee who swore an allegiance to John C. Calhoun in 1850 and eventually became engulfed in disunionist sentiment as the state moved towards secession a decade later. In 1859 L. W. Spratt, Editor of the “Charleston Mercury” proclaimed, “we stand committed to the South, but we stand more vitally committed to the cause of Slavery”\(^5\). Nowhere was this statement closer to the truth than in Florida on the eve of secession. Economics and politics were intertwined in antebellum Florida and, since the planter aristocracy controlled the economy of the state, they drove the political machine as well. Florida was only ready to follow South Carolina’s lead after the planters defected from the ranks of the conservative Whig party and joined the radical Democrats who, by 1861, overwhelmingly favored disunion.

Before the events of 1861 or even 1850 can be studied in depth it is essential to look back upon the decade that paved the way for Florida’s later extremist actions. Florida was a very different state in the decades preceding the Civil War than it was when it followed South Carolina into the Confederacy in 1861. In 1850 Florida’s statehood was only five years old but the economic and social makeup of the state was already deeply rooted. The decade of the 1850’s further entrenched these values and solidified the landscape that helped dictate the events of 1860-61. The dawn of the 1850’s saw the new state participate in its first national census. Florida’s 1850 population was 88,445, of

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that number 40,242 or 45.5% were black. There were, however, only 932 free Negroes.\(^6\)

Most of Florida remained unsettled and virtual wilderness, much as it had been in 1821 when the Adams-Onis Treaty transferred the territory from Spain to the United States. The populated regions included the areas known as East Florida, West Florida, and Middle Florida. Middle Florida became known as the black belt of the state as it housed most of Florida’s slaves working on the state’s largest plantations. Middle Florida consisted of Jackson, Leon, Gadsden, Madison and Jefferson counties and in 1850, all except Jefferson were staunchly Whig. Their shift to the Democrats in the mid 1850’s helped tip the balance of the state away from the conservatives. East Florida was dominated by the ancient city of St. Augustine while the area known as West Florida looked to Pensacola as the region’s principal city and port. Pensacola, with a population of 2,876 was also the state’s largest city in 1860.\(^7\) The area of South Florida, was largely uninhabited except for Key West and Tampa, but was also staunchly Democratic and would help to carry the party until the conversion of the black belt.

These three major regions were vastly different largely due to their geography. Middle Florida’s soil was characterized as “generally a red, a very ferruginous clay, which in the southern states always shows that it is a good land for cotton”\(^8\) and therefore this is where the majority of Florida’s plantations were centered. Key West and Pensacola both relied heavily on their ports and trade with foreign nations as well as with other states. Escambia County, of which Pensacola was the seat, was the gateway for Eastern Alabama’s cotton exports to England and the rest of the world, thus forcing West Florida to rely heavily on good relations with Georgia and Alabama.\(^9\) This latter fact became extremely important when the question of immediate or delayed secession arose in 1861. Many feared Florida would be alienated, isolated, and unable to survive economically if Alabama and Georgia did not themselves secede. This tie could be traced back to Florida’s infant days in the United States when “the legislatures of Georgia and Alabama indicated willingness to annex appropriate parts of the newly acquired

\(^6\) Seventh Census of the United States---1850---Florida
\(^7\) Eighth Census of the United States---1860---Florida
land”. During the 1837 constitutional convention, Governor Richard Keith Call proclaimed that the proposed annexation by the Alabama Legislature would hinder and delay the entry of Florida into the Union and thus the proposal was dismissed entirely by the legislature.  

From the outset, Florida would prove distinct largely due to its access to and dependence on the sea. Before Middle Florida was created, Florida was dominated by Pensacola in West Florida and St. Augustine in East Florida. They alternately held sessions of the territorial legislature in their cities, which left delegates scurrying back and forth between the two situated 400 miles apart. When the first session met in July of 1822 in Pensacola “the members from St. Augustine had traveled fifty-nine days by water to attend” with one delegate, Thomas Lytle, losing his life in a storm. When the second session of the Florida Legislative Council met in St. Augustine in 1823, the delegates from Pensacola were shipwrecked and barely escaped death. The solution to this dangerous situation, benefited the new settlers of Middle Florida as commissioners John Lee Williams and William H. Simmons selected “the present day site of Tallahassee as the location for the new capital of Florida”. Not only was Tallahassee the midpoint between St. Augustine and Pensacola but “Middle Florida also contained hundreds of thousands of acres of rich land suitable for plantations”. Richard Keith Call had “looked with favor upon the location and believed that it might allay the extreme east-west sectionalism in Florida”. The selection, or rather creation, of inland Tallahassee as the capital was a vital step towards replicating the “Old South” in Florida.

As settlers flocked to Florida, many sought a new and better life, feeling Florida was a land of opportunity. Florida was the nation’s but, more importantly, the South’s newest frontier. Despite over three hundred years of Spanish, British and French rule, Florida was largely a virgin land to whites in the 1820’s. It was considered part of the

11 Journal of the Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates to Form a Constitution for the People of Florida
12 Ibid, p. 122
15 Ibid, p. 14
“old Southwest” which included Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, and eastern Texas and can account for why many felt Florida was a land of opportunity where settlers could begin new lives.\textsuperscript{17} This attitude is somewhat similar to that which would fuel the westward expansion movements of the 1840’s and 1850’s.

However, not everyone who moved to Florida in the period after it became an American possession was looking for a different lifestyle. Most of the “elite men who moved to Middle Florida…sought, as did planters throughout the Old Southwest, to prosper and rule through the acquisition of land, control of dependents, and staple crop production”.\textsuperscript{18} These members of the South’s planter aristocracy often hailed from South Carolina, Georgia or Virginia and wished to replicate their own state’s mentalities and values within Florida’s borders. The early political prejudices can be traced back to these initial settlers. The Georgians and South Carolinians tended to be more radical and would make up the fire eating Democratic element of Florida’s politics while the Virginians for the most part would flock to the Whig and Conservative parties. An early settler in Middle Florida noted “In time [Florida will] become an important Southern slaveholding state-producing as its staples, Cotton, Sugar, Rice and Fruit”.\textsuperscript{19} In 1823 John Lee Williams speaking of Middle Florida, proclaimed that “the cotton fields exceed by one half, any I have seen and the sugar cane better than the Mississippi affords”.\textsuperscript{20} In 1821 when Florida became a United States Territory, the land held fewer than 8,000 people including slaves, but by the mid 1830’s immigration to Middle Florida had caused the population of this region alone to swell to over 35,000.\textsuperscript{21} By the time the first territorial convention to discuss statehood met at St. Joseph in 1838 the state had was home to 48,223 of which 21,132 were slaves.\textsuperscript{22}

The population of West Florida, conversely, was in a constant state of decline from 1830 onwards. In 1830 the region boasted 9,478\textsuperscript{23} people but the 1840 territorial census found only 5,500 people while Middle and East Florida had more than doubled

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Baptist. \textit{Creating an Old South} p. 2-3
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 2
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid p. 18
\item \textsuperscript{20} Doherty. \textit{Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist}. p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Gannon. \textit{Florida, A Short History} p. 30.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid, pg. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Tebeau. \textit{A History of Florida}. p. 134
\end{itemize}
over the decade.\textsuperscript{24} The state’s regions also bickered with each other over the question of statehood. East Florida, jealous of the power and influence Middle Florida would have in the political arena based on the region’s rapid growth in population and wealth, voted 614-255 against statehood. Middle Florida voted 1,152-226 for it and West Florida 732-324 in favor of the resolution.\textsuperscript{25} The constitutional convention was only made possible because the legislature had placated the West and East by giving them greater proportional representation than Middle Florida.\textsuperscript{26} By 1839 Floridians had voted in favor of statehood in one final referendum after the close of the constitutional convention by a narrow 2,065-1,961 margin.\textsuperscript{27} In spite of the vote, statehood would not come to Florida until 1845. By this time the planters had succeeded in constructing their new “southern society” in Florida.

Florida was a vast territory and to govern this land effectively in the antebellum period called for a strong centralized government. It was under this assumption that President James Monroe appointed William P. DuVal as Florida’s first territorial governor. DuVal was reappointed by Presidents John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. DuVal was a close follower of Andrew Jackson as were all of the men who made up what became known as the “nucleus” of Florida politics.\textsuperscript{28} Ironically it was out of the “nucleus” that Florida’s anti-Jackson parties, the Conservatives and later the Whigs would emerge. These parties would include most of those who would later oppose immediate secession or secession in general.

Richard Keith Call, Florida’s most famous governor during the territorial period, was also a member of the “nucleus” and became one of Florida’s most prominent Whigs and Florida’s most loyal Unionist in the following decades. The “nucleus” which dominated the legislature as well, was backed by the powerful Pensacola Gazette and drew more than nominal resentment from East and Middle Florida alike.\textsuperscript{29} The “nucleus” did not begin as a political entity but rather as “a group of men having similar property and political interests who cooperated informally on matters in which they thought

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Territorial Census of Florida, 1840
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p.125
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Dorothy Dodd. Florida Becomes a State (Tallahassee: Florida Centennial Commission, 1945) p. 38-39
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Tebeau. A History of Florida p.126
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Doherty. The Whigs of Florida, p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid, p. 3
\end{itemize}
The opponents of the “nucleus” attacked them viciously labeling them greedy land speculators intent on increasing their own bank accounts at any cost. These charges did hold some merit as Call and George W. Ward were both land speculators and the original name of the “nucleus” was the “land office faction”. Ward was the Registrar of Public Lands in the 1820’s and another “nucleus” member, Robert Butler, was the Surveyor General after 1824. Along with politicians and “land officials”, Leon County sheriff, Romeo Lewis, was also a member of the “nucleus”.

Both the Whigs and the Democrats formed ranks in Florida during or shortly after the economic panic of 1837. The Democrats did not wield any power within Florida until after the deliberations of the constitutional convention which lasted from December 3, 1838 to January 11, 1839. They were ironically known then as the Jeffersonian Republican Party of Florida. The convention was Florida’s chance to debate the issues gripping the rest of the nation. The convention kicked off a long and arduous debate between pro and anti-banking factions. The Whigs, or Conservatives as they were called at the time, sided with the banking groups while the Democrats sat on the opposite side of the spectrum. The real “victor” of the convention was David Levy. He led the Democrats out of the convention as a force that could match the “nucleus” step for step in Florida’s politics. Many members of the old guard, including Governor Call, did not realize how much power the Democrats had amassed until they convinced President Martin Van Buren to relieve Call of his office in 1839 and replace him with East Florida Democrat and Levy ally Robert Raymond Reid. The battle that raged between Whigs and Democrats over Call’s dismissal was the first of many that characterized antebellum Florida’s political landscape.

The early 1840’s were exemplified by an anti-monopolist movement, which rallied to combat corporations created by the Conservative Party in the territorial legislature aimed to help a select few, most of whom would later make up the Whig Party. The movement was spearheaded by the Democratic Party which quickly began referring to itself as the party of the people. The Conservatives made a bungled attempt

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30 Doherty, Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist, p. 49
31 Ibid, p.42
32 Doherty, The Whigs of Florida, p. 1
33 Ibid, p. 8
34 Doherty, Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist, p. 118
to transpose blame on their opponents by labeling them as unpatriotic. They even
denounced class distinctions and “ridiculed the idea that measures calculated for their
benefit did not also benefit all other men”. It is ironic to note that the moderate planter
aristocracy of the 1840’s initially would not make up the majority of the fire eating
secessionists whose goal would be to protect the “property” of the conservatives. Call
saw the need to organize the Conservative Party and the Whigs into a strong unified
entity but his views were not highly malleable and he “never quite grew out of the idea
that gentlemen do not solicit votes”. Call did take the stump for William Henry
Harrison in 1840 on the national level but this was done more out of revenge against
President Martin Van Buren and the Democrats.

The Whigs in Florida clearly lagged behind the Democrats in the early years of
the decade. They were not united but, rather, split between States Rights Whigs and
conservatives. Out of the State Rights Whigs rose the newspaper which would
ultimately become the main Whig organ in Florida, the Florida Sentinel, originally based
in Quincy but moved in 1841 to Tallahassee. With a Whig in the White House, the
party in Florida looked to replace Governor Robert Reid who they claimed had usurped
Call’s power. Call was named to the post that “so appropriately belonged to him” on
March 19 by President Harrison, less than a month before the elderly chief executive’s
death.

The return of Call to the governorship did not immediately unite the Whig party,
as the congressional elections in 1840 demonstrated. East Florida put forth the
incumbent, an anti-statehood conservative Charles Downing, while Middle and West
Florida, whom Downing had alienated, threw their weight behind George Ward. The
Democrats, however, were united behind David Levy, who was referred to as “that little
Jew politician” by opponents. Levy easily won the election over the divided Whigs.

The Whigs soon copied the Democrats and organized local county and district

36 Ibid. p. 119
37 Doherty. The Whigs of Florida. p. 9
38 Tallahassee Floridian, September 5, 1840
40 Tallahassee Floridian February 13, 1841, published from the Pensacola Gazette
41 Doherty. Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist. p. 124
42 Ibid. p. 125
conventions for the next round of elections in hopes that they would not see another split such as which had cost them the 1840 election. The Whigs ultimately rebounded and united behind the State Rights faction of the party and regained control of the Florida legislature which they held from 1843 through 1844.\(^\text{43}\) It was during the period from 1841-1844 when Call again occupied the governor’s chair and the Conservative Party officially disintegrated. Its pieces were picked up by both the Democrats and the Whigs. Many Whigs blamed Call for not doing more in this period to help further organize, build and strengthen the Whig party\(^\text{44}\).

Call’s second term as Governor was characterized by several new movements and a solution to the “Indian problem”. Firstly, there was a revival of religious activity in Middle Florida, which many felt was long overdue.\(^\text{45}\) Florida was a lawless frontier in the eyes and minds of its numerous visitors and critics. Even Governor Call, in an address to the Florida territorial legislature, commended the temperance and religious movements that sprang up across Middle Florida and urged the “encouragement and support of the friends of morality and virtue.”\(^\text{46}\) Call’s second term also saw peace in Florida for the first time since 1835 as President John Tyler negotiated an end to the Second Seminole War.\(^\text{47}\) The peace was secured largely because of the actions of Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton who had proposed “an armed occupation act to plant settlers on the frontier as a barrier against Indian raids”.\(^\text{48}\) This act opened the door for more federal aid to Florida and ultimately to Tyler’s intervention and the end of the war. Two new counties were created in 1844 out of land previously occupied by the Indians. One was named for David Levy (Levy County) and the other for Benton. In a true show of Southern nationalism, Benton County was renamed Hernando County in 1850 when the Missourian showed anti-Southern sentiment during the crisis surrounding the Compromise of 1850.\(^\text{49}\) Alcohol, frivolous lifestyles, and Indians proved less of a threat to Florida than the depression and the yellow fever epidemic that preceded it and

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\(^{44}\) Doherty, *Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist*, p. 125  
\(^{45}\) Comte de Castelnau “Essay on Middle Florida” p. 236-37  
\(^{46}\) *Florida Senate Journal*, 1843, reported in the *Florida Sentinel*, January 20, 1843.  
\(^{47}\) *Presidential Message* quoted from U.S. House of Representatives, *Executive Documents*, #27, 27\(^{\text{th}}\) Congress, 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Session, p. 223.  
\(^{48}\) Tebeau, *A History of Florida* p.149  
\(^{49}\) Ibid
wiped out the town of St. Joseph’s as well as claiming the life of former governor Robert Reid and two successive editors of the Floridian.\textsuperscript{50}

Out of the depression and chaos of the epidemic arose a new battle; the battle for statehood. Duval County’s Isaiah D. Hart, a Whig, “introduced resolutions which would have nullified the St. Joseph’s convention of 1838 and would have required the delegate to Congress to oppose Florida’s admission until a new convention should be held”.\textsuperscript{51} These actions were carried out mainly for financial reasons as Hart and his followers did not feel that Florida could carry the financial burdens of statehood. The resolution did fail but it began the debate that carried through Florida’s ultimate admission into the Union in 1845. The 1844 session of the territorial legislature saw the anti-statehood forces secure the passage of a resolution that called for Florida to be split into two separate territories with two separate governments.\textsuperscript{52} Although this request was turned down by Congress, it clearly showed that the sectional animosities that had been prevalent since Florida’s creation as a territory were still present and a driving force in political life.

The leading advocate for statehood was still David Levy who had defeated George T. Ward in 1843 to return to Congress.\textsuperscript{53} Levy’s overall duty leaned towards the well-being of the South and he argued that Florida’s admission was necessary to offset Iowa’s proposed admission as a free state. This, he claimed, would preserve balance within the Union. Levy also touts states rights when he proclaimed “statehood would mean freedom from federal interference” and more importantly “a greater voice in national politics”.\textsuperscript{54} By championing statehood, Levy forever tied the party with the eventual secession movement. In the short run the party rode Levy’s coattails into securing a Democratic Legislative Council in 1844 whose goal was to renew Florida’s application for statehood. This conflict was a moot point as the House of Representatives’ Committee on Territories had already furnished a bill by January 7, 1845 calling for the admission of both Florida and Iowa.\textsuperscript{55} The bill passed the House on

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{50} Doherty, \textit{Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist}, p. 130
\textsuperscript{51} Doherty, \textit{The Whigs of Florida}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, p. 14
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid
\end{flushleft}
February 13, the Senate on March 1, and was signed into law by President John Tyler on March 3. It is also important to note that Governor Call had been replaced by Democrat John Branch in July of 1844 largely due to Call’s open support for Henry Clay, Tyler’s staunchest enemy in the question over the annexation of Texas. This meant that Florida’s transition to statehood was made completely under Democratic auspices thus furthering Levy’s claim of a great victory for his party. Two decades after becoming a United States territory, Florida entered the Union as the twenty-seventh state. The state had already experienced several fiery political battles but nothing could prepare Florida for the turmoil of the decade to come.
CHAPTER I

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH STATE

Florida’s initial years of statehood were characterized by the growing political rivalry between the Whigs and Democrats. In the years leading up to the Crisis of 1850 the Whigs reached the height of their political power on the national as well as state level. The following years saw a marked decline in their prestige due to the perception born out of the Compromise of 1850 which labeled them unwilling to defend Southern rights at all costs. The aftermath of the crisis was a critical period in which the planter aristocracy first began to question their security within the Whig Party.

In 1845 the United States and Florida were at peace. The horrors of the Second Seminole War (1835-1842) were in the past and many Floridians were looking forward to a peaceful end to the decade. Even though war was on the horizon, it would not directly affect the peninsula. The Mexican American War (1846-1848) would prove a catalyst for fifteen years of debate and conflict culminating in the secession of the Southern States, including Florida, and subsequently the Civil War. The Whigs were the party in Florida that stood in the way of the Democrats and their fire eating tendencies. The initial successes of the Whigs in the early statehood period raised the hopes of Unionists such as Richard Keith Call, but the demise of the Whigs in the mid-1850’s left many with little hope of being able to contain the escalating tide of extremism. The results of the numerous political battles in antebellum Florida are essential in understanding the road the state took towards secession in 1861.
Seven years after the constitutional convention at St. Joseph’s decreed statehood as the future path of action, on March 3, 1845, Florida entered the Union as a slave state alongside the newly created free state of Iowa. While the population had grown steadily throughout the territorial period, Florida was still thinly settled. The fifteen years from statehood to secession did see a rapid growth in both white and black (slave and free black) population, with the influx of immigrants from Florida’s neighboring Deep South states helping to shape the political culture of the infant state.

Florida’s population when it entered the Union in 1845 was estimated at 66,500 of which at least 27,181 were slaves and 453 were free people of color. In a speech before the General Assembly on July 1, 1845, Governor William Dunn Moseley called for a statewide census in order to properly re-apportion the legislative districts. In only five years the population of Florida had grown from 54,477, an increase of more than 12,000. The counties listed in the 1845 Census were home to 4,316 more slaves than in 1840 and 103 more free people of color. The peculiar institution was more vital to Florida’s livelihood in its early days of statehood than it had been in the territorial period and this trend would continue throughout the remainder of the antebellum period. In 1845 slaves made up 48.7% of Florida’s population, placing the state high among the ranks of fire eating states such as South Carolina and Mississippi whose actions Florida would emulate as early as 1850 and ultimately during the secession debates a decade later.

Florida boasted seventeen counties in 1845, with Wakulla, Marion, and Benton being added since 1840 and Mosquito County adopting its modern name of Orange County. Hillsborough and Orange Counties were the southern edge of the United States, a lawless and largely uninhabited frontier. Orange County was home to only 195 inhabitants in 1845, 122 more than were counted in Mosquito County by the 1840 Census. The concentration of population and power in the state, which lay in the black belt of Middle Florida, solidified during the state’s infancy. Middle Florida, while

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1 1st State Census of Florida, 1845
3 6th Census of the United States—1840—Florida
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Benton County was renamed Hernando County in 1850; 1st State Census of Florida, 1845
7 Ibid
accounting for only 7,333 square miles out of a recorded 58,650 for the entire state, was home to 47% of Florida’s population in 1845. West Florida and East Florida were populated fairly evenly but West Florida’s populace was condensed into a small area of only 8,171 square miles while East Florida was made up of more than 43,000 square miles. Leon County had a population of 9,612 of which 6,632 or 68.9% were slaves. Neighboring counties of Jefferson (6,525; 64% slaves), Gadsden (7,645; 53.1%), Jackson (5,629; 52.9%), and Madison (3,762; 46.5%) were similar in makeup. Even Orange County, which was home to small yeomen farms and “cracker” homesteads, had a population that was 33.8% slaves. Slaves made up around 33% of the populations of most of the counties not situated in the black belt, including the seaside communities of St. Augustine, Jacksonville and Apalachicola where commerce and sea trade drove the local economies.

Once admitted to the Union, Floridians moved quickly to create a distinct political culture. The Democrats held a statewide convention at Madison on April 14, 1845 where they chose William Dunn Moseley of Leon County to run for governor and David Levy as their congressional selection. Levy, still craving more power, accepted the nomination only with the understanding that he would be guaranteed election as United States Senator from Florida if the Democrats were to win control of the state legislature. Once again the Whigs did not move with haste and the same sense of urgency that motivated the Democrats. Instead of opting for the more prudent strategy of a statewide convention as the Democrats had, the Whigs proceeded through a caucus, which further reduced their unity.

The Whigs’ main problem rose from their divided party leadership. Richard Keith Call had refused to take charge of the situation and the Whigs were paying dearly for his lack of stewardship. The party, which was still in its infancy after being combined with Call’s Conservatives, was split along regional lines. Middle Florida held the power and wealth as outlined above by the 1845 census. Consolidation of power within their own party structure gave the Democrats important leverage over the Whigs. The East

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8 16th Census of the United States, 1940, Areas of the United States
9 1st State Census of Florida, 1845
10 Ibid.
11 Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, May 3, 1845
Florida branch of the Whig Party was home to infighting of its own as Duval County named Joseph B. Lancaster as nominee for Congress while St. John’s County had supported Benjamin Putnam.\(^{12}\) The Whigs of Middle Florida finally took action during the crisis and attempted to organize the party apparatus. Leaders from the Middle Florida counties of Leon, Gadsden and Wakulla met in Tallahassee at the Leon County Courthouse on April 22 and nominated Richard Keith Call for the governorship and settled on Putnam as the Whig candidate for Congress.\(^{13}\) Despite the fact that he was not willing to take charge of the situation, Call was a unanimous choice of the other Whig leaders.

The year 1845 would prove a low point in the political history of Florida’s Whigs. Newspapers were a main avenue through which political policies and propaganda were introduced and spread in the antebellum years. Both the Democrats and the Whigs could count on several newspapers in the three distinct regions of the state to carry their banners. In the wake of the embarrassing in-fighting that plagued the Whigs immediately following Florida’s admission to the Union, the party lost two of their most important organs. Tallahassee’s *Star of Florida*, a former proponent of the Conservatives and friend and sympathizer to the Whigs made an about face and proclaimed neutrality as the campaigns commenced.\(^{14}\) This was a major blow to the Whig cause as the Democratic papers remained intact. The Whigs still had the *Florida Sentinel* in Tallahassee and the *Gazette* in Pensacola but the editor of the St. Augustine *News*, Thomas T. Russell, sold the paper to Democrat Albert Nunes, who furthered the decimation of the Whig cause by cementing the *News* as a Democratic entity upon its transfer.\(^{15}\) Upon retiring, the former editor of the strongest Whig voice in East Florida proclaimed: “an able paper or a useful paper must have support”, something which he felt the Whigs had squandered by their lack of cohesiveness in dealing with the nominations.\(^{16}\) While the *Star* did not openly support the Democrats, they did nothing to further the election hopes of Call and Putnam.

\(^{12}\) St. Augustine *News*, February 8, 1845  
\(^{13}\) Pensacola *Gazette*, May 3, 1845  
\(^{14}\) Tallahassee, *Star of Florida*, April 18, 1845  
\(^{16}\) St. Augustine, *News*, April 12, 1845
The paper stated that it saw little hope that Call could defeat Moseley in the gubernatorial race and all but called Levy’s election to Congress over Putman a virtual certainty.\textsuperscript{17}

During the campaign itself, the major attacks made by the Democrats focused on the former anti-statehood stances held by the Whigs and Conservatives leaving the Whigs in the precarious position of running for office months after Florida became a state, something they as a party had opposed. In spite of the fact that they were not even facing each other in the election, most of the campaigning and debate fell to Call and Levy. They were the best known members of their respective parties and therefore carried their respective party banners. In keeping with their previous record, the Whigs ran on a stability and predictability ticket, not answering the attacks of the Democrats who clearly had won the support of the people.\textsuperscript{18}

In the May 26\textsuperscript{th} election, the Democrats won the governorship with Moseley defeating Call 3,292 to 2,679 (55.1%-44.9%) and won the congressional seat with Levy polling 3,614 votes to Putnam’s 2,375 (60.3%-39.7%).\textsuperscript{19} West Florida was the only section of the state that provided the Whigs with a majority of the vote. The Whigs fared no better in the elections for the general assembly where they tallied a mere ten seats out of forty in the house and six out of seventeen in the senate.\textsuperscript{20}

Florida’s first two senators were to be chosen by the general assembly that convened on June 23. True to a previous pledge, the assembly sent David Levy to Washington. The body also chose fellow Democrat James D. Westcott to accompany Levy. The assembly voted along party lines as both candidates were selected with an identical vote of 41-16.\textsuperscript{21} Two days after the election, Representative Britton Barkley of Jackson County voiced his displeasure at the outcome of the election. He called a motion before the House that disputed the election of Levy and Westcott on constitutional grounds. His first motion refuted the validity of the election since it was voted jointly between both houses which entailed members of the Senate entering the House chambers. He claimed this action could not be authorized without a prior act by the legislature according to the Constitution. Barkeley went on to call on the ethical dilemma that Levy

\begin{footnotesize}
17 Tallahassee, \textit{Star of Florida}, April 18, 1845  
18 Doherty, \textit{The Whigs of Florida}, 1845-54, pg. 16  
19 Ibid.  
20 Ibid.  
21 House Journal, July 1, 1845, pg. 33
\end{footnotesize}
faced or felt he should face in relation to his moral obligations to carry out the office to
which he had been elected to by the populace, that of representative not senator. The
Jackson County representative finished his rant by labeling the entire proceeding an “evil
example, and dangerous to free Republican institutions”.22 These tactics failed and on
July 11, 1845 Governor Moseley, in a speech to the House, announced that Levy had
successfully vacated his seat in accordance with clause 5 of article 17 of the State
Constitution.23 Levy had officially submitted his notification to vacate the seat three days
earlier where he claimed “that by this change of position there I shall be enabled to
promote, with more efficiency….the interests of our cherished state”.24

The Whigs proceeded to move outside the statehouse and resorted to attacking the
Democrats in the public sector, focusing on newspaper propaganda. The Whigs and their
papers were intent on dividing the Democratic Party by attempting to create friction
between Levy and Westcott. The scheme called for the major papers, mainly the Gazette
in Pensacola and the Florida Sentinel in Tallahassee, to proclaim each Democrat as the
true power behind the Democratic throne. Their hope was to drive a wedge in the unity
of the party. The Gazette ran a letter to the editor that sarcastically paid tribute to
Westcott, proclaiming him to be the sole power in the Democratic Party. Westcott was
“praised” for running the party in the same manner in which “the autocrat of Russia rules
his dominions.”25 The paper went on to claim that the rest of the party and the state were
“puppets in his hands and organs of his will.”26 The Whig papers actually illuminated the
fact that there were too many Democrats and not enough offices to go around. The
Florida Sentinel went as far as to state that Levy himself was lucky to have obtained the
office he now held. In taking this course of action the Whigs were hopeful that the
Democratic Party would split in half.27 The division that the Whigs counted on never
materialized. Levy controlled the party and Westcott was content to ride his coattails in
Washington.

22 Ibid, July 3, 1845, pg. 34-35
23 Ibid, July 11, 1845, pg. 59
24 Ibid, July 8, 1845, pg. 61
25 Pensacola, Gazette, July 12, 1845
26 Ibid.
27 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, February 3, 1846
The Whig newspapers were not the only ones issuing propaganda. The Whigs took particular offense to an article in the *Floridian* which was highly critical of its own party. In response to this attack, Leon County representative Thomas Brown introduced a resolution and preamble on July 14. The resolution was in direct response to an editorial in the *Floridian* which he claimed was as “ill-timed and uncalled for as it is false and malicious”.

The article lauded the legislature for its industrious work and patriotism and further praised the body for its lack of party spirit, “except among Whigs, who try to impede and bother business”. Ironically the Whigs were criticized by the Democratic papers for party unity, something they had finally achieved some semblance of after years of chaos. The resolution itself labeled the article as a “gross libel on the Whigs members of the house” and further called for the editor of the *Floridian* to be dismissed from his post.

The impressive Democratic victory in May did not signal an end to the political struggles that had dominated much of 1845. Levy had made it known that he had his eyes set on a bigger prize and his subsequent election to the United States Senate had left his seat in Florida’s House of Representatives vacant, meaning another election was in order. This election was a “special election” and was scheduled for October. The Whigs faced a perilous situation concerning this election. Five months earlier they had been embarrassed by the Democrats in the general election and some prominent members of the party were questioning whether or not it would be in their best interest to contest the vacated seat. As early as August, Whigs had been vocal in various newspapers, even going so far as to say it would be in the best interest of their party to run no candidate at all.

The Democrats chose William H. Brockenbrough, a veteran politician from the territorial legislature. This turned out to be exactly what the Whigs needed since Brockenbrough was a former Conservative Party member who did not enjoy the trust or loyalties of the majority of Democrats. The Whigs, on the other hand, were at an important juncture in their party’s history and what they truly needed was a young,

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28 House Journal, July 14, 1845, pg. 73-74
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Pensacola, *Gazette*, August 16, 1845
32 Doherty. *The Whigs of Florida*, 1845-54. pg. 18
vigorous, unknown candidate whom the Democrats could not easily attack. What they got was Edward C. Cabell, a man who would turn out to be a prominent figure in antebellum Florida politics and a virtual savior for the Whigs in the state. The Democrats aimed to assault the Whigs and their candidate on the issue of national and state banks. Cabell was willing to go toe to toe with the fiery Democrats and because he was only twenty-nine and had recently moved to Florida from Virginia. It was difficult for the Democrats to attack the him and the Whigs on the issue of banks since there was virtually no connection between the two.\footnote{Pensacola, Gazette, August 16, 1845}

Cabell won the election after the initial votes were tallied leading to protests from the Democrats who claimed that all votes were, in fact, not counted. The Secretary of State had certified the election but that did not stop the Democratic press from vilifying the Whigs for “stealing” an election. The Whig newspapers were surprisingly quiet on the subject leading Tallahassee’s \textit{Star of Florida} to proclaim the Democrats’ must have valid claims of election fraud.\footnote{Tallahassee, Star of Florida, November 14, 1845} The Democrats believed that the votes counted by county clerks could not be validated since they saw these officials as unauthorized to participate.\footnote{Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, December 2, 1845} The case went all the way to the United States House Committee on Elections which argued in favor of Brockenbrough. The committee threw out the votes tallied by the county clerks leaving the Democrat with a small majority, and recommended that Cabell vacate the seat in favor of Brockenbrough. Two vastly different sentiments arose from this result. The staunchly Whig organ in Apalachicola, the \textit{Commercial Advertiser} stated that Cabell owed his defeat “solely to the influence of party drill”, while the \textit{Gazette} in Pensacola was content that the Whigs were back on the political map of Florida despite the fact that Cabell did not hold onto the seat.\footnote{Apalachicola, Commercial Advertiser, February 14, 1846} By the end of Florida’s first year in the Union, the two party system mirrored that in most other Southern states. While the Democrats held the power, the Whigs were slowly organizing and beginning to challenge them.

The year 1845 was an eventful one in Florida as the government and citizens scrambled to bring the state up to date with the rest of the Union it had recently joined.
Florida’s first year as a state saw two legislative sessions, with the second, convening in November to discuss matters that seem trivial at the present such as the ongoing border dispute between Florida and neighboring states, Georgia and Alabama. One of the first acts debated by the assembly, as requested by Governor Moseley in his opening speech on November, 17, intended to create a distinct American or Southern identity for Florida.\(^37\) Moseley stated that the territory of Florida had been modeled on the British system of government and he called for an immediate overhaul to a more American system, mirroring Florida’s sister states in the South. Numerous motions were brought before the House in November before a resolution was finally passed in December which called for the immediate publication of the British statutes and Florida’s movement away from them. This was not concluded until 1846 when a motion to move on the action approved by the assembly on December 27, 1845 was approved and, which in turn, severed all ceremonial ties to Queen Victoria. A bill was later introduced that would transform these wishes into law.\(^38\) Floridians also hoped to distance themselves from territorial days by claiming that the new state did not have to abide by or be held accountable for any debts relating to the territorial government, which they claimed was not representative of the people of the state since it had been appointed by Congress in Washington.\(^39\)

Florida’s independent nature was further reflected in its first proposed state flag, introduced in 1845 by the Committee on Arrangements and presented to Governor Moseley at his inauguration. Although it flew at the inauguration, it was never officially adopted because of the controversial motto printed on the flag. The flag, which was made up of green, white, red, orange and blue stripes, contained a ‘mini’ American flag in the upper left hand corner, but also the phrase “Let Us Alone”. While Charlton Teabeau claimed that “those words probably represented the sentiments of most Floridians, the flag did not appear again.”\(^40\) Florida did not adopt an official state flag until 1868, and this model featured the state seal that most Floridians are familiar with today mounted on a plain white background. St. Andrew’s Cross, the present design of

\(^{37}\) House Journal, November 17, 1845, pg.
\(^{38}\) Ibid, December 16, 1846, pg. 68
\(^{39}\) Ibid, December 16, 1845, pg. 162
the flag, was added in 1900 as Florida followed the rest of the South in trying to immortalize the “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy.\footnote{Ibid.} The motto, “Let Us Alone” was removed officially and replaced with “In God Is Our Trust” by a resolution from the General Assembly on December 18, 1846.\footnote{House Journal, December 18, 1846, pg. 95}

The second session of Florida’s General Assembly was only the beginning of the state’s growing allegiance to its Southern sister states. On November 24, a representative brought four concurrent resolutions before the House embodying Florida’s position on pertinent and divisive issues that were threatening to tear the nation apart along sectional boundaries. The first resolution called for Florida’s representatives in Washington to vote in favor of the state constitution of Texas, which supported slavery and other “Southern rights”. Secondly, Florida’s Senators and Representatives in Congress were asked to vote for a tariff reduction, following the line set by South Carolina in 1831 during the Nullification Crisis. The next resolution brought to the forefront the great party debates of the late 1830’s dealing with the question and sovereignty of a national bank. It was the intention of the Democratic Party in Florida as well as the United States to “vote against any bill that may come before Congress to establish a National Bank” and the above was the tone of the third resolution. The final resolution dealt with the funds from the sales of public lands being distributed by Washington, therefore infringing upon individual states’ rights.\footnote{Ibid, November 24, 1845, pg. 38} These resolutions were approved the following day. Five days later, Charles Russell again reinforced the position of Florida’s Democrats when he offered another item that stated that the party had no confidence in the elected officials in Washington until they proved that they would abide by the resolutions introduced on November 24.\footnote{Ibid, November 29, 1845, pg. 63} An additional resolution was then added based purely on sectional differences in which Florida was asked not to vote for any bill in Washington that would support the United States Military Academy at West Point since it was viewed as a “Northern” institution.\footnote{Ibid}

In spite of the fact that Florida was building a “Deep South” state, most of the legislation of the first session did not deal with slavery, owing largely to old laws

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] Ibid.
\item[42] House Journal, December 18, 1846, pg. 95
\item[43] Ibid, November 24, 1845, pg. 38
\item[44] Ibid, November 29, 1845, pg. 63
\item[45] Ibid
\end{footnotes}
regarding the system that were already in place and did not need to be amended or updated. On December 7, 1846, however, a bill was brought before the House calling for stricter enforcement of a measure first passed in 1832 which prohibited migration to Florida by free blacks and mulattoes.\textsuperscript{46} Eleven days later an additional bill was introduced which would “prevent free Negroes and mulattoes that come in the merchant service as sailors, from landing on the shores of Florida, except in certain cases.”\textsuperscript{47} Once again Florida was following the lead of South Carolina and other extremist Deep South states which were terrified by the prospect of free blacks spreading abolitionist sentiment and creating opposition towards slavery and the white society that dominated it. These acts, which came about in South Carolina following Denmark Vesey’s failed slave rebellion in Charleston in the early 1820’s, quickly took hold in Florida.

December saw a rebirth of the internal sectional crisis that had gripped the heart and soul of Florida dating back to the beginning of its territorial days. The various distinct geographical regions of the state had not lost their animosity toward each other by the culmination of the first year of statehood. The speaker of the House read an act which called for Leon and Gadsden to be the only counties in the state awarded three representatives with Jefferson and Jackson acquiring two and the rest allotted only one apiece.\textsuperscript{48} The act was passed 21-12 by the House and presented to the Senate who ratified it on December 29. The same day Russell and Bartolo Olivaro represented the voices of East Florida when they filed a protest declaring “That said bill is partial, unequal, and unjust, inasmuch as it allows St. John’s, with a Federal population of 2,240, but one representative…”\textsuperscript{49} They went on to argue that St. Johns County, which once dominated Florida politics, was grouped with its southern neighbors, the frontier counties of St. Lucie and Orange, in a senatorial district while Wakulla County, with only 994 inhabitants, had its own Senator. They also argued on the behalf of Alachua County, which had a population of over 1,500 but had to share a district with neighboring Marion County.\textsuperscript{50} It was clear by this act that Middle Florida had assumed control of the state. In spite of the fact that the region’s population did outnumber other regions, including the

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, December 7, 1846, pg. 32  
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, December 18, 1846, pg. 93  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, December 17, 1845, pg. 166  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, December 29, 1845, pg. 258  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid
East, the act was meant to assure Middle Florida’s continued dominance. This quarrel also showed that even though many Floridians were united in their allegiance to their Southern neighbors and the causes they championed, the state had not come very far from the troubles that had defined its territorial phase.

In his speech opening the legislative session of 1846, Governor Moseley did not concentrate on matters exclusive to Florida, but rather, turned his attention to international affairs such as the war with Mexico and the border dispute brewing between the United States and Great Britain concerning the Oregon Territory’s northern boundary. This conflict was threatening to lead to the third war between America and its former imperial ruler in the last seventy years. The pressing issue of war with Mexico overshadowed the border dispute with Queen Victoria. Moseley, like most Southern statesmen, was extremely patriotic and supported Manifest Destiny, which, in this case, included expansion into the Southwest at the expense of the Empire of Mexico.51 Moseley’s sentiments foreshadowed the crisis that would grip Florida and the rest of the nation four years later as the country tried to seek a compromise over the territories newly acquired from Mexico, and the raging debate over the expansion of slavery. Not all in Florida and the South favored the war with the same zeal that Governor Moseley did. Many Whigs such as Richard Keith Call were appalled at “the little war we have so wantonly provoked with Mexico”.52 Ironically the war, which many Whigs opposed, helped bring a Whig war hero, Zachary Taylor, to the White House in 1848.

As the session progressed, a bill was introduced that would alter the state constitution in terms of residence laws. Florida’s ideologies were shaped by the geographic makeup of its inhabitants and since most of these citizens were from neighboring Deep South states they were driven largely by the institution of slavery. These citizens, who would largely transform themselves into pro-secessionists fifteen years in the future, pushed for an alteration in the Constitution to reduce the voting qualification to one year’s residence from two years. When opening the 1846 session of Florida’s General Assembly, Governor Moseley went as far as to recommend that the residence qualification be reduced even further to allow a person to claim that status after

51 Ibid, November 20, 1846, pg. 8g
52 Doherty, Herbert J. Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961) pg. 141
only six months. Eventually a compromise was reached and a bill ordered that called for the franchise to be awarded to all white males over the age of twenty-one who had resided in Florida for a year but this was further reduced to six months if they lived in the same county since applying for residence. The bill finally passed on December 16 by a landslide vote of 33-1. Florida’s actions demonstrated that a year after statehood was granted, the state was still trying to establish an identity, a Southern identity, mirroring its sister states in the region.

As Florida moved towards unification behind a common vision and path, party politics and petty jealousy reared its ugly head once more. David Levy, now referred to by his new surname of Yulee, had made many enemies in Florida as well as in Washington. Some of this resentment stemmed from his blind allegiance to his mentor, the radical Southern demagogue and avid states rights advocate, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Others felt Yulee had a vested interest in the railroad industry in Florida for selfish reasons which they claimed to be increasing his personal wealth. Yulee’s Jewish heritage was a factor in this animosity but overall it was an amalgamation of all the aforementioned elements. Whatever the reason might have been, Yulee and his legacy could not be avoided in Tallahassee even as he represented Florida in the nation’s capital. On December 11, John Waterson, the representative from Levy County, spoke before the assembly and alerted his fellow statesmen to his plan of bringing a bill before them which called for changing the name of his own county from Levy to Wakasassee. Many members of Florida’s General Assembly resented the fact that there was a county named after Yulee (Levy) as he was still very much alive and heavily involved in the politics of the state and nation. Yulee was a very proud man, and this pride was often viewed scornfully as nothing more than hubris. After days of debate the bill was called for a vote for the third time and it passed by a count of 20-13 and was sent to the Senate.

54 House Journal, November 25, 1846, pg. 8q
55 Ibid, December 16, 1846, pg. 84
56 Ibid, December 11, 1846, pg. 51
for certification.\textsuperscript{57} However, the bill was not ratified by the Senate and it was returned to the House defeated on January 5, 1847.\textsuperscript{58}

In the midst of in-state fighting over party differences, Floridians for the most part, agreed that their state needed to stay committed to the Southern cause during the impending sectional crisis which arose as a consequence of the military victories over Mexico and the acquisition of new territory that accompanied them. To what extent and with how much ardor they supported the rest of their neighboring states laid the groundwork for future debates between Whigs and Democrats in Florida and throughout the South. On the subject of supporting the war, Governor Moseley urged all Floridians to lay down their political differences in favor of patriotism. Herbert J. Doherty, in his work \textit{The Whigs of Florida, 1845-1854}, claimed that many of Florida’s Whigs quietly opposed the war because they feared a sectional crisis would arise in its wake. He also noted that they were perplexed and fervently vexed by President James K. Polk and his expansionist devotion.\textsuperscript{59} Yulee also earned scorn from the Whigs for his strong backing of the Polk administration’s resolution introduced in Congress that proposed the annexation of Cuba as a remedy for Southern fears concerning the demise of slavery.\textsuperscript{60}

Governor Moseley opened the 1847 session of the General Assembly by applauding the efforts Floridians had made on the battlefields in Mexico while at the same time attacking those who had opposed the war.\textsuperscript{61} These opponents, whom Moseley did not name, clearly were the Whigs. He branded them as unpatriotic and accused them of labeling true patriots “anti-Christian” and “un-holy”.\textsuperscript{62} Moseley concluded his tirade by voicing his displeasure with those in Washington who wished to prevent slavery from being afforded its constitutional right to expand into the territory taken from Mexico.\textsuperscript{63}

The Wilmot Proviso, which was intended to curtail the expansion of slavery in any territory that the United States was to acquire from Mexico, lit a fire under the sectional and political debates. This was exactly what Moseley had been speaking out against in his November 1847 speech. The Whigs in Florida, as well as around the South

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\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, December 17, 1846, pg. 91
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, January 5, 1847, pg. 190
\textsuperscript{59} Doherty, \textit{The Whigs of Florida, 1845-54}, pg. 22
\textsuperscript{60} Pensacola, \textit{Gazette}, January 10, 1846
\textsuperscript{61} House Journal, November 23, 1847, pg. 16
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, pg. 16-17
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, pg. 18
did not favor Wilmot’s proposal as they were not in favor of curbing the expansion and perpetuation of the institution of slavery. Whigs, like their Democratic counterparts in the region, were in favor of protecting the same basic principles that all Southerners held dear, one of these the right to take slave property into newly annexed territories. The Southern faction of the Whig party was dominated by planters who benefited greatly from the slave economy and their stance was therefore to do whatever it took not to agitate the situation.64 These sentiments foreshadowed those that the Whigs would express in favor of a compromise as the sectional conflict intensified in 1850. Unlike the Democrats, the Whigs did not wish to press the issue because they were afraid the consequences of such actions would be catastrophic to the Southern way of life.

The result of these political differences led to increasingly bitter fighting between the Whigs and the Democrats nationally as well as in Florida. The free-soil faction emerging among the Northern Whigs terrified Southerners, especially Democrats who were afraid that the Southern Whigs might follow along party rather than sectional lines. On December 21, 1847, a bill was brought before the General Assembly of Florida which reaffirmed the sentiments the Governor had delineated a month earlier. The vernacular of the bill mirrored that of Moseley and it stressed that Florida would continue to show unyielding support for President Polk, the war, and all American troops involved in the fighting, disregarding any public outrage and dissension locally or on the national level.65 The bill was finally passed on January 3, 1848 by a resounding count of 32-0.66 Three days later a resolution was passed in the House which was introduced by Louis Aldrich of Alachua County, A.K. Allison of Gadsden, William A. Forward of St. Johns and Thomas H. Hagner of Leon, stating that Florida would dutifully follow Virginia’s lead as the spokesman for the entire South regarding the attempts to restrain slavery’s expansion.67 The Democrats also responded to the situation by means of propaganda, hoping to drive a wedge deep into the Whig party which nationally had many members who were vocal in their opposition to the war. The goal was to portray Southern Whigs as being subservient to their Northern party brothers. Ironically, a similar charge against

65 House Journal, December 21, 1847, pg. 121-122
66 Ibid, January 3, 1848, pg. 207
67 Ibid, January 6, 1848, pg. 230
Northern Democrats was levied by Republicans a decade later which would help to
divide and for a time destroy that party. The St. Augustine News labeled the newly
elected Whig Senator from Florida, Edward C. Cabell, as a mere pawn in the hands of the
Northerners. The rift between North and South was clear when the News proclaimed that
“the Abolition Whigs now claim him (Cabell) as their own, and struggle as he will, he is
now bound to them hand and foot by the ties of party”.

The battle lines had clearly been drawn.

Cabell and Florida’s Whigs responded to the Democratic attacks in a rational,
non-belligerent fashion, further enhancing their image as the party of compromise,
moderation and conservatism. Cabell exemplified the Whig platform by stating that the
Whigs expressed concern for the entire nation, thus labeling the Democrats a sectional
party that did not support the nation as a whole. He further explained that the Whigs
would not be influenced by a section of the party but would rather function as an
American body. Cabell was following the lead of prominent national Whig leaders
such as Daniel Webster of Massachusetts and Henry Clay of Kentucky. Both attempted
to appeal to all the nation’s sections, Webster by denouncing abolitionism and Clay by
embracing compromise, further distancing himself from other Southern Congressional
radicals such as Calhoun or Yulee. In Florida cooler minds prevailed as the Whigs swept
control of the General Assembly in the October statewide elections. After Calhoun
issued his “Southern Address” to Congress, Westcott left party ranks and joined Cabell
and other Whigs in refusing to endorse it because its tone was riddled with inflammatory
sectional rhetoric that posed a great threat to national reconciliation.

The 1848 session of Florida’s General Assembly saw a Call ushered back in
Florida politics, but it was not the former Governor, rather his nephew, Wilkinson. A
Whig in his own right, Wilkinson was elected Clerk of the House of Representatives after
he had been denied the same seat the previous year in a 19-14 vote against Mariano D.
Papy. On the state level, Whigs in Florida seemed more willing to concern themselves
with local issues, such as promoting positive growth in the both business and industrial

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68 St. Augustine, News, November 13, 1846
69 Marianna, Florida Whig, February 9, 1848
70 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, October 19, 1847
71 House Journal, November 23, 1846, pg. 5
sectors. Yulee, working from Washington, still concentrated on local issues as well, pushing for the construction of a cross-state railroad despite furious opposition from his political opponents in the Whig party.\textsuperscript{72} Much legislative business dealt with various modes of internal improvements which the Whigs had been trying in vain to push through since Florida’s admission to the Union.\textsuperscript{73} Unfortunately for the Whigs, financial conditions were not favorable to their cause and the year was spent, for the most part, preparing the state for its first inclusion in a national presidential election.

The Whigs felt they needed to win the South to win the presidential election, and to do this, they needed to shed their image as a sectional party. Whigs in West Florida, often the most conservative in the state, pushed hard to nominate Henry Clay, the “Great Compromiser” for the presidency. The \textit{Florida Whig}, published in Marianna in Jackson County, came out in support of Clay as well, but went a step further by weighing in on the slavery and expansion debate. The paper condemned the Wilmot Proviso as did most Southerners, regardless of party affiliation, but, it also denounced the war as a fruitless crusade undertaken for selfish reasons of expansion and personal gain. The Whig party organ also criticized and opposed the Polk administration annexing territory gained from Mexico as a result of the war.\textsuperscript{74} In spite of this position, Middle and East Florida’s Whigs supported the hero of the Mexican-American War, General Zachary Taylor of Louisiana for president. Much to the chagrin of the Democrats, the Whigs were perceived the more compelling choice based on their moderate stances on several key national issues.

The Whigs in Florida had finally organized themselves to a point where they could go on the offensive against the Democrats in the statewide elections. The Democrats had met in Madison and nominated Jefferson County’s William Bailey, a prosperous planter, for the governorship while extending the Congressional nod to former territorial Governor William P. Du Val. This selection intrigued many since Du Val had been a close ally of Richard Keith Call as an original member of the “nucleus” and later the Conservative Party as well as a staunch supporter of Whig President William Henry

\textsuperscript{72} Thompson, Arthur W. “The Railroad Background of the Florida Senatorial Election of 1851”, \textit{Florida Historical Quarterly}, XXXI, January 1953, pg. 184-185.
\textsuperscript{73} Doherty, \textit{The Whigs of Florida, 1845-54}. pg. 24
\textsuperscript{74} Marianna, \textit{Florida Whig}, March 8, 1848
Harrison. Future war-time Governor John Milton was one of the three presidential electors nominated by the Democrats along with Charles Dupont of Gadsden County, who, like Du Val, was a former member of the Conservative Party. The Florida Whig easily picked up on the tactics of the Democrats proclaiming that their only chance of victory would be to follow a moderate approach. This would in turn appeal to the undecided populace that seemed to be favoring the Whigs and their conservatism more than the radicalism that was often invoked in relation to the Democrats.

The Whigs lost no time in launching a full assault on Du Val. They ridiculed the Democrats for choosing him, claiming that if he was the best they could summon they were bound to be hopeless in the election. As they had in the past, the Whigs held county meetings rather than a single convention. Despite the fact that they were not organized, the three separate divisional conventions, representing the West, Middle and East all nominated former Conservative Party and “nucleus” member Thomas Brown of Tallahassee as candidate for Governor. He was tabbed “Old Matter of Fact” as a play on Zachary Taylor’s nickname of “Old Rough and Ready”. On the local level, the race for Congress between Du Val and Cabell brandished a relentless attack on the Democrat by the Whigs who noted that he had previously supported the creation of a Bank of the United States when he was a Congressman from Kentucky. This countered his actions as territorial Governor where he vetoed the charters of banks more often than not. DuVal was mocked for his seemingly constant state of oscillation on numerous issues, the banks being at the forefront.

Although the majority of the Florida Whigs had supported Henry Clay, they fell in line after he lost the nomination to Zachary Taylor in Philadelphia and pledged their support for the former war hero. The Democrats, on the other hand, found more problems at the national level. The delegates to the national convention from the state were under strict instructions to oppose any candidate who favored popular sovereignty and, since Lewis Cass of Michigan advocated this policy, Floridians were in a precarious

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75 Doherty. *The Whigs of Florida, 1845-54*. pg. 25
76 Marianna, *Florida Whig*, April 5, 1848
77 Ibid, April 12, 1848
78 Ibid, May 3, 1848
79 Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, August 5, 1848, August 19, 1848
80 Doherty. *The Whigs of Florida, 1845-54*. pg. 27
situation when Cass looked to be on his way to gaining the party’s endorsement.\footnote{Ibid} The Democratic Party in Florida, as well as other states across the South, was divided. Various members endorsed the selections of the national convention while the majority did not, leaving some radicals to resign their posts in protest. The Whig newspapers did not pass on the opportunity to incite the flames by printing just how pleased they were that the Democrats would have to choose which path to follow, one being to “sacrifice on the altar of party loyalty the dearest rights of the South”.\footnote{Marianna, \textit{Florida Whig}, July 1, 1848} Despite opposition and some resignations, the official line of Florida’s Democratic Party was to follow the lead of the national party. This action fanned the flames of sectional animosity within the ranks of the party in Florida. Democrats in East and West Florida were appalled at the prospects of being dragged along at the will of the state committee in the capital who the Jacksonville \textit{News} aptly labeled “a few wire pullers in Tallahassee”.\footnote{Jacksonville, \textit{News}, July 1, 1848}

While the candidates traversed the state making speeches, the subject was always brought back to the pressing national issues concerning the expansion of slavery and the stances of the national candidates. These in turn mortally wounded the chances of Florida’s Democrats despite their true feelings on the issue. The creation of the Free Soil Party in Buffalo in the summer of 1848 and the subsequent nomination of former Democrat Martin Van Buren seemed to seal the party’s fate both on the local and national level. Van Buren stole old “Jacksonian Democrats” away from the present day party of Cass and paved the way for the Whig victory.\footnote{Doherty, \textit{The Whigs of Florida}, 1845-54. pg. 28} The Whigs had successfully portrayed themselves as the party of compromise and moderation and in 1848 that is what the country and the state needed. Cabell defeated DuVal for the Congressional seat by a vote of 4,382-3,805 a margin of 53%-47%. Thomas Brown was elected Governor by a similar margin, polling 53.2% or 4,145 votes to 46.8% or 3,646. The Whigs also swept both houses of the General Assembly.\footnote{Marianna, \textit{Florida Whig}, December 2, 1848} The margin of victory for the Whigs was far from the landslide that some expected based on the unity problems that faced the Democrats. Yet the victory was significant enough to show that Florida was not as radical as it had been.
four years earlier and would prove to be in the near future. Zachary Taylor won 4,539 votes in Florida to 3,238 for Cass constituting a larger margin of 58.4%-41.6%.  

The political landscape of Florida had clearly changed in the three short years since the state entered the Union. Florida noticeably had one eye on the national level as the Mexican War drew to a close and the sectional debates spurred on by the conquest of vast new territories heated up. While Florida was not a major player in the debates that would ultimately end in bloodshed and civil war, the politics within the state were drawn closer and closer to the events unfolding on the national level. Tempers would flare in Tallahassee in much the same way that they were to in Washington, Kansas and South Carolina in the coming decade.

86 Ibid
CHAPTER II

THE CRISIS OF 1850

The Whigs reached the height of their power in Florida from 1848-1850. Henry Clay’s compromise had saved the Union from bloodshed, albeit for a mere decade, the party had won back the governor’s mansion, and the Democrats appeared to be divided and frazzled. While Florida succumbed to moderate forces it was clear by the end of 1850 that the state’s political culture was in fact transforming. Radicalism slowly gained ground in the state as the perceived threat to the institution of slavery increased and the planter elite of Middle Florida began to question their political allegiance.

Democrats were seen as the party of emotion and irrationalism and lame duck Governor William Dunn Moseley’s speech opening the 1848 session was filled with patriotic fervor that echoed these sentiments. Moseley had just witnessed his party endure an embarrassing defeat at the hands of the Whigs on every level and, he was trying to stir up support for the Democrats by playing on Southern sentiments and interests. Moseley tried to paint the Democrats as the true “party of the South”, but, as the voters proved in the 1848 elections, enflaming sectional animosity was not on the minds of the majority of voters. In spite of the major setback at the polls, Moseley had his mind set on uniting the South against any and all opposition to slavery.
The Governor spoke correctly of ominous “clouds now lowering over our Southern horizon enveloping in darkness the future destiny of our glorious confederacy”. Moseley continued his assault to include the Free Soil Party which he believed had not only cost the Democrats the White House, but also proved a possibly deadly affront to slavery as well as the Democratic Party. Moseley foresaw that a “systematic and incendiary assault upon the peculiar institutions of the South will soon be made, with a determination and strength which can no longer be regarded with contempt”. He clearly did not feel compromise was the answer and he was not in favor of following the policies that had won the Whigs the election. In his mind this would be the equivalent to selling one’s soul to the devil. He also went on to say “I have no fears that when the issue is distinctly presented, the South will be united in its resistance to this wanton aggression of on its rights; and that all the differences of opinion…will be merged”. In his fiery speech Moseley tried to warn the state and the rest of the South against becoming complacent and thus further sacrificing Southern ideals for the sake of stability and compromise. Moseley’s words echoed those of the radical fire eaters who would draw Florida and the South out of the Union a decade later.

The two leading newspapers in the state were Whigs organs, the Florida Whig of Marianna and the Florida Sentinel located in the capital city. According to Herbert J. Doherty, the Florida Sentinel was Florida’s most influential paper due to its location, dependability and stability as one of the state’s oldest papers. East Florida’s Whigs were bolstered when Edward C. Cabell and State Senator Samuel Burritt of Duval County enticed Columbus Drew to migrate south to Florida from Virginia where he had worked on the National Intelligencer in Washington to publish the Florida Republican in Jacksonville. This new organ quickly became one of the leading Whig papers in the South.

The General Assembly, controlled by the Whigs, pushed aside Moseley’s warnings and continued on with the business of everyday government in the state. They

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1 Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Florida, November 28, 1848, pg. 17
2 Ibid
3 Ibid
5 Ibid
turned their attention to electing a Senator to serve the state’s needs in Washington. This election was for the seat currently held by Democrat James Westcott whom the Whigs did not wish to see reelected in March. On December 11, the Secretary of the Senate, C.W. Downing, forwarded a note to the House in which he affirmed the Senate’s decision to proceed with the election. Since Florida did not elect Senators based on popular vote, several different people were nominated by various members of the assembly. There was no statewide campaigning as much of this was done during the months leading up to the November elections. The aforementioned Samuel Burritt of Jacksonville, a lawyer, was nominated, along with Jackson Morton of Escambia County. Jesse J. Finley was nominated by Nicholas Long of Jackson County and George T. Ward of Tallahassee also was nominated by William Maxwell also representing Leon County. All of these candidates were Whigs. Jesse J. Finley had support of the Florida Whig since he was from Jackson County where the paper was published. The Pensacola Gazette backed Jackson Morton of Pensacola largely because they felt West Florida was a neglected region in the state.

The first vote proved inconclusive as no one candidate earned a majority. Burritt led the way with 26 votes, followed by Ward with 16, Finley with 7 and Morton with 6. A second vote was called for immediately and the results again were indecisive. Burritt led the pack again with 18 followed by Ward with 16, Finley with 7 and Morton with 6. The third vote again saw Burritt in the lead with 26 votes again followed by Ward with 17, Finley with 7 and Morton with 5. At this point, a motion to adjourn until the following week was voted down 29-28 continuing the painfully prolonged process of selecting Florida’s representative in Washington. As if to complicate matters further, Walker Anderson, a Democrat from Pensacola was nominated by John Ghent, an independent, in an attempt to draw away some Democratic support from Burritt. The consequent vote saw Burritt and Ward again leading the way but, without a majority, no election was valid, and, when a second vote for adjournment was brought before the

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6 Marianna, Florida Whig, November 25, 1848
7 House Journal, December 11, 1848, pg. 47
8 Marianna, Florida Whig, November 25, 1848
9 Ibid
10 Ibid
11 Ibid
12 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, December 12, 1848
Assembly it was again defeated 33-25.\textsuperscript{13} The fifth vote again did not produce a Senator and upon the third motion for adjournment, the Assembly voted 29-28 in favor of postponing the election until the following day.\textsuperscript{14} On December 12, the Assembly voted 24-14 to indefinitely postpone the vote.

The seeming deadlock was due largely to sectional differences that remained within the state and even within the Whig Party itself. The Whigs had united to defeat the Democrats in the statewide elections of 1848, but, the state as a whole could not shed the cloud of animosity and jealousy that had gripped Florida since the beginning of the territorial period. Both the \textit{Pensacola Gazette} and the \textit{Florida Republican}, attacked the Whigs of Middle Florida for trying to horde all of the power in the state. They also both in turn mocked the Middle Florida Whigs for graciously allowing them the right to even furnish the state with representatives.\textsuperscript{15}

It is important to examine how Florida had changed from 1821 to 1850 and, more significantly, in the five years it had been a state to fully understand the sectional tension and changing political landscape. Florida’s population grew significantly in the five years since admission. In 1845 the state had a population of 66,500\textsuperscript{16} but by 1850 it had grown to 87,445, an increase of almost 21,000 or 31.5\%.\textsuperscript{17} Florida remained the smallest state in the nation, but had seen a population boom and also an increase in size by close to 35,000 over the entire decade of the 1840’s. Most of these immigrants came from neighboring Southern states, mostly Georgia and South Carolina. Prior to the 1840’s Florida had been settled by a great number of Virginians, who for the most part were more moderate than their Deep South brethren. Middle Florida still held the power in the state. The region boasted 34,959 people or 39.9\% of the state’s population.\textsuperscript{18} Leon County had a population of 11,442 of which 8,203 or 71.6\% were slaves. Gadsden and Jefferson Counties also had slaves make up more than 50\% of their populations, 4,880 out of 8,784 and 4,938 out of 7,718 respectively.\textsuperscript{19} As a whole Florida was home to 39,310 slaves in 1850 which accounted for 44.9\% of the population and Middle Florida

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\textsuperscript{13} House Journal, December 11, 1848 pg. 49  \\
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, pg. 50  \\
\textsuperscript{15} Tallahassee, \textit{Floridian}, December 9, 1848 and January 18, 1849  \\
\textsuperscript{16} Dorothy Dodd. “Florida in 1845”. Florida Historical Quarterly, XXIV, Issue 1  \\
\textsuperscript{17} 7\textsuperscript{th} Census of the United States---1850---Florida  \\
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid  \\
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid
\end{flushleft}
alone was home to 46.8% of Florida’s slaves. Florida had 4,143 farms in 1850 with the majority located in Middle Florida reinforcing the importance of slavery and the influence of the middle region of the state.\textsuperscript{20}

Florida, with a slave population of 45%, was fourth behind South Carolina (57.6%), Mississippi (51.1%), and Louisiana (47.3%) and ahead of Alabama (44%) and Georgia (42%).\textsuperscript{21} Of the four states ranked above Florida in percentage of slave population, two (Mississippi and South Carolina) preceded the state in seceding from the Union in 1860 and 1861. The other state, Louisiana, was also one of the seven Deep South states to secede before the firing on Fort Sumter. Florida’s transformation into a “Deep South” state, dependent on the institution of slavery, was well underway by 1850. The state was locked into the same trap that befell South Carolina and the other radical states in their dependence on slavery. Florida was commercially prosperous due to its long coastline, but this too was tied deeply to slavery as cotton was exported from ports such as Apalachicola, Jacksonville and especially Pensacola bound for England and other destinations in Europe. Pensacola also served as a port to export cotton from Eastern Alabama by way of the Escambia River to the Gulf of Mexico.

Sectional differences still dominated Florida, largely due to the surprising growth rate of Middle Florida compared to East and West Florida. The other two regions, which had dominated the state during the early territorial stage, were now growing at a much slower pace than the Middle region and were jealous of its growing size and power. Escambia County had a population of only 4,351 in 1850 with Santa Rosa at 2,883. In East Florida, Duval County and St. John’s County had populations of 4,539 and 2,525 respectively, and the fact that the East and West could not unite to combat Middle Florida confirmed the latter region’s continued dominance politically and economically.\textsuperscript{22}

When the Assembly reconvened on January 1, 1849 a vote was called before the Assembly for the election of a senator once again. This time only George Ward and Jackson Morton were nominated, but the elimination of the other candidates did not change the situation. Even though Morton defeated Ward 29-27, a revote was ordered by

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid

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the Speaker of the House. In the subsequent vote, Jackson Morton, who had trailed badly in the initial elections in November, was certified as United States Senator. In the end, Morton, who became Florida’s first Whig Senator, received 30 votes to 27 for Ward, with ironically 22 of the 30 coming from Democrats. Only 8 Whigs voted for the Escambia politician. The Democrats saw Morton as the lesser of two evils since he was a novice compared to Ward who had long been involved in Whig politics.

The brewing sectional conflict between the North and South over slavery and its expansion could not escape the halls of Florida’s General Assembly. On January 3 a motion was introduced and passed in which Florida once again reaffirmed its allegiance to its Southern sister states and that it would do all in its power to support the South in Washington as well as in Tallahassee. The resolution declared in defiant terms that the people of Florida were ready to join other Southern states in defense of their institutions and rights should the time come.

In regards to the proposed admission of California as a free state, Floridians resurrected the old argument that was used to bring Florida into the Union in 1845 which called for a balance of slave and free states. The vast majority of Floridians were discouraged by the lack of support given to those Congressmen who sought to organize the territories annexed from Mexico under the guidelines of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Governor Thomas Brown, a veteran of the War of 1812, spoke for the minority in the South who placed Unionism in front of Southern rights. It is undeniable that Brown was a proponent of Southern rights and states rights since, as a Virginian, Brown had always displayed sympathy for the South. He was, though, deeply concerned with further upsetting sectional tensions. Despite not being able to officially take office until October 1849 because of contradictory statements in the territorial and state constitutions concerning the exact date of the succession of Governors, Brown delivered his inaugural speech on January 11, 1849. Brown’s speech differed greatly from that of Moseley only three months earlier. While he did reveal that his support lay with the rights of the

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23 House Journal, January 1, 1849, pg. 127
24 Ibid, pg. 128
25 Ibid, pg. 127
26 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, January 9, 1848
27 House Journal, January 3, 1849, pg. 145
28 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, February 1, 1849
individual states, and the South, Brown also talked about compromise and how the nation was founded. He condemned partisan politics, which many saw as a personal attack on the Democrats, while also stating that “the Northern fanatics have done much to weaken the attachment and reverence of the people of the Union; and I fear as much has been done by Southern demagogues as Northern fanatics”. This was a direct denunciation of John C. Calhoun and his young protégé from Florida David Levy Yulee. Brown’s speech was given praise by newspapers around the state because it also wisely emphasized important internal improvements within the state that were supported across party lines.

Brown did anger and shock many Democrats with his harsh words aimed at Southern radicals who, led by Yulee and Calhoun on the national level, expressed their beliefs in the South Carolinians’ “Southern Address”. Many Democrats verbally abused Edward C. Cabell and the Whigs because Cabell refused to sign the address for the same reasons stated by Brown in his speech. Calhoun’s words were a threat to the nation as much as the abolitionists and the Free Soil Party were in the North. Many Whigs did not feel that the time had come to further agitate the situation. Newspapers like the *Florida Republican* did in fact claim that most Floridians, whether Whigs or Democrats, would support the South if slavery were in fact attacked. They differed from the Democrats because they felt that slavery was in fact not being attacked by the majority of Northerners. They claimed that radicalism “will kill, not cure the patient”. On the national level Cabell was clearly shaken by the negative reactions to the actions of his fellow Floridians. He backed a measure put forth by his Southern colleagues that would create a party platform to oppose ending the slave trade in Washington, D.C. and exclude expansion of the institution into the newly acquired territories. Cabell withdrew from the Whig caucus along with eight other Southern Whigs when their plan was not approved by the party as a whole.

The radical Democrats, led by Calhoun, began to push for some sort of conference of Southern states to meet and discuss what they saw as attacks on their way of life. Calhoun and his cohorts were angered by the prospect of California’s admission

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29 Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, January 16, 1848
30 Jacksonville, *Florida Republican*, March 15, 1849
31 Ibid, June, 14, 1849
32 Ibid
33 Ibid, December 13, 1849
to the Union as a free state and also by resolutions passed by the state legislatures in every Northern state except Iowa which favored Congress’ right to exclude the expansion of slavery into the territories. As 1849 drew to a close Yulee recommended to his colleagues that a meeting of Southern governors take place, and, if this was not enough, he suggested to Calhoun that they split from the Democratic Party to form a new Southern Rights Party to combat the Free Soil Party and other anti-slavery forces rising in the North. Yulee was not alone in these sentiments as Calhoun already had a plan in mind. Calhoun proposed a convention to meet in Nashville and for each Southern state to send delegates to that city in June of 1850. The Florida Sentinel, Tallahassee’s Whig organ, was appalled at the call for a conference since, as a more moderate force than most Whigs, they felt this action would antagonize the anti-slavery forces in the North. They echoed Brown’s sentiments of a year before that more harm would come to the South as a result of these actions.

Initially Governor Brown remained silent on the issue. He was encouraged by the Whig press, which did not want to see the issue brought to the forefront of Florida’s politics. They agreed with Brown that “passion was generally replacing intellect”. While some newspapers took a cautious approach towards the proposed convention, not wanting to antagonize the Democrats or their fellow Whigs, the Florida Republican stated that it would rather see it “strangled in its birth than lend it countenance”. This did anger Democrats and even some Whigs since it meant that Brown refused to either endorse the convention or name Florida’s delegates to it. The path Florida would take in the Compromise of 1850, and beyond, is significant in understanding the changes that were taking place in the state’s landscape. Florida was being groomed by South Carolina much in the way David Levy Yulee was being mentored by John C. Calhoun. Florida was to prove one of South Carolina’s strongest, but largely inconsequential, allies during the secession crisis and, even though the Whigs controlled the state at the beginning of

34 Mills M. Lord, Jr. “David Levy Yulee, Statesmen and Railroad Builder” (Master’s Thesis, University of Florida, 1940), pg. 73
35 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, January 10, 1850
36 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, January 14, 1850
38 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, January 24, 1850
39 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, January 29, 1850
the decade, it was easy to see that Whigs such as Brown were in the minority when it came to dealing with the question of Southern honor and rights. While it was hard to find any whites Florida who opposed states rights and the institution of slavery, Florida’s transition into a radical fire eating state was not complete. Also noticeably quiet during the Crisis of 1850 was Richard Keith Call. Call had faded from the limelight in the five years since he had left office, but his sentiments had not changed much. Call was confident of the path chosen by Governor Brown and he therefore gave Brown his support out the public’s view.40

The conflicts in Florida mirrored the ones erupting on the national level. Fortunately for the nation a civil war was averted, or at least postponed, when calmer heads prevailed and Henry Clay remerged to propose what became the Compromise of 1850. The compromise did not sit well with radicals on either side. The bill was referred to as the “surrender bill” by Florida’s Democratic papers.41 The Floridian and Journal in Tallahassee, when referring to Clay’s masterpiece, claimed “it was well said that not one man in a hundred would consider this plan a compromise…It is an almost unconditional surrender to the North”.42 In their view the admission of California as a free state and the proposed organization of Utah and New Mexico as free territories would leave the slave states completely surrounded. The radical Democrats could feel the Northern yoke being tightened. However, the Whigs and their newspapers favored the compromise, even more so in Florida and throughout the South since the bill had measures that did protect slavery. The Whig newspapers spent most of their efforts assailing radicals such as Yulee in Florida and Calhoun on the national level.43

Nevertheless Florida’s Whig representatives in Washington did not take the moderate stance that the papers did. They followed Yulee in endorsing a letter authored by the Democrat to be sent to Governor Brown in Tallahassee. The letter called for Brown to finally recognize the Southern Convention in Nashville and appoint delegates

41 St. Augustine, Ancient City, February 14, 1850
42 Tallahassee Floridian and Journal, February 9, 1850
43 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, April 11, 1850
to it.\textsuperscript{44} Cabell and Morton, both devout Whigs, united with Yulee since they felt the federal government was encroaching on the rights of the South. Democrats saw Morton as being malleable and they approached him first before focusing their attention on Cabell who would be the tougher convert since he had originally opposed a Southern Convention. Cabell joined Morton and Yulee but felt it necessary to send an additional letter to Governor Brown in which he carefully defended his position and reasons for endorsing the letter. Cabell was afraid that the anti-slavery forces had gained too much influence and that, despite the fact that his party had favored the compromise, this bill indeed, if left unchecked, could possibly bring about an end to the Southern way of life.\textsuperscript{45}

Governor Brown’s response further ignited Florida’s radicals while it also damaged the already strained relations between Brown and his citizens. Brown followed the path he had established in his speech a year before opening the state’s General Assembly. He labeled the convention “revolutionary…and directly against the spirit if not the letter of the Constitution of the United States” and went further by stating his discontent with Cabell, Morton and Yulee for putting him in such a precarious position.\textsuperscript{46} Brown again refused to endorse and send delegates from Florida to Tennessee by saying “the time has not arrived for such measures, and I pray God such a time may never arrive”.\textsuperscript{47} Interestingly enough, Brown stated that the South had not yet been put in a position that warranted such radical action. This statement illustrated that, while he was one of, if not the most moderate politician in Florida in 1850, he was still a Southerner and did not condemn future action against anti-slavery forces if he deemed it necessary.

Brown was a Unionist, but still a Southerner and, as he had in his speech of January 11, 1849, he attacked Northern radicals along with Southern radicals and charged both groups with antagonizing the other into making rash and unwise decisions.\textsuperscript{48}

Brown’s moderate stance and grave risk did pay off for the time being since the nation was momentarily spared from bloodshed. The Democratic press vilified Brown,

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\textsuperscript{44} “Yulee, Morton, Cabell to Governor Brown”, February 6, 1850, published in Jacksonville, \textit{Florida Republican}, March 7, 1850
\textsuperscript{45} “Cabell to Governor Brown”, February 12, 1850, published in Jacksonville, \textit{Florida Republican}, March 7, 1850
\textsuperscript{46} “Governor Brown to Yulee, Morton, and Cabell”, February 22, 1850, published in Jacksonville, \textit{Florida Republican}, March 7, 1850
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid
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labeling him as a traitor while the Whig press praised his courage in standing up against
the extremists. 49 Other Whig papers such as Jackson County’s Florida Whig also
supported Brown’s conservatism while the Gazette in Pensacola blasted their native son,
Morton for endorsing the convention. The paper went as far as to compare Brown’s
actions with the successful campaign President Andrew Jackson waged on South
Carolina during the nullification crisis close to twenty years earlier. 50 In addition, the
press stated “may we not hope that Governor Brown’s letter has killed the nullification of
1850?” 51

Most of Florida’s Whigs, despite their Southern patriotism, fell in line with the
Governor and were equally appalled at Morton’s actions. They criticized Morton
unmercifully claiming he was nothing more than Yulee’s lapdog, afraid to think for
himself and deviate from the path set forth by the powerful Democrat. Morton took these
attacks to heart and lashed out at Brown and his fellow Whigs in Florida in a letter
published by the Florida Republican. In it he accused Brown of not acting in the best
interests of the state but rather trying to appease Northern Whigs and President Taylor
behind a guise of Unionism. Morton went on to state that the Nashville Convention, as it
was now being called, was in the best interests of Florida and the South, and was not a
radical action but rather a precautionary measure meant to implement a contingency plan
in case the situation took a turn for the worse. 52 He complained that Brown represented
the interests of neither of Florida’s two political parties by the stance he had taken.

Brown did not give up the fight despite being outnumbered. He counterattacked
valiantly but it was becoming clear that his views were too moderate for most Floridians,
even some members of his own party. The Governor attacked those radicals who were
calling for a second American Revolution to free the South from the shackles of bondage
imposed on them by the North. Brown mocked them by proclaiming that he:

did not wish to see another revolution and if I feel called upon to blush in this
connection, it is for those who pronounce this government a Russian despotism…

49 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, March 7, 1850
50 Pensacola, Gazette, April 11, 1850
51 Ibid
52 “Morton to Governor Brown”, March 10, 1850, published in Jacksonville, Florida Republican, April 4,
1850.
who would call a convention of modern politicians to remedy the inherent defects
in our great charter of liberties...who think themselves able to improve it...who in
respect to anticipated grievances would change or destroy it, and who decline the
people with dazzling schemes of a Southern Confederacy.\textsuperscript{53}

Ironically it was the radicals, such as Calhoun and Yulee, who claimed they were
upholding the constitution by protecting slavery while Whigs such as Brown felt that the
fire eaters were endangering the well-being of the nation and more significantly the
institution of slavery and the Southern way of life. The Pensacola \textit{Gazette} also weighed
in on the subject, backing the Governor’s stance by likening the Nashville Convention to
the Hartford Convention of 1814-1815 when several New England states mulled over the
possibility of seceding from the Union and forming their own confederation because they
felt their ways and customs differed greatly from the rest of the infant nation.\textsuperscript{54}

Florida’s Whigs, despite Governor Brown’s protests, realized that they could no
longer oppose the convention while still saving face. The Whigs, then, changed their
tactics and decided if they could not prevent it, they might as well make it as favorable to
themselves as possible. They set out to ensure that a moderate-laden, handpicked
dlegation, would represent Florida in Nashville. Brown reached back to his youth in the
era of the American Revolution to try and convince Morton and others that he did not
want to see a second revolution in his lifetime, because he feared that is what the
convention would produce. In the end the Whigs circumvented Brown and his wishes by
joining the Democrats to appoint delegates to travel to Tennessee. The delegates were
selected at meetings held in Florida’s three regions. Each region, meeting in Ocala (East
Florida), Tallahassee (Middle Florida) and Marianna (West Florida) chose both a
Democrat and a Whig to represent the state. At Tallahassee, Charles H. Dupont was the
Democratic selection while Arthur J. Forman represented the Whigs. Marianna chose
Congressman Cabell and Democrat James F. McClellan while Ocala nominated Joseph
M. Hernandez, a Whig and B.M. Pearson from the Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{55}

Brown’s opposition to the convention could have been a deathblow to the Whigs,
and Brown himself, if tensions at the national level were not alleviated by the actions of

\textsuperscript{53}Tallahassee, \textit{Florida Sentinel}, April 16, 1850
\textsuperscript{54}Pensacola, \textit{Gazette}, June 15, 1850
\textsuperscript{55}Jacksonville, \textit{Florida Republican}, May 23, 1850
Massachusetts Whig and famous orator Daniel Webster. Webster drew scorn from several Northern and Southern radicals for his “Seventh of March” speech in which he denounced radicalism, praised conservatism and moderation and, called for Henry Clay’s compromise to be upheld. The positive reaction to Webster’s speech allowed Cabell and Hernandez to decline the nominations to attend the convention. Cabell praised Webster’s speech for helping to save the Union. He also lauded Clay and his work on the compromise, referring to both men as true patriots working with the nation’s best interests in mind.\textsuperscript{56} While the speech did not garner enough support for the compromise to be passed immediately, it was clear that the tides had begun to change in favor of moderation and conservatism on the national level. The radicals suffered a further blow to their cause when John C. Calhoun died on March 31.

While many Florida Democrats moderated their extremism, the St. Augustine \textit{Ancient City} did not. It still charged the Southern Whigs with forcing the region to submit to the abolitionists and Northern radicals. The paper also did not endorse Clay’s compromise, labeling it the driving force behind the submission.\textsuperscript{57} These attacks embarrassed several of the state’s leading Democrats who tried, largely in vain, to promote a more temperate compromising atmosphere and platform for their party. The last large center of opposition to the compromise was President Zachary Taylor, but his death, shortly after that of Calhoun coupled with Millard Fillmore’s support for the compromise momentarily quenched the fires of radicalism.

It was under these auspices that the Nashville Convention began in the summer of 1850. It did not attract either the attention or the enthusiasm that Calhoun, Yulee and other fire eating Southerners had hoped. The Nashville Convention still stood for division which clearly countered the prevailing attitude of conciliation that the compromise had, for the most part, fostered. The President of the Convention was William L. Sharkey of Mississippi who himself was a moderate and the tenor of the meeting followed his lead. Representatives from Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia were present, with only South Carolina

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, March 21, 1850
\textsuperscript{57} St. Augustine, \textit{Ancient City}, June 22, 1850
maintaining an extremist posture. While a resolution that condemned the compromise was passed, pushed through by the South Carolinians, Sharkey was able to use his influence to counter the fiery mood this created and shelve the action until Congress had come to a final decision concerning Clay’s proposed bill. The bill was now being championed by Democrat Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, as Clay himself had become gravely ill. At home Whigs such as George W. Call, son of the former Governor, and rising Whig politician, scolded the Democrats at a party meeting. In Alligator, now Lake City, Call placed the blame for the sectional crisis squarely on the shoulders of the Democrats. Once they had achieved victory through their support for the Compromise at the national level many Whigs turned their attention towards inflicting further damage on their political opponents.

The Compromise of 1850 was seen as a triumph for the Whigs, especially in Florida and the South, but, in the final analysis, it was not a complete victory. In Washington, Cabell and Morton joined Yulee in voting against the abolition of slave trade in the District of Columbia. They also tried to bar the admission of California to the Union as a free state. Morton followed the fire eating Democrat Yulee in opposing Texas giving up its claims to territory that would become New Mexico while Cabell favored the measure. After the bill passed Congress, Cabell was the only Floridian to support it. Cabell proclaimed that “we have not obtained all which I think should have been granted us, but no right has been taken away by the action of congress”. The passage of the bill was met with thunderous denunciations from the Democratic press including the editor of the Floridian and Journal, Tallahassee’s leading Democratic organ. He proclaimed that the passage of the bill was met “with joyful acclamations from abolitionists and submissionists”. He persisted in saying that the compromise left the South with one choice, and that was disunion.

Yulee sensed his radicalism was in fact making more enemies than friends, especially after the death of his mentor and chief ally John C. Calhoun. Regardless of

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58 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, June 13, 1850  
60 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, July 9, 1850  
61 Ibid, September 24, 1850  
62 Ibid, October 1, 1850  
63 Tallahassee, Floridian and Journal, September 28, 1850
being one of the principal proponents of Southern rights in Washington, Yulee felt he was making grave concessions to the North by becoming an advocate of the expansion of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean. For Yulee this was a concession since it would allow slavery to be excluded from territories north of the line. He therefore considered a concession on the North’s part only fair in light of what he felt were injustices imposed on the South. The Northern Congressional representatives did not favor any further action to appease the South since they alleged they had furnished enough in defense of slavery. As imagined, the Northern reaction infuriated Yulee and thrust him back towards the radical side of the spectrum. He bitterly assaulted the North in Congress for not making any dispensation to the South when he demanded, “Will the presence of slavery taint the soil? Will it be contaminating to those who go from the North to mingle with those Southern emigrants who bring their slaves with them?” Yulee’s words mocked the North and their views, while still not separating the abolitionists from the majority of Northerners.

It must be noted that, despite their opposition to sectional turbulence and inciting controversy between the North and South, most Florida and Southern Whigs, such as Richard Keith Call, had little sympathy for free blacks and even less for slaves. They also had the same disdain and scorn for Northern abolitionists that their radical Democratic counterparts displayed. The Whigs loathed radicals, both Northern and Southern. Call defended slavery as did most Whigs in Florida, though he also felt that blacks and slaves were mentally inferior to whites. In a letter written to John S. Littell, Call asserted his beliefs that blacks were “wild barbarians, to be tamed and civilized by the discipline of slavery…an animal in the form of a man”. He went further proclaiming that “nobly has this race done the great work required…they have been elevated in the scale of human beings”. These words condemning the black race are as harsh as those from any Southern radical in the antebellum South. Call and other Whigs made up the majority of Middle Florida’s “plantation aristocracy,” which explains these views. Call’s plantation, located in Tallahassee on Lake Jackson, was home to 140 slaves, 4,000 acres

64 Ibid
65 Doherty. Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist. pg. 140
of land with an overall value of more than $6,000 per acre. Yet, Call, along with the majority of Whigs, was not willing to secede from the Union in order to preserve the lifestyle to which he had become accustomed and which he fervently defended in his words to Littell.

The Compromise of 1850 did not end the sectional turmoil. It merely served as a fleeting truce that did little to placate the sullen and implacable hostility that Southerners felt towards the North. In the midst of this ongoing tumult, Florida faced the prospects of an impending Congressional election. The Whigs ran on a platform that stood by the compromise while the Democrats attacked it outright. The Democrats nominated John Beard while the Whigs countered with Cabell. Beard was a native of North Carolina who had moved to St. Augustine in 1838 and later settled in Tallahassee. Beard’s most notable public job had been as registrar of public lands, a job given to him by Whig president John Tyler. It was also rumored that Beard was a member of the Whig party in 1840 because he supported Whig William Henry Harrison in the presidential election of that year. He answered these assaults by launching a vigorous campaign across the state in which he conveyed the anti-compromise sentiments of Democrats. He supported Yulee in favoring the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean which also meant that he opposed the admission of California as a free state. Beard tried to present himself as a Jeffersonian by claiming that he did have faith in the Union which he felt was “based upon the truth and force of those principles which the immortal Jefferson made the ground work of…and which were illustrated by the lamented Calhoun”. He also added that the South had lost all in the compromise without any personal gain and further declared “I love the Union with a reasonable affection” but “not with a servile or superstitious reverence as some great deity”. He dared Whigs to label him as a traitor or a disunionist, but he continued to follow the same platform throughout his campaign. In Beard’s opinion, the compromise was the work of abolitionists.

Cabell was equal to the task when he stated that “Major Beard is for a dissolution of the Union because (he opposed) the passage” of the Omnibus Compromise Bill. He clearly affirmed that he was a staunch Unionist by pronouncing that “the issues are Union

66 Seventh Census of the United States---1850---Leon County, Florida
67 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, July 25, 1850
68 St. Augustine, Ancient City, August 31, 1850
and disunion…I am for Union: peace or war…I am for peace”. 69 Cabell went further by asserting that “never, either as a Representative or Candidate, will I assume the awful responsibility of recommending to you dissolution of the Union”. 70 Cabell and the Whigs tried to lure support away from the Democrats by appealing to the old line Jacksonian Democrats, the ones who had opposed nullification twenty years before. The Democrats shot back by criticizing Cabell for refusing to stand firmly with his other Southern colleagues in protecting Southern rights. That the Northern wing of Cabell’s party was associated with such loathsome men as William H. Seward was not forgotten by the Democrats as they waged their slanderous campaign. They accused Cabell of being a puppet for Seward and Joshua Giddings of Ohio who, along with Benjamin Wade, had become one of the leading figures in the anti-slavery movement in the Midwest. Seward had opposed the Compromise for different reasons than the Democrats, calling for the unconditional admission of California to the Union, and the abolition of slavery from the District of Columbia. This stance incensed and at the same time troubled Democrats. They tried to use this fear to attack and slander Cabell merely for being associated with the same party as Seward.

The Democrats recommended that Cabell and his fellow Southern Whigs break their bond with the abolitionists who they felt dominated the North while in turn allying themselves with the Democratic Party. The “party of Jackson”, as they often mislabeled themselves, was in their own minds the “only party in the North which has stood up, or will stand up, for the rights of the South, as secured and guaranteed by the constitution”. 71 Cabell’s vacillating feelings in regards to the Nashville Convention were also brought forth by his opponents. Initially, in the letter he co-authored and endorsed along with Yulee and Morton, addressed to Governor Brown, Cabell had supported Florida’s participation in the convention. When the convention finally took place, Cabell did not attend even though he was the Whig delegate from West Florida, nominated at Marianna. 72 He was labeled a buffoon who possessed a “quivering uncertain

69 Jacksonville, Florida Republican, September 26, 1850
70 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, September 24, 1850
71 St. Augustine, Ancient City, March 23, 1850
72 Ibid, October 5, 1850
character”. He was further ridiculed for being someone who “professed Whiggery…(but) had not brains enough to classify their principles” in the midst of his political stance.  

To offset the Democratic aggression, the Whigs countered with someone other than Cabell on the campaign trail. Former governor and staunch moderate Richard Keith Call broke his self-imposed silence in order to trek around the state promoting Cabell while at the same time trying to maintain support for Clay’s compromise. Cabell was in Washington during the majority of the campaign and thus relied on his fellow Whigs in the state to carry his standard in his absence. Call and the Whigs began their campaign confident that the passage of the compromise had virtually killed the Nashville Convention and settled the sectional controversy for the time being. The response from the Democratic press and candidates proved they were gravely mistaken. As shown above, the Democrats spun the sectional crisis to make it appear to have been perpetrated by the Northern Whigs and, by 1850, “Northern” was a soiled word south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Call confronted Beard at a Democratic barbeque, marking the beginning of a heated series of interchanges between the two. Call took to heart what he saw as blatant assaults on the Union which he cherished deeply and vowed to fight Beard to the end even though he was not even a candidate for office and had retired to his plantation. At the barbeque, Call scolded Beard in an emotional speech that dripped with nationalistic fervor and sentiment. Disunion was an unthinkable horror for Call and he asked “where would enslaved humanity [white humanity, not black] throughout the earth, turn for succor, hope or comfort, if the great God of nations should withdraw his protecting arm, and permit this sun of liberty to sink in a night of strife and fraternal blood”. Call proved to be a more eloquent speaker than Beard and this aided the Whig cause immensely. Cabell’s bid for reelection was also bolstered by George T. Ward of Tallahassee and David S. Walker who himself was running for registrar of public lands,

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73 Ibid, July 27, 1850
74 Ibid
75 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, September 10, 1850
Beard’s old position, against Mariano D. Papy. Papy, too, was an advocate of the extension of the Missouri Compromise line and he campaigned on this platform.\textsuperscript{76}

Much to the chagrin of Beard and the Democrats, proponents of severing political ties with the North were a small minority in Florida in 1850. Florida was not yet as radical as it would be in 1861 and clearly not on the same level in 1850 as South Carolina was. The Democrats overestimated the degree of anti-Northern sentiment in the state as did their major newspapers. The \textit{Floridian and Journal} in Tallahassee praised Beard for his stance on the compromise in which they reported that he preferred disunion to subservience to the North. The following words from one of Beard’s speeches were quoted in the same issue:

\begin{quote}
Fellow citizens, we all cherish a habitual and hereditary love for the Union: But it is the Union that our sires bled for…an Union of equal rights…an Union to promote the general welfare…not that of a particular section; an Union to secure ‘domestic tranquility’; and not one to expose us to the horrors of a servile Negro war, excited by those who ought to be our friends”\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

These harsh words were just the leverage that Cabell needed. The Democrats made a last ditch effort to soften their appearance by claiming they were not in favor of disunion. The Whigs responded sardonically, asking if Beard was in fact their candidate and if he had not proposed a Southern Confederacy as a viable means of action. Beard and the Democrats had, indeed, run on that platform and the election results of November verified that Florida was not yet ready for such extremism.

When the election finally transpired, the Whigs were able to stave off a furious rally by the Democrats. Cabell and Walker defeated Beard and Papy respectively but it was not the decisive victory the party had enjoyed in 1848 and that many had predicted. The Whigs, despite the passage of Douglas’ “Omnibus Compromise”, had in fact lost valuable momentum over the past two years. While the Whigs proclaimed a great victory for conservatism, compromise and peace, the election results showed the importance of Southern nationalism and how the crisis of 1850 was in many ways a Democratic victory

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid
\textsuperscript{77} Tallahassee, \textit{Floridian and Journal}, September 21, 1850
in disguise.\textsuperscript{78} The Compromise of 1850 had merely acted to prolong the inevitable schism that was destined to shake the foundations that the United States had been founded upon seventy five years prior. The bill was simply another fruitless effort aimed at mending a fatal wound with a simple bandage. These results in no way meant that Floridians approved the compromise, especially since Cabell had initially voted against various measures in Henry Clay’s bill. By choosing the incumbent over Beard, the population showed that Beard had lost this election with his virulent tone more than Cabell had won it.

The majority from Cabell’s 1848 victory was reduced by 86 votes. While this might not seem a monumental change, one must keep in mind that there were a mere 8,581 votes cast in the election overall. Cabell garnered 4,531 votes to Major Beard’s 4,050 giving the Whig 52.8\% of the popular vote. With his campaign closely linked to Cabell’s, and his platform based on that put forth by the Whigs, David Walker was able to defeat Mariano Papy 4,414- 3,785, surpassing Cabell’s margin of victory percentage. Papy attained a meager 46\% of the vote as Walker took over Major Beard’s old post as Registrar of Public lands.\textsuperscript{79}

A further investigation of the statewide results showed that Cabell carried the black belt of Middle Florida where the state’s wealthier landowners resided. This area, long a strong bastion of Whig support, had more to lose with the continuance of the agitation over the slavery question. If the institution of slavery was undermined it would be a result of extremist uncompromising policies of the radical Democratic representatives. Middle Florida, which continued to maintain a tight grasp over Florida politics as well as economic production, was a vital battleground, and one that the Democrats knew they would have to make immense strides in if they were going to wrest power away from the Whigs in future confrontations. The only county in Middle Florida to throw its weight behind Beard was Jefferson, which came as no surprise to Floridians.\textsuperscript{80} Despite being the buckle of the black belt, Monticello and Jefferson County had long proved a Democratic stronghold, forever defying logic in refusing to succumb to the conservatism of the Whigs. Aside from Jefferson County, the Major was able to

\textsuperscript{78} Jacksonville, \textit{Florida Republican}, October 16, 1850
\textsuperscript{79} Pensacola, \textit{Gazette}, November 9, 1850
\textsuperscript{80} Tallahassee, \textit{Florida Sentinel}, February 25, 1851
muster most of his support from the poorer small yeoman farmers in South and East Florida.

The genuine shock for the Whigs came when they failed to retain control of the General Assembly. The Whigs had swept state elections in 1848, but two years later found their rivals in control of the state legislature Congress of the state. Radicalism did not carry the day to the extent that many Democrats hoped it would, but, the party of Calhoun did hold a feeble majority in the Assembly. The Democrats had the advantage of a solitary seat in the Senate and only two in the House. The importance of this Democratic victory lay in the reality that the Assembly would be charged with the task of electing a Senator to represent Florida in the nation’s capital for David Yulee’s term was set to expire in 1851.

When the dust settled from the calamitous events of 1850, Florida remained in the Union but, it was clear that her populace was growing more radical by the day. More importantly, Southern rights was quickly becoming a cause that many within the state would fight for even if that meant breaking the bonds of Union. The Whigs, who had risen to the apex of their power in the years preceding the Compromise of 1850, were slowly being swept aside by their political rivals, the Democratic Party. Florida, once a bastion of conservatism, was now becoming a hotbed of extremism.
Florida and the South had survived yet another crisis as the turbulent year of compromise came to a close. Unfortunately for the state and the nation, the predicament was far from over. Before any sense of calm had set in, South Carolina would again push America to the brink of civil war in 1851 with its continued agitation over what they saw as outrageous and blatant attacks against the South made by the federal government. Providentially for the Union, the rest of the South, especially Virginia, was not yet ready to sever ties; thus South Carolina was ultimately forced to submit to moderate forces. These forces were also prevalent in Florida keeping the state from yielding to fanatical voices and politicians such as John Beard and David Yulee. The planter aristocracy still found some security within the Whig Party, if only for the time being.

As the Democrat led General Assembly converged on Tallahassee to begin its fifth session, the state searched for leadership to navigate the peninsula out of the precarious waters in which it found itself engulfed. The moderate Governor Thomas Brown, a staunch Whig, who had been noticeably absent from the fiery campaigns and election of 1850, used his opening address to the General Assembly as a platform to unite the state by calming partisan and sectional tensions. Brown confronted the issues that had brought the nation to the brink of dissolution by claiming “except for a common government, the South, the East, the Middle and the West, may be said to have no other community of interest…each stands isolated…perhaps viewing the other with more or
less jealously”.¹ This statement might at first glance appear the opening of a speech one
would expect to hear from an extremist. Yet, to the contrary, Brown used this as a means
to reaffirm his previous stance that the Union could endure as long as all those involved
sacrificed to preserve the present situation. Brown also commented on the Compromise
of 1850 by acknowledging that the “just expectations of the people of this state” were not
met in their entirety by the measures of the bill while also admitting that there was no
surrender as it is always necessary for both parties in a conflict to acquiesce in order to
obtain a reasonable settlement.²

The one issue of the compromise Brown deemed worthy enough to fight for was
the enforcement of the new Fugitive Slave Act. A majority of Southerners had long been
in accordance with the need for a strong law to deter abolitionists and their sympathizers
from meddling in what the South felt were its internal affairs. While Brown called on the
people of the country to uphold the law, his conservative demeanor was noticeably
present when he issued a further warning to radicals in the South as well as those in the
North.³ Even though Brown was still a conservative and a unionist, there was evidence
of a minor transformation in the closing section of his speech when he drew a line in
terms of infringements upon the South in reference to the Fugitive Slave Laws. Brown
stayed true to his Southern sentiments by proclaiming that this law, at all costs, must be
obeyed by the North. Failure to do so would lead to a catastrophe that would doom the
entire nation. Brown relinquished to the Assembly the authority to act in response to any
encroachment upon the rights of the South in the problem of fugitive slaves. He stated
that “in the event of a repeal of the Fugitive Slave Bill, or the consummation of any other
aggressive measure” he would not oppose the proclamation to convoke a “Convention of
the people of this State…with harmonious action with our sister States of the South”.

Radicals in the South had been looking for grounds with which to dissolve the bonds of
Union and, ironically, one of the most conservative pro-unionists in Florida had delivered
to them a foundation on which they could base their future claims. In closing his speech,

¹ Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of
Florida, November 25, 1850, pg. 9
² Florida House Journal, November 25, 1850, pg. 18-19
³ Ibid, pg. 19
Brown did distance himself from the fire eaters, advancing his moderation by outlining the difficulties any proposed Southern convention would entail.\(^4\)

The Assembly wasted no time in taking its executive’s words to heart, passing Resolution Fifteen, which gave the Governor the power to call a convention in retaliation to a repeal of or assault on the Fugitive Slave Act. The resolution carried an ambiguous tone and word selection which gave the state more leeway in determining what constituted an aggressive act.\(^5\) This was a clear victory for the more radical factions.

Less than two weeks later, the governing body was tested when it became clear, at least to those in Florida, that the Northern Congressmen in Washington and their constituents had a “fixed and determined purpose… to resist, obstruct, defeat and actually nullify the Fugitive Slave Bill”.\(^6\)

There was no concrete evidence for such claims, yet the mere fact that Northerners controlled a majority of Congress was enough to strike fear into the hearts of many Southerners. The South could not afford to be reactionary any longer. They could not even heed the concessions made by Governor Brown, but, rather, the time had come for the state and region to become proactive, to control their own destiny and that of their peculiar institution without having it dictated to them by the North. Here were the failures of the Compromise of 1850 in the eyes of many Southern Democrats. The South had been submissive in regards to Henry Clay and Stephen Douglas’ calls for reconciliation. They had not abided by John C. Calhoun’s course and they were in turn paying the consequences of their inaction. The time for compromise, or even argument, had passed. All that was left was a call for immediate action. The House resolved that the Florida delegation in the national Congress was instructed to “enter a protest against the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Bill”. The resolution was passed by an overwhelming 30-5 margin and was later certified by the Senate and forwarded to Washington. Ten days later a bill was introduced which called for the repealing of acts designated in 1849 which hindered the state from barring the migration of free blacks to Florida.\(^7\)

\(^4\) Ibid
\(^5\) Ibid, pg. 24
\(^6\) Ibid, December 10, 1850, pg. 91
\(^7\) Ibid, December 20, 1850, pg. 131
Unfortunately for moderates and Unionists alike, the new year saw a surge in extremism sweep across the state and, in the winter of 1851 various fire eaters took it upon themselves to call several independent Southern Rights Conventions to be held at a variety of locations throughout the state. These conventions would serve to highlight Florida’s political landscape in the winter and spring of 1851. The Committee on Federal Relations of the State of Florida issued a majority report before the General Assembly in December formalizing the state’s sentiments towards the perceived intrusions made by the Federal Government. It also recommended what actions should be taken in the future in order to insure that Florida and its sister states would be allowed to continue their peaceful existence inside or outside the Union. The report affirmed that the time for “mere abstract propositions on the subject of the rights of slaveholders, or vague threats of what the South will be disposed to do, on the contingency of any specified encroachment upon those rights” had passed.  

The time had come for action in the form of a Southern Convention, one with more power and credibility than the ill-fated Nashville Convention. The report alluded to past radical sentiments by reiterating, “the past is irrevocable, but the future is before us, to be won or lost according to as we are true or false to ourselves”. The authors who felt validated in their convictions were confident that these actions were the only means by which their lifestyle could be preserved. To reinforce their cause, they evoked the classics by proclaiming “in the words of the old Roman, ‘it is not in our stars but in ourselves’”. Southerners conceded that the region might not persevere without the concerted effort of its citizens, uniting to state their case and willing to fight for their cause. The South was painted as an oppressed region, refused permission to defend its constitutional rights. That a large portion of the population began to take these words to heart illustrated the changing nature of the state’s attitude and opened avenues for further extremism. This is the terminology that fire eaters, largely from the Palmetto state, had been looking forward to hearing from the remainder of the South during the constitutional crises of the 1830’s, and 1850. For the time being, it looked as if South

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8 Ibid, December 30, 1850, pg. 166
9 Ibid
10 Ibid
Carolina had at least one ally in Florida during the crisis of 1851, no matter how inconsequential aid from the peninsula state would.

As the report given by the Committee of Federal Relations progressed it evolved into a fire eating propaganda tool that likened the South’s strife to that of the thirteen colonies in relation to England in the years leading up to the outbreak of the American Revolution. They compared the federal government to the “tyrannical and oppressive” regime of King George III, which had been overthrown only through the use of force by a united and determined people. 11 These claims were an avenue into a debate on states rights, which, in turn, grew to be a justification for secession. Ironically, allusions to bondage and subservience to the federal government (which rapidly took the place of the “North”) were implanted in order to craft a valid defense for the institution of chattel slavery.

Walker Anderson, chairman of the committee and chief author of the report concluded by alleging that any further “concession by the South, for the sake of Union has now been made to the very verge of dishonour (sic), and every Southern heart revolts at submission to further injustice”. 12 Many have claimed that “honor (was) the keystone of the slaveholding South’s morality” and an attack on the South was a personal affront to one’s honor, which left the victim with one choice, to retaliate and defend his “Cavalier Chivalric” society. 13 Anderson and the committee were grateful that Governor Brown’s previously unwavering stance opposing a Southern Convention had softened. They were gratified that the governor had opened the door to further action but they were less than ecstatic at his moderation and conservatism. They said the abolitionists in the North were guilty of perpetuating further crisis by their unyielding actions. They went further by stating that, if the South was forced to secede, they would not be the guilty party for “there would be no then no Union to love, for its spirit and its life will have past away, when the weaker party have to resort to separation to escape the tyranny of the stronger”. 14 The perceived need to unite the South and the state was evident in the language of the report. The document played on the fears of the citizens while labeling

11 Ibid, pg. 168
12 Ibid, pg. 172
13 Bertram Wyatt-Brown. Southern Honor, Ethics and Behavior in the Old South. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) pg. vii
14 House Journal, December 30, 1850, pg. 173
those who resisted oppression as patriots working for independence rather than disunion. The message was brought to a close with a plea for the “adoption of sundry resolutions asserting the rights of secession…and also a bill providing for the calling of a Convention of the People of Florida”.  

The General Assembly wasted no time in resolving that the United States was formed by separate sovereign entities that had the right to renounce their allegiance to the confederacy at any time they felt compelled to do so. Ironically, this should not have applied to Florida since it entered the Union only in 1845, but the fanatics of the day overlooked that detail. The third resolution passed strengthened the first in maintaining the right to withdraw from the Union if an overt act was committed against the sovereign state. The resolutions went on to announce to the nation that Florida and the South had been victimized by the Compromise of 1850 but that the state would abide by the bill because “in her heart she was not a proponent of disunion.” This sentiment was in stark contrast to the other resolutions which bestowed upon the state the right to extract itself from the Union. Despite his defeat at the hands of the moderate Cabell in the election a month earlier, Major Beard’s fiery words were quoted in the sixth resolution where he claimed that Florida did not posses a “blind idolatry to a mere name,” the Union. In spite of the ardent rhetoric of the bill, it was concluded by a pledge to adhere, at least for the time being, to the bonds of Union, as long as the rights of the South were upheld and most importantly, the Fugitive Slave Bill was enforced.

While very few in Florida advocated immediate secession, the state was being transformed into a credible ally for the fire eaters in South Carolina. A second bill was passed by the House in which the right to call a convention in Florida in response to any future aggressive action by the North was delegated to the Assembly. Such an action was defined as a repeal or change to the Fugitive Slave Bill, any proposed measure to abolish slavery as an institution in the District of Columbia or further prohibition and exclusion of slavery from territories organized in the future. While it is imaginable that few in Washington noticed Florida’s defiant proclamations, they serve as an essential tool to uncover the origins of secession and further help to illuminate changing public opinion

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15 Ibid, pg. 173
16 Ibid, pg. 174
17 Ibid
within the state. It also mirrored radicalism throughout the Deep South, especially in South Carolina.

Not everyone in Florida agreed with this dogmatic approach as seen by a minority report from the House Committee on Federal Relations delivered by Bolling Baker on January 14, 1851. Hopkins began the retort by agreeing with the majority that the right of secession was a natural right. The report differed in that it felt that “as a constitutional right, we hold the doctrine to be absurd.”\textsuperscript{18} It also granted that John C. Calhoun was correct in asserting that secession was born and bred in the North following the War of 1812 and the Hartford Convention. Additionally they noted that to look to secession as a means of maintaining the peace was equally illogical and that “even its most sanguine advocates avow, that its attempted exercise must be followed by war.”\textsuperscript{19} This notion was one that was held by Governor Brown, Richard Keith Call and a majority of Whigs in the state. They asserted that secession was not a viable option unless the ultimate goal was disunion.

With that said, the minority also acknowledged that the federal government had no constitutional right to restrain a state from seceding and that this was why secession would lead to war. Armed conflict would become the only means to preserve the Union. Baker challenged the majority to provide an adequate defense for their call for rebellion. In this, the minority claimed that it was impossible to differentiate between secession and revolution, they were in fact one and the same.\textsuperscript{20}

This was the major argument put forth. Baker, looking at the big picture, was more inclined to undertake a thorough investigation of what the consequences of these actions might produce. The minority further distanced itself from the fanatic nature of the initial report put forth by Walker Anderson by proclaiming that they did not view the Compromise of 1850 as a “lamentable triumph” of the “abolition principles” in a spirit of “malignant and obdurate hostility to the South.”\textsuperscript{21} It was the conclusion of Baker that the minority would demonstrate unyielding support for their fellow Southern statesmen if they perceived the actions taken by the federal government to be conducted in a vengeful

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, January 14, 1851, pg. 299
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, pg. 300
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid
manner towards the region. Then, and only then would they consider secession. Since they did not deem this to be the case, the minority offered a substitute bill which they believed would better “constitute a platform upon which all may firmly stand, who value the integrity of the Union and the rights of the South”. 22

The new bill differed only in its tone. It still called for the governor to use his discretion in calling a convention if the South suffered further unprovoked provocation at the hands of the North. The resolution included general reminders that reaffirmed the interpretation of the constitution’s rights or lack thereof to prohibit the expansion of slavery, as well as a warning to citizens of the free states which asked them not to interfere with the peculiar institution. The bill ended with advice on how to arrange and conduct a convention within Florida should future actions by the North render this a viable option and make secession a reality. 23 An additional bill was also introduced before the House on January 18 which denounced the Omnibus bill, calling into question how it could be labeled a compromise when only the South gave in. It further attested to Florida’s lack of preparedness to resist the will of the nation alone. The bill did claim that the state was determined to aid its Southern allies should the situation arise where it was necessary to do so. 24

The fifth session of Florida’s General Assembly proved a battleground of ideology where radicals continually argued with moderates concerning the path the state and the region should pursue.

Those in favor of disunion were not appeased by the measures debated on but ultimately not ratified by Florida’s Senate. They considered organization the key component in the success of their ultimate aim of protecting slavery and other Southern rights at all costs. Immediately following Edward C. Cabell’s reelection, a hastily formed convention was called in Tallahassee by fire eating citizens of Leon County. This convention laid the groundwork for Southern Rights Associations that emerged in Leon, Gadsden, Jefferson and Madison Counties over the next few months. It is essential to note that out of these four counties, three had been staunchly Whig, although all were located in the black belt and all four would play vital roles in the secession of Florida in 1861. These associations surpassed the extremist emotions of the Assembly by pledging

22 Ibid, pg. 301
23 Ibid, pg. 303
24 Ibid, January 18, 1851, pg. 354
to vote only for openly zealous advocates of Southern Rights. They also agreed to boycott Northern firms professing abolition while at the same time giving preference to products of Southern manufacturers. The constitution adopted by the association in Gadsden County vowed to maintain the doctrine of states rights as defined by the resolutions of similar societies in Kentucky and Virginia.\textsuperscript{25}

The Southern Rights Association of Madison County met at the Madison Courthouse on June 7, 1851. The keynote address was given by Madison County’s John C. McGehee whose importance to secession would be felt ten years later when he presided over Florida’s Secession Convention. His speech echoed many sentiments expressed previously by Democrats in Florida’s legislature. He charged the federal government with intending to overthrow Southern rights through its actions, especially the Compromise of 1850. McGehee followed that accusation with an attack on moderates throughout the South, labeling them weak and submissive. McGehee had faith in his fellow Southerners but this confidence was dealt a fatal blow when the Nashville Convention, at which he was a delegate representing Middle Florida for the Democrats, amounted to nothing. McGehee was disappointed but at the same time hopeful that through actions such as the creation of the Southern Rights Associations throughout Florida and the Deep South, their voices would be heard, their warning heeded and their goals finally accomplished.\textsuperscript{26}

McGehee offered a pledge, readily accepted by those in attendance. He vowed no longer to “remain silent…under indignity and insult”.\textsuperscript{27} Yet again he confronted Governor Brown and the moderates whom he blamed for what the radicals perceived as embarrassing inaction on the part of the South in the face of what they felt was a viable and potentially mortal threat. He lauded the people of Madison County for their enthusiasm in sending him to the second convention in Tennessee, which was meant to atone for the ineffectiveness of the initial meeting. Madison County elected McGehee its spokesperson, not waiting for Florida to initiate participation in this second convention.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, June 7, 1851
\textsuperscript{26} “Address of John C. McGehee Before the Southern Rights Association of Madison County, June 7, 1851” \textit{Florida Historical Quarterly}, V, issue 2, pg. 68
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, pg. 69
McGehee, however, was unprepared for the type of reaction the Florida press accorded the convention while he was in Tennessee. The denunciations were a slap in the face of the South, and McGehee was appalled to learn that his “name was used as a watchword of clamor and tumult to carry the crowd in opposition to principles I was known to entertain and advocate”. McGehee could not fathom why people would oppose what he viewed a noble and just campaign to maintain a Southern lifestyle to which most were devoted. Unlike the Whigs and other moderates who felt, rightfully so, that extremists antagonizing the situation would culminate in disaster for the South, McGehee felt that radical measures were needed to safeguard Southern rights.

McGehee, deviating from others before him, highlighted slavery as the main issue at stake. While others alluded to it and there is no doubt as to what “rights” they referred when they spoke of defending Southern rights, McGehee actually articulated the need for the system and what might occur should it be attacked and dismantled. He further exclaimed that “Florida is a slave state…by her constitution and laws the right of property in slaves is guaranteed and protected…the state as our sovereign is bound to protect every citizen equally and alike in the enjoyment of his life, liberty, and property”. McGehee challenged Governor Brown to provide protection for this cause. The fire eater also readily employed common propaganda tactics in order to strike fear into the hearts of Floridians, alluding to gruesome images of mass rebellion, anarchy and slaughter should abolitionists be afforded too much power in governing the nation. He evoked scenes of horror of the consequences of the slave rebellion in Santo Domingo. McGehee reiterated his belief that the South was built on a pillar of white supremacy that would be shaken if the “naturally lazy, indolent, improvident and unscrupulous” black race was allowed the basic freedoms that he and his allies harped on endlessly in their cries for justice.

The radicalism of John C. McGehee’s words was unmistakeable in the manner in which he attacked not only slaves, abolitionists and Northerners, but, in addition fellow Southerners who he depicted as cowards and traitors for not employing fanatical measures in order to protect the institutions of Southern society. McGehee echoed the

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28 Ibid, pg. 71
29 Ibid, pg. 81
30 Ibid, pg. 86
sentiments of the disunionists when he concluded his address, by claiming he expected others to respond with a “determination to spend our lives or meet our deaths in her cause”. At a Fourth of July picnic in Madison held by the Southern Rights Association, the fire eaters proudly flaunted their mottoes “equality in the Union or Independence out of it” and “a Southern Confederacy should be the motto of every Southern man”. By calling on the patriotism of every Southerner, the radicals challenged their opposition to rally to the cause. In Leon County an estimated 10% of the voting population belonged to the Southern Rights Association while that number ran as high as 33% in McGehee’s home county of Madison.

Much to the vexation of the fire eaters, their radical convictions were not widely accepted and essentially helped to impel a stronger, more concerted Unionist movement in the state. The Democrats were preparing their struggles for the inevitable future crisis with these committees and the fervent declarations they professed. The crusade against extremism mushroomed throughout the South after the ill-fated Nashville Convention. The second Nashville Convention, held in November 1850, was scarcely attended, with Texas and Arkansas not bothering to send delegates. The Whig press rejoiced in the failure of the convention claiming that the lack of support should “check any attempt to get up bastard representations by Court House meetings, in which not a tenth of the people are represented”. While the Democrats had gained some ground in the 1850 election, the radical wing of the party’s over-zealous disunionist program clearly alienated a large faction of the South which still believed in the concept of the Union. The momentum lost by the radicals was evident during the fifth session of Florida’s General Assembly. David Levy Yulee’s term as United States Senator was set to expire in 1852 and the legislature was charged with either returning Yulee to Washington or replacing him. Yulee’s dedication to Calhoun’s principles had alienated him from most moderates in the state, Whigs and Democrats alike. Under the guise of an attack on his ambitious railroad construction ventures, members of the General Assembly began a campaign to remove Yulee from his seat.

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31 Ibid, pg. 88
32 Tallahassee, Floridian, July 19, 1851
34 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, January 28, 1851
Irrespective of the growing opposition to Yulee, most in Florida naturally assumed that the Democrats would unquestioningly re-elect him. The Democrats held a 31-28 advantage in the legislature with 30 votes necessary to constitute a majority. Consequently, it was assumed that they would vote along strict party lines, returning the Senator to his seat. In reality, however, Yulee had irritated members of his own party with his radicalism, thus jeopardizing his reelection bid. Furthermore south Floridians believed the Senator had ignored and neglected their region. The sparsely populated counties of Hillsborough and Dade did have enough influence to pull voters from Yulee’s ranks. This, coupled with the opposition to Yulee’s railroad endeavors, was enough to prevent the needed majority. Yulee favored a rail line from Fernandina on the Atlantic Coast to Cedar Key on the Gulf of Mexico. Democrats in Key West suspected that this railroad would steer business away from Key West’s docks. Furthermore, would-be rival railroad entrepreneurs and businessmen from Yulee’s native region in northeastern Florida additionally resisted his project. Many of these adversaries were in favor of a line running from Jacksonville to Pensacola and they did not balk at the prospect of crippling Yulee.35

Former governor Richard Keith Call, who had also favored the Jacksonville to Pensacola railroad line to which Yulee had objected, submitted a proposal to the current Governor, Thomas Brown, in early 1851, laying out his plan for the panhandle venture. Brown took this opportunity to introduce a diagram of an internal improvement board which he had long favored. He made his recommendation to the legislature during the fifth session. Among the topics included in Brown’s proposed measure was an enhancement of the state’s education system as well as reviving the old Whig mainstay of government controlled banking. Public education was essential to Brown as Florida’s illiteracy rate among school-age children was embarrassingly close to 66%.36 Brown was quoted as saying that he hoped the internal improvements would help to eliminate “local disorganized projects” which Herbert J. Doherty took to mean David Yulee’s proposed

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36 Florida Senate Journal, December 9, 1850, pg. 86-87
cross-state railroad. The Assembly created a board which would consist of members elected by the governing body from each judicial district in addition to permanent members appointed by and including the governor himself. Call was in turn appointed as a board member by Brown.

When the vote to fill the Senate seat commenced, both the first and second ballots saw Yulee receive 29 votes with no opposition. The remainder of the ballot was left blank in protest. On the third ballot, Yulee’s support slipped to 28 votes. The results of the fourth ballot stunned all those present by declaring Key West native and future Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory as the victor with 31 votes. The votes were amassed from a combination of twenty-four Whigs and seven disillusioned Democrats. Yulee would not go down without a fight as he protested the assembly’s decision based on the verity that he had scored a 29-0 victory on the initial two ballots. His argument held little weight and Mallory was certified as Florida’s new Senator.

Mallory, who was half Irish and half Connecticut Yankee, was born in Trinidad in 1813, the son of a sea captain. In 1820 he was stranded in Key West upon the death of his father. Mallory continued to reside there and became a successful marine lawyer before turning his attention to politics and the Democratic Party. Upon hearing his name mentioned as the nominee for the Senatorial seat, Mallory was dismayed since he did not favor a split within the ranks of Florida’s Democrats. The discarding of a party member paralleled the 1849 election when disaffected Whigs had united with Democrats to defeat George T. Ward. Mallory, as a Democrat, was not the first choice of the Whigs, but since they constituted a minority in the Assembly, he was viewed as being the lesser of two evils in contrast to the fire eating protégé of Calhoun. Democrats who favored Yulee tried to point out that Mallory had similar attitudes in relation to the sectional conflict in an effort to persuade the Whigs to reconsider their decision. Mallory had openly supported the Nashville Convention and was even elected as an alternate delegate to the meeting. The Democratic press declared Mallory’s election a sign that Whigs had

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38 Florida House Journal, January 12, 1851, pg. 278-279
40 Dorothy Dodd. “The Secession Movement in Florida, Part I”, pg. 15
41 Ibid, pg. 16
approved states rights and the pro-Southern course of action. The Whigs struck back with the contention that Mallory’s inexperience in dealing with national issues was a sign that his genuine feelings were not yet known because they had yet to be publicly displayed. In reality, the Whigs had a valid point since he declared in a letter written during the Nashville Convention and published in the *Floridian and Journal* “In Union is our safety”. Tallahassee’s *Florida Sentinel* was skeptical about Mallory’s election nonetheless maintaining the Whigs had “bought a pig in a poke” in the Key West attorney.

While conservatism had quelled the flames of extremism once again, the power of the Democratic Party as a whole was clearly growing in comparison with their rival. The Nashville Convention had been a failure for the Democrats and the fire-eating Yulee had been replaced by a more moderate Democrat in Mallory. All hope was not lost for the secessionists. Radicals such as John C. McGehee were only beginning to stir the pot and many in Florida were beginning to look north to South Carolina for guidance.

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42 St. Augustine, *Ancient City*, January 25, 1851
43 Tallahassee, *Floridian and Journal*, February 8, 1851
44 Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, February 4, 1851
CHAPTER IV
THE COLLAPSE OF THE OPPOSITION

Florida clearly was not ready to follow South Carolina into the abyss of secession in 1850 or 1851, but the latest election returns did show an alarming trend in the shifting mindset of Florida voters. The stout confidence Floridians held in the Whig Party in 1848 had been shaken by 1850. When the Whigs detected this apparent loss of influence within the state, they designed their new course of action to directly meet the challenges set forth by the Democrats. Florida and the nation had averted a civil war for the time being but had in no way weathered the political maelstrom that faced the nation. As the decade of the 1850’s progressed, these divisions became more apparent. Whigs were vexed at the prospect of being labeled the enemy of the South, which was exactly the goal of the extremists within the Democratic Party. The diminished power Whigs held in 1850 as compared to 1848 was an indication of the lack of confidence the voting public had in the party’s ability and, more importantly, desire to defend slavery and Southern rights at all costs. This trepidation mobilized the moderates to create Constitutional Union Clubs within Florida as well as throughout the rest of the South to combat the Southern Rights Associations.

The movement originated in Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama before making its way further south. It drew the attention of many prominent Southern statesmen who were not eager to break the bonds of Union. In Florida, former governor and devout conservative Richard Keith Call took keen interest in this faction since he always had been and always would be a unionist. Call was interested in attracting as many
disillusioned Democrats as possible to the unionist banner. Consequently the Union camp was composed of both Whigs and Democrats in Florida. These unionists shared anxieties over the greater visibility of radical factions in both North and South. In 1851 Call paid a visit to the North, returning to Tallahassee with a new-found sense of optimism in his cause. He was encouraged by the rapid development of the region’s transportation structure which he felt would help to bind the two disparate sections of the country closer together. Despite witnessing first hand abolition societies and their sympathizers in the North, he downplayed their role within the greater Northern society and portrayed them as a small minority who did not possess enough muscle to bully the South into relinquishing supremacy over its black population. Call urged all Southerners to join the Union Party, forecasting that this organization would pave the way for a serene decade ahead.¹

Call campaigned vigorously in support of the Union Party making speeches and striving to persuade his peers to enlist in his crusade against radicalism. Call asserted that “the man who loves party more than he loves his country, who contracts his patriotism…is unworthy of the name of American Citizen”.² This plea was an effort to lure Democrats away from the rigid lines of partisan politics. To Call, unionism was the central objective that he desired the nation to achieve and maintain. He knew his ultimate goal of a unified National Union Party was virtually unattainable and, he therefore turned his efforts towards the South which he also knew would be a daunting task. In spite of the fact that he conceded that old party ties, prejudices and sectional differences were too much to overcome nationally, Call did not give up hope that a Southern party could be founded. He felt that this measure, the creation of absolute unity within the region, was the sole means to preserve the Union. However, his proposals were scoffed at by Democrats who suspected the Whigs were a party “in a most fearful decline”.³ They mocked Call and his peaceful overtures stating “we should have thought much of General Call’s views…if he had advanced them when the Whig Party had something beside a

² Ibid
³ Tallahassee, Floridian and Journal, December 27, 1851
It became evident that the Whigs had indeed lost much of their power as 1851 drew to a close.

Public pro-Union meetings, which were created to rival the Southern Rights Associations, were for the most part fueled by Whigs, although one such gathering took place in Key West and was sponsored by pro-Mallory Democrats. The *Florida Sentinel* made notice of various attempts to create a Union Party in Georgia. The paper endorsed this party and encouraged Florida to follow the lead of its northern neighbor by declaring “whenever a Union Party shall be organized on broad, generous, liberal, constitutional ground, we propose to be with it.” Southerners were not the only ones who opposed extremists. In New York various merchants and businessmen sanctioned unionist meetings and associations to combat free-soil elements in both the National Whig and Democratic Parties.

Call was not isolated in his labors as he was joined by fellow Whig Edward Carrington Cabell. Cabell, who represented Florida in the United States House of Representatives, was fearful of the impending disintegration of the national party in an election year. Like Call, he saw a Union Party as the best possible alternative to a splintered Whig party. Cabell was infuriated by the prospects of free-soil Whigs dominating the Party and, by 1852, it became evident to him that his enemies were not abiding by their earlier assurances to tolerate the strict enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act. In a speech before Congress in Washington, he distanced himself from the majority of the national Whig Party by throwing all his weight behind the Constitutional Unionist faction of the party. Cabell supported Millard Fillmore as the Whig presidential candidate because he believed his nomination would be the only hope of the party in the South. Cabell would eventually ally himself with future secessionist and Confederate Secretary of State Robert Toombs as well as future Vice President of the Confederacy Alexander Stephens, both from Georgia, in stern opposition to “Old Fuss and Feathers,” Winfield Scott’s bid for the presidency. Despite the efforts of Call and Cabell, Florida’s
Union Party never achieved the same status it had attained in Georgia or Alabama. Deep-rooted political animosity and profoundly entrenched party lines were stronger in Florida than in other Southern states, save for possibly South Carolina.9

The failure of the Whigs to consolidate power and generate a productive opposition to the growth of fanaticism in Florida was never more evident than in the gubernatorial election of 1852. Yulee had been one of Calhoun’s disciples, but from his mentor’s death in 1850 until the 1852 campaign, the Floridian had stood steadfastly alone in the state in his unwavering allegiance to South Carolina’s fire eating circle; indeed, he was one of Florida’s only radicals with any degree of popularity. The campaign and election of 1852 saw the birth of a new extremist group known as the “South Carolina School” of Florida politics. This group, which would be responsible for pushing the state towards secession in 1861, consisted of disunionists whose supreme aim was to protect Southern Rights and the institution of slavery.

The Democrats were better equipped to handle the turmoil of sectional conflict in 1851 than the Whigs. The party of Jackson, as they still falsely fashioned themselves, drew on their rich history as a powerful force in American politics to hold the party together. The Democrats also knew they needed to distance themselves from the fiery image born out of the Crisis of 1850. While they did not want to abandon the very pillars upon which their scorching rhetoric was based, they realized that in an election year, sacrifices had to be made. They toned down their disunionist stance and desperately struggled to present a more peaceful demeanor. When the Democrats gathered in April to hammer out their platform for the upcoming state elections, they met amid an atmosphere of moderation, adopting a platform that was perceived as inoffensive and temperate in character.

The Democrats fashioned themselves as the party of the South and thus retreated from the vindictive overtly confrontational course that their previous campaigns had pursued. They denounced further agitation of the slavery question which they now understood to be “mischievous and unwise”.10 The Whigs, however, did not believe that their rivals had turned over a new leaf. They saw these actions as what they were, a ploy

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9 Ibid
10 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, April 27, 1852
to obtain votes and guarantee the election of a Democrat to the governorship to replace the moderate Thomas Brown. The *Florida Sentinel* asked “do they imagine that they can cause the people to forget their course but a short time ago, when some of them declared that the compromise ‘tore the Constitution to tatters’, and they would rather see the Union dissolved”. ¹¹ They urged Floridians to look to the past to see the true nature of the Democrats and called on them not to be duped by loquacious prose which they claimed was orchestrated in such a manner as to sway the voting populace into their camp. ¹²

It took nine ballots for the Democrats to select their candidate. Ironically, the Democrats, who now claimed to be a more moderate entity, chose fire eating James Broome to headline their ticket. Broome, leader of the “South Carolina School” had migrated to Leon County from South Carolina in 1837 and was labeled a “Secessionist in the abstract and the concrete, of the strictest sect of the South Carolina seperationists”. ¹³ This selection appeased the radicals in the party who had quietly opposed any softening of the party’s image. The nomination also demonstrated that the Democrats were confident enough in the validity and righteousness of their principles to take this risk. The Democrats were convinced that the Whigs were too badly divided as a direct result of the growth of the Constitutional Party to pose a legitimate threat. The Democrats were not yet a unified extremist camp and their nomination of the moderate Augustus E. Maxwell best illustrated this line of thinking. Unlike Broome, who had vehemently opposed the Compromise of 1850, Maxwell had defended it. Maxwell was an intelligent choice for the Democrats because he was well known and popular across party lines.

Once more the Whigs opted for separate county meetings to select their candidates. The party felt that staging separate caucuses would create a tighter and more genuine bond with a larger bulk of the population. These assemblies were held in Jackson, Santa Rosa, Jefferson, Marion, Columbia and Duval counties. The Duval caucus threatened to abandon the national party if it fell under the control of Northern free-soilers. The party’s platform also foreshadowed the emergence of the Nativists and Know-Nothing Party, which would follow the Whigs in the middle part of the decade as the chief opposition to the Democrats. The party resolved that the Compromise of 1850

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¹¹ Ibid, June 8, 1852
¹² Ibid, May 11, 1852
¹³ Marianna, *Florida Whig*, May 11, 1852
must be the final settlement of the sectional issues that had almost engulfed the nation in civil war. They naively rallied behind the bill as the ultimate savior of the Union. Out of these meetings emerged a demand for a statewide convention which was held on July, 14 in Tallahassee. The purpose of this convention was to display the solidarity, strength and resolve of the Florida Whigs.  

In addition to displaying unwavering allegiance to Clay’s compromise, the Whigs endorsed Fillmore’s presidential candidacy as well as selecting George Ward as their candidate for governor along with supporting Cabell’s reelection bid. Unfortunately for the Florida Whigs, the national party was growing more divided by the day. As they had in Florida, Whigs from across the South tried in vain to secure sponsorship for the finality of the Compromise from their Northern brethren. This proposal fell on deaf ears and, to protest this rejection, the Southern Whigs in Congress walked out on their party and published an *Address of Southern Whigs to the Whigs of the United States*. In this address, they chastised the national party for its refusal to sanction the compromise as standing for the end to sectional politics and debate. This maneuver was aimed at securing a peace of mind that would come with the party’s acceptance of the Omnibus Bill which would furthermore protect the South from future assaults against the institution of slavery.  

The Whig national convention was set to commence on June 16 in Baltimore. In the days leading up the convention, Cabell once again addressed the Northern faction of his party and issued a stern warning. When asked if he intended to join the ranks of the Democrats, he replied with a resounding denunciation of the opposition but, alluded to his growing dissatisfaction with his own party. Cabell believed he spoke for the majority of Southern Whigs when he proclaimed “if the Northern Whigs cannot meet us here (Compromise); if they are resolved to go on with slavery agitation, and to repeal the fugitive slave law, the party ought not to be preserved”.  

It was evident to Cabell that agitation would lead to greater sectional strife which could only conclude with a bloody civil war. That Cabell observed that disorder could stem from his own party’s actions displayed his swelling suspicion of the Northern wing of the party. In Baltimore, the

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14 *Ibid*, May, 4, 1852
15 *Ibid*
party appeased its Southern constituents by adopting the Compromise as its platform, which they naively pronounced would draw the sectional calamity to a close.

The selection of a platform that placated the South was viewed as an affront to the moral values of the anti-slavery bloc of the Whigs. In all reality, they were not strong enough to pose meaningful resistance to the desires of the Southerners so they conceded what they viewed as a minor setback. In return for their compliance, the anti-slavery Whigs demanded that concessions be made in their favor as well. They requested the improbable; Southern support for Winfield Scott as opposed to Millard Fillmore. In the end, the improbable proved not to be impossible as several Southern delegates threw their weight behind Scott who finally triumphed on the fifty-third ballot. The Southerners were rewarded for their allegiance when William Graham of North Carolina was chosen as Scott’s running-mate. These conciliations did not mollify various Northerners who walked out on the convention and the party, forecasting the potential demise of the party while subsequently giving birth to the Free Soil Party and ultimately the Republicans.

The nomination of Scott drew scorn from the majority of Southerners. Their derision was more evident in Florida where the public held an old grudge against the general. This disdain found its roots in Scott’s unappealing assessment of Floridians made in 1836 during the Second Seminole War. He had ridiculed and lambasted the citizens when he issued Order #48, accusing them of what he deemed cowardly actions in the face of relentless Indian attacks. He questioned their patriotism and belittled them for the panic which they displayed. The Hero of Churubusco said he had “the misfortune to command a handful of brave troops in the midst of such a population”. In an attempt to rectify the situation and hopefully lure the state into his ranks, Scott acknowledged that his comments were harsh and, based on new evidence and information they were in fact unwarranted. Scott did not apologize and the majority of Floridians could not see past his hubris. In principle, Florida’s Whig newspapers hesitantly supported Scott since he was their nominee but they accepted the reality that the best they could hope for was a strict adherence to the principles of the Compromise. Several Whigs, such as Colonel

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17 Nevins, Ordeal of The Union, Volume I, pg. 27-29
18 Tallahassee, Floridian and Journal, May 22, 1852
19 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, July, 6, 1852
20 Pensacola, Gazette, June 26, 1852

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Thomas Waddell of Fayettsville, speculated that a Scott victory in 1852 would pave the way for William H. Seward’s nomination in 1856. The Democrats added fuel to the anti-Scott fire by condemning the General since his candidacy had recently been endorsed by known Pennsylvania abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens.

The Democratic national convention had another thought in mind when it adjourned. It provided a shocking compromise candidate in New Hampshire’s Franklin Pierce. Pierce’s nomination was celebrated as a victory for Southern rights. Pierce was a doughface and was perceived highly malleable, someone the powerful Southern wing of the party could control. The platform hammered out mirrored that of the Whigs. On paper, it seemed that the Democrats extolled similar virtues and goals since the creed of the party centered on upholding the Compromise of 1850 while ending all agitation of the slavery question. The selection was met with praise and adulation from Florida’s moderate democrats such as Augustus Maxwell. Maxwell delivered a verbose speech before Florida’s Democratic ratifying committee in which he placed the title of “Defender of the Compromise” upon Pierce. His speech was well received by the audience. Ironically, James Broome, who accompanied Maxwell on Florida’s Democratic ticket, followed the moderate with a scathing speech which denounced the Compromise. He was rewarded with a larger and more genuine ovation from those present.

Radicalism was not dead by a long shot in Florida as the upcoming election was to prove. Though the Democrats had downplayed the extremism in their message, Broome’s nomination for governor and the immense support he received frightened moderates and unionists alike. Broome was considered by many the leader of the “South Carolina School” of politics who desired to replicate the Palmetto State in Florida and had fervently encouraged migration south in the previous decades. It was his hope to surround himself with as many followers and allies as possible who all held the same radical vision for the state and the South. Broome was a wily politician who realized that in order to achieve his lofty ambitions, he would have to make sacrifices and

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21 Tallahassee, *Floridian and Journal*, August 7, 1852
22 Ibid, June 22, 1852
compromises along his rise to power.\textsuperscript{23} Broome was aided by the fact that between 1850 and 1860 the number of immigrants to Florida from South Carolina and Georgia doubled. By 1860 Georgians constituted the largest group of non-native Floridians and were closely followed by former residents of the Palmetto State.\textsuperscript{24} A further attraction many felt to the party stemmed from a stroke of political genius. The combination of Broome and Maxwell satisfied the entire spectrum of Democrats while the seemingly united front displayed by the party enveloped some Whig factions who were not content with the state of their own party.

When the Whigs met in Tallahassee for their state convention they selected Richard Keith Call to lead the caucus. George Ward, the gubernatorial candidate, pledged to abide by the Baltimore Convention. Initially Cabell carried his hostility towards Scott back to Tallahassee with him claiming Scott “would not carry a single state or poll as many as 50 votes in Florida”.\textsuperscript{25} Cabell further urged the state convention to deal solely with the gubernatorial and congressional elections while ignoring the national election. When Ward heard of these comments, he vowed not to run on the same ticket with Cabell. Once again, the Whigs were plunged into a chaotic state of panic as Ward called a secret session to eliminate Cabell from the party’s label. These attempts were unsuccessful since Cabell still had numerous supporters and delegates were sent from various counties throughout the state with express instructions to nominate Cabell. The congressman backed down under immense mounting pressure and “declared that he would acquiesce in the decision to support Scott, as he certainly could not support Pierce”.\textsuperscript{26} The Democrats jumped at another opportunity to further soil the name of the Whigs when, regarding the absurdity of running Cabell on the same ticket with a pro-Scott man, the \textit{Floridian} proclaimed, “surely such a farce was never before played off on an enlightened community”.\textsuperscript{27} Cabell’s actions were publicly defended by the Whigs who placed the blame for his misguided judgments on his Georgian allies Toombs and Stephens. Cabell’s rise to prominence was astounding and unheralded in the annals of

\textsuperscript{23} Tallahassee, \textit{Florida Sentinel}, September 28, 1852  
\textsuperscript{24} Doherty. The Whigs of Florida, 1845, 1854. pg. 56-57  
\textsuperscript{25} Dorothy Dodd. “The Secession Movement in Florida, 1850-1861, Part I” \textit{Florida Historical Quarterly}, XII, Issue 1, 1933, pg. 16  
\textsuperscript{26} Dorothy Dodd. “The Secession Movement in Florida, 1850-1861, Part I” pg. 16-17  
\textsuperscript{27} Tallahassee, \textit{Floridian and Journal}, July 17, 1852
Florida’s history but his continued association with the sickly Whig Party was slowly destroying his political career.

The divisive nature of the Whigs signified blood in the water for the Democrats. They pounced on this opportunity and their press reported the death of the Whigs in Florida. This demise was brought about partly by petty internal fighting which, when leaked to the public, exposed the party’s glaring weakness, a lack of unity on the decisive issues still threatening to rip the nation apart. The various Democratic organs mocked the Whigs for thinking that any Democrats could possibly consider supporting Cabell since he now showed what they perceived his true colors by standing with the Whigs, however begrudgingly, in nominating Scott. The Jacksonville News relished the prospect of informing the state about the shortcomings of their arch-rivals. They boldly stated “the body will be embalmed and kept over ground till November, when it will be laid in a grave”.  

As the election drew near, the Whigs made a last ditch attempt at victory by chastising Broome and the Democrats for supporting a program whose principles placed the longevity and welfare of the Union in grave peril. The Whigs, to no avail, tried desperately to deflect the criticisms hurled at the chaotic structure and platform of their own party back on their opponents. Broome and the Democrats responded with a crafty defense of their position based on the notion that they now embraced the idea of unionism and were a pro-Union party. They made it evident that they were not compromising any of their pro-Southern rights or values. The Democrats alluded to the fact that their earlier sentiments, which blatantly were radical and disunionist in regards to the Compromise of 1850, were fostered in an emotionally charged environment and that the party was merely reacting to unjust abolitionist attacks. Broome privately admitted that his over zealous language had damaged his prospects of returning a Democrat to the Governor’s Mansion and that his idioms needed to be toned down in order to take full advantage of the rift in the Whig Party. This fragmentation had afforded the Democrats the unique opportunity to not only defeat, but, possibly, drive the nail into their opponent’s political coffin.

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28 Jacksonville, News, quoted in Pensacola, Gazette, August 14, 1852
The change in Broome’s attitude was manifested publicly in a speech delivered in Tallahassee where he shocked many attendees by vowing to support the Compromise of 1850. While this sudden about face stunned the audience, Broome reassured his supporters that the nation would not be held hostage by Douglas’ bill. If Northerners altered their views on slavery and resolved to renege on the stipulations of the compromise, Broome vowed to throw his full support behind the secessionists. In the weeks leading up to the election incumbent Governor Thomas Brown fought vigorously against Broome, in many instances giving more impassioned speeches than the Whig candidate himself. Brown tried in vain to strike fear in the hearts of the voters by painting Broome as a radical who could potentially destroy the Union. The grim reality the Whigs faced was that most of their traditional support from the black belt of Middle Florida was waning. Since the territorial days, with the exception of Jefferson County, this region had been a strong bastion of Whiggery. The planter aristocracy was quickly realizing that the Democrats and not the Whigs were the only party strong enough to protect their peculiar institution. In an ironic twist of fate the Democrats rested their prospects on defense of the Compromise while the Whigs were labeled as traitors to the South forever linked to and dominated by the Northern wing of the party.

When the dust cleared and the votes of the statewide election were tallied South Carolina ruled Florida. James E. Broome defeated Ward 4,628-4,336. While the margin of victory was not overwhelming at 51.6%-48.4%, the writing was clearly on the wall even if the Whig press did not want to admit it. Despite all of the turmoil surrounding his candidacy, Cabell was almost returned to Washington. In the end his bid for reelection failed by 22 votes and the moderate Democrat Augustus Maxwell was charged with assuming his seat in the nation’s capital. The Florida Sentinel tried to make the best out of a gloomy situation by announcing that “the Whigs of little Florida have gone down with the national flag at their masthead, in a gallant struggle”. The shifting of support in Middle Florida was made apparent when it was revealed that both Cabell and Ward had lost Leon and Gadsden Counties. These counties, along with Jefferson,

29 Tallahassee, Floridian and Journal, September 11, 1852
30 Tallahassee, Florida Sentinel, September 28, 1852
31 Ibid, October 19, 1852
32 Ibid, November 23, 1852
were home to the highest numbers of slaves, bales of cotton produced and, cash value of farms in the state, and, as mentioned before, the planters no longer felt their assets were safe in the Whig party. In all Cabell lost three counties in East Florida which had helped to send him to Washington in 1850. These counties of Marion, Alachua, and St. Johns were all important economically as the former two were driven by a plantation economy similar to the black belt. Cabell’s only gains were in the sparsely populated regions of South Florida where his opposition to Scott endeared him to the local population which had assumed the brunt of Scott’s verbal abuse during the war two decades earlier.  

The situation got worse for the Whigs the following month when the results of the presidential election were announced as 1,996 fewer votes were cast in the national election than in the statewide vote. This seemed to help Pierce who routed Scott in Florida polling 4,318 votes to the general’s total of 2,875. The landslide, which saw Pierce garner 60% of Florida’s vote, clearly demonstrated the fear that Southerners had of the Northern wing of the Whig party. The only counties Scott carried in Florida were Nassau, Walton and Holmes. The embarrassing thrashing at the polls left a permanent scar on Cabell’s once bold psyche. The promising energetic unionist stalwart was left distraught and disillusioned. He abandoned politics shortly after the election to assume the presidency of the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad, a title he held until he moved away from Florida before the Civil War never to return. Cabell spent the remainder of his days quietly in Missouri until his death in 1896 at the age of 80.

Although the Whigs would meekly muster candidates for the 1854 midterm elections, 1852 is often cited as the true end of the party’s run in Florida as well as on the national level. Both Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, the latter the final bastion of conservatism in the party, died in 1852, more than offsetting Calhoun’s death two years earlier and leaving the party in the hands of William H. Seward which all but sealed its fate in the South. With Cabell’s departure, the power of the party in Florida was firmly in the hands of the old “nucleus” of Call, Ward and Brown. A further blow to the Whigs was the demise of their once influential newspaper ring, which after 1853 consisted only

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33 Doherty. *The Whigs of Florida, 1845, 1854.*, pg. 57  
34 Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, November 23, 1852  
35 Doherty. *The Whigs of Florida, 1845, 1854.*, pg. 57-58
of Tallahassee’s *Florida Sentinel*, Pensacola’s *Gazette*, and Jacksonville’s *Florida Republican*.\(^{36}\)

The Whigs had one last gasp of breath left in them and this was spent in 1853-1854 in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The bill was originally introduced in December of 1853 by Iowa Senator A.C. Dodge, and was championed by Stephen A. Douglas, chairman of the committee of Territories in the Senate. It negated the premises of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had outlawed slavery north of the 36-30 line. “Popular sovereignty” was the new term that rose from the proposed bill. Douglas would embrace this phrase as his darling and this was the platform upon which he would ultimately rest his political fate. The South initially opposed the bill since Northerners were known to be more mobile, especially in migration to the western territories which the bill concerned. Ultimately the Democrats viewed the bill as a possible victory since it opened up territories north of the Missouri Compromise line to the possibility of being saddled with chattel slavery. Whigs were highly critical of the law, which they felt would reopen freshly healed wounds concerning the sectional and slavery debates that had recently thrust the nation to the brink of civil war.

The overall attitude of the Democrats could be seen in an editorial composed by the editor of Tallahassee’s *Floridian and Journal* in which he stated:

> We are willing to regard the support of and vote on that bill as a test of the sincerity of the North in favor of the principles embraced in the Compromise of 1850, in the case of Utah and New Mexico….before this bill gets through Congress, the South will have an opportunity of seeing who among the members of both houses construe the Compromise of 1850 as a settlement of the Slavery difficulty.\(^{37}\)

The Whigs in Florida quickly realized they were in the minority in opposing the bill. They held firm and this stance constituted the last failed effort to halt the growth of radicalism in Florida. In May of 1854 President Franklin Pierce signed the bill and it became the law of the land. The majority of ordinary Floridians viewed the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a Southern victory in stark contrast to the way they had

\(^{36}\) Doherty, *The Whigs of Florida, 1845-54*, pg. 58

\(^{37}\) Tallahassee, *Floridian and Journal*, January 28, 1854
perceived the outcome of the Compromise of 1850. Support for Douglas’ new bill in Florida was though exaggerated by the Democrats in the state. The remnants of the Whig Party were not as optimistic and enthusiastic as their own press, which stated the bill was:

highly gratifying to the South…while the abolitionists are consistent to the extension of slavery, it is particularly gratifying to see the South unite with a unanimity unprecedented in the annals of legislation to approve a principle in ’54 of the propriety of which she was divided in ’50.\(^{38}\)

It was also evident that the Whig party would not be able to mount a serious opposition to the Democrats in the midterm elections set to take place later in the same year since the press and the politicians were not even on the same wavelength. The Whig newspapers had previously been used to implement shrewd and lucid propaganda to boost the party’s platform. By 1854 the party did not have a coherent leadership or a recognized platform on which the press could advertise. In hindsight it is ironic to note that while the Democrats celebrated this Southern victory that furthered the demise of the Whigs, this bill and Stephen Douglas’ undying support of popular or squatter sovereignty would in due time spell doom of the Democratic Party and lead to Civil War first in Kansas and later throughout the nation.

The Democrats were eager to form a platform that would highlight the principles that the party extolled and on which their candidates would campaign in the coming months. Their convention was scheduled to take place in July in Madison, the site of John McGehee’s fiery secessionist speech three years earlier.\(^{39}\) As expected the Democrats approved the Kansas-Nebraska Act. It was seen as a “measure in a spirit of justice to all the States” and furthermore it gave them new hope that they could finally put the disaster of Henry Clay’s bill behind them. They once again nominated the moderate Maxwell for Congress knowing full well that they were likely to secure a majority in the General Assembly for two more years, thus returning the fire eating David Yulee to Washington to look after the party and state’s most important interests.\(^{40}\)

\(^{38}\) Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, March 11, 1854  
\(^{39}\) Jacksonville, *Florida Republican*, June 29, 1854  
\(^{40}\) Ibid, August 3, 1854
Various Whigs favored a meeting in Alligator in order to endorse their candidates and to oppose the growth of extremism that the Democrats represented. Not all Whigs supported the idea of a convention because the party had never relied on such measures in the past. The Republican saw the need for a statewide meeting to unite the party in resistance to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.\(^\text{41}\) The party, which finally decided not to stage a convention because Thomas Brown was unanimously selected to counter Augustus Maxwell’s candidacy, did approve one measure of the new bill, which was the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.\(^\text{42}\) Brown began his campaign by accusing the Democrats of reopening the slavery issue by their persistent allegiance to the bill. He labeled them as hypocrites and claimed that their commitment to the ruling contradicted the platform on which they had run in 1852, which had implored the state to seek finality in the Compromise of 1850.\(^\text{43}\)

Brown did vacillate in his views and seemingly contradict himself by claiming that had he been in Congress he would have supported the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in the end because it truly was a victory for the South. Brown and the Whigs realized that many Floridians were disenchanted with the former governor since he was remembered for failing to fully embrace Southern rights during his four year term that ended in 1852. Brown had refused to appoint delegates to the Nashville Convention and in the process he had alienated several members of his own party. Desperately the Whigs tried to paint Brown’s candidacy as one of a staunch Southern rights man but as they very well knew, their attempts would be hopeless. Brown viewed his campaign as a last attempt to stem the tide of radicalism as he still regarded a state dominated by the Democrats as a first step toward secession and the bloody battle that would unquestionably follow. During the campaign, Richard Keith Call canvassed feverishly for Brown and stood steadfastly in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

The Democrats observed the rupture in the Whig party in regards to Douglas’ act and made overtures to the segment of the party which had favored endorsement of the measure, ultimately inviting them to join in an alliance with the Democrats to create a unified Floridian Party which would stand for the rights of the South. In spite of the fact

\(^{41}\) Ibid, August 10, 1854
\(^{42}\) Ibid, August 3, 1854
\(^{43}\) Ibid, September 28, 1854
that they acknowledged their plight to be grim and basically hopeless, the Whigs refused such an alliance. Brown opposed a coalition with his rivals because he did not want to abandon the Northern Whigs, even though they were seen as the radical abolitionist wing of the party. The Democrats retorted by trying to play on the Whigs’ Southern patriotism by exclaiming that unless a bond was established “they can do the South no good”.\textsuperscript{44} Maxwell abided by the Democratic platform and took full responsibility for his party’s efforts at aiding the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He additionally praised Franklin Pierce’s administration for its bold stance in enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act.\textsuperscript{45}

The results of the 1854 midterm election illuminated the gravest fear of the unionists. The avenue towards radicalism and ultimately secession was cleared by virtual abolition of the two party system in Florida. Augustus Maxwell was returned to Congress in a landslide which saw him garner 56\% of the votes to Brown’s 44\%. In 1852 Maxwell had defeated Cabell by a mere 22 votes, but two years later the margin was 1,074.\textsuperscript{46} Gadsden County was the only county in Florida’s black belt that reaffirmed its allegiance to the Whigs. The majority of planters still did not feel comfortable placing their fate in the hands of a party they felt could not protect their interests.

Many conservatives resolved to ignore the radicalism that surrounded the Democratic Party further strengthening extremism in the state. The Whigs even lost their previous strongholds of Escambia and Wakulla Counties while Maxwell was victorious in Columbia, Putnam and Levy as well. The only county he won in 1854 that Cabell had not carried in 1852 was Hamilton.\textsuperscript{47} While the two party system in Florida did technically exist after 1854, the Congressional election of the year did mark the final time a Whig candidate was found on a ballot in the state. Democratic dominance in Florida was even more apparent after the election and so was the state’s penchant for radicalism. The leadership of the Democratic Party had shifted from the more moderate element, largely William Dunn Moseley and James Westcott, and was now firmly entrenched in the hands of the “South Carolina School”, led by Governor Broome, John McGehee and future fire eating Governor Madison Starke Perry who would lead Florida into secession

\textsuperscript{44} Tallahassee, \textit{Floridian and Journal}, August 26, 1854
\textsuperscript{45} Jacksonville, \textit{Florida Republican}, August 17, 1854
\textsuperscript{46} Tallahassee, \textit{Florida Sentinel}, November 7, 1854
\textsuperscript{47} Doherty. \textit{The Whigs of Florida}, 1845, 1854. pg. 60
in 1861. Gone was the romanticism that Call and numerous Whigs had employed to defend their actions and policies. The 1850’s were a decade Call and the Whigs wished to forget as it had become engulfed by emotionalism.

James Broome’s address opening the seventh session of Florida’s General Assembly focused almost entirely on Southern rights ignoring many internal issues that the holdovers from the Whig Party preferred to highlight. It was evident from this speech that the state was firmly in the hands of fire eaters whose sole goal was to protect slavery at all costs and who were not afraid to remove the state from the Union in order to accomplish that end. Following in South Carolina’s wake, Florida seemed resigned to being driven purely by emotional rather than rational thought. Broome, speaking for the South as a whole, pledged that the region was conditionally loyal to the federal government and would abide by Washington’s decrees as long as the abolitionists did not make further encroachments upon the constitution. If such injustices were made a “union of the South for the protection of the South” would be created.48

With the Democratic hold on Florida virtually unchallenged, Richard Keith Call’s outlook on politics shifted. Call and the other former Whigs searched for new options until he become enamored by the Know Nothing Party which was growing rapidly to replace the void left by the Whigs. The foundation of this party was built around racist beliefs, but not ones aimed at blacks. The Know Nothing or American Party as they were formally known, directed its hatred towards European immigrants, mainly Catholics from Ireland and the German states. For that reason the party did not have much appeal in Florida which was virtually devoid of these immigrant groups. In 1860 Florida’s foreign born population accounted for a mere 9.8% of the population.49 Most of these immigrants had settled in Escambia, Clay, Duval and St. Johns counties, which as seen before did not hold the state’s power and therefore were neither influential nor prominent enough to require a response to the Know Nothing Party’s recruitment. The party did win the city elections in Jacksonville in 1855, which gave Call a false sense of hope for the 1856 gubernatorial race and the elections to the General Assembly. Call’s suddenly harsh racist attitudes shocked many conservatives when he proclaimed the fact that

49 Eighth Census of the United States---1860---Florida
immigrants to the United States no longer were composed of Europe’s “intelligent class” who were capable of understanding the nation’s established institutions. Call lambasted these immigrants who had fled the famine in Ireland and political turmoil in the German states by labeling them as “the lowest orders of Europeans” who were being thrust upon America like a plague.⁵⁰

Call was desperately trying to deflect attention from the sectional issues that reinforced the principles and platform of the state’s radicals. The Know Nothings’ aim was to unite the state in opposition to the true enemies of the South and the nation. Call urged that “it’s the genius of your country which calls on you…let us unite in the name of God and country to save our liberty and institutions”.⁵¹ The pleas of Call fell on deaf ears in Florida. The foreigners were not a threat to the state and its institutions. The Democrats did a better job of rationalizing the perceived threats to slavery posed by abolitionists and their political allies situated thousands of miles away. They responded by claiming “Protestant as we are, we can join in no such infamous un-American proscription”.⁵² Call’s own family was hesitant in joining the ranks of the American Party in 1855. Wilk Call gave nominal support to his uncle while still maintaining his allegiance to the defunct Whig Party. Call’s nephew, George, abandoned his uncle altogether to join the ranks of the Democratic Party and he, along with Call’s son-in-law Medicus Long, united in a debate against their former mentor in December of 1855.⁵³ Florida’s foremost conservative was unsuccessful in persuading his own family to oppose the growing rise of radicalism in the state. The writing was on the wall and by 1856 the state was ready to follow South Carolina over the cliff that was secession into the abyss of disunion and defeat in the Civil War.

Call was more active and successful in the national American Party where he was offered the vice presidential candidacy in 1856. He declined this honor due to his failing health. He was joined in his effort by Thomas Brown, whom many radicals viewed with contempt and scorn for his policies during his term as Florida’s governor. On the state level David S. Walker was nominated for governor by the Americans and James M.

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⁵⁰ Tallahassee, *Florida Sentinel*, August 7, 1855

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid, August 25, 1855
Baker for Congress. They were opposed by George S. Hawkins and Madison Starke Perry, who if possible, was a more radical fire eater than James E. Broome. Perry was a fellow South Carolinian born in 1814 and had represented Alachua County in Florida’s General Assembly beginning in 1850. Hawkins, a former lawyer from New York, had also been indoctrinated in politics under the watchful guise of the extreme faction of the party and joined Perry and Broome as a member of the “South Carolina School” of Florida’s Democratic Party.

The 1856 election was the last race of the antebellum period in Florida that saw the Democrats run opposed. Perry easily won the Governor’s mansion, Hawkins was sent to Congress and the Party maintained and even increased its stranglehold over the state legislature. When the dust had cleared the Democrats had won 42 of Florida’s 65 seats or roughly 65%. The rise of the Republican Party in 1856, which coincided with the split of the American Party, was the death blow for the old conservative camp in Florida as well as in the Deep South. The Republican Party would not even gain recognition in Florida and was absent from the ballots in both 1858 and 1860. Call continued his fruitless efforts to keep Florida within the Union, but without a viable party to back him and more importantly without much support from the planter aristocracy, Call’s crusade, as noble as it was, was hopeless. Call supported the Constitutional Union Party in 1860, but even as it became apparent that the black Republicans under first Seward and later Abraham Lincoln were going to win the White House, the old General refused to support the rest of the state in favor of secession.

The spokesperson for conservatism in Florida would not have his prayers answered. As the state edged closer to South Carolina, which in turn meant to secession, Call uttered a feeble prayer in which he begged God to allow him “in the hour of death” to have “the stars and stripes...still wave over me and wave forever over our whole united country”. Upon hearing that Florida had voted 62-7 in favor of secession, Call was a broken man. He was approached on the steps of the capital in Tallahassee and asked his

54 Jacksonville, *Florida Republican*, October 4, 1856
55 Tallahassee, *Floridian and Journal*, June 28, 1856
56 Ibid, November 29, 1856
57 Doherty, *Richard Keith Call, Southern Unionist*, pg. 158
reaction to the vote. He stated “you have opened the gates of Hell, from which shall flow
the water of the dammed to sink you into perdition”\(^\text{58}\).

The great metamorphosis in Florida’s political culture from 1845-1856 was the
key factor in the state’s eagerness to join South Carolina and Mississippi in becoming the
third state to secede from the Union on January 10, 1861. The planter class, which
controlled the black belt of Middle Florida, which in turn dominated the state’s political
structure, abandoned the conservatives in favor of the radical fire eating Democrats. It
was only under Democratic leadership that they felt reassured that the peculiar institution
of slavery and the Southern way of life to which they had grown accustomed was safe
and could survive and prosper.

\(^{58}\) *The Florida Peninsular Newspaper*. Jan. 10\(^\text{th}\), 1861
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