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## FLORIDA'S IMAGE IN JUVENILE FICTION, 1909-1914

by PETER A. SODERBERGH\*

In the years between Appomattox and Sarajevo many young readers took their leisure pleasures from the pages of hard-backed novelettes. More respectable, to parents at least, than the "dime novel," the novellas exploded with the heady escapades of fictional boys and girls whose mental and physical reserves were unlimited. Descended from earlier models created by Martha Finley and William T. Adams— and rooted in the "success" ethos popularized by Horatio Alger, Jr.— the series published after 1898 outdid their prototypes in every aspect but quality.

Upon the death of Adams ("Oliver Optic") and Alger, a different breed of author took command of the juvenile book field. Born in the 1860s, these men worked quickly (one volume per month, at times), flooded the market with thrilling and intricate tales of adolescent endeavor, and reaped unprecedented monetary returns. By 1910 young Americans were awash in a frothy tide of "inspired bilge," to quote one observer of the era.<sup>1</sup> They were eagerly devouring these repetitive, temporal books in which their literary counterparts performed herculean feats chapter after chapter. If sales are any index, the readers enjoyed the vicarious experiences immensely.<sup>2</sup>

The prolific Gilbert Patten supplied them with the *Frank*

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1. The opinion is Rychard Fink's, expressed in his introduction to Horatio Alger, Jr., *Ragged Dick and Mark, the Match Boy* (New York, 1966), 6. For a readable overview of the period in which Alger rose to prominence see John Tebbel, *Rags To Riches: Horatio Alger, Jr. and the American Dream* (New York, 1963); more scholarly analysis is Ralph D. Gardner, *Horatio Alger, or, The American Hero Era* (Mendota, 1964).
2. Estimates vary, but it appears that Alger's books sold 250,000,000 copies between 1868 and 1920. As is indicated below, this achievement was surpassed by his legateés. The Alger sales are noted in Quentin Reynolds, *The Fiction Factory* (New York, 1955), 83.

*Merriwell* sequence, which ran to 208 titles eventually.<sup>3</sup> Frank G. Patchin turned out the *Pony Rider Boys*, *Circus Boys*, and *Grace Harlow Overseas* series, among others. To the literary downpour Harrie I. Hancock contributed *Grammar School Boys*, *Young Engineers*, *Dave Darrin*, and *Boys of the Army*. The anonymous but undisputed king of the juvenile book industry, Edward Stratemeyer, and his stable of hired writers, produced over 700 titles, including the familiar *Tom Swift*, *Bobbsey Twins*, and *Rover Boys* sets.<sup>4</sup>

Today, these dated and simplistic books are decaying in the twilight zone of flea markets, musty attics, and "antique" shops.<sup>5</sup> But in their halcyon days they provided excitement to generations of youths not yet transfixed by mass media. Through these books a boy or girl could make a 200-page trip to anywhere. No corner of the globe was safe from the fictional zealots of the many series. One could gape at the Rockies with the *Saddle Boys*, traverse the earth with *Dave Dashaway*, attend a World Series on the strong arm of *Baseball Joe*, explore Africa with the *Motion Picture Comrades*, or watch the *Girls of Central High* win a track meet. The fare was reasonable, averaging sixty-five cents a volume, and the transportation was usually furnished by Edward Stratemeyer and Company.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Patten is the only major writer of his genre who left us a personal record of his life. It offers valuable insights into the years of these books' greatest popularity, 1896-1930. As "Burt L. Standish," Patten devoted 20,000,000 words to the *Frank Merriwell* theme, and by the 1960s at least 500,000,000 books in that series had been printed. See Gilbert Patten, *Frank Merriwell's "Father"* (Norman, 1964), xiii, and John L. Cutler, "Gilbert Patten and his Frank Merriwell Saga," *Maine Bulletin*, XXXVI (May 1934).
  4. The *Rover Boys* (1899), *Bobbsey Twins* (1904), and *Tom Swift* (1910) series alone are said to have sold 70,000,000 volumes collectively. Commencing in 1904, Edward Stratemeyer founded and closely supervised a syndicate of "swift writers," numbering as many as fifty, to turn out books in the various series, e.g., *Bunny Brown*, *Ruth Fielding*, *Radio Boys*, *Motorcycle Chums*, etc. It was not widely known that Stratemeyer was the guiding force behind this massive output, or that it had made him a millionaire. See Arthur Prager, "Edward Stratemeyer and His Book Machine," *Saturday Review* (July 20, 1971), 15-17, 52-53; Arthur Prager, *Rascals at Large* (New York, 1971).
  5. There are, no doubt, private and institutional collections of these series, but locating and purchasing copies for personal use can be a difficult proposition. It took this writer a year to collect the six volumes examined in this paper and the twenty-eight companion works to the six for the purpose of perspective. Depending on condition and the author's stature, the cost of such books ranges from fifty cents to \$10.00 a piece.
  6. Stratemeyer's group employed over sixty pseudonyms in the process of

It was inevitable that the authors would discover Florida. Alert to the need for fresh story-base locales, they found a bonanza in the "southernmost state." Florida had everything: flowers for the ladies, reptiles for the squeamish, havens for fugitives, hurricanes, curative powers, mysterious tributaries, and Seminoles ("Me Indian. My name Ottiby. Me Chief! Ugh!") What more could one ask? Information about the state was transmitted via these books to millions of youngsters who had never been and never expected to go to Florida. What portrait of Florida was painted by the authors? What attitudes were communicated through the words and deeds of the protagonists? How might one interpret the significance of this particular cycle of stories? The answers lie among the brittle pages of a representative sampling from one five-year period, 1909-1914.<sup>7</sup>

The leading characters in the Florida plots were, to say the least, a privileged and homogeneous group. For example, since the authors were quartered in the East their *dramatis personae* tended to be Northerners, somewhat inflexible in their views.<sup>8</sup> *The Motor-Boat Club* organized in Maine; *The Outdoor Girls*

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creating the multi-volumed series. A partial list of the better-known names would include: "Captain Ralph Bonehill," "Arthur Winfield," "Frank V. Webster," "Lester Chadwick," "Lieutenant Howard Payson," "Roy Rockwood," "Victor Appleton," "Helen Thorndike," "Clarence Young," "Carolyn Keene," "Franklin W. Dixon," and "Laura Lee Hope." It is reasonable to assume that several generations of young Americans were devoted to "favorite authors" who did not exist. A comprehensive survey of this literary movement up to 1934 is in "For Indeed It Was He," *Fortune* (April 1934), 86-89, 194, 204, 206, 208-09.

7. The books which form the basis of this article are: H. Irving Hancock, *The Motor-Boat Club In Florida, or, Laying the Ghost of Alligator Swamp* (Philadelphia, 1909); Clarence Young, *The Motor Boys in Strange Waters, or, Lost in a Floating Forest* (New York, 1909); Archibald Fletcher, *Boy Scouts in the Everglades, or, The Island in Lost Channel* (Chicago, 1913); Laura Lee Hope, *The Outdoor Girls in Florida, or, Wintering in the Sunny South* (New York, 1913); Laura Dent Crane, *The Automobile Girls in Palm Beach, or, Proving Their Mettle Under Southern Skies* (Philadelphia, 1913); Laura Lee Hope, *The Moving Picture Girls Under the Palms, or, Lost in the Wilds of Florida* (Cleveland, 1914). "Laura Dent Crane" was used as a pen-name by Frank G. Patchin.
8. Gilbert Patten was from Maine; Frank Patchin spent most of his life in upstate New York; Harrie Hancock was born and educated in the Boston area; and Edward Stratemeyer made his home in northern New Jersey near Elizabeth, the city of his birth. Their predecessors were easterners as well: Alger and Adams (Massachusetts), Martha Finley (Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Maryland), James Kaler (Maine), Charles Fosdick (New York), Edward Ellis (Ohio and New Jersey), and Warren Lee Goss (New Jersey). Kaler and Fosdick were known to their readers as "James Otis" and "Harry Castlemon" respectively. A popular writer,

and *The Motion Picture Girls* lived in New York; *The Motor Boys* came from a Boston suburb; and *The Boy Scouts* joined the Beaver Patrol in Chicago. Three of *The Automobile Girls* resided in western Massachusetts, and the fourth in Illinois. There was no hope that a trip to the land of Spanish moss and orange blossoms would convert these faithful Yankees. As "Mollie" of *The Outdoor Girls* put it: "Of course it's lovely [in Florida] . . . but we are Northern girls, and one winter in the South can't change us."

Provincialism was but one element that they had in common. They were also very secure financially. In volume two of their series *The Motor Boys* ("Bob," "Jerry," and "Ned") discovered a gold mine in Nevada and coasted handsomely on the proceeds through the next seven volumes. *The Outdoor Girls* were from well-to-do families who "made no display of their means." That "quartette of adventuresome damsels," *The Automobile Girls*, were high society debutantes. Not yet sixteen, the four *Boy Scouts* were sponsored by a bank president and were in line for \$10,000 in bonuses. "Ruth" and "Alice," *The Motion Picture Girls*, were paid well by the "Comet Film Corporation." In short, wealth appeared to be a prerequisite for a jaunt to Florida. The only people of little or no income the reader encountered were Floridians, upon whom the gifted "chums" lavished patronizing remarks: "Do you suppose people ever really work here?"

The characters shared a mobility the average boy and girl must have envied. Without fear of demotion or loss of credit they absented themselves from their high schools for long periods. Naturally, they were "sufficiently advanced" to do so unpenalized. Thus liberated they tripped the light fantastic from South Pole to North, normally unchaperoned, and left in their wakes testimonials to youthful bravery and resourcefulness. To the ageless rascals of the books, restrictions of time and space did not exist and no problem was insoluble. Where adults failed, progenies shone. *The Motor Boys* solved robberies, rescued kidnapped tots, and stifled a dastardly scheme "to change the signals in a lighthouse." The spunky *Automobile Girls* captured a jewel thief and unearthed a buried treasure. A Wall

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Percy K. Fitzhugh, creator of *Tom Slade* and *Peewee Harris*, and prime competitor to Stratemeyer, was raised in New York and made his later home in New Jersey. There were very few exceptions to this regional pattern until the 1920s.

Street conspiracy was exposed by *The Motor-Boat Club*. "Ruth" and "Alice" helped studio personnel survive a killer snowstorm that dwarfed the blizzard of '88. The four *Outdoor Girls* settled property disputes, recovered "valuable papers," and dispersed spooks. It was all quite routine, and carried off with the insouciance of a mature genius.

All this transpired before they went South. How could Florida possibly measure up? What challenges could these veterans of social combat find there? Did evil lurk somewhere below the thirty-first parallel? The authors clearly decided that the Everglades was the only inscrutable location in an otherwise uncomplicated state. The Everglades was perfectly suited to elastic imaginations. According to the books, quicksand puckered around your ankles and giant saw-grass lacerated your downy cheeks without provocation. Hungry saurians patrolled the waters in search of human delicacies. Manatees towed boats up blindstreams and abandoned the occupants to angry mosquitoes: "The little pests are after me with a vengeance!" Lethal snakes slithered and swam noiselessly nearby, and *Ficus aurea* sought your throat. In addition, the Everglades was an Elysian field for outlaws, untrustworthy Indians, and "ugly Negroes": "Yo'uns had better make tracks away from heah!" Author Harrie Hancock was of the opinion that the Everglades was one place where "watchfulness must be constantly exercised."<sup>9</sup>

Did this deter the young heroes and heroines? Not at all. Uncowed, they were impatient to start. "Hurrah for the Everglades!" yelled one lad. "Florida it is! . . . Couldn't be better. I was always fond of oranges and cocoanuts," another said. "It sounds—enticing," conservative "Grace" murmured to her outdoor pals. "Hurrah for Florida!" a movie actor exclaimed.

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9. To the writers the term "Everglades" was synonymous with "swamps," wherever they were located. Certainly they knew that the Everglades proper lay to the south of Lake Okeechobee, and there was sufficient data available, even in New York City, to belie contentions that the Everglades were as horrible and fatal as depicted. This is but one instance in which, for the sake of dramatic impact, the truth was bent to meet the needs of the plot. As one observer who confronted the Everglades noted: "Everyone has heard of the Everglades; but I think the general impression of what constitutes the Everglades is absolutely erroneous." The word "swamp," he perhaps overstated, had "no application whatever" to that region. See Hugh L. Willoughby, *Across the Everglades* (Philadelphia, 1898), 14.

"There's where I've always wanted to go." *The Automobile Girls* were anxious to sample any delight "that sunny Florida might yield them."

Enthusiasm was not enough, however. Some literary justification was needed, so the authors devised crucial reasons why trips to the Everglades were necessary. "Grace" of *The Outdoor Girls* had to go because her brother was a prisoner in a turpentine camp. If they ever wished to see their bonuses *The Boy Scouts* had to find a missing heir who was in the clutches of "two roughly-dressed, heavily-bearded men." An "ultra-fashionable" embezzler drew *The Motor Boat Club* into the swamps. *The Motion Picture Girls'* company was going on location in the area. *The Motor Boys'* original motives were to help Professor "Urich Snodgrass" snare a rare butterfly for a museum and take a vacation, but affairs took a turn for the worse once they got to Titusville.

It was convenient, too, that sojourns to Florida might serve secondary, humanitarian purposes. The authors wrote about the state's magic effect on the infirm.<sup>10</sup> *The Motion Picture Girls'* father, "Hosmer DeVere," was a former stage personality whose vibrant voice was deteriorating. His daughters had hopes "that the warm air of Florida may improve, and even cure" his throat condition. Miss "Amy" of *The Outdoor Girls* had a sick "Aunty" who was frail and worn due to a "deep-seated malady present in her system." Everyone knew that a "trip to Florida might work wonders," if they could get her there before she passed over. *The Automobile Girls* aunt "Sallie," in Palm Beach

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10. Shortly after the Civil War writers began to extol the virtues of Florida as a haven for the seriously ill. Ledyard Bill, *A Winter in Florida* (New York, 1869), included a section (173-187) of "Hints to the Tourist, Invalid, and Sportsmen." A chapter (XIV, 210-17) "For Consumptives" was in Sidney Lanier's wry presentation, *Florida: Its Scenery, Climate, and History* (Philadelphia, 1875). By the 1880s the state's reputation had grown considerably. James A. Henshall, M.D., *Camping and Cruising in Florida* (Cincinnati, 1884), 232, took some "chronic patients" on a Florida tour and was able to recommend the area to those afflicted with "pulmonary consumption, chronic bronchitis, dyspepsia, neuralgia, nervous exhaustion, etc." It was not untoward for the authors of juvenile books to mention this positive aspect of Florida's character, nor did they exaggerate its significance. A reference work they may have consulted for historical and geographic information also remarked that invalids would "find comfortable accommodations" in the winter season. See Charles L. Norton, *A Handbook of Florida* (New York, 1890), part I, "The Atlantic Coast," XIV.

just a few days, was already resuscitated. "I never felt so well in my life as I do in this delightful place," she announced.

Suitcases bulging, rationales memorized, and fully prepared to tame the "wilds" of Florida, the boys and girls departed the chilly North for the "land of sunshine and magnolias." By motorboat, locomotive, steamer, canoe, and shanks mare they moved inexorably toward the interior. Typically, there was a stopover at Jacksonville, and a polite nod to history at St. Augustine: "This is really the most scrumptiously scrumptious place I've ever been!" Thereafter, all minds focused on the Everglades. Hearts began to palpitate. Early élan gave way to sobering thoughts of murky waters, rapscallions, and ALLIGATORS ("Ugh! The horrid creatures!"). The time of testing was at hand.

Bolstered with orangeade, the young adventurers plunged into the recesses of central east Florida.<sup>11</sup> The flora were impressive, but the fauna were disquieting. Unlike the birds, panthers, deer, and chamelons – who were merely frolicsome – the alligator colony resented the foreign invasion and behaved rudely in each volume. Cranky and incorrigible, the saurians glowered at the intruders from every riverbank. They attacked one of *The Motor Boys*: "It tried to eat me up!" They also cornered *The Outdoor Girls* on a receding sandbar, encircled *The Motion Picture Girls'* barge, and molested a ladyfriend of *The Motor-Boat Club*. This was a tactical error. For their trouble, all alligators – guilty and innocent – were shot through the eyes, clubbed with oars, rammed by boats, and stoned by the outraged visitors. Still, annoyances had their silver linings. Irrepressible "Mollie," just off the sandbar, wondered: "What

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11. The authors offered little specific information as to the sections of Florida in which most of the story action occurred. Once the heroes embarked for the Everglades, borderlines and distances became indistinct. The few clues given indicate that in five of the six volumes the intrepid adolescents were roaming around in Brevard, Orange, and Osceola counties. Of Florida's forty-seven counties in 1910, only Lee and Palm Beach had fewer residents per square mile than Brevard and Osceola. Together, they contained but 10,224 persons. Orange County came closer to the state average of people per square mile (13.7) but, the heroes were operating in sparsely inhabited areas – which may account for the noticeable absence of Floridians in the plots. There was no hint that the state's population had increased some 42.4 per cent since 1900. See *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910* (Washington, 1913), I, 105; II, 299, 302.

would we do for valises and satchels if we had no alligators?"<sup>12</sup>

Having chastised the local animal life, the heroes grew serious. Missions had to be accomplished, and the arduous tasks might have to be undertaken without aid from the authorities. "Florida police officers are not cowards. The men of Florida are brave," author Hancock assured his readership. But, he explained, they were not fools either. They did not traipse nonchalantly into the Everglades in pursuit of the "Who's Who in criminal circles." The long arm of Florida was a bit short when it came to that.<sup>13</sup> No such paltry excuse would suffice for the juvenile heroes, however. They crossed the perimeters into the unknown, while their elders gawked in admiration.

The adversities they met in the Everglades were monumental. *The Motor Boys* were drenched by a sudden hurricane, harrassed by felons, and stricken with a high fever shortly after eating a suspicious mango. Separated from their boat and victimized by hostile laborers, *The Outdoor Girls* were stranded on an island festooned with ghostly moss. "Tom" of motorboat fame was captured and hog-tied by convicts. *The Boy Scouts*, armed with revolvers, were disarmed and roughed up by sneering outlaws. "Ruth" and "Alice," their canoe purloined by a frisky dugong, lost their bearings and roamed the swamps for thirty pages. The

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12. Once the authors decided to portray the Everglades as a place of mystery and terror, it was almost mandatory to choose at least one of its natural residents as a nemesis. The lot fell to the usually apathetic alligators, who were given demoniac and carnivorous characteristics far beyond their actual tendencies. The writers chose to ignore the testimony of many who visited or lived in the state. One observer reported that they were "not a pest, they are quite cowardly, and the largest of them will actually run from a child of six years, unless actually cornered." George M. Barbour, *Florida for Tourists, Invalids, and Settlers* (New York, 1882; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1964), 290. See also Charles T. Simpson, *In Lower Florida Wilds* (New York, 1920), 239-43. Simpson made his home in southern Florida in 1882.
13. It seems likely that fugitives from the law occasionally found their way to the Everglades. Some may have escaped from the movable convict camps located in the central east area in the early 1900s. There were cases of individual eccentricity also, and one or two "gangs," such as the Ashleys in the area before World War I. But to contend that the Everglades quadrant was overflowing with criminals who had made happy, permanent homes in the "trackless jungle" is a fanciful distortion. If Florida law enforcement agents refused to enter the Everglades it was for reasons other than fear of a regiment of outlaws who awaited them. W. S. Batchley, who was in Florida in 1911, noted the convict camps in his *In Days Agone* (Indianapolis, 1932), 143. A survey of anti-social elements in the area may be found in Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *The Everglades: River of Grass* (New York, 1947), 295-332.

greatest misfortune befell one "Noddy Nixon," foil to *The Motor Boys*. "Noddy" ate some "queer kind of red berries" and went totally deaf.

Was this the end at last? Had gallant youth found its Waterloo in Florida? Would their faithful readers never see another volume in the series? No. In whirlwind finales reminiscent of the movie serial *Perils of Pauline*, the heroes rose to new heights, effected mass escapes, and maintained their perfect records. Escutcheons unblemished, they tabulated their achievements. Thanks to *The Motor Boys* Professor "Snodgrass" had his blue Lepidoptera: "Oh, boys! . . . I've got them!" *The Motor-Boat Club* retrieved the \$50,000 stolen from their immediate employer. "Albert Hoover," the displaced scion, was restored to his family by *The Boy Scouts*. "Grace" secured her brother's release from bondage as a turpentine slave. *The Motion Picture Girls'* misadventures had provided their cinematographer with some splendid footage, which "caused a sensation when shown in New York." At Palm Beach *The Automobile Girls* proved that the lovely "Countess Sophia von Stolberg" was not the "notorious woman swindler" wanted by the Paris police.

And what about Florida? By the final chapter the novelty had worn thin. Having penetrated and disinfected the Everglades, the exhausted but exultant heroes' ardor for the state cooled rapidly. Florida might be a lovely spot, but warriors grow restive in drydock. "Too much loveliness palls on one after a bit," Miss "Mollie" yawned. With the countess acquitted and en route to Europe, *The Automobile Girls* felt that "sunny Florida had lost all charm." One of *The Motor Boys* concluded: "Well, there's nothing to keep us down South any longer, I guess." *The Boy Scouts* retired to an isle near the mouth of the St. Johns River and fidgeted for a month. Gradually the vivid memories of the Everglades faded. No one talked of returning some other day. Exhilarated at the prospect of further conquests, the heroes chose their new destinations—in four cases, the Far West— and sped off into awaiting volumes.<sup>14</sup> The great Florida adventure was over.

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14. From Florida *The Automobile Girls* went to Washington, D.C. to assist the state department in frustrating foreign spies, and *The Outdoor Girls* traveled to New England to "have great fun and solve a mystery while on an outing." *The Motion Picture Girls* went to Rocky Ranch to make

This first Florida cycle in juvenile literature presents an opportunity to make some brief observations and respond to questions raised at the outset. For instance: In what form did the state emerge from these works? If one took the material at face value, as many Edwardian adolescents may have, Florida was a strange place indeed. What a young reader gleaned about the area may be illustrated in a composite paragraph drawn from all the volumes under consideration. Had the gregarious "chums" taken time to record their experiences in diaries, the entry might resemble the following in today's phraseology:

FLOR'I-DA (1909-1914): An unsurveyed, tropical region inhabited by semi-educated, imperturbable Southerners with funny accents who are protected by one platoon of drowsy policemen. Everyone coexists peacefully with thousands of armed criminals, until prodded into action by righteous Northerners. The southern, central, and northwestern portions of this state have not been colonized, and no industrial, educational, or political institutions are in evidence. Florida, is blessed with three cities, one "sleepy-looking" hamlet, one major river, and two lakes. The larger lake, Okeechobee, may be reached in ten minutes from anywhere. The state has no capital city but, if demographic clusters and social life are any indication, the capital will be in the swamps, due East of Kissimmee. The typical unemployed Floridian's diet consists of oranges, cocoanuts, oranges, cornpone, oranges, fried chicken, and oranges. The typical alligator's diet consists of careless Floridians. The state's "first families" are Seminoles, most of whom are named "Okee" and who scurry around in the underbrush because they are shy. Florida has no visible source of or need for state revenues. Its humble natives eke out livings by serving as guides or informants for transient millionaires who drop in to search for something priceless they misplaced in the Everglades. Once the dynamic visitors leave the state, Floridians become comatose. If the state has a future it will be as (1) a zoo, or (2) a health spa, or (3) a

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a movie called "East and West" ("Ho, for the West! . . . All aboard!"). California beckoned irresistably to *The Motor-Bout Club* and *The Motor Boys*, and *The Boy Scouts* stopped off at the Grand Canyon. What happened after they arrived may be assumed.

national terminus for missing persons. Florida has not changed in any way since it was admitted to the Union recently.

Although it is unproductive to take low-grade fiction too seriously, it is fair to say that Florida was done an injustice by the purveyors of juvenile stories.<sup>15</sup> Descriptive information was selected for its dramatic potential. Many features of the state's character were distorted or oversimplified. Geographic license was fully operative. No serious attempt was made to enlighten as well as entertain. Obviously, the use of Florida as a thematic device was an excuse to continue a lucrative literary formula.

In a kind mood one might ask: How could it have been otherwise? The authors were good businessmen. They took the public's pulse, diagnosed a special interest correctly, and issued the right prescription, over and over again. Many of them had newspaper experience—and the journalist's knack for snappy dialogue, organized presentation, pace, and dramatic events which might intrigue young citizens.<sup>16</sup> They were immersed in a trade that placed heavy premiums on speed, continuity,

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15. Just before World War I, the first serious attack on these juvenile books was mounted by Franklin K. Mathiews, an "advocate of better reading for boys" (there was no concern expressed about girls), who was appointed chief scout librarian, Boy Scouts of America, in 1912. He immediately began a campaign against "mile-a-minute" fiction, labelling it "cheap," "pernicious," and "sensational," and making no secret of his disdain for the likes of Edward Stratemeyer. Mathiews was certain that boys would be "handicapped" and "terribly crippled" by the "trashy" pap the authors dispensed. Sounding very much like vice-hunter Anthony Comstock, Mathiews called for the banning of the books from public libraries and newstores, close supervision of reading matter by adults, and the publication of alternate choices in literature. Only partially successful in stimulating a flurry of book bans, Mathiews sponsored a series of his own books with B.S.A. approval. He made no visible inroads into the "cheap books" domination of juvenile tastes and, by 1934, he was "no longer rabid" to exorcise them from the market. He even acknowledged that they might "engender the reading habit." Generally over-reactions to low-level literature have been counter-productive. See Franklin K. Mathiews, "Blowing Out the Boy's Brains," *Outlook*, CVIII (November 18, 1914), 652-54; "For Indeed It Was He," 208-09.
16. Frank Patchin held positions as reporter and city editor for papers in New York, Rochester, and Washington. Gilbert Patten wrote for Maine news weeklies in the 1880s. Harrie Hancock worked for the Boston *Globe* and the *New York Journal*. Many of Stratemeyer's anonymous employees were newspapermen who worked in his syndicate as their regular jobs permitted. See Prager, "Edward Stratemeyer and His Book Machine," 52.

and momentum. Eyes always on the target— Americans between twelve and eighteen— the authors showered it with adjectives, exclamation points, heroic platitudes, and climaxes in a frenzy of action that substituted nicely for real thought. So much was happening, who would notice that no ideas passed by?

The producing agencies, such as the Stratemeyer syndicate, were dedicated to completing one title in an ongoing series every sixty days. This precluded the possibility of extensive research. Hearsay, rumors, myths, clichés, almanacs, and roadmaps become the ready references in which the hasty writer seeks his evidence. His solace lies in verisimilitude, his reality in caricature. With the exception of Harrie Hancock, who had direct contact with Florida in 1898, few of the authors of this cycle revealed much more than a superficial acquaintance with the area.<sup>17</sup> Even if they knew a great deal, the necessity to devise thrills in geometric progression smothered any display of deeper understanding. The cash nexus and literary accountability may not be mutually exclusive, but they are often strangers.

It would be a retroactive insult to our forbears's intelligence to suggest that they were hoodwinked by these books. There is no reason to believe that they suffered psychic damage or that their prejudices were directly attributable to the inferior ma-

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17. By early May 1898, Tampa had become the "focus for invasion activity" in the war with Spain. Over 125 newsmen gathered in the city and made the Tampa Bay Hotel their headquarters. With Clara Barton, Teddy Roosevelt, Frederic Remington, Richard Harding Davis, and other notables, the impatient correspondents waited for the crossing to Cuba. Not until June 10 did the troops depart Tampa, although some journalists managed to make the trip surreptitiously beforehand. Hancock, then representing *Golden Hours* magazine, spent a month with the army in Cuba, returning on the transport *Seneca* in July. In *The Motor-Boat Club in Florida* Hancock rendered descriptions of Tampa and the social functions at the hotel which could only have been done by one who had been there and observed keenly (204-26). Unfortunately the other sections are quite mundane, in the spirit of the "potboilers" of the time. In his other series (*Boys of the Army*, *High School Boys*, *Annapolis*, *West Point*, et. al.) Hancock made no better use of his talent and experiences. On the Spanish War interlude see Charles H. Brown, *The Correspondents' War* (New York, 1967), 202-34, "Piazza Pieces at Tampa." Although his book *The Automobile Girls* at Palm Beach does not display it, author Frank Patchin probably knew Florida fairly well. He "traveled extensively, visiting every part of the world except South America" and was a resident of Jacksonville when he died in March 1925. *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York, 1932), XXII, 365.

terial the corporate writers offered them. Popular fiction is only one and perhaps a minor component of the public consciousness. And what about Florida? It transcended the cursory treatment it received splendidly. Hurricanes, poverty, outlaws, and Messianic adolescents notwithstanding, the state prospered. Its population in 1900 (528,542) more than doubled by 1930.<sup>18</sup> One recalls that, in a weak moment, "Ruth" of *The Motion Picture Girls* cried out: "I think the Garden of Paradise must have been in Florida!" Perhaps some young readers of that era stopped reading right there, on page sixty-seven, and vowed to go South someday.

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18. In 1930 the population was 1,468,211. See *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930* (Washington, 1932), 395.