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Alachua Settlers and the Second Seminole War

by C. S. Monaco

The forest must be subdued before the enemy can be finally conquered. Every inch of ground taken from him must be firmly held by permanent settlers who will cultivate the soil and make the wilderness their home. Under this system the savage would gradually retire before the approach of civilized man.

R. K. Call, "Governor's Message," January 11, 1839¹

The role of Florida's interior settlements and relatively modest settler population has never been assigned much historical significance vis-à-vis the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). With few exceptions, the historiography has focused on the military aspects of this protracted conflict, with certain key battles, military commanders, Native American leaders, and the destruction of the east coast sugar plantations garnering the most interest.² The

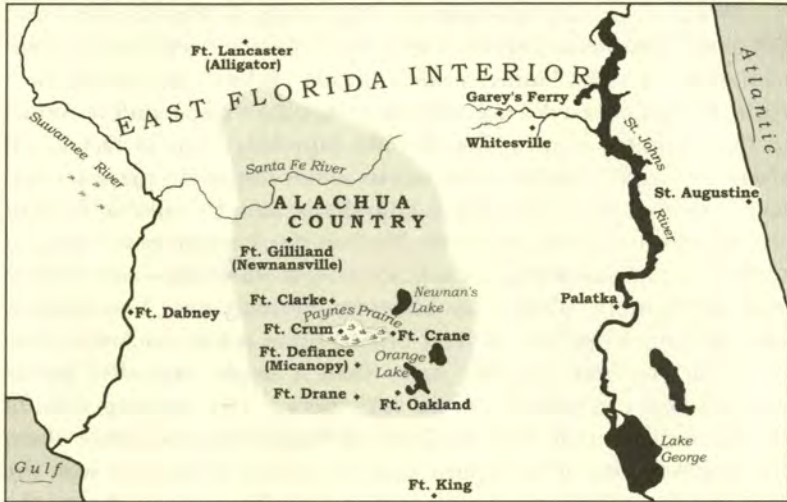
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1. R. K. Call, "Governor's Message," *Floridian and Advocate* (Tallahassee), January 12, 1839.
2. The foremost scholarly treatment remains John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1836*, rev. ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1985). More recent studies, geared for general readers, include John and Mary Lou Missall, *The Seminole Wars: America's Longest Conflict* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Joe Knetsch, *Florida's Seminole Wars, 1817-1858* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2003). For the role of African-Americans, see Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom Seeking People*, eds. Alcione M. Amos and Thomas P. Senter (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); Larry Eugene Rivers, *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 148-49, 185, 191-94, 203-8.

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ramifications of President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act (1830) which celebrated the prospect of placing "a civilized population on large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters"³ are well-known, along with the treaties of Moultrie Creek (1823), Payne's Landing (1832) and Fort Gibson (1833), accords that further set the conflict on a direct course. African-Americans—free and enslaved—have also been acknowledged, albeit belatedly, as central players. In contrast, Anglo-American settlers have arguably been the least recognized faction, and indeed have generally been mentioned only in their ancillary (and often maligned) role as frontier militia. Yet the Second Seminole War, despite its longevity and cost, was not dissimilar to America's earliest settler clashes with indigenous peoples.⁴ To be sure, the problem of runaway slaves and possible insurrection was at issue, but the central motivation, as suggested by Andrew Jackson himself, was far broader in scope: complete settler domination and control of the land.⁵ Once this status was achieved, "supremacy over the red and black races," according to the settler point of view, would follow.⁶ An enforced inequality and supremacy over indigenes was in fact the operative condition of settler societies throughout the world and, "American exceptionalism" notwithstanding, this state of affairs was much in

3. President Jackson's Message to Congress "On Indian Removal," December 6, 1830, *Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990*, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
4. The use of *indigenous*—while rare among Florida historians—has several advantages. This term can be applied transnationally and thus links the Native people of different countries as a First People. *Indigenous* has become the word of choice in the comparatively new field of settler colonialism, a body of scholarship that has strongly influenced this article. This term (along with its variant, *indigene*) readily identifies Native people as the original possessors of the land and is relatively free of negative connotations. "Indian," by contrast, carries significant cultural baggage, so to speak—much of it derogatory and/or stereotyped. Nevertheless, I will intersperse more conventional wording throughout this essay whenever appropriate. For an example of scholarship that utilizes a similar framework in relation to Seminoles, see Susan A. Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones: A Seminole Saga* (Lawrence:University Press of Kansas, 2003).
5. For the importance of placing the American experience into a settler framework, see Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). See also, Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
6. George Gillett Keen, "The Survival of the Fittest," January 12, 1900, in *Cracker Times and Pioneer Lives: The Florida Reminiscences of George Gillett Keen and Sarah Pamela Williams*, eds. James M. Denham and Canter Brown, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 44.



The forts and towns of the East Florida interior (circa 1836). Abandoned settlements not shown include: Hogtown, in the vicinity of present-day Gainesville; Spring Grove, in the western Paynes Prairie region; and Wacahoota, directly west of Ft. Defiance. Micanopy, the first territorial village, was rebuilt after the war and is the only one of the original Alachua settlements still in existence. Map by author.

evidence in the United States.⁷ In the case of Florida, the peninsular interior—the region between the Suwannee and St. Johns rivers, once the exclusive domain of the Seminoles—became a focus of Anglo settlement from 1812 onward. It was this locale, most especially the productive farming and cattle grazing land of north-central Florida known as the “Alachua country” (*Tierras de la Chua*), which became the principal, contested ground.⁸ Within this prized region few places held as much resonance for both settlers and Native Americans than Paynes Prairie (near present-day Gainesville), a 20,000 acre expanse of grassy plane and fresh water marsh, encompassed by an even larger area of lakes and dense hardwood hammocks.

7. For a concise examination of this subject, see Dolores Janiewski, “Gendering, Racializing and Classifying: Settler Colonization in the United States, 1590-1990,” in *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class*, eds. Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (London: Sage, 1995), 132-60.
8. Chris Monaco, “Fort Mitchell and the Settlement of the Alachua Country,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 1-25. “Alachua” will be used here in the original sense: the land between present Lake City in the north and Orange Lake to the south. During the 1830s, the actual Alachua County encompassed a far larger area and stretched from present Columbia County to Charlotte County.

Whether the Seminole wars actually qualify as “Florida’s Iliad and Odyssey,” as historian Gary Mormino once characterized them, is open to debate.⁹ Unlike Homer’s epic, Florida settlers came to stay and build. Frontiersmen did not arrive to realize their quest, only to return to their original homes. The Florida experience was in fact much closer to Virgil’s *Aeneid*: a contentious settler migration toward a new land.¹⁰ Be that as it may, there is little doubt that the humble frontier settlements in the Paynes Prairie-Alachua district were never integral to most renditions of this epic tale. Even so, modest towns and hamlets such as Micanopy, Wachoota, Hogtown, Spring Grove, Newnansville (the Alachua County seat), and myriad other settler enclaves, some of which consisted of little more than a single extended family, comprised the nexus of interior settlement.¹¹ The opening salvo of the Second Seminole War, the Battle of Black Point, took place along the southern rim of the prairie and was contemporaneous with the mass exodus of terrorized settlers from their homesteads during the war’s initial phase. About 2,000 men, women and children desperately sought protection within various log fortifications that were hastily erected for their defense, a dramatic episode that drew intense national interest at the time but remains virtually unacknowledged today.¹² Moreover, while the army’s conduct during two battles in the fortified village of Micanopy once evoked considerable national pride during an otherwise dismal period for the military, these engagements are perhaps the least known of the war.¹³ By addressing these and

9. Gary Mormino, “A River of Peace? The South Florida Frontier in the Nineteenth Century,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (July 1991): 58.

10. For more on Homer and Virgil, seen within a settler context, see Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 97-98.

11. Of these, only the village of Micanopy still remains. The arrival of the Florida Railroad just before the Civil War spurred the growth of new towns along the route between Fernandina and Cedar Key, but also meant economic ruin for many towns and hamlets that were bypassed; see, George W. Pettengill, Jr., *The Story of the Florida Railroads, 1834-1903* (1952; reprint, Jacksonville, FL: Southeast Chapter of Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, 1998), 21-24, 28-36.

12. For the number who sought shelter in the interior forts, see “Extract of a letter to the editor of the Savannah Georgian,” September 4, 1836, in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, September 22, 1836.

13. In an effort to address this dearth of research, Gulf Archaeology Research Institute (Crystal River, Florida) is currently undertaking an extensive archaeological investigation of the Battle of Micanopy and the Battle of Welika Pond (both 1836) as well as the remnants of the two forts centered in the present town of Micanopy. The National Park Service’s Battlefield Protection Program has funded this study.

other gaps in the historiography, I hope to demonstrate the ultimate significance of the neglected settler paradigm, both in terms of the peninsular interior and in regard to the Second Seminole War as a whole. The romanticized image of the frontiersman has certainly been a major component of the American mythos, one that has, for a variety of reasons, been fairly muted in Florida territorial history. On the other hand, the view of settler colonialism as a largely hegemonic force that aimed, through a variety of means, to deprive indigenous people of their lands and basic rights and strove to maintain supremacy at all cost, has been a relatively recent scholarly focus.¹⁴ The fact that this oppressive rationale stood alongside exalted notions of personal liberty and equality is a virtual signature of settler communities. My intention, however, is not to seek villains or heroes but to utilize the settler perspective as a valuable interpretive tool. While the main emphasis will necessarily center on the Florida interior, I do not intend to negate the import of St. Augustine or other communities east of the St. Johns, all of which played their own part in the war and also exhibited a settler *mentalité*. Nor do I wish to minimize the substantial settler population of Middle Florida (between the Apalachicola and Suwannee rivers). Instead, this article will largely confine itself to the so-called “seat of war”: the peninsular interior. After all, it was this region’s “cracker” contingent who, according to John T. Sprague—the premier contemporary chronicler of the war—were most culpable in instigating hostilities.¹⁵ Space does not allow for a full review of the war years and so I will necessarily restrict most discussion to the origins of the war and proceed until the first year of conflict.

The Patriot War and Beyond

Perhaps the clearest articulation of the settler mindset in Florida arose as a result of Anglo-American incursions into Spanish East Florida beginning in 1812. Dubbed the Patriot

14. In addition to the sources cited herein, see Udo Krautwurst, “What is Settler Colonialism? An Anthropological Meditation on Frantz Fanon’s ‘Concerning Violence,’” *History and Anthropology* 14 (2003): 55-72; Donald Denoon, “Understanding Settler Societies,” *Historical Studies* 17 (July 1979): 511-27; Graeme Wynn, “Settler Societies in Geographical Focus,” *Historical Studies* 20 (April 1983): 353-66; Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (London: Cassell, 1999). For a concise review of the literature on settler colonialism, see Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 6-11.
15. John T. Sprague, journal entry, May 6, 1839, in “Macomb’s Mission to the Seminoles: John T. Sprague’s Journal, Kept During April and May 1839,” ed. Frank F. White, Jr., *Florida Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (October 1956): 166.

War (1812-1814), this invasion created havoc throughout the sparsely inhabited and ill-defended colony and endured, in one form or another, for several years. The patriot venture into the Alachua country, initially led by Daniel Newnan, a Georgia militia colonel, was not only a punitive expedition—aiming a blow at the stronghold of the Seminoles, the Georgians' long-time foes. It was also intended to evaluate prospects for settlement. As it happened, Newnan's advance narrowly averted complete annihilation.¹⁶ In response, a much larger U.S. military force entered the southern Paynes Prairie area and decimated such prosperous Seminole villages as Paynes Town and Bowlegs Town, actions that resulted in the dispersal of these Native people from their land.¹⁷ After efforts to capture St. Augustine failed, a core group of Georgian settlers, along with their families, arrived once again in Alachua—this time with colonization exclusively in mind.¹⁸ It was here that these determined individuals attempted to establish a formal state structure that they proclaimed as the independent (and short-lived) Republic of East Florida (1814). In promulgating this scheme, patriot leaders sent a formal appeal to Washington, D.C. that requested annexation by the United States. Integral to their declarations was a plainly articulated settler rationale that not only relied on the rampant nationalist and expansionist sentiments that surfaced during the War of 1812, but invoked biblical precepts to justify their land claims in Spanish Florida. As “proper” cultivators of the soil, unlike the “Savage Race” they usurped, Anglo settlers were acting according to God's commandments, as they were now in the process of subduing and replenishing the earth. This was an essential duty, it was argued, that the Spanish had utterly neglected—much to their discredit—during Spain's lengthy colonial tenure.¹⁹ Such notions were widely accepted at the time

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16. James G. Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 240-43; Rembert Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border, 1810-1815* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1954), 195-210.
 17. A separate “Negro Town” was also destroyed. See Colonel Smith to General Flournoy (Camp New Hope, East Florida), February 24, 1813, in T. Frederick Davis, “United States Troops in Spanish East Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (April 1931): 271-72.
 18. Monaco, “Fort Mitchell,” 1-17.
 19. “Petition for Admission into the Union” and “Resolution by the Legislative Council of the Elotchaway District,” January 25, 1814, Patriot War Documents, Miscellaneous Documents, Tebeau-Field Library of Florida History, Cocoa, FL.

and were also in accord with influential Lockean concepts of land ownership that originated during the previous century. This philosophy emphasized “improvement” to heretofore pristine and “neglected” land as an economic and moral necessity.²⁰ It should be noted that settler colonies throughout the British Empire (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada, for example) also made full use of this particular reasoning in justifying their dominion over indigenous lands.²¹ The patriot construction of a “Republic” also reveals a presumption of self-government and political independence that was intrinsic to the settler collective. Such beliefs harken back to Puritan John Winthrop’s claim of a direct covenant with God which sanctioned the right “to draw our own articles.”²² This same supposition also inspired Texans to establish a separate republic in 1836.

Even though Secretary of State James Monroe rejected the patriot proposal, the cultural imperatives of settler supremacy and privilege in peninsular Florida can be traced from this period onward. Indeed, the initial patriot incursion became a foundational moment in settler consciousness. Despite the fact that most fled the interior during the spring of 1814—following the assassination of their leader, General Buckner Harris, by Seminoles—many of the same Georgian protagonists returned with their families after Florida was transferred to United States jurisdiction in 1821. From then on the most “respectable” element assumed leadership roles in the territory.²³ Former patriots, ranging from diligent landowners to the more marginal and less prosperous “cracker” faction, were indeed a conspicuous presence in the interior before and during the Second Seminole War. Their influence was centered in the county seat of Newnansville (named after the impetuous patriot hero, Daniel Newnan).²⁴ Pioneers

20. “Of Property,” in John Locke, *The Works of John Locke, Esq.*, vol. 2 (London: n.p., 1714), 165-172; see also, Barbara Arneil, *John Locke and America: The Defence of English Colonialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

21. See, for example, Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, David Philips, and Shurlee Swain, *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous Peoples in British Settler Colonies, 1830-1910* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-11.

22. Quoted in Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 61.

23. Monaco, “Fort Mitchell,” 18-22.

24. For example, Alachua County’s first judge, Francis R. Sanchez (based in Newnansville), was a leader of the original group that petitioned for admittance into the Union in 1814. For additional background on Sanchez and other leaders, see Monaco, “Fort Mitchell.”

who were part of this return migration, such as the Dell, Lanier, Knight, Cone, Daniels, Stanley, Osteen, Summerlin and Hogan families, joined others who originated from the same “wiregrass” region of southern Georgia and South Carolina and established homesteads.²⁵ This cohort was quite homogeneous and many were linked by marriage. On the other hand, the elite patriot faction was best represented by John H. McIntosh, Jr., the son and namesake of the former “Director” of the Republic of East Florida. McIntosh settled at Oaklands, a 2,500 acre sugar plantation that was adjacent to the estate of his brother-in-law (and fellow Georgian), Colonel Duncan L. Clinch.²⁶ Both plantations were located some distance from Newnansville, in Alachua’s southern district. Despite deep economic disparities, a distinct cultural continuity was in evidence throughout the interior settlements. This demographic feature was most pronounced during the 1820s, a period before many arrivals from other parts of the South, as well as some enterprising northerners, appeared on the scene. Despite a distinct uniformity, however, isolated settlements were often rife with intra-communal conflict. Charges of trespassing as well as more serious crimes of assault and battery were often brought before the superior court in Newnansville.²⁷ Local officials also enforced a rigid, albeit selective, moral code and zealously pursued cases of adultery and fornication, for example. Most defendants were poor whites and all indiscretions had to meet the standard of a “public scandal.”²⁸ Many simply evaded prosecution through marriages of convenience.²⁹ Clearly then, even though pioneers may have resided in one of the most secluded regions of the South, life was not devoid of social mores or conformity. On the other hand, the frontier, just as in the American West, often

25. For a list of the original Alachua patriots, see “Petition to Congress for Admission into the Union,” January 25, 1814, in T. Frederick Davis, “Elotchaway, East Florida, 1814,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (January 1930): 153.

26. Indenture between John H. McIntosh, Jr. and Joseph and Charles Lawton (Charleston, South Carolina), June 19, 1832, Deed Book B, Ancient Records, Alachua County Court House, Gainesville, Florida. [hereafter ACCH].

27. For a sample of such cases, see *Territory v Cason*, November 20, 1835; *Territory v Kelly*, *Territory v Sparkman*, and *Wanton v Summerlin*, November 23, 1835, Superior Court Minutes I, 216-23, Ancient Records, ACCH.

28. Wm. L. Clark and Wm. L. Marshall, *A Treatise on the Law of Crimes*, 2nd ed. (St. Paul, MN: Keef-Davidson Co., 1905), 708; *A Digest of the Laws of the State of Florida, From the Years One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty-Two to the Eleventh Day of March, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty-One, Inclusive* (Tallahassee, FL:n.p. 1881), 424.

served as a safe haven for outlaw gangs, many of whom robbed stagecoaches, preyed on travelers and who—when caught—were subject to vigilante-style retribution.³⁰ The settler community, as historian James M. Denham posits, bore an independent streak and “usually acted on their own authority, often showing little respect for governmental or judicial authority.”³¹

Immigration did not fulfill expectations in the decades following Florida’s cession to the United States. The inexorable “wave of white population” that was thought to have descended upon the Alachua region by some members of Congress, for example, did not match reality.³² The rigors of the frontier combined with the region’s proximity to Native settlements discouraged masses of outsiders from venturing into the interior. Despite major obstacles, however, Alachua claimed 2,200 inhabitants by 1830 (a number that included slaves)—a population that nearly equaled the total for St. Johns County (St. Augustine).³³ Such parity between the former provincial capital and the interior would have been unimaginable under the Spanish when few dared enter Indian lands. Thus, even a relatively modest settler presence represented a notable population shift.

Following the Patriot War and subsequent to Andrew Jackson’s controversial military incursion west of the Suwannee (First Seminole War, 1817-18), the Native population was significantly weakened, both economically and, according to most contemporary observers, in spirit as well.³⁴ By the time of the change of flags in St. Augustine (1821), only a few scattered villages remained in the Paynes Prairie area and the once prosperous cattle-based

29. James M. Denham, “A Rogue’s Paradise”: *Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1861* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 105. For examples of such cases brought forth during a single court session in Newnansville, see *Territory v Jenkins*, *Territory v Reddaught*, *Territory v Ivy*, *Territory v Sparkman*, *Territory v Crews*, April 12, 1828, as well as other cases in Superior Court Minutes 1, 5-7, Ancient Records, ACCH.

30. Denham, “A Rogue’s Paradise,” 185-88.

31. *Ibid.*, 10.

32. “Florida Indians: Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 21, 1823,” in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 2 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1834): 408.

33. William Darby and Theodore Dwight, Jr., *A New Gazetteer of the United States of America* (Hartford, CT, Edward Hopkins, 1833), 165.

34. John K. Mahon, “The Treaty of Moultrie Creek, 1823,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (April 1962): 350.

indigenous culture no longer predominated.³⁵ Micanopy, the new hereditary head of the Alachua band who had succeeded his uncles King Payne and Bowlegs, had resettled with his kinsmen and advisors, including Jumper (Ote Emathla) and the black leader, Abraham, in less abundant circumstances to the south (Okahumpky and Peliklakaha). Micanopy became the principle Seminole leader during the onset of the Second Seminole War.

While serving briefly as Florida governor, Jackson did not stray from his settler roots. His view of the Native tribes was analogous to a vanquished and humiliated foreign enemy: as such, these persons were not allowed autonomy. Jackson therefore refused any attempt at negotiation, a stance that he maintained despite pressure to initiate some form of treaty. Formal accords would only endow Indians with an undeserved sense of sovereignty, according to the governor, and would create rights where none should exist.³⁶ Following Jackson's tenure, however, a congressional committee determined that the U.S. was bound by the terms of the prior Spanish cession (Adams-Onís Treaty, 1819) whereby former colonial "inhabitants," which included indigenes, were to be accorded citizenship.³⁷ Territorial political appointees had no other choice but to proceed with a formal and far-ranging treaty (Moultrie Creek) that would not only put an official end to hostilities but would be obligated, albeit reluctantly, to recognize Native land rights.

During treaty proceedings held between government agents (who mostly consisted of Jackson loyalists) and tribal leaders, Native

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35. For more on the Native American cattle industry, see Joe Knetsch, "Expansion of the Southern Cattle Industry and its Impact on the Seminoles," in *Fear and Anxiety on the Florida Frontier: Articles on the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842*, ed. Joe Knetsch (Dade City, FL, Seminole Wars Foundation Press, 2008), 1-11; see also, J. Leitch Wright, Jr. *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 67. The Alachua region had a centuries-old tradition of cattle production; see, Amy Bushnell, "The Menendez Marquez Cattle Barony at La Chua and the Determinants of Economic Expansion in Seventeenth-Century Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (April 1978): 408-432; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 310.
36. Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun (Pensacola), September 17, 1821, in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, 28 vols., ed. Clarence Edwin Carter (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1934-1975), 22: 207.
37. "Florida Indians: Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 21, 1823," in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 2: 408-10. The benevolent tone of this document is quite remarkable for its time. Ultimately, however, Native rights were placed within the purview of appointed Indian agents and were subject to the discretion of the president.

people were at an enormous disadvantage. In fact, federal officials, following Jackson's advice, believed that only an atmosphere of total domination—reinforced by a strong military presence—would, in the opinion of principal negotiator James Gadsden, “render them [Native Americans] perfectly Subservient to the views of the Government.”³⁸ Nothing less than forfeiture of tribal lands, in exchange for inferior reservation holdings, a monetary stipend, as well as other token benefits, were deemed acceptable.³⁹ This one-sided scenario assured, at least in theory, that the emerging settlements in the peninsular interior and the panhandle would hold exclusive title and be free from Indian interference. Treaties such as this were vital to the construction of “abject Otherness,” as one scholar has phrased it.⁴⁰ Aside from dispossessing Indians from their land and villages (transforming them into refugees), treaties isolated the population from the dominant settler society, restricted mobility and established a framework for continued subjugation.⁴¹ In the case of Moultrie Creek, most reservation land, located well to the south of Paynes Prairie (the northern boundary was near present-day Ocala), was nutrient poor, possessed sparse game, and was unsuitable for the indigenous agro-pastoralist way of life—a situation that did not bode well for the future. Regardless, a settler-based land scheme predominated, one that directly served the interests of yeoman farmers and herdsmen as well as the small but influential group of wealthy planters.⁴² Firm lines of demarcation had been drawn in what amounted to a massive land grab. Most whites would have preferred that all Indians be removed entirely, a scenario that would have additionally secured Anglo-American property rights (including slave ownership). Territory west of the Mississippi had not yet opened for Indian resettlement; hence,

38. J[ames] Gadsden to Secretary of War, June 11, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 22: 696.

39. The details of this treaty are well-known; see Mahon, “Treaty of Moultrie Creek,” 350-72.

40. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 28.

41. *Ibid.*

42. The Alachua planter elite included the aforementioned Clinch and McIntosh as well as Moses E. Levy, a former West Indies merchant (who owned 100,000 acres in East Florida) and the father of future congressional delegate and U.S. senator, David L. Yulee. The average number of slaves per plantation amounted to twenty-six. See “Sugar Planting,” *Niles' Register*, June 15, 1833; C. S. Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 108.

the more typical settler “logic of elimination”⁴³ could not be fully enforced. Yet the treaty still afforded settlers some hope that, in their view, an inferior “species” of people would be confined to their own “nation” so as not “to retard the prosperity of [their] Territory.”⁴⁴ The most bountiful lands were, at least on paper, under settler sovereignty.

Land of Promise?

The contested Alachua country long held mythic allure. However, any conception of a settler “promised land” in the interior has been a missing element in standard histories—not unlike the import of the settlers themselves—and so requires some elaboration. Aside from naturalist William Bartram’s idyllic descriptions of Paynes Prairie during the eighteenth-century,⁴⁵ among the earliest accounts of this little known region were those written during the Patriot War. Like Bartram, these Anglo-Americans were clearly elated by their bountiful surroundings. Orange trees and vegetables appeared to grow “spontaneously” and the few remaining herds of Seminole cattle were amazingly robust, the equal of the finest beef.⁴⁶ The Alachua country, as far as these individuals were concerned, was surely the “most Fertile and . . . most desirable part of North America.”⁴⁷ A degree of hyperbole was certainly in evidence. The patriot advance into East Florida had developed into a heated national controversy and so these men were intent on portraying themselves, as well as the remote country they possessed, in a flattering light. Nevertheless, the Georgians’ first-hand reports confirmed that the area’s Edenic reputation had at least some basis in fact. The self-conscious idealization of “virgin” land as the site of future settlement, one that supplanted indigenous sovereignty, also adhered to a distinct settler outlook that was the equivalent of the seventeenth-century “city upon a hill” claim of Massachusetts Puritans.

43. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387-88.

44. Petition to the President of the United States (Alachua County, Territory of Florida), January 1834, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 6: 465-66.

45. William Bartram, *Travels of William Bartram*, ed. Mark Van Doren, (1791; reprint, New York: Dover, 1955), 169-70.

46. “Extract from a Letter by a Patriot Officer,” January 27, 1814, quoted in *Savannah Republican*, March 1, 1814.

47. “Resolution by the Legislative Council of the Elotchaway District,” January 25, 1814, Patriot War Documents.



Jacob Summerlin (1820-1893), so-called "King of the Crackers," strikes an iconic pose with cattle-whip in this undated photo. The son of a patriot settler from Georgia who lived with his family in Newnanville during the Second Seminole War, Summerlin eventually moved south of Alachua and accrued a fortune in the early Florida cattle industry. *Courtesy Florida State Archives.*

If dominion over the land was the primary impetus at work in the years before and during the Seminole war, then it is vital to come to terms with this landscape. Unlike the scenes of other Indian conflicts in America, such as the western plains or the desert southwest, Florida has presented a more challenging task. Currently, the region formerly designated as the *Tierras de la Chua* (the area south of present Lake City in Columbia County to Orange Lake in northern Marion County) is largely devoid of the ancient woodlands that were once a major distinguishing feature during previous centuries. The canopies of the former lowland hammocks, as was often reported, were so profuse that even the mid-day sun failed to penetrate. Hammocks also contained thick underbrush, composed of “scrubs, shrubs, vines, and parasites of all kinds,” which resulted in a “matted mass, impervious to the eye”—a natural refuge for Indians and their black allies throughout the war.⁴⁸ These ecosystems differed substantially, however, from the more open and dryer pine-barrens that also pervaded the region. Like much of the eastern United States, the Florida interior has undergone massive ecological transformation.⁴⁹ While ancient woodlands have mostly disappeared, Paynes Prairie still remains; its current manifestation as a wildlife preserve, however, has been dramatically altered over time. Massive flocks of exotic birds no longer blot the horizon and of course certain predators, like the once-ubiquitous black wolf, are extinct. Urban growth, years of timber harvesting as well as modern farming techniques have inalterably transfigured this area.⁵⁰ In short, the land the original settlers yearned to “subdue” has born the ultimate fruit, so to speak, of this very impulse. As a result, effort must be made to envision the

48. “The Florida Train,” *Floridian and Advocate* (Tallahassee), July 17, 1841. For further description of these hammocks, see John T. Sprague, April 28, 1839, in “Maccomb’s Mission to the Seminoles,” 161.

49. Similar ecological change occurred in such settler habitats as New Zealand, where—in the course of 100 years—the ecology shifted from predominant rainforest to mostly grassland. See Michele D. Dominy, “Hearing Grass, Thinking Grass: Postcolonialism and Ecology in Aotearoa-New Zealand,” in *Disputed Territories: Land, Culture and Identity in Settler Societies*, eds. David Trigger and Gareth Griffiths (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 54.

50. Tropical old-growth stands can only be seen in select areas of south Florida; see James T. Tanner and Paul B. Hamel, “A Long-Term View of Old-Growth Deciduous Forests,” in *Bottomland Hardwoods of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley*, eds. Paul B. Hamel and Thomas L. Foti (Fayetteville, AK: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1995), 106-08.

contested terrain or the real context will be missed. The *mise-en-scène*, in other words, has to be *imagined* for the territorial years.

In contrast to the reverence that the Alachua settlers exhibited toward the land, remarks by the U.S. Army during the Second Seminole War are notable for their denigration of the entire wilderness region. Following the collapse of the Spanish mission system, colonial administrators left the interior as an autonomous Native American zone; a concept also formalized during British rule. The U.S. Army saw little reason to reject this precedent. Major General Thomas Jesup, one of a series of military commanders during the war, adjudged this territory as fit only for Indians: "Even if the wilderness we are traversing could be inhabited by the white man (which is not the fact) . . . would the [war] be worth the cost?"⁵¹ His informed judgment was that it was not. Subtropical forests and wetlands were considered to be unlike any other place in the South. Hammocks were so impenetrable, another ranking officer complained, "that an Indian who gets perhaps ten feet in them is not to be seen afterwards, and cannot be overtaken."⁵² Accurate, detailed maps were an unknown commodity, few roads existed, and local guides were required for even short journeys. The region in fact presented such a mystery that comparisons to equally unfathomable terrains of Africa and China were common. Special note was given to the fact that General Jackson halted at the Suwannee River during the First Seminole War; supposedly an acknowledgment of the futility of venturing into the dreaded region.⁵³ Faced with "unmitigated suffering and privation, without the least possible expectation of fame or glory," General Winfield Scott suggested that a bounty of 160 acres be offered to each man who enlisted, but stipulated that this should not be Florida land: "that would be a fraud."⁵⁴ Officers who were compelled to officially defend the conduct of the war, failed to mention the verdant Paynes

51. Jesup quoted by Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *From Everglade to Canyon with the Second United States Cavalry* (1875; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 33.

52. Testimony of Colonel William Lindsay, December 7, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 7: 137. For mention of the unparalleled "verdure and altitude" of these "primeval groves of nature," specifically in the Micanopy area, see Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 48.

53. "Major General Scott's Address or Summary of Evidence Taken in his Case," January 19, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 7: 198.

54. Winfield Scott to Lewis Cass, June 14, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 7: 279.

Prairie; the year round growing season; the steadily increasing stocks of cattle, horses and hogs in Alachua; or techniques such as “girdling” whereby settlers were starting to transform hammocks into farm land and where crops grew with apparently little effort.⁵⁵ The army’s negative assessment of the interior (as well as their blatant omissions) can therefore be seen as central to a simple defensive rationale: if the land was not only insurmountable but truly valueless as well then the war itself was entirely misplaced—and thus all failures could be absolved.⁵⁶

It should come as no surprise that the army’s denigration of the interior was matched by an equally dismissive attitude toward the settler community as well. The abilities and courage of local militia volunteers were frequently maligned. And, as John Sprague paraphrased General Zachary Taylor, Floridians had become corrupted by “the great amount of money” that circulated as a result of the war. Thus, according to this view, any effort to end hostilities was expected to be subverted by these “dependents and plunderers upon the government.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, army personnel could not fathom why anyone would choose to live in such an isolated and unforgiving backwoods environment and, as is usually the case, the poorer and more uneducated the settler, the more liable they were to mockery. On the other hand, the prevalent settler perspective viewed the army, especially foreign recruits who heralded from a host of European countries, as the exogenous “other.” The motivations of outsiders, unlike the presumed righteousness of the settler collective, were thus highly suspect.⁵⁸ These “good for nothing . . . scourgings of other countries,” as one Newnansville resident complained, were nothing more than “brandy-drinking” sluggards.⁵⁹ Indeed, drunken raids by U.S. soldiers on local homesteads resulted in major losses of property and intensified mutual antipathy. Settler marginalization

55. The method of girdling or stripping off the bark at the base of trees escalated during the citrus and vegetable boom of the 1880s, a cheap method of clearing hammock land. See Carl Webber, *Eden of the South* (New York: Leve & Alden, 1883), 26. For an earlier account of the advantages of agricultural production in the interior, with reference to the 1830s, see “Florida: Its Soil and Products,” *Western Journal* 6 (June 1851): 178-83.

56. The region’s farming potential only came into its own after the arrival of the railroad in the latter part of the nineteenth-century.

57. Sprague, May 6, 1839, in “Macomb’s Mission to the Seminoles,” 166.

58. Veracinci, *Settler Colonialism*, 18-20.

59. Quoted in James M. Denham, “Some Prefer the Seminoles: Violence and Disorder among Soldiers and Settlers in the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (July 1991): 40.

continued into the twentieth-century and also managed to infiltrate Florida historiography. This tendency was the converse of the hyper-romanticizing of settlers that typically marked other regions of the North American Spanish borderlands, especially Texas.⁶⁰ For Texans at least, settlers were not the *banditti* who were so despised by Spanish colonial officials but heroes in a great moral quest.⁶¹ By comparison, Florida historians were far more favorably disposed toward Spanish colonists, especially in the context of St. Augustine, and less inclined toward Anglo settlers.⁶² Rembert Patrick's use of "white trash" in reference to an entire group of Georgian settlers in *Florida Fiasco*, one of the acknowledged classics in state history, exemplifies this bent.⁶³ There has also been a reluctance to engage with the territorial or Anglo-settler period and unwillingness to come to terms with the era's most significant episode, the Second Seminole War. Prior to John Mahon's seminal history of this conflict, as the author himself acknowledged, there was virtually nothing written on the subject since the nineteenth-century.⁶⁴ This lacuna produced a sense of historical fragmentation that has only been addressed relatively recently.⁶⁵

Gathering Storm

The Florida tribes did not promptly withdraw onto reservation territory after the Treaty of Moultrie Creek. Micanopy and a few other chiefs had already established villages within the reservation boundaries; these locales were among the very few places that could sustain settlement.⁶⁶ Despite significant obstacles most Seminoles

60. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 245-47.

61. *Ibid.*

62. Particularly instructive in this regard is George R. Fairbanks, *The History and Antiquities of the City of St. Augustine, Founded A.D. 1565* (New York: C. B. Norton, 1858). The author reconstructed history in the fanciful image of Spanish conquistadors. He posited that Florida's greatness did not exist in the present or in future prospects but resided in its past, specifically a noble Spanish past.

63. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 53.

64. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, ix.

65. The work of James M. Denham, Canter Brown and others has done much to rectify past neglect. Yet there is, I believe, still much to overcome if we are to continue to rise above pure caricature or, more frequently, simple omission.

66. Former Anglo-Spanish Indian trader Horatio Dexter was hired by Florida Governor Duval to prepare a series of first-hand reports concerning this region. Dexter inexplicably portrayed this general area in glowing terms and undoubtedly influenced the decision to locate the reservation to the south. See Horatio Dexter to William P. Duval, August 20, 1823, in Mark F. Boyd, "Horatio S. Dexter and Events Leading to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek," *Florida Anthropologist* 11, no. 3 (September 1958): 88-95.

managed to emigrate by 1826. Soon after arrival, however, many experienced severe malnutrition or death by starvation.⁶⁷ In response to dire conditions, roving bands headed north to Paynes Prairie where cattle and other livestock were pilfered for food. Settlers had in fact dramatically increased cattle herds to roughly the same number that the Alachua Seminoles formerly managed at their peak prosperity under King Payne: upwards of 10,000 head grazed on the prairie alone.⁶⁸ Such super-abundance, combined with livestock in other Alachua districts, became a natural lure for any starving and distressed population, especially those who revered the region both as their rightful homeland and as “consecrated ground” (land that was believed to harbor ancestral spirits).⁶⁹ For his part, Micanopy—unintimidated by a visit to the White House in May 1826—still regarded this land as his birthright and was not averse to informing high ranking officials that, “I think I ought to have it [back].”⁷⁰ Hence the Alachua country, treaties notwithstanding, was the epitome of a hybrid space: it was claimed by both sides but belonged to neither.⁷¹

Periodic violence and bloodshed between settlers and indigenes became routine throughout the 1820s and 30s. A stream of settler petitions were directed to Florida Governor William Duval and to officials in Washington, D.C., alerting authorities of continuing “depredations” and requesting that military fortifications be established for their defense.⁷² Slaves belonging to settlers as well as the Native tribes also became a heated issue. Both factions accused the other of slave stealing and settlers believed that runaways were being harbored within the reservation—intransigent and often duplicitous claims by prominent whites led to further strife.⁷³

67. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 58; Canter Brown, Jr., “The Florida Crisis of 1826-1827 and the Second Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (April 1995): 423.

68. “Florida: Its Soil and Products,” *Western Journal* 6 (June 1851): 181.

69. John T. Sprague, journal entry, April 27, 1839, in Frank F. White, Jr., ed., “Macomb’s Mission to the Seminoles: John T. Sprague’s Journal, Kept During April and May 1839” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (October 1956): 160; William H. Simmons, *Notices of East Florida* (1822; reprint, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973), 46.

70. “Talk to the Indians by Col. White,” *New York Spectator*, August 10, 1827.

71. Hybridity has become a key concept in the social sciences and has greatly influenced historians as well. Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), while highly theoretical, remains a seminal text.

72. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 61.

73. Major Ethan Hitchcock believed that former Indian agent Gad Humphreys was one of “the Principal causes of the War” by virtue of his “fraudulent claims

An illicit trade in liquor, carried on by “numerous petty dealers in Whisky”⁷⁴ (whites who operated out of derelict log shanties near the reservation), as well as an assortment of traders and “swindlers” who, in the opinion of the U.S. Indian agent, exerted disproportionate influence “over the poor deluded Indian,” also added to an already fractious environment.⁷⁵

By the early 1830s, Fort King was in operation just north of the reservation and in close proximity to the Indian agency. Initially intended as a buffer between Native people and the Alachua settlements, this lone interior post was subsequently viewed as a key component in the emigration of the Florida tribes to the West. The government now pointed to the treaties of Payne’s Landing and Fort Gibson as justification for removal, despite the dubious circumstances that surrounded these accords. Major Ethan A. Hitchcock, former commandant of cadets at West Point who was closely associated with the War Department, privately admitted that not only was the Treaty of Payne’s Landing an outright fraud—the Indians “have never in fact agreed to Emigrate”—but went so far as to state that the Native tribes were “in the right to defend themselves in the country to the best of their ability.”⁷⁶ Regardless of the merits of Hitchcock’s claim, Fort King was certainly an inadequate presence on the frontier (at war’s onset the small post only claimed 200 troops⁷⁷)—a situation that underscored the poor planning, corruption and inadequate funding of the removal program. By 1834, “this wretched and misguided people,” according to settler leaders, showed no inclination to emigrate and, even worse, were steadily transforming into a state of rebellion and anarchy. Never truly restrained by reservation boundaries, indigenes, especially the Miccosukee bands, boldly encamped within range of Anglo settlements and butchered stolen livestock in plain sight. “Their insolence and recklessness of feeling,” the settlers wrote to President Jackson, had reached a distressing level.

upon Indian negros [sic]—Claims purchased by him in all variety of ways not honest”; Ethan A. Hitchcock, January 25, 1841, Hitchcock Diary #17, 94, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

74. Quoted in Joe Knetsch, *Fear and Anxiety on the Florida Frontier*, 15.

75. Wiley Thompson to William P. Duval, January 1, 1834, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 6: 454.

76. Ethan A. Hitchcock, November 4, 1840, Hitchcock Diary #16, 32.

77. Gov. John H. Eaton [Florida] to Gov. William Schley [Georgia], January 21, 1836, folder 18, box 3, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens.

Indians no longer disguised “their contempt for the government and its laws” and threatened “bloodshed should any measure be adopted to restrain and control them.”⁷⁸

Numerous details of the pre-war months have been addressed in the historiography. Much has been made, for example, of the imprisonment of Osceola (Asin Yahola) by Indian agent, General Wiley Thompson—an individual who remained in a peculiar state of denial throughout the escalating discontent. Osceola’s ill-treatment by the agent was surely a factor in rising tensions, as Thompson’s later assassination by Osceola suggests. Little attention, however, has been paid to the deteriorating circumstances in the Alachua settlements. An episode that occurred in June 1835 epitomizes this situation. A violent incident erupted on Paynes Prairie which involved an irate settler faction and a group of Indians who were caught in the act of cattle rustling. Two Indians were brutally whipped and another was shot dead after coming to the aid of his companions. There were wounded on both sides. News of this event spread quickly and many feared that this expression of frontier vigilantism could trigger all-out war.⁷⁹ The prairie episode thus embodied the core contest between settler and indigene. In this instance, the use of deadly force can be seen as a precursor to war.⁸⁰ Between 1812 and 1835, despite steady encroachment by Anglo settlers, a succession of treaties and the presence of the U.S. military, whites were still unable to assert sovereignty. The reasons for this predicament were fairly obvious: settlers failed to hold a clear numerical advantage; the federal government was reluctant to provide adequate funds either for frontier defense or for Indian deportation; and a highly diffuse settlement pattern and an ill-trained, poorly armed local militia further weakened the settler position. Within any frontier zone, as historian David Weber has

78. Petition to the President of the United States (Alachua County, Territory of Florida), January 1834, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 6: 465-66.

79. Mark F. Boyd, “The Seminole War: Its Background and Onset,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (July 1951): 55; Keen, “Times of Long Ago,” October 13, 1899, in *Cracker Times and Pioneer Lives*, 27. This particular incident occurred near the Hogtown settlement; see M. M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (New York: B.B. Hussey, 1836), 65-66.

80. According to Duncan Clinch, the subsequent murder and scalping of an army private while on an errand to deliver mail August 1835—an unprecedented and highly provocative act—was intended as direct payback for the incident at Paynes Prairie; see Boyd, “The Seminole War,” 56. For a more detailed account of the mail carrier attack, see Cohen, *Notices of Florida*, 66.

observed, a transformational process takes place and “new orders arise out of a maelstrom of contention.”⁸¹ In the context of the interior, this axiom was just as valid for the Second Seminole War as it was for the previous Patriot War.

Duncan L. Clinch, now the commanding general of the regular army in the territory and, as previously mentioned, a leading Alachua planter, was among the few who recognized that—given the absence of a major military presence—certain tribal factions would resist deportation. Clinch’s pessimism rested on a solid appreciation of power: the dispossession of any people from their lands was dependent on brute force, or the threat thereof, as well as the backing of a state infrastructure.⁸² As Florida was sorely wanting in both respects, trouble surely lay ahead. As early as January 1835, Clinch warned the Adjutant General that a future rebellion, aided by “Indian Negroes and Negroes on the plantations,” could easily devastate the Alachua settlements, an uprising that would undoubtedly take advantage of small-scale, guerilla type warfare.⁸³ He was only mistaken in regard to the latter. The initial phase of the war actually witnessed indigenous leaders conducting impressive operations against the combined forces of the U.S. Army. Ultimately, the general’s warnings, based on familiarity with the region and its people, could not counter the misguided optimism that permeated the judgment of Andrew Jackson, the War Department and Indian agent Thompson, all of whom believed that Indian removal was not only exceedingly benign in character but would proceed unhindered.⁸⁴ Such miscalculation was reflective of a pervasive outlook whereby Native “others” existed so far outside the cultural mainstream that they assumed a phantom-like quality.⁸⁵ “They stand alone among the great family of man,” claimed Boston’s influential *North American Review*, “to be surveyed and observed, rather than be described and explained.”⁸⁶ Because Indians were typically conceived as

81. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 12-13.

82. For more on the use of power, see Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispospossess? Comments from the Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (March, 2004): 165.

83. Clinch to Adjutant General, January 22, 1835, quoted in Rembert W. Patrick, *Aristocrat in Uniform: General Duncan L. Clinch* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963), 71-73.

84. *Ibid.*

85. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 86.

86. “Removal of the Indians,” *North American Review* 30 (January 1830): 70.

uncivilized children who could not think for themselves and lacked any substantial or worthwhile identity of their own, then they certainly could be readily disposed of. Given the preponderance of such attitudes throughout American society and the high regard that was placed in General Jackson's past exploits and supposed understanding of the Native tribes, it could be posited that the war itself was the result of a distinctive delusionary rationale—not the least of which was the self-proclaimed liberality and munificence of the Indian Removal Act.

Perhaps the most peculiar aspect of the Second Seminole War was that it did not take place earlier. True to Clinch's expectations, the first engagements surfaced within the greater Paynes Prairie region. By December 1835—faced with continued government maltreatment, ineptitude and apparent duplicity; the upcoming sale of their remaining livestock at a fraction of their real value; as well as the prospect of leaving ancestral land for a humiliating residence in the West that would be under the sway of their traditional Creek adversaries—the anti-removal bloc gained control and were now committed to war. The events surrounding Dade's Massacre and the killing of agent Thompson have overshadowed the fact that the first concerted efforts by Seminole forces resulted in the destruction of settler homesteads in the interior as well as the meticulous appropriation of all livestock. At least 15,000 head of cattle were hijacked in the Alachua region alone, in addition to considerable stocks of horses and hogs.⁸⁷ Hostilities advanced rapidly and encompassed both large-scale sugar plantations and smaller homesteads east of the St. Johns River where further cattle theft (4,000 to 5,000 head) augmented the indigenous reserves.

Alachua Forts and Battles

In the face of increased hostilities during the closing months of 1835, settlers began to erect defensive perimeters of log pickets (i.e., pine logs set vertically with tops sharpened, about eighteen feet tall) to protect life and property.⁸⁸ Because the militia was undermanned and lacked adequate arms and ammunition, Clinch

87. "Florida," *Richmond Enquirer*, July 19, 1836.

88. Brief mention of these towns, as well as a description of the pickets, can be found in Woodburne Potter, *The War in Florida: Being an Exposition of its Causes and an Accurate History of the Campaigns* (Baltimore: Lewis and Coleman, 1836), 92.



Presidential “peace medals” were presented to Seminole leaders during treaty signings prior to the Second Seminole War. While seldom noted, the reverse side of these medals, such as the 1831 Andrew Jackson medal (left), offers insight regarding government intentions and insecurities. Clasped hands portrayed the military and indigenes as equal partners—an idealized and highly misleading image. By 1850, clasped hands were replaced by scenes of settlers and Indians. Only after national Indian removal became a virtual *fait accompli* in the West, however, did an increasingly asymmetric, and hence more realistic, iconography predominate. In the 1887 Grover Cleveland medal (right), a virtuous settler is awarded almost mythic center-stage while a tribal leader and his forest homeland are placed on the periphery. *Image courtesy Collection of the New York Historical Society (Accession number 1966.101 [Jackson] and 1163 [Cleveland]).*

urged Floridians to take charge of their own defense. Settlers began “forting-in,” as it was termed.⁸⁹ This aspect of the early war years may easily be overlooked, as fortifications of any type are usually attributed to the military alone. To be sure, these frontier outposts were utilized by the militia and often commandeered by the U.S. Army as forts, but their origins are of at least equal significance. The frontier stockades therefore resembled structures dating back to the earliest American settlements.

On December 18, 1835, ten days before the Indian agent’s assassination, an indigenous band headed by Osceola launched a surprise attack on a Florida militia unit that was accompanying

89. This term was ubiquitous on the southern frontier; see *Fifty Years in Camp and Field: Diary of Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock*, ed. W.A. Croffut (New York/London: G. P. Putnam, 1909), 106; for the ill-prepared militia, see Patrick, *Aristocrat in Uniform*, 89; for residents taking charge of their own defense, see Petition of James Edwards, April 11, 1848, *Senate Report 118, 30th Congress, 1st Sess. (1848)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

a baggage train at the southern rim of Paynes Prairie, six miles from the village of Micanopy. With eight militiamen dead and six wounded, the Battle of Black Point, as it was called, was the first battle of the Second Seminole War. Seminole and Miccosukee warriors, along with their black Seminole cohorts, indiscriminately torched farms and plantations, including fields and pasture land. A number of settlers were either killed or wounded. The Alachua district abruptly faced annihilation and survivors fled in panic to the nearest fortification. Some 200 refugees assembled at Fort Crum, a settler stockade hastily built around a solitary dwelling on Paynes Prairie.⁹⁰ Fort Clarke, also in the vicinity, was merely an enclosed settlement consisting of "20 men & their families."⁹¹ The more substantial villages of Newnansville and Micanopy drew the largest number of refugees: the former shielded 490 and the latter about 300 men, women and children.⁹² Living conditions deteriorated dramatically. In Micanopy, for instance, a correspondent noted the dismal fate of fugitive families who subsisted in crude, makeshift shelters: "Within these close pickets, they huddled together, many of them in a state almost of starvation."⁹³ As in Newnansville, Whitesville, Garey's Ferry, Hogtown and elsewhere, family accommodations in Micanopy—now named Fort Defiance—meant a ten foot square lean-to or shack; a potent source of misery as well as disease.⁹⁴ Altogether, thousands faced bleak prospects in the interior and exhibited "a scene of starving and squalid wretchedness scarcely to be imagined."⁹⁵

In comparison to the settler forts, the defensive perimeters erected at the most prosperous Alachua sugar plantations, such as McIntosh's "Oaklands" (Fort Oakland) and particularly Clinch's "Lang Syne" (renamed Fort Drane), are far more familiar to historians.⁹⁶ These structures were quickly converted to army

90. "Indian Hostilities," *Jacksonville Courier*, December 24, 1835.

91. Henry Prince, May 22, 1838, in *Amidst a Storm of Bullets: The Diary of Lt. Henry Prince, 1836-1842* ed. Frank Laumer (Tampa, FL: Seminole Wars Historic Foundation, 1998), 118.

92. "Florida," *New York Spectator*, June 30, 1836.

93. James W. Simmons, "Recollections of the Late Campaign in East Florida," *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post*, August 13, 1836.

94. Mahon, *Second Seminole War*, 175.

95. "Extract of a letter to the editor of the Savannah Georgian," September 4, 1836, in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, September 22, 1836.

96. For reference to Fort Oakland see Testimony of Dr. Henry D. Holland, June 18, 1841, in Claim of John H. McIntosh, *H. Rpt. 470, 27th Congress, 2nd Sess.* (1842) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office).

posts without much alteration. "Fort Drane was neither more nor less than General Clinch's sugar plantation," as one observer succinctly phrased it.⁹⁷ Situated in what is now northern Marion County, both posts were in closer proximity to the interior settlements and settler forts than Fort King.⁹⁸ By November 1835 Clinch anticipated the worst case scenario, but the small number of available troops was not likely to be much of a deterrent.⁹⁹ Despite this situation, the new forts at least afforded an element of hope for settlers. Fort Drane, now Clinch's headquarters, was stocked with food stuffs from his plantation and was reasonably situated for any future movements that might be initiated after the arrival of reinforcements.¹⁰⁰ Fort Defiance (Micanopy) was appropriated by the army during the spring of 1836. With the further addition of Fort Gilliland (Newnansville), a militia stronghold; Fort Dabney, a plantation stockade on the Suwannee; Fort Lancaster, at Alligator Settlement, near present Lake City; and Garey's Ferry, located on the banks of a western tributary of the St. Johns River, the military seemed to be gaining some ground. Nevertheless, indigenous forces were reportedly "highly elated with their successes."¹⁰¹ The speed with which they overwhelmed and devastated much of East Florida forced Jackson and the War Department to reassess their assumptions. Although Washington awarded high priority to reasserting control of the interior and in safeguarding survivors,¹⁰² the new commanding general, Winfield Scott, declined to aggressively pursue the war during the summer months, erroneously concluding that "the Alachua settlements may easily be defended" until cooler weather arrived.¹⁰³

In addition to the disappointment surrounding the two battles fought at the Withlacoochee River—where outnumbered

97. Simmons, "Recollections of the Late Campaign."

98. Motives of self-interest surely entered the equation as well; the newly garrisoned Fort Drane would help assure that Clinch's substantial investment would not suffer the same fate as other plantations in the region. Fort Oakland, owned by Clinch's brother-in-law, was also liable to similar criticism.

99. Only 535 troops were scattered throughout the Florida territory at the time; Knetsch, *Fear and Anxiety*, 87.

100. For more on Fort Drane, see Knetsch, *Fear and Anxiety*, 85-104.

101. Col. Lane to T. T. Webb, September 30, 1836, in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, November 24, 1836.

102. R. Jones [Adjutant General] to Major General Scott, May 5, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*: 7, 280.

103. Winfield Scott to General Clinch, May 7, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*: 7, 286.

Seminoles repulsed the combined forces of the U.S. military, an outcome which prompted critics to conclude that the army had been “out-generaled” by the likes of Osceola¹⁰⁴—the first year of war brought heightened national attention to the deteriorating state of the interior forts. Malnutrition, foul drinking water, swarms of disease laden mosquitoes and cramped, unhygienic living conditions combined with the paltry state of early nineteenth-century medicine: the result was rampant illness.¹⁰⁵ Newly arrived federal troops and volunteers from southern states were prone to dysentery, yellow fever, typhoid fever, malaria—even epidemics of chickenpox. Mortality from disease far surpassed deaths from combat. And, while the army was reluctant to admit it, instances of suicide among officers affected an already declining morale.¹⁰⁶ “Fine athletic fellows,” a medical orderly lamented at Fort Drane, were now “in the lowest state of misery.”¹⁰⁷ Instead of functioning as secure bastions, these forts were perceived as isolated death traps, especially during the late spring and summer heat.¹⁰⁸ Because many officers originated from New England, newspapers as far as Maine, drawing upon letters from the field, grew intimately familiar with these distant Florida garrisons, referring to the most interior posts of Drane and Defiance as “grave yards” during summer 1836.¹⁰⁹

Seminoles pursued a relentless strategy during this period. Beginning in May 1836 at Fort King, the army began to withdraw, necessitated by illness and the questionable significance of a post so removed from interior settlements. This “retrograde

104. Augustus Crawford to [Governor] William Schley, June 20, 1836, folder 9, box 50, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

105. Mary C. Gillett, *The Army Medical Department, 1818-1865* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1987), 56-72; John Bemrose, *Reminiscences of the Second Seminole War*, ed. John K. Mahon (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2001).

106. The horrific case of Lt. Col. John Lane at Fort Drane is worth note: “Lane, in a paroxysm of insanity produced by a fever of the brain . . . committed suicide by introducing the point of his sword above the right eye, and forcing almost through his head.” [Gov.] Call to Jones, October 22, 1836, quoted in Knetsch, *Fear and Anxiety*, 103. The army attributed Lane, still in his twenties, as the inventor of the pontoon bridge; “Ponton Equipage.” *Army and Navy Chronicle*, October 27, 1836.

107. Bemrose, *Reminiscences*, 96.

108. Horses and mules died as well, presumably from heat exhaustion; D. L. Clinch to General Scott, April 27, 1836, *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 7: 282.

109. *Christian Intelligencer and Eastern Chronicle* (Gardiner, Maine.), September 16, 1836.

movement" gave Native forces the initiative. After occupying the abandoned Fort King, Osceola and other war leaders launched an unsuccessful assault at Fort Drane. Afterwards their attention shifted further north to Fort Defiance. The fort and village of Micanopy were situated on high ground overlooking the massive Tuskawilla Hammock. Micanopy was founded in 1821 and so had the distinction of being the first territorial town in Florida.¹¹⁰ The site was contiguous to Cuscowilla, the former eighteenth-century village of Cowkeeper (Wakapuchasee), an early indigenous leader and Oconee chief who was revered as the founder of the Seminole Nation and whose matrilineal descendants, such as Micanopy, continued to lead the tribe.¹¹¹ This locale thus held deep significance for indigenes.¹¹² Enclosed within the settler village stockade was an assortment of homes and businesses, the largest being a two-story cotton house and gin.¹¹³ Additional buildings included a post office, general store, blacksmith shop, barns, storage houses, a distillery, assorted dwelling houses, kitchens, etc.—a tableau of settler life and industry.¹¹⁴ Unlike Newnansville, a boom-town that consisted of an irregular sprawl of crude log cabin structures,¹¹⁵ the more conventional wood-plank buildings in Micanopy were neatly organized within village lots.¹¹⁶ The "principal building," described as an "excellent dwelling house"

110. For more on Micanopy's founding, see Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida*, 95-114.

111. Miller, *Coacoochee's Bones*, xi, 8-9.

112. Some authors, including Susan Miller, have termed Cowkeeper's band at Cuscowilla "proto-Seminole"; see, for example, Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 204. "Tuskawilla" was a corruption of the original village name.

113. Petition of George Center, February 10, 1846, *H. Rept. 204, 29th Congress, 1st Sess.*

114. Descriptions of the private property in the village are contained in the various "petitions" to Congress that are cited herein. Property owners, such as Messrs Wanton, Ledwith, Center, Waldron, Edwards, Brush, Hagan, and Humphreys—as well as their descendants—attempted to recover substantial losses that were the result of the intentional burning of Micanopy by the U.S. Army in 1836. Despite these efforts, most individuals failed to receive compensation.

115. Denham, "A Rogue's Paradise," 50.

116. Early Micanopy was something of an anomaly as the town was originally under the auspices of a land development corporation known as the Florida Association of New York. Houses were required to be "50 feet apart" and town lots were "100 feet deep." See, Peter Mitchel, Moses E. Levy and Jasper Ward to Edward Wanton, February 18, 1822, in James David Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records of East and Middle Florida, 1789-1868," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1930), 119.

and valued at \$800 (an extraordinary sum for the frontier) was chosen as the officers' quarters during the army occupation.¹¹⁷ The hamlet's most renowned resident was Colonel Gad Humphreys, former territorial Indian agent and a prosperous planter and slave owner.¹¹⁸ Most inhabitants had a history of business dealings with Indians, as Micanopy was the nearest town to the northern reservation boundary (about twenty-five miles).

On May 20 a band of Seminoles launched a nighttime musket and rifle salvo at Fort Defiance. After a half hour the post commander dispersed the enemy with several well-placed "rounds of musketry."¹¹⁹ The fort and village, it should be recalled, still harbored settler families from six months earlier, all of whom were unable to evacuate to the comparative safety of more eastern settlements, such as Garey's Ferry.¹²⁰ A few weeks later a far more serious confrontation ensued. On June 9 about 250 warriors—again under Osceola—gathered at a moderate distance from the Micanopy palisades in an effort to draw out the troops in a full-fledged engagement. Known as the Battle of Micanopy, this daytime encounter involved "gallant" charges by U.S. cavalry, a surprise attack on the enemy's rear flank, and artillery rounds that resulted in Native forces retreating into Tuskawilla Hammock after an hour of intense fighting. This triumph, along with another local engagement called the Battle of Welika Pond (July 19), provided the national press with examples of bravery and tactical success in an otherwise gloomy period of sickness and retreat and consequently captured the country's attention to a degree that exceeded their actual military value.¹²¹ "The repulse and defeat of

117. Depositions of Lieut. G. H. Talcott, January 30, 1846 and Captain M. M. Clarke, January 7, 1848, in "Report of the Committee of Claims," January 25, 1848, *Senate Report 45*, 30th Congress, 1st Sess.

118. Humphreys's residence and outbuildings were left unprotected, as they were located about 300 yards from the stockade perimeter; Petition of Gad Humphreys, February 10, 1846, *H. Rpt. 203*, 29th Congress, 1st Sess. (1846).

119. *New Hampshire Sentinel*, June 30, 1836.

120. In contrast, most of the small, temporary forts in Alachua were deserted by this time and most settlers managed to escape to Garey's Ferry; *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, June 16, 1836; *Jacksonville Courier*, June 2, 1836.

121. A brief national sampling, centering only on the Battle of Micanopy, includes: *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 28, 1836; *Richmond Enquirer*, July 1, 1836; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, June 28, 1836; *New York Spectator*, August 18, 1836; *Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 27, 1836; *Boston Courier*, August 11, 1836; *The Age* (Augusta, Maine), July 6, 1836; *New Hampshire Gazette* (Portsmouth), August 16, 1836. The battle was also briefly mentioned in the *Times* (London), July 13, 1836.

the Indians at Micanopy," wrote an anonymous contributor to the *Army and Navy Chronicle*, "has partially dispelled the gloom that was pressing upon our arms in the south, and furnish Andrew Jackson with an opportunity . . . of disposing the meed of praise upon the gallant and the brave."¹²²

Twice that summer, outnumbered and sickly troops not only survived attack but succeeded in at least temporarily driving the enemy back. But the worsening situation of both soldiers and civilians at Micanopy reached epidemic proportions. The "pestilence" at Fort Drane had already necessitated its abandonment in August.¹²³ Conditions at Fort Defiance deteriorated even more with the arrival of evacuated troops. The order to relinquish and burn the post and village of Micanopy—the last remaining army fortification south of Newnansville—was perhaps inevitable given the circumstances.¹²⁴ On the morning of August 24, after proceeding a few hundred yards east from the village, the wagons paused while soldiers went about torching the town in order to deprive the enemy of any material advantage.¹²⁵ In what was surely the lowest ebb of the war, at least from the settler perspective, most of the Alachua country—indeed the interior as a whole—had been deserted by the army and reclaimed by Indians.

Conclusion

In 1837 a newly built Fort Micanopy stood at the same spot that had been occupied by the former village and post.¹²⁶ The 250 feet square fort was one of the largest in East Florida and served as the command and supply center for garrisons in the southern Paynes Prairie-Alachua district (forts Crane, Tarver, Drane, Walker, Waccahoota, Mizzell, and Wheelock).¹²⁷ Throughout the course of the war the army devoted

122. "Lt. Colonel Heileman," *Army and Navy Chronicle*, August 11, 1836.

123. Letter to the Editor, "A Citizen of Middle Florida," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), August 27, 1836.

124. The assignment was carried out by the newly arrived Major Benjamin F. Pierce (brother of future United States president Franklin Pierce) along with a fresh supply of troops and wagons.

125. Memorial of James Edwards, April 6, 1846, *H. Rpt. 536, 29th Congress, 1st Sess.* As most structures were constructed using timber hewn from old-growth pine (rich in flammable resin), the resultant conflagration was reported to be exceptionally intense.

126. C. S. Monaco, "Fort Defiance & Fort Micanopy: Second Seminole War Sites in the Town of Micanopy," 2008, paper available at the Micanopy Historical Society Archives, Micanopy, Florida.

127. "Topographical Survey of Military Section No. 7 by George C. Thomas," 1835-1843, L 247 Portfolio, RG 77, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

considerable resources to the establishment of an extensive network of wooden forts. Following a strategy devised by Zachary Taylor, much of the East Florida interior was divided into twenty-mile square military districts (twenty-one in total) with a centrally located fort within each square.¹²⁸ This military region extended from the Georgia border down to the Withlacoochee River. Each post was connected by a maze of roads and bridle trails that facilitated transportation and allowed for the distribution of supplies that originated from the main depot in Palatka.¹²⁹ Immense supply trains, consisting of ninety or more covered wagons with teams totaling 400 mules and horses, stretched a mile or two in length whenever teamsters delivered food, munitions and other vital supplies to the interior posts.¹³⁰ By 1840, with many of Florida's Native people removed to the West, numerous garrisons like Fort Micanopy attracted small communities of settlers who catered to the needs of military personnel and once again featured the ubiquitous grog shop.¹³¹ During lulls in the conflict, settlers returned to their fields and tended to crops. Newnansville also benefited during the war. While the town's population swelled with settler-refugees, there was a parallel boom in adventurous and often unscrupulous merchants who were drawn to the area by a steady stream of federal dollars.¹³² Following the war, some obscure post communities, such as the rebuilt Fort King (present-day Ocala), evolved into permanent towns and so further spurred development.¹³³ Hence the contest between settler sovereignty and indigene ultimately resulted in a far more substantial infrastructure. The passage of the Armed Occupation Act (1842) provided 160 acres of free land—located in the non-surveyed portions of the Florida Territory south of Newnansville—to enterprising individuals who were willing to build homesteads, farm

128. Mahan, *Second Seminole War*, 249-51. Taylor later amended these square sizes to 18 square miles.

129. Ernest F. Dibble, "Giveaway Forts: Territorial Forts and the Settlement of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 207, 210-12. For the significance of the Palatka depot, see "The Florida Train," *Floridian and Advocate*, July 17, 1841; M. L. Brown, "Notes on U. S. Arsenals, Depots, and Martial Firearms of the Second Seminole War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (April 1983): 446, n.6.

130. "The Florida Train," *Floridian and Advocate* (Tallahassee), July 17, 1841.

131. John C. McManus, *American Courage, American Carnage: 7th Infantry Chronicles: The 7th Infantry Regiment's Combat Experience, 1812 through World War II* (New York: Forge, 2009), 56-57.

132. Ellen Brown to Manneville Brown, June 9, 1838, in *Echoes from a Distant Frontier*, 86-7.

133. Dibble, "Giveaway Forts," 207.

and defend their property. In addition to farming, yeoman pioneers were expected to act as a paramilitary force to keep the remaining Indians in check. Despite high expectations, the program attracted, at most, a modest 2,500 settlers.¹³⁴ The conclusion of the war brought about economic decline for many isolated communities and, free land notwithstanding, the prospect of grappling with hostile Seminoles was not a position that many relished. By the time Florida entered the Civil War the state was the least populated region of the Confederacy. It was only during the post-bellum era that the Alachua country truly came into its own. The reconstruction of the Florida Railroad after the Civil War allowed for the efficient transportation of citrus and winter vegetables to major northeastern cities—a lucrative market that spurred the growth of new inland towns, such as Gainesville, and attracted a far different settler component. Seminoles, of course, had long ceased being a threat. Newcomers included northerners who were captivated by reports of quick riches and, once having caught “orange fever” sought their fortunes in a vastly more domesticated “midland” Florida, especially during the 1880s and 90s.¹³⁵

Given the superior resources of the United States, the outcome of the Second Seminole War was never really in doubt. But while historical narratives have emphasized armaments and tactics as well as biographical details of the leading (non-settler) personalities, contextual understanding has suffered. Despite the recent efforts of a few historians to provide a belated and much needed settler “voice” within the historiography,¹³⁶ the war has never been envisioned as

134. Knetsch, *Fear and Anxiety*, 241. This number—based on a study by Joe Knetsch and Paul S. George—is considerably less than earlier estimates. According to Knetsch, only 200,000 acres were actually open to new settlers. For additional insight regarding the Armed Occupation Act, see Laura Jensen, *Patriots, Settlers and the Origins of American Social Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 181-84.

135. Webber, *Midland Florida: The Eden of the South*, 11-12. By 1890, Alachua County, much reduced in size from the 1820s and 30s, had an expanding population of 23,000; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Population by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1910, 1900, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 63. Subsequent hard freezes put an end to large-scale orange production, but winter vegetables continued to be an important crop well into the early twentieth-century.

136. See, for example, James M. Denham, “The Florida Cracker before the Civil War as Seen through Travellers Accounts,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (April 1994): 453-68; Denham and Brown, Jr., *Cracker Times and Pioneer Lives; Echoes from a Distant Frontier: The Brown Sisters’ Correspondence from Antebellum Florida*, eds. James M. Denham and Keith L. Huneycutt (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004); Canter Brown, Jr., *Ossian Bingley Hart: Florida’s Loyalist Reconstruction Governor* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Canter Brown, Jr., *Fort Meade, 1849-1900* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

the final stage in a prolonged struggle for economic and cultural dominance of the frontier. The clichéd images of settler gold-lust in the Black Hills, or the westward expansion toward the vast farming and grazing lands in the West has certainly been etched upon popular consciousness. The peninsular interior, in contrast, has lacked an equivalent narrative. Histories of the war generally take place against a vague background of uninhabited pine-barrens, prairies or swampland, with the occasional “cracker” component standing on the margins. As we have seen, however, the Florida interior was far more than a nebulous backwoods setting but stood on its own as a unique social, cultural, and ecologic matrix. Settlers were central—not peripheral—players and their often brutal quest for land and dominion, at the expense of Indians, was a guiding principle. As territorial expansion was conflated with ideas of republican freedom, settlers assumed a privileged position in their relations with leading state and federal authorities. Indeed, this frame of mind permeated American society and was a durable influence on government policy.¹³⁷ This neglected framework therefore becomes vital to fully understanding the final interplay between Florida settlers and indigenous people and should continue to inform historians in any further study of the territorial period and beyond.

137. Rana, *Two Faces of American Freedom*, 13-14.