

RAILROAD BARON, FIRE-EATER, AND THE "ALIEN JEW": THE LIFE AND  
MEMORY OF DAVID LEVY YULEE

By

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To my friends and family

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School  
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This dissertation explores the confluence of the constructed categories of race and whiteness through the figure of David Levy Yulee. As a two-term senator, a large-scale landowner, and the entrepreneur responsible for Florida’s first major railroad, David Levy Yulee was a leader in nineteenth-century Florida’s economic development and political history. He was also the nation’s first Jewish senator, an irony as he did not practice the Jewish religion, maintain Jewish cultural practices, or associate with Jewish communities. Quite the opposite, Yulee engaged Christian society, married a Christian woman and occasionally attended church, and adhered to Christian religious dogma. Nevertheless, most people considered him to be a Jew because of his family and ancestry, links to Judaism often socially described as race. Many nineteenth-century Americans, including Yulee, considered these bonds to be permanently inscribed in his blood marking him as distinct from the widely perceived nineteenth-century archetype of the Christian Anglo-American.

Although society ascribed Yulee with a racial Jewish identity, this designation did not limit his social or political success. Yulee manipulated this social label by aggrandizing some aspects of his racial background, but also by performing the role of

a Southern white gentleman, an archetype of white Southern manhood. Aside from aligning with Christianity, Yulee mingled with the elite of Southern Christian society. He also fiercely advocated the Southern political position of states' rights and the corresponding right to own slaves; indeed, he owned numerous slaves and large plantations. Yulee's projection of whiteness helped him earn admission into the ranks of upper-class Southern society and allowed him to achieve social, economic, and political success, but he remained racially bound to Judaism.

Moreover, this dissertation illustrates the role of memory in constructing academic and usable, oftentimes fictitious, history and community identity. Since his death in 1886, different social communities have remembered Yulee as a railroad entrepreneur, a staunch supporter of the Old South, and as the nation's first Jewish senator. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Yulee's Jewish identity has served as an example in discussions about the extent of American inclusion and citizenship. Jews in south Florida, home to one of the nation's largest Jewish communities, use Yulee to illustrate the enduring and prominent Jewish role in the state's history. For much of the twentieth century, north Florida communities have often remembered Yulee in the context of the Old South, yet these memories have been waning in the last third of the twentieth century. In their place, Floridian's are increasingly applying memories of Yulee as a community builder and railroad entrepreneur to their own endeavors in creating community unity out of diverse social sectors.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Early Sunday morning, October 10, 1886, David Levy Yulee, a former United States senator from the state of Florida, died at the Clarendon hotel in New York City. Newspapers reported that Yulee was returning to his home in Washington, D.C., from a vacation in Bar Harbor, Maine, when he stopped in New York on the first of October.<sup>1</sup> His health began deteriorating soon after arriving in the city. As the situation gravened, doctors ushered Yulee's family to his bedside. They surrounded him when he passed away that autumn morning, pneumonia reportedly claiming his life.

Yulee's family brought the former senator's remains to Washington, his home for the last several years of his life. There, the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church held memorial services for him before interring him beside his wife in Oak Hill cemetery near Georgetown. Yulee had many esteemed colleagues among the social and political elite of his time. Former United States President Chester Arthur was one of his many prominent dinner guests while his honorary pallbearers included former Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston.<sup>2</sup> Public sites, such as the Court of General Term in Washington, D.C., adjourned early on the morning of October 12 out of respect to Yulee's memory.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, presses carried the news of his death, which made the front page in such widely read publications as the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*.

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<sup>1</sup> The most extensive accounts of Yulee's death are found in the *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, and the *New York Times*, October 11, 1886, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *The American Israelite*, October 22, 1886, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1886, 2.



Newspapers around the nation began issuing obituaries, eulogies, and editorials in the days and weeks following Yulee's death. Some obituaries contained little more than a few sentences, but many more offered extensive memories of his life. Editors could choose from many aspects of Yulee's life as subject matter for these foundational memories of him. The ex-senator had endured a long and often turbulent political career in the Democratic Party, one that was pierced by the Civil War, the most divisive and violent domestic episode in American history. Yulee also became an extremely wealthy man by touting Florida's natural resources and commercial prospects, spurring internal improvements, and amassing a great fortune as a real estate speculator, planter, and railroad developer. Yulee's accomplishments seem even more remarkable since most people marked him as the first senator of Jewish descent in the history of the predominantly Christian United States. These first memories of Yulee at the time of his death outlined the different ways in which his political career, entrepreneurial activities, and religious heritage would be historically remembered.

Obituaries in Florida's newspapers devoted considerable attention to Yulee's political and economic activities that affected Florida's material and political development. A leader in the drive for statehood, Florida's newspapers connected Yulee's political efforts with the state's demographic growth and material prosperity, and especially recalled his role in the development of Florida's interior. Florida obituaries mentioned Yulee's efforts towards improving the state's communication and transportation infrastructures by developing the state's ports and postal system. They lauded his efforts in advancing the state's railroads both before and after the Civil War. Some obituaries reminded their readers that Yulee's push for federal assistance against

the local Indians spurred the passing of the Armed Occupation law, which provided 160 acres of land to frontier settlers.<sup>4</sup> Yulee's promotion of Florida's internal improvements benefited many people: the poor, the wealthy, and especially him.

Conversely, most obituaries across the nation paid scant attention to Yulee's endeavors in Florida. Most newspapers depicted Yulee as a wealthy man, but they were unclear, for instance, whether he inherited his wealth, acquired it through his legal career or agricultural pursuits, or made it in railroad development and real estate speculation. Accounts often referred to Yulee's dual antebellum careers as a lawyer and planter. They also noted that Yulee was president of the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad after the war, although only a few mentioned his involvement with Florida's railroad system prior to the war. Most obituaries reflected the Gilded Age fascination with wealth and grandeur, and addressed Yulee's wealth more than they considered how it was obtained. Some recalled the beauty of his "magnificent house . . . said to be one of the most complete and elaborately furnished in the city."<sup>5</sup> Other editorials mentioned the handsome inheritance he left his heirs.<sup>6</sup> A column in the *Washington Post* made the point that, despite losing a fortune during the war, he, "unlike most of his Southern brethren," was able to rebuild his wealth.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, most obituaries were only peripherally concerned with Yulee's wealth, entrepreneurial exploits, or his political efforts on behalf of Florida.

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<sup>4</sup> The (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 14, 1886, 4.

<sup>5</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 1

<sup>6</sup> The *Washington Post*, November 2, 1886, 1.

<sup>7</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 1.

National obituaries revealed a fascination with Yulee's racial background and paid more attention to his Jewish descent than to the benefits he brought to Florida. Racial discourses pervaded American society in the late nineteenth century. Yulee's lineage—his blood—was his only direct attachment to Judaism, yet newspapers directly referenced it near the beginning of their obituaries, reminding readers of his “Hebrew extraction” or that he was born to “Hebrew parents.”<sup>8</sup> Yulee's Jewish heritage was, in fact, the central topic of discussion in several extended articles and editorial sections. The *Washington Post* relayed an article told by a correspondent from the *Louisville* (Kentucky) *Courier-Journal* titled, “The Romance of Yulee: His Ancestry—Blending of Many Strains of Blood” which claimed that Yulee's family were racially “Sephardin, or learned men” that had once attended to the Emperor of Morocco.<sup>9</sup> Yulee's children, the article continues, should rejoice in their fortune: “few families in this country inherit more that is worthy of respect than the Yulee's. . . . They combine the blood of the Bluegrass with that of the Arab, the Hebrew and the English cavalier.”<sup>10</sup>

Obituaries also indirectly addressed Yulee's Jewish identity by referring to his official name change from David Levy to David Levy Yulee at the dawn of his national political career in 1845. Speculation abounded surrounding the reasons for this action. The *Philadelphia Enquirer* reported that after David Levy fell in love “with a Kentucky lady named Wickliffe, he changed his name to Yulee on his marriage to her, the change

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<sup>8</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 1; the *Philadelphia Times*, reprinted in the *Macon* (Georgia) *Telegraph*, October 24, 1886.

<sup>9</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 25, 1886, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

being, it is said, one of the conditions imposed by the bride.”<sup>11</sup> The *Columbus* (Georgia) *Enquirer* claimed “he changed his name from Levy to Yulee, the maiden name of his mother. He did this, it is said, on account of a quarrel with his father.”<sup>12</sup>

Confusion and contradictions surrounded Yulee’s Jewish identity, particularly in relation to his ancestry. Articles in the *Philadelphia Times* and the *New York Times* claimed that Yulee’s grandfather was a “self-exiled Moor” who had “repudiated the Mohammedan for the Jewish faith” when forced to flee Morocco.<sup>13</sup> Yulee’s father, religiously Jewish, “married an English lady of good family,” a gentile, minimizing the connection with racial Jewishness and relegating the relationship between Yulee and Judaism to the religious faith of his father.<sup>14</sup> While the *Columbus Enquirer* reported that Yulee was his mother’s maiden name, other newspapers, like the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, claimed Yulee to have been his father’s former family name. The *Washington Post* noted that Yulee’s father, “Moses E. Levy married Miss Abendanone, a Jewish lady, in England.”<sup>15</sup> The *New York Post*, by contrast, reported that Yulee’s grandfather “changed his name from Yulee to Levy, partly because the return of any member of the Yulee family to Morocco had been interdicted on penalty of death and partly because the self-exiled Moor had repudiated the Mohammedan for the Jewish faith.” Years later, Yulee’s father, Moses E. Levy, “married an English lady of good

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<sup>11</sup> The *Philadelphia Enquirer*, October 12, 1886. Also, the *American Israelite*, October 15, 1886, 10.

<sup>12</sup> The *Columbus* (Georgia) *Enquirer*, reprinted in the *New York Times*, October 24, 1886.

<sup>13</sup> The *Philadelphia Times*, in the *Macon* (Georgia) *Telegraph*, October 24, 1886; the *New York Times*, October 17, 1886, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The *Washington Post*, “The Romance of Yulee,” October 25, 1886, 2.

family and the issue was a boy, who was called David L. Levy.”<sup>16</sup> Further complicating the matter, many obituaries recalled his Hebrew descent even as they noted his “membership” with the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., the site of his funeral services.<sup>17</sup> Americans viewed Yulee’s religious and racial heritage—his connection with Judaism—ambiguously, a fact evident in the lack of unanimity in the obituaries regarding his association with Judaism.

Florida’s newspapers did not often comment on Yulee’s Jewish background or connect him with Judaism. This is a notable omission given the attention to detail found in Florida’s obituaries pertaining to other aspects of Yulee’s life, particularly his financial exploits and his political career, as well as the notoriety of the topic of Yulee’s Jewish identity in most national publications. In fact, only one Florida obituary mentioned that Yulee “was born of Hebrew parents,” and this was reprinted from the *New York Times*.<sup>18</sup> Florida did not have a large Jewish population at the time of Yulee’s death in 1885. Most of the Jews living in the state, primarily of German descent, did not challenge the entrenched social order of white supremacy even if they maintained political differences among themselves. The itinerant Jewish salesmen, primarily of East European descent, often seen traversing the southern countryside and dealing with all prospective clients, black and white, generally did not reside in Florida. Yulee’s Jewish identity did not concern most Floridians who at least publicly preferred remembering a proud Southerner, state activist, and successful entrepreneur.

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<sup>16</sup> The *New York Times*, “Some Glances Backward,” October 17, 1886, 6.

<sup>17</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution*, October 12, 1886, 1; the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 13, 1886, 4.

<sup>18</sup> The (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886.

Politics was the primary source of Yulee's notoriety at the time of his death. Across national newspapers, Yulee's obituaries commented on his public political career, a career that lasted over two decades and culminated in his resignation from the United States Senate on the eve of the Civil War. A few newspapers recalled his efforts in the Florida territory by mentioning his service as a territorial delegate to Congress and as a delegate to the state convention that formed the state's constitution in 1845. They also acknowledged his election to the United States Senate following the admission of Florida to the United States in 1845. Some accounts even recognized his active political participation within congressional ranks as chairman of the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads.<sup>19</sup> Many obituaries regarded him as a "distinguished statesman" whose "word meant much and his presence was a power," at least in the antebellum period. Most agreed that, while not as nationally prominent as some of his contemporary senatorial colleagues, he was "long anterior to the war, as Senator from Florida . . . better known than the state he represented."<sup>20</sup> These components of his career were, however, tangential to the focus of most obituaries in the national media.

Yulee's defense of states' rights and his association with the former Confederacy dominated the political memories of him found throughout national obituaries. The memory of the war still pervaded the thoughts of many Americans, a fact reflected in the tones of the obituaries in the regional presses. Newspapers nationwide recalled Yulee's loyalty to the Southern states, yet the attitudes towards his former Confederate allegiance in the obituaries betrayed the sectional loyalties of the newspapers in which

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<sup>19</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 1.

<sup>20</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 2.

they were found. Northern presses noted that Yulee was one of the first senators to secede, and pointed to what would become an infamous letter to his colleague and Confederate General, Joseph Finnegan, as proof of his disloyalty to the Union. In his letter to Finegan, Yulee called for political and military planning against federal positions in Florida before the state had even announced its intent to secede. The letter, obtained by a *New York Times* correspondent during the war, advanced the idea of occupying federal positions in Florida prior to secession and while Yulee still held a senate seat. According to the *Times*, the letter stated that Yulee intended to use his senate position “to prevent legislation which would put the Government into condition to meet a hostile attack from its enemies,” but was unable to execute this plan because of the swiftness of many of the Southern states’ secession.<sup>21</sup> Newspapers also recalled Yulee as an active member of the Confederate Congress, or at least an active participant in the Confederacy. Regardless of the level of his participation, Northern newspapers disparaged Yulee because of his participation in what they often disparaged as the “secession” or the “rebellion.”

Memories of Yulee’s connection to the Confederacy stained the comments of some Northern presses, whose terse obituaries reflected their feelings about him in painfully clear terms. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* offered a brief statement on his recent passing before quipping that “he withdrew from the Senate in 1861 to take part in the rebellion,” a sentiment mirrored in the (Chicago) *Daily Inter Ocean*.<sup>22</sup> The *Washington Post* called him “one of the leading secessionists,” while the *New York Herald* stated

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<sup>21</sup> The *New York Times*, October 11, 1886, 5.

<sup>22</sup> The *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 11, 1886, 2. Also, the (Chicago) *Daily Inter Ocean*, October 11, 1886.

that Yulee “did all in his power to organize troops for the defence [sic] of the State and took such an active and prominent part in the rebellion that at its close he was incarcerated in Fort Pulaski for several months.”<sup>23</sup> The *Philadelphia Enquirer* resented that he was freed at least partly because “President Johnson . . . had been one of his colleagues in the Senate”<sup>24</sup> The *Herald’s* rival, the *New York Times*, claimed that it was “as an active promoter of the secession of the Southern States that Senator Yulee gained his chief notoriety,” and continued by referring to Yulee as “one of the original secessionists of his time, and one of the most dangerous plotters against the General Government in 1860-61.”<sup>25</sup> The editors at the *Boston Globe* were dismayed that the brazen Yulee had been “the first of the seceding Senators to announce the attitude of his State [sic],” while the *Philadelphia Times* considered him to be “among the more prominent of the coterie of southern leaders who, in their zeal for slavery, precipitated the great rebellion.”<sup>26</sup>

Despite their often heated statements associating Yulee with the rebellious states in the Civil War, many Northern newspapers mitigated this connection by mentioning his efforts at national reunion and rebuilding efforts following the cessation of hostilities.<sup>27</sup> The *New York Herald* noted that “after the war Mr. Yulee accepted the situation and did

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<sup>23</sup> The *New York Herald*, reprinted in *The Washington Post*, October 12, 1886, 2.

<sup>24</sup> The *Philadelphia Enquirer*, October 12, 1886.

<sup>25</sup> The *New York Times*, October 11, 1886, 5; the *New York Times*, October 17, 1886, 6; the *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886.

<sup>26</sup> The *Boston Daily Globe*, October 11, 1886; the *Philadelphia Times* in the *Macon (Georgia) Telegraph*, October 24, 1886.

<sup>27</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).



all in his power to restore the prosperity and commerce of the State.”<sup>28</sup> Although widely regarded as “a thorough Southron [sic] in tastes and sympathies,” the *Philadelphia Times* stated that Yulee “in later days admitted the rashness of the secession leaders of 1861.”<sup>29</sup> Others claimed that Yulee “abandoned the forum for the Lares and Penates of home life,” by removing himself from politics and the public view, and concentrating on his personal life<sup>30</sup> Newspapers portrayed his political career as an archaic relic of the distant past, and regarded Yulee as one of the last of the dying generation of political leaders responsible for leading the United States into, and through, the Civil War. The *Washington Post* stated that “his compatriots of thirty years ago can now be counted on one’s fingers,” while the *Chicago Daily Tribune* casually reminded its readers that “the death of ex-Senator Yulee leaves only Jeff Davis and R.M.T Hunter living of those who withdrew from the Senate in 1861.”<sup>31</sup> Soon enough all living reminders would be gone, and there would be only memories. He was, as the *Washington Post* indicated, from “a far off and nebulous period” of American history.<sup>32</sup>

Southern newspapers linked Yulee with the Confederacy in much more positive contexts than Northern presses. The terminology framing the obituaries was one key component of this shift in contextualization. Northern presses referred to the war as “the rebellion,” while Southern sources readdressed the recent war as “the war between

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<sup>28</sup> The *New York Herald*, reprinted in the *Washington Post*, October 12, 1886.

<sup>29</sup> The *Philadelphia Times*, reprinted in the *Macon (Georgia) Telegraph*, October 24, 1886.

<sup>30</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886.

<sup>31</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 2; the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 16, 1886, 4.

<sup>32</sup> The *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886, 1.

the states,” “the crisis,” or “the disturbances.”<sup>33</sup> The overall tone of the obituaries was another factor in Southerners contextualization of Yulee’s role in the Civil War. The *Raleigh News and Observer* agreed with the *New York Times* that Yulee “was an earnest advocate of secession, and it was in this connection that he was chiefly distinguished,” yet while Northern newspapers indicted Yulee for his loyalty to the Southern states, the *News and Observer* praised his decision, recalling that “he was a strong man in his day and his patriotism and integrity were always conspicuous.”<sup>34</sup> Southern presses, unlike their Northern counterparts, rarely commented on his efforts towards rebuilding or reunion and, in fact, only minimally commented on his post-war life. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, for instance, claimed that Yulee took no active part in politics following the war while in South Carolina the *Yorkville Enquirer* remarked that “with all his distinction he had passed out of sight and few remembered him.”<sup>35</sup>

Florida’s newspapers represented Yulee’s public life differently than newspapers in the rest of the nation. While most of the nation’s newspapers recalled Yulee as a minor figure in national affairs, obituaries in Florida’s newspapers often exaggerated his national prominence. The *Fernandina Mirror* in northeast Florida claimed that Yulee “acquired a remarkable influence in the Senate and in the administration. His name and position were national in their extent, and he was recognized as one of the ablest

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<sup>33</sup> For examples of Northern terminology regarding the war see, the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 11, 1886; the *Boston Daily Globe*, October 11, 1886. For Southern phraseology, see the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 12, 1886; *Fernandina (Florida) Mirror* in the (Tallahassee) *Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886; (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 12, 1886;

<sup>34</sup> The *Raleigh (North Carolina) News and Observer*, October 11, 1886, 2.

<sup>35</sup> The *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 12, 1886; the *Yorkville (South Carolina) Enquirer*, October 20, 1886, 2.

statesmen in Washington.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the *Florida Times-Union* stated that Yulee “took rank among the few most influential members” of the Senate.<sup>37</sup> Florida’s newspapers praised Yulee’s efforts on behalf of his home state. The *Florida Times Union* questioned whether anybody had played a greater role in the state’s development and hailed him as “the ablest man that Florida ever sent to the national councils.”<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the *Fernandina Mirror* claimed that “it is not too much to say that Florida owes more to Mr. Yulee than to any other citizen of the State” before referring to him as the “ablest, most energetic and successful of the citizens of Florida.”<sup>39</sup>

Many of Florida’s citizens eulogized Yulee, but some offered more critical evaluations of his political career and concomitant economic ventures. The *Weekly Tallahassee and Land of Flowers* called his political service and economic development, “pleasant monuments to his memory, but the old feudal tenant system under which many of the residents of Cedar Key and Fernandina have held their homes under him for years, is not altogether so pleasant.”<sup>40</sup> An editorial from the *Pensacola Commercial*, incensed at the size Yulee’s estate and the value of the inheritance he left to his heirs, linked this inheritance with Yulee’s efforts towards Florida’s internal improvements. According to the editorial, Yulee wished to improve the state’s economy “by whatever aids may be necessary.” Yet,

Because the lands that make up that “aid” has, much of it, been sold, and the proceeds off those sales constitute the bulk of the late Mr. Yulee’s

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<sup>36</sup> The *Fernandina* (Florida) *Mirror*, reprinted in (Tallahassee) *The Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886.

<sup>37</sup> The (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886, 2.

<sup>38</sup> The (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886, 2.

<sup>39</sup> The *Fernandina* (Florida) *Mirror* reprinted in the (Tallahassee) *Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886.

<sup>40</sup> The (Tallahassee) *Weekly Tallahassee and Land of Flowers*, October 20, 1886, 1.

estate. If the lands are forfeited, as the law requires them to be, the estate of Yulee will have to disgorge to the amount that he has received for those lands, and the price of the lands will go into the U.S. treasury and help to lower our taxes instead of remaining in the pockets of Yulee's heirs. It is the people's lands and the people's money, and Yulee has no right to either.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, most of Florida's citizens asserted a more optimistic vision. "As the asperities of political or business antagonisms have passed away, the people of Florida have realized more and more how much they owed to Mr. Yulee, and how that his memory will be long honored [and] respected."<sup>42</sup>

Floridians, like other Southerners, did not uniformly support the Southern cause, but many white Floridians bound themselves to the political issues of slavery and secession. Florida's newspapers, like others in the South, associated Yulee with the Southern cause and lauded his decision to remain with the Confederacy. The *Florida Times-Union* labeled Yulee "warmly Southern in his sentiments before and during the war."<sup>43</sup> The *Fernandina Mirror* linked Yulee, the people of Florida, and the Confederacy by proclaiming that "in common with other Southern Senators . . . [Yulee] made a stand for his section, and when the crisis came left the halls of Congress to return to share the fate of his people."<sup>44</sup> Florida's presses questioned why Yulee, unlike so many other, more notorious, Southern nationalists, was detained for such a long time and asserted that he was likely singled out "as a victim to the animosity of parties in power."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The *Pensacola (Florida) Commercial*, October 20, 1886, 1.

<sup>42</sup> The *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886, 1.

<sup>43</sup> The (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886, 2.

<sup>44</sup> The *Fernandina (Florida) Mirror*, reprinted in the (Tallahassee) *Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886.

<sup>45</sup> The (Tallahassee) *Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886, 1.

As the historian David Blight explains, many of the bitter war memories receded into the past by 1886 as the United States entered a period of unprecedented growth and expansion that required national unity. The horrible memories of war still remained in the North, but victory outweighed loss and progress overshadowed stagnation, trends evident in the themes of reconciliation and reunion marking some of the Northern obituaries. Southern presses, by contrast, were not as concerned with the progressive spirit of reunion as they were with remorsefully remembering the “lost cause” and the end of the “Old South.” Despondent “lost cause” rhetoric enveloped many Southern obituaries of Yulee. The *Columbus Enquirer*, for instance, venerated him in death with an obituary whose tone placed his memory with the gods.<sup>46</sup>

Florida’s newspapers, unlike other obituaries throughout the Southern states, followed the national trend by acknowledging his efforts toward national reunion and recognizing his involvement in the state’s post-war reconstruction. The *Florida Times-Union*, for example, claimed that he “was among the first of the prominent statesmen of the South to counsel acceptance of the results of the war and the turning of the attention of the people to material prosperity.”<sup>47</sup> The (Tallahassee) *Weekly Floridian* expanded this view. Rebuilding Florida’s infrastructure, and especially its wrecked railway system, Yulee, “without capital, without credit, by the sheer force of his intellect and will, placed the railroad in order, opened up the interior to settlement and business, extricated the railway from overwhelming embarrassments and brought it to a condition where its value was recognized and the necessary capital furnished to make it what it

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<sup>46</sup> The *Columbus* (Georgia) *Enquirer*, October 15, 1886.

<sup>47</sup> The (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886, 2.

now is, the leading and most extensive and well-equipped railway system in the State.”<sup>48</sup> Florida’s obituaries make it clear that Yulee’s political and economic activities benefitted Florida’s citizens regardless of their alignment with national or regional trends.

The different projections of Yulee found in the obituaries and editorials at the time of his death are important for several reasons. Recalling the often contentious aspects of his life, especially the debates surrounding his Jewish and Southern identity, newspapers expressed broader social concerns that existed throughout Yulee’s life and long after his death. Inaccurate information and speculative memories play a role in these projections, but it is apparent that historical accuracy is not especially relevant. These obituaries are exercises in remembering and forgetting history by imploring memory to evince particular cultural expressions. Importance comes from both the message conveyed through certain representations of Yulee and by the different meanings audiences derive from particular images of Yulee. Different memories underpin representations of his life and are a reflection of the values and sentiments of specific imagined communities. These obituaries reveal the ways in which communities manipulated memories of Yulee to shape and reflect social and cultural beliefs in the late nineteenth century.

Analyzing changes over time in the transmission and reception of memories of Yulee illuminates our understanding of the role of memory in the construction of history and community identity within shifting historical contexts. Yulee’s identity has always been dynamic. This dynamism is evident in the myriad and often disparate ways that

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<sup>48</sup> The (Tallahassee) *Weekly Floridian*, October 21, 1886.

communities have imagined him over time, making Yulee an appropriate vehicle for examining the manner in which communities shape and project memory to construct and maintain their social identities. Cultural education and individual experiences shape memories, which, in turn, are expressions of a community's cultural values exhibited through the individual's historical consciousness. The memories rendered of Yulee's life have been constantly renegotiated and recast by various and often competing communities since his death. Different communities retain their own select memories of Yulee and shape specific images to serve their particular needs. Many communities attempt to inscribe and solidify particular images by embedding memories in public spaces through the concrete medium of monuments as well as the less static images presented in historical texts and museum exhibits. Contrasting images of Yulee in historical texts and public history reflects the development and display of community values in different contexts. This dissertation will explore why some memories of Yulee have persisted, why others have perished, and how they have all been consistently revived or renegotiated in changing historical contexts.

One goal of this dissertation, corresponding to the first chapter, is to clarify and synthesize the existing information about Yulee scattered in the several biographical essays, historical text excerpts, and the two doctoral dissertations that focus on specific aspects of his life.<sup>49</sup> The historian Chris Monaco's recent coverage of Yulee in his biography of Yulee's father, Moses E. Levy, makes two key points in his text relevant to

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<sup>49</sup> Arthur W. Thompson focused on Yulee's unique enterprise in the context of the competing political economies of Southern agrarianism versus Northern industrialism. Arthur W. Thompson, *David Yulee: A Study in Nineteenth Century American Thought and Enterprise* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1954). Joseph Adler contended that Yulee was a "fire-eater" in the 1840s but not on the eve of the Civil War in the late 1850s, when he advocated moderation and expressed his desire to remain in the Union. Joseph G. Adler, *The Public Career of Senator David Levy Yulee* (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1973).

this research. Monaco, like most historians, dismisses Yulee's Jewish identity, but he thoroughly explored Yulee's family lineage, helping to dispel the mountain of myths surrounding Yulee's descent and heritage. Moreover, Monaco's thorough investigation of Levy's religious and social beliefs elicits the tensions between father and son, helping to clarify the debate surrounding Yulee's religious identity. Moses E. Levy was a religious utopian who felt that Jewish survival depended on agricultural labor and a strict reliance on Torah. David Levy Yulee rejected this view, preferring integration into modern secular by downplaying his Jewish identity.<sup>50</sup>

Chapter two explores the nature of Yulee's Jewish identity, a topic that has received limited historiographical attention.<sup>51</sup> Scholars have given much attention to the subject of Jewish identity in the United States. The eminent Jewish historian Yosef Yerushalmi elicited the fundamental crisis faced by Jews in the formation of modern Jewish identity and the overarching paradigm guiding historical investigations of this issue: the conflict between assimilation and anti-Semitism in an overwhelmingly Christian environment.<sup>52</sup> Within this paradigm, most studies of modern American Jewish identity center on individual Jews and Jewish communities struggling to negotiate their American and Jewish identities. Emily Bingham, for instance, explores the social tensions and internal conflicts faced by the Mordecai family as they

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<sup>50</sup> Chris Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Leon Huhner's focused on Yulee's Jewish identity in his 1917 article "David Levy Yulee, Florida's First Senator," which will be discussed in chapter four. Leon Huhner, "David Levy Yulee, Florida's First Senator," 52-74. In Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).

<sup>52</sup> David N. Myers, "Of Marranos and Memory: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History," 18. In Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers eds., *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 1-21.



negotiated between their American and Jewish identities throughout the nineteenth-century United States.<sup>53</sup> Prominent Jews, such as Mordecai Noah, the early nineteenth-century businessman and politician, and Judah P. Benjamin, the Southern statesman and Confederate cabinet member, often remained distant from the Jewish religion and society, yet they still publicly identified as Jews.<sup>54</sup>

Benjamin, for one, navigated the assimilation-anti-Semitism dichotomy by immersing himself in the dominant “white” culture. Whiteness conveyed cultural superiority and evinced an ability to assimilate. Most Jews subscribed to whiteness to counteract perceptions of their pre-modern exclusion and exclusiveness, and their association with cultural blackness, the lack of civilization and an inability to assimilate. As historians Eric Goldstein and Leonard Rogoff argue, Jews constructed myriad forms of Jewishness—racial, religious, and cultural—to fit themselves into the prevailing “overt racial discourses” of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries in which they straddled the line between “blackness” and “whiteness.” American Jews formulated their identity with an underlying consideration to the social status of African Americans and the tacit recognition by Jews that they were not viewed by Christian Americans as entirely white. While they strove for, and often successfully claimed, the benefits of whiteness, this came at the cost of strained relations with those not categorized as white resulting in

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<sup>53</sup> Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York.: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1981).

ambivalence about forsaking the blackness with which they have historically been associated in favor of a whiteness emanating from a historically unreliable source.<sup>55</sup>

Yulee represents a departure from these historiographical trends. Personal aspersion and political animosity compelled anti-Semitic attacks against Yulee, but Southerners rarely questioned Yulee's whiteness—his ardent support of the Southern social and political platform insured that. Additionally, Yulee never identified himself as a Jew—society ascribed this mark on him. Removing the analytical lens from self-designated Jews and Jewish communities and concentrating on Yulee, a politically successful and prominent Southern Jew who did not engage Judaism, reveals the primary importance of race in nineteenth-century Jewish identity constructions.

Historians Todd Endelman, Tony Kushner, and other scholars successfully employed this innovative methodological technique in a comprehensive study of Benjamin Disraeli's Jewish identity entitled *Disraeli's Jewishness*.<sup>56</sup> Focusing on Disraeli, England's three-term conservative Prime Minister (1868, 1874-1880), as an example of Jews' ability to assimilate into a specifically liberal English context, the contributors illustrate how Disraeli constructed a concept of racial Jewishness, one that excised Jews from the Anglo-Saxon race, but that placed them near the top of an international racial hierarchy. Race is a social construction, a biological fallacy, but man nineteenth and twentieth-century Americans understood it as (and often still perceive it to be) a very real and potent concept. Transferring the insights from this scholarship

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<sup>55</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 11 Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The racial place of the Southern Jew, in Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: an Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 390-426

<sup>56</sup> Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner, eds., *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London, England: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002).

onto a study of David Levy Yulee and coupling it with the scholarship on race, “whiteness,” and Jewish identity by Goldstein and others will show that Yulee’s Jewish identity did not impede his social, political, or economic advancement because he manipulated it to emphasize positive racial attributes while mitigating its detrimental qualities through his performance as, and association with, elite white Southern gentlemen. Yet, in accordance with Rogoff’s assertion that Jews were seen as black, Yulee’s political foes used his Jewish identity to personally assail him and critique his support for states’ rights. Yulee’s constant negotiation of Jewish and Southern identity betrays a dynamic character whose identity was never fully forged during, or after, his lifetime.

Scholarship about the myth of Sephardic superiority, cultivated among European Jews between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, underpins Endelman’s concept of racial Jewishness. Yosef Kaplan and Miriam Bodian identify the creation of this myth in northwestern European communities as a way for sixteenth-century Iberian exiles—Jews and converses—to link themselves with their Jewish religion and Iberian culture simultaneously.<sup>57</sup> These Sephardic communities, most notably those in Amsterdam and London, were among the first to negotiate Jewish and European identities concurrently by means of cultural commuting. Born from Spanish ideas of *limpieza de sangre*, Sephardic Jews were familiar with racial concepts and discourses. They used them to their advantage for the next three centuries, both to separate themselves from inferior sorts, including other Jews and common peasants, while simultaneously creating

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<sup>57</sup> Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portugese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997); Yosef Kaplan, “The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews of Western Europe and their Relation to the Alien and the Stranger.” In *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648*, Benjamin Gampel, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 121-145.

illusions of grandeur that provided them with a sense of socio-cultural strength and status. They presented a precedent for post-Enlightenment Jews throughout Europe to implement when confronted by the modern dilemma of assimilation. Disraeli, for one, used this myth to justify his Jewishness in an English context while Benjamin applied it in a specifically Southern context. The myth of Sephardic superiority served Yulee in the same way it helped Disraeli and Benjamin, by showing precedence for some Jews to assimilate mainstream culture while justifying their leadership position.

The third chapter examines Yulee's Southern identity. Until the 1960s, minus a brief lapse during the Reconstruction era, white Southerners grounded their identity in the legal separation of blacks and whites and the maintenance of total white political authority over the region. The slave economy, developed in the early nineteenth century and driven by "King Cotton," was the basis for this regionally distinctive Southern society. Within this framework, Yulee modeled his Southern identity in the image of the unchallenged plantation master. Like other plantation owners, Yulee assumed complete authority over his property—including his slaves and his and family—and vigorously fought to defend the Southern states' rights platform, a hallmark of Southern political identity. As the historian Edward Baptist explains, political leaders like Yulee claimed the mantle of Southern gentleman while contesting their Whig political enemies, those traditionally associated with the Southern plantation ruling class, by obliterating class distinctions and demanding a more participatory and broadened white democracy in the contested political terrain of early American Florida. Following the South's defeat in the Civil War, Yulee, like other white Southerners, strove to retrench the system of white political and legal control over Southern blacks lost in

the recent fray. Even as Yulee upheld the traditional standards of white Southern planter identity, certain aspects of his life and character contradicted those notions. Like many Democrats taking part in the battle for political authority in antebellum Florida, Yulee did not come from a long-standing Southern planter family with roots in Virginia or the Carolinas, nor did he operate solely within the confines of plantation and civic life. A study of Yulee demands a broader definition of the white Southern planter elite than has often been attributed to them.

Chapter four focuses on the relationship between memory, identity, and the construction of history. Historians have produced an abundance of scholarship during the last two decades that have defined different types of memory as well as considered the theoretical implications of using memory as a category of analysis.<sup>58</sup> Memory has existed as a category of analysis since the early twentieth century and the pioneering work of Maurice Halbwachs, but its popularity has grown remarkably in the last three decades. Halbwachs introduced the major guiding premise in the field, the idea that individual memories can only exist within social contexts. These social contexts are comprised of collective memory, which the historian Susan Crane defines as “a conceptualization that expresses a sense of the continual presence of the past,” and historical memory, “narratives that represent pasts...in relation to presents/presence.”<sup>59</sup> Collective memory is based in different communities’ shared lived experiences. When these experiences become too remote, deteriorated by time and experiential memory,

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<sup>58</sup> A brief listing includes, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “Introduction,” in *Where These Memories Grow* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *American Historical Review* 102:5 (Dec, 1997), 1386-1403; Susan A. Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” *American Historical Review* 102:5 (Dec, 1997), 1372-1385.

<sup>59</sup> Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” 1373.

they are preserved through historical memory. Historical memory is always representational and can be located in a variety of what the French historian Pierre Nora called *lieux de memoire*, constructed symbols for representing the past.<sup>60</sup> These “sites” of memory include (but are not limited to) textual forms, such as history books, biographies, and newsprint, as well as historical markers, monuments, and museum exhibits. History, a legitimized and official form of historical memory, demands rigid adherence to a narrative that desires unity. Collective memory often conforms to the guidelines of historical memory, legitimized in historical scholarship by professional historians and for public consumption by different individuals and groups within a particular community, yet it often contests historical memory as well. To Crane, memories are rooted in the individual and occur in the individual’s historical consciousness, “the desire for experiences to be understood historically.”<sup>61</sup> Historical consciousness is the personal experience of real individuals in relation to history and not imagined collectives. Historical consciousness is informed by collective and historical memory, but Crane stresses the centrality of reception, located in the individual, is central to this process.

The fourth chapter investigates the inextricable link between memory and identity by examining the different contexts in which memories of Yulee have been recollected since his death. Memories are fundamental to the construction of what the historian, Benedict Anderson, famously coined “imagined communities,” social groups bound by

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<sup>60</sup> Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” 1374.

<sup>61</sup> Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” 1374.

perceived common cultural references.<sup>62</sup> These communities shift their cultural beliefs and practices to reflect contemporary needs more than tradition. In the words of the historian Michael Kammen, societies “reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and . . . do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present,” a process evident in the contests over memories of Yulee.<sup>63</sup>

Americans’ first memories of Yulee occurred in the context of the tumultuous Reconstruction period and the concurrent developing drive for national reunion. The historian David Blight, in his influential book *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory*, suggests that white Americans sacrificed the pyrrhic victory of emancipation and racial egalitarianism in favor of the national cohesion necessary to navigate the perceived social disorder of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To Blight, the solidarity provided by “the inexorable drive for reunion both used and trumped race.”<sup>64</sup> Yulee’s obituaries evince this transition, as memories both disparage his association with the rebellious South and honor his efforts towards rebuilding national cohesion. One reason Americans demanded unity was because of the influx of foreign immigrants driving the rapidly advancing ideals of industrialization and urbanization. Yulee served as a model in national conversations about race and

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<sup>62</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (New York, Verso, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 3. See also, Eric J. Hobsbawm ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Patrick Hutton, “Recent Scholarship on Memory and History,” *The History Teacher* 33:4 (Aug, 2000), 533-548.

<sup>64</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

citizenship as Americans, amid national reconciliation efforts, faced issues of defining the parameters of American citizenship and the rights of American citizens.

The connection between memory and identity is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the abundant scholarship on memories of the Lost Cause and the Old South and the connection between these memories and any distinctive Southern identity. Blight concludes that the campaign for national unity included the widespread endorsement of myths about a Lost Cause and an Old South that lasted well into the twentieth-century and was only resolved by the advance of the civil rights movement. Historical memory conveyed mixed feelings about Yulee's Southern identity, expressed through the different perceptions of Yulee's allegiance to the Confederate cause, until white Southern women's clubs firmly implanted him on the Southern side by connecting him to Confederate mythology in Florida's public history. Historians have recognized the prominent role of Southern white women in forming and solidifying white Southern sentiment for the "Lost Cause" and meshing a Southern identity into a historical framework through their participation in women's clubs and social organizations, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC).<sup>65</sup> Women asserted their authority over local historical and collective memories in the South, perhaps no more apparent than in the realm of commemorative public history. The historian Jack Davis, for example, shows how socially and politically powerful white Southerners perpetuated the Lost Cause myth throughout the twentieth century in the constructed splendor of

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<sup>65</sup> For instance, see William F. Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 105-137, 183-226; Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy In North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).



antebellum Natchez, Mississippi. Davis specifically proposes that local residents in Natchez equate “whiteness” with cultural superiority, and continues by illustrating how white Southerners prominently displayed this imagined cultural superiority in the public domain (for heritage tourists). For Davis, public history attempted to solidify specific historical images in monumental or celebratory form, and embed particular recollections of the past in the private minds and public spaces of Natchez, Mississippi, while simultaneously suppressing alternative memories of a more contentious past remembered by local ethnic and racial minorities.<sup>66</sup> The manipulation of memories of Yulee by Southern white women’s groups confirms and expands our knowledge of the decisive role of women in constructing and maintaining any specifically Southern identity.

Discerning a distinctive Southern identity has become increasingly difficult in the wake of what the eminent Southern historian C. Vann Woodward referred to as the “bulldozer revolution,” the concurrent mass migration into the region, and the Civil Rights Movement. Historians of the South, including those focusing on Southern Jewish history, have focused on two key issues: defining the South as a region and “Southern” as a regional identity in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> Facing a

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<sup>66</sup> Jack E. Davis, *Race Against Time: Culture and Separation in Natchez Since 1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001). See also, LeeAnn Whites, “You Can’t Change History By Moving a Rock: Gender, Race, and the Cultural Politics Of Confederate Memorialization,” in *The Memory of The Civil War in American Culture*, Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 213-236.

<sup>67</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, “Introduction,” in Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 7. For more information on nineteenth-century Jewish acceptance of Southern social values, see Mark Greenberg, “Creating Ethnic, Class, and Southern Identity in Nineteenth-Century America: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-1880” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1997); Eli Evans, *The Provincials* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn to the South* ix, xii; Stephen J. Whitfield, “Jews and Other Southerners: Counterpoint and Paradox,” in Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn to the South*, 76-104; Jacob R. Marcus, “Foreword,” in Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical*

waning distinctiveness, or at least the public appearance of it, historians such as Stanley F. Chyet, implored their colleagues to focus on this time period, and to discern the impact of northern immigration on definitions of the South and Southern.<sup>68</sup>

The Southern Jewish historian, Leonard Rogoff, responds to Chyet's prodding and covers immigration into the Sunbelt and Southern development expansion from the 1960s to the 1990s in his book, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina*.<sup>69</sup> Rogoff claims that late twentieth-century Jews secured their place in the South through their acceptance of regional collective memories. Jewish migration to the South is also one of the issues explored in the historian Deborah Dash-Moore's *To the Golden Cities*. Dash-Moore discusses America's internal Jewish migration from the northeastern and mid-western United States to Sunbelt cities such as Los Angeles and Miami, in the post-World War II period.<sup>70</sup> The mass movement of Jews to the Sunbelt provided a need for Jews already in these regions, along with the Jewish newcomers, to re-define the boundaries of their changing imagined communities. Memories of Yulee as a Jew serve to incorporate Florida's Jewish migrants into the state's historical memory, reinforcing Rogoff and Dash-Moore's assertions and buttressing. They also buttress the historian Mark Bauman's contention that the distinctively Southern self-perception of many of the region's inhabitants in itself

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*Society* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), viii. Mark K. Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style* (Cincinnati, Ohio: American Jewish Archives, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Whitfield, "Blood and Sand: The Jewish Community of South Florida," *American Jewish History* 82:1 (Jan, 1994), 73-96, and "The Braided Identity of Southern Jewry," *American Jewish History* 77:2 (March, 1988), 363-387.

<sup>69</sup> Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> Deborah Dash-Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

solidifies the existence of a peculiar identity, and prompts continuing exploration in the transformative nature of memories and how they continually renegotiate identities and history.<sup>71</sup> The current research complements the scholarship dealing with these issues.

Representations of Yulee found in the small town of Archer, Florida, exemplify how different communities have mobilized memories of Yulee since his death to construct and reinforce various group identities. These memories are found in community histories and are imprinted on the public landscape, often providing a façade of collective agreement and community solidarity. The Archer Railroad Museum, opened in the 1980s and located near the town's center, is housed in the former train depot that served the Florida railroad. Exhibits inside laud Yulee and the railroad and correlate the centrality of the railroad's development with the town's creation and growth. Just outside the museum is a historical marker sponsored by the Alachua County Historical Commission and the Florida Department of State. Dedicated in 1989, it provides a brief biography of Yulee, identifying him as a Jew and therefore the first Jewish senator in the United States. These re-visions of the past, stamped on public sites near the center of town, have supplanted older visions. Just over a mile north of the old train depot is another historical marker erected by the Kirby-Smith chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1939. It commemorates the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the flight of Jefferson Davis's baggage train and its arrival at the site of Yulee's Civil War era "Cottonwood" plantation. Yulee's plantation provided supplies for the Confederacy and served as the final resting spot for Jefferson Davis's fleeing baggage train in the waning days of the Civil War.

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<sup>71</sup> Mark K. Bauman, "Introduction," in Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 355.

Expressions of memory, embedded in the social and physical landscape through scholarly texts, mass media sources, and public history, feature different and often contradictory aspects of Yulee's life that are replicated in numerous communities along the railroad route, including Gainesville, Cedar Key, and Fernandina Beach, Florida. Moreover, they display how the views of the past change over time by revealing the conflict and continuity between communities over what are considered to be relevant historical memories and the manifestation of those memories in public history. In 1886, at the time of his death, Yulee's celebrity stemmed from his support for secession and the Confederacy. Florida's historical memory promoted the "lost cause" suggesting that Florida's post-bellum population, concentrated primarily in the northern part of the state until the mid-twentieth century, attempted to incorporate into the rest of the "New South." Memories of the Civil War and subsequent expressions of the "lost cause" and veneration of an imagined Old South appeared in Florida's twentieth-century public history and have retained importance to many Floridians as a means of identifying with other Southern states.

These memories, however, are gradually being replaced by others whose meanings are more important and less inflammatory to many contemporary Florida residents. Neutral depictions of many towns' origins in Yulee's railroad enterprise remove them from any contextual relationship with the "Old South" and replace it in a historical context of expansion and development that is familiar to most Americans and one that is celebrated in American myth-history. Moreover, representations of Yulee as a Jew in contemporary Florida's public history helps construct social and historical parameters for Florida's Jewish communities as well as providing a sense of belonging

to place and a continuity with the past. References to Yulee's Jewish heritage generates a respect for diversity that engenders the image of a more diverse and accepting South, one that goes against historical understandings of a solidly white South. These memories reveal the various ways that communities have chosen to remember Yulee and are indicative of the values held by different communities. By 2000, memories centered on Yulee's heritage and development of the railroad largely supplanted the focus of attention on his association with the Confederacy found in his obituaries. Nevertheless, struggles over memory persist as even the seemingly politically neutral depiction of Yulee the railroad magnate and the inclusive projection of Yulee as a Jew has stirred protest from African-American communities who remember Yulee as a slaveholder.

The state of Florida serves as a particularly unique and analytically useful geopolitical site for exploring how memory affects identity construction. Like Yulee, the state's identity was, and continues to be, dynamic. Deep in the geographical and socio-cultural South and inhabited primarily by immigrants from other southern states and from around the Caribbean, Florida's borderland status reflected the lack of a secure regional or national identity, even after acquiring statehood in 1845. Though it closely associated politically and economically with other southern states, it also shared many characteristics with the trans-Mississippian frontier as well as retaining intimate commercial connections with the northern United States and the Caribbean.<sup>72</sup> Florida relied heavily on federal subsidies and military assistance. Florida's ports—

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<sup>72</sup> Arthur W. Thompson purported that Florida's nineteenth-century political economy was more closely related to development in the trans-Mississippian west than in the South. Arthur W. Thompson, "David Yulee: a study of nineteenth century American thought and enterprise," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1954). See also, Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's plantation frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Jacksonville, Key West, Pensacola—contained Republican contingencies before the war and were, in any respect, occupied by Union troops for most of the war. Floridians publicly projected a Southern white identity for most of the twentieth century, until the 1960s. The onslaught of what C. Vann Woodward dubbed the “bulldozer Revolution” and the Civil Rights Movement heralded conflict for the state’s regionally distinctive Southern identity. Northerners flocked to the Sunshine State, and especially the southern half of the peninsula, leading to the Florida proverb that the farther south you go, the farther north you end up. Yet, Florida is typically Southern in that it epitomizes Woodward’s “bulldozer Revolution” and the Americanization of the South (or, the Southernization of America). The mass migration to Florida affected concepts of identity enshrined in the state’s public history. The abundance of ostensibly politically neutral public history erected since the 1980s includes revised images of Yulee that evince this move away from the old “New South” and towards a more multicultural and inviting new “New South.”

This dissertation explores some of the mystique of David Levy, qua Yulee. Ambiguities will always persist regardless of concentrated research into the life of Yulee, yet those ambiguities are perhaps less the reflection of the inevitable restraints in historical research than the impreciseness in cultural identity. Yulee was a Jew, a white Southerner, a Confederate sympathizer, and a businessman, but he did not conform precisely to any of these identities. The current investigation of his life and the memory of his life disclose much about the elasticity of identity and the human urge to create cultural identity. Ultimately, however, Yulee was a unique individual with his own

distinctive history, one that intersected with the national and regional narratives in important ways.

## CHAPTER 2 THE LIFE OF DAVID LEVY YULEE

When the news of David Levy Yulee's death reached Florida, the (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union* proclaimed that the "late Hon. David L. Yulee has had probably a larger influence upon the character and development of the State, and played a larger part in its history, than any other man."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Yulee was a central character in nineteenth-century Florida's history. He was a key figure in the rise of Florida's Democratic Party and was instrumental in securing Florida's statehood. Yulee also held the distinction of serving as one of Florida's first two United States senators. He represented the state on the eve of the Civil War, and was the first senator to declare to Congress his state's secession from the United States. Yulee spearheaded efforts to develop Florida's infrastructure and launched the Florida Railroad, the state's first cross-peninsula line connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Alongside these achievements, Yulee was also the first Jewish member of the U.S. Senate. Although a principal agent in the state's early development who was lauded as a favorite son, Yulee was neither "a native of Florida nor a citizen of the state at the time of his death." Rather, he was a cosmopolitan Southerner who embodied the international complexities of his adopted state.<sup>2</sup>

Any biographical sketch that is part of a larger study must be abbreviated in coverage. The following survey is no exception. David Levy [Yulee] was born on June

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<sup>1</sup> (Jacksonville) *Times-Union*, October 13, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> (*St. Augustine (Florida) News* quoted in the *New-Hampshire Patriot*, July 3, 1845, 1; *Ibid.* Charles W. Lewis responded to the editor of the *Times-Union*, "Permit me to correct you, Mr. Yulee had resided in Washington for the past three years, but he retained his citizenship here, and was a registered voter of this county." (Jacksonville) *Times-Union*, October 14, 1886.



12, 1810, on the Caribbean island of St. Thomas.<sup>3</sup> His birth and those of his three older siblings—his sisters Rachel and Rahma and brother Elias—were among the first recorded in the island’s newly established Jewish community at Charlotte Amalie. A modest number of Jews had lived on Danish St. Thomas since the late-seventeenth century, but unlike their counterparts on the more prosperous Dutch islands of St. Eustatius and Curacao, they failed to establish a stable religious community. British harassment of Dutch possessions, including the invasion of St. Eustatius in 1781, inflicted severe losses on many Jewish merchants, causing them to reconsider the safety and profitability of St. Eustatius’s ports and inducing their flight to St. Thomas. Business relations and family connections linked many Jews around the Caribbean, as did their shared cultural traditions originating in an Iberian (Sephardic) past, factors that helped ease the transition for Jewish immigrants from St. Eustatius to other, neighboring Caribbean islands where the Sephardic tradition also prevailed, such as St. Thomas. Although the burgeoning Sephardic Jewish community strove to build a cohesive Jewish community, it also integrated and engaged with the wider non-Jewish community. Many Jews, for instance, conducted business with their gentile neighbors and eagerly joined them in Masonic lodges.<sup>4</sup> The thriving business environment on St. Thomas generated additional incentive for Jews to migrate there. There were approximately 160 Jews on St. Thomas maintaining a Sephardic-style synagogue

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<sup>3</sup> David Levy added the surname “Yulee” as an adult. He has been historically referred to and remembered as “David Levy Yulee” so I, likewise, will most often identify him as “Yulee.” Yulee and his brother, Elias, were presumably among the first Jewish boys circumcised on the island. Denmark claimed St. Thomas in 1671 and held the island until 1917, when the United States took possession of it. Danish rule was interrupted by brief periods of British rule in 1801 and from 1807 to 1815, when Yulee was five-years old.

<sup>4</sup> Judah M. Cohen, *Through the Sands of Time: A History of the Jewish Community of St. Thomas, U.S., Virgin Islands* (N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 1-19.

founded in 1796, a cemetery, and a *hebre*, or burial society by the time of Yulee's birth in 1810.

Yulee's parents, Moses Elias Levy and Hannah Abendanone, typified the recent Jewish immigrants that formed the majority of the population of this rapidly emerging Jewish community. The Abendanone's were a wealthy and influential Sephardic family with commercial and familial ties throughout the Caribbean. Hannah's father, David Abendanone, was a merchant who came to St. Thomas from St. Eustatius following the British military incursion in 1781. When David's seventeen-year-old daughter, Hannah, married Moses E. Levy in 1803, the Abendanone family was already well established and respected in the developing community.<sup>5</sup>

Moses E. Levy's family history was rather extraordinary. Levy was born into a prominent Sephardic family in North Africa whose genealogy included a long list of important merchants and advisors to various Muslim rulers. Levy's father, Eliahu ha Levy ibn Yuli, was an influential merchant and courtier in the late eighteenth-century Moroccan court of Sultan Sidi Muhammad (Muhammad bin Abd-Allah).<sup>6</sup> On one occasion, Yuli warned the sultan of a plot hatched by the sultan's son and rival Mulay Yazid against the throne, resulting in Yazid's arrest. Muhammad's death in 1790, and Yazid's subsequent ascent to the throne, forced Yuli's hurried departure from Morocco to Gibraltar. Levy was born in Mogador, Morocco, in 1782 while his father still served

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<sup>5</sup> Sources identify the Abendanone's as merchants and ship-owners in a diverse Atlantic World economy, but they are not connected with the trade in any specific commodities. F. O. Bro-Jorgensen to Mary MacRae, Copenhagen, Denmark, March 8, 1950, box 1, David Levy Yulee Papers, Special and Area Studies Collection, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (Yulee Papers); Chris Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Monaco names the Moroccan sultan as Sidi Muhammad while Cohen refers to him as Muhammad bin Abd-Allah. Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 12, 15; Cohen, *Through the Sands of Time*, 13.

the Sultan. He accompanied his parents, sister, and at least one servant in the family's flight to Gibraltar in 1798. Levy was only a young man when his father died around 1800. He later recalled having had a religious epiphany and, soon thereafter, he dropped the "Yuli" surname for unknown reasons and left Gibraltar for St. Thomas, where he felt he would be free to explore his religious ideals. The *haskalah*, the enlightenment movement among Europe's newly emancipated Jews that espoused the compatibility of religion with nationalism, influenced Levy's thought, but unlike many *maskilim* (supporters of the *haskalah*), Levy proposed returning to a biblical form of Judaism guided by the Old Testament in a separate, rather than integrated, national-religious community.

Levy probably chose St. Thomas because of a social connection. Elias Sarquy, a family servant in Morocco, apparently accompanied them on their escape from North Africa. Eliahu ha Levi ibn Yuli released Sarquy from servitude upon reaching Gibraltar, and Sarquy left for the Caribbean. It is likely that Sarquy, who prospered as a merchant on St. Thomas, remained in contact with the family and helped Moses E. Levy establish himself on the island. As the historian Chris Monaco notes, Sarquy's deferential manner towards Levy undoubtedly increased Levy's social capital, allowing him to obtain a share in a commercial ship that engaged primarily in the lumber trade.<sup>7</sup> Levy was also active in the Jewish community and was a member of the synagogue, *hebreh*, and Freemasons. Although he had little personal wealth, Levy's elite Moroccan family background, rising stature in the Jewish community, and promising business acumen provided sufficient reasons for the wealthy Abendanone's to arrange their daughter's

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<sup>7</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 23.

marriage to him in 1803. Soon after the wedding, Levy purchased his own cargo ship and entered into a business venture outfitting merchant ships with Philip and Emmanuel Benjamin, his wife's relatives and fellow immigrants from St. Eustatius. Philip Benjamin's son Judah later became Yulee's senatorial colleague and a prominent Confederate official.<sup>8</sup>

Yulee was born into this increasingly affluent and influential household, yet little is known about his childhood on St. Thomas. Yulee's son and first biographer, Charles Wickliffe Yulee, recorded only a few of his father's childhood memories.<sup>9</sup> David referred to this period only once in his abundant papers, although his allusion is to the most important circumstance in Yulee's childhood: his parent's separation and divorce. He remembered his youth on St. Thomas as being "disconnected with any other presence than that of my mother and of a single visit there, of a few days only, of my father. I was told that my brother and sisters had been sent to London for their education so that I knew none of them until I met them at a late day."<sup>10</sup> Moses E. Levy and Hannah Abendanone divorced in 1815 but had separated at least three years earlier.<sup>11</sup> Yulee later claimed that it was his father's "peculiar views and condition of mind" that "wrecked

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<sup>8</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 24-26; Joseph G. Adler, "The Public Career of Senator David Levy Yulee," (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Wickliffe Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 2:1 (1909), 2. According to C. Wickliffe, Yulee recalled the change of possession of St. Thomas from England to Denmark in 1815. Yulee also remembered falling from a stone pillar outside of his father's residence on St. Thomas, an incident that apparently left him with a lifelong scar on his forehead.

<sup>10</sup> David Levy Yulee, "Narrative of My Administration of My Father's Estates: Relations with My Father's Family," box 1, Yulee Papers. Yulee did not meet his brother Elias until 1827. The two developed a close relationship and corresponded regularly. Yulee did not meet his sisters until Levy's death in 1854, although he had infrequently corresponded with them before. See Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Their divorce was not officially granted until 1818. Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 28 (fn 25).

the unity of his family, [and] was well understood among its members.”<sup>12</sup> However, as the historian Chris Monaco notes, Yulee was a toddler when his parents separated. He was, moreover, distressed over legal proceedings surrounding his recently deceased father’s estate when he penned the preceding comments. It may be, as Monaco claims, that their marriage, arranged in the “Old Antediluvian style,” simply did not take into account their conflicting personalities.<sup>13</sup>

Levy retained a residence in Charlotte Amalie, but his expansive business pursuits carried him throughout the Atlantic world, and he spent considerable time in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and England. By 1817, Levy supplied Spanish authorities in the Caribbean and South America with a variety of goods, including gunpowder, as well as assisting their endeavors against the Caribbean pirates hampering Spanish trade and political authority. He also became increasingly dedicated to his idea of establishing a Jewish utopian agricultural community in the United States, an objective that would ultimately bring his son David to Florida. These diverse commitments consumed Levy, and as a result he did not spend much time with his youngest son during Yulee’s formative years. Yulee would likely have been surrounded by his mother and her extended family and raised in the cosmopolitan Jewish community at Charlotte Amalie during this time, yet he would have faced considerable solitude as well, since his three siblings had already been sent abroad for their education.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> David Levy Yulee, “Narrative of My Administration of My Father’s Estates.” Yulee Papers.

<sup>13</sup> David Levy Yulee, “Narrative of My Administration of My Father’s Estates,” Yulee Papers. Also, see Moses E. Levy to Samuel Myers, May 4, 1819, Barton-Myers Collection, Moses Myers Papers, Jean Outland Chrysler Museum of Art (JOC), Norfolk, VA (Myers Papers). See Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 30-31.

Levy influenced his son's childhood, despite his long absence from it, and began planning Yulee's education in early 1819. He decided to send his nine-year-old son to the United States rather than to join his older brother in England. Levy preferred the United States for several reasons. A plan for a utopian Jewish agricultural community was foremost on his mind. Levy wished to create a community where Jews could escape what he considered to be their "degraded state" of existence in religious and cultural poverty by living modern agrarian lifestyles in accordance with Old Testament strictures.<sup>15</sup> Levy's visions were not far-fetched in the eyes of many of his contemporaries. Jews had only recently been released from the restrictions of pre-modern legal and social constraints as well as their own self-imposed limitations on religious and social development. In this new social milieu, many Jews sought new avenues of religious and social satisfaction through the establishment of religious reform movements and utopian communities. Noteworthy American Jews such as Rebecca Graetz and Mordecai Noah espoused similar ideals. Each of them felt the United States was a progressive nation in the proverbial "New World" with a tradition of religious toleration free from the taint of European anti-Semitism. It also contained abundant land for purchase and settlement and was an ideal potential utopia.

Levy also had commercial and personal connections with several prominent American Jews, including Moses Myers. Myers was a wealthy and influential Jewish merchant living in Norfolk, Virginia, who maintained extensive business contacts with Jewish merchants throughout the Caribbean. Prominent in Norfolk's civic community, he served in the Virginia militia, the Norfolk city council, and was a member of the

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<sup>15</sup> Moses Levy to Rachel DaCosta, September 1, 1853, Yulee Papers. Also, Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 5-8; 39-47; Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 3, 5.

Masonic lodge.<sup>16</sup> Myers, like Levy, maintained close ties to Jews and Judaism, but criticized Jewish religious and community institutions and lived primarily in the secular world. He, too, was searching for a revitalized and modern Judaism. Levy's plans for his utopian Jewish agricultural community impressed him and his two sons, John and Samuel. Twenty-eight-year old Samuel, the younger and more impressionable of the two brothers, was particularly captivated and eagerly engaged the project. Levy asked his new protégé, Samuel, to assume responsibility for David's board and education to which Samuel, recently married and with a young child of his own, consented.

In June 1819, Levy plucked David from the security and comfort of his home and family on St. Thomas and sent him to the United States with Emmanuel Benjamin, Levy's former business partner. The two disembarked at Wilmington, North Carolina, where Yulee met Samuel Myers, his new guardian, for the first time, before the two of them carried on to Norfolk. Several historians record that Myers promptly placed Yulee in the Norfolk Academy, a reputable preparatory school that he, too, purportedly attended before matriculating at the College of William and Mary.<sup>17</sup> However, the available historical records do not support this claim and there is no evidence that either Yulee or Samuel Myers ever enrolled there. The only references to Yulee's attendance at any specific educational institution are receipts for payments by Samuel Myers to "R.S. Cleland's school." Regardless, Yulee remained enrolled in school under Cleland's

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<sup>16</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 53; Malcolm H. Stern, "American Jewry Comes of Age," in Jonathan D. Sarna, ed. *The American Jewish Experience* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986), 32-37.

<sup>17</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 7 (fn 11); Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 71, 119; Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 57.

supervision, an indication that Myers must have believed that the young boy would receive the classical education Levy desired.<sup>18</sup>

Torn from his family on St. Thomas, brought to a different nation, and placed in a strange environment, Yulee must have already been apprehensive about his new living arrangements, but several other events further strained living conditions in the Myers household following Yulee's arrival in Norfolk. Moses E. Levy, Samuel Myers, and Moses Myers had invested in land in Illinois as a prospective site for their utopian project, but their speculation failed and the Myers's became financially indebted to Levy. Compounding the precarious financial situation, Samuel, who pledged to "not pause or tremble at the task" of helping Levy organize and establish his Jewish agrarian community, retracted his commitment and moved to Pensacola, Florida, with his wife and child to practice law.<sup>19</sup> Samuel Myers's departure left the adolescent Yulee in the hands of the septuagenarian Moses Myers. Levy feared that his son would burden the Myers family when they initially agreed to have David stay with them. His fear was not unwarranted. Moses Myers later complained that the adolescent's behavior required "the full attention of the family," although he did not define any specific incidents.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Like many nineteenth-century private schools and independent tutors, the Cleland School is absent from historical records and historical memory. Schools found it difficult to retain the financial support and enrollment necessary for long-term survival prior to the installation of wide spread public education. The Norfolk Academy, unlike its competitors, lasted. It is possible that historical memory conflated Yulee's attendance at a competing school that ceased to exist. Unfortunately, the Norfolk Academy, too, retained only sparse records from this period. The only available records from the Norfolk Academy do not list David Levy or Samuel Myers on the ledger. The Moses Myers collection contains two receipts from Samuel Myers to "R.S. Cleland's school" for David's education. Samuel Myers to Cleland School, April 13, 1820; Samuel Myers to Cleland School, unknown date, 1820; Samuel Myers to Cleland School, March 13, 1821, Myers Papers (JOC). Thanks to Laura Christiansen, curator at the Jean Outland Library, Chrysler Museum of Art, and Gay Savage, archivist at the Norfolk Academy, for their assistance recovering this information.

<sup>19</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Moses Myers to Moses Levy, April 8, 1825, Myers Papers. See, Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 119.



Yulee's living arrangements may have been adverse, but he apparently found comfort in school. According to Charles Yulee, David built many friendships during his stay in Norfolk and retained fond memories of his time at school.<sup>21</sup> Yulee's father felt otherwise. Despite Levy's initial reception to educating his son in a liberal Christian environment, he clearly became more distraught at the nature of Yulee's education over time. Levy believed that the Christian environment in Norfolk, and especially at the school, turned his son's religious outlook away from Judaism. However, very few educational opportunities fit his demanding criteria and hardly any Jewish educational institutions existed in the United States for most of the nineteenth century, let alone reputable academies. The fact that he demanded that his son receive a strong classical education compelled him to place Yulee in a liberal educational environment that could potentially challenge his Jewish heritage.

Ultimately, the idea of a classical education under the direction of a responsible clergyman was less distressing than the reality. Levy implored Myers to employ his son as a printer or in a counting house, presumably to retain him in a more controlled and Jewish environment while removing him from Christian influences. Yulee was bitter that he was forced to work as a clerk in a counting house while other young men of his age and station pursued higher education, and he approached his employment with unfeigned frustration. Charles Yulee later claimed that Levy's increasing dissatisfaction with his son's Christian educational environment and its influence on David's character

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<sup>21</sup> Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, 5. Charles Wickliffe writes, "The friendships he formed here lasted without exception, all his life, and were, Southern fashion, inherited by the succeeding generation, as the writer was glad to find, when he entered the University of Virginia." Similarly, amateur historian, Celeste Kavanaugh, recalls in her family's memory of Yulee that, "he came under the influence of the school principal, a devout Presbyterian clergyman, who shaped his life in a manner which Moses had not foreseen." Kavanaugh, *David Levy Yulee: A Man and His Vision*, (Amelia Island, Fla.: Amelia Island Museum of History, 1992), 5.

persuaded him to abruptly cut David's funding, effectively forcing David to leave Virginia, yet it seems that David left Norfolk of his own volition. Evidence suggests that David resented his father's intrusion on his life. Suffering from "languor and apathy" with his employment and stagnant social situation, David expressed his gratitude to Moses Myers for his hospitality before leaving Virginia to seek the solace and comfort of his mother and maternal family on St. Thomas.<sup>22</sup>

Sixteen-year-old Yulee hastily departed Norfolk in April 1827 and returned to St. Thomas. He left no record of his return to St. Thomas, but evidence suggests he was uncomfortable with his mother's physically and mentally abusive new husband, Moses Julien.<sup>23</sup> It is possible, too, that David's seven years in the United States—nearly half of his young life—created a cultural gap between him and his relations on St. Thomas. He would address this cultural distance many years later when he refused to bring his ailing mother to America because of her disagreeable "West India habits and education," a set of unknown traits that were perceived as stale and un-American, and which annoyed and embarrassed him. These factors spurred his exodus from St. Thomas after only a

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<sup>22</sup> David Levy to Moses Myers, April 17, 1827, Myers Papers. David's siblings were not on St. Thomas. Elias was in the United States and Levy sent David's sisters to England where they attended school under pseudonyms in order to avoid anti-Semitism. Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 46. Charles Wickliffe Yulee later claimed that Levy's increasing dissatisfaction with his son's Christian educational environment and its influence on Yulee's character persuaded him to abruptly cut Yulee's funding, effectively forcing him to leave Virginia and return to his Jewish family on St. Thomas. Wickliffe explained Levy's action as being prompted by a "condition of religious socialism," induced by the failure of religions to supply a universal guiding principle enunciated in his thought "All our actions must be for the love of God only." This principle, "while theoretically most sound, led practically to few spasmodic ultra examples, but far oftener, resulted in sophistic self-reasoning, through which he did whatever he wished." Charles Wickliffe Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 2:1-2 (1909), 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 143

few months to live with his brother Elias on their father's plantation, Pilgrimage, in Florida.<sup>24</sup>

Following the failed land investment in Illinois with the Myers's, Levy turned his attention to purchasing land in the newly ceded Florida territory. In March 1820, during Yulee's first year in Norfolk, Levy purchased over 67,000 acres of land in north central Florida near present-day Micanopy from Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo, a business associate in Havana. He immediately dedicated part of this property as the site for his utopian community. Pilgrimage did not thrive as a Jewish utopian community, so Levy turned to slave labor in order to maintain his plantation's viability, a tactic that had the desired effect. Pilgrimage prospered as a sugar cane plantation—it was one of the first in Florida—and was fully operational when Yulee arrived in 1827.<sup>25</sup>

David found a cultural frontier in the Florida territory, and one that was in limbo. Spain ceded East and West Florida—the Florida Territory—to the United States through the Adams-Onís Treaty of February 22, 1819, but the United States did not officially take possession until July 10, 1821. The newly acquired territory contained nearly 54,000 square miles of land, 1,200 miles of coastline, and 11,000 miles of navigable waterways, but a small total population that had only grown to 34,730 free and enslaved residents by 1830.<sup>26</sup> At the time the United States acquired the territory, most of the

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<sup>24</sup> David Levy Yulee to Moses E. Levy, March 7, 1848, box 40, Yulee Papers; Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 9, 97, 100, 105; Joseph G. Adler, "Moses Elias Levy and Attempts to Colonize Florida, 26-27, in Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), 17-30.

<sup>26</sup> United States census data available online at <http://library.ucf.edu/GovDocs/statisticsfl.php>; [www.statemaster.com](http://www.statemaster.com); [www.stateofflorida.com](http://www.stateofflorida.com). Also, see Arthur W. Thompson, "David Yulee: A Study of Nineteenth Century American Thought and Enterprise," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1954), 11; Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 301; Marjory Stoneman Douglas claimed 48,223 residents, including 21,132 slaves, based on the census data gathered by the Florida Legislative Assembly in 1837. Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *Florida: The Long Frontier* (New York:

territory's residents either settled in port towns such as Pensacola in the western panhandle, Key West at the end of the Florida Keys, or Jacksonville and St. Augustine along the Atlantic coast. Many others spread out into the hinterland of St. Augustine and Jacksonville, in the area bounded by the St. Marys River to the north, the St. Johns River to the west, and the Atlantic coast to the east. There were also several thousand Indians accompanied by perhaps hundreds, if not thousands, of runaway slaves (mainly from Georgia and South Carolina) that dominated the state's interior, where Levy's plantation was located. Prior to Americas' acquisition of the territory, Florida's few residents generally enjoyed a tradition of relaxed Spanish rule, one that included few racial or religious restrictions. Spain's cession spurred emigration from the Southern states into the territory, causing a reconfiguration of cultural and political values. Established planters arrived alongside poor white farmers, traders, and trappers from the southern states. Typically abandoning depleted land, planters from the Carolinas, Virginia, and the Caribbean brought their property—including human chattel—into Florida in their quest for refreshed soil, wealth, and power. Florida's Indian population, only recent immigrants to the area themselves, gazed warily at the stream of new arrivals while free blacks in St. Augustine felt the restrictive grip of American racial values and policies. As Florida's population continued to slowly but steadily grow through the 1820s and into the 1830s, these various groups vied for social influence and political power in Florida's dynamic cultural environment.<sup>27</sup>

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Harper and Row, 1967), 157; For estimates of the Seminole population in Florida, see Michael Gannon, ed. *The New History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 191.

<sup>27</sup> Gannon, *New History of Florida*, 265. For more on colonial Spanish rule, see Jane G. Landers, ed. *Colonial Plantations and Economy in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000). For a thorough discussion about the contest over Florida's political identity between 1820-1850, see Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's plantation frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill:

This socio-cultural frontier thrived in the geographic hinterland surrounding Levy's plantation in Florida's interior. Many residents and migrants would have concurred with the assessment that "Florida was, for the most part, a howling wilderness, and indescribable in its wild yet horrible and beautiful grandure[sic]"<sup>28</sup> Numerous hazards existed in the dense forests and expansive swamps that covered much of the territory. Venomous snakes, alligators, sub-tropical and tropical diseases, intense heat, lawlessness, and occasional Indian resistance were just some of the factors limiting Florida's settlement. Yet Florida also promised agricultural and commercial potential, an alluring prospect that brought immigrants like Moses E. Levy. The forests and swamps contained a profusion of commercially valuable flora and fauna while beneath them lay rich, fertile soil ready for the plow. The abundant navigable waterways traversing the land eased transportation concerns and made the commercial exploitation of the hinterland viable, though still difficult. Although peninsular Florida initially remained sparsely populated after the territorial cession to the United States, increasing numbers of cotton plantations, small farms, Indian settlements, and the occasional small town dotted the countryside amidst the stretches of oak, pine and cypress.

After growing up in the comparatively cosmopolitan environs of Charlotte Amalie and Norfolk, Yulee's arrival on Florida's interior frontier must have produced mixed

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University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For a general discussion about frontier economic, political, and social exchange, see Daniel H. Usner, *Indians, settlers, and slaves in a frontier exchange economy: the Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Canter Brown, *Ossian B. Hart: Florida's Loyalist Reconstruction Governor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997) 24, 26.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 4, James D. Elderkin, *Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of a Soldier of Three Wars* (Detroit, 1899), 17, in Brown, Jr., *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 8.

feelings of trepidation and enthusiasm. He later claimed that this was the happiest period in his life, although this was a statement issued in a politically motivated public letter to his constituents.<sup>29</sup> Pilgrimage was located among the oak hammocks and pine forests deep in the interior of the north-central peninsular part of the territory. Micanopy, a small trading town named in recognition of the Seminole leader, was the closest neighboring American settlement. Local Seminoles, who were eventually forced on to a nearby reservation established in 1823 under the Treaty of Moultrie Creek, frequented Micanopy to trade, but they also presented a constant threat to the expanding white population.

Yulee's arrival in an unfamiliar, frontier environment was also the first time he met his older brother, Elias. Fortunately, the two—six years apart in age—quickly developed a close relationship. Levy sent Elias to England as a youth for his education before removing him from school and shipping him to the United States and Harvard College. After leaving Harvard, where he encountered the same challenges to his religious identity as his younger brother encountered in Norfolk, Elias proceeded to Pilgrimage where the two brothers learned about property management from the plantation overseer while their father travelled abroad in England. Yulee spent much of his free time fishing and reading. He embarked on an ambitious regimen of legal studies that he hoped would lead to a career in law, one that he likely envisioned launching in St. Augustine, Florida's oldest and largest town and one accessible from Micanopy. Yulee frequented St. Augustine with Elias, who introduced him to their father's friends among the town's social elite. The quaint former seat of Spanish East Florida shared a similar

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<sup>29</sup> "Circular of Mr. Levy of Florida to his constituents," June 17, 1844, reprinted in *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, July 16, 1844. See Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 9

size, climate, and society with Charlotte Amalie, and must have been a pleasant respite from the daily responsibilities of plantation management. Yulee cultivated close relationships with many of St. Augustine's wealthy and powerful citizens on his regular visits into town, associations that would later form the nucleus of his future political constituency.

The brothers' lives were interrupted in early 1829 when their father returned to Florida from England. Both suffered strained relations with him. They disapproved of their father's unorthodox Jewish religious views and strenuously disavowed his abolitionist sentiments, which were at odds with Pilgrimage's labor system and were not well received in the American South. Levy suffered at best an uncomfortable relationship with Elias, and one that Elias would not endure. He departed Pilgrimage for St. Thomas in 1829 before eventually returning to the United States where he spent time in the Washington Territory in the Pacific Northwest as well as in Savannah, Georgia. Levy and his oldest son remained distant until Levy's death in 1854, although David and Elias maintained fairly regular communication with each other throughout their lives.<sup>30</sup>

David did not remain at Pilgrimage much longer than his brother. He was becoming politically active, much to his father's chagrin, and had joined his neighbors in petitioning President Andrew Jackson in early 1829 to establish a military fort at Micanopy for protection against local Indians. Levy remained detached from politics,

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<sup>30</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 143-144; Leon Huhner, "David L. Yulee: Florida's First Senator," in Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 57.

once claiming, "in politics, I have neither portions or lots."<sup>31</sup> He wanted his son to be a planter who supported Levy's goals, and disapproved of David's political indulgences or his desire to enter the legal profession. By April 1829, David left Pilgrimage and took employment as a clerk to the legislative council of Florida at the behest of friends' suggestions.<sup>32</sup> A short while later, he assumed a position in Newnansville, Florida, at the Alachua County circuit court before settling in St. Augustine in 1831. He continued studying law during this time, and was granted admission to the bar of the eastern district of Florida in 1832. David primarily practiced commercial and real estate law, and even handled some of his father's legal cases despite their differences. He also developed a friendship with judge and future territorial governor Robert Reid, whose tutelage enhanced the young lawyer's reputation and guided the formation of his political career in Florida's rising Democratic Party.

Yulee, Reid, and their colleagues in Florida's Democratic Party manufactured their political success on the foundation of political ideals associated with Andrew Jackson. Jacksonian principles shaped the nation's Democratic Party for over two decades by espousing rugged individualism and the ideal of the common man alongside populism and territorial expansion, which appealed to the townsmen, farmers, and frontiersmen inhabiting territories such as Florida. Yulee's frontier experiences on his father's plantation and his social interaction with the elite of St. Augustine society exposed him to the myriad concerns of eastern Florida's diverse constituency and

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<sup>31</sup> Moses Levy to the editor of the *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, January 13, 1843.

<sup>32</sup> Levy's resentment over Yulee's decision to pursue public life flared years later when complained that "David became a lawyer instead of agriculture as he promised against my views." Moses E. Levy to Rachel Pretto Henriques, September 18, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers. Nevertheless, real estate litigation forced Levy to engage his son's professional services on several occasions over the next two decades.



shaped his democratic political views. In Florida's fertile political landscape, Levy utilized his personal frontier experiences, his wealthy and influential connections in St. Augustine, and his engaging personality to cast himself as the archetypical Jacksonian Democrat.<sup>33</sup> His earliest forays into the public forum, including a well-received July Fourth oratory in St. Augustine in 1834, occurred when Jacksonian Democracy was at the zenith of its national appeal. He and his fellow Democrats opposed the Whig planters from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, who sought to maintain their entrenched social and political authority born of their rich land holdings in Middle Florida, located between the Suwanee and Apalachicola rivers and the seat of Florida's agricultural and political power. The contest for political control of Florida intensified as immigrants streamed into other parts of the territory.

Yulee continued practicing law in St. Augustine, but he saw his future in the political arena and took advantage of the opportunity to enhance his political prestige when it surfaced in 1835. Yulee joined the territorial militia and was present at several important diplomatic counsels, including the "Great Talk" between Seminole leaders, including Osceola, and federal Indian agent General Wiley Thompson, who was in charge of American military and diplomatic operations in mid-1835.<sup>34</sup> His continuing

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<sup>33</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 162-163. According to Thompson, four counties in middle Florida—Gadsden, Leon, Jefferson, and Jackson—contained half of the territory's population and the majority of its wealth, including eighty percent of the territory's cotton production, in 1840. Thompson, "David Yulee," 11. A complete discussion of the contest for social and political control of mid nineteenth-century Florida can be found in E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Charles Wickliffe closely aligned his father with democratic ideals by correlating Yulee with humble origins and a rough and tumble frontier lifestyle. Wickliffe claimed that his father, in true Jacksonian form, rose from a low station in life, outfitted in slaves' clothes, to attain his prominence in the Democratic Party. In another instance, Wickliffe claimed that his father once won the vote of an entire Whig controlled precinct with a well placed bullseye in a shooting contest. The veracity of these tales is dubious, but they suggest that Levy created a political persona fashioned along Jacksonian lines. Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 14-15.

agitation for Indian removal bolstered his political image and earned him the significant political backing necessary to get elected to the St. Johns County legislative council in 1836 and to the new bicameral Florida legislature the following year. In 1838, as a delegate from St. Johns County, Yulee participated in the territorial constitutional convention whose objective was to frame and draft a viable constitution making the territory eligible for admission into the union as a state. Congressional approval of the constitution further enhanced Yulee and the Democratic Party's reputation. In 1841, Florida voters elected him to the prestigious and influential position of territorial delegate to the United States Congress, a position to which he won an overwhelming re-election campaign in 1843.

Yulee's political popularity stemmed from a platform grounded in securing federal assistance for the territory and in leading Florida into the Union. He fiercely advocated Indian removal and the extension of federal authority, insisting that Florida required federal troops and dollars to mobilize and protect settlement and material development. Foremost, Yulee vigorously lobbied for Florida's admission into the Union. Foreseeing the potential political barriers Florida faced as a prospective slave state, he strictly adhered to the Missouri Compromise, surveying the political canvass for another, non-slave territory also seeking admission to augment his chances for success. He addressed these concerns in a letter to his Democratic Party and future senate colleague from Florida, James D. Westcott, in which he said, "as it will be next to impossible to bring Florida in alone, it has been thought best to get our matter under way in this session, and not risk a defeat, but to be in train for immediate action in the

next session.”<sup>35</sup> Yulee also faced intense opposition to these goals from within the territory he represented, where Whig opposition to statehood blocked the initial attempt at admittance. Nevertheless, three years of incessant efforts stumping for statehood in the public forum and in private conversations ultimately placed him on the brink of an unqualified political victory. As Florida and the free state of Iowa prepared to enter the union in 1845, Yulee boasted to Westcott just days before Florida’s admission:

I took up this measure at the only time when there was a hope of uniting the people—came out wholly in the fact of unanimous opposition in my own district, on the favor of which I was so dependent for my prospects in life—took the stump upon the subject—wrote my friend in its support—got the measure reported in the only shape it could have passed—have now got it through the House with a triumphant vote—have been laboring like a slave to overcome the party policy by which we were to be buried in the Senate, and am now satisfied it has been successfully overcome and that we will be admitted—and with all this evidence of my sincerity I am to be blamed if by unavoidable circumstances it should fail. . . . This disposition to blame me may be owing to my not continuing to make incessant noise about it. It is not according to my way to do so. I have my own manner of accomplishing things. I came out upon the subject and kept it going, until public sentiment at home was ripe for the movement. I then turned to the accomplishment of the measure here and worked in quiet until it was time to make a noise and demonstration here, and then did it, and succeeded. Never judge me to be inactive because I am silent.<sup>36</sup>

Florida became the twenty-seventh state to enter the United States on March 1, 1845.

Levy campaigned for one of the new states’ two senate seats immediately following Florida’s entry into the Union. In August 1845, Florida’s Democratic-controlled General Assembly unanimously selected Yulee to represent the new state in the United States Senate. David Levy, one of the first two senators from the state of Florida, took his seat

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<sup>35</sup> David Levy to James D. Westcott, 1842, in Leon Huhner, “David Levy Yulee: Florida’s First Senator,” 63, in *Jews in the South*. Eds. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 52-74.

<sup>36</sup> David Levy to James D. Westcott, February 22, 1845, in Huhner, “David Levy Yulee,” 64.

on December 1, 1845. Soon thereafter, on December 10, 1845, David Levy changed his name to David Levy Yulee by an act of the Florida legislature.

On April 7, 1846, Yulee married Nancy “Nan” Wickliffe, the daughter of Charles A. Wickliffe, a former governor of Kentucky and the U.S. postmaster general during President John Tyler’s administration, at Wickland, the Wickliffe family plantation near Bardstown, Kentucky.<sup>37</sup> Wickliffe was notoriously beautiful and a pious Christian, the combination of the two earning her the sobriquet “the Wickliffe Madonna.”<sup>38</sup> Yulee likely met her at a social function during the Tyler administration and declared his love for her soon thereafter. Letters exchanged between the two during their brief courtship suggest that she initially resisted his overtures before committing herself to marriage. There were practical considerations to their marriage. Wickliffe’s family name and connections expanded Yulee’s political network and social prestige, while Yulee’s own political capital and his increasing wealth derived from his legal and political careers, as well as land speculation, made him a marriageable prospect.<sup>39</sup> Their intense feelings for each other, however, subsumed any pragmatic considerations. On one occasion, Yulee wrote to her as she pondered his marriage proposal, “how zealously do I long to be accepted as your slave! To deserve and obtain your hand . . . is now my only object in

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<sup>37</sup> *Bismarck Tribune*, October 19, 1883; *the American Israelite*, October 15, 1886; Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 61; Huhner, “David Levy Yulee,” 18. Nancy Wickliffe’s brother, Robert Wickliffe, was governor of Louisiana just prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Yulee often addressed Nancy as “Nan” or “Nannie” in their decades of correspondence.

<sup>38</sup> “Ladies,” (Washington D.C.) *The Huntress*, February 27, 1847, 11:8, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 39. Robert Seager, *And Tyler Too* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 47.

life.”<sup>40</sup> His promise of devotion endured. The couple ultimately raised four children—Charles Wickliffe, Florida (“Flora”), Margaret (“Maggie”), and Caroline (“Nannie”). Letters exchanged between them throughout their lives indicate that they remained happily married until Wickliffe’s death in 1884.

David Levy Yulee took his Senate seat on March 3, 1846, and dedicated his term to promoting Florida’s economic development and the protection of Southern interests.<sup>41</sup> Yulee worked with the United States postmaster general and the Senate Post Office Committee procuring postal routes through Florida, which improved commerce and communication throughout the state. He also served on the Naval Affairs Committee from 1845 to 1848 and became its chairman from 1848 to 1851. From this position he championed improvements for Florida’s ports and harbors, for instance securing funding for a naval yard in Pensacola. Yulee displayed economic progressivism in his vision of the maritime future by advancing ironclad vessels. He foresaw technological innovations in shipbuilding and took a political risk by endorsing the commission of iron vessels. Ironclad vessels were still a novelty in an era of wood, wind, and steam. Moreover, Florida’s timber industry, a major supplier to the United States Navy, competed with Northern and European iron manufacturers. Conversely, he favored a conservative approach to the social and legal aspects of naval policy. For instance, he supported traditional naval disciplinary measures by opposing the abolition of flogging

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<sup>40</sup> David Levy to Nancy Wickliffe, May 30, 1845, Yulee Papers. See also, (Washington, D.C.) *The Huntress*, February 27, 1847, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Yulee, “Senator David L. Yulee,” 14; Huhner, “David L Yulee,” 67.

sailors as a punitive method, a measure championed by the Jewish naval officer Uriah Levy.<sup>42</sup>

Yulee's aggressive stance on the dominant and interrelated issues of the day—continental expansion, states' rights, and slavery—earned him the appellation “Florida fire-eater.”<sup>43</sup> Yulee firmly believed that the United States constitution protected individual property in federal territories. He staunchly supported the Missouri Compromise of 1820, a diplomatic agreement between the Northern and Southern states that in part permitted the admission of only an equal numbers of free and slave states into the Union. This compact preserved representational equality in the Senate and maintained Southern voting power in the expanding nation. Yulee consistently voted against any alteration of it and especially abhorred the Wilmot Proviso, an addendum to a military appropriations bill introduced by Pennsylvania Democrat David Wilmot in 1847 that forbade slavery in any new territory acquired in the war with Mexico. He opposed California's admission into the Union as a free state and the abolition of slavery in Washington, D.C., yet Congress's approval of both affirmed Yulee's conviction that Congress was failing to protect American citizens' constitutional rights while assailing Southern political convictions, a feeling that hastened his alignment with John Calhoun, the prominent South Carolina senator and ardent states' rights advocate.

Yulee did not retain the support of Florida's voters when his Senate term expired in 1850. Following several votes, the state General Assembly awarded the vacant seat to Democrat Stephen Mallory, the champion of South Florida's expanding population.

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<sup>42</sup> Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee, 87-92.

<sup>43</sup> Thompson, “David Yulee,” 154.

Yulee's decade of service in the nation's capital created a chasm between him and many of his constituents, one that no longer allowed him to present himself as a "man of the people." Voters in Florida condoned his efforts to develop the state's infrastructure, but they, and his political colleagues in the state's legislature who made the Senate selections, were leery of his radical states' rights platform as well as the direction of his private economic pursuits. Yulee contested the decision in court and retained his seat as the incumbent until the state officially determined Mallory the victor in August 1852.<sup>44</sup>

Yulee's failure to retain his Senate seat did not diminish his political zeal and he remained involved in state and national politics, but he focused his gaze on other interests outside of the political arena. Beginning in 1844, he purchased and developed a 5,000-acre plantation along the Homossassa River on Florida's Gulf Coast. By 1850, Yulee moved his growing family—which by this time included his son Charles and daughter Margaret alongside as many as eighty slaves—into a newly built plantation house he called Margarita located on thirty acres of land on Tiger Tail Island at the mouth of the river. Yulee planted several crops on his property, including cotton and citrus, but he concentrated his attention on sugarcane for which purpose he ordered the construction of a sugar mill in 1851. Yulee's crop yields and sugar production increased over the next decade—as did his family's size. Fortunately, the lucrative sugar industry helped Yulee strengthen and consolidate his financial resources while feeding his expanding family.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 70.

<sup>45</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 103-104.

Yulee became considerably absorbed in an enterprise he had entertained since the beginning of his political career: the construction of a cross-peninsula railroad.<sup>46</sup> There were nearly 9,000 miles of railroad tracks in the United States in 1850. Almost 6,500 miles of this track were in the Northern and Western states while the Southern states contained just over 2,000 miles. Florida had one of the least developed railroad systems in the South with only four short lines and sixty-three miles of track in 1845.<sup>47</sup> Settlement and development in Florida primarily concentrated around coastal and port cities—Pensacola, Key West, and St. Augustine—prior to the nineteenth century. This settlement pattern expanded towards the rich agricultural lands of Middle Florida once the United States acquired the territory in 1819. As in much of the South, settlers took advantage of the numerous rivers and waterways in the region to carry their goods directly to market rather than privately financing expensive and cumbersome railroads. The existing railroads in Florida were generally short lines that connected with larger regional lines before running to ports along the coast, though the lines presented the quandary of a lack of standardized rail gauges.

Yulee foresaw new potential for railroads in Florida. He envisioned a line originating on the Atlantic coast and crossing the peninsula before terminating at the Gulf of Mexico. The railroad would replace the expensive, time-consuming, and storm-dangerous sea route around peninsular Florida while theoretically providing easier,

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<sup>46</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," especially 66-124. Also, Gregg M. Turner, *A Journey into Florida Railroad History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 70-80;

<sup>47</sup> Historical Statistics of the United States from colonial times until the Civil War; Tribune Almanac (1863), 29. See [www.history.furman.edu](http://www.history.furman.edu); 1860 census of the United States, preliminary report, Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945(Dept. of Commerce, 1949), 200. See [railroads.unl.edu](http://railroads.unl.edu). Also, Thompson, "David Yulee,"63; Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 93-95



safer, quicker, and cheaper access to the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>48</sup> Yulee tried securing a railroad from St. Augustine to regional lines as early as 1837, but this plan never materialized. Nearly a decade later, he touted the prospect of a publicly owned railroad in his 1844 “Circular Letter . . . to the People of Florida,” and asked the U.S. Senate, successfully, for appropriations to survey a potential rail line originating in either Fernandina or Jacksonville and ending in Cedar Key.<sup>49</sup>

Yulee’s dream became a concrete plan when he acquired the necessary pledges of capital to organize as the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad Company in 1849. A series of financial dilemmas forced the dissolution of the Atlantic and Gulf in 1851, but Yulee forged ahead and reconstituted the company as the Florida Railroad Company in 1853. At the same time, Yulee’s colleagues at the state and federal levels secured the passage of favorable land management legislation, such as the federal Swamp Land Act and the Florida’s Internal Improvement Act, policies that stimulated internal development and, tangentially but not without coincidence, aided the Florida Railroad. The company situated its headquarters in Fernandina and began laying track in 1855. Anson Bangs was the initial contractor, but his dubious background and poor credit history forced his replacement by the railroad’s administrators in June 1856 with the firm of Joseph Finnegan and Company. Finnegan, who would later become known as a Confederate general, was a land speculator and development contractor as well as one of the leading investors in the Florida Railroad. His mixed labor force of free and enslaved workers plodded through the first few miles of construction, taking over a year

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<sup>48</sup> Forty-eight ships wrecked along Florida’s coasts in 1848. Thompson, “David Yulee,” 76.

<sup>49</sup> “Circular of Mr. Levy of Florida to his constituents,” June 17, 1844, reprinted in *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, July 16, 1844; Thompson, “David Yulee,” 55-56, 75, 78, 90, 98

to advance less than ten miles. If the swamps, dense forests, insects, and varmints did not slow production, then manpower issues and financial crisis did. The Panic of 1857 nearly halted construction permanently and forced Yulee to once again seek a monetary infusion after which construction and building continued relatively unfettered until the railroad's completion in 1860.

The Florida Railroad opened the first forty-three miles of track for operation between Fernandina and Baldwin, Florida, on September 11, 1857. Within six months, service extended an additional fifty miles to Starke, Florida. Yulee telegraphed an announcement to the New York Chamber of Commerce, in 1859, that "Fernandina," a new seaport in the South, presents herself, through your Chamber, for recognition in the commercial circles of the world." He predicted that "thirty years hence it will be one of the three leading ports of the South," a sentiment shared by many in Florida and across the nation.<sup>50</sup> By June 12, 1860, the entire 154-mile line between Fernandina and Cedar Key was open for regular traffic although it would be another year before the first train traversed the entire route.<sup>51</sup>

Not all of Florida's citizens supported Yulee's endeavors. Most agreed that Fernandina's deepwater port was superior to Jacksonville's, yet Jacksonville already had a developed harbor and wharves. Curiosity mounted when the Florida Railroad declared Fernandina as its Atlantic terminus, and his detractors subsequently vocalized their displeasure once they became aware of Yulee and his financial associates' recently—and secretly and quietly—purchased property in the center of a booming

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<sup>50</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 110-111; Thompson, "David Yulee," 498-499.

<sup>51</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 110-111.

town. Yulee encountered fiercer resistance from southern Florida's Gulf Coast residents, especially those in the budding town of Tampa, a promising port on the peninsula's Gulf Coast. Even before 1850, Tampa's residents were critical of Yulee's plans and believed that he intended on following the earlier survey guidelines and building in the direction of Cedar Key rather than to Tampa, a move that would shift the flow of commerce away from Tampa and devastate its nascent economy. They consequently threw their political support to Stephen Mallory in 1851 forcing Yulee to consider their rising political strength as he determined the railroad's route.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the party's rebuke of him in the contested 1850 election, Yulee remained the acknowledged leader of the state's Democratic Party. He also retained his influence in Tallahassee, as his lobbying for internal improvement revealed, despite his hiatus from the Senate. Political support in the capitol city was more important than that in the port city of Tampa. In December 1854, Florida's Democrat-controlled legislature sent Yulee to the United States Senate for a second term.<sup>53</sup> Back in office, Yulee once again advanced Florida's internal development, only this time he promoted the Florida railroad's central role in that development. Without coincidence, much of the Florida Railroad's construction progressed after Yulee reclaimed his senate seat in 1855. Besides urging the passage of the Federal Land Grant Law, Yulee served as chairman of the Post Office and Post Roads Committee. From this perch, with the aid of his brother-in-law, United States Postmaster General, Joseph Holt, he cemented lucrative

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<sup>52</sup> Turner, *Florida Railroad History*, 74; Kelly Reynolds, *Henry Plant: Pioneer Empire Builder* (Florida Historical Society Press, 2003), 142-144; Brown, *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 104.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 66.

mail and telegraph contracts for the railroad.<sup>54</sup> Yulee also chaired the Naval Affairs Committee, a position that allowed him to press for federal recognition of Fernandina as an official port of entry and to negotiate the removal of dangerous shoals off Amelia Island, thereby facilitating the use of Fernandina's harbor.

Far graver issues faced the second-term senator than securing benefits for Florida's internal development. Rising sectional tensions threatened to rip the country apart as secession loomed on the horizon over issues of slavery and states' rights during the political crisis of the 1850s.<sup>55</sup> Yulee remained a staunch advocate of states' rights, but his views were less radical than they had been a decade earlier. He favored diplomacy and negotiation to rash action, casting broader appeal to Florida's citizens. Years of personal relations and business ventures with Northern politicians and financiers blunted his formerly severe position. Yulee feared secession and hoped to remain in the Union, but he was intolerant of abolitionism and despondent over its preponderance in the North, and he remained devoted to the sanctity of states' rights. Support for the states' rights position did not impede Yulee's efforts towards compromise, especially as the specter of secession became increasingly imminent, but his hope faltered with the failure of the Baltimore Convention—the meeting held by moderate Democrats to avoid secession—and the Northern election of Abraham Lincoln to the White House in 1860. He remained hopeful for a peaceful reversal of the flaring tensions, but he and his colleagues would only entertain constitutional guarantees

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<sup>54</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 130-133.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1978).

protecting their states' rights or their state's right to a peaceful separation from the Union, positions that were becoming increasingly untenable.<sup>56</sup>

Even as Yulee considered different resolutions for saving the Union, he and his fellow Southern statesmen planned the formation of an independent Southern government. Toward this end, Yulee wrote what would become a dangerously incriminating historical document calling for the formation of a Southern government and military. In a letter to his former associate Joseph Finnegan, he suggested that "the immediately important thing to be done is the occupation of the forts and arsenals in Florida." He continued:

What is advisable is the earliest possible organization of a Southern Confederacy and a Southern Army. The North is rapidly consolidating against us upon the plan of force. A strong government, as eight States will make, promptly organized, and a strong army with Jeff. Davis for General in Chief, will bring them to a reasonable sense of the gravity of the crisis. Have a Southern government as soon as possible, adopting the present Federal Constitution for the time, and a Southern army. I repeat this because it is the important policy.... I shall give the enemy a shot next week before retiring. I say enemy. Yes. I am theirs and they are mine. I am willing to be their masters, but not their brothers.<sup>57</sup>

On January 7, 1861, Yulee reiterated to Finnegan the importance of organizing a Confederate government as soon as possible. In the meantime, Southern senators would remain in Congress until March 4, 1861, in an attempt to "keep the hands of Mr. Buchanan tied, and disable the Republicans from effecting any legislation which will strengthen the hands of the incoming administration."<sup>58</sup> However, secession sentiment peaked before the plan's implementation, forcing Yulee's premature resignation. On

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 138-140

<sup>57</sup> David Levy Yulee to Joseph Finnegan or George W. Call, January 5, 1861, Yulee Papers.

<sup>58</sup> David Levy Yulee to Joseph Finnegan, January 7, 1861, Yulee Papers; Huhner, "David L. Yulee," 70.

January 10, 1861, Florida's legislature voted to immediately secede from the United States. Eleven days later, on January 21, 1861, Yulee publicly announced his state's decision and resigned his post during the first meeting of the newly elected sectional Congress.

Yulee's withdrawal from the Senate marked the end of his political career. Instead of official participation in the new Confederate administration, Yulee became absorbed in his agricultural efforts, railroad affairs, and family. Although he did not become a member of the new Confederate government, he supported Confederate endeavors in numerous ways, especially as a contributor of material resources. For instance, he financed and outfitted blockade runners to haul goods such as rum and quinine from Cuba and the Bahamas to the resource-starved South.<sup>59</sup> Yulee also raised crops and harvested lumber on his plantations, and continued operating the railroad, both of which advanced the Southern war effort. Yulee's business concerns occupied a great deal of his time and created a frenzied schedule that necessitated frequent absences from his home and family. While his family remained at Margarita, Yulee often stayed at the Florida Railroad's headquarters in Fernandina. Despite his limited participation as a purveyor of resources to the South and his distance from the main theaters of combat, Yulee, like most Americans, could not escape the destruction and loss brought by war.

In January 1862, Union forces briefly occupied the poorly defended terminal point of the Florida Railroad at Cedar Key, Florida, burning the few ships and warehouses. Federal troops remained in the region for the duration of the war, harassing

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<sup>59</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 154, 539-540; Charlton Tebeau, *History of Florida*, (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1977), 215; Also, private conversation with Dr. Gary Ellis, Director, Gulf Coast Archaeology, at Yulee Sugar Mill State Park on Yulee Days, May 31, 2008.

Confederate sympathizers, impeding the efforts of smugglers, and devoting part of their efforts to capturing Yulee, whose smuggling activities and treason irked Union officials.<sup>60</sup> A few months later, in March 1862, Union forces faced only light resistance when they landed at Fernandina. The town's residents were already in flight when Union forces appeared, but a few passing cannon barrages hastened their departure. Yulee, forced to "take to the bushes," was in one of these cars.<sup>61</sup> Several newspapers reported that one of these shells hit Yulee's train car as it fled Fernandina, killing the man next to him, but neither Yulee nor the invading Union commander left any records verifying this rumor, and it seems Yulee evaded the invading forces without incident.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, Yulee's troubles continued. In late May 1864, Federal soldiers discovered Yulee's Margarita plantation and attempted a surprise attack on it. His family was not at Margarita at the time—they had been staying with some local friends near Ocala—but several of Yulee's slaves spied the raiding party before they landed and warned their fellow bondsmen of the impending attack. All of them avoided the Union raiding party before reporting the incident to the Yulee family. Yulee's slaves stayed in the family's service for the length of the war, but Union troops burned Margarita and most of the plantation property to the ground, leaving only a boiler and

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<sup>60</sup>Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>61</sup> (Columbus, Ohio) *The Crisis*, March 26, 1862; *The Trenton* (New Jersey) *Times*, February 5, 1862; (Amherst, N.H.) *The Farmers Cabinet*, March 13, 1862.

<sup>62</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 94. There are different versions of this event in historical and collective memory. One report said that two men sitting next to Yulee were killed and that Yulee had to flee the car for the bushes. *New York Times*, March 15, 1862, in Turner, *Florida Railroad History*, 83. Another says Yulee and his colleagues had to take to the bushes in flight; (Amherst, N.H.) *The Farmers Cabinet*, March 13, 1862, v.66, issue 33, 2. Federal military reports claim nothing was hit by their fire.

fragments of other machinery from the sugar mill remaining.<sup>63</sup> Following this incident, Yulee brought his family to a new plantation called Cottonwood, in Archer, Florida, a site that was conveniently located near Gainesville, Florida, the new headquarters for the Florida Railroad, in the interior of the north-central peninsula, a part of the state that was at a distance from either coast little Union sympathy or threat of military invasion existed. Yulee's family remained at Cottonwood for the duration of the war while he traveled between there and his work in Gainesville.

Confederate impositions on Yulee's property burdened him as much as Union harassment. Two specific instances brought Yulee into conflict with Confederate authorities. In mid-1863, Confederate officials seized 50,000 pounds of sugar that Yulee sold to merchants in Savannah, Georgia. Yulee took the case to court and won the legal victory, but he was eventually only paid a fraction of the private purchase price offered to him in Savannah.<sup>64</sup> Yulee's legal debacle with Confederate officials over the Florida Railroad's resources was even more detrimental. In mid-1862, Confederate officials determined that the railroad's iron rails could better serve the Confederate cause by their removal and redistribution to other parts of the Confederacy. Yulee refused to countenance this idea and adamantly defended the railroad's property. He won a court injunction in Florida against the Confederate claims but had few alternatives

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<sup>63</sup> A Confederate officer, Captain Hope, warned Yulee that federal troops intended on stopping his sugar production and capturing him. Lieutenant Hill (C.S.A.) to Captain Hope (CSA), October 13, 1862, Yulee Papers. Also in Thompson, "David Yulee," 532-533

<sup>64</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, November 23, 1863, Yulee Papers, J.M. Fairbanks to David Levy Yulee, May 28, 1864, Yulee Papers; Robert A. Taylor, *Rebel Storehouse: Florida in the Confederate Economy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 78-79; Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*, 81. Thompson, "David Yulee," 154-157, 534.



besides continuing his fight in court when Confederate officials refused to comply, and the issue plagued him through the duration of the war.

Amid the debacle with Confederate authorities over possession of the Florida Railroad's iron, Southern newspapers questioned Yulee's loyalty to the Confederate cause and circulated rumors that he was considering Florida's re-entry into the Union. Adamantly denying these reports, Yulee and other prominent Floridians nevertheless had to consider the South's political options as Confederate hopes waned by the end of 1864. When word of Lee's surrender at Appomattox reached Florida, acting Governor Abraham K. Allison sent Yulee and several other former statesmen to Washington, D.C., to plea for Florida's readmission. Instead, Union officials arrested Yulee near Gainesville on undisclosed charges. They briefly detained him in Jacksonville, before transferring him to Fort Pulaski in Savannah, Georgia.<sup>65</sup> Yulee's imprisonment lasted for thirteen months, almost as long as former Confederate President Jefferson Davis.<sup>66</sup> His wife's repeated requests for his release, alongside those from prominent political and business colleagues, could not earn Yulee's release. Only after former Confederate General Joseph Johnston personally asked the former Union commander Ulysses S. Grant to intervene on Yulee's behalf did President Andrew Johnsons permit Yulee's release in late-March 1866.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 165-167. At the same time, Union forces, who had been pursuing Jefferson Davis and other members of the Confederate congress, raided Cottonwood while searching for the remainder of the Confederate administration—namely, Judah Benjamin—and treasury part of which, in the waning days of the war, made its way through Florida. This incident will be more thoroughly discussed in chapter four.

<sup>66</sup> Yulee's friend, former Confederate General Joseph Johnston, ostensibly prompted Grant to write the letter that has been credited for finally attaining Yulee's release. Grant's letter was reprinted in the (Washington D.C.) *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 30, 1866.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 173-175.

Yulee returned to Florida and immediately set about repairing his personal and business finances. Although he communicated extensively with his family, political, and business associates during his imprisonment, his circumscribed mobility did not permit his presence in court or his attendance at business meetings, which hindered his ability to deal with his, and Florida's, post-war economic and political issues. His incarceration and absence from Florida permitted the maligned former federal tax collector and "carpetbagger" Unionist, Lyman B. Stickney, to maneuver into the position of assuming control of the foundering railroad, but upon his release from prison Yulee mobilized his political allies and blocked Stickney's machinations. Although he temporarily retained control, the debt-ridden Florida Railroad defaulted on its interest payments on October 6, 1866, and was immediately repossessed by the Internal Improvement Fund, which held its mortgage. The fund's board promptly sold it at a loss—and at Yulee's behest—to Isaac Roberts, an agent for investors at the New York firm of Edward Dickerson and Associates and the railroad's principal financiers since 1857. Yulee faced some hostility from within Dickerson and Associates, but the firm's president, Edward Dickerson, supported him and named him the railroad company's vice-president. Relegated to a subordinate executive position, he nevertheless maintained a principal stake in the railroad he initiated.

Yulee resumed responsibility for the daily management of the railroad's affairs and continued orchestrating its financial rearrangement. Many of the railroad's Freeland bondholders suffered financial devastation during the war and demanded an immediate return on their investment. Yulee and Dickerson, on behalf of the bondholders, purchased a generous portion of the railroad's land at the rate of one cent per acre, a

fraction of the promised investment return, but a transaction that provided immediate funds in a devastated economy for the cash-strapped bondholders. Several years later, the railroad repurchased the land at the revitalized market price from Yulee, Dickerson, and their associates, providing them all with a comfortable profit. Condemned by some for what appeared to be a dubious investment, the measure nevertheless provided necessary financial relief to the bondholders when they needed money and secured financial stability for the railroad. More broadly, Yulee's business acumen regenerated the railroad and returned prosperity to north-central Florida in the postwar years.<sup>68</sup> By 1870 the Florida Railroad maintained regular service from Fernandina to Cedar Key, but it continued to survive on investments rather than profits.

With the railroad back on track, Yulee sought new commercial and passenger ship contracts and treasured private American and European investments in order to expand his operation.<sup>69</sup> The Florida Railroad was in an enviable business position: it lacked any direct competition, a situation resulting from the Vose injunction. Francis Vose and his associates lost their investment when the board liquidated the railroad. The Vose injunction, instituted by the state in 1870, prohibited any new land grants or state-sponsored internal development until Florida's Internal Improvement Fund reimbursed Vose the full pre-war value of his investment in the state's development, an undertaking the fund could ill afford but one that, ironically, buoyed the railroad's success.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 187-188. Turner, 92-94; Samuel A. Swann, "Circulars . . . agent for bondholders," March 1, 1869, at <http://www.floridamemory.com/Collections/broadsides/broadsides.cfm?DOC=112>

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 191-195.

<sup>70</sup> John T. Foster and Sarah Whitmer Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers: The Transformation of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 83; Brown, *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 245-249.

The railroad had endured financial hardships and re-organizations on several previous occasions, but a new wave of financial difficulties emerged in 1880 that finally bounced its founder. Shifting trans-Atlantic markets and investment trends generated a shake-up in the railroads financial base, loosening Yulee's control over his enterprise. Re-financing with additional American and foreign funding kept the railroad afloat, but the new ownership purged Yulee from the managerial ranks in the wake of their re-organization. He continued serving on the railroad's board of administrators, but when another consortium of American and English investors bought the railroad in 1881, Yulee finally retired from active participation in its affairs.<sup>71</sup>

Retirement from business and public life appealed to Yulee's wife, Nancy, who wanted a home in Washington, D.C., where the two would be closer to friends and family. The Yulee's were avid socialites and both of them engaged the nation's social elite regardless of past sectional differences.<sup>72</sup> Consenting to his wife's request, Yulee purchased property in 1881 on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, D.C., and hired his son-in-law and aspiring architect Charles H. Read to build his mansion. Florida's residents recognized Yulee as one of the wealthiest men in their state, having accrued a fortune in his business ventures, real estate speculation, legal and political careers, and various other investments (as well as the inheritance from his father, legally granted to him shortly after Levy's death in 1854). The Yulee house, widely hailed as one of the most beautiful and modern in Washington, D.C. at the time, had just been completed when Nancy Wickliffe Yulee died on March 16, 1885. Wickliffe's death left Yulee

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<sup>71</sup> Yulee remained on the board of directors until his death in 1886. Thompson, "David Yulee," 207-210.

<sup>72</sup> Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976).

despondent. He spent much of his time with his family and donated large sums of money to charities, schools, and churches that had appealed to his late wife.

Nevertheless, he was unable to shake the void in his life left by her passing, a condition that contributed at least partly to his own decline in health. He died in New York City seventeen months after his beloved wife, on October 10, 1886, after falling ill while vacationing with his family in Maine.

### CHAPTER 3 YULEE'S JEWISH IDENTITY

David Levy Yulee, the Democratic Party's candidate for territorial representative to the United States Congress, faced intense opposition from his Whig opponents in Florida's fiercely contested 1841 election. Viciously attacking him throughout his campaign, Whig editorialists hurled anti-Semitic slurs at Yulee and decried the "infidel" Democratic Party. "Oh David," they declared following his victorious election, "thou art truly a jewe-el [sic]."<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine's Democratic Party organ, the *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, responded to these attacks by cynically reprimanding the Whigs for their "Christian-like efforts to disfranchise this highly respected citizen . . . 'traitor,' 'alien,' and 'Jew' though he be."<sup>2</sup> This was one of the first occasions the public identified Yulee as a Jew, but it would not be the last. Nearly half a century later, shortly before his death in 1886, newspaper articles referring to Yulee's Jewish heritage appeared across the nation. The myriad speculations, questions, and concerns about Yulee's identity throughout his lifetime reveal the conflicting views many Americans held about Jewish racial identity and the ambiguous place of Jews in nineteenth-century America's social and racial hierarchies.

It is ironic that Yulee was labeled a Jew. Although born into a distinguished Jewish family and raised in the affluent Jewish community of St. Thomas, Yulee relinquished his connections with that community, did not maintain Jewish cultural traditions, and did not adhere to Jewish religious rituals as an adult. Quite the opposite, Yulee attended church and adhered to Christian religious dogma, married a Christian

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<sup>1</sup> *St. Augustine News*, June 11, 1841. See (St. Augustine) *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, March 19, 1840, regarding the Whigs reference to the "infidel" Democratic Party.

<sup>2</sup> *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, March 5, 1840; May 28, 1841.

woman and allowed his children to be raised as Christians, and donated to Christian charities and institutions. His intimate association with Christianity induced his father, and later historians, to label him “a Presbyterian.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the general public considered Yulee to be a Jew. They based their decisions on Yulee’s familial connections to Judaism. Yulee’s blood links to Judaism made him, according to the prevailing standards in the United States for much of the nineteenth century, racially Jewish. While Yulee’s racial designation seemed permanent and his corresponding link to Judaism inescapable, prevailing ideas regarding race remained ambiguous and malleable thereby allowing their manipulation towards specific social and political needs. Yulee must have felt that his Jewish identity, whether used to praise or disparage, was detrimental to his social and political advancement as he typically evaded or ignored inquiries into this part of his life. Nevertheless, Yulee’s cultural whiteness overrode his racial classification which did not hinder his social or political ambitions in Florida, a remote and sparsely populated region on the southern borderlands of the United States.<sup>4</sup>

European racial theories and depictions of Jews informed cultural perceptions held of them in the United States and around the Atlantic World. Consequently, a broad cross-section of Europeans and Americans shared similar views of, and anxieties about, Jews. These views were based on a combination of biblical exegesis, folkloric tradition, and Enlightenment rationalism, and maintained the central belief that Jews were

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<sup>3</sup>Moses E. Levy to Rachel DaCosta, September 18, 1845, box 40, David Levy Yulee Papers, Special and Area Studies Collection, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (Yulee Papers)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different color: European immigrants and the alchemy of race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006),

fundamentally different from Christians. The perception of Jews as a distinct stock of people—a separate race—originated in the fifteenth-century Spanish policy of *limpieza de sangre*, or purity of blood. As the Spanish *reconquista* drew to a close, Christian nobles and merchants in Spain urged the aristocracy to implement this policy in order to separate “New Christians” of Jewish heritage and Jewish converts, or “conversos,” from “Old Christians” on the basis of family and descent.<sup>5</sup>

From the end of the fifteenth century until the rise to prominence of scientific racism in the late nineteenth century, race was an evolving term that meant something akin to nation, but with a basis in blood. Intellectuals and lay people alike imagined the insular Jewish communities as a race based on their blood bonds and kinship networks. Religion, however, formed the basis of Jewish identity, and both Jews and non-Jews viewed Jewish identity primarily through this prism. In this context, they linked Jews into a “nation” through their biblical connection as the children of Abraham and as the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moreover, Jews comprised a discrete and easily discernible social, economic, and political community bound to their religious identity. Prior to the Enlightenment, non-Jews traditionally pushed Jews to the periphery of society where they faced numerous legal, economic, and social restrictions, often lived in circumscribed residential quarters, and wore visible badges marking their Jewish identity. No need existed to racially differentiate between Jews and non-Jews because they were already physically and socially separate.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 16. Also, Renee Melammed, *A Question of Identity: Iberian conversos in historical perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18-25; Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portugese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Hasia Diner, *Jews of the United States, 1654-2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 74.



By the nineteenth century, the Enlightenment credos of liberty and equality ushered Europe into the modern era and justified the Jews legal emancipation from their social, political, and economic constraints. Jews in the newly established United States and in Europe's constantly shifting Caribbean colonies traditionally faced fewer restrictions on their citizenship than their brethren in Europe. Nevertheless, European emancipation shaped American and Caribbean attitudes towards Jews by relaxing the existing social and political restrictions against them.<sup>7</sup> Entry into mainstream society abroad translated into similar domestic opportunities, creating new prospects for Jews. Many eagerly edged away from the social and geographical margins when afforded the opportunities provided by the Enlightenment. This produced several challenges. Non-Jews often distrusted the Jews' national loyalties and criticized their alleged tribalism while the new social and economic competition threatened their often tenuous socio-economic positions. In this milieu, non-Jews sought new means of identifying the Jewish outsiders while strengthening their own national identities. Jews, by contrast, distinguished between their Jewish religious identity and their national allegiance and proclaimed the compatibility of the two in order to negotiate this difficult issue.<sup>8</sup>

Jews faced internal threats to their identity that proved even more challenging than the external pressures limiting their full emancipation. The balancing act of maintaining their Jewish identities while assimilating into the broader social landscape proved to be

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 78-91.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Brenner, Vicki Caron, and Uri R. Kaufmann, eds., *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered: The French and German Models*, (London: Leo Baeck Institute, 2003); Jacob Katz, ed., *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, (New York: Transaction Books, 1987); Naomi Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830-1914*, (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984)

the gravest concern for Jews in the United States during the nineteenth century. Jews responded to the threat of Jewish assimilation and the subsequent loss of Jewish identity in myriad ways. Many fought to preserve their traditional cultural and religious practices while others demanded reform. In these endeavors, American Jews instituted adaptations that mimicked the religious atmosphere of their Protestant neighbors. Liturgical adaptations, such as the introduction of English language and the adoption of Sunday school, were among the innovations made in Jewish religious practice that led to the emergence of Reform Judaism in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Moses E. Levy, for instance, attempted to modernize Jewish cultural practices while reforming religious institutions based on biblical precepts. Others, such as Yulee, retreated from Judaism while striving for the benefits of assimilation. As questions about Jewish identity permeated American thought, racial discourse became increasingly central to stabilizing its fluid boundaries. Spanning much of the nineteenth century (1810-1886), David Levy Yulee's life illustrates the increasingly fundamental connection between racial theories and Jewish identity constructions during this period.<sup>10</sup>

Yulee's Jewish identity was firmly rooted in his immediate family and ancestry. His maternal family, the Abendanones, and his father, Moses E. Levy, were among the

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<sup>9</sup> Leon A. Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue, 1820-1870* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1976); Gary Phillip Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston, 1788-1828: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994); Marc Lee Raphael, *Judaism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 39-73, esp. 47-48; Diner, *Jews of the United States, 1654-2000*, 112-155.

<sup>10</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*; Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, eds., *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1998). In particular, see, Todd M. Endelman, "Memories of Jewishness: Jewish Converts and their Jewish Pasts," *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 311-329; Brenner, *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered*; Katz, *Toward Modernity*; Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation*; Haim Beinart, ed., *The Sephardi Legacy*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1992); Benjamin Gampel, ed., *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

social and economic elite of St. Thomas's Jewish community. The prosperous Abendanone family maintained extensive business and kinship networks throughout the Caribbean. David Abendanone, Yulee's maternal grandfather, was a wealthy merchant and a part of the St. Thomas Jewish community's leadership. Unlike the Abendanones who built their reputation over generations of living in the Caribbean, Moses E. Levy quickly established himself due in large part to the prominence of his North African Jewish family. The Yulee family attained immense wealth, social status, and political prominence among Jewish and Muslim communities in politically volatile Muslim North Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yulee's genealogy included a *sheikh* and a *nagid*—Jewish community leaders—alongside important merchants and advisors. Eliyahu Ibn Yuli, Levy's father, attained the heights of power for a Jew in Morocco under the reign of sultan Sidi Muhammad. Eliyahu was a professed Jew although he reportedly wavered from Judaism and proclaimed his desire to convert to Islam in the tenuous days following the sultan's death and the subsequent assumption of power by the sultan's son in 1781. However, Eliyahu likely used this tactic to buy time while allowing his family's escape to Gibraltar, where he maintained business and social contacts. Eliyahu rejoined the Jewish community and resumed practicing the Jewish faith after his safe arrival in Gibraltar, even educating his youngest son, Moses, in a Hebrew school.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Moses E. Levy dropped the name "Yuli" for unknown reasons when he immigrated to St. Thomas in 1801. Monaco does not discount the idea that Yuli could be an anagram derived from Psalm 39 and translated as "They (all the nations) shall come and bow down before Thee." Moroccan historians have claimed that the honorific title was appended to the family name, but Monaco views it as a part of the family name by the time of Eliyahu's lifetime. Levy may have rejected this designation in favor of his family's traditional name, "Levy," once he moved outside of the Mediterranean context. Monaco also proposes the possibility that Levy dismissed the Yuli surname because he loathed his father's self-aggrandizement and lack of spirituality. Eliyahu's family consisted of his son Moses, his daughter Rachel, and his wife Rachel. Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 5, 14-15, 21.

Moses Levy lived during the height of the Jewish Enlightenment—the *haskalah*—and participated in the widespread Jewish reform efforts that sought to negotiate the compatibility of Jewish religious communities within broader national communities. The often contentious discussions marking this confluence of imagined communities deeply impacted Judaism in the early modern era and shaped Yulee’s childhood environment on St. Thomas. In 1796, the growing Jewish community, primarily deriving from St. Eustatius, obtained recognition from the Danish government to establish formal congregational institutions, which they did in the Sephardic tradition. A second wave of Jewish immigration, also claiming Sephardic roots but predominantly from Curacao, doubled St. Thomas’s Jewish population after 1798. The new immigrants, Levy among them, adjusted the community’s regulatory codes and reorganized its leadership, changes that reflected the experiences of the new immigrants from the mature Jewish community at Curacao.<sup>12</sup>

Levy’s protracted community efforts and work demands during this period in his life, coupled with a personality that many of his family members considered stubborn and excessive, led to his separation and eventual divorce from his wife and prohibited him from spending time with his family. As a result, Yulee primarily spent his childhood with his mother and her extended family among the Jewish community of St. Thomas. Nevertheless, Levy continued affecting his son’s life. Like many Jews in the early nineteenth century, the reform impulse of the modern era influenced Levy’s religious and cultural idealization of Judaism. Levy wanted to rejuvenate Jewish religious and

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<sup>12</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 32. Monaco also mentions that Philip Benjamin, an early advocate of Jewish religious reform, was “possibly influenced by Levy’s religious views.” See also, Eli Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: the Jewish Confederate* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 105. For the early history of the St. Thomas Jewish community see, Judah M. Cohen, *Through the Sands of Time: a history of the Jewish community of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 1-19.

cultural practices and expected his son to help him in this endeavor. Coming from a background that only recently began experiencing the relaxation of traditional restrictions against Jews, Levy confronted the modern era by seeking to strengthen Jewish solidarity and community identity. He believed that the freedoms of modernity could release Jews from rabbinical injunctions and return them to a more authentic religion grounded in the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament. Consequently, he wanted to mold contemporary communitarian and utopian ideals with Old Testament Biblical ordinances, and desired that Jews live a modern agricultural lifestyle under ancient biblical guidelines. In the relatively unrestricted social and political environment of the United States, Jews such as Levy, and his better known co-religionists Mordecai Noah and Rebecca Gratz, assessed the social and political landscape and imagined new forms of Jewish solidarity, community building, and expressions of Judaism.<sup>13</sup> Like Noah, Levy wanted to create a utopian settlement for Jews, but the nature of their operation held only vague similarities. Levy planned to create an agricultural commune in Florida for Jews based on the biblical commandments of the Old Testament and not the rabbinical instruction that dominated Jewish life since the destruction of the Temple in 70 B.C. As Levy discovered, however, trying “to transform old clothes men or stockbrokers into practical farmers” proved to be exceedingly difficult, and his utopian operation ultimately failed.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*; Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes and Meiers Publishers, Inc., 1981); Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1997); Emily Bingham provides a wonderful overview of a family’s struggles and successes during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 105.

Levy's plans for a Jewish agricultural utopia determined the direction of Yulee's education. To meet these conditions, Levy insisted on grooming Yulee to serve his Jewish communitarian project, but he maintained little faith in the few Jewish education programs available in Europe or the United States. He believed Jewish educational schools placed a higher premium on preparing their students for business and social networking rather than educating them in religious principles.<sup>15</sup> His disdain for Jewish instruction—an issue he wished to address in his own communitarian undertaking—and his insistence on preparing Yulee to serve his communitarian efforts compelled him to relinquish a Jewish religious education in favor of a classical one. Levy wanted his son educated in the United States where he placed Yulee under the tutelage of Samuel Myers, his fellow Jewish reformer. Levy felt that Myers embodied the ideal modern Jew, and would serve as a strong role model for his son while counterbalancing outside influences. He appealed to Myers regarding his son's education: "my wish is to make a scholar of him and to bring him up hardy and with as simple ideas as possible—if you know any person that will suit to trust him with to answer my purpose write me. I'll rather him be a liberal Unitarian clergyman—I expect no other observance of religion than to let him be educated in such a manner as to give him a chance of his being some use to our undertaking."<sup>16</sup> Levy probably considered the potential influence of Christianity on his son, but he felt that these influences could be withstood—if not also educationally beneficial—as long as his son followed basic Jewish practices and

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<sup>15</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 46. Levy was a progressive in the realm of education. He placed his daughters in non-Jewish schools, but gave them pseudonyms in order to avoid racial prejudice.

<sup>16</sup> Moses E. Levy to Samuel Myers, April 6, 1819, Moses Myers Papers, Jean Outland Chrysler Library, Chrysler Museum of Art, Richmond, Virginia (Myers Papers); Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 70.

resided in a primarily Jewish environment surrounded by like-minded Jews. Towards this end he requested that David observe the Sabbath and refrain from eating pork.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his intentions for Yulee's future, Levy paved the way for his son's departure from Judaism and initial flirtation with Christianity. Several factors surrounding Yulee's residence with the Myers family while attending a Christian school in the United States profoundly affected his religious outlook and destabilized his Jewish identity. Jewish family members in a Jewish community no longer enveloped Yulee. The acculturated Myers family, especially Samuel Myers, rarely practiced any Jewish religious traditions, and it is unlikely that Myers upheld Levy's requests regarding David's religious observance. Not only were Yulee's living arrangements not conducive to maintaining Jewish traditions, but the impressionable adolescent also faced the overwhelming external pressure of a predominantly Christian society. Evangelical Protestants eagerly hunted for proselytes among America's Jews, many of whom, like David, were already struggling to maintain traditional religious and cultural practices in the face of overwhelming social pressure to assimilate.<sup>18</sup> Yulee's exposure to Southern society and Christianity during this period fundamentally affected his religious and social outlook. Levy should have foreseen this outcome when he permitted Yulee's enrollment in a school administered by a Christian headmaster, but he did not fully comprehend the potential challenge to his son's Jewish identity. He took a risk and lost, which caused him to grow increasingly distraught over the nature of Yulee's education and social development over time. Conveying his concerns about his son's developing religious

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 48.

outlook to Moses Myers, Levy wrote, “at this distance I don’t know what to do with David—his age will not permit that he shall long remain among Christian enthusiasts—to College I am determined not to send him.”<sup>19</sup> Levy feared for “the spiritual good of my children,” and wondered “what can one expect from children brought up as Jews are in general” when surrounded by the influences of non-Jewish society.<sup>20</sup> Distressed, Levy turned to Myers to place David in a more sheltered Jewish environment. “I the more lean on you in this particular,” Levy wrote to Myers, “because he is a Jew,” but David’s resulting brief employment in Baltimore only drew a deeper divide between father and son.<sup>21</sup>

Yulee suffered an enduringly strained relationship with his father based partly on their growing religious division. Summarizing his thoughts about the constant tension in their relationship, Yulee wrote shortly after his father’s death in 1854, “The causes of our separation were similar to those which had previously separated him from his wife, his oldest son, and to a more or less extent from his daughters, modified in this case by the dependence of their sex.”<sup>22</sup> Moses Levy’s family did not share his stubborn insistence on his exclusive religious views. His inability to compromise, especially on religious matters, led to the dissolution of relations with most of his family members including his wife and his oldest son, Elias. Levy also resented Yulee for choosing a

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<sup>19</sup> Moses E. Levy to Moses Myers, September 29, 1823, Myers Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Moses E. Levy to Moses Myers, unknown date, Myers Papers.

<sup>21</sup> Moses E. Levy to Moses Myers, unknown date, Myers Papers.

<sup>22</sup> David Levy Yulee, “Narrative of my administration of my father’s estate,” box 1, Yulee Papers. Monaco asserts that Yulee was despondent with his recently deceased father because the only existing will left nothing for him. Yulee may have been bothered at his exclusion from his father’s inheritance, but he was reiterating sentiments that he had previously made and that were shared by other members of his family. See Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 3.



public life outside of Judaism over service to Levy's ill-fated Jewish utopia at Pilgrimage near Micanopy. Together, the failed Pilgrimage and his infidel son represented personal failures in close succession. Years later he recalled the disastrous consequences of his educational choices for his children. "They are not to blame but myself," Levy wrote to his daughter Rachel in 1845, "for giving them an education which makes them uneasy as Jews and compels them to find out a society in which their education can find a field of action more suited to their mould of mind than the degraded state of my degenerated people offers them."<sup>23</sup> Levy ultimately recognized his role in his children's adoption of Christian perspectives. He could not blame them if Christianity filled a void that distant and unapproachable Judaism, with its "mockery of prayer" and "no sincerity of heart," could not satisfy.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, he refused to countenance Yulee's growing bond with Christianity and disapproved of his secular professional goals.

Yulee's dissatisfaction with his brief return to St. Thomas provoked his departure to Florida where his father maintained the Pilgrimage plantation. Had he any desire, Yulee would have found it difficult to maintain Jewish religious and cultural traditions in frontier, north-central Florida. Compared with Norfolk, Virginia, Micanopy was an isolated and underdeveloped backcountry town. Jews had only lived in Florida since 1763 when Spain, who barred Jewish settlement in their colonies on the basis of religion, ceded the territory to England. Small numbers of Jewish migrants, predominantly claiming Sephardic origin, entered the region from the Caribbean and

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<sup>23</sup> Moses Levy to Mr. DaCosta, September 18, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Rachel DaCosta to Moses E. Levy, September 13, 1854, box 3, Yulee Papers.

French Louisiana, and congregated in port towns such as Pensacola and St. Augustine. They primarily worked as small shopkeepers and merchants, but many of them left when the British relinquished Florida back to Spain in 1783. Florida remained practically devoid of Jews until the Spanish permanently ceded it to the United States through the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, yet few Jews went to Florida once it became part of America, instead preferring to seek refuge in established Jewish communities found mostly along America's eastern seaboard. In 1845 there were less than 100 Jews scattered among 65,000 citizens in Florida, but the surge of European pogroms in 1848 hastened primarily German-Jewish emigration to America, including to the newly admitted state. By the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmstead caustically remarked that "a swarm of Jews, within the last 10 years, has settled in nearly every southern town, many of them men of no character,"<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, only a few hundred Jews lived in Florida at the middle of the nineteenth century out of a national Jewish population of approximately 50,000. There is no indication of any viable antebellum Jewish community in the state as much as the presence of Jews. Prior to the Civil War, in fact, the only formal institution in antebellum Florida was the Jacksonville Hebrew Cemetery which was not established until 1857.<sup>26</sup> Despite the legal and social freedom to practice their religion, there simply was not much opportunity—or perhaps desire—for Jews to do so.

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<sup>25</sup> Dennis C. Rousey, "Aliens in the WASP Nest: Ethnocultural Diversity in the Antebellum Urban South," *The Journal of American History*, 79:1 (June, 1992), 153.

<sup>26</sup> Heimovics, Rachel B., and Henry A. Green, *Jewish Life in Florida: A Documentary Exhibit from 1763 to the Present* (Coral Gables, Fla.: MOSAIC, 1991), 8-10; Heimovics, Rachel B., and Marcia Zerivitz, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail*, (Tallahassee, 2000), 28; Samuel Proctor, "Pioneer Jewish Settlements in Florida, 1765-1900," in Samuel Proctor, ed., *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writings of Regional History in the South* (Miami Beach, 1956). Canter Brown Jr., *Jewish Pioneers of the Tampa Bay Frontier* (Tampa, FL: Tampa Bay History Center), esp. 25-26, 28, 48-49.

Yulee lived with his older brother, Elias, at Pilgrimage while their father moved between St. Augustine, the Caribbean, and England. Christianity strongly influenced Elias by this time, and he may have imparted his developing views to Yulee. Elias also introduced Yulee to some of St. Augustine's prominent citizens. St. Augustine was a small but cosmopolitan port town of several thousand inhabitants that contained a negligible Jewish population and no distinctive Jewish community. In Florida, like the rest of the South and the nation, Jews sought to fit in not stand out, and they generally did not advertise their Jewish identity. The town's leading citizens—politically, economically, and socially—were Christian, and they likely affected Yulee's evolving religious thought as well as his developing social and political character. The palpable tension between father and son surrounding Yulee's religious inclinations, and his professional and political direction, mounted upon Levy's return from Europe in 1829, finally provoking Yulee's departure from Micanopy.

The deterioration in relations between Yulee and his father intensified with the beginning of Yulee's legal career and his rising political fortunes. In Levy's opinion, his son's embrace of secular culture was tantamount to a rejection of Judaism. Levy dismissed his son's career pursuits and condemned him as a convert: "David, who also received what is called a classical education, instead of helping me become a lawyer and a politician. He is a Presbyterian."<sup>27</sup> However, Yulee's rejection of his father's religious beliefs did not reflect a rejection of his father. Following a decade of near estrangement, Yulee made overtures in a letter to his father in December 1842 asking for a restoration of proper familial relations, though with undisguised impatience for his

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<sup>27</sup> Moses E. Levy to Rachel DaCosta. Also in Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 155.

Levy's religious convictions and preaching. "I appreciate, while I deplore the feeling which precludes your addressing me by applications of endearment which are common in the world between those holding the similar relationship of father and son. I cannot but pray that time and circumstances will gradually lessen the breach which has divided you from your child, and restore us to the condition to which the promptings of nature lead."<sup>28</sup> Although the relationship was functionally repaired, Moses Levy continued trying to impose his religious views on both his son, and later, his daughter-in-law, forcing Yulee to respond, "in respect to our religious views and conduct you must consent to leave us unquestioned and responsible only to God, who we pray will in the fullness of his mercy enlighten and guide our hearts."<sup>29</sup>

Both men's religious expressions were different reactions to the social and political environments in the United States. If Levy could be characterized as having one foot in the modern era and the other in the pre-modern, his son was entirely settled and comfortable in modernity.<sup>30</sup> Levy's experience of the tenuous position of even powerful and wealthy Jews in Muslim North Africa, coupled with the tradition of Jewish exclusion from elite social and political circles in Europe, pushed him to look inward towards Judaism as the salve for community issues and identity. Growing up on St. Thomas and in the United States, Yulee felt less confined by a restrictive past than his father. Free to change the focus of his identity from one based in religion to one based in nationality, Yulee viewed his Jewish heritage as stifling and attempted to shed it while enhancing his national identity. In other words, he fixed his identity with a nation state

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<sup>28</sup> David Levy to Moses E. Levy, December 7, 1842, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>29</sup> David Levy Yulee to Moses E. Levy, July 21, 1849, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 2.

formed on a foundation of political ideals rather than a nation of people united by a common religion or race.

Yulee expressed fervent patriotism towards that end, particularly with the advancement and development of the country's southern frontier. Historian Jonathan Sarna notes that nationalism among nineteenth-century American Jews often stemmed from "a desire to escape the Jewish taint of foreignness." Sarna's observation is especially relevant in the context of a dynamic borderland such as that found in Florida, where social and political identities and power relations were yet to be settled. Within this fluid space, Mordecai M. Cohen, an army officer stationed in Florida, referred to Yulee as "not only one of the most enlightened, but also one of the most patriotic inhabitants of Florida. . . . No gentleman is more thoroughly imbued with a ripe knowledge of all the rich resources of that land, so none would experience more pride or pleasure in developing its capabilities yet hidden to the many, and none have more at heart the furtherance of its permanent prosperity."<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Yulee voraciously imbibed the values and mores of elite white Southerners, including states' rights and the corresponding right to own slaves, alongside his religious affiliation with Christianity. Florida's citizens associated the ambitious young politician more with the white upper class of Southern society than with Judaism.

Little evidence exists of much widespread anti-Jewish sentiment in antebellum Florida's historical record. For the most part, Jews in Florida acculturated to their neighbors lifestyles and resembled the rest of Florida's population, much as Jews in the

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<sup>31</sup> M.M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston, S.C., 1836), 62-63, in Thompson, "David Yulee," 7. For an examination of the federal policy of Indian removal see Michael D. Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek government and society in crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). A full account of the second Seminole War can be found in John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1967).

South mirrored their gentile neighbors.<sup>32</sup> According to historian John Efron, “the ‘relative insignificance’ of Jews in a country’s anthropological literature reflected social tolerance and acceptance.”<sup>33</sup> This concept has even more currency when proposed about an inconsequential Jewish population, such as that which existed in Florida for much of the nineteenth century, contrasted with a large black population. Moreover Jews, although not quite white, had all of the opportunities of white folks as long as they adhered to Southern values, including the subjugation of blacks. While at least some Jews disavowed slavery, including Yulee’s father, they refrained from voicing their opinions, preferring acculturation to conflict.<sup>34</sup> As the historian Mark Greenberg notes, “because Jews clustered in commercial ventures and purchased blacks rather than toiling as manual laborers, their ‘whiteness’ was rarely questioned and they faced relatively less social ostracism than other immigrant groups.”<sup>35</sup>

Yulee enhanced his whiteness by closely connecting with the Southern white elite while advocating the extension of political power to all white men. He sought federal benefits for the influx of settlers that provided the basis of his political support, and upheld the right of white men to possess the land by urging the federal government to protect Florida’s citizens from what he considered to be Seminole aggression during the

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<sup>32</sup> Canter Brown Jr., *Jewish Pioneers of the Tampa Bay Frontier* (Tampa, FL: The Tampa Bay History Center, 1999), esp. 25-26, 28, 35-36, 48-49, 53-58; Brown Jr., Philip and Morris Dzialynski: Jewish Contributions to the Rebuilding of the South,” *American Jewish Archives* 44 (Fall/Winter, 1992), 516-539.

<sup>33</sup> John Efron, *Defenders of the Faith: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siecle Europe* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 41-45, in Leonard Rogof, “Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew,” *American Jewish History* 85:3(1997), 202.

<sup>34</sup> Richard E. Sapon-White, “A Polish Jew on the Florida Frontier and in Occupied Tennessee: Excerpts from the Memoirs of Max White,” *Southern Jewish History* 4(2001), 93-122.

<sup>35</sup> Mark I. Greenberg, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia 1830-1870,” *American Jewish History* 86:1 (1998), 63.

Second Seminole War (1835-1842). As a territorial representative, he cited recurring Seminole hostilities against innocent white settlers from his new non-voting congressional stump, and clamored for continuing military assistance and federal aid to use “against the Indian banditti.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite Yulee’s best efforts to strengthen perceptions of his whiteness, anti-Semitism existed in Florida and Yulee’s Jewish identity became an issue once his expanding political fortunes extended beyond the local level. He first faced charges of being an “alien,” an indirect but implied expression of anti-Semitism, while running for territorial representative in 1838. Peter Sken Smith, a friend of Moses Levy and Yulee’s Whig political rival, contested Yulee’s citizenship and indicted him as an “alien,” a label that carried with it the tincture of perpetual foreignness by casting Jews as historical outsiders to Christian society. It resonated loudly in Florida’s unsettled frontier social context, and especially as Americans confronted the immigration explosion of the 1840s. Smith brought his legal case against Yulee’s citizenship to Florida’s territorial court where he claimed that Yulee was not technically—and therefore, legally—an American citizen. He based his charge on the notion that Yulee’s father, Moses Levy, never obtained legal American citizenship for either himself or his family when he came to the United States in 1821. Smith levied the charge in retaliation against Yulee’s claim that Smith was an abolitionist, a dangerous allegation in the South. Yulee won the election, but Smith contested it in court and the issue continued dogging Yulee through the ensuing legal battle. Anti-Semitism may have had a degree of social potency, but the courts disregarded Smith’s allusions to Yulee’s Jewishness while affirming his legal

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<sup>36</sup> *The Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 1st session, July 29, 1841, 264.

citizenship. Several newspapers chided Smith's invocation of an "alien" status for Yulee even as public officials remained quiet on the subject. The issue of Yulee's citizenship resurfaced in 1841 as he campaigned for the position of territorial delegate to Congress, but by this time opposition rhetoric had absorbed more overt anti Semitic overtones.

Subtle condemnations against Yulee the "alien" transitioned into more direct attacks against Yulee's Jewish heritage as he continued climbing the political ladder through the state and up to the national level. These attacks reflected the heightening tension in American society between citizenship, race, and immigration, and evident in the rise of the American "Know-Nothing" Party. In Florida, Yulee represented a social and political threat to the white planter immigrants from the Caribbean and the Southern low country who strove to recreate in Florida what they remembered as traditional society. Coalescing into Florida's Whig Party, this element of Florida's citizenry described themselves as "true Americans" and "Protestants," utilizing the double entendre as both Christians and protestors against Yulee.<sup>37</sup> They related Yulee's Jewish identity to questionable citizenship status by denouncing the "unnaturalized foreigner" and the "infidel" Democratic Party he represented as morally loose and one that "takes neither God nor Man for its guide."<sup>38</sup> Rejecting a complimentary comparison between Yulee's patriotism and that of other prominent foreign actors in American history, Whigs considered him to be a "shilling jewsharp" compared to "the melodious note of the sonorous organ" present in earlier European immigrants.<sup>39</sup> Later, the *St.*

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<sup>37</sup> *St. Augustine News*, October 15, 1841. Also, February 26, 1842; May 21, 1842; April 29, 1843. Also in Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 159.

<sup>38</sup> Florida Herald and Southern Democrat, March 19, 1840

<sup>39</sup> *St. Augustine News*, October 8, 1841.



*Augustine News* condemned Yulee's legislative efforts to bring relief to Florida's war-weary citizens by speculating that his omission of rations for settlers as part of the Armed Occupation Bill was due to "some religious scruples on the issue of pork."<sup>40</sup> After Florida's legislature, in 1845, "christened . . . Levy County" in honor of Yulee in 1845, "Judas Iscariot," a Whig editorialist for the *News*, pondered the likelihood of Yulee changing the name of the state from Florida to "New Jerusalem."<sup>41</sup>

Although no physical descriptions of Yulee exist from his lifetime, later sources referred to him as "olive-skinned," "slightly built," and "hearty."<sup>42</sup> The historian John Mahon provided the most detailed depiction, describing him as "a handsome man of Portuguese and Jewish lineage, with a high forehead and long hair parted on the left and falling to the lobes of his ears."<sup>43</sup> Portraits and photographs taken of him reveal a rotund man, perhaps challenged in stature, with fair skin and thick black or gray hair, depending on when the image was issued, yet we should remain aware, as historian Catherine Soussloff reminds us, that portraits often functioned as manifestations of social pretensions and assimilation as much as representing racial (or ethnic) identity.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, these images did not prohibit national media sources from indulging in stereotyping by incorporating Orientalist images—olive skin; dark, curly hair; dark eyes;

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<sup>40</sup> *St. Augustine News*, August 27, 1842.

<sup>41</sup> *St. Augustine News*, March 15, 1845.

<sup>42</sup> Celeste H. Kavanaugh, *David Levy Yulee: A Man and his Vision* (Amelia Island, Fla.: Amelia Island Museum of History, 1995), 6; Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," 33.

<sup>43</sup> John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1967), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Catherine M. Soussloff, "Portraiture and Assimilation in Vienna: The Case of Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat," in Howard Wettstein ed., *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 121-141.

generous proportions—into their caricatures of the Jewish Yulee as weak and effeminate. The widespread application of Orientalist discourses illustrates social receptiveness to it in nineteenth-century American society. The *Boston Mail* referred to Yulee as “the sweet little dandy from Florida—the smallest man physically; and perhaps intellectually, in the House—well perfumed with ladies’ essences, *with hair well curled*,” while the *Massachusetts Spy* called him “the little dandy manikin delegate . . . who seems just fit for the doll of a *Varmount gall*.”<sup>45</sup>

As anti-Semitic attacks against Yulee intensified through 1843, Yulee’s mysterious family and ancestry came into question inflaming concerns about his racial background. Few people knew about Yulee’s family history outside of some of the prominent long-term residents of St. Augustine, and, as a result, rampant speculation about his ancestry arose in the nation’s newspapers and in Congress. The public soon learned about Yulee’s familial link to Africa, an ironic connection as abolitionist newspapers indicated, given Yulee’s ardent white Southern identity.<sup>46</sup> Rumors even spread that Yulee might be the product of a presumed interracial tryst on St. Thomas, a suggestion that raised the concern of former president John Quincy Adams who privately quipped about his political-party foe, “Levy [Yulee] is said to be a Jew, and what will be, if true, a far more formidable disqualification, that he has a dash of African blood in him, which,

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<sup>45</sup> *St. Augustine News*, April 22, 1843. The English press similarly caricatured Benjamin Disraeli. See, Anthony Wohl, “Ben JuJu’: Representations of Disraeli’s Jewishness in the Victorian Political Cartoon,” in Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner, eds., *Disraeli’s Jewishness* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 105-141. Likewise, Judah Benjamin faced similar remarks. See Eli Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: the Jewish Confederate*, (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 148, 333.

<sup>46</sup> (Boston, Mass.) *The Liberator*, May 15, 1846.

*sub rosa*, is the case with more than one member of the house."<sup>47</sup> According to Adams, worse than a Jew in a political place of prominence in nineteenth-century America was an African. Americans questioned the racial fitness of Jews for American citizenship, but granted them access to American society because of their physical, and presumably cultural, whiteness, in contrast to readily apparent black Africans. Far more disturbing to Adams, however, was a package of both. In this scenario, Yulee's Jewish whiteness might cloak any African blackness casting considerable doubt on the veracity of both designations.

Responding to the rumors, future Florida historian George Fairbanks, Moses Levy's attorney at the time and a friend of the Levy-Yulee family, released his knowledge of the family history. Most people soon dismissed such ribald claims as those of Adams about Yulee's ancestry, instead replacing them with the images provided by Fairbanks. Americans still stereotyped Yulee based on the continent from which he derived, but they viewed North Africa as part of an imagined Orient more than they associated it with sub-Saharan black Africa. The new stories that emerged invoked the discourses applied to Orientals more than Africans, but questions and gossip persisted as correspondents and editors across the nation's presses grafted their own embellishments and bits of (mis)information onto the family's tree. Levy and Yulee's continuing silence added to the confusion, as neither of them clarified the veracity of the reports until several versions of their family's past were already in circulation.

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<sup>47</sup> *New York Evangelist*, June 12, 1841; (New York) *The Log Cabin*, June 12, 1841; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams comprising his Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia, 1877), 10:483. It is possible that people confused Moses E. Levy with Nathan Levy, the American consul to St. Thomas, who publicly acknowledged his black mistress. See Marcus, *United States Jewry*, 91.

The most widely repeated story about the family's past originated from the Washington correspondent for the *Richmond Enquirer* and appeared in several newspapers around the United States. This report connected Yulee to a regal North African heritage by claiming that Yulee's grandfather was the first Councillor, or Grand Vizier, of the Emperor of Morocco. The story continues that the Grand Vizier protected the Emperor from a plot hatched by the Emperor's son. As fate would have it, the Emperor died and the son was released from prison to ascend to the throne. In revenge, the new Emperor threw the former Grand Vizier into prison, confiscated his estate, and forced the family to flee to Gibraltar. The fate of the former Grand Vizier was unknown, or unreported, but the Grand Vizier's grandson, David L. Yulee, became the "youngest man in the U.S. Senate, of which he is a most useful and promising member—notwithstanding the fact that his grandsire was as staunch and phlegmatic an old Turk as ever sat cross-legged or whiffed the houka."<sup>48</sup> This article simultaneously muted the connection between Yulee and Judaism while binding him to a family background that confirmed his right to political eminence. Moreover, this version of the family history became the basis for most public information about Yulee. It traced Yulee's Jewish identity to his mother, "an English Jewess," satisfying the public knowledge that Yulee came from a Jewish background, a particularly noteworthy point in the South where race was legally inscribed in the mother. Additionally, though not as socially important, it bound him to Judaism according to Mosaic Law. At the same time, it located his prestige in his father's lineage of unknown, or unreported, religious orientation, although undoubtedly not Christian.

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<sup>48</sup> (New Hampshire) *Barre-Patriot*, March 6, 1846; (Milwaukee) *Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, March 11, 1846; (Norwalk, Ohio) *Huron Reflector*, March 24, 1846.

Most stories about Yulee's family background place him within Orientalist discourses as a Jew, Moslem, and North African. Newspapers depicted an exotic and mysterious "Orient" that stretched from North Africa, through the Middle East, to Asia. Denigrated in contrast to the West, the Orient nevertheless contained the very foundations of Western Civilization. This conundrum reflected part of an ongoing process in American society where whiteness, the principal basis for citizenship, was being refined through racial classification.<sup>49</sup> Orientals represented a problematic category in this organizational system because of their questionable whiteness. Region and culture often determined the manner in which Orientals would be viewed. North African geographical blackness could be countered by cultural whiteness, particularly when contrasted against sub-Saharan African blackness. Yulee's North African family was wealthy, politically powerful, and socially prominent—certainly not slaves. Orientals were readily contrasted with blackness and appeared white in a starkly biracial society such as that found in the American South. Reception of widely held social mores and cultural values yielded the reward of political acceptance for those deemed Oriental while also allowing any traditionally white Americans to feel gratified by the "soundness of the principles upon which our government is based; casting its shield, as it does, around all who choose to partake of its blessings."<sup>50</sup>

Anti-Semitism against Yulee dissipated once the Democratic Party grasped control of state politics and sent Yulee to the Senate in 1845, but it periodically resurfaced throughout his life. Feeling betrayed that Yulee directed the construction of his cross-

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<sup>49</sup> Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: race and nation in the twentieth century* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> (New Hampshire) *Barre-Patriot*, March 6, 1846; (Milwaukee) *Daily Sentinel and Gazette*, March 11, 1846; (Norwalk, Ohio) *Huron Reflector*, March 24, 1846.

state railroad towards Cedar Keys rather than Tampa, the Tampa newspaper *Florida Peninsular*, which was also a Whig publication, searched for opposition to the “Jewish Dynasty” in 1858, and wondered “where is the host of old line Whigs and Americans, who are always victorious against the *alien*—the *traitor* and the *proselyte*.”<sup>51</sup> Anti-Semitic outbursts against Yulee, and Jews in general, increased with the onset of the Civil War as Americans lashed out against any potential enemies in their midst. Jews as a social group were always viewed circumspectly as American citizens, a perception heightened by the national political crisis. Union General Ulysses S. Grant’s General Order Number Eleven (1862) calling for the removal of Jews from recently conquered territory in the central Mississippi Valley and Confederate Senator Henry Foote’s bombasts against Jews in the Confederate Congress, alongside the consistent stream of anti-Semitic outbursts from Northern and Southern presses unnerved many Jews. Judah Benjamin, who served successively as the Confederate Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of State, and Secretary of War, bore the brunt of much of this harassment. Similar to Benjamin, Yulee’s political opponents railed him as a traitor to his country. Yulee’s Senate colleague from Tennessee, Andrew Johnson, denounced “the contemptible little Jew.”<sup>52</sup> Once fighting began, Northern newspapers recalled General Sam Houston’s harangue against the untrustworthy “little gipsy Jew, Yulee.”<sup>53</sup> The *New York Times* claimed “it is well known that it was because his Jew heart did not get all it craved that he urged the secession of Florida—and like the base Judean, threw

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<sup>51</sup> (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, September 11, 1858. See also, August 27, 1859.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Francis Adams, *Charles Francis Adams, 1835-1915: an autobiography: with a Memorial address delivered November 17, 1915*, by Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: 1926), 94.

<sup>53</sup> The *New Orleans Independent*, reported in the *Chattanooga Daily Gazette*, March 16, 1865; also, the (San Francisco) *Daily Evening Bulletin*, April 19, 1865.

away a pearl richer than all his tribe.” In response the Jewish journal *The Israelite*, published in the North and which defended Jews across sectional lines, segmented Yulee from the Jewish religion while maintaining his racial connection by proclaiming that Yulee was not a Jew but “had been an Israelite, long, long ago.”<sup>54</sup>

Yulee’s detractors exploited his Jewish roots as the basis for many of their criticisms, but by contrast, Yulee’s constituents praised the racially Jewish candidate who exercised religious freedom. Yulee’s Democratic supporters responded to Whig anti-Semitism by equating their candidate with appropriate Christian behavior. They lauded Yulee after his 1840 election victory, “notwithstanding the very kind and Christian-like efforts to disfranchise this highly respected citizen.”<sup>55</sup> The *Saint Joseph Times* proclaimed that “the present Delegate, is of Jewish descent,” and commended Yulee for being “the first of his race that has ever been elected to Congress.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat* noted that “With the unflinching fortitude of the proscribed race from which he sprung, he has suffered bitter persecution and disinheritance because he would not and could not adhere to the religious dogma of his ancestors.”<sup>57</sup> Many people were aware of Yulee’s rejection of the Jewish religion and of the turmoil this created with his religious father. Social dictates frowned on family rifts, but many of Florida’s citizens looked favorably on Yulee’s exercise of religious liberty and his choice to associate with Christianity, even at the expense of his

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<sup>54</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 145-148, 153-155, 167-171, 200-210, 261; Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 68.

<sup>55</sup> *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, March 5, 1840

<sup>56</sup> *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, July 30, 1841.

<sup>57</sup> *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, April 9, 1841. See Monaco, Moses E. Levy, 158.

relationship with his father. One contemporary observer wrote that Yulee's "father is a wealthy Jew—but has discarded him [Yulee] because he will not adhere to the Jewish Creed."<sup>58</sup> Yet Yulee was still regarded as a Jew. "Levy eats pork," wrote one Florida resident, "yet he is a renegade Jew—and the people of Florida will some day find out the Shylock."<sup>59</sup>

Yulee's Jewish identity may have factored into his engagement and marriage to Nancy "Nan" Wickliffe as it did to his political aspirations. In later years, newspaper articles, historical accounts, and memoirs suggested that Nancy Wickliffe, or her father, would not countenance marriage to somebody with such a Jewish sounding name as "Levy," but no direct evidence from the time exists to confirm these accounts. Letters exchanged between the two at the time of their engagement never directly addressed the issue of Yulee's Jewish identity, but they contained vague allusions that became more transparent during the course of their marriage. Newspaper reports clarifying Yulee's family history coincided with his engagement to Wickliffe, and it is possible that Yulee revealed his family's history to his prospective in-laws to assuage their fears about his racial heritage and appease their Christian sensibilities. Wickliffe showed trepidation at Yulee's initial marriage proposal in early 1845 before accepting it, but Yulee implored her to put off a final decision "by a reason which will be satisfactory to

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<sup>58</sup> Corinna Aldrich to Mannevilletta Brown, May 30, 1841, in James Denham and Keith Huneycutt, eds., *Echoes From A Distant Frontier: the Brown Sisters' Correspondence From Antebellum Florida* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 148-49.

<sup>59</sup> James Anderson to Ellen Anderson, April 27, 1845. In Denham and Huneycutt, eds., *Echoes From A Distant Frontier*, 193.



you when hereafter explained.”<sup>60</sup> Soon thereafter, as he campaigned for one of the new state’s two Senate seats during the summer of 1845, he began aggressively exploring Christianity. By December 1845, as he prepared to take his seat in the Senate, he officially changed his last name from “Levy” to “Yulee.” Wedding arrangements ensued. The confluence of Yulee’s engagement, his name change, and his pursuit of religion crystallizes the topics of Yulee’s religious beliefs and the nature of his Jewish identity.

Protestant Christianity dominated the religious landscape of nineteenth-century America and influenced its social and cultural outlook. Close affiliation with Christianity eased integration into American society for many Jews. Christianity undeniably played a central role in American society, yet society did not demand strict adherence to Christian religious faith and practice. The appearance of religious affiliation with Christianity mattered more to Americans than vigorous belief or doctrinal observation. Moreover, the adoption of Protestant discourse satisfied American’s demand for the society-wide acknowledgement of the supremacy of Protestant moral and ethical guidelines. Evangelical Christians sought Jewish converts, but they found few of them. Conversion did not correspond to social advancement which was attainable by simply acknowledging, or superficially subscribing to, the supremacy of Christianity in American society.

Wealthy, charismatic, and politically promising Jews such as Yulee, who closely associated with Christianity, faced few marriage restrictions. Nevertheless, intermarriage between Jews and Christians remained rare throughout the nineteenth

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<sup>60</sup> David Levy to Nancy Wickliffe, April 1, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers. Mr. James H. Phillips recalled that Wickliffe “could not marry any man with a name something like Levy.” Interview with Mr. James Harvey Phillips in Ocala (Fla.) *Banner*, Feb 16, 1906.

century. Oftentimes, both parties had something to gain when it occurred. Letters exchanged between Wickliffe and Yulee during their courtship and throughout their marriage clearly elicit an undying devotion for each other, but ulterior motives existed in the marriage for both parties. Yulee strengthened his social status by marrying into an established and genteel Christian family. The Wickliffe family produced several prominent politicians. Nancy's father, Charles, served as Kentucky's governor for a brief period in 1840 and as the federal postmaster general from 1841 to 1845 during the Tyler administration. Nancy's brother, Robert, later represented Louisiana in Congress. What the Wickliffe's yielded in political clout they may have lacked in financial security, a benefit that they may have seen in Yulee.<sup>61</sup> The promising young politician came from a wealthy and regal family even as he expanded his personal wealth through his legal practice and shrewd land deals. Yulee may also have revealed his ideas for building a railroad and other internal developments in the new state of Florida which may have appealed to the Wickliffe family. Beyond economic benefits, Nancy, the zealously Christian "Wickliffe Madonna," obtained the promise of bringing a dignified and powerful Jew into the Christian flock. In any case, Yulee's cultural whiteness overrode any perception of Jewish racial inadequacy and did not hinder the Wickliffe's from sanctioning the marriage.

Yulee's engagement and the early years of his marriage corresponded to his most intensive exploration of Christianity. His religious self-education was an earnest exploration of Christianity as well as a superficial public and private display that reflected the individualism associated with the Second Great Awakening, a movement

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<sup>61</sup> Robert Seagar, *And Tyler Too* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 67.

occurring during Yulee's early life. Yulee never committed to the authority of religious institutions. Instead, he replicated Protestant mannerisms and preferred to focus on the individual's role in communing with God.<sup>62</sup> "There is more to be done by self-cultivation and prayer," he once told Nancy, "than by the blessings of the preachers. With faith all things will come—and what better guide to faith can we have than the Bible. The fault I think is that I do not devote time enough to the contemplation of spiritual things, nor to the training of my heart."<sup>63</sup> Although he began attending church, Yulee favored the modern individualism expressed in Presbyterian or Episcopalian services to others. Regardless of the institutional setting, he believed that "a good sermon should always be of convenient brevity."<sup>64</sup> He oftentimes skipped services altogether and preferred reading sermons or biblical scripture at home, towards which end he built a theological collection "whose works may be useful lights to us."<sup>65</sup> He read the Bible regularly, but his focus on the Old Testament seemed to frustrate his wife—who implored him to study the New Testament.<sup>66</sup>

Religion did not occupy Yulee's attention as much as politics or business pursuits. In the decade following their marriage his religious fervor waned and appeared more often as a form of compulsion to appease his wife than a desire to find redemption.<sup>67</sup>

"We made no agreements about our reading in the Bible," he testily complained to

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<sup>62</sup>Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 48.

<sup>63</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, January 24, 1848, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>64</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, March 11, 1846, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>65</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 6, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>66</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 26, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>67</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 7, 1847; December 21, 1847; December 26, 1847; January 24, 1848, box 40, Yulee Papers.

Nancy when she proposed a daily reading of the Sermon on the Mount, “ I intend [scratched out “propose”] to read the sermon on the mount every Sunday . . . but I don’t propose it as a task.”<sup>68</sup> He often noted his “appointed” and “promised” church attendance and scriptural readings in his letters to his wife as if he were satisfying a demand.<sup>69</sup>

Despite his relaxed religious observation, Yulee repeatedly told Nancy that he wanted to emulate her religious tenor. “What would I surrender to be as pure and good as my dear Nannie.” Even if he failed to achieve her high religious standards, he still hoped that “her excellence may at least help to attract to me the mercy I shall need.”<sup>70</sup> He earnestly claimed to seek Christianity, but he wondered if religion was not in his nature and therefore unattainable. “Yes my dear wife,” he wrote in December 1847, “I do sincerely wish to be a Christian. But without the grace of the Almighty I feel myself incapable of emerging from the slough of sin.” Yulee accepted responsibility for his lack of religious commitment and believed Nancy would guide him towards the enlightened path. “I still feel my corruptness and that I utterly lack the Holy Spirit of a good man. I am debased in my nature—my heart owns it, and I pray to be inspired with Grace to raise me to the standard of Godly spirit—but I have it not yet. I can’t help dwelling upon the thought that it is you, my darling wife, who is to lead me to the feet of God. . . . Help me in the effort to raise myself—that I may not be a burthen upon your spirit.”<sup>71</sup> He nevertheless pledged to continue searching and occasionally recommitted himself to

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<sup>68</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 7, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>69</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, February 3, 1846, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>70</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 6, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>71</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, September 26, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

pursuing Christianity as he likely pledged to his wife: “I will still strive—and I have a hope that you are to be the instrument of my regeneration and salvation.”<sup>72</sup>

Nearly a decade after their marriage, Yulee contemplated the unfulfilled and unspecified promises he made to her prior to their marriage. “I have been often inconsiderate, and have sometimes, I know it given you pain. I have been selfishly disregarding of your pleasure upon many occasions when a proper thoughtfulness and devotion would have inspired me to overcome my many distempers of habit that were calculated to be disagreeable to you. I have permitted my pursuits and engagements to abstract me from your society—But above all I have not helped you to be good....I ask now forgiveness and for assistance in my improvements.”<sup>73</sup> His religious passions ran high during difficult periods in his life, such as through the Civil War and during his post-war imprisonment. But once the dire circumstances passed and favorable business and political climates ensued, Yulee’s religious fervor once again diminished.

His lack of interest in formal religion should not be misconstrued as disdain for religion altogether. He once told Nancy, “We can only make our covenant with God and with the lights of the Bible, commune with our own heart, as to our conduct.”<sup>74</sup> Yulee maintained a strict set of religious principles grounded in an interpretation of fundamental Judeo-Christian principles. He expressed his religious perspective to Nancy early in their engagement: “Love is God—and God is Love, Love God, and your neighbor, as yourself and in this is summed up the whole mystery of happiness here

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<sup>72</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 16, 1847, December 21, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>73</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 30, 1855, box 41, Yulee Papers.

<sup>74</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, February 4, 1848, box 40, Yulee Papers.

and hereafter—now and forever.”<sup>75</sup> He remained consistently committed to this basic conviction throughout his life, enunciating it on several occasions to his children.

Yulee believed that religion benefitted humanity, but he tempered his religious views with secular reason. Shortly before announcing their engagement, Yulee wrote a letter to Nancy discussing his views on the paradoxes of religion and reason. He encountered an insane woman that cursed vehemently compelling Yulee to conclude that “she seemed to have lost her reason from religious excitement.” To Yulee, religion without reason was tantamount to insanity. He continued by relaying the story of another woman that committed suicide after a miscarriage, leaving her remaining children orphans. “What a safeguard is religion in all the circumstances of life,” he reflected. “[R]eligion would have taught her resignation, and resignation would have saved her reason, and eventually her life.”<sup>76</sup> Yulee affirmed the necessity of both: “without reason and religion, how degraded and disgusting would be human existence,” but he disagreed with imposed religious beliefs and institutions.<sup>77</sup> Yulee believed in God without the trappings of organized religion. In the same manner that he dismissed Jewish religious institutions and practices, he was likewise leery of Christian religious institutions. However, in a predominantly Christian society it made more sense for a politically ambitious young man to publicly associate with the Christian sentiments and institutions of the majority than either the Jewish practices of his forebears or no religion at all.

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<sup>75</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, February 3, 1846, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>76</sup> David Levy to Nancy Wickliffe, September 18, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>77</sup> David Levy to Nancy Wickliffe, September 18, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers.

Yulee may have worshipped in a Christian church, but he did not go through the formal process of conversion. Throughout the duration of the marriage, Nancy pressured her husband to do so. The pressure intensified and became more transparent over time. Once they began having children, Nancy wanted to baptize them as Christians. She also wanted Yulee to accept baptism to serve as a model for their family. "Dear and good husband," she wrote to him in the spring of 1857, "I would be so grateful to God, if I could soon very soon have my baby Nannie baptized, and if God would give you the dear fathers grace to seek it at the same time."<sup>78</sup> She intensified the pressure during the war, and as Protestant evangelism suffused the nation in the years following the end of fighting, she used Yulee's post-war imprisonment as an opportune moment to press her efforts.<sup>79</sup> "Last night I heard little Nannie praying for you," she wrote to him in May 1865. "Among other things she prayed 'may my dear father soon be baptized.'"<sup>80</sup> "Dear husband," she wrote to him a year later in 1866, "I know you have often felt you ought to profess Christ. Think what an example it would be to our children. You might have some hesitation about it now because you are a prisoner, and it would look like weakness from prison life. But make up your mind to this. Satan will by any excuse he can, keep you from it. And you must turn your eye to that Father who has never forsaken you, but oh so lovingly cared for you in youth and manhood, and made you so useful and good. Give him the Glory."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Nancy Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, March 17, 1857, box 41, Yulee Papers.

<sup>79</sup> Diner, *Jews in the United States*, 163.

<sup>80</sup> Nancy Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, May 30, 1865, box 41, Yulee Papers.

<sup>81</sup> Nancy Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, January 23, 1866, box 27, Yulee Papers.

The turbulent context of post-bellum Florida added potency to Nancy's pleas for his conversion. In the excited political and social atmosphere, Jewish whiteness faced potential threats and increasingly came into question. Yet, Florida's burgeoning Jewish population, though still numbering only a few hundred, thrived in the political, economic, and social turmoil of the Reconstruction era at the local level reflecting broader trends across the South. Jews established synagogues and philanthropic organizations in Jacksonville and Pensacola, participated in Masonic clubs, and became involved in the social fabric of many towns throughout the state. Newspapers noted Jewish marriages and festivals and portray an inviting and accepting social environment. Following a Purim ball sponsored by Tallahassee's Jewish politicians Jacob Burkem and Julius Diamond, and attended by Jews and Gentiles alike, the *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian* praised the evening enjoyed by all: "May all of our Israelitish friends in Tallahassee live to enjoy many more feast of Purim."<sup>82</sup> Jews during the Reconstruction period in Florida were a representative microcosm of much of the white South's general population.

Like other Southerners, Florida's Jews were not a united monolithic block and they supported both the Democratic and Republican parties during Reconstruction. Some Jews followed in Yulee's footsteps—although none achieved his prominence—and conformed to the Southern Democratic platform and the reinstatement of white political supremacy. Jacob Cohen became an alderman and city council member in Reconstruction-era Orlando. His religious counterpart Philip Dzialynski joined him on the expanding south Florida frontier as a Polk County Commissioner, while Herman

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<sup>82</sup> *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, March 26, April 27, 1878, in Claire Levenson, *Temple Israel of Tallahassee* (Tallahassee: Congregation Temple Israel, 1985), 15-18.



Glogowski served the Democratic Party as the Mayor of Tampa for over a decade.<sup>83</sup> Jewish Republicans in Florida shared the same fate as their gentile Republican neighbors. Typically they were merely shunned and occasionally harassed by their white neighbors irrespective of their religious denomination, although in the violent spirit of the times some ended up like Marcus Brendt, Tampa's tax collector, who had "his head split open by an axe."<sup>84</sup> Coupled with the growing Jewish civic participation, increasing numbers of itinerant and often foreign Jewish peddlers wandered the countryside catering to black and white clientele and upsetting the strict social boundaries separating whites and blacks. Historically, Florida's residents rarely assailed Jews with anti-Semitism, but the potential existed as manifest in other parts of the South, such as nearby Thomasville, Georgia, just across the Florida border, whose residents expelled the Jews from their community in 1862.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the tumultuous atmosphere, the tone and content of Yulee's response to his wife's evangelism hardly changed since the early days of their marriage: "I wish I

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<sup>83</sup> Canter Brown Jr., *Jewish Pioneers of the Tampa Bay Frontier*, 26-27, 35-36, 53-58, 60; Brown Jr., "Philip and Morris Dzialynski: Jewish Contributions to the Rebuilding of the South," *American Jewish Archives* 44 (Fall/Winter, 1992), 516-539. Green, *MOSAIC*, 14; Heimovics, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail* 7,19; Mark I. Greenberg. "Tampa Mayor Herman Glogowski: Jewish Leadership in Gilded Age Florida," Mark I. Greenberg, William Warren Rogers, and Canter Brown, Jr., eds., *Florida's Heritage of Diversity: Essays in Honor of Samuel Proctor* (Tallahassee: Sentry Press, 1997), 55-67.

<sup>84</sup> Brown Jr., *Jewish Pioneers of the Tampa Bay Frontier*, 25-26. Samuel Fleischman, a Jewish Republican living in Marianna, Florida, was murdered by Democrats for his beliefs, which ostensibly included arming blacks. The story of Samuel Fleischman is found in many sources, most notably, Ralph L. Peck, "Lawlessness in Florida, 1848-1871," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40:2(Oct, 1961), 164-186., and Joe Martin Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1965). Canter Brown Jr., "Philip and Morris Dzialynski: Jewish Contributions to the Rebuilding of the South," in *American Jewish Archives* 44 (Fall/Winter, 1992), 516-539; Mark I. Greenberg. "Tampa Mayor Herman Glogowski: Jewish Leadership in Gilded Age Florida," Mark I. Greenberg, William Warren Rogers, and Canter Brown, Jr., eds., *Florida's Heritage of Diversity: Essays in Honor of Samuel Proctor* (Tallahassee: Sentry Press, 1997), 55-67.

<sup>85</sup> Louis Schmier, "Jews and Gentiles in a South Georgia Town," in Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), 2.

could be like you—and if the illumination of my heart could come of a spark from yours, it seems to me it would be doubly dear. Do not despair in your efforts with me. The seed which you plant although long inert may one day germinate to our mutual happiness.”<sup>86</sup> Yulee did not object to his wife’s requests for their children’s baptism, but he did not place any of his own religious pressures on them and refused to be an instrument of his wife’s religious desires. He remained committed to his basic religious convictions and repeated them to his children as they grew older. “To love God and our neighbors as ourselves’ is the whole law of life. The love of God inspires to all high virtues and the love of neighbor subordinates self, and makes action the benevolence which is one of the high virtues the love of God influences.”<sup>87</sup>

Yulee remained apprehensive about evangelism and steadfastly refused conversion. He wrote to Nan early in their relationship, “Is it not attributable to that great fault in preaching, which altho’ very efficient in making proselytes, has always struck me to be very dangerous as well as injurious—I mean the habit of appealing to the fear instead of the gratitude of man—and driving them by their terror, instead of gently drawing them by their love, to the feet of God.”<sup>88</sup> Yulee concluded that religious conviction was an inner force that could be stimulated, but not compelled, by external pressure. “The difficulty lies in turning to reach the extended hand of God. . . . And yet unless of our own accord we turn to him . . . we must be without it—for otherwise there would be wanting [sic] free will, and without free will there could be no virtue.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 21, 1865, box 41, Yulee Papers.

<sup>87</sup> David Levy Yulee to Margaret Yulee (daughter), August 15, 1870, box 41, Yulee Papers.

<sup>88</sup> David Levy to Nancy Wickliffe, September 18, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>89</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, May 18, 1851, box 40, Yulee Papers.

Yulee maintained this intellectual position toward Judaism as well. Confronted by his father's religious compulsions and faced with estrangement for not following his father's demands, Yulee nevertheless rejected Levy's religious ideals and remained firmly loyal to his own religious beliefs. Even in the context of their only recently repaired and fragile relationship Yulee clearly stated his unwillingness to display any pretense of conformity to his father's religious views. Yulee wrote to his father, "In matters of opinion and convictions, religious, political, or moral, I can never be as uncandid as to deceive you by false professions. . . . However much I might desire so to conform to your views as to recover the affection in your bosom which benefits our relations . . . I would not be deserving of your respect if I won you by politeness of conformity."<sup>90</sup>

Yulee's rejection of conversion invites several explanations. For one, he absorbed the modern ideal of secularism. His basic religious philosophy stressed the concept of free will alongside the enlightenment ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. His belief in these ideals, coupled with his mistrust of religious dogma and institutions, allowed him to feel secure in not subscribing to any official religion. Instead, he proposed a secularized religion, one underpinned by basic Judeo-Christian principles but propelled by reason. Yulee may also have felt the psychological weight of his Jewish heritage on his shoulders, perhaps even sharing a sense of racial brotherhood with his fellow Jews. Despite flirting with Christianity, he never outright rejected his family's Jewish traditions. Certainly he was aware that the overwhelming majority of Jews shunned apostasy. Of the nearly 200,000 Jews in the United States in 1859,

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<sup>90</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, May 18, 1851, Yulee Papers, box 40.

reportedly fewer than four hundred “Hebrew Christians” converted to Christianity.<sup>91</sup> “We are a stiff-necked race,” Miriam Cohen said to Mary Chestnutt, “shabby as a Jew is in your eyes, he is a miracle of respectability, compared with a *converted Jew*. That is the very lowest thing out.”<sup>92</sup> Conversion, too, offered no release from the increasingly powerful racial discourse binding Yulee to Judaism in the modern era. In fact, controversy over converted Jews formed the basis for nascent ideas about blood and race that circulated in late fifteenth-century Iberia before being synthesized into the policy of *limpieza de sangre*. Those initial ideas about Jewish racial identity germinated into the increasingly powerful and scientific racial discourse that emerged at the dawn of the modern era.

Enlightenment rationalism and political liberalism may have yielded Jewish emancipation and generated new opportunities for Jews in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world, but it also created dilemmas by blurring the once clear boundaries between Jews and gentiles. In a similar vein to late fifteenth-century Iberia, as Jews became full citizens in the modern era, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish them from non-Jews. Social theorists considered new ways of identifying Jews and increasingly applied racial rhetoric in their constructions. As historian Eric Goldstein notes, “biology, shared ancestry, and blood” gradually replaced “cultural particularity” and became the distinguishing factor differentiating Jews from non-Jews.<sup>93</sup> Both Jews

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<sup>91</sup> Statistics from “The Jews in America,” in the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, Aug 9, 1859.

<sup>92</sup> Miriam DeLeon Cohen to Mary Chestnutt, in C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chestnutt's Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 317.

<sup>93</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 11; “Because Jews could no longer count on clear social boundaries to set them off from non-Jews, they looked to race as a transcendent means of understanding and expressing the ties that held them together as a group. In short, racial language helped them

and gentiles adhered to these new guidelines for determining Jewish identity. By the middle of the nineteenth century, prominent social theorists such as Josiah Clark Nott characterized Jews in explicitly racial terms while Nott's colleague Robert Knox stated that "race is everything."<sup>94</sup> Jews as well as non-Jews adhered to the prevailing racial theories. Nott's and Knox's sentiments mirrored the proclamation uttered by the character Sidonia in Benjamin Disraeli's 1847 novel *Tancred*: "All is race. There is no other truth."<sup>95</sup> Race language based in family, ancestry, and blood resonated especially loudly in the South, where racial classification equated to civic freedom or enslavement.

Americans, including Jews, generally described race in terms of whiteness and blackness, a constructed ideology that stood out more starkly in the Southern slave states than in the rest of the United States. The demographic preponderance of slaves in the Southern states, coupled with the few and generally acculturated Jewish population, meant that Jews did not threaten America's social order. In the Southern states, as Goldstein remarks, "Jews did not become a primary focus of racial discourse" even as race remained the primary basis of their identity.<sup>96</sup> Social perceptions of Jews located them on the lighter end of the theoretical racial hierarchy between the whiteness of the dominant majority and the blackness of the "other." Often depicted with characteristics administered to both ends of this cultural spectrum, Jews represented a racial conundrum. The ambivalence displayed by Jews and non-Jews over the Jews'

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express their ongoing attachment to the social dimension of Jewishness even as the social distinctiveness of Jews began to weaken," 19.

<sup>94</sup> Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 394, 408; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 16.

<sup>95</sup> In Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

<sup>96</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 16.

ambiguous racial identity left their whiteness constantly in question.<sup>97</sup> The increased immigration of German Jews in the middle of the nineteenth century and of Eastern European Jews in the late nineteenth century heightened this ambiguity. They may not have been completely accepted as white, but they were not black either. Because of their demographic minority and their ambiguous racial identity, Jews found they could utilize racial rhetoric to enhance their social position without fear of retaliation. This was especially the case in the Southern states where the large populations of enslaved “black” Africans served as the lightning rod tending to redirect prejudice away from Jews and similar minority groups, such as Catholics.<sup>98</sup> Race could be used to segment Jews from society, but race also afforded Jews a means of integrating into the social mainstream while retaining a sense of distinctiveness.<sup>99</sup> Most people considered racial characteristics to be innate and immutable, a perception reinforced by the emerging racial science of the mid to late nineteenth century.<sup>100</sup> Yet even as the biological sciences more firmly bound racial characteristics to different social groups, these racial qualities could be manipulated for constructive or destructive purposes.

Yulee confronted race and manipulated racial theories similar to his Jewish political counterpart in England, Benjamin Disraeli.<sup>101</sup> Like Disraeli, Yulee’s expanding

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<sup>97</sup> Rogoff, “Is the Jew White?” 390; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 12, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 30.

<sup>99</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 20.

<sup>100</sup> Sarna, *Mordecai Noah*, 113; John Efron, “Scientific Racism and the Mystique of Sephardic Racial Superiority,” *LeoBaeck Institute Year Book* 38 (1993): 75-96.

<sup>101</sup> Abraham Gilam, “Disraeli in Jewish Historiography,” 24, 27-28. Sir Isaiah Berlin, “Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity,” *Midstream* 16:7 (August/September 1970): 29-49; Paul Smith and Charles Redmond, eds., *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner, eds., *Disraeli’s Jewishness*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell,

public notoriety forced him to explain his Jewish identity. Towards this end Yulee employed racial language to describe his connection with Judaism because he lacked a strong religious connection. Moreover, racial language allowed him to sever his cultural links with Judaism even as it affirmed his racial bond. Disraeli's critics forced him to confront and explain his racially Jewish roots to the public despite the fact that he converted to Christianity as a youth. Public pressure required Disraeli to manipulate racial theories in order to validate his social and political standing. Yulee did not face the same intense or widespread anti-Semitic hostility as Disraeli, but he, too, subtly manipulated racial theories to help justify his elite position in American society and politics.

One way Yulee accomplished this task was by adopting a new surname through an official act of the Florida legislature in December 1845.<sup>102</sup> This action satisfied several practical purposes. Yulee understood that he could never completely detach himself from Judaism. So, he never officially abandoned the name "Levy" and continued signing his name as "David L. Yulee" for the remainder of his life. The name "Yulee," though not a common Anglo surname, was not markedly Jewish either, at least not in America. It hearkened to a foreign origin, but it also connected him with a powerful and wealthy family, one that had been respected for generations. Additionally, rumors spread that either the devoutly Christian Nancy or her father would not sanctify marriage to somebody with such a Jewish-sounding name, but historians Joseph Adler

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2002); David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914*, (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>102</sup> Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the . . . General Assembly of the state of Florida, at its . . . (Tallahassee: Floridian Office, 1845), 253, 259, 252, 262.

and Chris Monaco note that the historical record does not legitimate this claim.<sup>103</sup>

Letters exchanged between the couple after she agreed to their marriage imply that, while they may have considered the idea of a name change, she seemed unaware of his actual intention and revealed her surprise at his action. Assuaging her discomfort after learning about the change, Yulee wrote to Wickliffe, “so I took you a little by surprise? It was sudden—but it is best—You will soon be used to it. And anyhow why may you not still call me Levy which is yet one of my first names.”<sup>104</sup> Whether or not the Wickliffe family demanded the change is unknown, but it surely would have pacified any possible tension. The name change also clarified any misinformation circulating in the media about Yulee’s ancestry. Publicly addressing his Jewish family’s North African past quelled the widespread rumors linking Yulee with a sub-Saharan African heritage in the early 1840s.

Still, many of Yulee’s contemporaries (and subsequent historians) wondered why he changed his name, and various reasons for his action circulated in the nation’s media. Yulee’s own public response to the questioning, often overlooked, was that “many of my friends ask why I have made the addition to my name. . . . [I]t is a natural inquiry. The facts are being these: The name which my father inherited was that which I asked permission to resume. It was his pleasure to suspend its use after leaving his parental home and to employ the name of Levy in its stead. From reasons which will naturally suggest themselves in every heart that holds in great regard the memory of those through whom we trace our being and lineage, I have thought it becoming in me

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<sup>103</sup> Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 38-40.

<sup>104</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe, January 28, 1846, Yulee Papers.



as a reverential duty, to reclaim the name, and restore it to a place in the register of the human race.”<sup>105</sup>

Despite Yulee’s rationale, persistent speculation about alternative motives persisted. Some sources concluded that Yulee changed his name to undermine the public’s connection between him and Judaism. His father, for one, suspected additional motives. Levy firmly believed that his son removed the conspicuous Jewish name to avoid anti-Semitism. The name “Levy” marked him as a Jew, a consideration Moses Levy felt affected his son’s decision. Levy explained in a letter to the editor of the (St. Augustine) *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat* that “I have a printed record by me to show that my father was known but by the name of LEVY. True it is, that the family name was that of YULEE, but surnames are little thought of by Orientals particularly; a Levite with the Jews is called but LEVY. The family name is used only in signing documents. . . . Some of my people find the name [Levy] an inconvenient travelling one, even in the most tolerant countries in the world.”<sup>106</sup>

References to Yulee’s family history, however, concurrently strengthened his claims to social status and political leadership by appealing to the prevailing racial theories of the mid nineteenth century. Ambiguous perceptions of Jewish racial identity left room for positive and negative constructions of Jews as well as for further subdivisions of Jewish racial classification and hierarchy. Yulee subtly employed ideas about hierarchies within the Jewish race to enhance his social and political prestige.<sup>107</sup> He employed the myth of Sephardic supremacy in order to deflect stereotypes

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<sup>105</sup> *The Greenville* (South Carolina) *Mountaineer*, February 30, 1846.

<sup>106</sup> Moses E. Levy to the Editor of the *Herald, Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, Feb 24, 1846.

<sup>107</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 19.

associated with the Northern and Eastern European Jews at the time. Concurrently, he bound himself to a heritage that gave him footing in the foundation of western civilization.

Sephardic Jews claimed descent from the Iberian exiles of the late fifteenth century and earlier.<sup>108</sup> Jews had ascended to the highest social, political, and economic heights in medieval Iberia, and had interacted well with their Christian and Muslim neighbors. During the Christian *reconquista* of Iberia, Spanish Christians attempted to purify their society by purging it of non-Christians. Jewish success and integration in Iberian society had threatened many Christians, leading to the forced conversion or expulsion of Jews beginning in the fourteenth-century. Many Jews converted to retain their advantageous social or economic positions, but some continued privately practicing Judaism. Even those who did not continue practicing their traditional religion faced scrutiny from the Christian community that felt threatened by the new internal competition. Iberian Christians began identifying these Jewish “conversos,” or “New Christians,” on the basis of their ancestry and forcibly expelled them from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497.<sup>109</sup>

Following their expulsion, Sephardic Jews spread throughout the Mediterranean, the Atlantic World, and into the major urban centers of Western Europe. The social accomplishments and cultural achievements of Iberian Jews prior to their banishment

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<sup>108</sup> Some historians trace Sephardic heritage to the Babylonian exile in 586 BCE. Contrast Paul Wexler and Todd Endelman, “Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardic Superiority,” 28-35, in Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner eds., *Disraeli’s Jewishness* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 23-35, with Yosef Yerushalmi, “Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History,” 13, in Benjamin Gumpel, ed., *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3-22.

<sup>109</sup> Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portugese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1997), 11.

from Spain and Portugal provided them with a reputation for sophistication. Consequently, many Jews and non-Jews considered the Sephardic Jews to be more urbane and refined than other Jews, a representation engendered by the Sephardic communities living in exile. Connected to each other by heritage, marriage, and business, not to mention name, Sephardic Jews maintained their connection with the broader non-Jewish world through their economic activities. Their extensive business and family networks throughout the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds provided them with a greater degree of wealth and a broader cultural outlook than most of their Northern and Eastern European brethren.<sup>110</sup> Prospering financially and socially, Sephardic Jews absorbed the values of their gentile neighbors including their ideas on race and racial hierarchies. While race separated Jews from their non-Jewish neighbors, Sephardic Jews adapted race as a means of distinguishing themselves and their communities from the abundant population of impoverished and haggard *Ostjuden* the Jews commonly associated with Northern and Eastern Europe.<sup>111</sup> Their perceived position of cultural eminence validated their oftentimes higher levels of social status in Jewish and Gentile communities. The wealthier and more cosmopolitan Sephardic Jews claimed that they, and not the masses of Northern and Eastern European Jews,

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<sup>110</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, "The Sephardi Contribution to Economic Life and Colonization in Europe and the New World (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries)," 365, in Haim Beinart ed., *The Sephardi Legacy*, 365-398.

<sup>111</sup> Yosef Kaplan, "The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews of Western Europe and their Relation to the Alien and the Stranger," 125, in Benjamin Gumpel ed., *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 121-145; Todd M. Endelman, "Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardic Superiority," in Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner eds., *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 23-35 Also, see Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portugese Nation*, 17, 24; John M. Efron, "Scientific Racism and the Mystique of Sephardic Racial Superiority," 78-79, 85-86, in *Leo Baeck Institute YB* 38 (1993), 75-96.

provided the world with “its most precious possessions—religion, laws, social institutions, its sacred books, and finally its Divine Savior.”<sup>112</sup>

Benjamin Disraeli, one of nineteenth-century England’s towering political figures and a two-term prime minister, used the myth of Sephardic superiority to assert his political and social status. So, too, did Judah Benjamin, Yulee’s senatorial colleague from Louisiana and a longtime family friend. Both men faced anti-Semitic condemnations from the media and their political opponents, and both men reputedly responded with the quip, “Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the Right Honourable Gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon.”<sup>113</sup> To Jews like Benjamin or Disraeli, any criticism levied against Judaism inherently condemned Christian society. After all, Judaism lay at the very center of Christian, and therefore European, civilization. This statement acknowledged these eminent politicians connection to Judaism while also intending to link them with a cultural legacy surpassing that of their European counterparts. Indeed, the main idea is that Jewish culture lay at the foundation of western civilization including

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<sup>112</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity,” in *Midstream* 16:7 (Aug\Sept 1970), 29-49. “Fay,” a correspondent for the *Richmond Enquirer*, links the Yulee family with the “Sephardin, or learned men,” many of whom can claim an ancestry “older than that of any of the European nobility, and their antiquity cannot be disputed.” The *Washington Post*, “The Romance of Yulee: His ancestry—Blending of Many Strains of Blood,” October 25, 1886, pg 2. The *New York Times* stated that “the Grand Vizier lived almost as grandly and ostentatiously as the Emperor himself—sleeping and eating and entertaining in apartments of ravishing splendor , ornamented with mosaics, velvets, laces, costly woods, and silver and gold.” *The New York Times*, “Some Glances Backward,” October 17, 1886.

<sup>113</sup> Endelman, *Disraeli’s Jewishness*; Bernard Glassman, *The Fabricated Jew*. Another common version of this quotation is, “It is true that I am a Jew, and when my ancestors were receiving their Ten Commandments from the immediate Deity, amidst the thundering and lightnings of Mt. Sinai, the ancestors of my opponent were herding swine in the forests of Great Britain.” Some sources associate this quote the Jewish senator from Louisiana, Judah P. Benjamin. See Eli Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: the Jewish Confederate* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 97.

Christianity, which Disraeli referred to as “completed Judaism.”<sup>114</sup> Yulee applied this myth more subtly than either the outspoken Disraeli or the gregarious Benjamin, both of whom publicly acknowledged their Jewish identity. Allusions to Yulee’s Sephardic heritage came through his name change rather than an outright defense of his Jewish heritage. Each of these conservative politicians—Disraeli, Benjamin, and Yulee—consistently referred to the biological basis, and centrality, of race in justifying their eminent positions.

Ultimately, neither the anti-Semitic condemnations mobilized against Yulee nor Yulee’s own subtle manipulation of racial notions of Sephardic supremacy measurably affected his political accomplishments. Much of Yulee’s political success can be attributed to the fact that he possessed many attributes lacking in a frontier setting like Florida. His father, a wealthy and respected Florida landowner, came from a regal family and provided Yulee with a strong classical education. Yulee had access to financial and social resources that he utilized to develop extensive political, financial, and social connections. Additionally, he possessed charm, wit, and intellect, raw talents that allowed him to penetrate the highest social circles in Florida, Washington D.C., and throughout the Atlantic World. Yulee also personified the Democratic Party’s emphasis on personal ambition and ability. His diligence and resourcefulness garnered him political support while influencing Florida’s growth and development.

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<sup>114</sup> Disraeli stated in his book, *Lord George Bentinck*, “I look upon the Church as the only Jewish Institution remaining. . . . If it were not for the Church, I don’t see why the Jews should be known.” Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 98; Disraeli affirmed this notion in other novels such as *Sidonia* and *Coningsby*. Daniel Schwartz, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin: Jewish Perspectives on Disraeli’s Fiction,” 49, in Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner eds., *Disraeli’s Jewishness* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 40-59. Bernard Glassman, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Fabricated Jew in Myth and Memory* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2003), 40-72.

Florida's voters paid scant attention to Yulee's Jewish identity because he satiated their political demands. As the historian Chris Monaco states, "Most Florida voters—burdened by protracted war and financial calamity—did not care if David Levy was an alien, Jew, or even an illegitimate mulatto. What mattered was whether he could bring some relief to the territory, especially in the form of federal dollars, an expectation that Levy fully met."<sup>115</sup> Yulee represented the political interests of a broad cross-section of white men in Florida, winning him favor with the state senate that elected him to the national Senate. In the context of a large enslaved black population, racial nuances and cultural differences between whites mattered little. Whites, including Jews, downplayed their differences while encouraging the overarching and binding notion of whiteness.

Yulee's affirmation of Democratic white political solidarity only thinly veiled his personal desire to solidify his position within the ranks of the white elite. He built his first plantation, *Margarita*, along the Homossassa River in 1848 and later added a second plantation, *Cottonwood*, to his possessions. Additionally, he owned large tracts of acreage throughout rural north central Florida as well as property in towns that included Fernandina, Cedar Keys, Gainesville, and St. Augustine. Slave ownership was a key component to Yulee's performance of whiteness. He used as many as eighty slaves for sugar cane production at *Margarita* and over a hundred for the construction of the Florida Railroad during peak work seasons. He also owned a handful of slaves that attended to his wife and children throughout the war. Plantation and slave ownership, civic engagement, and business pursuits allowed Yulee to equate himself with the

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<sup>115</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 160.

Southern white elite while overshadowing his much less visible and more tenuous connection with Judaism.<sup>116</sup>

Many Jews served in local politics throughout the United States, but Yulee was the first to achieve statewide and national success. Reflecting on Moredecai Noah's inability to win a seat in Congress for New York in 1828, historian Jonathan Sarna stated that "in theory, a Jew could be president; in practice, he faced grave difficulties in attaining any office at all."<sup>117</sup> Unlike Noah, Yulee did not face "grave difficulties" as a Jew. Anti-Semitism did not hinder Yulee as it did Noah. One reason may be that Noah campaigned in New York where the comparatively large Jewish population made Jews more visible. Moreover, the relatively few African Americans in New York, compared with the Southern states, made Judaism a stronger defining characteristic in determining citizenship in New York than in the South. Noah's controversial journalism and eccentric personality created an aura of brashness and audacity: he launched his utopian community, named *Ararat*, dressed in royal garb and proclaiming that he was the new judge and protector of the Jews. Newspapers cynically labeled him the "king of the Jews."<sup>118</sup> His grand project failed abysmally—within days of its ostentatious inception. Noah also possessed a mediocre political record in an urban environment saturated with prospective political talent. He also openly defined himself as Jewish and mobilized his Jewish identity in a public arena containing weaker color barriers and stronger religious and ethnic obstructions than existed in Florida. Conversely, Yulee's

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<sup>116</sup> Todd M. Endelman, "The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England," 231, in Jacob Katz, ed., *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* (New York: Transaction Books, 1987), 225-246.

<sup>117</sup> Sarna, *Mordecai Noah*, 46.

<sup>118</sup> Sarna, *Mordecai Noah*, 17.

democratic politics and advocacy of state's rights was a popular political platform in Florida and throughout the South. His successful political record and widespread popularity among Democrats—and even some Whigs—provided him with a support base that Noah lacked. Finally, Yulee included himself among his constituency by detaching from Judaism and associating with Christianity.

Yulee aligned closely with Christianity for the duration of his adult life. He attended church periodically, studied scripture and sermons, and donated money to churches and other Christian institutions. Although he never converted, Yulee remained devoted to his wife and supported her connection with Christianity. He donated large sums of money to several Christian institutions in her honor and made sure that her memorial was appropriately graced by Christian icons and devotions following her death. He did not allow religious symbolism to get in the way of his desire to spiritually connect with her in the afterlife by arranging to be buried next to her in the Presbyterian cemetery in Washington, D.C. Nan's favorite New Testament proverbs are inscribed on his tomb, which is similarly marked by Christian iconography and topped with two angels. Newspapers across the nation noted the elite pallbearers and his burial in a Christian cemetery affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of which they claimed he was a member. Nevertheless, they identified him as a Jew.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Washington Post*, October 11, 1886; *New York Times*, October 11, 1886.



## CHAPTER 4 YULEE'S SOUTHERN IDENTITY

In 1883, the *Bismarck* (North Dakota) *Tribune* published an article entitled “A Relic of the Past: Active, Useful, and Sagacious” about Yulee’s life focusing particularly on his post-Civil War career. Once well known “as a subject of King Cotton” who “highly enjoyed a diet of red-hot things when fire-eating prevailed in the days of antebellum politics,” Yulee renounced the Lost Cause and wholeheartedly supported America’s reunion following the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> After rebuilding Florida’s principal railroad system and working with moderate Republicans to help resuscitate Florida’s failing political and economic infrastructure, Yulee moved to Washington, D.C., to benefit from retirement. There, the charismatic ex-senator and his wife enjoyed dinner parties and sundry engagements with other members of America’s social and political aristocracy, regardless of their varying positions on the political spectrum.

Renouncing the Confederacy and actively promoting the reintegration of the Southern states into the United States did not qualify as behavior traditionally associated with staunch advocates of “King Cotton,” yet Yulee remained intimately associated with the South for most of his life. As a public political figure, plantation owner, and former slave master, Yulee personified the image of a white Southern gentleman. Yulee’s Southern conservatism underpinned his whiteness providing him with access to power and status. He maintained this specifically white Southern identity through various social and cultural performances. Foremost, Yulee’s Southern identity revolved around performing the role of the planter and included inculcating Southern codes of honor and manhood, publicly adhering to Christianity, and fiercely defending

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<sup>1</sup> *The Bismarck* (N.D.) *Tribune*, October 19, 1883.

the institution of slavery. Yulee pinned the political component of his Southern identity on his support for states' rights and the corresponding right to own slaves and to secede from what he perceived as a compact between states, yet his social and economic interactions betray close connections to the North while his political course did not always reflect unquestioning loyalty to the Confederacy. As the editorialist of the *Tribune* unwittingly suggested through the medium of Yulee, Southern identity was a dynamic and nuanced category of identification that did not have easily discernible parameters. It is ironic that the same newspapers that identified Yulee as a "Southron" and "fire-eater" also noted that he was neither born in the South nor did he die there.<sup>2</sup>

Historians have grappled over definitions of Southern identity for generations. Problems arise immediately in trying to define "the South." Is it a circumscribed geographical region? Is it an idea? Who are "Southerners?" Who are white Southerners?" How do Southerners define themselves and how are they defined by others? What archetypes exist for Southerners on which to base their identity? The "South" and "Southern" are concepts imagined differently over time, between regions, and across social boundaries. Historians have often designated the South in geographic terms, as the part of the nation below the former Mason-Dixon boundary that closely adhered to slavery and states' rights, yet not all of the states in this "South" joined the Confederacy and not all communities within in the Confederate states

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<sup>2</sup> (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886; *The Philadelphia Times*, reprinted in the *Macon (Georgia) Telegraph*, October 24, 1886. Charles Lewis, an acquaintance of Yulee's, noted that Yulee retained his Florida citizenship and participated in Florida's elections, even while living in Washington. Charles W. Lewis to the editor of the (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, October 14, 1886. According to historian James Cobb, "Southron" is a designation for elite white Southerners. James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45.

embraced secession.<sup>3</sup> The South is often regionally identified according to the states that comprised—or that would ultimately comprise—the former Confederacy. However, history is contingent and few could have predicted the final composition of the Confederacy until political lines hardened following the shelling of Fort Sumter in April 1861. Since the conclusion of the Civil War, historians have identified the South as the region where Jim Crow laws prevailed, but his marker, too, has become complicated since the Civil Rights Movement. Current historical discussions complicate definitions of the present geographical South by noting the late twentieth-century influx of northern and foreign immigrants into the region—even as they exclude Southern states, such as Florida, from their conversations—and yet, the South of old was also a land of immigrants: Scots, Irish, Lebanese, Chinese, Cubans, Italians, French, and by no small measure, Jews.<sup>4</sup>

Any definition of the “South” leads to the conundrum of identifying “Southerners.” Not everyone in the South was white, Protestant, or of European descent. For the first half of the twentieth century, historians and the general public imagined a monolithic white South, but scholarship since the civil rights era has erased this image while expanding Southern archetypes by including Southern matrons, yeomen farmers, enslaved and free blacks, and poor white Crackers. Historians have searched for an

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<sup>3</sup> Missouri, Maryland, Delaware, and Kentucky, all slave-states, remained with the Union during the Civil War. Delaware always favored the Union, but the status of the other three border states remained open until the incident at Fort Sumter, S.C.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the complications of geographical and sociological definitions of the “South” and “Southern,” please see Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches From the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); John Shelton Reed, *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); David M. Potter, *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 3-17, Cobb, *Away Down South*, 2, 5-6; Edward L. Ayers, et al, eds., *All Over The Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 65; Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

essential antebellum white Southern identity in cultural constructions of honor and manhood, in the gendered and hierarchical master-slave relationships of the plantation lifestyle prevalent in the Southern states, and in the political concept of Southern nationalism. They have concentrated their investigations of post-bellum white Southern identity in the region's conservatism, folk culture, or its image as the antithesis to America. The indelible role of memory and history in shaping regional culture and society, coupled with the inception of Confederate iconoclasm venerating the "Old South" and a "Lost Cause," has proven to be a potent argument in terms of self-perception and national identity. Other studies investigated the changing nature of Southern identity over time and in different places, as well as broadening the field of inquiry to extend beyond white men and women in the South. Historians now consider the various constructions of Southern identity, and the changes within these constructions in shifting historical circumstances rather than grasping for an essential form. Nevertheless, pinpointing a precise Southern identity has proven futile. As the historian Emory Thomas notes, "The 'Southern Way of Life' is an elusive euphemism at best," one that can be described as a haphazard compilation of numerous "traits, characteristics, and sacred cows." Thomas's fellow historian Edward Baptist describes Southern identity and the Old South as a contingent story "told by some anxious folks."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For the quotation, see Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 2; Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's plantation frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 281. Please refer to the following books for extended discussions of Southern identity since the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese *Within the plantation household: Black and White women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, roll: the world the slaves made* (New York, Vintage Books, 1973); Grady McWhiney, *Southerners and Other Americans* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Frank Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political*

Baptist explains that discerning a Southern identity has proven difficult enough in established states with sustained traditions of slavery, but it is especially challenging in a newly settled frontier environment such as Florida. Yet, according to Baptist, it is precisely in this setting that we can most clearly visualize its construction. Shortly after Spain ceded Florida to the United States in 1819, Virginia and Carolina planters migrated to the territory in search of fresh soil and new sources of financial security. In Florida, planter-immigrants sought to transplant their ideals of planter society and hierarchical deference in the rich uplands of the northern part of the territory, known as "Middle Florida." Many joined the Whig Party that defended the interests of planter society and dominated politics in the Florida territory during the 1820s and 1830s. Yeoman farmers from throughout the southern United States and the Caribbean also moved into Florida, searching for the wealth and political status they lacked in their homelands. These men, based primarily along the northeastern peninsular coast and interior hinterland, joined the rising Democratic Party that finally unseated the Whigs and wrestled control of state politics in the early 1840s.<sup>6</sup> Yulee became the leader of

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*Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Jack E. Davis, *Race Against Time: Culture and Separation in Natchez Since 1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); Potter, *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Charles W. Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Cobb, *Away Down South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 2, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Baptist, *Creating an Old South*, esp. 1-15, 154-190, 219-246.

the Democratic Party that championed the cause of the “honest laboring class” and assumed power in 1839 before shepherding the territory into statehood in 1845.<sup>7</sup>

While these civic men—white men—in Baptist’s narrative battled each other for political power, they all agreed on the basic tenets of Southern identity. “Southerners” adhered to a political-economy based on land acquisition and the agricultural production of cash crops, often through forced labor. As Whigs and Democrats, planters and yeomen farmers negotiated the nature of Southern identity in territorial Florida, virtually no white resident questioned its entry into the Union as a slave state.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, Baptist’s convenient definitions do not extend beyond the scope of his study, which ends at the start of the Civil War. In post-bellum Florida, as in locations throughout much of the former Confederacy, defining Southern identity is generally predicated on two principles: the reconsolidation of political control of the former Confederate states by white men and women, and their maintenance of an aura of cultural supremacy over their black neighbors.<sup>9</sup>

Many historical studies since the mid-twentieth century expanded definitions of the “South” and “Southerners” to include all of the regions inhabitants beyond its white citizens, but Americans generally equated (and often continue equating) Southern identity with whiteness. Historically, they commonly referred to white men and women as “Southerners.” Black men and women held labels of the proverbial other: slaves, colored, Black-and-Tan Republicans, or worse, but not as the beholders and definers of

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<sup>7</sup> David Levy to Martin Van Buren, undated, 1839, box 3, David Levy Yulee Papers, Special and Area Studies Collection, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (Yulee Papers).

<sup>8</sup> Baptist, *Creating an Old South*, 2, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Davis, *Race Against Time*, 2-4; Cobb, *Away Down South*, 88-89.

“Southern.” Similarly, white people from the South who disagreed with the overwhelming social sentiments suffered labels that separated them from Southerners. Following the Civil War, Atlanta evangelist Sam Jones discerned that the people many Lost Cause proponents referred to as “Yankees” were actually native Southerners, and not foreign or northern immigrants. Conversely, Northern and foreign immigrants to the South who maintained Southern ideals were considered “southernized” and labeled as “naturalized southerner[s].”<sup>10</sup>

Jews were a part of the diverse network of communities that defined nineteenth-century white Southern identity. Non-Jewish Southerners generally viewed Jews as white, though racially distinct, and accordingly afforded them a place in Southern society. No strangers to the South, individual Jews had lived in the region since the seventeenth-century and established official religious communities in Savannah, Georgia, in 1733 and in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1749. As many as a thousand Jews lived in South Carolina at the dawn of the nineteenth-century, one-third of the American Jewish population, while half of the new nation’s Jewish population lived in the Southern slave states. Vibrant Jewish communities existed in Savannah, Richmond, New Orleans, and Baltimore, while Jews could be found in small towns throughout the region. Most of America’s Jewish population worked as merchants or shopkeepers in urban areas. Most also claimed Sephardic ancestry and practiced Sephardic religious traditions through the early nineteenth century, but many European “Ashkenazic” Jews lived among them, some claiming Sephardic descent to enhance their reputations. Charleston, with perhaps 500 Jewish residents, was the nation’s

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<sup>10</sup> Cobb, *Away Down South*, 70, 89; Nancy Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, October 8, 1856, box 40, Yulee Papers.

largest Jewish community, but Jewish emigration into the South tapered off at the beginning of the nineteenth century and stalled for the next seventy years until New York surpassed it in 1830. Nearly 50,000 Jews streamed into the budding new republic by 1850, and another 100,000 in the next decade, but the vast majority remained in the North. Numbering roughly one-third of their Northern co-religionists on the eve of the Civil War, Jews were often indistinguishable from other white Southerners in social behavior and political thought and, accordingly, faced little discrimination.<sup>11</sup> Racially Jewish, Yulee illustrates the nuance and complexity behind shifting nineteenth-century constructions of Southern identity. In doing so, he reveals the basis of Southern identity in the cultural construction of whiteness.

Several factors prepared Yulee to adopt and shape a lasting white Southern identity. The presence of slaves on St. Thomas, especially in the primary commercial center of Charlotte Amalie, certainly influenced Yulee as a child. As European nations moved towards prohibiting slavery in their Caribbean colonies, slave-owners on the islands sought to liquidate their human property before any legislation took effect. Danish-controlled St. Thomas, unlike many of its neighboring islands, remained a free port, retained lenient commercial policies, and tacitly permitted the continuation of the slave trade even after Denmark prohibited slavery in 1803. As a result, St. Thomas became a major trading depot for Caribbean slaves often legally sold or illegally

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<sup>11</sup> Hasia Diner, *Jews of the United States, 1654-2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 75, 105, 155-202; Marc Lee Raphael, *Judaism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 39-73; For a brief bibliographic overview of Southern Jewry during the nineteenth century see, Mark K. Bauman, *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Mark Greenberg and Marcie Cohen Ferris, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: a new history* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2006); Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews In The South* (New York :Free Press, 1997); Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), esp. 11-54.



smuggled to burgeoning markets in the southern United States—and foremost through the port of Fernandina, the very port Yulee sought to expand with his railroad.

Sources indicate the presence of slaves in the Yulee household, an issue that contributed to the tension between Moses E. Levy and his wife, Hannah Abendanone. Levy disapproved of slavery and publicly espoused abolition when not in the United States. He spoke of the ill effects of slavery upon his son in a speech in London, England, to the Surrey Anti-Slavery Society: “As [the boy] grew up, he was taught to look down upon and despise [the slave] as being an inferior order, and upon every occasion struck and abused him.” Years later, Levy wrote to his son-in-law, Jonathan DaCosta, that his former wife’s mistreatment of slaves affected his youngest son and factored into his pro-slavery political position. Purposely or not, while Levy connected the institution of slavery with the social construction of whiteness and white behavior, he simultaneously placed his family, and by implication all Jews, in the white camp. “Thus the worst and most malignant ideas,” he said of Yulee’s childhood socio-cultural education, “were engendered in the mind of the white.”<sup>12</sup>

Yulee’s upbringing on St. Thomas prepared him for the similar urban society with slaves he would encounter in the southern United States. Charlotte Amalie maintained an estimated population of 14,000 residents in 1815, including roughly 2,500 slaves (and perhaps two hundred Jews).<sup>13</sup> Most of the enslaved lived on the few plantations in the island’s interior, but nearly all of them passed through Charlotte Amalie. The 1820 census reported 8, 478 residents in Norfolk, Virginia, making it smaller than Charlotte

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<sup>12</sup> Chris Monaco, *Moses Levy: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>13</sup> Judah M. Cohen, *Through the Sands of Time: a history of the Jewish community of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands* (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 21; [www.vinow.com/stthomas/History](http://www.vinow.com/stthomas/History).

Amalie, but still the fourth largest city in the South.<sup>14</sup> Like Charlotte Amalie, few slaves lived in Norfolk, but many passed through Virginia's largest port and ended up on the plantations farther inland or farther south. Also like Charlotte Amalie, slavery still permeated Virginia even as it diminished throughout the Chesapeake and Tidewater regions of the Upper South in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Many plantation owners in the Upper South sold their human chattel to the lower region, to places like Florida, where the prospects of the cotton industry and other large-scale plantation agriculture fueled the thriving institution.<sup>15</sup>

Slaves formed a part of the social landscape in Virginia as in Charlotte Amalie, yet there is no indication that anybody in the Myers family owned any slaves or that Yulee personally engaged them on a regular basis. However, the institution comprised an integral component of the Southern Christian society that Yulee encountered and cultivated in Norfolk, and he clearly felt no moral conflict over the institution.

Yulee acquired personal knowledge of slavery in the context of large-scale agriculture and plantation management at his father's property near Micanopy. Slave labor, not Jewish immigration, sustained Moses Levy's *Pilgrimage* plantation. Young Yulee's moral guardian who delivered abolitionist speeches on the world stage went against his professed values so that he might compete with the slave-labor efficiency of his fellow planters. Levy avoided the subject of abolition when in the United States, but he made several trips to England where he wrote and lectured on the subject.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov); [historync.org](http://historync.org).

<sup>15</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-14, 358-365.

<sup>16</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 1, 48.

Conversely, Yulee fiercely supported the institution in the U.S. political arena and endorsed its expansion into all new territories even though he did not own any slaves until 1848, the year he purchased Margarita, his first plantation. Strife over opposing views of slavery—alongside Levy’s rejection of his son’s religious affiliation and professional and political aspirations—added to the tension between Yulee and his father described in the preceding chapter.

Yulee acquired other aspects of Florida’s frontier Southern identity while learning the rudiments of plantation life in Micanopy. Charles Wickliffe Yulee stated that his father spent much of his time fishing and practicing his marksmanship during what Yulee described as his “happy youth,” a time when he nurtured his nascent Southern identity while transitioning from “heedless boyhood to maturity.”<sup>17</sup> Outdoor activities centered on subduing nature and polishing one’s mental and physical ability to vigorously defend individual self-determination and honor, including the perpetuation of violence towards that end if necessary, appealed to many white Southerners.<sup>18</sup> Towards this end, many white Southerners espoused the forced removal or extermination of Indians from prospective agricultural domains they wished to occupy. Indian removal pacified white Southerners’ desire to sit atop the ecological and socio-cultural ladder, but the penultimate manner of controlling nature centered on owning other dependent bodies and unequivocally forcing them to cultivate the often dangerous and unforgiving surroundings pried from the Indians. This ideal was a cornerstone of white Southern identity.

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<sup>17</sup> Joseph Adler, *The Public Career of Senator David Levy Yulee* (Ph.D. diss., (Ohio) Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 9; Circular of Mr. Levy of Florida to his Constituents, June 17, 1844, reprinted in *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, July 16, 1844.

<sup>18</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South; Baptist, Creating an Old South*, 89-90.

In shaping his own white Southern self-identity in the late 1820s and early 1830s, Yulee simultaneously helped forge the Southern identity that would characterize Florida as a part of the Deep South. Both Yulee's personal identity, and that which he helped carve for the future state, reflected the ideals of Florida's former military governor (1821) and United States president (1829-1837), Andrew Jackson. Jackson's political ideals—famously described as Jacksonian Democracy—promoted rugged individualism, expansive political democracy, territorial expansion, and small government. Yulee closely adhered to these occasionally contradictory values as he built a broad and loyal constituent base throughout the eastern part of the Florida Territory. Whigs characterized Yulee as a Loco-Foco—a radical Democrat—and decried the barbecues and shooting contests he sponsored while campaigning.<sup>19</sup> These events, designed to appeal to the average man, extended civic life to men who had, until then, been politically subjugated by the planter-led, hierarchical Whigs that controlled state politics and the nature of Florida's Southern identity since the Spanish cession in 1819. Yulee would remove Indians for the farmer and the merchant, and he would protect them from the oppressive national bank controlled by the hierarchical Whigs. Democrats shared with Whigs, however, an unshakable faith in the dominance of whiteness: the common cultural values, priorities, and attitudes that perpetuated the integrity and supremacy of white Southern political hegemony. Yulee and his associates exploited this category to broaden their political base and expand their political clout. Led by Robert Reid, Yulee

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<sup>19</sup> *The Saint Augustine News*, February 16, 1839, March 7, 1839; (Jacksonville) *Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, November 23, 1844. Charles Wickliffe Yulee later claimed that his father won an entire Whig precinct with a bulls-eye shot at a barbecue. The story is dubious, but it illustrates Yulee's appeal to the average man. Charles Wickliffe Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 2:1-2 (1909), 7.

and his colleagues formed the nucleus of the Democratic Party that imprinted their expanded version of Southern identity on the future state of Florida.<sup>20</sup>

Yulee's civic engagement typified Jewish political behavior throughout the South—indeed, the nation. For the most part, Jews concentrated their political energy within their local communities. In Savannah, Georgia, the Sheftall family had been involved in local affairs since America's War for Independence, while in Richmond, Virginia, Gustavus Myers served as president of the city council member from 1843 to 1855. Jews contributed at the state level as well. Dr. Edwin Warren Moise was an Attorney General and Speaker of the state House of Representatives for Louisiana in the 1840s and 1850s, while Dr. Levi Myers was elected to the South Carolina legislature as early as 1796, both alongside the political involvement of the aforementioned Moses Myers in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>21</sup> Northerners also elected Jews to local and state posts, but no Northern Jewish politicians represented their states in Congress. In the South, Yulee preceded the election of Louisiana's Judah P. Benjamin to the senate by seven years.<sup>22</sup>

Both Benjamin and Yulee were remarkably similar right down to their origins: they were born a year apart in the Danish Caribbean (British for much of their youth) where their families were connected by marriage. There is no evidence that they mingled prior to their arrival in Washington D. C., but they maintained contact during their time in the nation's capital. More important, Yulee and Benjamin unabashedly committed themselves to the standards of elite white Southerners and were well received by

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<sup>20</sup> Baptist, *Creating an Old South*.

<sup>21</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 29-30, 198-200

<sup>22</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, v. 1-2 (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 84-88; Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 198-200. David Kaufman of Texas was elected to Congress in 1846

Christian society and integrated into Southern gentile culture. Politically, they both adamantly defended states' rights and slavery, and enhanced their political claims by purchasing plantations and slaves. Both married Christian wives from established upper-class families and both men attended Christian religious services. Both men remained aloof from Judaism and the Jewish community, although Benjamin was more vocal in his defense of his Jewish lineage.<sup>23</sup>

A crucial part of Yulee and the Democratic Party's developing political platform called for the removal of Florida's Indians to open the way for white settlement. In no place in the South was removal a greater priority than in Florida, where federal troops and territorial and state militias fought three Indian wars that cost the United States dearly in lives and monetary expense. American settler pressure in Alabama and Georgia forced the region's Indians--Creeks, Yuchi, Yamassee, and Choctaw—into Florida where whites tended to lump them into an undifferentiated group as Seminoles. The flood of incoming white settlers hemmed them in and left them without places to live and avoid conflict. The Treaty of Moultrie Creek (1823) established a boundary between white and Indian settlement that intended to protect them both, but white encroachment on Indian land, coupled with the belief that the Indians disavowed previously established treaties, inflamed anxieties between the parties. White settlers understood all too well that runaway slaves—with their detailed knowledge of the surrounding white communities and homesteads—found a safe haven among the Indians. The thought of contingents of runaway slaves assisting Indian raids against white settlers struck fear into Florida's white residents and further fueled tensions.

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<sup>23</sup> Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*, 55-86.

These dangerous conditions could not exist in a territory whose white residents firmly resolved to join the union as a Southern slave state. Indian removal eliminated the potential threat to the slave order most white immigrants anticipated.<sup>24</sup> Yulee galvanized the white settlers taming peninsular—central and south—Florida, and spearheaded the campaign for removal of the local Indian population. As settlers continued entering Florida and calling for removal, tensions flared, violence escalated, and a war seemed imminent.

Yulee's enlistment in the militia, and his limited participation in the conflict remembered as the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), enhanced his standing as a Southerner. Military service appealed to white Southern social sensibilities, which revered martial duty, honor, and violence.<sup>25</sup> As a military officer, Yulee garnered social prestige by commanding men and facing the potential for direct confrontation with the enemy. He did not see any military action, but the threat of conflict and the spread of fear touched him personally. Yulee had experienced the oftentimes strained Indian-settler relations along Florida's southward expanding frontier while living in Micanopy, which lay on the threshold of the conflict between the local Indians and the incoming white settlers. Moses Levy fostered good relations with the local Indians, and they occasionally traded with the settlers at Pilgrimage, but when tensions finally exploded in late 1835, launching the Second Seminole War, the Indians attacked and destroyed

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<sup>24</sup> See John Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-42* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1985). Colonel Thomas Jesup, the American military commander prosecuting the war in Florida, stated that "rest assured, this is not an Indian, but a Negro war." Russell F. Garvin, "The Free Negro in Florida Before the Civil War," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 46:1 (July 1967), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 25-61, 418-419.

Pilgrimage.<sup>26</sup> In lieu of this personal loss, Yulee's appeals for federal troops and aid on behalf of the territories' settlers enhanced his growing political reputation as an outspoken proponent for Florida's frontier population and for territorial development.

If Yulee was a firebrand about states' rights, he was equally so about the United States as a white man's country, about land as the proprietary of a superior culture. He benefitted, as did other white Floridians, from an open frontier and the advance of commercial agriculture. As long as Indians remained present, white expansion faced an important impediment. Americans (including Southerners) distinguished Indians from Southerners much as they distinguished blacks from Southerners. White immigrants viewed Indians as part of the natural Southern landscape. In the same way the new immigrants cleared Florida's forests and tamed the environment, the land also had to be devoid of any Indians before any of the settlers could realize their dreams of independent living, even wealth.

After leaving the militia prior to 1837, Yulee continued fighting for Indian removal in the political arena, an equally important forum for elite white men to promenade their Southern identity. As territorial and congressional representative, Yulee advocated continuing federal military assistance against the Seminoles and urged financial compensation for Florida's volunteers for their part in the war. Addressing Congress in 1842, Yulee claimed that the patience and conduct of Florida's citizens towards their Seminole neighbors entitled them "to the praise of the country." After dramatically displaying a Seminole spearhead he claimed was removed from the corpse of a dead white child, Yulee firmly rejected clemency for the Indians and demanded a continuation

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<sup>26</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 9, 151-152.



of federal military intervention. Contrasting white civility with Seminole hostility Yulee unequivocally stated, “let us hear no more of sympathy for these Indians. They know no mercy. They are demons, not men. They have the human form, but nothing of the human heart. . . . If they cannot be emigrated, they should be exterminated.”<sup>27</sup>

Yulee and Florida’s Democratic Party envisioned their future states’ Southern identity based on precedents established in other Southern states only recently added to the Union. As Florida’s constitutional convention met in 1838, Yulee and his fellow Democrats proposed forming Florida’s political and legal systems on models established in other Deep South slave states like Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Their Whig counterparts resisted some of the more democratizing features of the document benefitting white males, but both parties agreed on the entrenchment of white authority. Both parties insisted, much to the dismay of their Northern colleagues, on strict measures prohibiting emancipation and forbidding the immigration into Florida of any colored person other than the enslaved. Yulee and the Democratic Party also reaffirmed the need for sectional balance within the Union while restating the Democratic Party’s determination to expand state and individual sovereignty. Their platform appealed to many Floridians who desired the benefits of statehood.<sup>28</sup>

Slavery did not consume Yulee during his first decade of political activity—Indian removal and the drive for statehood commanded much more attention—but as a territorial representative and senator facing the escalating abolitionist movement, he steadfastly supported the institution and feverishly defended its constitutional legality in

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<sup>27</sup> Mahon, *The Second Seminole War*, 311.

<sup>28</sup> Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 28-34.

Congress. In 1842, while serving as a territorial representative without voting power, Yulee railed against England's disregard for the Treaty of Washington. The tenth article of this treaty called for the return of fugitive slaves to the United States. Yulee demanded the return of seven slaves charged with committing a murder in Florida before fleeing to the British Caribbean. British legislators acknowledged the validity of Yulee's arguments, yet neither they nor Yulee's colleagues in Congress acted to meet his demands.<sup>29</sup>

While squaring off with his political opponents over the nature of Florida's Southern identity, Yulee faced vigorous opposition to his own, personal identity. Though a rising star in the Democratic Party in the early 1840s, Yulee lacked entrenched political power and faced virulent political attacks steeped in anti-Semitic rhetoric. Likewise, the state he represented only recently entered the Union with a generous amount of federal financial and military assistance. While there was little doubt that Florida would enter the Union as a Southern state, the political nature of Florida's Southern identity remained ambiguous and debatable. Whigs wanted to impose the traditional racial and social hierarchies they brought with them from Virginia and South Carolina. They demonstrated this desire by deriding Yulee's Jewish background and foreign birth. By contrast, Yulee vigorously asserted both his own, and Florida's, Southern identity through fierce political rhetoric and aggressive action that buttressed his claims to Southern identity against potential criticism. Hailing political democratization, Yulee rhetorically included himself among Florida's population as

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<sup>29</sup> David Levy, Speech of Mr. Levy of Florida on the Tenth Article of the Treaty of Washington (Washington, D.C., Blair and Reeves, 1844), 3-31.

“Florida’s favorite son” and “the people’s friend.”<sup>30</sup> Despite his West Indian and Jewish background, the editors of the *Saint Augustine News* declared, “we think, and the people are satisfied, he is a son of Florida—they in their might have adopted and claim him.”<sup>31</sup>

Yulee continued implanting himself, and the state he represented, in the Southern camp after entering Congress as Florida’s first senator in 1845. States’ rights and slavery lay at the heart of the South’s political platform and underpinned Yulee’s, and many white Floridians’, Southern identity. Yulee’s republican rhetoric appealed to “conservative and union loving . . . patriots and just men” in the North to recognize the states’ rights position.<sup>32</sup> Responding to Congressman David Wilmot’s infamous rider, Yulee stated to Congress, in 1848, that the “Constitution of the United States is the fundamental law, and that all municipal laws or regulations inconsistent with its provisions, or with the law of his country, *cease to exist* immediately on the United States becoming the owner of new territory. Slavery being recognized, by the constitution [sic], must exist under the constitution so long as the Territory is the property of the U.S.”<sup>33</sup> Wilmot’s Proviso did not make it through Congress, but it led to legislation upholding the notion of popular sovereignty, the idea that the citizens of a territory or state would determine the legality of slavery, and one that Yulee entirely refuted. The failure of Northern Democrats to maintain the Party standard forced a

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<sup>30</sup> (Jacksonville) *The Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, November 28, 1844, December 1, 1844.

<sup>31</sup> *The St. Augustine News*, May 10, 1845.

<sup>32</sup> David Levy Yulee to F. H. Elmore, September 14, 1847, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in the (Montgomery, Ala.) *Tri-Weekly Flag & Advertiser*, March 16, 1848. Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 67-68, 163-164. Yulee foreshadowed Chief Justice Taney’s infamous Dred Scott decision (1857) by nearly a decade.

sectional schism that promoted Yulee's close alignment with the fiery senator from South Carolina John C. Calhoun. Yulee clarified his thoughts on the subject of slavery in the western territories in an 1848 speech to Congress, a statement that he correctly asserted would be "sustained by the Southern Senators generally." In it, he condemned the prohibition of slavery, or even the notion of popular sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> To Yulee, America was a union of sovereign states. From this premise, it followed that the privileges enjoyed in any of the states should be enjoyed in the territories. Yulee strenuously objected to any legislation that denied full rights to slave-owners in any newly acquired territory, and refused cooperation with any political candidates unwilling to entirely endorse the rights of slave-owners. Any compromise of these rights, he said, insulted the "moral pride" and "dignity" of Southerners.<sup>35</sup>

Yulee's belligerent activism and pleas for Southern unity placed him at the forefront of Southern political thinkers considering the idea of Southern nationalism.<sup>36</sup> He signed Calhoun's "Address to the Southern People," a declaration of the Southern political position that responded to Wilmot's Proviso by proclaiming that American citizens could bring their property—slaves—into newly acquired territory, in January 1849 and wrote to Calhoun that if Congress would not pass an amendment securing Southern rights, then it would be "the best policy to take steps at once for a

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<sup>34</sup> Editors of the *Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser* supported Yulee's speculation and wholeheartedly endorsed his declaration. (Montgomery, Ala.) *Tri-Weekly Flag and Advertiser*, March 16, 1848.

<sup>35</sup> David Levy Yulee, *Remarks of Mr. Yulee of Florida on the Rights of the People of the United States in Acquired Territory* (Washington, D.C., 1848). See also Adler, David L. Yulee, 55.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the intellectual origins of Southern nationalism, refer to Eugene Genovese, *The Slaveholders Dilemma*, and Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*.

separation.”<sup>37</sup> In 1849, he supported Calhoun’s initiative for a Southern political convention and endorsed the ensuing Nashville Conference, a meeting of Southern political leaders to discuss the prospects of a unified Southern position towards territorial expansion and the extension of slave-owners’ rights in the territories. Yulee proposed a strategy of Southern unity and movement towards separation if an equitable agreement could not be reached. He wrote to Calhoun, “Our institutions or the Union must yield. . . .We must abandon slavery or the Union at once. . . .We must have some distinctive organization by which we may be separated from the enemies of the Rights of the States.”<sup>38</sup> Yulee believed that Southern honor rested on maintaining sectional balance and not succumbing to “a hostile Northern majority.”<sup>39</sup> Many of Yulee’s Southern colleagues privately supported this view but publicly disavowed it because of its controversial nature. Rather than threaten the Union by forming a sectional political entity, Yulee watched in dismay as Southern senators at the convention preferred simply to condemn the Omnibus Act and demand the continuation of the 1820 Compromise. Florida’s Whig governor, Thomas Brown, did not even send a delegate to Nashville, despite the state General Assembly’s approval for such action, because he feared its “revolutionary” tendencies.<sup>40</sup> Disappointed by the moderate outcome of the

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<sup>37</sup> Huhner, “David L Yulee,” 68.

<sup>38</sup> David Levy Yulee to John C. Calhoun, July 10, 1849, box 40, *Yulee Papers*.

<sup>39</sup> David Levy Yulee to (Fla.) Governor Thomas Brown, February 6, 1850, box 40, *Yulee Papers*.

<sup>40</sup> David Levy Yulee, Jackson Morton, and E.C. Cabell to Governor Thomas Brown, February 6, 1850, box 40, *Yulee Papers*. Also, Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 60-64.

Nashville Convention, he referred to the resultant compromise, which passed with the assistance of several of his Southern colleagues, as “surrender.”<sup>41</sup>

Although labeled a fire-eater, Yulee considered his position to be moderate compared with the inflammatory rhetoric emanating from the North. “The spirit which seems to move our northern brethren,” he eerily foreshadowed to his wife in 1848, “is far from being past or benevolent.”<sup>42</sup> Northern condemnations of the Southern political position threatened “dislocation of the union,” yet Yulee remained faithful in the “still strong sentiment of Americanism and union.”<sup>43</sup> He believed the Union could be saved but only if the “[S]outh has become united in purpose,” while Northern representatives heed their constituents’ demands for peace.<sup>44</sup> From this perspective, Northern political leaders acted for minority interests leading to disorganization within Northern ranks. Conversely, any Southern expression of unity intended to pressure the North into political acquiescence rather than to construct an independent Southern nation.

Yulee’s posturing during his early national political career garnered the attention of the press and laid the groundwork for his lifelong reputation as a “fire-eater.” His stubborn support for the Southern political platform provoked one Northern newspaper to refer to him as “a Locofoco and more than half Disunionist.”<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, his

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<sup>41</sup> David Levy Yulee to Mr. Cooper, et al., February 20, 1851, box 40, Yulee Papers. Yulee continued his stand against any infringement of the states’ rights platform and voted against the admission of California as a state in 1850, claiming that political equilibrium must exist between slave and Free states in order to defend the rights of all Americans. *Speech of the Honorable David L. Yulee of Florida on the Admission of California*, August 6, 1850 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1850).

<sup>42</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, May 9, 1848, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>43</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, July 24, 1848, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>44</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, June 26, 1850, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>45</sup> *The Cleveland (Ohio) Herald*, January 24, 1851.

belligerence also led him into several widely broadcast political blunders. He notoriously condemned the *Washington Post* editor Thomas Ritchie and suggested banning comments in the press deemed harmful to the South, an implicit rejection of the First Amendment.<sup>46</sup> Yulee also gaffed because of his commitment to the “Young America” ideals espoused by his Senate colleague Stephen A. Douglas. Foremost, proponents of “Young America” championed territorial expansion. Yulee espoused a Southern version of this program. In Yulee’s opinion, acquiring Cuba, alongside additional territory from Mexico, would open avenues for national expansion that would aid the South and maintain the political equilibrium between free and slave states. Andrew Jackson contemplated this goal as he marched through Spanish Florida with his Tennessee volunteers in 1817, and Yulee supported it through the Ostend Manifesto, a rationalization for the conquest of Cuba drafted by Pierre Soule, America’s ambassador to Spain, in 1854. While many Americans supported territorial expansion, particularly along the growing nation’s western frontier, most Americans preferred avoiding war with Spain and denounced this suggestion.<sup>47</sup>

Although Yulee believed he would retain his Senate position, several factors adversely affected his re-election chances in 1851. His few, but embarrassing, political mistakes and his aggressive stance on states’ rights and slavery may have disgruntled some of his constituents as the veil of sectionalism. Even if they supported states’ rights, many voting Southerners disapproved of secession, especially those in states

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<sup>46</sup> *United States Congressional Globe* 29<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, February 9, 1847, 366-367; Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 48-49.

<sup>47</sup> Adler, “Senator David Levy Yulee,” 71; Arthur W. Thompson, “David Yulee: A Study of Nineteenth Century American Thought and Enterprise,” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1954), 74; Matthew J. Karp, “Slavery and American Sea Power: The Navalist Impulse in the Antebellum South,” *Journal of Southern History* 77:2 (May 2011), 283-324.

like Florida that had not only recently entered the Union, but depended on federal assistance for their survival. Moreover, Yulee's political career prior to 1851 rested on campaigning as a man of the people. Once hailed as "the poor man's friend," and the "people's friend," this façade became difficult to continue as Yulee increasingly mingled with the South's wealthiest planters and the nation's political elite.<sup>48</sup> Moving into his own plantation, replete with slaves, in 1848 further discredited his claims of being a champion of the people. Yulee's railroad development scheme also irked citizens in port towns located on the southern half of the peninsula, such as Key West and Tampa. A railroad would allow ships to bypass their harbors, harming their favorable economic position while excluding them from Florida's potential commercial growth. Despite pledging that he would build his railroad to Tampa, the track appeared to head towards Cedar Keys, cutting Tampa and the growing number of residents in south Florida out of the prospective benefits.

Frustrations with Yulee became clear when he failed to win a majority of the total votes from the Democrat-controlled General Assembly in December 1850, when as many votes were not cast at all as were cast supporting his re-election. In a new election South Floridians, who burned Yulee in effigy, maintained their allegiance to the Democratic Party, but they rallied around Stephen Mallory, of Key West, who defended Tampa's interests and helped him defeat Yulee in the state's contested Senate election.<sup>49</sup> Yulee contested Mallory's victory and retained his Senate seat through 1851, but the Senate eventually upheld Mallory's election, forcing Yulee's acquiescence.

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<sup>48</sup> (Jacksonville) *The Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, November 28, 1844, December 1, 1844.

<sup>49</sup> Turner, *Florida Railroad History*, 74; Kelly Reynolds, *Henry Plant: Pioneer Empire Builder* (Florida Historical Society Press, 2003), 142-144; Brown, *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 104.



Despite the loss, Yulee remained involved in civic affairs, a vital component of Southern elite identity. He previously delivered on his campaign pledges to bring Florida into the Union and to bring federal assistance into the new state. Most Floridians endorsed his states' rights stance, and his constituents continued holding him in high esteem as the Democratic Party's leader. Although no longer in office, Yulee nevertheless remained politically active as the avowed leader of the Democratic Party and as a private businessman during the interlude between his Senate terms.<sup>50</sup>

While serving as a first-term senator, Yulee enhanced his Southern identity by purchasing his first plantation, Margarita, on Tiger Tail Island near present-day Homosassa, Florida. Margarita was more than a spacious home and a new source of wealth for his family. The plantation served as a public display of Yulee's status and wealth and as a symbol of his place in the regional culture. Southern Jews often owned slaves, but few Jews owned plantations. Most Jewish slave-owners were urban residents who exploited no more than a few household servants, often as status symbols, but those who ran significant agricultural operations, like Yulee or Judah Benjamin, extracted the massive amounts of labor required to run their operations from large numbers of enslaved blacks.<sup>51</sup> Yulee grew several crops on Margarita, but he focused his attention on the labor-intensive farming and production of sugar, an industry which required numerous affordable and able-bodied laborers which, in the South,

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<sup>50</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 60-66; Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 68-69.

<sup>51</sup> The landmark essay on the topic of Jews and slavery is still Bertram Wallace Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865*, esp. 147-151, in Maurianne Adams and John Brace, eds., *Strangers and Neighbors: Relations between Blacks and Jews in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 147-182. Eli Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: the Jewish Confederate* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 32, 39-41; Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 263-268.

usually meant slaves. Adhering to the region's social mores, Yulee purchased household slaves as well as a corps of field hands totaling as many as eighty enslaved persons. Additionally, he employed a seasonal slave labor force capable of sustaining the plantation's crops during the peak planting and harvesting seasons. It is likely, too, that Yulee used slaves on his citrus plantation at Orange Springs, along the shores of Lake Lochloosa, as he later did at Cottonwood, in Archer, Florida, during the Civil War.

Evidence suggests Yulee assumed a paternalistic attitude towards slaves, one that theoretically characterized ideal behavior for the South's planter elite. He clearly referenced himself among the Southern aristocracy when he referred to the enslaved as "three millions of beings placed by Providence under *our* [italics added] guardianship."<sup>52</sup> The ability to support so many individuals reflected the accumulation of wealth and power and the moral and intellectual capacity to lead only possible from the social elite; white men like Yulee. According to testimony taken from Dollie Nattiel, the granddaughter of one of Yulee's slaves, Yulee remained at a distance from his laborers and employed overseers to obtain their complete subordination. Nattiel recalled Yulee's strictness and his expectation that the slaves would keep their quarters clean and orderly. He provided for their needs and might be considered benevolent as long as his workers maintained their submissive and dependent position in the hierarchy of master-slave relations. Yulee preferred, as Charles Wickliffe Yulee later recollected, keeping slave families together. He rejoiced when his slave Ramsay fathered two children, and suggested that he would not splinter the family by one day giving all of them to his son

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<sup>52</sup> *United States Congressional Globe*, 31<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session XIX, May 15, 1850.

Charles.<sup>53</sup> Both he and Nancy considered their slaves as part of their family, but only when they displayed total subordination to their white masters.

At least one of Yulee's slaves exhibited discontent. "Old Tom" grumbled about Yulee's "presents" of clothing. When Yulee pressed him for the reason behind his ingratitude, Tom avoided direct criticism and complained that the overseer upset him.<sup>54</sup> Tom's rejection of slavery quickened once the war began. Like all slave-owners, Yulee faced the risk of flight and fight from his slaves. During the war, Nan grew distrustful of Tom after apparently catching him plotting to escape. Yulee did not sell him, prompting Nan to respond that "he will never abandon the hope of freedom, and if your life should ever stand in his way, you are not safe my husband."<sup>55</sup> Later, Tom purportedly assisted Federal troops in finding Margarita.<sup>56</sup>

Yulee's standing as a planter appealed to Southern social mores and helped validate his status, yet he did not embody the characteristics of the stereotypical Southern planter in several ways. Until recently, historians cast Southern planters in monolithic terms, as wed solely to the pre-capitalist, pre-modern agricultural system surviving in the South. Yulee fits a different interpretation: that of the planter-capitalist immersed in the modern, and expanding, Atlantic World economy and influenced by

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<sup>53</sup> Dollie Nattiel, 1939 (Archer Railroad Museum); David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 17, 1857, box 41, Yulee Papers; Charles W. Yulee, "Senator David Levy Yulee," in *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 2:1-2 (1909), .

<sup>54</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee Yulee, July 6, 1851, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>55</sup> Nancy Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, March 2, 1862; April 2, 1862, box 43, Yulee Papers.

<sup>56</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 17, 1857, box 41, Yulee Papers.

affairs on America's western frontier.<sup>57</sup> Yulee did not rely on his plantation's crop production for his source of income. Instead, he maintained a diversified economic outlook and involved himself in a variety of economic activities that included law, real estate, and shipping. Most conspicuously, Yulee's pioneering efforts in developing the Florida Railroad illustrates the vision of a sophisticated entrepreneur dedicated to economic diversification in broad national and transnational contexts.

Yulee imagined the Florida Railroad from a capitalist perspective within the framework of the modern Atlantic World in which he was raised, and he financed, constructed, and expanded it in accordance with this ideal. He wanted to transcend the Atlantic World economy by extending trade westward to the Pacific Ocean. The concept of a railroad cutting across the northern part of Florida's peninsula to connect safely and quickly America's east coast ports with the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean while bypassing the dangerous, distant, and expensive trip through the Florida Straits displays his entrepreneurial imagination. Yulee garnered political support in Florida by touting the benefits the railroad would bring to farmers and traders throughout the northern part of the state. It would also serve as a vital infrastructural component that would stimulate Florida's economic potential while increasing settlement in the north and central parts of the peninsula, where spur lines would connect Florida's interior to the main rail-line, providing quick, cheap transportation to domestic and, by ship, foreign markets. Moreover, the railroad would build political capital for the Democratic Party by strengthening the party's seat of power in eastern Florida while

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<sup>57</sup> Baptist, *Creating an Old South*, 18. Arthur Thompson preceded recent historical trends by half a century when he noted Yulee's involvement in a broader, industrial-capitalist context in his 1954 Ph.D dissertation. Thompson, "David Yulee," 1-2, 92; Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power," 283-324.

drawing commerce away from Whig controlled Middle-Florida. He also praised its advantages to the Southern economy by making the South less dependent on Northern transportation and shipping centers. Nevertheless, he always expected mail and shipping contracts between cities like New York and Charleston to destinations throughout the Gulf of Mexico to form the backbone of the railroads capital. Yulee initially hoped to finance the venture with capital from his friends in Florida, but he was unable to keep the investment within the state and pursued Northern financing as early as 1849.<sup>58</sup>

By 1848, Yulee imagined a joint private-public venture similar to those adopted in the Western states and territories, in which private investment coupled with public land grants to stimulate internal improvement, and he quietly began soliciting investments from friends in Florida as well as Northern financiers.<sup>59</sup> He and his business partners then hastily, and covertly, purchased the land necessary for commencing construction. He wrote to his wife, “our railroad matter is no longer in doubt . . . I am authorized to purchase the land for terminus, and all the land I can get on good terms in that neighborhood . . . .This investment of capital in the enterprise settles the question, and converts my ‘project’ into a ‘reality.’ It is upon my advice that the organization of the company and the survey is suspended, in order that we may get the lands we want before the value of them is enhanced by the assurance that a road is to be made. It is arranged that the proprietorship of the two towns is to be separate from the railroad stock—and I am one of the proprietors. Now all this is private. I don’t wish it to be

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<sup>58</sup> According to several newspapers, Floridians generally approved of Yulee’s efforts towards acquiring Northern capital. Thompson, “David Yulee,” 59, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, “David Yulee,” 54, 77.

bruted, lest our plans might be interfered with. When I say private, I don't mean not to speak of it in the family, but only to guard you against speaking of it out of the family."<sup>60</sup>

Yulee wished to bypass the existing port at Jacksonville and suggested developing Fernandina as "the point for the Atlantic terminus—a new one—and my own idea."<sup>61</sup>

Data from the earlier federal surveys supported this position. Yulee and his associates also used this survey data to project Cedar Key as the terminal point on the Gulf for their line. They asked Congress to make Cedar Key an official point of entry, thereby necessitating the extension of federal funds to develop the port, a request granted in 1845. Meanwhile, Yulee and his business partners secured over a thousand acres of land on Cedar Key and began developing its port.<sup>62</sup> Within months, by August 1851, Yulee wrote to his wife, "I have been successful, under circumstances of remarkable difficulty, in securing the lands we desire for the railroad—without the slightest suspicion being excited of the object of the purchase, or for whom it is."<sup>63</sup>

At this point, however, the limitations of "enterprise as a public trust" became clear to Yulee. His Northern investors balked at the financial constraints and restrictions on private ownership set by the state in the company's charter, especially the idea that the enterprise would revert to public ownership after twenty years, and withdrew their pledges before the laying of a single track, forcing Yulee's dissolution of the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad, in 1851.<sup>64</sup> Realizing that public ownership created restrictions that

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<sup>60</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, May 19, 1851, Box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>61</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, June 5, 1851, Box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 60; Greg Turner, *A Journey Into Florida Railroad History* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 73; Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 93-116;

<sup>63</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, August 23, 1851, Box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>64</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 79-80.

dissuaded private capital investment, Yulee now believed that the success of his venture depended on state and federal assistance, acquired in the form of land donations, augmenting private ownership. He immediately set about the task of reorganizing a new business plan with increased capitalization and new investors based primarily in Florida. By 1853, Yulee and his business colleagues, including prominent Floridians George W. Call, Judge Isaac W. Bronson, and Joseph Finegan, incorporated as the Florida Railroad Company.

The Panic of 1857 forced Yulee to refinance the project through his Northern and European investors in a desperate attempt to keep construction going during the stressed economic time.<sup>65</sup> The New York investment firm, Edward Dickerson and Associates, provided Yulee with sufficient cash to continue building, but only in exchange for four of nine seats on the railroad's board of administrators and mortgages on the railroad's property, including Yulee's personal property in Fernandina, purchased by him and his Florida colleagues from the outside investors who bailed out of the Gulf and Atlantic project. Northern, and to a lesser extent, European, financing made the railroad's construction possible.

Yulee's stance on federal land paralleled the political values of settlers on America's western frontier more than with traditional Southern planters.<sup>66</sup> He followed an entrepreneurial course of action attuned to the western frontier to obtain the land

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<sup>65</sup> He did this again after the war in order to keep the line open and extend service to Ocala, Florida. Thompson, "David Yulee," 206-207.

<sup>66</sup> Baptist, *Creating an Old South*, 19; Thompson, "David Yulee," 54. Developments in the South affected identity construction and political affiliation on the Western frontier as well. See, Christopher Phillips, "The Southernization of Missouri: Kansas, The Civil War, and the Politics of Identity on the Western Border," in Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Kyle S. Sinisi, and David H. White, Jr., eds., *Warm Ashes: Issues in Southern History at the Dawn of the Twenty First Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

necessary to develop his enterprise. Southern planters generally encouraged the federal government to sell federal land to private individuals or businesses so that the proceeds could be used to offset any money lost by lowering the nation's tariffs, a Southern political demand. Yulee, like many of his contemporaries in the western territories and states, wanted federal land granted to individual states, thereby allowing state legislators to delegate the land as they wished. He worked tirelessly behind the scenes in the state and national legislatures securing the passage of legislation favorable to railroad construction and internal development generally.

Yulee favored the federal Swamp Land Act of 1850, which transferred federal lands considered to be inundated to state authority for the purpose of drainage and improvement. Florida, with its vast expanses of swampland, received generous grants of inundated land from the federal government and land speculators and railroad developers—Yulee was both—saw themselves as the logical beneficiaries to develop this land. He also drafted internal improvement legislation recommending that the state create a mechanism for coordinating the development of land acquired through the 1850 act either through state action or through sale to private interests. His suggestions led to the creation of the Internal Improvement Board in November 1851, which oversaw management policies of state lands and the distribution of internal improvement funds. Governor James Broome appointed Yulee to the board in April 1854, and the board, under Yulee's direction, immediately drafted a policy of railroad development favorable to the Florida Railroad. On January 6, 1855, the state legislature codified the board's recommendations and passed the Internal Improvement Acts. One of the board's first actions was establishing the Internal Improvement Fund, which subsequently provided



200 feet of right away along the length of the track for the Florida Railroad's use. The board also granted alternating sections of state property to the railroad to be sold off with the profits to be used as a source of funding for the railroad's construction. The board then issued Internal Improvement bonds and Freeland bonds secured by mortgages on property owned by the Florida Railroad and its officers. Yulee also promoted legislation at the national level that culminated in the Federal Land Grant Law of May 17, 1856, which placed an additional 1.25 million acres of federal land in Florida under the state's control. The board set aside nearly half of this land, 500,000 acres, for the Florida Railroad. The combination of state and federal land grants formed the credit base for the railroad's construction, but the Florida Railroad's financial resources remained unstable and lasted just long enough to complete the track and begin operations before civil strife commenced between the states.<sup>67</sup>

Tampa's residents, as it turns out, had good reason for their earlier skepticism. The Internal Improvement Board, influenced by Tampa's political climate in the early 1850s, demanded that the Florida Railroad delineate Tampa as the final Gulf port on its route despite the fact that federal surveys indicated the viability of Cedar Key as the terminal point. Yulee bowed to this political pressure and pledged that he would build to Tampa, but he re-considered this position once he secured his re-election. He and his business cohorts argued that Cedar Key was the closest deepwater port to Fernandina on the other side of the peninsula, and claimed that it would cost less building to Cedar Key first and putting the railroad into operation before expanding to Tampa. In doing so they denied immediate and direct access to the line for Tampa's residents, a move that

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<sup>67</sup> Turner, *Florida Railroad History*, 78; Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 112-113; Thompson, "David Yulee," 122-123.

renewed the ire and suspicion of Tampa's citizens. Disgruntled citizens impatiently remarked that "we expressed doubts as to Mr. Yulee's good faith in letting the contract for forty miles of road in the 'direction of Tampa,' and those doubts haunt us."<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, construction continued towards Cedar Key.

Bound to Northern financing and the commerce of the western Atlantic World, Yulee added a distinctively Southern flavor to his venture by utilizing predominantly slave labor to build the railroad. Yulee initially wanted to employ free labor in an effort to induce white immigration into Florida, and he attempted to lure Irish immigrants from New York to Florida with offers of cash and stock in the railroad, but this idea foundered. He did hire white laborers from New York to work on the railroad for as much as two hundred dollars a year each, yet he ultimately resorted to slave labor that he found both more disciplined and slightly cheaper. He argued that slave labor relieved him of "those annoyances which always accompany the introduction . . . of contractors with hireling white labor from the North and foreign parts."<sup>69</sup> Slave labor imported from Virginia and North Carolina comprised the majority of the 350 to 400 laborers working on the railroad during its actual construction between 1855 and 1861. The use of slave labor in the railroad's construction may have been distinctly Southern, yet Yulee's Northern financiers typify the compliance of many Northerners with the institution of slavery. None of the railroad's financiers withdrew their support upon the

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<sup>68</sup> (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, September 18, 1858. Also, see issues from May 21, 1859; June 4, 1859; August 13, 1859;

<sup>69</sup> (Tallahassee) *Floridian and Journal*, February 21, 1855.

transition to slave labor, nor did they hesitate in accepting Yulee's slaves as collateral for loans during the final stages of construction.<sup>70</sup>

By 1856, Yulee was the champion of Florida's Democratic Party who had firmly rooted the state he represented in the Southern political and economic bloc. The vigorous contests over Yulee's, and Florida's, Southern identity had receded, leaving less reason for its defense, and moderation, not the overt and aggressive defense of states' rights that characterized his first term in office, marked the political character of Yulee's second term in Congress (1857-61). As a veteran legislator, the wisdom of age and political experience also tempered Yulee's former belligerence. He was certainly more aware of the Pandora's Box opened by political discussions of slavery and states' rights and, consequently, he generally avoided congressional debates on the brewing regional turmoil for most of his second Senate term. Instead, Yulee focused his attention on garnering aid for developing Florida's economic infrastructure much as he did when he served as Florida's territorial representative. Yulee's business affiliations with Northern investors, too, muted his previously confrontational expression of Southern identity. He realized that Southerners needed Northern investment capital to expand and diversify their economy, a realization based on his own inability to secure the necessary funds in Florida and throughout the Southern states. Southern investors partially subsidized Yulee's project, but New York financiers supported the bulk of the expenses. Alongside his business partnerships, nearly three decades of public service provided Yulee ample time to build relationships with a broad array of people from

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<sup>70</sup> August Belmont and Co., partially underwrote the Florida Railroad in 1860. Thompson, "David Yulee," 116-117.

around the nation, and especially in the North, regardless of his insistent political sectionalism.<sup>71</sup>

Although he refrained from participating in public debates about secession, Yulee continued espousing a similar position to the one he took during his first term. In a letter to Florida's Governor James Broome, in 1854, Yulee proclaimed himself to be a "Southern patriot" and stated that the "South should affiliate with no party which does not distinctly recognize the States as the only Sovereignities, and the Union as a compact between them."<sup>72</sup> Several years later, as he returned to Congress, he noted the rising abolitionist fever among his Northern peers. "The temper of the House is revolutionary. I should say rather the temper of the opposition." He continued by mentioning the rising political tension connected to the developing Republican Party and their prominence in the House of Representatives. From Yulee's perspective, Northern congressmen forced political debates that "will raise issues higher and more imposing than ever—for it will reach beyond social and party struggle, and into issues of revolution. The subjugation of the Senate representing the states, by the house representing a simple numerical majority, will convert the government from a confederation into a consolidated empire—in which members will be despotic."<sup>73</sup> Five years after leaving the Senate with a reputation for fiery rhetoric and secessionism, Yulee now condemned similar Northern behavior.

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<sup>71</sup> Yulee's son, Charles Wickliffe Yulee, claimed that many upper-class Northerners retained harmonious relations with their Southern brethren. Charles Wickliffe Yulee, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 17-18.

<sup>72</sup> David Levy Yulee to (Fla.) Governor James Broome, November 3, 1854, box 41, Yulee Papers.

<sup>73</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, August 22, 1856, box 41, Yulee Papers.

By 1860 Florida's voters considered Yulee to be a moderate in contrast with the more extreme position taken by his younger, bolder, and increasingly influential political colleagues representing the Southern states in Congress and urging them towards secession. For instance, Yulee fought with the younger, firebrand Democrat Madison Perry over the urgency of Southern secession (as well as the route of the Florida Railroad).<sup>74</sup> Yulee still advocated the states' rights platform and maintained, as he had since at least 1849, that states had a right to secede, but he remained hopeful for a peaceful resolution to the strained tensions and preferred an agreement that would preserve the union. He was never as pessimistic as his political associate, E. E. Blackburn, who declared, as the House of Representatives moved to repeal the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, "this Union is already dissolved, and all that's wanting is to declare it to the world."<sup>75</sup> Yulee supported the independent gathering of Southern statesmen in Charlestown seeking a resolution to the grave danger facing the nation, but internal disputes between radical and moderate factions led to the meeting's fissure. Moderate Southerners called for a new convention in Baltimore while the more radical element of Southern legislators met in Richmond. Yulee endorsed the representatives in Baltimore, but they could not reach any consensus on the Democratic Party's position, and the convention adjourned without resolving any issues. The failure to reach a satisfying conclusion in Baltimore frustrated Yulee, but a more decisive blow came after

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<sup>74</sup> Turner, *A Short History of Florida's Railroads*, 29; Glenn E. Reddick, *A Study of the Farewell Speeches of the Southern Senators at the Time of Secession* (M.A. Thesis, University of Florida, June 1949), 60; Thompson, "David Yulee," 146-147. The great Southern historian William T. Cash referred to Yulee and his Democratic counterpart, Stephen Mallory, as "followers of their party rather than leaders of it." William T. Cash, *The Story of Florida*, v. 1 (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 424.

<sup>75</sup> E.E. Blackburn to David Levy Yulee, December 12, 1850, box 40, Yulee Papers.

his friend and Senate colleague Stephen A. Douglas repudiated the South's right to secede when posed the question at a gathering in Norfolk, Virginia, in October 1860.<sup>76</sup>

Douglas's denunciation of the South's right to secede induced Yulee's re-commitment to a public hard-line approach. Yulee refused to deny the secession rights of sovereign states, a cornerstone of the Southern political position. "Secession is a great preservative right of the States," he declared in a public circular to Florida's citizens in October 1860, "It cannot be questioned by those who agree that the Constitution of the United States is a compact between sovereign States." Underscoring this political position, Yulee brazenly declared that with "those who do not so regard that instrument [the Constitution], I have no political sympathy, nor any fellowship as a Democrat." Yulee recognized that the upcoming presidential election was split within the parties along sectional lines, and that the more populated Northern states, galvanized under the Republican Party, would win the election and hold a congressional majority alongside the presidency. He declared that the ascent to power of the anti-slavery party threatened the "Southern form of society" and forced the South to face the possibility of having to defend the "security and happiness of our families and firesides." "My own judgment is very fully decided" Yulee proclaimed, "We cannot endure a Government which puts itself in conflict with our social safety, and civil development. We must be assured against the unnatural condition of a society warred upon by its own Government. I am now convinced, after careful observation since 1850, when the South consented to pass into a minority, that we require new guaranties in the Union.—Nothing short of the adoption of the Federal compact to the changed

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<sup>76</sup> Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," iii, 139.

circumstances of the country by appropriate alterations, will restore peace. The changes which seventy years has made . . . all make very proper a review of the terms of Union.” Although Yulee adhered to the Southern political agenda out of his own beliefs and because of constituent support for secession, he nevertheless remained hopeful for a diplomatic solution. “It is imminently desirable,” he said “to avoid any serious, civil commotion, and, in many grave aspects, most desirable to preserve the Union of the States, even with much sacrifice. But we must have PEACE. . . .We should arrange together, now and at once, for living in peace, or parting in peace.”<sup>77</sup>

Abraham Lincoln’s victory in the 1860 presidential election and the majority rule in Congress established by the Republican Party confirmed Yulee’s fears that the “Southern form of society” was under siege by the North. Reacting to the election outcomes, Yulee, supported by the majority of Florida’s voters, determined to “dissolve the connection with the Northern states” and “promptly and joyously return home to support the banner of the state” to which he held allegiance.<sup>78</sup> Before seceding from the Union, Yulee stated he would retire from politics upon completing his term in March 1861, but the rapidly boiling secession crisis forced his early withdrawal. On January 21, 1861, eleven days after Florida’s legislature agreed upon seceding from the United States, Yulee cordially addressed Congress and announced his state’s decision.

Tentative about what lay ahead, Yulee’s allegiance to the Southern cause was nevertheless typical of most white Southerners, including Southern Jews. Jews filled the ranks of officers and enlisted men in the Confederate and Union armies. Three

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<sup>77</sup> David Levy Yulee to Dr. W. H. Babcock, Editor, (St. Augustine) *East Floridian*, reprinted in the (Tampa) *Florida Peninsular*, November 17, 1860.

<sup>78</sup> David Levy Yulee to Florida Legislature, quoted in *Janesville (Wisconsin) Daily Gazette*, December 8, 1860.

thousand of them fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War, while another seven thousand fought for the Union. Men on both sides lost their lives and limbs. Jews conspicuously did not favor their common religious bonds over their regional allegiance: nobody questioned the dedication of the Southerner Abraham Ehrlich, who proudly displayed his stumped arm as a testament to his Confederate service.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the presence of Jews in all ranks of Northern and Southern military and civilian society, Judah Benjamin was the only Jew in either region of the country to serve in the highest tiers of political office, acting first as the secretary of state for the first year of the Confederacy and then as secretary of war until the Confederacy dissolved in April 1865. Benjamin's political achievements during this time are notable as he specifically, and Jews in general, faced an escalation in anti-Semitic language during the Civil War that marked the height of American Judeophobia to that point in the young nation's history.<sup>80</sup> On the eve of the Civil War, Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson assailed Benjamin as "being part of a foul and wicked plot to . . . overthrow the government of his adopted country which gives equality of rights even to that race that stoned prophets and crucified the Redeemer of the world."<sup>1</sup> Northern congressmen condemned Southern Jews for their disloyalty to the Union while Southern politicians concurred with their colleague, Mississippi Congressman Henry Foote, that "the infamous Jew . . . Judas P. Benjamin" would surely lead the South to disaster. General

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<sup>79</sup> Louis Schmier, "Jews and Gentiles in a South Georgia Town," Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds., *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1984), 5. One notable exception was the editor of the *Israelite*, H.M. Moos, who, based in Cincinnati, Ohio, continuously fought anti-Semitism throughout the nation, even defending Southern Jews against the rhetoric of Vice President Andrew Johnson and Ohio Governor John Brough. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 260-261.

<sup>80</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 202.



Ulysses Grant infuriated Jews with his infamous Order Number 11, which called for Jews to vacate Union-occupied land in the trans-Mississippi South. Some Northern Jews later refused to vote for him because of it—but Southern Jews could not point fingers: the citizens of Thomasville, Georgia, dismissed Jews from their community in 1862.<sup>81</sup> The harassment reached a tragic low point in late 1861 when an Associated Press writer following Union General Benjamin Butler’s invasion of New Orleans called for the “extermination” of the Jews in their midst, a remark that offended even Northern presses sympathetic to Butler’s own heavy-handed anti-Semitism.<sup>82</sup>

Suspicious about Jewish national loyalty translated into rhetorical assaults when contemplating Jews on a grand historical scale and when speaking about them in broad, sweeping terms. It was easy to imagine Foote’s comment that “Jewish Shylocks” would own much of the South at the war’s end, or to conceptualize Florida Senator Robert Hilton’s remonstrance that Jews descended “as the locusts of Egypt” and flock “as vultures to every point of gain,” but Southerners knew the Jews in their communities and among their ranks—which were generally organized along community lines—and could not engage in pogroms against them.<sup>83</sup>

Yulee exhibited his loyalty to the South by calling for Southern unity and opening discussions about the framework of a new Southern government. Faced by a North that dominated the machinery of national politics and claimed the banner of the federal government, Yulee realized the South had to transform its regional identity into a national one. He stated this necessity in a provocative letter to his associate Joseph

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<sup>81</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 110, 199-204, 260-261.

<sup>82</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 168.

<sup>83</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 200-201

Finegan, a former contractor for the Florida Railroad and future Confederate General. “The North,” he said “is rapidly consolidating against us upon the plan of force” for which the South must organize a Southern government and military in order to “bring them [the North] to a reasonable sense of the gravity of the crisis.” Yulee reiterated this requirement: “Have a Southern government as soon as possible adopting the present Federal Constitution for the time, and a Southern army.”<sup>84</sup>

Yulee evoked the Constitution because he, like many Southerners, believed that Southern legislators offered its correct interpretation. As historian David Potter noted, fervent Southern sectionalism was not exclusive from intense national patriotism. Both co-existed in the South.<sup>85</sup> According to the Southern white perspective, Northerners offered a radical vision of the Constitution that strayed from the original intention. From this perspective, white Southerners viewed themselves as the true inheritors of the founding fathers’ ideals reasserting the true spirit of the Constitution; they viewed themselves as true “Americans.” After taking his Senate for the first time, Yulee acknowledged self-doubt in his ability, his character, “all but my patriotism.”<sup>86</sup> In Southern opinion, the North had usurped the nation’s political agenda and identity which the South now felt compelled to regain.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> David Levy Yulee to Joseph Finegan or Col. George W. Call, January 5, 1861.

<sup>85</sup> David M. Potter, *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968). Also, Charles G. Sellers, ed., *The Southerner as American* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1960), vi, 51-52.

<sup>86</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, December 2, 1845, box 40, Yulee Papers.

<sup>87</sup> Cobb, *Away Down South*, 54-56. The Southern orator and “New South” proponent D.A. Tompkins claimed in the late nineteenth century that “the Southern people are the Americans of Americans,” who represented a purely “American army---not an army of foreigners and blacks fighting for pay.” Cobb, *Away Down South*, 81.

After stating what he deemed the central elements for constructing a Southern nation, Yulee hotly declared that “I shall give the enemy a shot next week before retiring. I say enemy! Yes; I am theirs and they are mine. I am willing to be their masters, but not their brothers.”<sup>88</sup> This comment nearly cost him his life and landed him in federal prison for treason following the war. However, he likely penned it in a moment of passion after being instigated by recent combative conversations with his former brother-in-law and interim secretary of war, Joseph Holt. Holt had rebuked Yulee for seeking information about federal military positions in Florida. From this perspective, Yulee’s invective may have been directed at Holt, and those whose ideals resembled Holt’s, rather than being directed at the North in general. Nevertheless, the letter containing this comment, once Union forces discovered it after invading Fernandina in 1862, intimately linked him to the Confederate cause and overshadowed any statements he made regarding a peaceful resolution to the impending conflict. Even his directives for constructing a separate Southern nation and his intent to interfere in congressional proceedings during the final days of the Buchanan administration did not harm Yulee as much as this statement.

Constructing a Southern nation proved exceedingly difficult for a region with a political platform that rested on individual state sovereignty.<sup>89</sup> The hastily constructed Southern national identity faced one of its first tests on January 15, 1861, a week before Yulee resigned from the Senate. Yulee and other Southern legislators mediated

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<sup>88</sup> Cobb, *Away Down South*, 81.

<sup>89</sup> Cobb, *Away Down South*, 54-59.

between South Carolina and the United States following the federal occupation of Fort Sumter earlier in January. They appealed to South Carolina's representatives for unity:

We represent states which have already seceded from the United States, or will have done so before the first of February next, and which will meet your state in a Convention on or before the 15<sup>th</sup> of that month. Our people feel that they have a common destiny with your people and expect to form with them in that convention a new Confederation and provisional Government. We must and will share your fortunes, suffering with you the evils of war, if it cannot be avoided, and enjoying with you the blessings of peace if it can be preserved. We, therefore, think it especially [sic] due from South Carolina to our States—to say nothing of other slave-holding states—that she should as far as she can consistently with her honor, avoid initiating hostilities between her and the United States or any other Power.<sup>90</sup>

Yulee's avowal of states' rights and his support for the formation of a Southern confederacy did not extend to his own participation in the Confederate government. Overcoming public pressure for the experienced politician to serve the new administration, Yulee did not join the Confederate government. Nonetheless, he endorsed the Southern cause and supported Confederate efforts in other ways. Yulee helped prepare and mobilize Florida's defenses, and urged Florida's young men to enlist in the Confederate military at the beginning of the war. He communicated extensively with officials in the Confederate Congress—including Confederate President Jefferson Davis, General Robert E. Lee, and Secretary of War Judah Benjamin—about topics such as Florida's defenses and arming slaves to fight advancing Union armies, but they dismissed his appeals.<sup>91</sup> Despite the Union invasion of Fernandina in early 1862, he continued corresponding with leading Confederate officials throughout the war.

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<sup>90</sup> David Levy Yulee and other Southern legislators to General Isaac W. Hayne, envoy from South Carolina to the President, January 15, 1861.

<sup>91</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 148-152, 507-508, 528-531; Adler, "Senator David Levy Yulee," 159.

Yulee's assistance to the Southern cause only thinly veiled his more urgent desires: Florida's protection and the protection of his personal interests. He devoted most of his energy to shielding the only recently completed Florida Railroad, of which he assumed primary control following the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1861. Yulee's communications with Lee and Davis focused on defending the railroad's terminals—which included his weighty investments in local real estate—at Cedar Keys and Fernandina, but Confederate officials did not consider these ports, or the railroad, essential to Southern security and, consequently, they did not provide Florida with any degree of military assistance. Moreover, Yulee's smuggling efforts earned a handsome profit. Quinine could be cheaply purchased in Cuba and sold at a huge profit in the South for twenty dollars an ounce, while rum could be procured for a mere seventeen cents per gallon and resold for twenty-five dollars.<sup>92</sup>

The conflicting motivations behind Yulee's wartime actions evoked the inherent contradiction between Southern nationalism and the rights of states and individuals. Jacksonian Democracy implored precisely the type of rugged individualism and opportunism found in frontier areas such as antebellum Florida. It underscored Yulee's early political career and drove his dual goals of democratizing power for white men while bringing Florida into the union. Yulee achieved these aims when the Democratic Party overthrew Florida's Whigs and organized a state based on the rigid model of democratic white supremacy established in other Deep South states. He firmly implanted Florida in the Southern camp with the antagonistic states' rights politics that characterized his first Senate term. Yet, while Democrats drove the Whig Party from

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<sup>92</sup> Thompson, *David Yulee*, 154.

political dominance, they retained the planter ideal of complete household domination promoted by Whigs. Newly empowered white men strove to be like the Whigs they displaced. Once, and even before, men like Yulee acquired political empowerment, they purchased land, plantations, and slaves.

By 1860, Yulee's stable Southern identity, publicly secured in a plantation elitism and Confederate patriotism, allowed him to suggest alternative views to the conflict. Many previously mentioned factors—experience, relationships, and business—contributed to his broadened perspective and motivated him to seek peaceful solutions to the impending crisis. While he strove to maintain peaceful political and profitable business relations with his Northern brethren, Yulee would, nevertheless, not dismiss any component of the states' rights platform upon which his Southern political identity hinged. Herein lay Yulee's dilemma, and the general dilemma of Southern nationalism. Yulee supported the Confederacy, but his own state and his individual rights received priority over national demands, a conflict of interests that emerged throughout the secession states and that plagued the effectiveness of the Confederate government. In turn, Yulee's devotion to self and state, a common contradiction between state and national loyalties displayed by many staunch Confederates, generated conflicting views of his Southern nationalism and taxed the stability of his Southern identity.

Two incidents during Yulee's wartime experiences illustrate the conflict between white Southerners, individual states, and Confederate nationhood. In July 1863, Yulee bypassed Confederate offers to buy his sugar at less than market value and instead sold it to merchants in Savannah, Georgia for a dollar per pound. Confederate officials invoked the recently authorized Impressment Act to impound the sugar and compensate

Yulee seventy-five cents per pound. Newspapers in the southeastern Confederate States of America followed the case as Yulee appealed to the Florida Supreme Court for the full value of his goods. He won the case, much to the chagrin of Southern nationalists, and demanded full compensation. Without any Confederate Supreme Court in which to appeal the decision, the Confederate government was forced to negotiate an amicable solution.<sup>93</sup> Yulee's legal victory, however, injured his reputation as a staunch Southerner, and Southern nationalists would further interrogate his loyalty to the South before he could attempt to restore his standing.

As Confederate officials deliberated with Yulee over his sugar, another, more notorious issue arose. In early 1863, Confederate authorities decided to impress the iron rails along part of Yulee's Florida Railroad outside of Union-held Fernandina for more effective use in other parts of the Confederacy. Yulee contested their decision and adamantly refused to allow the removal of his rails. When Confederate officials queried Yulee's Southern loyalty, Yulee responded that "the much allusion you make to the idea of patriotic efforts and sacrifices . . . require some response. I humbly trust I may not be wanting at any time in necessary and dutiful sacrifices and contribution to the great Cause in which all citizens are engaged, and will gladly unite with yourself and other Trustees in liberal and patriotic devotion of our means. But I have not the right to make myself free with the property of others, nor to seek merit for a generous patriotism at another's cost."<sup>94</sup> Once again, Yulee pressed the case in Florida's Supreme Court and emerged victorious. The decision did not impress Confederate authorities who

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<sup>93</sup> Charlton Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 228; Thompson, *David Yulee*, 155-156; Robert A. Taylor, *Rebel Storehouse: Florida in the Confederate Economy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1995), 78-79.

<sup>94</sup> David L. Yulee to (Fla.) Governor John Milton, June 4, 1863. Thompson, "David Yulee," 546.

refused to adhere to the court's verdict. In May 1864, an ambitious Confederate official, Lieutenant Jason Fairbanks, refused to comply with the injunction. Protected by Confederate troops, Fairbanks began removing the rails until an injunction stopped and sent the matter back to court. Yulee battled the Confederate government for possession of the rails but the rail iron was already dispatched. Yulee was eventually reimbursed a fraction of the confiscated rails' value, but his dissatisfaction continued to be made manifest in the courts and the affair was only completely resolved by the war's end.<sup>95</sup>

While Yulee fought the Confederacy over the railroad's iron, newspapers robustly questioned his Southern patriotism as well as his business ties to Northern capitalist interests.<sup>96</sup> Yulee's Northern business partners still legally owned the majority stock in the railroad. In this context, Yulee honestly claimed that he was unable to liquidate property that did not belong to him. His loyalty to his business colleagues during the railroad-iron fiasco may have catered to Southern sensibilities regarding honor and the sanctity of private property, but these ideals did not assuage Southern nationalists, nor did they remove the specter of self-interest off of Yulee's stubborn possession of the railroad's property.<sup>97</sup> The pressure intensified when rumors spread that Yulee sought reunion with the North in early 1864, prompting a public proclamation of his loyalties to the Confederacy, yet as Confederate hopes dimmed in early 1865, Florida's leaders,

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<sup>95</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 157-164. According to C. W. Yulee, this battle over the Florida Railroad's iron caused a rift between Yulee and Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Charles W. Yulee, "David L. Yulee," 28.

<sup>96</sup> Gregg Turner, *A Short History of Florida's Railroads* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 36-37; William Cash, *The Story of Florida*, v. 1-2 (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 650; Thompson, "David Yulee," 157-162.

<sup>97</sup> (Gainesville, Fla.) *Cotton States*, April 16, 1864. Also, Thompson, "David Yulee," 163.



Yulee among them, earnestly considered the option of surrender and prospective reunion with the North.<sup>98</sup>

While some Southerners questioned Yulee's Southern identity, few Northerners doubted the ex-senator's convictions. Following the capture of Fernandina in early 1862 and the discovery of Yulee's treasonous letter to General Finegan, federal officials considered Yulee a traitor and actively sought his capture. In October 1862, Union troops detained a Confederate blockade runner who later informed Yulee that federal authorities intended on capturing him and disrupting his smuggling operations: "they said they would have him, and when in possession of him, he would be hung as a traitor."<sup>99</sup> Union raiders converged on Yulee's Homossassa plantation in June, 1864, but Yulee had been staying in Gainesville to avoid precisely that type of threat. His family, too, had providentially stayed with friends in Ocala. Most of the slaves fled the scene to return later, but the Union soldiers burned his plantation—one of the strongest symbols of Southern identity—to the ground. Southerners might have expressed reservations about Yulee's regional bonds when word spread in the Northern and Southern press in early February 1864 about his intention of bringing Florida back into the Union, but Northerners remained convinced of his Confederate allegiance. As an editorial in one Northern newspaper summarized, "whatever may be Yulee's present frame of mind, he was an active and zealous secessionist as long as he dared to be, was prominent among the Congressional conspirators who plotted the rebellion, and

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<sup>98</sup> (Gainesville, Fla.) *Cotton States*, April 16, 1864.

<sup>99</sup> Lieutenant Hill to Captain S. E. Hope, October 13, 1862, in Thompson, "David Yulee," 430.

has a much better claim on the attention of the hangman than the clemency of the President.”<sup>100</sup>

In April 1865, Florida’s governor, John Milton followed his conviction that death would be preferable to reunion and committed suicide at his Marianna, Florida, home. Yulee felt otherwise. Milton’s successor, Abraham Allison, organized a surrender committee that included Yulee, one of Florida’s, and the South’s, senior political representatives to negotiate Florida’s re-entry into the United States. Union troops intercepted Yulee along the way to Washington, D.C., before arresting and briefly detaining him in Jacksonville, and then transferring him to Fort Pulaski outside Savannah, Georgia. Yulee believed that his diplomatic mission and his lack of participation in the Confederate government would secure his passage beyond Union lines. Certainly, his friends and colleagues in the North would recall his political moderation and charming personality. Instead, prominent members of President Andrew Johnson’s administration viewed him as the fire-eater of the Calhoun Era who had, a decade later, counseled secession and left written evidence of his treachery.

Yulee remained imprisoned longer than every Confederate statesman except Jefferson Davis and former Alabama Senator Clement C. Clay, Jr. Yulee’s previously established reputation as a fire-eater, coupled with the discovery in 1862 of his treasonous letter to Finegan, partly underlay his lengthy detention. Yet as Yulee noted, many Confederate officials committed far graver offenses, but received pardons.<sup>101</sup> By

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<sup>100</sup> *New Haven (Connecticut) Daily Palladium*, February 23, 1864. Northern editors repeated these ideas following the war. See, *Ft. Wayne (Indiana) Daily Gazette*, March 14, 1866. Presses also clamored for Benjamin’s head, and the head of every leading secessionist. See Evans, Judah P. Benjamin, 298-299 (“Freedom’s Immortal Triumph”), 304.

<sup>101</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, October 14, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers.

Yulee's own admission his captors treated him well, but Yulee worried about the length of his incarceration and was unable to ascertain why he was still being detained after the release of far more prominent Confederate leaders. Some sources identified the letter he wrote to Joseph Finegan on the eve of the war, discovered in his Fernandina home after he fled advancing Union forces, as the basis for his imprisonment.<sup>102</sup>

Yulee's wife, Nancy Wickliffe, remained unconvinced that this letter was the full reason behind his detention. She eventually concluded that personal vindictiveness emanating from the judge advocate's office squelched her husband's release. Judge Joseph Holt, the ambitious federal advocate general following the war, retained harsh feelings for his Southern sympathizing former brother in law, who he deemed a traitor. Wickliffe and others believed that Holt, the former husband of Wickliffe's deceased sister, secured Yulee's imprisonment.<sup>103</sup> It is also possible that Yulee's Northern railroad investors played a role in his lengthy imprisonment. While they may have believed he attempted to protect their property, they may also have believed that he acted out of presumptuous self-interest. Numerous appeals from economic and political leaders in Florida and throughout the nation declared that Yulee's political weight would be useful in restoring civil order and economic re-development in Florida. Their tireless efforts, none more than his wife, culminated in a letter from General Ulysses Grant that finally helped win Yulee's amnesty in May 1866, thirteen months after the conclusion of the war.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, November 27, 1865; Ft. Wayne Daily Gazette, March 14, 1886.

<sup>103</sup> Holt was married to Nancy Wickliffe's sister, who died shortly before the outbreak of war. Thompson, "David Yulee," 173

<sup>104</sup> A copy of Grant's appeal can be found in the (Washington, D.C.) *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 30, 1866. See Thompson, "David Yulee," 173.

Yulee clarified the conflicting perceptions of him as an avowed secessionist and as a Union sympathizer while in detention at Fort Pulaski. Yulee viewed the Southern military defeat as permanent—the Civil War mortally wounded any notion of Southern nation. “I don’t think I have one vindictive feeling towards the North,” Yulee confessed to Nancy, “but look on our conquerors as the rod in God’s hand.”<sup>105</sup> He published a statement declaring his intent to reintegrate peacefully into the Union and to support the federal government. “It is bootless to look back,” he declared, “The great duty, than, of the day, is Pacification. . . . Let us of the South do our full part in this effort of Christian and chivalrous duty.”<sup>106</sup> Yulee did not, however, denounce the South or the Southern cause and, in fact, reconfirmed his regional loyalty and his support for Southern principles. “The ordeal appointed for me is a legitimate result of the responsibility appropriate to the station in which Providence had placed me in the beginning of the Southern movement,” he wrote Nancy shortly after being imprisoned, but “if I have all the while preserved integrity in my public purposes, and I cannot, without changing my nature and accustomed habit of mind and feeling, make any change in my opinions, or in my habits and duty of frank utterances of them, when occasion calls.”<sup>107</sup>

Yulee praised the racial and social hierarchy that underpinned Southern society, and feared the “Africanization” of the South in the wake of emancipation. Federal troops and Republican Party members upheld emancipation for Florida’s previously

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<sup>105</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, September 25, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers. Nancy responded that if Northern officials released him, “patriotism has not left me quite . . . I might almost love the United States.” Nancy Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, October 12, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers.

<sup>106</sup> David Levy Yulee to Reverend F. C. Johnson, December 9, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers. Thompson, “David Yulee,” 179.

<sup>107</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, May 29, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers.

enslaved population much to the dismay of Yulee's family: "I am sorry to say that some of the negroes are proving their freedom by disrespect to me."<sup>108</sup> Yulee previously wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis advising against arming black soldiers in the waning days of the Confederacy. "This is a white man's government," he wrote to Davis, "to associate the colors in the camp, is to unsettle castes; and when thereby the distinction of color and caste is so far obliterated that the relation of fellow soldiers is accepted, the mixture of races and toleration of equality is accepted."<sup>109</sup> He continued cultivating this notion of racial inequality and white political rule into the post-bellum era, much to the chagrin of his former colleague Whitelaw Reid, who commented upon seeing Yulee just prior to his arrest, at "how ignorant he was that during the last four years anything had happened . . . , that Southern men were not to be heeded whenever they stamped their feet."<sup>110</sup> Yet even after his release Yulee assumed white superiority and desired the reinstatement of Southern white men to political prominence, whether Democrat or Republican.<sup>111</sup> He believed the former slaves could learn civilization and earn their civil rights, but that it would be neither easy or soon. He never considered them capable of becoming fully equal citizens. In a letter to his wife he wrote, "I am satisfied with securing the negroes their civil rights. They ought to be protected from injustice, but they are incapable of the rights of suffrage."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Charles Wickliffe Yulee to David Levy Yulee, June 13, 1865; Nancy Yulee (daughter) to David Levy Yulee, November 10, 1865; Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, June 13, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers.

<sup>109</sup> David Levy Yulee to Jefferson Davis, October 27, 1864, box 43, Yulee Papers.

<sup>110</sup> Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour* (Cincinnati, 1866), 164-65, in Thompson, "David Yulee," 166.

<sup>111</sup> Thompson, "David Yulee," 166-167.

<sup>112</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, October 3, 1865, box 43, Yulee Papers.

Yulee also feared the domination of the local government and economy by what he considered to be Northern interests, and was acutely concerned when their measures involved the railroad. Following his release from prison, Yulee's first priority was to thwart the efforts of Lyman Styckney, the despised Northern federal tax collector in Jacksonville, from seizing control of the Florida Railroad. He threw his support behind Florida's conservative leadership during President Andrew Johnson's reconstruction program and approved of the state's post-bellum constitution which included a notorious set of stultifying Black Codes. Although committed to peaceful reintegration into the Union, Yulee strenuously opposed the Republican Party's reconstruction policies installed after 1866, and approved of any Democratic and Republican coalition required to recreate and maintain the antebellum social, economic, and political order. He supported Florida's new Republican-drafted constitution that, aside from granting suffrage to black men, retained much of its pre-war character and, remarkably, went to great lengths to retain the racial hierarchy. More critically, Yulee favored the succession of state governors who did little to impede conservative efforts at limiting black political participation while reinstating white rule. Nullifying the radical Republican threat associated with Northern "carpetbaggers," or worse, Northern sympathizers, and black voters bolstered Yulee's influence and reaffirmed his Southern identity at time of social, economic and political crisis in the South.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> John T. Foster and Sarah Whitman Foster, *'Beechers, Stoves, and Yankee Strangers: The Transformation of Florida'* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1999), 32, 43, 59-60. Catherine Bishir notes that antebellum planters became postbellum industrial-capitalists thereby creating an economic continuum between the Old and New South. Yulee, however, truly maintained this linkage in his efforts to retain control of the railroad. Catherine Bishir, "Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern Past in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1885-1915," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). See also Scott R. Nelson, *Iron Confederacies: Southern Railways, Klan Violence, and Reconstruction* (Chapel

Like most Jews in the South during Reconstruction, Yulee did not face any serious degree of anti-Semitism. Relations between Jews and gentiles did not change much between the antebellum and post-bellum South despite a slight growth in the presence of Jews in the South and in their level of social and political engagement. Migration within the United States, alongside foreign immigration into the country, did not affect the South to the same degree as the Western and Northern states. Accordingly, Jewish populations did not spike in the South, even in booming cities like Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta exploded from fewer than 10,000 residents in 1860 to over 37,000 in 1880, becoming one of the largest cities in the South, but it still contained only 600 or so Jews. New Orleans was the South's largest city at 287,000 residents in 1900, and it contained the largest Jewish population in the region, fewer than 5,000 souls. More Jews, nearly 50,000, lived in lower Manhattan in 1880 than in the entire South.<sup>114</sup>

Some Jews filtered into the region from the North while others came from different parts of the South, but the majority of many stable Southern Jewish populations were comprised of established local residents who had long conformed to the social and political ideals of their Christian neighbors. Variation existed within these ideals for Jews as they did for other Southerners, yet most Southerners viewed Jews as white. Their small numbers, respectable employment as merchants and shopkeepers, and European cultural and racial background contrasted sharply with the recently

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Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Cobb, *Away Down South*, 81-82; Thompson, "David Yulee," 177-186.

<sup>114</sup> Mark K. Bauman, "Role Theory and History: The Illustration of Ethnic Brokerage in the Atlanta Jewish Community in an Era of Transition and Conflict," 238, in Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 236-264; Diner, *Jews in the United States*, 105; Census data for New Orleans Jewish population found at [www.msje.org/history/archive/la/new\\_orleans.htm](http://www.msje.org/history/archive/la/new_orleans.htm).

emancipated blacks. The Southern Jewish population may have appeared to grow because of the increasing civic participation of the South's Jewish settled population and the shifting composition of the Southern Jewish population, which was becoming more central and Eastern European in complexion and culture. Moreover, the ubiquity of peripatetic Jewish peddlers on the Southern landscape, many of foreign origin and Northern residence, fostered an image of parasitic salesmen willing to break traditional regional mores for money. Timothy Thomas Fortune, a Floridian writing during Reconstruction, commented that the "Jews invaded the southern states . . . with their merchandise in packs on their backs."<sup>115</sup> However, these men were not permanent residents of the South; they were examples of the sinister universal Jew, a caricature associated with black Republicans and Carpetbaggers and a threat to the white South, not the engaging white Jewish neighbor.<sup>116</sup>

Jews took part in all aspects of Southern society, particularly at the local level within their communities, and they supported both the Republican and Democratic parties during this time. The citizens of Montgomery, Alabama, for instance, elected a Jewish Democrat and a Jewish Republican to the position of town mayor during this time.<sup>117</sup> Jewish civic participation occurred without fear of reprisal—at least not based on their Jewish background. More important to white Southerners was how closely

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<sup>115</sup> Timothy Thomas Fortune, quoted in Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, "Turn to the South": Essays on Southern Jewry (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 106.

<sup>116</sup> Louis Schmier, "'For him the 'Schwarters' Couldn't Do Enough': A Jewish Peddler and His Black Customers Look at Each Other," in Adams and Bracey, *Strangers and Neighbors*, 223-236; Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982); Schmier, "Jews and Gentiles in a South Georgia Town," 1-16; Diner, *Jews in the United States*, 100.

<sup>117</sup> Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism," in Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora*, 276; Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," in Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora*, 109-110.



Jews aligned to Southern standards of whiteness. Stray too far and Jews, like their gentile neighbors, were susceptible to brutal consequences. Samuel Fleischman, a Jewish shopkeeper near Marianna, Florida, had previously been viewed as a “peaceful and honest citizen” by Marianna’s citizens, but following the war Fleischman supported the Republican Party and tended to a lucrative business with many local blacks, a practice that enraged many of Marianna’s predominantly Democratic residents.<sup>118</sup> Local residents openly harassed Fleischman with chants of “there’s a Republican-he’s no better than a dog,” and “I smell a radical and he stinks like a nigger,” but they never assaulted him based on his Jewish identity. Rather, they killed him because of his political allegiances after he reportedly commented that “if the colored people are to be murdered in this way, for every black man that is murdered there should be three white people killed,” and offered guns and ammunition to the black citizens.<sup>119</sup>

Historian David Blight explains that Americans sacrificed the fight for black civil rights for the sake of national reunion during the Reconstruction Era. Yulee’s marriage of moderate politics and a firm Southern identity based in white political rule symbolized this spirit of reunion. Waving the bloody shirt and unrepentant Confederate nationalism gradually lost appeal as the war receded further into the past. By contrast, Yulee embodied the national desire for unity. When erroneous rumors spread in the Northern press that Yulee sought compensation for the loss of his slaves, Yulee’s defenders

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<sup>118</sup> J. Randall Stanley, “History of Jackson County, FL,” (1950), 145. In Samuel Proctor, “Pioneer Jewish Settlements in Florida, 1765-1900,” in Samuel Proctor, ed., *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writings of Regional History in the South* (Miami Beach, 1956), 99.

<sup>119</sup> Apparently this comment was made to a Mr. Bayard, a federal representative, following the murder of the blacks. Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Conditions and Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, FL. 42<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session. Bureau of Freedmen Select Documents, Report of Charles Hamilton, July 31, 1869. J. Randall Stanley, “History of Jackson County, FL,” (1950), 145. In Samuel Proctor, “Pioneer Jewish Settlements in Florida, 1765-1900,” in Samuel Proctor, ed., *Proceedings of the Conference on the Writings of Regional History in the South* (Miami Beach, 1956), 99.

quickly responded that not only had Yulee upheld the resolution pledged in 1866 to accept “the perpetual union of the states, and the liberty and equality of all citizens,” but that the slander had “placed the character of Mr. Yulee in a new light throughout the union.”<sup>120</sup> By 1876, the railroad’s success, coupled with Yulee’s moderate political views, connections with Republican and Democratic leaders, and diplomatic savvy in an atmosphere of national reunion, had reinvigorated his popularity and appeal.

Conservative Democrats and moderate Republicans reportedly asked him to run for a third term in the Senate—and pledged enough Republican Party support to ensure victory—but Yulee declined the invitation.<sup>121</sup> His political days had passed him, and his business career was not far behind. He nevertheless continued unabashedly supporting conservative rule in Florida. On one occasion he ostensibly dissuaded his primarily black work force from voting against the Democratic ticket in 1876. Though denying the charges, he responded “If the company had done what is alleged, it would only have done what it had a right to do. If, in view of its own interest, it was important to secure a certain government policy . . . [then] there is no reason in morals or law why it should not prefer in its services those who are disposed to promote and sustain its policy and interest.”<sup>122</sup> Despite his constant political maneuvering, positive relations with most of Florida’s political leadership, and apparent public popularity, Yulee did not play a leading role in Florida’s political arena during the Reconstruction Era.

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<sup>120</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 30, 1874; (Rochester, New York) *Union and Advertiser*, December 5, 1874; (New York) *The Buffalo Courier*, December 31, 1874

<sup>121</sup> (Atlanta, Ga.) *The Daily Constitution*, May 5, 1876, July 7, 1876. Also, David Levy Yulee to S. L. Niblack, June 30, 1878; David Levy Yulee to W. Naylor Thompson, January 11, 1879, box 43, Yulee Papers; Thompson, “David Yulee,” 185, 193-195; Foster and Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers*, 43, 59-60; Brown, *Ossian Bingley Hart*, 193-194, 215, 239.

<sup>122</sup> Thompson, “David Yulee,” 199.

After resuscitating the Florida Railroad and helping to restore Southern white rule, Yulee determined to retire in the nation's capital at Washington, D.C. The early 1880s proved a propitious time to return to Washington as the spirit of the era of reunion prevailed in the culturally "Southern" capital. The Democratic Party, as paradoxical defenders of national unity and "Lost Cause" celebration, had returned to national political prominence by 1876 and engendered, with the aid of favorable Republican administrations, a zeitgeist of reunion.<sup>123</sup> In this atmosphere, Yulee's "Southern" charm bred mutually hospitable behavior from his former Northern political enemies, now his neighbors and friends.<sup>124</sup> By 1885, Northerners that had once clamored for Yulee's head as a traitor now claimed that "he was not in the confederate senate" and defended him as not being an "ardent secessionist."<sup>125</sup> Illustrating the coexistence of national unity and Lost Cause beliefs preponderant in the early 1880s, a Southern historian requested personal information from Yulee for inclusion in a Southern history he was compiling within two weeks of Yulee's induction into the Northwestern (Ill.) Literary and Historical Society.<sup>126</sup> Yulee's death, in 1886, heralded the feelings of reunion prevalent across the nation. "He was warmly Southern in his sentiments," explained the *Florida Times-Union*, "and was among the first of the prominent statesmen of the South to counsel acceptance of the results of the war and the turning of the attention of the

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<sup>123</sup> David Levy Yulee to Nancy Wickliffe Yulee, September 26, 1884, box 43, Yulee Papers.

<sup>124</sup> *The Bismarck* (North Dakota) *Tribune*, October 14, 1883.

<sup>125</sup> *The Fitchburg* (Massachusetts) *Sentinel*, March 31, 1885.

<sup>126</sup> P.T. Beauregard to David Levy Yulee, March 14, 1886; Northwestern Literary and Historical Society to David Levy Yulee, March 23, 1886, box 3, Yulee Papers.

people to material prosperity.”<sup>127</sup> Northern and Southern friends and associates attended Yulee’s funeral in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

Investigating nineteenth-century Southern identity through the filter of David Levy Yulee reveals the dynamic nature of this category over time, and between spaces and individuals. Despite the occasionally inflammatory rhetoric espousing bold action, Yulee did not rest his Southern identity upon the political categories of secession and Southern nationalism. His Southern identity relied on his cultural performance of whiteness and the continuing entrenchment of white political power rather than attaining Southern nationhood. Nevertheless, memories of fire-eating and secession overshadowed his evolution towards political moderation and national reunion, leaving a legacy of dedication to the Southern cause that endured beyond his death.

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<sup>127</sup> (Jacksonville, Fla.) *Florida Times-Union*, October 13, 1886.

## CHAPTER 5 MEMORIES OF DAVID LEVY YULEE

Archer, Florida, a small north Florida town of just over 1,300 residents, owes its existence to Yulee and the Florida Railroad. Founded in 1858 as railroad construction pressed westward through the northern peninsula, Yulee named the town Archer in honor of his friend and Florida's first secretary of state, General James T. Archer. Driving through this town at the dawn of the twenty-first century, a visitor can see firsthand memories of Yulee, so central to Archer's history, imprinted on its physical landscape. The Archer Historical Society Railroad Museum is located near Archer's historical and contemporary center. Housed in a nineteenth-century train depot associated with the Florida Railroad, the historical society promotes Yulee's significance as the father of the Florida Railroad. Just outside the museum stands a historical marker that the state of Florida dedicated in 1989. Like the museum on whose grounds it stands, the marker recalls the importance of Yulee's entrepreneurial imagination to Archer's existence. It also notes that Yulee was the first Jewish senator in the United States. Roughly a mile from the center of town lies a low, flat plaque under a lone oak tree on private property that was once a part of Yulee's Cottonwood plantation. The Kirby-Smith chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated the "Cottonwood" plaque in 1939 to honor Yulee's association with an Old South imagined as seemingly timeless as the surrounding moss-draped oaks and creaking stands of tall pine. The confluence of these distinctive images of Yulee within the town limits of

Archer, Florida, reveals both continuity and conflict in one community's memories of him.<sup>1</sup>

Memories of Yulee are not confined to Archer. They permeate the physical landscape of north Florida as well as the historical consciousness, consciously or not, of the region's residents. Highway 26 travels west from Fernandina to Cedar Key alongside Yulee's old Florida Railroad line. The continuing physical presence of the tracks and railroad bed today conjures the pioneer days of North Florida communities and retains Yulee in the region's social memory. The town of Yulee, north of Jacksonville, and Levy County, on the Gulf coast south of the Big Bend, summon him from the past, as do the bridges and streets, buildings and residence halls, school plays, lecture series, and even a World War II liberty ship named in his honor.<sup>2</sup> Museums, dedications, and monuments invoking Yulee span north Florida and reach as far south as Miami. Alongside the various images portrayed through public history are historical texts, community accounts, and personal narratives. An examination of the memories of Yulee reflects myriad perceptions of his varied identities as a Jew, a Southerner, and a railroad magnate. Concurrently, the projection of specific images of Yulee represents endeavors in national, regional, and local community building and identity construction. Communities construct their identities by emphasizing some attributes even as they suppress others. Disagreements over projections of Yulee remind us of the tension and struggle over authority and power inherent in the collective

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<sup>1</sup> Rance Braley, *A History of Archer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Archer Historical Society, 1988). <http://www.afn.org/~archer/arch010.htm>, December 31, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> T. R. Leigh to Florida Neff Yulee, November 15, 1944, box 40, *David Levy Yulee Papers*, Special and Area Studies Collection, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida (*Yulee Papers*).

memories, and in the process of utilizing those memories, towards the construction of specific identities.

Memory is a category of analysis that has gained popularity while causing consternation among historians. Memory studies combine the scientific with the folkloric by analyzing the objective and factual in conjunction with the mythic and legendary. As historian Susan Crane notes, historians of memory differentiate, or should differentiate, between historical and collective forms of memories, both of which are ultimately interpreted and understood by individuals as historical consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Historical memory is solidified and preserved in texts, museums, and the commemorative activities of historical societies and organizations. The interpretations found in these sites of memory are categorized under the rubric of “scientific” and thus validated through the discourse of science. Authority for these historical memories is augmented by academic historians, recognized professionals—primarily men until the late twentieth century—who capture important concepts, events, and personalities for posterity, and whose stamp of approval legitimates and reifies specific visions of the past, yet their clout is not essential. Southern women, organized in historical organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, dominated the domain of historical memory in the South for much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even when their vision clashed with that presented by academic historians.

Collective memory can be defined as the public recollection of the past by a social community. It is the way in which communities choose to remember, and forget, events

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Crane, “Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,” *American Historical Review* 102:5 (Dec, 1997), 1372-1385; Susan Crane, “Introduction: Of Museums and Memory,” in *Museums and Memory*, Susan A. Crane ed., (Palo Alto, Cal: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1-16.

and figures important to them. More important, it is the application of a community's memories in the construction of a usable and personally meaningful past. Collective memory is part of the foundation of a community's identity. While it generally rests on scientifically validated historical memory, it is not dependent on it, and it often includes mythic and folkloric memories with little or no factual basis but powerful community and individual resonance. Collective memory is often solidified and advertised in public history, its iconography, where it perpetuates in concrete form one of several changing, and sometimes competing, abstract ideas. Moreover, public history hardens a perspective that is increasingly seen as immutable. It is, essentially, a public display of power, an expression of dominance that reinforces existing social and political hierarchies. Different community's collective memories, often evinced in public history, both define Yulee's legacy while they simultaneously define the community. Individuals acting as members of imagined communities apply historical and collective memories in concert, yet discrepancies often exist between the two revealing fractures within and between communities over history and identity. While collective memory emphasizes the attributes that one community sector may value, it also suppresses the perspective and values of other groups.<sup>4</sup> The evolving memories of Yulee from the time of his death

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," 1372-1385; Susan Crane, "Introduction: Of Museums and Memory," 1-16; Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *American Historical Review* 102:5 (Dec, 1997), 1386-1403; Robert R. Archibald, "Memory and the Process of Public History," *The Public Historian* 19:2 (Spring 1997), 61-64; Michael Kammen, "Public History and the Uses of Memory," *The Public Historian* 19:2 (Spring 1997), 49-52; Barbara Franco, "Public History and Memory: A Museum Perspective," *The Public Historian* 19:2 (Spring 1997), 65-67; John Bodnar, "Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker," *The Journal of American History* 75:4 (March, 1989), 1201-1221; John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants: Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History," *The Journal of American History* 73:1 (June, 1986), 137-151; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); William F. Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).



in 1886 until the beginning of the twenty-first century illustrate divergence and compromise in these continuing historical debates.

People began applying memories of Yulee as a Jew in broader historical contexts soon after his death in 1886. Defining citizenship and identity preoccupied many Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The conclusion of the Civil War, only a generation in the past, and African American emancipation, citizenship, and suffrage underlay this dilemma. So, too, did the influx of immigrants into America's rapidly growing industrial and urban centers. The conquest of the American West and the extension of American influence on an international scale further strained concepts of national identity. These events, coupled with the fluid but increasingly scientific categories of race, generated ambivalence over the boundaries of various racial and civic identities within the context of an American national identity. Considerations about what constituted an "American," who could fit into that category, and under what terms confronted many American citizens on a daily basis. Yulee served as a vehicle in these discussions primarily because of his Jewish identity. His Jewish ancestry did not limit his participation in America's civic or social arenas, allowing him to achieve social, economic, and political success during his lifetime. As a result, he epitomized the American ideals of integration and assimilation so important to native-born Americans and immigrants, in particular Jews. Ironically, he also illustrated the limits of American inclusion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in Mark Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 390-426. For more on the concept and formation of nationhood, see Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Michael Kammen employs Anderson's ideas in the development of

Even before Yulee's death, newspapers mobilized collective memories of him and his family history in a spat of articles appearing around the nation that connected Yulee's Jewish and foreign background with his successful life to illustrate the opportunities available in America. The articles' authors eschewed facts in their nationalistic reflections, focusing instead on mythic tales about "The Romantic History of the Yulee Family."<sup>6</sup> Any one of the different versions of Yulee's family background, claimed the *Marion (Ohio) Daily Star*, "read[s] like a page of an Oriental tale."<sup>7</sup> One widely copied version of the story, released by the *Chicago Tribune*, reiterated the traditional tale about Yulee's noble ancestry. Yulee's grandfather was the prime minister to the Moroccan Sultan who, after foiling his masters rebellious sons' plan to overthrow the established authority, purportedly lost his head when the sultan's son soon thereafter inherited the throne. In the wake of this family disaster, Yulee's grandmother, "an English Jewess named Levy" fled to England before later departing to America with her young son, Yulee's father, Moses E. Levy.<sup>8</sup>

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the American nation in America's national collective memory. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition and American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Memory studies have played an important role in studies of the American South and Southern identity. For example, in Natchez, Mississippi, "white" memory recollects an antebellum past of plantation luxury and happily servile "blacks," a past that simultaneously reinforced white authority in the existing power structure. Only with the civil rights movement and increasing national, and federal, attention were subordinated blacks able to promulgate their version of the past. These contesting memories, played out throughout the South, are redefining Natchez, MS. Jack E. Davis, *Race Against Time: Culture and Separation in Natchez Since 1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001). Also, David Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, reprinted in the *Indiana (Penn.) Progress*, March 4, 1886; the *Marion (Ohio) Daily Star*, March 15, 1886; the *Bangor (Maine) Daily Whig*, March 15, 1886.

<sup>7</sup> The *Marion (Ohio) Daily Star* March 15, 1886.

<sup>8</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, reprinted in the *(Penn.) Indiana Progress*, March 4, 1886; the *Marion (Ohio) Daily Star*, March 15, 1886; the *Bangor (Maine) Daily Whig*, March 15, 1886.

The (St. Augustine) *Florida Herald* validated some aspects of the family history, amended others, and created new mythic components, all the while legitimizing its version of the family history by claiming that its facts derived from the “the most authentic sources. . . .Some of our older citizens can confirm them.” Newspapers throughout the nation disseminated this version of the family’s history, one that emanated from Yulee’s home locale. The *Herald* maintained that Yulee’s grandfather, a Grand Vizier, was involved in the royal intrigues stated in the *Tribune’s* account, but he was not beheaded. Rather, he fled to Gibraltar with his son and daughter where he later died. The *Herald* omitted any mention of a Jewish grandmother, instead stating that Moses Levy married Hannah Abendanone, “a Jewish lady, in England,” before moving to St. Thomas. The *Herald* also connected Yulee to Judaism through his grandfather, but not through his grandfather’s blood. Rather, the *Herald* claimed that Yulee’s grandfather converted to Judaism. It elaborated that the Grand Vizier “was a Moor by birth and ancestry, and educated in the Mohammedan creed. Being a man of studious habits, he became a convert to the Hebrew faith, and transmitted his convictions to his descendants, many of whom have been marked by a similar inquisitiveness into spiritual beliefs and a similar independence in their assertions.”<sup>9</sup> According to another article reported in the *New York Times*, part of the reason the Grand Vizier fled Morocco was because “the self-exiled Moor had repudiated the

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<sup>9</sup> *The Florida Herald*, reprinted in the *Galveston (Texas) Daily News*, “The Yulee Family. How the Descendant of a Mohammedan Grand Vizier Became an American Senator,” May 2, 1886. Much of this version was reprinted in newspapers across the nation following Yulee’s death. For example, see *The Washington Post*, “The Romance of Yulee—His Ancestry—Blending of Many Strains of Blood,” October 25, 1886.

Mohammedan for the Jewish faith.” After immigrating to St. Thomas, Moses “married an English lady of good family” while visiting England.<sup>10</sup>

In each tale, Yulee was connected to Judaism through an ancestor’s marriage and/or conversion, links that weakened but did not sever him from Judaism. Some accounts limited his Jewish associations by minimizing the amount of Jewish blood in Yulee’s veins. Yulee’s Jewish blood came through his matrilineage, which was crucial for maintaining blood lineage ties to Judaism, but which was also perceived as less important to the patrilineal and patriarchal social order predominating in America. At the same time, his mother’s purported English background diluted and improved his Jewish ancestry. Other accounts connected Yulee to the most regal strains of Jewish blood. Yulee’s family, by blood and marriage, “belonged to the ‘Sephardin,’ or learned men,” noted the *Florida Herald*, and was “traceable to a greater antiquity than the European nobility, who only date from the crusades.”<sup>11</sup> Yulee’s positive racial attributes, appropriately combined by his marriage to Nan Wickliffe produced an all-American family who “mingled the blood of Jews, Moors, and of Blue-Grass Christians.”<sup>12</sup> The *Washington Post* mirrored these sentiments: “Few families in this country inherit more that is worthy of respect than the Yulees. They are great-grandchildren of a distinguished Kentuckian, and the children of a United States Senator. They combine the blood of the Bluegrass with that of the Arab, the Hebrew, and the English cavalier.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *The New York Times*, “Some Glances Backward,” October 17, 1886.

<sup>11</sup> (St. Augustine) *The Florida Herald*, May 2, 1886.

<sup>12</sup> *Bangor (Maine) Daily Whig*, March 15, 1887; *The Chicago Tribune*, reprinted in the *Indiana (Penn.) Progress*, March 4, 1886; the *Marion (Ohio) Daily Star*, March 15, 1886.

<sup>13</sup> *The Washington Post*, “The Romance of Yulee: His ancestry—Blending of Many Strains of Blood,” October 25, 1886.

Each of the Yulee family's racial lines contributed attributes to the construction of a new, hybrid race. In the eyes of many progressive Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, Yulee's family epitomized the creation of a heterogeneous, but white, American race.<sup>14</sup>

Romanticizing Yulee's family history served several purposes for late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans. Such an ancient lineage allowed popular accounts to couch an imagined ostentatious "Orient" in a romantic rhetoric that reflected the interests of their Gilded Age and Progressive Era readers. Popular literature applied exotic images equating "Orientals" with an extravagance that titillated American audiences because it differed greatly from their common, mundane experiences. Newspaper accounts included vivid descriptions of the Grand Vizier's alleged prodigal lifestyle such as those reported by a Spanish gentleman Senor Monsanto, who toured the Grand Vizier's former North African domains. Monsanto noted that the Grand Vizier's palaces were "specimens of mammoth magnificence in architecture and embellishment, the walls covered with wainscoting and panels of mahogany and other costly woods, inlaid in the morquetry in silver and gold."<sup>15</sup> *The New York Times* similarly noted that "the Grand Vizier lived almost as grandly and ostentatiously as the Emperor himself—sleeping and eating and entertaining in apartments of ravishing splendor, ornamented with mosaics, velvets, laces, costly woods, and silver and gold."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, a rising cultural interest in royalty and aristocracy, missing elements of

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<sup>14</sup> Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 1-80

<sup>15</sup> *The Washington Post*, "The Romance of Yulee: His ancestry—Blending of Many Strains of Blood," October 25, 1886.

<sup>16</sup> *The New York Times*, "Some Glances Backward," October 17, 1886.

traditional stability in America, reflected the American insecurity with national identity that characterized this period. Americans had become more comfortable identifying with distinguished lineages and families alongside the emerging Gilded Age meritocracies because each symbolized strength and order in an age marked by disruption. Yulee, a business leader who succeeded by his own gumption and the descendant of an aristocratic family, was imagined as a stanchion of the old guard and a model for the self-made, maintaining a secure society.

Orientalism provided Europeans with a means for disparaging non-European races while casting them as a contrast to European civilization, yet the Orient retained positive attributes as well. The Orient contained abundant wealth and resources and was an imagined place of intellectualism and tradition—pinnacles of civilization, indeed, the origin of civilization—even as it was cast as the domain of despots, heathens, and backwardness. Linking Yulee to the Orient with his ancestor’s flight from its dark forces provided him with a rich and ancient, not to mention honorable, historical background. It conveyed the continuation of wealth and status from remote times into the present through Yulee and his family, and implied a deep rooted family trait that many Americans construed as race and that justified Yulee’s descendents—heirs to his legacy—social position and affluence. Simultaneously, it connected him to a heritage that was neither Christian nor European and, therefore, only tentatively American. Positive characteristics could be grafted from Yulee’s Oriental ancestry to an allegedly superior American stock, but he could never be detached from his Jewish “Oriental” racial identity.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). See also, Ivan D. Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews* (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2005); Holly

Instead of being a limitation, Yulee's race could alternatively be proudly remembered in the context of an embracing nation, one that rewarded talent and ambition with economic success and social inclusion. In this context Yulee (and his Senate colleague Judah Benjamin) could be used as a vehicle for illustrating the ideals of American opportunity and inclusiveness, a role he served much of his life. Newspapers periodically lauded Jewish integration and political success in the United States for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. Following his successful initial election to the Senate in 1845, the editor of the *Florida Herald* announced that "instances such as this go most strongly to prove the soundness of the principles upon which our government is based; casting its shield, as it does around all who choose to partake of its blessings, and admitting all alike to an equal participation in its every privilege, which ensure to the country at large the benefit of character and talent accompanied by energy sufficient to make itself felt whether generated on the Alps in Siberia, or near the Deserts of Arabia, as in the case of Mr. Y."<sup>18</sup> Jewish political advancement was not limited to America. In the wake of Benjamin Disraeli's climb to the pinnacle of political power in England, the *Richmond Enquirer* claimed that "the world is rapidly freeing itself of nearly two thousand years of foolish prejudices against a much vilified people, when the highest office which a citizen of England can win is given to one of a persecuted race."<sup>19</sup> In 1898, newspapers casually looked upon Oregon's election of Joseph Simon to the Senate, offering a perspective informed by the election

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Edwards and Brian T. Allen, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> (St. Augustine) *The Florida Herald and Southern Democrat*, February 24, 1846.

<sup>19</sup> *The Richmond Enquirer* reprinted in the *Macon (Georgia) Weekly Telegraph*, March 20, 1868.

of the country's first Jewish American senator. "The service of Israelites in our highest legislative bodies (for many have been members of the House) is not especially a matter of remark," noted the *Kansas City Star*. "A race which furnished the earliest and greatest law-givers may reasonably be expected to possess a genius for legislation. This truth has been recognized in other countries even more than in our own."<sup>20</sup>

Yulee is a prime example of American inclusiveness, but he also reminded Americans of continuing if not heightening anti-Semitism in the years following Yulee's death, at least in one section of the country. In their obituary, the *American Israelite* offered an explanation for Northern anti-Semitism in the region's large German immigrant population. "None of the Northern states has ever been represented in the national Senate by a Jew," remarked the *Israelite*, "a state of affairs which is largely due to the absence of the large proportion of German voters which we find north of the Mason and Dixon's line. Why the German should always be the first to scratch the Jew at an election is more than we can tell, but that he does so is a fact so well substantiated as to require no proof."<sup>21</sup> Anti-Semitic overtones did not solely emanate from German immigrants in the North and not to the extent that the *Israelite* contended; nor were they necessarily overt. Polite society preferred employing the designation "Hebrew" or "Israelite" to what was perceived as the occasionally derogatory designation "Jew." For instance, following Colorado's election of Simon Guggenheim to the Senate a decade later, the *Idaho Statesman* recalled that "the first Jew senator was David Yulee of Florida." The *Statesman* epitomized late nineteenth-century American

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<sup>20</sup> *Kansas City Star*, October 14, 1898; (Baltimore, Md.) *The Sun*, October 12, 1898.

<sup>21</sup> *The American Israelite*, October 22, 1886.



ambiguity over racial inclusion in the upper levels of America's civic nation by portraying a historically inclusive and accepting Congress, one that allows individuals to determine their own fate. In contrast to earlier accounts that praised the inclusiveness of mid-nineteenth century America, newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century exhibited aloofness towards Jewish success that betrayed the rising racial tensions brought by increased Jewish immigration. "The senate does not draw race lines, and some of the Jewish senators have numbered among the most prominent members of congress." Nevertheless, "some Jews in public life have rather sought seclusion, and have in consequence left little impression on the Senate." However, the *Statesman* assured its readers, "it has been of their own choosing rather than because of any discrimination against them on the part of other senators."<sup>22</sup>

Early historical memories of Yulee mirrored the vagueness of their popular collective counterparts. Charles Wickliffe Yulee provided the first, and admittedly biased historical account of his father's life. Published in 1909 in one of the first issues of the *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, C. W. Yulee's sketch of his father's life formed the basis for many ensuing historical and collective memories of Yulee, regardless of its basis in fact or lore. Yulee contended that his great-grandfather was a "racially Portuguese" high official in the Moroccan Emperor's court. Despite the European roots and implied Jewish ancestry, Yulee asserted that the family patriarch was "a Mahometan." Forced to flee with his wife and their infant son, Moses, the family

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<sup>22</sup> *Idaho Statesman*, February 25, 1907.

adopted Rachel's family name, Levy, following the Grand Vizier's death. David Levy reinstated what he considered the old family patronymic, "Yulee," in 1845.<sup>23</sup>

C. W. Yulee drafted his sketch in 1909, at the height of the Progressive Era and amid the heated racial discourses framing the relationship of the individual to the nation and determining the extent of American citizenship. Rapidly increasing immigration and the growing ubiquity of eastern European Jews in American society heightened racial tensions and tested the limits of American citizenship. Earlier Sephardic and German Jewish immigrants to America worked hard to achieve social integration. Now, the massive waves of foreign eastern European Jews threatened their social security. The strange sounds of Yiddish and the growing visibility of the oddly dressed eastern European Jews invigorated efforts at racial classification by Jews and gentiles alike.<sup>24</sup> Although C. W. Yulee had been raised in a Southern and nominally Christian household by a socially Christian father and a devoutly Christian mother, any association with Judaism, no matter how tenuous, potentially threatened his status in the prevailing social and political climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For this reason, Yulee's version of his family's history, like many popular accounts, minimized the family's connection to Judaism. At the same time, the exotic tales of the Yulee's alliance with Oriental royalty distracted readers from devoting attention to the family's Jewish lineage.

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Wickliffe Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 1:1-2 (Jacksonville: Publications of the Florida Historical Society, 1909), 3-42. Moses E. Levy apparently approved of the name change.

<sup>24</sup> Gerstle, *American Crucible* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rogoff, "Is the Jew White?" in Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 390-426; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness* (N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Louise Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: The Perception of the Jew in Nineteenth Century America*, (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1977).

Historians, such as Gary Gerstle, have noted the uncertain nature of racial discourses shaped by, and resulting from, ambivalent attitudes and understandings of race, while others, like Eric Goldstein and Leonard Rogoff, have discussed this dynamic in specifically Jewish contexts. Both Goldstein and Rogoff note that the wave of Jewish immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century occurred in the context of increasingly constrictive and contested racial discourses, not to mention restrictive laws, in America. Muslims, like Jews, were considered to be “Orientals” or “Semites,” and faced the same social critique of their fitness for citizenship. However, their relative invisibility compared with that of the influx of Jewish immigrants made them less threatening to American society while allowing them to retain a flexible racial classification. Emphasizing Oriental attributes may have been a strategy for deflecting attention away from his Jewish ancestry. Consequently, C. W. Yulee felt comfortable claiming that his grandfather, Moses E. Levy, was a “Mahometan.”<sup>25</sup>

That was the implication made in historian Leon Huhner’s biographical essay about David Levy Yulee, published for the American Jewish Historical Society in 1917 as America’s social climate was becoming more restrictive under the duress of the Great War. Contending with several of C. W. Yulee’s claims, Huhner indicated that the son’s desire to be completely detached from Judaism resulted in the inconsistencies found in his account. Although C. W. Yulee refers to his grandfather, Moses, as a “Mahometan,” who changed his name to Levy, Huhner insisted that “the Senator’s father was never known by any other name than Moses E. Levy, and was always

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<sup>25</sup> C. W. Yulee, “Senator David L. Yulee,” 5.

devoted to the ancient faith.”<sup>26</sup> He also claimed that Yulee changed his name under pressure from Nancy Wickliffe as a precondition for marriage, a claim repeated in the collective and historical memories of future generations.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, Huhner noted, he changed his name from Levy back to Yulee, “a well known Jewish name among Portugese Jews.” Summarizing his position on Yulee’s religion, Huhner succinctly stated that “though he can be regarded as a Jew by race only, yet his name deserves to be remembered because he was the first of his race.”<sup>28</sup> From Huhner’s perspective, Yulee’s Southern cultural identity and concurrent detachment from Judaism eased his integration into a receptive American race. Nevertheless, Yulee’s Jewish ancestry remained a persistent subject in historical or collective memory.

Conversations about the extent of civic and racial inclusion slowed in the restrictive atmosphere induced by the war in Europe, and ceased in the ensuing consensus-driven decade. With its conclusion, discussions about Yulee’s Jewish identity disappeared from the national media and remained secreted away in the national collective memories of American Jews and non-Jews alike until the eve of the second, and even greater, world war. In the context of rising tension in Europe and especially the Nazi persecution of Jews, the Jewish War Veterans of the United States promoted Jewish-American patriotism by contrasting the democratic and inviting United States with the fascist authoritarianism in Germany. The Jewish War Veterans collaborated with the “entire” Jewish community in Miami, Florida—8,000 out of over

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<sup>26</sup> Leon Huhner, “David Levy Yulee: Florida’s First Senator,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (1917), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Huhner, “David Levy Yulee,” 18

<sup>28</sup> Huhner, “David Levy Yulee,” 19.

170,000 residents on the eve of the Second World War—to recall the life of the first Jewish senator and “a pioneer Floridian Jew whose career is one of the most distinguished in the state.”<sup>29</sup> Most of Miami’s Jews migrated to south Florida once Flagler completed his railroad. They followed a path of integration similar to that of their nineteenth-century Jewish predecessors to Florida; not politically or socially distinct, yet they nevertheless felt secure and religiously conscious enough to establish their own religious institutions and organizations in each of the Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform traditions. Moreover, they could coordinate the resources to host as many as 10,000 Jewish veterans from across the nation alongside representatives from local Jewish and gentile veterans groups that were expected to attend the “patriotic observance” honoring the “ardent patriot” and “far-seeing statesman.” Imploring memories of Yulee’s patriotism affirmed the Jewish community’s own American loyalties at a time when national patriotic sentiments were galvanizing in response to events in Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Yulee had slipped from Jewish historical memory as well, and professional historians, Jewish and gentile alike, ignored him until the middle of the twentieth century. Most surveys of American Jewish history published in the first half of the twentieth century rarely provided more than a brief note about Yulee if they even mentioned him at all.<sup>31</sup> Several reasons exist for Yulee’s relative invisibility. Jewish

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<sup>29</sup> *Southern Jewish Weekly*, 14:40-41, August 18,25,1939.

<sup>30</sup> *Southern Jewish Weekly*, 14:40-41, August 18,25,1939. Statistical information about Florida’s Jewish population in Dash-Moore, *To The Golden Cities*, 25-26, 48; also [http://www.floridajewish.com/florida\\_jewish\\_history.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/florida_jewish_history.php). For more about the development of Florida’s Jewish community please see Raymond Mohl, *South of the South*

<sup>31</sup> Rabbi Lee Levinger, *A History of the Jews in the United States* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1930), 195; Lee Friedman, *Pilgrims in a New Land* (Philadelphia, Penn: Jewish

history was primarily published in Northern cities such as Philadelphia and New York that contained substantial Jewish populations with a modicum of financial and political clout. Even in these circumstances American Jewish historians did not feel confident creating critical historical narratives. Instead, they preferred to downplay historical instances that upset their engagement with America while meshing Jewish integration and achievement with national success. To many American Jewish historians, Jewish history in the South—the region that contrasted with American progress and optimism—was subsidiary to the dominant Northern Jewish perspective. Until the second half of the twentieth century, American Jewish scholars relegated Southern Jewish history and figures like David Levy Yulee to a second-class status, “provincials” in Southern Jewish historian Eli Evans’s terms.<sup>32</sup>

As the gathering of the Jewish War Veterans indicates, Jews remained concerned with their generally tenuous American identity and did not wish to provoke anti-Semitic outbursts or tarnish their image as anything less than patriotic Americans by highlighting their Jewish identity. The Jewish immigration boom between 1880 and 1920 sharpened the relief between the recent Jewish arrivals of European descent and their non-Jewish, American, countrymen. Security in a white American identity and general acceptance as fellow Americans would not return for American Jews until after the victory overseas. Anti-Semitism grew in the South following Reconstruction, reaching its climax with the Leo Frank case in 1915, as the emigration of more visibly and culturally distinctive Jews caused their whiteness to come into question. The Jews’ social position in the South,

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Publication Society of America, 1948); J. G. Fredman and Louis Falk, *Jews in American Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, 1954).

<sup>32</sup> Eli Evans, *The Provincials* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977)

previously unhindered, now corresponded to the restrictive environment that existed in the North even as their religious communities continued growing. Nevertheless, Jews at the time of the Miami veterans' recognition of Yulee were living in a city that segregated them alongside blacks.<sup>33</sup>

Jews did not fit the lily-white image many Southerners wished to project. They were increasingly written out of the Southern historical narrative, a story in which they had historically played a prominent role by the Dunning School, which perpetuated the image of a redeemed South controlled by whites, worked by blacks, and devoid of Jews. Historians of the Dunning School—followers of William Dunning, an early twentieth-century Columbia history professor—portrayed a Reconstruction Era South preyed upon by carpetbaggers, Jews among them, and overrun by black rule. As late as 1947 Merton Coulter, a prominent voice in the Dunning School, degraded Jews in his book *The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877*. Coulter lamented the “invasion of Jews” that came to the South looking “to reap a harvest in trade.” “In their tumble down shanties” they sold “cheap jack goods” to primarily black customers “who they endearingly referred to as ‘Mister.’”<sup>34</sup> He claimed that Jewish peddlers and merchants were at the root of this problem, and that blacks were so indebted to Jewish creditors that it was necessary for generous white philanthropists to donate money and help them advance toward economic freedom.<sup>35</sup> His personal feelings aside, Coulter also noted that anti-Jewish sentiment was not prevalent in the South during Reconstruction,

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<sup>33</sup> Dash-Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 48

<sup>34</sup> Merton E. Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), 202-203.

<sup>35</sup> Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction*, 203.

providing one reason for their prosperity.<sup>36</sup> In 1928, W. J. Cash, whose admonishment of white Southerners for their role in creating a benighted South irked many Dunningites, did not attack Jews in his important book, *The Mind of the South*, but he did assert their distinctiveness. Cash conceded that Jews, among others, were often thought of as aliens and scapegoats, “even when their fathers had fought in the Confederate armies.” After defending their loyalty to the South, he states that “the Jew, with his universal refusal to be assimilated, is everywhere the eternal alien; and in the South, where any difference had always stood out with great vividness, he was especially so.” He remarks that the Jews killed Jesus, but justifies any anti-Jewish sentiment as minimal, especially in comparison to the widespread anti-Catholic feelings of the time.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Jews rarely appeared in the story of the South.

Yulee had been practically invisible in Jewish historical memory since the publication of Huhner’s article in 1917, but he slowly reappeared as a result of the shifting tenor of American society towards an understanding (and celebration) of diversity, a change inspired by the civil rights movement which invigorated interest and a proliferation in the expression of cultural forms of identity.<sup>38</sup> American Jewish historians once again remembered Yulee, yet as before, they elicited conflicting images of his Jewish identity. In 1963, historian Harry Simonoff noted the omission of Yulee, who he regarded as an “eminent American and loyal southerner,” from many of the earlier histories of American Jews. Simonoff surmised that the lack of acknowledgment

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 202-203.

<sup>37</sup> W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. Introduction by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 298, 333-334.

<sup>38</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 212.



must have been because Yulee did not affiliate with Judaism.<sup>39</sup> A decade earlier, Bertram Korn, one of the first historians to tackle the topic of Southern Jewry, acknowledged that Yulee “abandoned Jewish life.” Nevertheless, Korn considered Yulee to be a “leading Jew,” who regretfully “never devoted himself to Jewish life.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, Jacob R. Marcus, arguably the most prominent contemporary Jewish historian, unequivocally asserts in his 1985 benchmark compilation on American Jewish history that Yulee identified himself as a gentile exclaiming, “it is hard to believe that he was not baptized.” Yet, Marcus conceded that Yulee maintained the middle name Levy, an indication that “he was not trying to conceal his Jewish origins” either.<sup>41</sup> None of these analyses considered the racial foundation of Yulee’s Jewish identity or the overall centrality of race in nineteenth-century concepts of identity.

The Southern Jewish historian Eli Evans noted in the 1970s what he believed to be Yulee’s denunciation of Judaism in his book on the Southern Jewish experience, *The Provincials*, leading to his claim that Judah P. Benjamin, not Yulee, was the first Jewish U.S. senator.<sup>42</sup> “Historians have recognized the Honorable Judah P. Benjamin as the first acknowledged Jew elected to the U.S. Senate,” wrote Evans. “Levy changed his name to Yulee and renounced Judaism, converted to Christianity after his marriage to

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<sup>39</sup> Harry Simonoff, *Jewish Participants in the Civil War* (New York: Arco Publishing Co., 1963), 212-213, 266-268.

<sup>40</sup> Bertram Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (New York: Atheneum, 1951), 3-5.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob R. Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, v. 1 (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 609-610. Marcus’s apparently neutral statements belied his true sentiments which he revealed in an interview conducted in 1985, in which he referred to Yulee as an “inverted Jew.” “I can tell you because I have been through the papers. He was a fanatical evangelical Christian. He was a real kook. . . . he had a brother who was . . . another kook. The father was a kook, a fanatical Jew.” Interview with Jacob R. Marcus, October 14, 1985, University of Florida Digital Collections, [www.ufdc.edu](http://www.ufdc.edu)

<sup>42</sup> Eli Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: the Jewish Confederate* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 48.

the daughter of the governor of Kentucky, and claimed he was not Jewish at all, but descended from a Moroccan prince.”<sup>43</sup> Despite the many similarities between Benjamin and Yulee’s relationship with Judaism—their lack of Jewish religious or community engagement, their expressions of elite Southern whiteness, and their association with Christianity—Evans bases his claim on Benjamin’s admission of his connection to Judaism, although as one contemporary noted, Benjamin “seemed to be uncomfortable with it.” Yulee, by contrast, never directly addressed his Jewish heritage in public or private communications. He also never felt the same glaring national public attention as Benjamin because he represented a much less populated and economically important state than Benjamin in Congress, and, more importantly, because he did not serve any role in the Confederate government. As Evans notes, Southern poet Stephen Vincent Benet immortalized the memory of Benjamin, the “dapper Jew . . . the dark prince” in his poem “John Brown’s Body”; nobody memorialized Yulee’s visage.<sup>44</sup>

The result of their different approaches to Judaism and politics is at the core of the disparities in historical memories of their Jewish and Southern identities. In the early twentieth century, C.W. Yulee remembered Yulee in the romantic halo of the Old South while Leon Huhner considered his life in light of his Jewish background. A half-century later, two doctoral dissertations focusing on aspects of his political and economic career have appeared, and he is mentioned in several works on Southern Jewish history, but no comprehensive biographies about him exist. Benjamin, by contrast, has been the subject of several biographies, the first published in 1906 by Pierce Butler and the most

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<sup>43</sup> Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 48. Other historians claim that Yulee severed all connections with Judaism. Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 155; Andrea Greenbaum, “Introduction,” in *Jews of South Florida*, Andrea Greenbaum, ed., (Hanover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 2005), xv.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Vincent Benet, “John Brown’s Body,” in Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, prologue, xvii

recent comprehensive coverage provided by the historian Eli Evans in 1989, alongside numerous articles.<sup>45</sup> The Gamble mansion, Florida's only surviving preserved antebellum mansion, only briefly lodged Benjamin in the same way that Cottonwood played only a small role in the flight of the Confederate cabinet and treasury, yet he is prominently displayed in association with this site. The Gamble Mansion, purchased by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1925 and donated to the state of Florida the following year, immediately underwent renovation and preservation.<sup>46</sup> The Citrus County Women's Clubs salvaged the remains of Yulee's sugar mills, but it took nearly fifty years to make the less expensive repairs.

Another reason for the limited attention may have been to diminish the prominence of slave-owning Southern Jews like Yulee in American Jewish history. Studies in American Jewish history expanded in the early 1960s, at the apex of the civil rights movement in which many Northern Jews were heavily involved. Memories of slave-owning secessionists such as Yulee unsettled the manner in which Jews wished to remember their American forebears and made them leery of identifying Yulee as a Jew. Rabbi Abraham Karp, for instance, mentioned Yulee's prominence as a planter and slave-owner before dismissing him from Judaism altogether.<sup>47</sup> Discomfort with Yulee's Southern associations induced some Jewish historians to claim that Yulee converted to Christianity, a tactic that detached him from Judaism, thereby disconnecting Jews from

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<sup>45</sup> Pierce Butler, *Judah P. Benjamin* (New York: G.W. Jacobs and Company, 1906); Rollen G. Osterweis, *Judah P. Benjamin, Statesman of the Lost Cause* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1933); Robert Douthat Meade, *Judah Benjamin: Confederate Statesman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943); Simon I. Nieman, *Judah Benjamin* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1963); Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.floridastateparks.org/history/parkhistory.cfm?parkid=7>. The Gamble Mansion was the site of a 1927 Confederate veterans reunion.

<sup>47</sup> Richard S. Tedlow, "Judah P. Benjamin," 49. In Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979), 44-54.

the stain of slavery. At the same time, and ironically, they make these claims in their various compilations of leading American Jews, a maneuver that allows them to grant him a Jewish identity.<sup>48</sup> Evans notes that “Christians in the South always consider conversion to have occurred when they meet a Jew two Sundays in a row in church,” which might explain why generations since Yulee’s death have often mistakenly considered him to be a Christian.<sup>49</sup> During his life, nobody made that mistake. Historians like Rafael Medoff note that Yulee generated public indecision over his Jewish identity by refusing to openly address it. Nevertheless, public criticism and the quips of Yulee’s former political colleagues John Quincy Adams and Andrew Johnson made clear that the general public displayed little indecision in identifying him as a Jew based on his lineage. From this perspective, memories of Yulee established his Jewish identity regardless of his own ambiguous self-identity or the hesitancy of Jewish historians.<sup>50</sup> The inconsistencies in memories of Yulee’s Jewish identity since the time of his death reflect the same doubts that existed during his lifetime.

In the wake of the civil rights movement, North Florida’s non-Jewish citizens employed Yulee’s Jewish identity to elicit judiciousness and inclusiveness in the region. In 1978, A *Gainesville Sun* editorial appeared in the midst of the volatile political campaigns between Jack Eckerd and Lou Frey, aspirants to be the Republican Party candidate for governor. During the fray, Frey embarrassed his opponent by reminding

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<sup>48</sup> Tina Levitan, *First Facts in American Jewish History: from 1492 to the present* (N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 142.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, Judah P. Benjamin, 238.

<sup>50</sup> Rafael Medoff, *Jewish Americans and Political Participation: A Reference Handbook* (Berkeley, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2002), 269. Sociologist Karen Brodtkin refers to public social perceptions as racial assignment, which occasionally contrasts with an individual’s self-perception, which Brodtkin defines as racial identity. Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 3.

the public of Eckerd's religious heritage, an action perceived to be anti-Semitic. Eckerd made the comment in 1974 while competing in the state senate race against the Jewish Democratic candidate Richard Stone, a contest Stone won. Eckerd had publicly apologized for the incident, and Stone accepted, but Frey's campaign team would not let the voters, especially the Jewish voters, forget Eckerd's intolerance. The *Sun* defended Eckerd by reminding its readers of his apology and by showing his lack of prejudiced behavior in business and political affairs. The *Sun* used Yulee's Jewish identity and successful political career to portray Florida's history of diversity and acceptance and to promote those qualities in contemporary Florida society and politics.<sup>51</sup> "In newspaper shorthand, David Levy Yulee is called a Moroccan Jew," wrote the *Sun's* editor. "That serves as well as anything else in polyglot Florida . . . . So what is this big thing about Jews in Florida politics? . . . As David Levy Yulee's career in Florida illustrates, the ultimate fruits of ancestry are brains and character. Everybody has some to varying degree. And these items, not ancestry, should be on the scales on election day."<sup>52</sup> At least one local citizen concurred: "the recent election of a young, relatively unknown political aspirant of Jewish extraction to the Gainesville City Commission is an indication of local political sophistication and maturity, belying any hint of religious or racial bigotry and confirming the basic soundness and fairness of area citizens."<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless the reappearance of discussions about Yulee's Jewish identity remained a peripheral component in the collective memories of Florida's non-Jewish population.

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<sup>51</sup> *Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*, "Out of the Polyglot," June 11, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> *Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*, "Out of the Polyglot," June 11, 1978.

<sup>53</sup> Louis C. Goolsby, "Life in Old Levy County," *Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*, June 11, 1978.

While *The Sun* used Yulee's successes to underscore its argument against prejudice, it ironically did so within the traditional romantic structure of Yulee's family heritage, and one that simultaneously fortified the myth of the Old South in the region's collective memory. Within this framework, Orientalist characterizations of Yulee continued to complicate his Jewish, or Moorish, family background. Late twentieth-century popular literature and media sources depict him as "darkly handsome in a romantic Mediterranean way," and as "olive-skinned," perhaps difficult interpretations to make when examining a portrait or a black and white photograph.<sup>54</sup> The title of a *Miami Herald* article, "Yulee Had Harem In His Heritage" elicited and embellished the prevailing romantic version of Yulee's family history. Like earlier stories, the *Herald* claimed that Yulee's mother, "the daughter of a Jewish physician . . . a young virgin, was a special prize," and was sold into slavery by Barbary pirates. Moses Levy, Rachel's son, bore "the heavy mental burden of having been born in a Mohammedan harem," and later adopted the name Levy. Yulee, Levy's son, "did not feel there was any particular curse in having a grand vizier for a grandsire. Or, perhaps he wanted to shed his Hebrew connections," surmised the *Herald*. "A short time later he married the daughter of Gov. Charles Wickliffe of Kentucky, a Protestant."<sup>55</sup>

Debates about Yulee's Jewish identity and the connections between his family history, his name change, and his subsequent marriage to Nancy Wickliffe continued to captivate the public imagination. The sheer romance of the story and the implied

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<sup>54</sup> Dorothy Young Smith, "David Levy Yulee," *Co-op Chatter* (Central Florida Electric Cooperative, March 1972), 6; Celeste H. Kavanaugh, *David Levy Yulee: A Man and His Vision*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Amelia Island, Fla.: Amelia Island Museum of History, 1995), 6, 11.

<sup>55</sup> *The Miami Herald*, December 11, 1968.

triumph of Christianity over Judaism encouraged the popularity of this tale.<sup>56</sup> The *News Tribune* noted that Yulee resumed—rather, improved—his family name, “with the Anglicized spelling” before marrying Wickliffe.<sup>57</sup> In an article for the *Co-op Chatter*, a newsletter for the Central Florida Electric Cooperative, local writer Dorothy Young Smith claimed that Yulee changed his name in deference to the wishes of the distinguished ex-governor of Kentucky, who just could “not think of a son-in-law with a Jewish name.” According to Smith, public approval of Yulee’s resulting marriage and concurrent detachment from Judaism led to a wave of people across the nation including “Yulee” in their newborn children’s names in his honor, one of the earliest examples of embedding Yulee in collective memory.<sup>58</sup> Celeste Kavanaugh’s coverage of Yulee, authored for the Amelia Island Museum of History, disengages Yulee from Judaism while linking him with Christianity through the establishment of Fernandina’s first Presbyterian Church.<sup>59</sup> Each of these authors minimizes his connection to Judaism while strengthening his links to a Southern Christian identity, and equation that exhibits the subtle but persistent views of a unified white South into the present.

Yulee’s Jewish lineage was at times a source of discomfort for him during his lifetime, and the precise nature of his Jewish identity is still questioned by many Florida residents, yet it has been a valuable link to the past for today’s Jewish population in Florida. Large numbers of Northern Jews relocated to Florida as part of what C. Vann

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<sup>56</sup> Chris Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 165, 171.

<sup>57</sup> (Fort Pierce, Fla.) *The News Tribune*, Wednesday, August 16, 1972.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, “David Levy Yulee,” 7.

<sup>59</sup> Kavanaugh, *David Levy Yulee*, 2, 23.

Woodward called the “Bulldozer Revolution” and the population explosion throughout the Sunbelt since the middle of the twentieth century. The Miami Jewish community, for one, stood on the threshold of unprecedented growth. In 1945, over 16,000 Jews claimed Miami as their home, double the number of Jewish residents that claimed Miami as home a mere five years earlier and a number that would grow at a staggering rate to 100,000 in a decade, fifteen percent of the population of the greater Miami metropolitan area. Within thirty years it would nearly triple again to 290,000.<sup>60</sup> Most of these migrants were Army veterans who “got sand in their shoes” while they were stationed in Florida during the war. Once the war ended, many of these veterans, primarily from the mid-Atlantic and Northeastern seaboard, came alone or with their families to live in the nascent Sunbelt.<sup>61</sup> The historian Deborah Dash-Moore claims that these Jews were bound by a “rootlessness and nostalgia” that separated them from their northeastern origins and from the Jews they already found present in Miami, while providing them the social space to create new Jewish identities.<sup>62</sup> According to historian Raymond Mohl, south Florida’s Jews newcomers were comfortable in the Jewish identity that had been nurtured in the large Jewish communities of the northeastern United States. They displayed these differences through their vigorous civil rights activism, which was unique among the South’s Jews. Unlike Florida’s established pre-World War II Jewish population, whose memories deferred to Yulee’s Southern identity and assimilation, Florida’s Jewish newcomers, especially in the last

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<sup>60</sup> Deborah Dash-Moore, *To The Golden Cities*, 25-26, 265

<sup>61</sup> Dash-Moore, *To The Golden Cities*, esp. 1-20, 97.

<sup>62</sup> Dash-Moore, *To The Golden Cities*, 267.



two decades of the twentieth century, claimed Yulee to illustrate Jewish contributions and thereby assert their position in Florida's history.

Concerned with the issue of Jewish continuity in Florida's history, Marcia Zerivitz asserted that "Florida's Jews were not marginal outsiders" in the states' history.<sup>63</sup> A professional fundraiser and Jewish community organizer, Zerivitz initiated a "pioneer history gathering project of the Florida Jewish experience" in 1984 to collect and preserve Florida's Jewish heritage.<sup>64</sup> Originating in the Jewish Community Center in Plantation, Broward County, Florida, as a grassroots community history project to gather the historical memories of local residents, organizers soon expanded their mission to recover the Jewish history around the entire state. By 1990, under the direction of Zerivitz and Rachel Heimovics, and reinforced by the academic credentials of Henry Green, the Director of the Judaic\Sephardic Studies program at the University of Miami, MOSAIC published a text and opened a traveling museum exhibit documenting Florida's Jewish history. During its four-year national tour, the museum proudly displayed David Levy Yulee as nineteenth-century Florida's most distinguished Jewish representative and the first Jewish senator in the nation. After traveling around the nation, the exhibit became part of the current Jewish Museum of Florida in Miami Beach.

The MOSAIC project also produced a publication, *MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida*, which provides an overview of Yulee's life while emphatically defending his status as the nation's first Jewish senator. Linking Yulee to Judaism and claiming his as

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<sup>63</sup> Henry Green, Marcia Zerivitz, and Rachel Heimovics, *MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida: A Documentary Exhibit from 1763 to the Present* (Coral Gables, Fla.: MOSAIC, 1991), 14.

<sup>64</sup> Rachel Heimovics and Marcia Zerivitz, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail* (Tallahassee: Florida Dept. of State, 2000), introduction; <http://www.jewishmuseum.com/mzbio.html>

America's first Jewish senator is a point of pride for Florida Jewry. It is also a way of demonstrating continuity and acceptance in the state's Jewish history. Museum organizers and the authors of MOSAIC vehemently refute Eli Evans's claim that Judah P. Benjamin carried that honor. According to the authors, Evans incorrectly states in his biography of Judah Benjamin that Yulee had converted to Christianity in a bid to legitimate his contention that Benjamin was the first Jewish United States senator. The MOSAIC authors point out that there is no documentation of Yulee's religious conversion and that the similarities in the religious and social lives of both men far outweigh any minor differences.<sup>65</sup>

The MOSAIC project produced a publication about Jewish history in Florida, the *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail*, which is a part of the Jewish Heritage Series and one of several books about Florida's Jewish history published through the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, in the early 1990s in a collaborative effort to promote the state's multicultural history.<sup>66</sup> The book's introduction speaks of "south Florida [as] home to the second largest concentration of Jews in the world," and "the nation's third largest Jewish community, estimated in 1999 at 800,000."<sup>67</sup> The express

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<sup>65</sup> Zerivitz and Heimovics, *MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida*, fn 50. Blizin, in his address at Yulee Sugar Mills State Park, state that "neither Yulee nor Benjamin were practicing Jews. Neither of them renounced Judaism but they were indifferent to it. Each married devout Christian women and their children were raised as Christians. Jerry Blizin, "David Levy Yulee, The Unsung Pioneer," a speech presented to the Citrus County Historical Society at Yulee State Park, May 29, 1992, 2, 7, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Zerivitz and Heimovics, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail*. Introduction. The series also includes the *Florida Black Heritage Trail and the Florida Cuban Heritage Trail*. Florida Heritage Publication (Tallahassee: Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources).

<sup>67</sup> Zerivitz and Heimovics, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail*, Introduction. More conservative sources estimate south Florida's (Broward and Dade County) population at 514,000. [www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/world-jewish-population.htm](http://www.simpletoremember.com/vitals/world-jewish-population.htm), December 28, 2010.; Also, Ira M. Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, "Jewish Population of the United States, 2006," in David Singer and Lawrence Grossman, eds., the *American Jewish Year Book 2006*, 106 (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2006). <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/usjewpop.html>. December 28, 2010.

purpose of *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail* is to expose the public “to the rich legacy of the Jewish community in Florida,” and to dismiss the perception “that Jews did not arrive until World War II.”<sup>68</sup> *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail* presents Yulee’s political and entrepreneurial accomplishments as subsidiary to his Jewish “first” in American politics. Moreover, unlike those historians who complicated Yulee’s Jewish heritage by claiming the title “Yulee” was Moorish in origin or an anagram for a Jewish phrase, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail* asserts that Yulee added the appendage specifically to highlight and honor his Sephardic ancestry, a position supported by his personal and societal conceptions of race in the nineteenth century, but that the authors of the Florida Jewish Heritage Trail must have deduced by combining Huhner’s note about the Portuguese etymology of the name with Yulee’s statement regarding the reason for his name change.<sup>69</sup>

Much of Florida’s contemporary Jewish population is composed of recent immigrants, primarily from the northeastern United States and including many senior citizens, who have only arrived in strength since the middle of the twentieth century. Relocating to Florida broke long established ties with their large Jewish communities in the North, while re-establishing residence in Florida meant founding new connections with the burgeoning Jewish communities of Tampa, Miami, and West Palm Beach. These communities bound themselves to Florida by basking in any triumph of Florida’s Jewish heritage. Yulee was undeniably the most prominent Floridian associated with Judaism and his importance in Florida’s earliest history made a Jew central to the

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<sup>68</sup> Heimovics and Zerivitz, *Florida Jewish Heritage Trail*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, Introduction, 10.

founding of his descendants' adopted state. Jews of south Florida, where he had virtually no historical impact and virtually no presence in the local historical record, embraced him most fervently. Perhaps this is not surprising. Jewish immigrants of Florida, like Jewish immigrants throughout the Sunbelt, have used Yulee to legitimate their presence by emphasizing his regional prominence in their adopted state alongside his national distinction. "Jews reinvented a past for themselves," writes Southern Jewish historian Leonard Rogoff. "Sunbelt Jews affirmed local roots and wrote themselves into the southern narrative. . . . [W]ith diverse backgrounds, Sunbelt Jews turned to history to create a communal memory . . . [by] emphasizing the continuity between the Sunbelt newcomers and older southern families." The efforts of Heimovics and Zerivitz, like those of other Southern Jewish community leaders, supports Rogoff's assertion that "Sunbelt Jews, no matter how recently they had arrived, sought to validate their own presence in the area, to plant the South in their collective memory."<sup>70</sup> The constructed historical perspective has often pushed Yulee, like the state he represented, to the periphery of the South and of Judaism, which has proven beneficial to Florida's Jewish transplants who can imagine both as not so traditionally Southern. Yulee now appears as a Jewish pioneer, the central figure in the state's nineteenth-century history, and in a more acceptable and inviting Florida, one not linked as closely to a history of intolerance as the rest of the South and thus a good prospect for a new home.

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<sup>70</sup> Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 149, 308, 313. See also, Deborah Dash-Moore, *To the Golden Cities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 263-275.

While the memories of Yulee elicited by south Florida's Jews solidify an image of his prominent role in Florida's history, he is not pervasively remembered by Jews in other parts of Florida or around the South. Jewish migrants to Florida in the last half-century use Yulee as a symbolic link to the past, not a practical link. He is a device they can use to reintegrate Jews into the region's history and thereby maintain continuity with the past, a past that extends four thousand years back in history, not somebody to be admired and emulated. Jews draw on more public and recent figures, and not necessarily Jewish, in American history to highlight their accomplishments. In the South, other individuals—most notably Judah Benjamin and Leo Frank—are considered when thinking about the Jews place in Southern history.<sup>71</sup> A slave-owner and a secessionist, the romanticism surrounding Benjamin cast by commemorators of the Old South, such as the UDC, and Benjamin's distance in the past allows Jews to remember him as an illustration of Jewish achievement and integration in the nineteenth-century South, despite facing anti-Semitic criticism. Frank evinces a different South, a dangerous one that is virulently anti-Semitic, always potentially hostile, and one where Jews have not had a historic role. This is the South with which most Americans are familiar and comfortable, the backwards South that contrasts with the progressive North and which serves as the nation's repository of blackness. In between these limits of inclusion and exclusion historians have studied the social place of Southern Jews such as the Mordecai family, and examined the development of Jewish thought and religious

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<sup>71</sup> I attempted to contact several past and present Jewish representatives in the Florida legislature, including Lois Frankel, Ron Klein, and Alan Grayson, and Debbie Wasserman Schultz, as well as Senator Carl Levin and Congressman Sander Levin of Michigan, and Dianne Feinstein of California, to see if they had heard of Yulee and, if so, if his career had any meaning to them. I have not heard a single response. A keyword search at the University of Florida, which houses the David Yulee papers, of Leo Frank returns 313 matches, 124 for Judah Benjamin, and sixty-six returns for David Yulee.

institutions through individuals such as Isaac Harby, an early Jewish religious reformer, or even Yulee's father Moses, the Jewish abolitionist abroad.<sup>72</sup> Yulee maintained only the subtlest connection to Judaism—albeit a very potent one—and avoided the public light when it shined the brightest—during the Civil War. By contrast, his Senate colleague Judah Benjamin was more public and more notorious. Consequently, historians remembered him. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Jackson, Mississippi, does not provide any information about Yulee because, as historian Stuart Rockoff, the director of the history department at the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, states “he had Jewish roots, but did not identify as a Jew.” It includes a statement about Benjamin in their Civil War display.<sup>73</sup>

Though secondary to speculation about Yulee's ancestral roots, collective memories of Yulee's Southern identity also garnered public attention. As noted earlier, discussions using Yulee to talk about race and citizenship occurred in the context of an only recently reunited nation, and commentary about Yulee's Southern identity at the time of his death occasionally reflected the lingering acrimony from the Civil War. In 1886, the *New York Times* reminded its readers that “it was as an active promoter of the secession of the Southern States that Senator Yulee gained his chief notoriety,” while the *Philadelphia Times* recalled that Yulee “was among the more prominent of the coterie of Southern leaders who, in their zeal for slavery, precipitated the great rebellion.”<sup>74</sup> More often, however, comments relating Yulee with the South elicited the

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<sup>72</sup> Bingham, *Mordecai*; Zola, *Isaac Harby*; Monaco, *Moses Levy*.

<sup>73</sup> Email communication with Stuart Rockoff, director of the history department at the Institute for Southern Jewish Life, August 23, 2011.

<sup>74</sup> The *Philadelphia Times*, in the *Macon (Georgia) Telegraph*, October 24, 1886; the *New York Times*, October 17, 1886.

prevailing sense of national reunion and progression into the twentieth century. For example, by promoting Yulee's acceptance among the nation's social and political elite over his Southern associations, the *American Israelite* showed the Jews' desire to integrate into a unified America rather than with rebellion and the Confederacy.<sup>75</sup>

Historical memories, too, conveyed mixed feelings, if not indifference, about Yulee's Southern identity. The emerging national historical literature rarely mentioned Yulee, who was, after all, a comparatively minor political figure, but historians of the South, and especially of Florida, commented on his seemingly conflicted zeal for the Confederacy. C. W. Yulee devoted most of his attention to his father's stance on the slavery issue and unabashedly committed his father to the Southern cause.<sup>76</sup> Yulee, according to his son, defended the constitutional legality of slavery, not its morality. In this sense, and as many Southern apologists claimed, Yulee fought as an American and as a Southerner for the appropriate constitutional interpretation of states' rights. To many Southern patriots, the two identities did not conflict.<sup>77</sup>

C. W. Yulee's image of his father as a reluctant Confederate torn by his decision to forsake the Union and only committed to doing so in the name of the values of the Founding Fathers conflicts with the images presented by other Southern historians. A decade prior to Yulee's publication, George Fairbanks, a prominent lawyer, state historian, and Yulee family friend, writing one of the earliest histories of Florida, hailed

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<sup>75</sup> *The American Israelite*, 1886

<sup>76</sup> Yulee, "Senator David L. Yulee," 9-12, 19-20.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Sellers and David Potter, among others, argued that Southerners did not see their Southern and American identity as mutually exclusive. See Cobb, *Away Down South*, 8.

Yulee as “among the most radical of the southern leaders.”<sup>78</sup> Even as the professionalization of historical scholarship became more firmly entrenched, Harry Cutler’s *History of Florida Past and Present*, published in 1923, continued lauding Yulee as “one of the most ardent champions of the cause of the southern states,” an appraisal that mirrored the Lost Cause sensibilities pervasive in state history texts throughout the former Confederacy.<sup>79</sup> Cutler also noted Yulee’s postwar efforts towards reunion and his amicable relations with Republican leaders, a reflection of the correlation between the emerging academy and popular collective memories supporting the Southern cause.<sup>80</sup>

A decade later, William Thomas Cash, the eminent state historian, first state librarian, and former conservative Democratic representative in Florida’s legislature, removed Yulee from the ranks of the fire-eaters and projected the more objective view of his Confederate loyalties initiated by historians such as Cutler.<sup>81</sup> Unlike Cutler and more in tune with both C. W. Yulee, Cash downplayed Yulee’s passion for the cause, stating that the fire-eating rhetoric that characterized his early political career lapsed into moderation at the time of the secession crisis in 1860-61. According to Cash, Yulee and his senatorial colleague Stephen Mallory “had been maneuvered into the position of

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<sup>78</sup> George Fairbanks, *History of Florida* (New York: J.J. Little and Co., 1898), 145. See also, Rowland Rerick, Francis Fleming, ed., *Memoirs of Florida*, v.1 (Atlanta: Southern Historical Association, 1902), 206-215.

<sup>79</sup> Harry G. Cutler, *History of Florida Past and Present*, v.2 (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1923), 364-366.

<sup>80</sup> Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 180.

<sup>81</sup> Further information about W. T. Cash can be found at the Florida Department of State, Division of Library and Information Services, The State Archives of Florida Online Catalog, <http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us>. February 27, 2011.



followers of their party rather than leaders of it.”<sup>82</sup> Cash’s moderated position anticipated a shift in projections of Yulee’s Confederate ties from one of radical encouragement to one of resigned support while not straying from the Dunning school’s main premise that Northern intrusion and black emancipation adversely affected Southern affairs. At the same time, Cash’s restrained presentation of Yulee illustrated the triumph of a scientifically informed and male dominated historical memory over popular and mythic collective memory in terms of recollecting a factual past. Nevertheless, collective memory perpetuated oftentimes mythic, but more comfortable and usable memories of the past in popular historical imagination. While C. W. Yulee offered an apologetic defense of his father’s Confederate support and Cutler promoted an image of repentant secessionism, Cash minimized Yulee’s Confederate links while cultivating the trend of calling attention to his railroad career, foreshadowing an idea that would mature in the collective and historical imagination by the last decades of the twentieth century.

As the twentieth century progressed, the focus of scholarly research shifted away from Yulee’s secessionism and towards his entrepreneurial career. Like Cash a generation earlier, Arthur Thompson in his 1954 doctoral dissertation portrayed Yulee as a staunch Southerner but an ambivalent Confederate. In depicting Yulee as a man consumed by his railroad ventures, Thompson completed the transition in shifting the focus of scholarly research from Yulee’s remembered secessionism to his entrepreneurial career. Thompson reflected the broader transition in Southern history towards the revisionist perspective that was occurring in the middle of the twentieth

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<sup>82</sup> William T. Cash, *The Story of Florida*, v. 1-2 (New York: American Historical Society, 1938), 424.

century. Joseph Adler reinforced this trend in his dissertation about Yulee's political career, published in 1973, which depicted Yulee as a staunch Southerner, but one who became more wary, though not necessarily publicly reticent, of secession over time.<sup>83</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, historians of the South have not remembered him as a fanatical secessionist.

Regional texts about the South do not often incorporate Yulee into their narrative. The Dunning School dominated the academy with their theories for over fifty years. Their histories often disparaged Jews in the South even as they ironically noted that Southerners of the time displayed little anti-Semitic antagonism. E. Merton Coulter, whose ranting about Jews was noted earlier, and W.T. Cash exemplify the desire of this school of historians to remove Jews from the Southern historical narrative by portraying them as northern intruders. Even the revisionists—those historians that challenged the Dunning School—disregarded Southern Jews and ignore their participation in Southern affairs. Avery Craven, one of the first revisionist historians, presented the image of a tragic South caught in a passionate nationalism and unable to deal with the consequences of racial equality. Craven mentioned Judah Benjamin, the most well-known Jew in America, only once in his classic *The Growth of Southern Nationalism*.<sup>84</sup> As a Jew and a relatively minor figure during the defining moment of the South, the Civil War, Yulee was simply not an ideal selection for Southern historical memory.

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<sup>83</sup> Arthur W. Thompson, *David Yulee: A Study of Nineteenth Century American Thought and Enterprise* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1954). Joseph Adler, *The Public Career of Senator David Levy Yulee* (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1973).

<sup>84</sup> Avery Craven, *The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 101.

While historians debated the nature of Yulee's Southern identity and his relationship with the former Confederacy in the pages of history texts, north Florida's residents mobilized efforts to imprint their memories of Yulee as an ardently patriotic Southerner on Florida's public landscape. White land-owning Southerners, those with economic and political authority over the majority of the poor black and white population in the South, led the campaign to imagine Yulee in a Southern context as a means of asserting social control through the projection of order and stability associated with the Confederacy and embodied in the entrenched white leadership of the Jim Crow "New South."

Elite white women in Florida, as in the rest of the South, participated in the commemoration and preservation of the antebellum past and played a critical role in shaping and disseminating collective memories of Yulee throughout the twentieth century. Historians have noted women's contributions to the construction and projection of the Old South model as the basis for Southern identity throughout the post-bellum South.<sup>85</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women's groups, foremost among them the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and Southern chapters of Daughters of the American Revolution, asserted their position as the guardians of the Confederate tradition. The UDC originally served as the driving force behind Confederate commemoration activities in the late nineteenth century, but these activities lost salience by the dawn of the twentieth century and the UDC's duties morphed

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<sup>85</sup> Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003); Davis, *Race Against Time*, 50; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1998), 197-198, 284-285; Julie Des Jardins, *Women and the Historical Enterprise in America: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Memory, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Brundage, *The Southern Past*.

following the First World War to include preserving and protecting what they considered to be the appropriate historical interpretation of the past: commemoration through education. As the historian Gaines Foster notes, the purpose of public monuments was to educate the illiterate, making them “disciplined and loyal supporters of society.”<sup>86</sup> Women were not expected to compete with men in the public domain, particularly in political and economic affairs, but they could affirm their influence over non-elite Southern society in public space through their leadership in the Confederate commemoration campaigns and, later, in the control over the white South’s collective memory and concomitant education of Southern society. Men, however, working through state bureaucracies or in academic institutions, often provided the authoritative validation for any set of memories.<sup>87</sup>

The movement to commemorate Yulee in a Confederate context originated as a private community enterprise mobilized by Kirby-Smith chapter of the UDC, politically sanctioned and financed by the white male elite, and socially buttressed by white citizens of Archer. In 1939, the Kirby-Smith chapter joined with Archer political and business leaders to commission the first public monument honoring Yulee at the site of his Civil War plantation, Cottonwood. The plantation house was destroyed following the Civil War, but the Yulee family retained the property, situated within a mile of the former rail line and the town’s center, until 1904 when Yulee’s daughter, Florida, sold it to Monroe Venable, one of Archer’s largest landholders, most influential businessmen, and a former town mayor. Bolstered by Alfred J. Hanna’s publication of Confederate

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<sup>86</sup> Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 130, 197.

<sup>87</sup> Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 128-131.

veteran Tench Francis Tilghman's diary in the January 1939 edition of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, the UDC prompted Venable to allow them to mark the precise location of an important remembered interaction between the heart of the Confederacy and the local community on Yulee's former plantation property with a plaque. In April 1865, several Confederate officials, including President Jefferson Davis and Secretary of the War Judah P. Benjamin, attempted to evade Federal troops and flee the country following the demise of the Confederacy. Union forces captured Davis in Irwinville, Georgia, in May 1865, ostensibly clad in women's clothing, but his baggage train, laden with official documents and containing the slim remnants of the Confederate treasury, made it as far as Yulee's plantation. There, Nancy Wickliffe Yulee confirmed Davis's capture to the remaining Confederate guards who conceived a plan to disperse and hide the money and important papers. Some of this baggage remained at Cottonwood until Union troops discovered it shortly after Yulee's arrest in Gainesville.<sup>88</sup> In 1939, Hitup Maddox, a colleague of Venable's and the owner of one of the largest businesses in Archer, a foundry, donated the bronze plaque marking the site commemorating the seventy-fourth anniversary of the flight of Jefferson Davis's baggage train in the final

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<sup>88</sup> A. J. Hanna provides a thorough description of the baggage train's trail. A.J. Hanna, *Flight Into Oblivion* (reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959) 113-120. The United Daughters of the Confederacy and other women's clubs were largely responsible for disseminating "Old South" memories from the nineteenth through the twentieth century. More info on the United Daughters of the Confederacy's role in shaping social memory can be found in Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003); See also, Gary Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh eds., *The Memory of The Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Local legend maintains that the troops did not discover all of the money, and that an undisclosed amount of Confederate gold remains secreted on the property.

days of the Civil War and its subsequent arrival at what would be remembered as its final destination: the stable behind Yulee's plantation home.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the political and social clout of those who sponsored the plaque, little public fanfare attended the dedication, which occurred on May 23, 1939. The majority of Archer's white population, if they tacitly supported white supremacy and the continuation of segregation, did not publicly endorse it through this commemorative activity. From this perspective, the dedication of the plaque confirmed the rule of the local white elite as much as it reinforced broader Southern ideals of white political and social authority. In a location recently touched by the nearby Rosewood massacre in 1923, and with a large and established black minority among the town's nearly 800 residents, anxious white Southerners, especially those in positions of power, sought to symbolically secure their authority in every aspect of society.

Unlike the place names in north Florida—Levy County and the town of Yulee—which invoke his role as a land owner and developer, the “Cottonwood” monument focuses exclusively on Yulee's association with the Confederacy. Old South proponents justified Yulee for commemoration because of the ardent passion he displayed for states' rights and secession early in his political career. His distinction as a champion of the states' rights position and his service to the state of Florida transcended any mitigating factors such as his dampened enthusiasm for secession by 1860, as well as his legal conflicts with Confederate authorities during the war.

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<sup>89</sup> A portion of the freight was taken to Waldo, Florida, where it was later discovered by federal troops. Local citizens in Waldo, together with the state of Florida, commemorated this part of the Confederate baggage journey with another historical marker. Thomas Massey Venable served in company D, 4<sup>th</sup> cavalry of the Confederate army before moving to Micanopy after the war. Another Venable family member purportedly served as an aide-de-camp to Lee at Appomattox. Interview with Lamar Crevasse, January 29, 1990, University of Florida Digital Collections, 3, 5-6; Jess G. Davis, *A History of Gainesville, Florida: with biographical sketches of families* (Gainesville, Fla., 1966), 193, 202, 204.

Nevertheless, the memorial is only peripherally concerned with Yulee much as he only peripherally associated with the Confederacy during its existence. Instead, the plaque commemorates the geographical site of the former Cottonwood plantation and its importance in the final days of the Civil War as the literal resting spot of the material remains of the Confederate government. Although the episode of the flight of Davis's baggage train only briefly touched Archer, it provided a direct link to the surviving values of an old order and the twin ideas of Southern regional supremacy and white racial supremacy.

Federal funds have often, though not always, supported community endeavors to record their local history. As the source of funding, federal authorities have been the underwriters of particular versions of the past that conform to the broader American historical narrative. Federal funds, for instance, oftentimes spurred the Confederate commemoration movement in Florida during the Depression years. State dollars helped bankroll the restoration of the Gamble mansion, the sole remaining antebellum mansion in Florida and a much more expensive endeavor than the erection of a plaque. The Gamble mansion, like Cottonwood, was only peripherally connected to the Confederacy, but important in Confederate lore. Judah Benjamin stayed at the Gamble mansion before departing Florida during his escape to the Bahamas, and eventually, Great Britain. Unlike Cottonwood, the Gamble mansion survived the Civil War before being restored by the UDC, with federal assistance, as Florida's sole surviving antebellum mansion.<sup>90</sup> The Federal Works Progress Administration and the Manatee

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<sup>90</sup> David Anderson, "Down Memory Lane: Nostalgia for the Old South in Post-Civil War Plantation Reminiscences," *The Journal of Southern History* 71:1(Feb, 2005), 105-136. See also, Jack Davis, *Race Against Time*.

County Writer's Programs provided textual recapitulations of Benjamin's flight that, like Hanna's presentation of the Confederate baggage train at Cottonwood, shrouded the memories in Confederate lore.<sup>91</sup>

During the Depression, federal dollars also buoyed the effort to collect the testimonies of the aging antebellum generation through the collection of slave narratives, part of the broader Federal Writer's Project. The reminiscences taken from local black and white residents buttressed the Old South images visible on the physical landscape. In a Depression-era interview conducted by Rose Shepherd, a writer for the Federal Writer's Project, with Julien R. Benjamin, a distant cousin of Judah P. Benjamin, Julien cited *The New Florida*, a state history published in 1887, to support his claim that slavery was not malicious.<sup>92</sup> Former slaves such as Dolly Nattiel, a young girl on Yulee's plantation at the time of emancipation, provided accounts to Shepherd in 1937 of their lives in bondage that upheld these claims. Many of these memories provided insights into slave life, yet they more forcefully tended to underscore the Old South myth of orderly plantations and happy slaves. Nattiel claimed that Yulee insisted his slaves maintain clean quarters, a sentiment suggesting the need for his paternalistic oversight as well as one that reinforced the notion of well-treated and content slaves. Nattiel may have given her testimony under invisible or overt social pressure to respond in ways upholding the existing white Southern order, yet they may have been honest recollections of her past. Herbert Nattiel, a great-grandson of Dolly Nattiel's sister,

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<sup>91</sup> Manatee County Writer's Program, (1936-38), 49-72. H. A. McLeod, *The Escape of Judah P. Benjamin* (Jacksonville, Fla.: Federal Works Progress Administration, 1937).

<sup>92</sup> Rose Shepherd, interview with Julien P. Benjamin, May 15, 1939, in *Biographical Sketches* (Writer's Program, 1939), 84-91.



claimed that Nattiel used to report on the other slaves to Yulee, and that his mother claimed “she was a mean woman.”<sup>93</sup>

Citizens in Citrus County remembered Yulee’s former Homossassa plantation, Margarita, and its associated sugar mill in the context of the Confederacy.<sup>94</sup> During the Civil War, Yulee planted nearly 5,000 acres of sugarcane alongside much smaller plots of cotton and citrus, essentials that were then smuggled past Union blockaders to supply the beleaguered Confederacy.<sup>95</sup> Following the destruction of the plantation house by marauding Union soldiers in 1863, only the sugar mill remained largely undisturbed before it eventually fell into disrepair. By 1889, the *Florida Semi-Tropical News* remarked on the ivy-covered ruins of Yulee’s sugar mills, which, analogous to other physical remnants of the antebellum South, stood as a stark reminder of Florida’s only recently lost antebellum past.<sup>96</sup> Reflective of so much of the fabled Old South, the sugar mills required resurrection and a return to their former vitality, comparable to the way in which the “New South” emanated from and closely resembled the Old South of its origins. These activities fell under the auspices of the assorted Southern women’s groups who figuratively and literally revived and restored antebellum property and

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<sup>93</sup> *Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*, Feb 25, 2005

<sup>94</sup> Blizin, “David Levy Yulee, The Unsung Pioneer,” 9; Hitup Maddox, speech delivered at Yulee Park, October 26, 1950; Florida Division of Recreation and Parks, “*A Guide to Yulee Sugar Mill Historic Memorial*,” Jan 12, 1971 (BTS); Smith, “David Levy Yulee,” 6-8.

<sup>95</sup> Robert A. Taylor, *Rebel Storehouse: Florida in the Confederate Economy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

<sup>96</sup> (Ocala) *Florida Semi-Tropical News*, January 1889.

memorabilia, symbolically resurrecting them from the trauma of the Reconstruction Era while preserving a remembered “Old South” of order and productivity.<sup>97</sup>

The Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins and State Historic Site originated as a local community effort spearheaded by the Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs.<sup>98</sup> The matriarchs of the Lost Cause chose Yulee for commemoration because he closely matched the ideal white Southern man of the antebellum era. His specifically Jewish background was easy to overlook because Jews were viewed as white Southerners. Yulee’s public projection of whiteness overshadowed his Jewish ancestry that only minimally mattered to most Southerners in the first place. In 1923, the Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs purchased the six-acre parcel of the 5,100-acre plantation containing the ruined sugar mills from Claude Root, a prominent businessman, landowner, and mayor of Crystal River, Florida. Three years later, the women’s clubs announced their objective of developing Yulee Park around the remains of the sugar mills. With the assistance of West Coast Development Company, the Women’s Clubs intended to restore part of what was “once one of the South’s most magnificent estates in antebellum days” to its former glory. In 1926 the *Florida Times Union* publicly asserted this goal. “Tiger-Tail Island . . . is to be returned to that splendor it knew when David Yulee, sugar planter, railroad builder, United States senator and Confederate States leader, was lord of the Homossassa county and

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<sup>97</sup> *Tampa Tribune*, October 17, 1954, box 19, *Yulee Papers*, box 19. Also, see Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, xii.

<sup>98</sup> Hampton Dunn, *Back Home: A History of Citrus County, Florida* (Inverness, Fla.: Citrus County Bicentennial Steering Committee, 1976), 29, 129, 233. The Inverness Women’s Club initiated preservation efforts before establishing the Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1922. The club’s founder, Ms. Phebe Kendrick, was the poet laureate for the Florida Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy, while another club president, Mrs. Edith Williams Schultz, was the wife of the clerk of the circuit court and a member of the Inverness city council.

employed a thousand slaves to till his soil, operate his sugar mill, and make beautiful the house to which he attracted the great of the earth of his day. . . . Yulee came—in 1847—he determined to create an estate that could be equaled by none in America—he succeeded.”<sup>99</sup> The Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs maintained the grounds of the property and placed a bronze plaque, donated by the Maddox foundry in Archer, on the remains of the chimney in 1950, but they did not have the financial strength to restore the ruins of the mill.

In 1953, the Women’s Clubs bequeathed the ruins to the Florida Division of Parks and Recreation because the clubs could not appropriately maintain the site for visiting school groups. The state’s Division of Parks envisioned Yulee in the same manner as the Women’s Clubs. They assumed responsibility for the site based on Yulee’s importance in Florida’s Southern history, and not the historical value of the sugar mills.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, local citizens, led by women, continued monitoring the site and directing the traditional historical interpretation offered by the Dunning School, at least through the civil rights era. Mary MacRae, a local historian and chair of the Citrus County Historical Commission, directed much of this historical interpretation and exerted her influence in all aspects of the park’s history. In one instance, she spied on a park ranger and tour guide whose “fine Scottish forebears” moved to the region during Reconstruction to assure the committee that “his history is flawless.”<sup>101</sup> The script of the

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<sup>99</sup> (Jacksonville) *Florida Times-Union*, March 22, 1926. Local collective memory recalls the death of numerous slaves during the mills operation. Interview with Gary Ellis at Yulee Sugar Mills, June 2008.

<sup>100</sup> John W. Griffin, Report on the Yulee Sugar Mill, Homosassa[sic], Florida, December 23, 1952, 2-3, 5. See also, Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins State Historic Site Management Criteria Statement, 6. The Board of Parks, nevertheless,

<sup>101</sup> Mary MacRae to William “Bill” Miller, Florida Board of Parks, August 21, 1968.

docent's storyline is unavailable, but in conforming to MacRae's demands it must have accorded with her romantic understanding of the Southern past. In the turbulent and transitional 1960s, some state authorities began challenging the collective memories of local communities and questioned MacRae's historical accuracy. "I found to my dismay," wrote Virginia Newman, information director for the Florida Board of Parks, after visiting MacRae at her house for a meeting about park development plans, "that most of her historical information is in her attic, and she said she had not had time to dig it out."<sup>102</sup> The appropriate historical memory, closely guarded by MacRae, mattered more than the facts collecting dust in her attic.

In the late 1960s, the board of Florida state parks initiated a historic preservation effort to renovate and rebuild the sugar mill remains, including the brick encasement, a boiler, kettles, well, and a press. By then, and befitting the historiographical shift from imagining Yulee as a Confederate to focusing on his economic enterprises, the historical interpretation of the physical remains of the mills as examples of Southern economic diversity began replacing the Confederate tradition as the central interpretive theme in the park. Nevertheless, the ruins still implored memories of the antebellum past. Just as white Southerners strengthened their regional identity by re-instilling a social order based on memories of an Old South, so too did they rebuild their physical past to uphold those memories. The physical presence of the ruins suggests an ambiguous meaning. Like any part of the South destroyed in the Civil War, but especially those reminders of the antebellum South such as plantations and important Southern cities, the site of the sugar mills serves as a testament to the destruction of

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<sup>102</sup> Virginia Newman to William "Bill" Miller, Florida Board of Parks, September 12, 1967.

the Confederacy. Yet, it is also a protected and reconstructed historical site that evokes continuity with, and state-sponsored maintenance of, the Confederate past. It is not the ubiquitous Southern plantation house—the very symbol of the white South—that can be found throughout the region, but it elicits another fundamental aspect of Lost Cause memory: the subjugation of blacks for the successful production of lucrative cash-crops. Any reconstruction of the South for commemorative purposes is a subtle version of the Southern soldier, staring north and prepared to fight, found in most Southern towns.

Yulee has rarely been affiliated with the evils of slavery in popular literature and in historical narratives. Quite the contrary, collective memory in Florida imagined Yulee's link to slavery in the same romantic paternalism that characterized regional memories of the Old South. Repeating a popular tale initially recited by C. W. Yulee nearly a century earlier, the *Miami Herald* portrayed Yulee as a merciful plantation master and claimed that Yulee “had a rule against buying or selling a slave if it meant separating a married pair.” In one incident, Yulee was considering the purchase of a slave. The slave was married and he wanted to maintain the integrity of the marriage, but he was apparently unsure about purchasing both slaves. The male slave, “whose wife was a shrew,” pleaded with Yulee, “Master . . . don't let that bother you about me and my old lady being separated.” The article then revealed that “there's no record whether Yulee did the slave the kindness of buying him.”<sup>103</sup> Local historian Hampton Dunn citing an earlier unnamed biographer, claimed that Yulee “had for some years favored the abolition of slavery and had no sympathy with the traffic in slaves, partly due to the many scenes he had witnessed in the slave markets in St. Augustine. He had been an

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<sup>103</sup> *The Miami Herald*, December 11, 1968.

individual contributor to the project for founding the Liberian Republic. The slaves of his own family were completely devoted to him and he cared for them for two years after the war until, through gifts of land, he made them capable of looking after themselves.”<sup>104</sup> Rance Braley, author of *Nineteenth Century Archer*, a community history published by the Archer Historical Society in 1988, recalled the “loyalty and service” of Yulee’s slaves. Braley noted that following emancipation, Yulee presented one of them, Uncle Pauldo, with his slave horn as a gesture of his gratitude for his dedicated service. Later, Uncle Pauldo ostensibly gave the horn as a gift to the Kirby-Smith UDC.<sup>105</sup> Historical investigations tend to muddle any claims of benevolence, yet collective memories of Yulee continue to exploit Old South mythology. In doing so, Floridians negate the reality of antebellum slavery and post-bellum segregation by imagining a history of benign race relations.

The usable past of one era can be the contentious past of another. The link between Yulee and the Confederacy began changing during the social revolution of the 1960s. The Cold War instilled an era of consensus throughout America in the 1950s, yet underneath the façade of unity, social reaction brewed. The onslaught of the Civil Rights Movement unleashed social and political changes across the country, especially in the South. There, civil rights demonstrations challenged and overturned the Jim Crow social order. Concurrent with these social changes were the physical ones wrought by the “bulldozer revolution” and what many consider the beginning of the

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<sup>104</sup> Dunn, *Back Home*, 28.

<sup>105</sup> Rance O. Braley, *19<sup>th</sup> Century Archer* (Archer, Fla.: Archer Historical Society), 2, 9. The Kirby-Smith chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy does not recollect these events and does not purport owning any of Yulee’s former possessions. Phone interview and email to the historian of the Kirby-Smith chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 2007.

Americanization of the region.<sup>106</sup> The internal migration of Americans from the Northeast and Midwest to the southern tier of the nation, dubbed the Sunbelt, generated a population and development explosion in that region. Technology and industrial employment in expanding urban areas replaced agrarianism, and suburbanization morphed the Southern landscape into something imagined as more recognizably “American” and nationally homogeneous.<sup>107</sup>

The dramatic social and physical changes occurring in Florida and the rest of the South began slowly eroding open support for Lost Cause mythology. North Florida, like many areas across the region, reassessed the manner in which it perceived, and broadcast, its local history. Rather than focusing on Yulee’s Confederate ties, many north Florida communities recast him in a different light. Local communities and state authorities in Florida shifted their attention towards popularizing Yulee’s Jewish identity and his railroad building efforts while relinquishing their support for what was increasingly viewed as his unpleasant association with the Southern rebellion and slavery.

An examination of two speeches given fifty years apart at Yulee Park demonstrates the changing dynamics, as well as the historical continuity, in Southern society between the middle and the end of the twentieth century. In 1950, Hitup Maddox, the owner of the foundry that donated the bronze plaques to the Yulee sugar

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<sup>106</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 6.

<sup>107</sup> Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); Charles G. Sellers, *The southerner as American* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield, *The South for new southerners* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Shearer Davis Bowman and Kees Gispén, *What made the South different?: essays and comments* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990).

mills and Cottonwood, delivered a speech at the park bathed in Old South imagery, and that waxed nostalgic about the former glory of Yulee's antebellum plantation at Homossassa. "Attracted by the beauty of the place," Maddox told his audience, "he and his new wife looked forward to creating a magnificent Southern plantation. . . . One of the picturesque tracts acquired by Yulee was beautiful Tiger Tail Island . . . . The thirty acre island was dotted with stately live oaks which had been left when it was cleared for building the large house and planting an orange grove." To tame the natural surroundings, "over one hundred slaves toiled for more than two years to level the forest, plow the fields, and plant the crops." Order and stability resulted. Yulee brought civilization to the frontier by stocking his home "with the furnishings of the famous Stockton mansion in Washington, and made Marguerita [sic] a show place of the Old South." His slaves, as many as a thousand according to latter-day accounts, resided in "serene plantation houses stretched along each side of a wide street, with palms planted in a straight row running through the center. Each family had their own cabin, whitewashed regularly, as was the neat picket fence which enclosed it."<sup>108</sup> During the war, "Yulee lived the life of a Southern planter at Marguerita [sic] . . . raising needed sugar cane for the Confederacy . . . [until] the Yankees had come to the island and had either destroyed or taken off everything there. Marguerita [sic] had gone up in flames. . . . Soon the sugar mill stood idle while the cane planted to feed it grew neglected in the fields, the corn and cotton went untended. The mill is still idle, the kettles empty, the

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<sup>108</sup> Dunn, *Back Home*, 28.



rollers still, and the boilers cold.”<sup>109</sup> Nature and chaos had reclaimed the land from the former antebellum pastoral.

In many respects, memories of Yulee retained remarkable resilience forty years later. Jerry Blizin’s speech, presented to the Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs at Yulee Park in 1992, established a direct connection to the antebellum past originating in the women’s clubs efforts to purchase and revive the park earlier in the twentieth century. “I’m very pleased to be here in Yulee State Park, this beautiful site that calls forth the memory of old Florida,” Blizin announced, “I want to thank Mrs. Beth Helms, whose father—Claude Root—presented this site to the Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs and made possible its ultimate donation . . . . I would also like to pay tribute to the many area residents . . . who have done so much to advance the cause of Florida history. There can be no doubt that the Citrus County Historical Society continues this tradition.” Like so many of his predecessors, Blizin recalled an exotic antebellum splendor in Yulee’s mansion: “Oil paintings, fine china and silver and much of Yulee’s library was [sic] purchased at auction from Judah P. Benjamin.” Refined plantation masters produced more than the standard fare of commercial goods. “Not only was sugar cane grown and processed at Homossassa,” reported Blizin, “but so were tropical fruits, exotic flowers and citrus. In fact, Sen. Yulee was among the first in Florida to grow sweet oranges budded from sour orange stock.”<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, subtle

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<sup>109</sup> Maddox, “Speech delivered at Yulee Park,” 3-6.

<sup>110</sup> Blizin, “David Levy Yulee: The Unsung Pioneer,” 1, 7, 9. An article in the *Country Chronicle* refutes this claim. “The first white men to experiment with growing citrus were Dr. Bernard M. Byrne and his brother, Charles, who settled on 3,000 acres near Orange Lake in 1845. They considered growing oranges superior to cultivating cotton or sugar cane, and wrote a pamphlet in 1866 documenting their opinion. Four years later, nine sweet China oranges were discovered growing on the nearby Owens Plantation and the first sweet buds were grafted onto wild trees.” *Country Chronicle*, April-June 2005, 1.

differences existed between the two speeches, particularly in the nature of the relationship between Yulee and the Confederacy. Blizin asserted that Yulee did not participate in the Confederate government. Quite the opposite, he claimed that Yulee leveled “unfortunate” lawsuits against the Confederacy during the war for infringing on his property rights by impounding the sugar he sold in Savannah and by taking the iron rails belonging to the Florida Railroad. More important, Blizin established Yulee’s importance in Florida’s history through his railroad rather than his Confederate connections.

Despite the apparent cultural overhaul of the South, media sources and popular literature continue to present Yulee in a quixotic antebellum context. The (Ft. Pierce, Fla.) *News Tribune* evoked traditional Old South nostalgia through the image of Yulee’s Homossassa plantation property, once “neglected, [and] overgrown with weeds and vandalized,” it was resurrected by the Citrus County Federation of Women’s Clubs and restored to its former landscaped glory.<sup>111</sup> The *Miami Herald* urged its readers to imagine Florida’s history through Yulee’s sugar mills, a “well preserved relic of a past era.”<sup>112</sup> The *Co-Op Chatter* projected Yulee as “one of the Southern Cause’s most ardent leaders,” who “contributed generously to the Southern Cause and shared produce with Confederate hospitals.” All that remains of Yulee’s “once magnificent plantation” are the sugar mills, “a monument to David Yulee, empire builder.”<sup>113</sup> Celeste Kavanaugh’s brief overview of Yulee’s life and association with Fernandina, which relies on her own and other local collective memories alongside historical sources, continues

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<sup>111</sup> (Fort Pierce, Fla.) *The News Tribune*, Wednesday, August 16, 1972.

<sup>112</sup> *The Miami Herald*, December 11, 1968.

<sup>113</sup> Smith, “David Levy Yulee,” 6-8.

the trend of setting Yulee's life in the context of the Old South while placing him on the perimeter of Confederate affairs. Recalling Yulee's ability to assume the mantle of both patriotic American and Southerner during his lifetime substantiates the increasingly popular present-day ideal of inclusiveness and acceptance without infringing on Southern ideals about a unique past.<sup>114</sup>

Since the middle of the twentieth century, professional historians have rarely associated Yulee with the Confederacy. Instead, they have tempered the persistent popular collective memories glorifying Yulee's Southern identity with rigorous scholarship supporting an ostensibly more historically accurate position. Thompson's and Adler's dissertations support the contention that Yulee's secessionism had waned, but he was unfortunately caught in the grip of secessionist hysteria that left the proud white Southerner little recourse other than following the Confederacy—his status depended on it. Southern Jewish historians, such as Robert Rosen, have also acknowledged this perspective.<sup>115</sup> Other historians, such as Robert Taylor, maintain the themes of Yulee's individualism—or selfishness—and his loyalty to Florida by arguing that his economic ventures and the fate of his state (and his property) superseded total dedication to the Confederacy.<sup>116</sup> Historian Chris Monaco's comprehensive biography of Yulee's father, Moses E. Levy, provides the most thorough and historically based coverage of Yulee even if Monaco tends to disparage him. Like Taylor and others,

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<sup>114</sup> Cobb, *Away Down South*.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>116</sup> See Taylor, *Rebel Storehouse*, 78-79. Also, William H. Nulty, *Confederate Florida: the Road to Olustee* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

Monaco assures the reader that Yulee's personal considerations dampened his affection for the Confederacy (and his father).<sup>117</sup>

However, attempts at providing detailed coverage, historical accuracy, and nuanced interpretations of Yulee's life have not always grasped the public attention in the same manner as imagining him in the context of the Confederacy. In an effort to focus the public's attention almost exclusively on the importance of Yulee's railroad, museum officials at the Amelia Island Museum of History renamed their museum the Florida Museum of Transportation and History in 1984, but this strategy proved unappealing and the museum returned to its original historical vision, which included connecting Yulee with the Old South. Museum organizers and volunteers also consistently encouraged and supported community endeavors portraying Yulee in this manner.<sup>118</sup> The Amelia Island museum's executive director, Deon Jaccard, co-wrote a play with Celeste Kavanaugh that was performed by Yulee elementary school. The 2004 Yulee Days festival in Archer, Florida, included a Santa Fe Community College student performance of the play "David and Nancy Yulee—A Story of Love, A Railroad, and the War of Northern Aggression."<sup>119</sup>

As the imagery used to describe Yulee attests, some white Southerners have retained allegiance to Old South reverence and commemoration. While their numbers have consistently diminished in the second half of the twentieth century, the resilience of these beliefs is apparent in the ferocity of their defense of their imagined South. Controversy over the placement of a memorial to African American tennis legend Arthur

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<sup>117</sup> Monaco, *Moses Levy*, 154-155, 164-165, 171.

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.ameliamuseum.org/default.php?page=history>.

<sup>119</sup> *Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*, June 24, 2004.

Ashe on Monument Row, the shaded mile-long boulevard dense with memorials to Confederate heroes, shook the streets of Richmond, Virginia, in 1999, as did the protests over South Carolina officials' decision to remove the Confederate battle flag from flying over the state capitol in Columbia. Less notorious and publicly visible battles are fought throughout the South as Southerners new and old, black and white, contest their history. A resolution read during a meeting of the Hillsborough County Commission near Tampa, Florida, summer home to the New York Yankees, proclaimed 2007 "the Year of Lee" in honor of his 200<sup>th</sup> birthday and angered many citizens and their representatives, especially because of its proximity to another resolution paying tribute to local black activist James A. Hammond.<sup>120</sup> The disputes over the Southern past, evident in memories of Yulee's Southern identity and commitment to the Confederacy, continue in the present.

Communities throughout north Florida had always remembered Yulee in the context of his railroad and its impact on the development of their communities, but this part of his life never sustained the same political capital or public interest outside of Florida as his Southern or Jewish identities. These issues simply overshadowed his railroad project in national and regional media, and in private conversations. However, memories of Yulee's railroad thrived nearly as much as those surrounding his political influence on a local level and in some state histories, an indication of its primacy in the historical identity of many north Florida communities.<sup>121</sup> "To far-seeing David L. Yulee," wrote W.T. Cash, "Florida owes more than to any other one man for its era of railroad

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<sup>120</sup> *Gainesville (Fla.) Sun*, unknown date, 2007; February 7, 2007.

<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Thomas R. Dye, "Race, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Economic Development: A Case Study of Cedar Key, Florida (m.a. thesis, Florida State University, 1992).

construction which began in 1853. . . . [Yulee] may be called the father of railroad building in the state.”<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, most Florida history books downplayed Yulee’s pioneering efforts.

Part of the reason for Yulee’s near invisibility in Florida’s internal development and railroad history was due to the relative unimportance of his railroad outside of north Florida. As much as Yulee touted his railroad and the main port at Fernandina, Whitelaw Reid found that in the immediate aftermath of the war “it means a straggling village, which in New York or Ohio, might have a post office, but certainly could not aspire to the dignity of a county-seat.”<sup>123</sup> The railroad changed ownership and was renamed several times between 1855 and 1881, when Yulee stopped taking part in its affairs. Each change neutralized the railroad’s growth for short time periods before it could resume standard operation. More importantly, the Florida Railroad paled in comparison with the overwhelming success of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant’s railroads in stimulating the state’s growth.<sup>124</sup> Flagler began acquiring railroads in Florida in 1885. Four years later, he began constructing a railroad to run the length of Florida’s Atlantic coast, including the Florida Keys, a project completed in 1912. Plant also constructed his railroad to Tampa, once the proposed endpoint of the Florida Railroad, during this

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<sup>122</sup> Cash, *The Story of Florida*, 379, 391.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, “David Yulee,” 165.

<sup>124</sup> Gregg M. Turner, *A journey into Florida railroad history* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Les Standiford and Henry Morrison Flagler *Last train to paradise: Henry Flagler and the spectacular rise and fall of the railroad that crossed an ocean* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002); Kelly Reynolds, *Henry Plant: Pioneer Empire Builder* (Florida Historical Society Press, 2003), 142-144; Charles E. Harner, *Florida’s Promoters: The Men Who Made it Big* (Tampa, Fla.: Trend House, 1973); Edward Nelson Akin, *Southern reflection of the gilded age: Henry M. Flagler’s system, 1885-1913* (m.a, University of Florida, 1975); David Leon Chandler, *Henry Flagler: the astonishing life and times of the visionary robber baron who founded Florida* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1986); G. Hutchinson Smyth and G. S. Dickerman *The life of Henry Bradley Plant* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1898); LaFayette McLaws, *Henry Bradley Plant* (S.I: s.n, 1930).

period. Media sensationalism and cunning self-promotion elevated Plant's and Flagler's railroads over Yulee's in the public imagination. Upon completion, both projects also overwhelmed, as critical components in the state's burgeoning infrastructure, the Florida Railroad in terms of bringing people and economic benefits to Florida. After 1890, Flagler's railroad provided safer and more reliable transportation for thousands of Northern tourists, some of whom remained in the verdant and under-populated state. Florida's population rose from 269,493 in 1880 to 968,470 forty years later.

Jacksonville, the starting point for Flagler's railroad grew from fewer than 10,000 residents in 1880 to 57,699 in 1910, a growth rate averaging over one hundred percent per decade. Likewise, Plant's railroad accelerated Tampa's growth from 720 residents in 1880 to 37,782 in 1920, making it the second largest city in the state. Conversely, both Cedar Key and Fernandina practically ceased growing. The population of Fernandina, the northern terminus of Yulee's railroad, rose from 2,562 in 1880 at the apex of the town's expansion, to fewer than 3,500 in 1910, while the population at Cedar Keys, the other terminus, dropped from 1,458 to 1,259 in the same period.<sup>125</sup>

American troops and goods supporting Cuban independence and signifying the beginning of American global expansion originated from Tampa Bay, not Cedar Keys.<sup>126</sup>

The "bulldozer" and social revolutions of the 1960s may have inaugurated the paradigm shift that marginalized the elements of Old South mythology while raising the importance of his development projects to the forefront of public attention, but it took

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<sup>125</sup> [www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents). Accessed February 21, 2011.

<sup>126</sup> Karl Grismer, D. B. McKay, ed., "Tampa, A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida (St. Petersburg, Fla.: St. Petersburg Printing Co., 1950), 302; Lafayette McLaws, *Henry Bradley Plant* (Federal Writers Projects of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Florida, 1930); Carita Doggett Corse, *The Story of Jacksonville* (Fla.: Jacksonville Women's Clubs, 1935).

another generation before the state's public history reflected this shift.<sup>127</sup> Public recollections of Yulee's central role in the state's affairs as a community leader eased anxieties among native white Floridians. Popular literature since the 1980s reflects this changing focus of historical attention. Local lifestyle and promotional magazines in northeast Florida such as *Amelia Now* and *Florida Living* published articles about Yulee and the establishment of Fernandina Beach.<sup>128</sup> Both articles focused more on his railroad career than his Southern identity. Moreover, projecting Yulee's Jewish identity portrayed an inclusive history that appealed to the new immigrants during the boom period that marked the second half of the twentieth century. Jewish identity, however, was exclusive and could be as divisive as his Southern identity. Instead, local citizens teamed with professional historians, museum administrators, and state organizations residents to promote seemingly neutral collective memories of Yulee's entrepreneurial adventures. Complementing the shift in historical and popular literature, north Florida communities refocused their public history away from the polarizing themes of Jewish and Southern identity and towards the less noxious theme embedded in the railroad. Yulee's railroad symbolized modernity and advancement and provided the image of a progressive Southern state, not one entrenched in a romantic, and regressive, worship of the past.

Archer, Florida, heralded this newer representation of its founding father. Yulee's Florida railroad led to the establishment and growth of Archer, which reached its zenith of expansion between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1930s, when the town

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<sup>127</sup> Please see *Amelia Now* (March 1981); *Florida Living* (Summer 1981).

<sup>128</sup> *Amelia Now* (March 1981); *Florida Living* (Summer 1981)



averaged nearly two thousand residents. Despite the centrality of the railroad to Archer's existence, the only public acknowledgment of Yulee's importance to the local community prior to the late twentieth-century was the Cottonwood memorial. In 1977, members of the roughly 1,000 town residents, including many first and second generation migrants to the region from other parts of the country, formed the Archer Historical Society, an organization that envisioned an alternate, and more inclusive, agenda for Archer's public historical representations. The society, comprised of long-standing community members and the newer residents that arrived since the 1960s, resolved to "preserve and protect . . . heritage . . . [and] those things upon which our nation, our state, and our community were founded," as well as "promoting unity, friendship, and understanding among the citizens of our town."<sup>129</sup> From this origin, the Archer Historical Society shifted the focus in the town's local representation of Yulee from Confederate to railroad pioneer and internal developer.

In conjunction with state and local officials, the Archer Historical Society strove towards this objective in 1988 when it placed a new historical marker and opened a museum at the site of the old train depot. The Archer Railroad Museum, a small, single-room old depot building is dedicated to Yulee, his railroad, and its centrality in Archer's history. The museum as well as the attendant marker, established in coordination with the Florida Department of Historical Resources, focuses more on Yulee's efforts to develop the railroad and his political contributions to the state than his relationship with the Confederacy. The plaque mentions Yulee's support for secession, but it also notes his contest with the Confederacy over his railroad's iron. Florida's antebellum culture is

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<sup>129</sup> Archer Historical Society Charter, August 18, 1977, in Rance O. Braley, *Nineteenth Century Archer* (Archer, Fla.: Rance O. Braley and Archer Historical Society, 1988).

displayed as well, subtly perpetuating memories of the Old South. It also mentions his Jewish heritage and proclaims him the first Jewish senator in America, yet these multidimensional memories of him are peripheral to those recalling him in the context of the railroad.<sup>130</sup>

A video-recording of the 1989 monument dedication, in the possession of the Matheson Museum of History in Gainesville, Florida, reveals the combination of memories found within the single site of Archer. A guest speaker, standing at a podium in front of the museum and next to the historical marker, noted Yulee's political accomplishments and remarked that he was the first Jewish senator in the United States, but he focused his discussion on the establishment of Yulee's railroad and the subsequent initiation of internal improvements for the interior of north-central peninsular Florida. Behind the speaker stood a row of Civil War re-enactors dressed in Confederate gray and standing at parade rest in honor of Yulee, the Southern statesman. The speaker concluded the opening remarks by dedicating the event to the enslaved black laborers whose burdened bodies toiled to overcome Florida's harsh natural environment while bringing civilization in their wake. The speaker closed the proceedings with a benediction before the Confederate guards fired a salutary volley.<sup>131</sup>

As in Archer, the Cedar Key History Museum recognizes Yulee for choosing Cedar Key rather than Tampa as the final destination for the Florida Railroad. Yulee's railroad transformed the sleepy fishing village into a small, but thriving, Gulf port town, yet the

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<sup>130</sup> The text for this, and many other, Florida historical marker is available online at [www.flheritage.com/preservation/markers](http://www.flheritage.com/preservation/markers); The Historical Marker Database, <http://www.hmdb.org/Marker.asp?>

<sup>131</sup> *Dedication of State Historical Marker* (Matheson Museum of History, February 1989), videotape, accessed May 2008.

growth was short-lived. The railroad operated less than two years before Federal troops captured and took control of Cedar Keys in 1862. After the war, Yulee stabilized and expanded the railroad, briefly returning Cedar Keys to prosperity, but new competition from Henry Plant's railroad practically extinguished Cedar Keys' commercial relevance. Plant had considered Cedar Keys as the destination for his new railroad and negotiated with Yulee about this prospect, but Yulee's reluctance to cede exclusive control over the town's railroad traffic forced Plant's consideration of other options. Local memories recollect Plant's declaration that "the hogs would wallow in their streets and the owls would roost in their attics" of an irrelevant Cedar Keys after his railroad bypassed it and took its commerce to Tampa.<sup>132</sup> History proved him amazingly accurate. Today, the museum minimally recognizes Yulee's contributions to the town through his railroad even as local collective memories still ponder the irreparable harm of his decisions on their community. He is not featured in any of the museum's exhibits or in the town's public history. Historical memory recalls Yulee as the man responsible for Cedar Keys growth. It recollects his heavy involvement in smuggling operations supporting the Confederacy in and around Cedar Keys, yet there are no public monuments or any other indication of the town's collective memory associating him with the Southern rebellion either.<sup>133</sup>

Fernandina Beach, too, owes its existence to Yulee and his railroad. Prior to 1855, the town of "old Fernandina" occupied a different physical location on Amelia Island than the one Yulee selected as the site for the railroad's main terminal and its

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<sup>132</sup> Hampton Dunn, "David Levy Yulee: Florida's First U.S. Senator," 6

<sup>133</sup> Cedar Key Historical Society Museum

deep-water port. Yulee ostensibly chose the new site in order to avoid the surrounding marshland separating the port from the town's former location, but he had also quietly purchased much of the property in the precise area he selected as the headquarters for the Florida Railroad and, therefore, the town's economic heart. Much of "old Fernandina" moved to the present location after the railroad's construction began in 1855. Fernandina steadily grew for the next three decades. Despite a brief lull during the union occupation and the early Reconstruction era, its prosperity clearly linked to the generally consistent shipping and rail traffic. Success halted as Plant's and Flagler's railroads bypassed the town rendering it unimportant in comparison with Jacksonville. Local historian Celeste Kavanaugh poignantly notes that "time would stand still for Yulee's Fernandina," but unlike Archer and Cedar Keys, whose populations decreased through the middle of the twentieth century, Fernandina doubled in size between 1930 and 1960, partly because of its location along north-south transit routes, but also because of its proximity to the city that overshadows it: Jacksonville.<sup>134</sup>

The first recollections of Yulee in Fernandina's public history related him to the Confederacy. A bronze plaque, undated but well worn and older than any of the surrounding markers, lies on the site of Yulee's former residence near the center of town in Fernandina Beach, a site he occupied until the federal invasion in 1862. In recalling plantation days, this marker spoke for, and still speaks for, the element of the community attached to the "Old South" of legend. The plaque, however, is not well marked, and neither are the numbers of people who publicly, or tacitly, express their approval of this version of history. Museum-sponsored walking tours divulge its location

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<sup>134</sup> Kavanaugh, *David Levy Yulee*, 42. Census statistics can be found online at <http://library.ucf.edu/GovDocs/statisticsfl.php>

and it is listed on the Florida historical markers website, but the present museum defers from promoting Old South romanticism, focusing instead on Yulee's entrepreneurial and developmental contributions.<sup>135</sup>

Like the rest of the region influenced by the social and demographic changes of this period, Fernandina's residents—with state assistance—began shifting the focus of cultural and historical attention from the Old South to community and economic development. In 1961, as the civil rights movement was igniting across the South, including in nearby Jacksonville and St. Augustine, the city of Fernandina Beach and the Florida Board of Parks and Historical Memorials dedicated a monument to Yulee entitled "Florida's First Atlantic to Gulf Coast Railroad."<sup>136</sup> Symbolically located in a highly visible setting at the town's center near the railroad's starting point, the monument suggests community pride in the result of Yulee's vision. Nearly forty years later, in 2000, the Florida Department of State and the Florida League of Cities placed another plaque on the city hall building, adjacent to the first one, recognizing Yulee as a "Great Floridian," an honor bestowed on a broad and diverse body of nearly four hundred Floridians representing Florida's multicultural heritage.<sup>137</sup> Alongside the historical markers, the Amelia Island Museum of History first opened as the Fernandina Historical Museum in 1978 in the Florida Railroad's Fernandina depot before finding a permanent home in the former Nassau county jailhouse. Yulee is featured as the father

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<sup>135</sup> The Historical Marker Database, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=33429>

<sup>136</sup> The Historical Marker Database, <http://www.hmdb.org/Marker.asp?Marker=33411>

<sup>137</sup> The state honored 385 people from a wide cross-section of Florida's history between 1998 and 2000 in the "Great Floridian 2000" program. A more selective list of "Great Floridians" is limited to 38 people, including Flagler and Plant, but not Yulee. [www.flheritage.com/preservation/index](http://www.flheritage.com/preservation/index), accessed on February 13, 2011.

of Fernandina Beach in one of the museum's show-case exhibits which also includes original railroad documents, memorabilia, and early photographs of Yulee, Fernandina Beach, and the Florida Railroad. Yulee's Southern identity has not been forgotten in the collective memories of many north Floridians, including those living in Fernandina. In an exhibit celebrating the different flags that have flown over northeast Florida's Atlantic coast, including the Confederate Southern Cross, the museum displays Yulee in association with the Confederacy, noting his departure as Union forces entered the town in 1862.

Although the state has assisted local endeavors in commemorating Yulee, he is not visibly represented in Florida's capital, Tallahassee, or in the Museum of Florida History, the official exhibitor of the state's history. The museum holds twin portraits of Senator Yulee and his wife in its archives that were commissioned by Yulee's daughter Florida, and painted by L. H. Gephard in 1928. The paintings are copies of originals completed between 1845 and 1860 by an unknown artist. Florida Yulee claimed that one of her nieces owned the originals, but their current location is a mystery. Yulee donated the copied paintings to the University of Florida in 1946. John J. Tigert, president of the university from 1928 to 1947, expressed his gratitude to her. "When the first memorial funds were made available to your University in my early days here, I did not appreciate what a great man your father was" wrote Tigert, "I think there are many people who would regard him as the most important figure in all Florida history. Certainly he would be ranked by well-informed people among two or three men who have made the largest contribution to this state."<sup>138</sup> Tigert, a native Tennessean, may

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<sup>138</sup> John J. Tigert to Florida Neff Yulee, December 5, 1946, Museum of Florida History, Tallahassee, Florida. Thanks to Lisa C. Barton for providing the provenance information for these portraits.

have been unaware of Yulee, but the local political and social elite had not forgotten him. The Florida State Museum in Gainesville, Florida, cared for the portraits, which were displayed in the library before ultimately being loaned to the Cedar Key Museum for exhibition in the early 1990s. In 1992, the Cedar Key Museum returned the portrait to the Florida Museum of History, who inherited ownership of the paintings from the former Florida State Museum, which had been renamed the Florida Museum of Natural History in 1988. They have not been displayed since that time, nor are there any intentions of doing so in the near future.<sup>139</sup> Memories of Yulee's staunch states' rights activism and support of white political supremacy upheld the Jim Crow social order found in Florida through the mid-twentieth century, but the changing population and socio-political dynamics have changed since that time and those characteristics are no longer appealing to the majority of the state's population.

Yulee Railroad Days in Archer, Florida, is the ideal setting for examining the confluence of different memories of Yulee. Yulee Railroad Days is an annual event celebrated across north Florida between late May and early June. Originating as Yulee Day, a local festival celebrated in Archer, Florida, since 1994, Yulee Railroad Days has expanded since 2002 to encompass the communities impacted by David Levy Yulee and his railroad. The event's purpose is twofold: to commemorate the Florida Railroad's centrality in the economic development of the northern peninsula of Florida, and to highlight the railroad's importance in the establishment and growth of various communities across the region along the train's former route. Through this commemorative activity, Yulee Railroad Days strengthens community ties and identity

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<sup>139</sup> <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/museum/history.htm>

while binding north Florida communities together by eliciting their common culture and history. In the spirit of Yulee's entrepreneurialism, the event also invigorates local commerce by stimulating economic integration and cooperation across the region, an act that further cements community concord. Local newspapers and television, a webpage, flyers, and community newsletters heavily advertise the occasion. Several towns along the tracks—Fernandina, Callahan, Gainesville, and Archer, to name a few—foment a festive atmosphere replete with commemorative speeches, actors and actresses dressed in period garb portraying Yulee and his wife, and various food, information, and memorabilia kiosks. The contemporary connection between these towns provided by the Yulee Railroad Days celebration reinforces the historical connections rooted in the railroad.<sup>140</sup>

By 2008, Yulee Railroad Days extended across the Florida peninsula to include participants from Fernandina to Cedar Key and south to Homosassa. Each location, alongside the official Yulee Railroad Days website, several historical markers, museum exhibits, and pamphlet information, exhibited the convergence of memories evident in Archer. Yulee is remembered in many of these venues as the first Jewish senator in America, but his Southern identity resounds more powerfully with the region's inhabitants. Walking through the Yulee Railroad Days event in places like Callahan, Florida, a small town in the northeastern part of the state, visitors cannot escape images and memories of the Old South. The Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) operated an information booth there, as did the Order of the Confederate Rose, a women's

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<sup>140</sup> [www.yuleerailroaddays.org](http://www.yuleerailroaddays.org); [www.afn.org/~archer/](http://www.afn.org/~archer/)



organization of Confederate sympathizers.<sup>141</sup> Confederate Civil War re-enactors maintained camp sites in Callahan and Archer, and several booths at both venues sold Confederate and other, “Southern,” memorabilia—flags, t-shirts, and bumper stickers. Sponsors for the event at the two sites included a number of regional Sons of Confederate Veterans camps from as far away as Tennessee working in concert with local business leaders, legislators, and state administrators.<sup>142</sup> The apparently inclusive gathering was promoted under the banner “Standing United As Americans,” yet the presence of “Blacks in the Confederacy” and “Miss Confederate Cavalry 2008” belied the Confederate foundation and framework.<sup>143</sup> So, too, did the proclamation in the SCV pamphlet that “some, in an attempt to alter history are consciously distorting the memory and reputation of the Confederate soldier, as well as the motives for his suffering and sacrifice,” implying that the SCV and those associated with them held title to the true history of the South.<sup>144</sup> The Confederate presence in places like Callahan illustrated the continuing existence of collective memories associating the region with the rest of the South by creating a visible impression of stereotypical “Southern” pride, yet the Confederate flags and overtures to “Dixie” also generated an underlying sense

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<sup>141</sup> *Lieutenant Edward John Kent Johnston, CSN, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) camp #745* (Yulee, Fla.). Members of the “Order of the Confederate Rose” support the Confederate version of history, but they are not necessarily the direct descendants of Confederate veterans found in the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

<sup>142</sup> *Standing United As Americans* (Archer, Fla.: June 7, 2008), Yulee Railroad Days event flyer; *Lieutenant Edward John Kent Johnston, CSN, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) camp #745* (Yulee, Fla.), information pamphlet; *Alachua County and The War Between the States, 1861-1865, The Governor Madison Starke Perry camp #1424, SCV*, information pamphlet.

<sup>143</sup> *Standing United As Americans* (Archer, Fla.: June 7, 2008). The flyer also promoted a fundraiser where individuals walked a short distance in honor of a local resident. Five of the six walkers honored war veterans, law enforcement officers, Civil War buffs, re-enactors, and a cannon maker, while the sixth walker honored Bo Diddley, “King of Oldies Rock’n’Roll” and “Hometown American Hero.”

<sup>144</sup> *Lieutenant Edward John Kent Johnston, CSN, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) camp #745* (Yulee, Fla.).

of shame and dismay among visitors who reject the divisiveness caused by the glorification of the Confederate past.

Linking Yulee to an Old South ideal united some white Southerners, but it also absolutely divided white Southerners internally and, more obviously, from black Southerners. This was a desirable outcome prior to the Civil Rights era, but advances towards cultural equality and the promotion of multiculturalism have buttressed the demand for inclusion. By the late twentieth century, Yulee's railroad served as a broader public medium than his Southern identity for unifying the region's residents. Although memories of Yulee in the context of the Confederacy pervade the event in most locations, Yulee's Florida Railroad is the focal point of the affair, and remembering his role in the founding and development of numerous north Florida towns as a result of the railroad stands at the forefront of the region's collective memory. Yulee's Jewish identity does not personally touch many of the area's residents, and associating him with the Confederacy—with a monolithic, white South—generates as much division as unity, but his railroad satisfies the demand for a broader and more inclusive history. The railroad led to the inception and maintenance of communities that remain bound together through their common history, ties to the land, and economic sustenance.

However, even in this seemingly neutral context, memories of Yulee evinced division. A black voice, less discernible than the louder and more politically potent white ones, contested the public expressions over the memory of Yulee. Black Southerners voiced discontent with public portrayals of Yulee's development efforts that did not acknowledge the widespread use of black slave labor. In commemorating the railroad's physical and symbolic unifying bond between the region's communities, white

Southerners had ignored, downplayed, or excluded black laborers. Yulee's railroad, like his plantations and much of the antebellum South, was built on the back of slave labor. Enslaved blacks were the primary labor force in the railroad's construction, and black labor maintained the railroad's service well into the twentieth century. Prior to the late twentieth century, historical recollections of black contributions to the railroads did not exist other than in a romantic form, but black collective memory recalled the exploitation of black labor and black citizens pressured the white sponsors of Yulee Railroad Days to present their memories alongside those of the area's white residents. If the intention behind remembering Yulee in the context of his railroad was to build community bonds, then the relationship between local blacks and whites, whose fracture was revealed in the public commemoration, had to be reconciled.

The Yulee Days event became a vehicle for building community bridges between the region's white and black residents.<sup>145</sup> Participants in the event recognized their neighbors' claims and amended the representations in their public history. In 2008, the Matheson Museum in Gainesville, Florida, erected wall panels in its main exhibition hall acknowledged Yulee's manipulation of slave labor in building the railroad. The exhibitors conclude that all citizens along the Florida Railroad owe the existence of their towns, homes, and livelihoods to slave labor as much as Yulee's entrepreneurial foresight. Likewise, panels along the Sweetwater Branch trail behind the Matheson Museum also acknowledge Yulee's application of slave labor in his projects. The Archer Railroad Museum now serves as an embarkation point for an increasingly popular tour of a section of the black heritage trail running between Archer and Cedar

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<sup>145</sup> Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 307-313.

Keys and commemorating the infamous Rosewood massacre.<sup>146</sup> Survivors of this infamous massacre fled the site on trains—on Yulee’s slave-built tracks—that transported them safely to Archer. Civic cooperation and community integration characterize the event, and both racial communities participate as consumers and retailers. Corrected by a largely ignored, or forgotten, black collective memory, Yulee Railroad Days shows how communities can transcend racial barriers by remembering a more inclusive past, one that builds stronger contemporary community bonds.

Florida’s collective memory, often embodied in its public history, has imagined David Levy Yulee in various and shifting manners since the end of the nineteenth century. Early memories revolving around Yulee’s Jewish and Southern identities dominated national and regional media outlets and popular literature, while his prominence in Florida’s political and economic development pervaded early Florida history texts. Several north Florida communities remembered Yulee in the context of his support for the Confederacy, a relationship maintained in the memories of local residents through the demarcation of his former plantations and associated antebellum “Old South” lifestyle in their public history. This “Lost Cause” veneration has receded, though certainly not disappeared, from the public foreground since the social upheavals of the 1960s and the simultaneous waves of northern immigration into the state. Replacing the image of Yulee the Southern planter is a currently more widely acceptable image of Yulee the entrepreneur and railroad developer. North Florida communities have always remembered Yulee through the railroad, but a broader public recognition of him in this context has been limited to the last forty years. At the same

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<sup>146</sup> Archer Railroad Museum, visitor sign-in records, Accessed in October 2005.

time, Yulee has also been increasingly recognized as a Jew. This representation not only assists the relatively new Jewish communities in binding themselves to Florida's history, but also imagines a multicultural past that accepted, and continues to accept, diversity with understanding. Symbolized in the quasi-permanence of the monuments dedicated in his honor, David Levy Yulee remains engrained in Florida's collective memory.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION: IDENTITIES AND MEMORIES OF DAVID LEVY YULEE

Over the course of much of the nineteenth century, David Levy Yulee helped transform Florida from a thinly settled territory into a growing and prosperous American state. He was one of Florida's key political figures in its antebellum history: he helped lead the territory into statehood, excised the state from the Union, and reintegrated it into the United States again. Yulee's dedication to Florida's economic development secured its place in the Atlantic World marketplace and included the development of its communication and transportation networks and the introduction of its first railroads. Yulee expanded his wealth and social status during this time, but the complicated relationship between his Jewish identity, his political conservatism, and his standing among the social elite made him a controversial and paradoxical character.

Historians have surveyed Yulee's political and economic contributions to Florida's historical development, but they have not ventured deeply into the construction of his social identity. Yulee's Jewish heritage was always a hot topic among historians and the general public, yet it has not been a central theme in any historical investigation of him. Historians have also not explored the manner in which Yulee depicted himself as a white Southern man, a social construction that secured his place in Southern society while counteracting anti-Semitic critiques of his standing and prestige. Moreover, Yulee's historical significance extended beyond his lifetime and into the realm of social memory, where different communities in the last one hundred twenty years have grappled over his identity as a means of asserting and validating their own social needs and identities.

Yulee exemplifies the centrality of race in nineteenth-century social constructions of Jewish identity. Abundant scholarship exists about Jewish identity in the modern era that generally ranks race among other markers of social identity constructs such as religion, culture, ethnicity, and nationality, but Yulee illustrates race as the primary determinant in these models. Unlike the subjects of most inquiries who self-identify as cultural or religious Jews, Yulee not only distanced himself from all forms of Judaism, but closely aligned with Christianity. Too, as a prominent public figure, a generous collection of personal letters and public commentary displays American society's connection of Yulee to Judaism in contrast to his own separation from it. Further, sources indicate that Yulee resigned himself to his social designation and utilized it to advance his claims to status. Todd Endelman and his colleagues illustrate the manner in which society ascribed a racial Jewish identity for England's nineteenth-century Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and the way Disraeli manipulated his ambiguous racial classification, especially by invoking the widely believed myth of Sephardic superiority.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Yulee followed this same course of action.

Race and whiteness are fluid and contingent categories that, though exclusive from each other, are best understood in their relationship.<sup>2</sup> Europeans viewed each other as having a certain degree of whiteness based on their perceived cultural similarities even as they separated themselves through inter-European racial classifications, a process further enhanced when extended beyond the continent. Jews

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<sup>1</sup> Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner eds., *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), esp. 1-22; Endelman, "A Hebrew to the End": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness," in Paul Smith and Charles Richmond eds., *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 106-130.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 42-43. 68-69.

represented a complex and disturbing ambiguity in this classificatory system as they were considered white and black; Western and European, and the European conception of its other: Eastern and Oriental. In America, Jews transcended many traditional European restrictions, partly because the stricter color and racial boundaries between white and black eased Jews' ability to cast themselves as white.

Leonard Rogoff argues that Americans throughout all regions of the country viewed Jews as more black than white and questioned their fitness for citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Jews were only tenuously white, a status which could be heightened by their adoption of the dominant socio-cultural values. Traditional European animosities against Jews persisted in the murkier color lines and racial barriers of the North, where consistent European immigration regenerated historical divisions between religions more than race, and where historical Jewish blackness often hindered the proposition of Jewish whiteness. However, Southerners readily imagined Jews as white in both settled and frontier territories where slavery dominated the political-economy and socio-cultural values grounded in the right to own slaves persisted, even if the precise racial status of Jews remained in question. Americans in the North and South recognized Yulee's racial otherness—it was practically assumed—but they rarely challenged his whiteness.

Yulee's cultural performance as a Southern planter mitigated any negative perceptions of him associated with his Jewish heritage while complimenting his invocation of Sephardic superiority and other positive attributes associated with a racial Jewish identity. Assuming the role of the planter, an archetype of white Southern

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in Mark K. Bauman ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 390-426.



manhood, Yulee underscored his whiteness while concurrently alleviating the feminized Oriental attributes embodied in his racial Jewishness. Presenting himself as a part of the Southern elite included the purchase of plantations and slaves, maintaining a firm conviction in states' rights, and adopting Southern social and cultural values, including the acceptance of Christian values and the supremacy of the Christian religion. Yulee adhered to these guidelines, and American society recognized him as a member of the Southern elite, but he represents a departure from stereotypical representations of Southern planters. For one, Yulee was an emergent capitalist entrepreneur who earned his wealth through modern venture capitalism rather than solely through traditional cash-crop production. Politically, Yulee maintained a proto-imperialist position that sought to expand American interests throughout the Gulf of Mexico and South America rather than the stagnant introspection and state concerns generally attributed to Southern political leaders. Moreover, he favored federal assistance, much like his Western political colleagues, in a region widely recognized for its determined avoidance of federal interference.<sup>4</sup>

Informed by the aggressive rhetoric and actions evident in the era's social and political media, Americans—and later, historians—imagined the Southern planter elite as a monolithic ruling force, a characterization that continues to pervade the public's imagination. As slave-owners and landowners, masters of men and nature; of their households, society, and politics, the planter elite ruled Southern society, but their domination was not as secure as the era's social and political media—and later

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur W. Thompson, *David Yulee: A Study of Nineteenth Century American Thought and Enterprise* (Ph.D., diss., Columbia University, 1954), 1-11; Matthew J. Karp, "Slavery and American Sea Power: The Navalist Impulse in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 77:2 (May 2011), 283-324.

historians—proclaimed. While the South expanded westward, white Southern men confronted each other over the extension of political and social leadership in the new Southern territories. Families from the Carolinas and Virginia attempted to assert their traditional leadership along the Southern frontier, but newcomers to the region, like Yulee, forced these constantly anxious Southern patriarchs to share political power in exchange for racial unity and the continuation of white supremacy in the South. After attaining political clout, these newly empowered white Southerners upheld the social and cultural values of the Southern elite with whom they just battled, presenting at least the façade of a monolithic white South.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, though projecting himself in this contest as a champion of the people through the Democratic Party, few links existed between men of Yulee's standing and the typical Florida settler. Whiteness may have replaced class as the qualification for political participation, but Yulee based his elite social and political status on conservative notions of class and heredity as much as whiteness.

Examining the different images of Yulee presented through collective and historical memory reveals much about the interconnections between memory, identity, and history. Memories are durable but they are also malleable, a quality oftentimes providing them with longevity. Some memories of Yulee have resisted change and remained constant while others have been adapted and revised to fit changing circumstances. Different memories of Yulee have been more important to various communities over time as well. Some memories have been long repressed, purposely forgotten by some, while other social groups or individuals retained them to be revealed

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's plantation frontier before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), esp. 1-15, 154-190, 219-246.

at more opportune historical moments. Some memories had been at the forefront of the public imagination before receding into the recesses of sub-consciousness, the barely remembered, yet they remain available and are occasionally invoked to shape and solidify community identity. Remembering certain facets of Yulee's life or envisioning him in particular manners aligned individuals with social and political platforms that granted access for some to social and political power while shutting the door on it to others. It follows that common memories symbolically unify some communities while generating divisions and separation from other communities. Memories of Yulee also illustrate the alignment of, and discrepancies between, historical and collective memories, a comparison and contrast most noticeable in public history. For example, the discourse of science—academia—both reinforces and contradicts different memories in the public domain illustrating the tension between modern and pre-modern nodes of historical retention and construction. In each case, memories are critical in the construction of usable histories, history that is not necessarily factual, but that upholds the foundational ideals and values of any given community.<sup>6</sup>

Yulee has been consistently remembered as a Jew, yet this aspect of his identity, once central in national discussions about civic and racial citizenship, has been replaced by other components of his character. Conversations about the parameters of American citizenship have not faded from the national limelight, but Jews are no longer a major part of this discussion. There is little disagreement in late twentieth-century America about the citizenship status of Jews, as they have generally been accepted as

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<sup>6</sup> Susan A. Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory," *American Historical Review* 102:5 (Dec, 1997), 1374, 1378-79; Susan A. Crane ed., *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity: art galleries and the making of modern culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Donald Preziosi, *Brain of the earth's body: art, museums, and the phantasms of modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)..

white since at least the end of World War II.<sup>7</sup> Comfortable in their whiteness, Jewish migrants to Florida in the last half-century have placed Yulee at the center of their collective memories because he evinces a long-standing Jewish presence in the South, and one that has made lasting contributions to Southern history. In the process, he affirms a perception of historical Jewish whiteness and integration in the South based on the premise that Jews accept the dominant Southern culture of their neighbors. Yet now, as in the antebellum era, the linkage between Jews and their white Southern neighbors perpetuates the disingenuous image of a monolithic white South even though south Florida's population is distinct from that in the northern part of the state. While south Florida's Jews, a significant and vocal minority of the state's total population since the mid-twentieth century, tout Yulee's accomplishment, his Jewish identity is not central to the publicly displayed collective memories of many north Florida citizens. North Florida's established Jewish communities, like other long-standing Jewish communities throughout the South, are an assimilated and shrinking minority of even Florida's comparatively small Jewish population, and one that tends to remain quiet on the subject of promoting Jewish exception, preferring the anonymity achieved through the adoption of Southern culture and integration learned from generations of historical experience.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Ira M. Sheskin, "The Dixie Diaspora: The 'Loss' of the Small Southern Jewish Community," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, Mark K. Bauman ed. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama press, 2006), 165-191; Stephen Whitfield, "Braided Identity of Southern Jewry," *Dixie Diaspora*, 428.

Myth and lore surrounding Yulee's family history remains in many memories, as do the lingering conflicts over the nature of his religious identity. Recent research by historian Chris Monaco has rectified much of the erroneous and fanciful information about Yulee's family background while solidifying the historical case for his Jewish identity. Nevertheless, professional and amateur historians continue complicating this topic. Some employ any one, or parts of several, of the traditional romantic tales about Yulee's family history, each providing different degrees of linkage between Yulee and Judaism, Islam, and/or Christianity. Others persist in linking him to Christianity through his perceived intellectual and spiritual affection, or at least his public association, with it. However, as the investigation of Yulee's Jewish identity in the preceding chapter exhibits, Yulee was always ambivalent about religion while never doubting his racial connection to Judaism.

Despite being bound to Christianity, many people continue conjuring decidedly non-Christian Orientalist images of him. Celeste Kavanaugh, for instance, insists on Yulee's Christian fervor while maintaining his bond to the East by innocently describing him as "olive-skinned" and "slightly built."<sup>9</sup> Michael Grundwald, a journalist and author of *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise*, derided Yulee as "a powder keg of a man with bushy eyebrows, a broad forehead, and dark hair that curled around his ears."<sup>10</sup> Applying the seemingly defunct notion of Jewish racial

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<sup>9</sup> Celeste H. Kavanaugh, *David Levy Yulee: A Man and His Vision* (Amelia Island, Fla.: Amelia Island Museum of History, 1995), 6, 11, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Grundwald, *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 65.

identity to Yulee in twenty-first century America illustrates the strength and persistence of race as a category for Jewish identification.<sup>11</sup>

Memories of Yulee's Southern identity and his association with the former Confederacy illustrate the continuing belief in a distinctive South. Historians argue over the characteristics of Southern identity or whether a peculiar Southern identity even exists. While the origins of any such identity remain obscured and debatable, its existence is nevertheless confirmed through the persistence of regional memories associating Yulee, the ambivalent Confederate but zealous Southerner, with an imagined Old South.<sup>12</sup> Until the mid-twentieth century, the predominance of segregation and second-class citizenship for blacks characterized the regional South. In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and increasing migration into the South, specific markers of white Southern identity became more difficult to discern. The continuing reverence for the Old South through the vehicle of David Levy Yulee illustrates the continuity of belief in a specifically white Southern identity linked to the former Confederacy and the antebellum South.

Despite the enduring bond between Yulee and the Old South, conflict continues to surround the nature of Yulee's relationship to the Confederacy and, consequently, the depth of his Southern character. For the first half century after his death, Floridians' historical and collective memories recalled an individual who supplied resources to beleaguered Confederate forces and Southern citizens, who helped muster Florida's men into Confederate fighting soldiers, and who strove to ease wartime hardships for

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<sup>11</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 209-234.

<sup>12</sup> James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Florida's neediest citizens. Yet, these memories also included recollections of litigation against the Confederate government, prohibiting Confederate troops from performing their duties, wartime profiteering, and charges of Yankee favoritism and readiness to surrender to the Union in late 1864 after the tide had turned against the Confederacy. Moreover, these memories were localized in Florida; broader regional studies did not remember Yulee. Yulee's apparent self-interest, coupled with his protection of what he believed to be Florida's interest over that of the Confederacy and his efforts to reunite his home state with rest of the union following the Civil War, compounded the perception of his ambiguous connection to the Confederacy and impacted his retention in Southern memory.

Within this contested terrain, white Southerners in north Florida, led by women's groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Citrus County Federation of Women's Clubs, imposed their visions of Yulee's Confederate ties on the physical landscape and affirmed him in this context in public history. Historians and the region's residents still debate the profundity of Yulee's Confederate allegiance and the nature of any idiosyncratic Southern identity, yet the small but enduring bronze commemorative plaques at Cottonwood, in Archer, on the site of his antebellum Fernandina home, and on the archaeological ruins bearing Yulee's name at Homossassa, are markers of public history that appear to permanently engrain memories on the region's physical landscape and in the collective memories of local citizens. Nevertheless, by the 1960s memories of Yulee in the Confederate context began clashing with the views of the droves of immigrants arriving in Florida, and increasingly with state administrators. Notwithstanding the continuing existence of Old

South sentiments among some of the region's residents, other public commemorations overshadow those paying tribute to the Confederacy through Yulee's white Southern identity.

Regional recollections associating Yulee with the railroad dominate the social and physical landscape in north Florida in the early twenty-first century. Memories of Yulee informing broader regional and national conversations about Southern and Jewish identity in early twentieth-century America often overshadowed local memories of his accomplishments as a railroad pioneer. Henry Plant's railroad to Tampa Bay and Henry Flagler's to southeast Florida quickly superseded Yulee's railroad in importance in the state's history and led to the development of the state's three largest metropolitan areas. While the majority of the state's residents remembered Flagler's and Plant's railroads as the ones opening the doors to Florida's demographic and commercial growth, communities impacted by the Florida Railroad have always remembered Yulee foremost in the context of Florida's railroad history.<sup>13</sup> Yulee Railroad Days, the region's most extensive current public commemoration of Yulee's life and accomplishments, is a testament to the centrality of the railroad in north Florida's public imagination.

Nevertheless, attempting to neutralize divisive portrayals of the region's history, events such as Yulee Railroad Days, a community building affair, perpetuated uncomplicated images of the Southern past by ignoring the magnitude of black contributions to the South. Black collective memory in north Florida, and throughout the South, has questioned the accuracy of the predominantly white historical memory that negates the

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<sup>13</sup> John and Sarah Foster propose that the development of central and south Florida began with Reconstruction Era "Yankee Strangers," and not railroad barons like Plant and Flagler. John T. Foster and Sarah Whitner Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers: the Transformation of Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1999).



impact of black Southerners on the region's history while concurrently building a new and inclusive historical discourse.<sup>14</sup>

Collective memory is vitally important to any community's self-constructed and ascribed history and identity. Popular collective memory may not always be aligned with historical memory, although it acquires greater respectability when historical scholarship supports its position, yet in many cases the value of collective memories to the individual and community as a foundation for identity construction often supersede historical memories in relevance. They are more important and meaningful to the historical consciousness of certain audiences regardless of their factual basis. Striving to produce an accurate historical memory, a product of modernity, is not as meaningful or soothing to the individual as the remembered and time-honored myth-history of collective memory. Individuals, as members of imagined communities—collectives—value personal usable history rather than the cold and distant history often projected by historical memory, especially academic history.<sup>15</sup>

David Levy Yulee is remembered by various groups as one of nineteenth-century Florida's most prominent figures. His critical role in Florida's economic and political development earned him the label "Florida's favorite son" while his passionate defense of states' rights prompted the title "Florida fire-eater" in the state's historical memory.<sup>16</sup> One of the pioneer Southern capitalist-entrepreneurs, Yulee was also the nation's first

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<sup>14</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 227-269.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon S. Wood, "No Thanks for the Memories," review of *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle Over American History*, by Jill Lepore, *The New York Review of Books*, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jan/13/no-thanks-memories/>

<sup>16</sup> Ulrich B. Phillips, *The Course of the South to Secession* (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1939), 135.

Jewish senator. Since his death, images of him as a railroad baron, an ardent Southerner, and a Jew have endured in the memories of local communities, regional boosters and detractors, and in national conversations, and have been introduced to the region's newer residents. The projection and prominence of any of these memories in the public's imagination and on Florida's geographical landscape has shifted over time and in the context of changing historical circumstances. Nevertheless, while different facets of Yulee's life have been promoted, repressed, or ignored, Floridians' memories of him as an important man in the history of their state has never faded.

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