

Florida Immigration—What Shall It Be?

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The subject assigned to me, "Florida Immigration, What Shall it Be?" is one that is not commanding much attention, not only in Florida, but throughout the entire South. We have recently had several conventions of representative men on the subject: Seldom do we have a gathering, or convention of any kind, agricultural commissioners, cane growers, turpentine producers, timber men, saw mill men, railroad men, ticket agents, traffic managers, farmers, cattle growers, agriculturists or horticulturists, but the subject of Immigration "crops out" in one shape or another.

In fact, the Southern States have agitated this question of Immigration—Foreign Immigration—to a very considerable extent during the past few years, much has been said upon the subject, numerous plans have been proposed to turn the tide of foreign immigration, from the West, to the South. The establishment of direct lines of immigrant ships, from Southern ports to Europe; with agents of the Southern States established in foreign countries, to secure immigrants, is probably the most popular plan suggested. To avoid the "contract labor laws," the States are asked to do what the citizen (or corporation), is prohibited from doing; and also to tax the people of the State, to secure cheaper

labor, to compete with the working men of the State.

Florida, I am glad to say, has not become hysterical, or anxious, in this matter. She has displayed no great haste to receive the influx of foreign immigrants—Japanese, Italians or Chinamen, so ardently desired, and earnestly advocated, by some of our sister States—urged on by Land Syndicates—mining and manufacturing corporations, desiring to secure cheaper, and more servile labor, than is now obtained in the South, outside the cities.

While the phenomenal development of the South, during the past decade, along all lines of industry, agriculture, mining, manufacture and transportation, has created a large demand for labor, and has largely increased the wages of our working people, it is questionable if it be for the best interests of the South, and particularly Florida, to encourage foreign immigration.

The South is now the only distinctly American section of the Union; where the traditions, habits, prejudices, virtues and vices; courage, chivalry, independence and love of freedom so characteristic of the early settler or pioneer, can be found in its purity. Where the true American character, begat by the "pioneer," "Puritan," and "cavalier," can still be found. The descendants of those adventurous men and women, who at their

own cost of deprivation and hardship, established the original thirteen colonies, on the Atlantic Sea Board; who first occupied the land, drove back the Indian; threw off the yoke of the old country—with its limitations, political and religious, to establish a Republic of Freemen, where liberty in its truest sense should prevail.

The true American type—we certainly have such a type—is now found principally south of "Mason and Dixon's Line"—In the South Atlantic, and Gulf States; and is most strongly marked in the rural districts of the cotton growing States; particularly in Florida, where most of our people can trace their lineage, directly to the founders of the Republic, with little if any admixture of foreign blood—Descendants of those grand old pioneers—rugged, capable, stubborn, courageous and honest, who lone handed, and by mere force of character, conquered the wilderness, as an heritage for their children, and children's children.

The descendants of whom fought the bloodiest war of modern times, to preserve the constitutional liberties of the Republic founded by their fathers. Those fathers, who by their sacrifices, made it possible for the foreign immigrant to flock to the States—the North and West—after the establishment of religious and political liberty, by our Revolutionary ancestors.

Florida has had a large increase of population, during the past fifteen years; she has increased from 391,000 to 620,000—a little more than 58 per cent.—From 1890 to 1900, she increased 35 per cent. (391,000 to 528,000). The States' census taken last year, now being completed, will show a greater proportionate increase.

Florida gained a larger percentage of

population, than any other Atlantic State, during the last United States census period; namely, 35 per cent. She exceeded the average of all the groups of States—that is the North Atlantic group—20.90 per cent. The South Atlantic, 17.90 per cent.; the North Central, 17.50 per cent.; the South Central, 26.10 per cent., and the Western Division, 31.90 per cent.

Her percentage of increase in population was exceeded only, by Arizona, Idaho, Indian Territory, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming, from 1890 to 1900; while the indications are that her increase for the present decade will be far greater in proportion.

The census of 1900, shows Florida's total population, as 528,542.

Of Native born Americans	504,710
Foreign Born	23,823

Percentage of Native Born	95.5
Percentage of Foreign Born	4.5

Our State census of 1905, will show a total of 62,000 approximately.

The most remarkable feature of Florida's population is the very large percentage of native born Americans; particularly natives of the Southern States—notably from the States of Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama and North Carolina.

In 1900, we find Florida born in-

habitants	342,818
Born in Georgia	57,692
Born in South Carolina	26,798
Born in Alabama	24,721
Born in North Carolina	13,339
Born in New York	4,463
Born in Virginia	3,754
Born in Ohio	2,721
Born in Tennessee	2,445
Born in Illinois	2,176

Born in Mississippi	2,102
Born in Pennsylvania	1,843
Born in Massachusetts	1,402
Born in Louisiana	1,357

All the other States and territories are represented in Florida's population, though the above list embraces all States that have 1,000 or more representatives in our population.

What I desire particularly to emphasize—is that Florida has had a greater proportionate increase in population than any other State, except the few Northern States mentioned previously, that have been filled up by foreign immigrants; exploited by the railroads and immigrant ships—for simply "business reasons." The "Foreign Immigrant" is exploited by the "Immigrant Ship" and railroad like any other commercial commodity. Lumber, merchandise, beef, or pork; cattle or hogs. And were it not for the laws prohibiting individuals (or corporations), importing contract labor, the question of foreign immigration would be solved at once by the importation of millions of coolies—not Chinamen, Japanese or Malays necessarily, but millions of "Redemptioners," from all parts of Europe, who would be sold for a term of years, to those desiring labor, miners, manufacturers, planters, saw mill and turpentine operators, for simply enough to pay their passage and a profit to the transportation lines, as was done during the early years of the last century.

Another remarkable feature of Florida's population—not only the great preponderance of American born citizens, is the great number of native born children; a population of 528,000 in 1900—shows 270,293 children, or youths less than 20; 197,600 of school age; and 72,693 less than four years old, more than half of our

population. Such facts are potent arguments against foreign immigrants, particularly when we know that thousands of our best American citizens are now seeking homes in the State. That this domestic immigration is rapidly increasing is patent to any one who is noting the rapid filling up of the whole State. I think the State census of 1905 will surprise many of our people, when the increase of population is noted, particularly the natural increase. Race suicide can by no means be charged against Florida, where over one-half of the population are school children, or younger.

That Florida needs, or can comfortably care for—more people, is true; that she is obtaining them more rapidly than any other Atlantic State, is also true; that by natural increase and by American immigration—men and women from the Southeastern States particularly, she is rapidly filling up the vacant places is also true.

Speaking of vacant lands, United States lands, I desire to call your attention to the fact that there is comparatively little vacant land, State or United States, remaining. The State has little left, no homestead lands at all, and has claims against what remains unallotted of some four millions of acres more than she has to meet the claims with.

United States homesteads are being rapidly exhausted. Most of the desirable homesteads are now occupied. The recent "Stone and Timber acts" are rapidly absorbing the remainder of the United States lands. Ninety per cent. of the public domain has passed into the possession of individuals, syndicates and corporations, during the past twenty years. Not only in this, but in other States.

Though Florida had probably a greater acreage of State lands than any other State, except Texas, some twenty-seven million acres, more or less, practically five-sevenths of all the land in the State—less than twenty-five years ago, she to-day is practically bankrupt in her landed possessions, and has claims against her for millions of acres more than she has to meet the claims with.

At a recent convention held in the Southern part of the State, the statement was made by several gentlemen; men well-informed and familiar with conditions; that one of the principal reasons why young men were flocking to the cities, was that lands for homes could not be purchased. This was not denied, though repeated by several members, and in the presence of representatives of several of the larger Land Syndicates.

Our public domain—once the boast of our State and Nation—has dwindled until now it is difficult for a young American to find 160 acres to homestead. We have parted with our heritage, our vast domain of productive soil—our own children—to say nothing of the foreign immigrant—are left without homes, to become the “bond servants” or “tenant farmer” of land syndicates, corporations or trust magnates.

Do we need immigrants? Yes; American immigrants; particularly from the Southeastern State—men who will own their own homes; maintain the true American spirit, a love of liberty, and personal independence. Such men as were recently alluded to by Judge Emory Spear—in charging a jury in a noted criminal case that has commanded international attention during the past seven years—in charging, the Judge said, “I am told that it has been cynically said by

a famous New Yorker that no man who has a million dollars can be convicted of crime in America. The verdict of this jury of plain, clear-sighted, honest Americans has falsified such a pessimism. Of that jury it may be said that there is perhaps not a man who cannot trace his ancestry to a patriot of the Revolution which established American independence. It is true, as I have often declared, that to the homogeneous Americanism of these Southern States when they are plainly shown their duty, our country may ever look with confidence for the enforcement of its laws and for the maintenance of its institutions.”

True they will have to purchase their lands—and pay several thousand per cent. profit to the present owners; and in a few years, find it difficult if not impossible, to obtain a free hold, by purchase or otherwise.

Doubtless, some of my auditors will consider me an alarmist, and believe my picture overdrawn; let me assure them such is not the case. When but a few years ago—less than twenty—the foreign emigrant, or the native born young American—had tens of thousands of homesteads, from which to select his one hundred and sixty acres; he has today but few to choose from, they are remote, scattered and not desirable, having but little agricultural value.

While our public domain has to a large extent disappeared, foreign immigration has increased until it has attracted the serious attention of thoughtful Americans. I quote a recent editorial from the “Miami Metropolis,” one of the most conservative of our Florida newspapers:

“Foreign immigrants are pouring into Eastern ports in such large numbers the Department of Labor and Commerce has

become apprehensive and has determined to more strictly enforce the regulations for the restriction of immigration."

This is a country of vast territory, and its assimilative powers are very great, but there should be some limit to the influx of foreigners and the crowding of our cities with a population which seriously adds to the gravity of problems that are pressing more and more for solution. The stream of foreigners is not sufficiently distributed. Too few become soil tillers and producers. It can be easily understood why this country is so attractive to the poor of overcrowded Europe, and quick and cheap transportation makes it comparatively easy for them to seek homes. In 1900 there were 10,460,000 people of foreign birth in this country, and over 21,000,000 born of foreign parentage. About 35 per cent. of the total population is wholly or partially of foreign parentage.

Of the foreign-born population, 94 per cent. is resident in the North, and 6 per cent. in the South. In 1900 the total foreign-born population of Allegheny, Pa., was, in round numbers, 30,000; in Atlanta, it was 2,500; in Charleston, S. C., it was 2,500, and 12,000 in Columbus, Ohio. In Louisville, it was 21,000 and in Lowell, 40,000; in Memphis, it was 5,000, and in Minneapolis, 61,000. In Worcester, Mass., it was 37,000; in Rochester, N. Y., it was 40,000; in Providence, R. I., it was 55,000, and 46,000, in St. Paul. In New York City there were 786,000 persons of German parentage, 715,000 of Irish parentage, 245,000 of Russian, 218,000 of Italian, 53,000 of Polish and 52,000 of Hungarian. A considerable per cent. of the total population is German and Irish.

These, as a rule, make excellent citi-

zens, and become thoroughly imbued with American methods and ideals. But there are millions of immigrants who are not desirable as citizens; and even a large inpouring of foreigners who may make good citizens is not wholly unobjectionable. Through immigration and natural increase the country is being rapidly filled, and when it becomes crowded, as it will, it means a change of conditions—from the free and easy methods of living characteristic of Americans, to the close economy and hard life of the crowded countries of the old world and labor will be cheaper and the cost of living greater."

That I am not alone in my position, I quote the language of that typical American citizen, Theodore Roosevelt—that representative American the descendant of the Dutch Founders of Manhattan on the one side, and an equally noted Southern family on the other; in an address to the representatives of Organized American Labor, at the White House, on March 21, speaking of immigration, he said:

"You have spoken of the immigration laws. I believe not merely that all possible steps should be taken to prevent the importation of laborers under any form, but I believe further that this country ought to make a resolute effort from now on to prevent the coming to the country of men with a standard of living so low that they tend, by entering into unfair competition with, to reduce the standard of living of our own people. Not one of you can go further than I will go in the effort steadily to raise the status of the American Wage Worker, so long as, while doing it, I can retain a clear conscience and the certainty that I am doing what is right. I will do all in my power for the laboring men except to do what

is wrong; and I will not do that for him or for any one else."

"We must not let our natural sentiment for succoring the oppressed and unfortunate of other lands lead us into what warped moral and mental attitude of trying to succor them at the expense of pulling down our own people. Laws should be enacted to keep out all immigrants who do not show that they have the right stuff in them to enter into our life on terms of decent equality with our own citizens. This is indeed first in the interests of the laboring man, but furthermore in the interests of all of us as American citizens; for gentlemen, the bonds

that unite all good American citizens are stronger by far than the differences, which I think you accentuate altogether too much, between the men who do one kind of labor and the men who do another kind. As for immigrants, we cannot have too many of the right kind; and we should have none at all of the wrong kind; and they are of the right kind if we can be fairly sure that their children and grandchildren can meet on terms of equality our children and grandchildren, so as to try to be decent citizens together, and to work together for the uplifting of the Republic."