Playgrounds or Classrooms:

Visions of Global Engagement in US Children's Literature, 1898-1941

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Introduction

Flipping open their copy of the December 4th, 1927, edition of the morning paper, readers of the *Los Angeles Times* would have found a half-page advertisement promising to fulfill their last-minute Christmas shopping needs. “A book—a moment—and the world is yours! There’s no land so far away, no clime so sweet but that the pages of a book can take you there,” the advertisement promised parents. “It’s a privilege to GIVE travel, thrills, dreams.”[1] Among its children’s titles, the advertisement prominently boasted stock of two different collections: the *Twins* series and the *Tom Swift* books. These book series, in particular, lived up to the advertisement’s promise of bringing the world into the laps of young readers. They transported their readers beyond the borders of the continental United States to foreign and exciting places with characters, like Tom Swift, who traveled or those, like the titular twins, who were foreigners themselves. The books, seemingly innocuous based on their titles alone, also presented children with specific vision of United States’ role in the world.

Throughout first half of the twentieth century, ideas about the ideal forms of American empire and foreign relations were transmitted through children’s literature. The *Tom Swift* series was produced under a publishing syndicate led by the enterprising Edward Stratemeyer. Stratemeyer, the brain behind famous characters like the Hardy Boys, took his young male protagonists on exciting adventures abroad. In their journeys, his heroes neither experience personal change nor develop deep connections with the places they encounter. Instead, Stratemeyer used global interactions as a means through which his characters could extract material goods, test new technologies, or otherwise enrich themselves. On the other hand, Lucy

[1] “Display Ad 74—After All, There’s Nothing Like a Good Book,” *Los Angeles Times,* 4 December 1927, https://www-proquest-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/historical-newspapers/display-ad-74-no-title/docview/162061214/se-2.

Fitch Perkins, a children's author popular with educators, wrote about assimilation and American global dominance through her stories of foreign-born twins. Her *Twins* series emphasized the ways that mutually transformative relationships could bring new peoples into the American sphere of influence. Through literary and historical analysis of Stratemeyer's and Perkins' books, I argue that the different ideas of foreign relations presented in these authors' works demonstrate a key intellectual tension in American conceptions of international power between the acquisition of overseas territories in 1898 and until the United States' entry into World War II in 1941.

Specifically, I use Perkins and Stratemeyer to identify two strains within popular ideas of how the US ought to pursue foreign relations——a transformative global presence and a transactional one, respectively. Perkins and Stratemeyer were not ideological masterminds, but the popularity of their works suggests that they may have helped to shape and reinforce the perspectives of their young readers. Because they wrote for child audiences, I also argue that these authors reflect culturally accepted and debated ideas. I draw on language used by American Studies scholar Christina Klein who, writing about middle-brow intellectuals in the Cold War, uses the term "global imaginaries" to refer to popular ideologies of international engagement. Klein argues that by abstracting "the infinite complexity of the world to comprehensible terms," a global imaginary "creates a common sense about how the world functions as a system and offers implicit instruction in how to maneuver within that system."[2] In the public intellect, global imaginaries map complex pathways of foreign relations onto comprehensible paradigms about the proper role of the US and its conduct in the world.[3]

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[2] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23.
[3] Michael Hunt also writes that popular ideologies serve as "an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggest appropriate ways

A global imaginary of transformation sought to spread American values, emphasizing the importance of relations as the key to successful global engagement. Lucy Fitch Perkins' *Twins* series fit within this framework, telling stories about twins of different nationalities set in their countries of origins. These books taught children about other cultures on one hand, while also perpetuating a narrative of Americanization that affirmed US international power on the other. Transformation saw global engagement as an obligation of the modern world. Perkins' liberal view of interaction was genuinely interested in how foreign cultures and peoples could positively influence the United States. The outcome of global interaction was twofold: Americans giving *to* foreign places and people, and Americans benefiting *from* foreign places and people. However, her appreciation of the possibilities of global relationships was limited by her continued interest in spreading American influence and the underlying context of material wealth to be gained from expansionism.

A global imaginary of transaction, in contrast, focused solely on how the United States could benefit from global relationships and questioned forms of interaction that required taking responsibility for foreign people and places. Ultimately extractive, the transactional global imaginary turned away from a shared, relational global experience. Across his fiction series, Edward Stratemeyer used transactions as the basis for his swashbuckling male protagonists' adventures. Unlike Perkins, Stratemeyer took a more conservative approach to international relations.[4] His characters travel abroad only when convinced it is in their best interest to do so,

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of dealing with the reality." Quoted in Michaela Hoenicke-Moore, "Containing the Multitudes: Nationalism and US Foreign Policy Ideas at the Grassroots Level," in *Ideology in U.S. Foreign Relations: New Histories,* eds. Christopher McKnight Nichols and David Milne (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 74.

[4] I use "conservative" and "liberal" in a literal sense of openness-to-change, rather than to denote the author's politics. Stratemeyer characters are more reluctant to travel and resistant to change once they do. Perkins, on the other hand, is more open to the generative possibilities of foreign relations and accepting of possible, albeit limited, change of American culture.

and typically did not come out of the interactions fundamentally changed. Unlike the hazy cultural benefits presented by Perkins, his characters receive only concrete outcomes through their adventures: gold, items of anthropological significance, proof of their own prowess against their enemies. Protagonists enter, extract some tangible material success, and promptly exit. Stratemeyer was also uninterested in how the interactions affected foreign people, who were only secondary characters in his stories. His adventures are concerned more with resources than people, and I use the term transaction to denote his emphasis the outcomes of interaction, rather than a mutually agreed upon exchange.

Importantly, transformation and transaction were not mutually exclusive concepts of global interaction. They both ultimately accepted and promoted a US interest in power on the world stage. Perkins and Stratemeyer, by writing within these paradigms, were both interested in justifying and understanding the benefits of an international presence. Neither entertain isolationist ideas. Transformative global imaginaries, moreover, often paved the way for transactions. While not exclusively focused on the material outcomes of interaction, transformations opened access to new markets and resources. But my argument focuses on the nuanced *differences* between their ideologies—in particular, the emphasis they placed on the relational aspect of global interaction. For transactional global imaginaries, relationships were unnecessary to securing American interests; for transformational global imaginaries, they were paramount to the ability of the US to expand its power abroad.

As I will demonstrate in this thesis, ideas of transaction and transformation were presented across Stratemeyer's and Perkins' children's texts. The books themselves articulated and gave specificity to these global imaginaries. In targeting young audiences, children's literature also projected ideas about foreign relations onto a generation of future citizens who

could embrace the approaches. By closely analyzing both the archival and literary elements of these popular children's books, I establish that these children's authors maintained specific visions about how global encounters should happen: on transactional or transformational terms.

Mapping the Ideological Landscape

Stratemeyer and Perkins both wrote about foreign relations during the first half of the twentieth century, a time of deep ambivalence about what kind of world power the United States ought to be. I take 1898-1941 as my time frame precisely because of the emergent debates about the proper form of US global engagement.[5] The war with Spain in 1898 and the subsequent annexations of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam (as well as the non-Spanish territories of Hawai'i, American Samoa, and Wake) marked a turning point in US foreign relations. In the nineteenth century, the United States had perused continental expansion dependent on the genocide of Indigenous people and the colonization of new territory by white settlers. After 1898, the United States shifted to a policy of administrative colonialism, where control was extended over foreign places without the promise of statehood, making the American empire look much more like that of its European counterparts.[6] The imperial acquisitions of 1898 gave the United States a new kind of global identity and brought with it questions of the form and function of global engagement. What exactly were US interests abroad? How could those

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[5] This period is often taken up by historians of US foreign relations. *The Cambridge History of America and the World*, for example, divides US foreign relations into four periods, with 1900-1945 being the third. I amend this the *CHAW*'s periodization of the early twentieth century to include the territorial acquisitions of 1898. I also exclude 1941-1945, when the US was militarily involved in World War II, as the children's books I read have distinctive European-oriented pro-war themes that are not representative of the broader trends in the time frame I analyze.

[6] For an overview of the shift from settler to administrative colonialism see Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Picador, 2019).

interests best be served? What kind of relationships should the US establish with the foreign peoples and places it encountered?

As historians Brooke Blower and Andrew Preston argue, "many Americans embraced an ideologically expansionist sensibility," but their "world views and foreign policy preferences ran along all kinds of fault lines during the first half of the twentieth century."[7] In many ways, the question of *if* the United should be globally engaged had already been determined. The U.S. had become enmeshed in global economies throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and had the world's largest GDP by the turn of the century.[8] At home, massive new immigration waves brought the world to American shores at the turn of the century, a process of global interaction adjacent to imperial acquisitions.[9] While the idea of isolationism has classically been used to define the foreign policy of this time period, historians like Christopher McKnight Nichols show that even self-identified isolationists sought to "reinforce many, albeit limited, forms of international engagement."[10] In fact, the category of "isolationism" has been questioned as Euro-centric by historians who point to United States' many engagements (militaristic and economic) in Latin America and the Pacific throughout the early twentieth century.[11] While there were certainly some Americans opposed to any international involvement, their presence in

[7] Brooke L. Blower and Andrew Preston, "Introduction to Volume III," in *The Cambridge History of America and the World*, eds. Brooke L. Blower and Andrew Preston, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 19.
[8] GDP discussed in Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Katherine C. Epstein, "The Sinews of Globalization," in *The Cambridge History of America and the World*, eds. Brooke L. Blower and Andrew Preston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 37–61.
[9] Immigration and imperialism discussed in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). Immigration rates had increased beginning in the late 1870s but began to rise even more rapidly after the turn of the century and until the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act in 1924 severely restricted new arrivals.
[10] Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.
[11] For examples, see Blower and Preston, "Introduction to Volume III" and Nichols, *Promise and* Peril, 18.

politics and culture has been significantly overemphasized, and I am concerned instead with nuances among perspectives about the extent and form of engagement.

This thesis questions early twentieth century global imaginaries, which grew out of both direct overseas expansion in 1898 and the American public's diverse interactions with foreign places and peoples. Categories like "imperialism" and "anti-imperialism" exist within both global imaginaries, especially when defining imperialism on narrowly territorial terms. Thus, I speak broadly about immigration, imperialism, and quasi-imperialism under umbrella terms of "global engagement" and "global imaginaries" in my argument about popular understandings of how the United States would act on a world stage. When it makes sense to do so, I will use a more descriptive phrase.

With American global presence established in practice, the early twentieth century saw new public debates about what *kind* of relationship Americans should have with foreign peoples and places. In these debates, global imaginaries of transformation and transaction take shape. For example, in the immediate wake of the United States' territorial acquisitions, many white Americans embraced ideologies of expansionism and tutelage of nonwhite people beyond the North American continent. President William McKinley, justifying the annexation of the Philippines in 1900, said "There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them and by God's grace do the very best we could by them."[12] McKinley, who had been an ambivalent imperialist but ultimately embraced annexation as an assertion of US power, articulated a common understanding that the United States had the power to transform the foreign people and places with which it came into contact. This paralleled the ideologies of the US's imperial counterparts in Europe, who

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[12] William McKinley, "Decision on the Philippines," 1900, accessed, 10 March 2024, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=1257.

extended political control over colonized people and grappled with how to include them in their empire.[13]

Other internationally minded Americans, such as Protestant missionaries, also advocated for the transmutative power of global engagement.[14] Progressive reformers within the US, often coming from a similar moral perspective, touted the ways in which immigrant culture both influenced the American "melting pot" and provided opportunities to Americanize newly arrived foreign peoples.[15] Like expansionist imperialist thought, these ideologies were based on the conviction that American global presence was necessary to spread democratic, capitalist, and Christian ideals. These outcomes would be best achieved by cultivating relationships with foreign people and places (directly imperial and otherwise). As a global power, both within their territorial boundaries and beyond, the US could also enjoy access to economies and shape countries in ways beneficial to them. Engaging with the world through the development of close, yet often unequal relations, provided beneficial outcomes. In fact, American interests could *only* be served if the country directly shaped a world friendly to their presence.

Not everyone so readily accepted the mission of the United States to make the world in its image. Objections to overseas expansionism developed in the immediate aftermath of the war in 1898. "We do not want the Filipinos. We want the Philippines," complained one San

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[13] Thomas Metcalf discusses the British idea of the "Other" in *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). He argues that British Victorians had to reconcile their ideas of liberal democracy with their imperial rule over people whom they viewed as inferior. In India, Metcalf argued, they were conflicted over "how far its peoples ought to be transformed into Europe's image, and how they should be expected to live according to the standards of their own culture." Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj,* 2.

[14] Emily Conroy-Krutz specifically discusses youth and missionary culture in "'For Young People': Protestant Missions, Geography, and American Youth at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *Ideology in U.S. Foreign Relations: New Histories,* eds. Christopher McKnight Nichols and David Milne (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 211-231. For interesting examples of the kind of (unintended) reciprocal effects of foreign relations, see David Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[15] Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, and Dianna Selig, *Americans All : The Cultural Gifts Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Francisco newspaper in 1900. “The islands are enormously rich, but, unfortunately they are infested by Filipinos.”[16] Such arguments did not necessarily reject forms of empire or the idea that the United States should be a global power. They *did* question whether interaction with foreign people was necessary to achieve the potential positive outcomes (e.g. “riches”) of global engagement. Driven by ideas of a racial hierarchy similar to expansionists, those in opposition to an unfettered transformative global presence did not deem it necessary to engage with foreign people. Instead, they emphasized global interaction's extractive benefits. They believed the United States could enjoy continued economic prosperity without fundamentally changing themselves or others.

These transactional ideologies pictured new forms of global interaction that bypassed the obligations of an imperial state. Despite their territorial grab in 1898, the United States did not seek significant further territorial acquisition. Still, the United States extended influence over countries in the Global South. Throughout the 1900s, 10s, and 20s, the United States militarily intervened in Latin American governments to secure leadership favorable to American political and economic interests.[17] Ideologies which supported such coercive policies certainly did not represent a rejection of America’s global presence. However, they questioned prevailing ideas of civilizational uplift: did foreign people and societies need to be transformed in order to be engaged?

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[16] *The San Francisco Argonaut* (1900), quoted in Civil Rights Congress (U.S.), *We Charge Genocide: the Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government against the Negro People* (New York, 1951).

[17] Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43-80. Dollar diplomacy, the use of economic power and loans to exert power over foreign governments, would serve a similar function, bringing countries in the Western hemisphere under American influence without the burden of annexation. For more, see Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Surprisingly, ideological and cultural questions about the form of engagement are not well explored in scholarship about foreign relations and empire in the early twentieth century. In contrast, the expansionist ideologies of the nineteenth and second half of the twentieth century are thoroughly studied throughout historical scholarship. Continental expansion westward in the nineteenth century is historically delineated by the idea of the frontier and "Manifest Destiny."[18] The end of World War II and the height of US global power, on the other hand, is clearly defined by Cold War politics that emphasized expansionist ideas of containment focused on bringing other countries into the American sphere of influence.[19] Studying the critical linkage period between these well-understood periods provides insight into how ideological tensions evolved.

Existing intellectual histories of US foreign relations in the first half of the twentieth century often rely on policy or high-brow debates to describe conflicting ideas about engagement.[20] For example, characterizations of early twentieth century expansion that use "the rubric 'Republic or Empire?'" are more concerned with national identity than the actual shape of engagement.[21] Ideas of unilateralism, multilateralism, and neutrality, on the other hand, are descriptive of diplomatic history.[22] Not reflected in these intellectual histories, however, were the

[18] The most famous example of this is Richard Slotkin's multi-volume series on the frontier, which extensively discusses the influence of Westward expansion on culture. The most famous of these works is Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence; the Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*, (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).
[19] Klein, for example, characterizes cultural understandings of the Cold War role of the US in the world as one of both containment and integration. Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 22-24.
[20] Interestingly, there is a lot of scholarship on the different dissident ideologies that emerged in the early twentieth century, especially Black internationalism. See, for example, Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011. https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807869161_makalani).
[21] Christopher McKnight Nichols and David Milne, "Introduction," in *Ideology in U.S. Foreign Relations: New Histories,* eds. Christopher McKnight Nichols and David Milne (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 23.
[22] As discussed in Brooke L. Blower, "From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 345–76. https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht091.

clearly common questions about the value of interaction and the form of engagement.[23] To fill out this historical conversation, I am interested in describing the different imperialistic flavors floating in the American consciousness. This thesis questions what form of expansionism Americans wanted to take. Specifically, what were the United States' interests in interacting with foreign people and places, and how could those interests best be served through different forms of engagement?

I propose the paradigm of transaction and transformation, but that is not to say that these are the only ideologies in this time. Reading two authors, while insightful, can provide only a partial understanding of public sentiment. Yet, I also hope this analysis will provide an opportunity to think more deeply about popular conflicts over the form of engagement in the early twentieth century. Children's texts offer potent insight into these debates.

Children, Culture, Nationhood

Through my analysis, I contribute to a growing scholarly conversation about how popular culture reflected and reinforced ideologies of US foreign relations. In the past three decades, scholars of American empire such as Amy Kaplan and Christina Klein have turned to culture to yield new understandings of imperialism. As Klein argues: "Cultural texts perform a hegemonic function to the extent that they legitimate a given distribution of power, both within and beyond the borders of the nation."[24] Literary texts can explain what ideologies resonate with and impact popular culture. Literary scholar John Carlos Rowe, for instance, discusses the importance of

[23] Thomas Borstelmann treats interactions between the US and foreign people in *Just Like Us: The American Struggle to Understand Foreigners* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). However, Borstelmann only talks in very general terms and discusses the Cold War more in depth than the early twentieth century.
[24] Klein, *Cold War Orientalism,* 7. See also Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

literature to the imperial project by using literary analysis to historically situate texts within public debates about imperialism.[25]

I also engage other historians who have pointed to the ways that childhood can provide particular insight into American culture. Sarah Maza, for instance, argues that cultural analyses of children can illuminate the "justifications for the building of national, social, racial, and cultural hierarchies."[26] Maza suggests that writing history "through children" can offer perspective on the ideologies and agendas of adults. Robin Bernstein, examining ideas of racial power, specifically points to how children's print and material culture can provide an avenue for understanding how children both receive and reproduce dominant ideologies.[27] Emily Murphy and Clif Straton, among others, apply this methodology to examine how children's culture and education instructed children in the ways of foreign relations.[28] My argument builds on these analyses, employing cheap mass-market children's texts which combine the methodology of historians of popular culture and historians of children's culture.

Throughout my thesis, I refer broadly to American children as the audience of the books, as it is difficult to distinguish the demographics of the actual readers. However, these books were

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[25] John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S Imperialism : From the Revolution to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16. Another useful text on literary culture and empire in the nineteenth century is Jesse Alemán and Shelley Streeby, eds, *Empire and the Literature of Sensation: An Anthology of Nineteenth Century Popular Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
[26] Sarah Maza,"The Kids Aren't All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1261–85. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa380.
[27] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence : Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
[28] Murphy examines children's culture and the Cold War in Emily A. Murphy, *Growing Up with America: Youth, Myth and National Identity, 1945 to Present* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2020). Clif Straton examines the role of education as an imperial project in Clif Stratton, *Education for Empire: American Schools, Race, and Paths of Good Citizenship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). There is also a rich scholarship on how the British empire was legitimized through British children's literature. See Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism Through Children's Books and Magazines* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) and M. Daphne Kutzer, *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books*, (New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000).

typically written for children of the same demographics as the authors (white, urban, Northerners), and their tone, characters, and content reflect this background. Other historians discuss how children at the edges of the colonial project were brought face-to-face with a completely different version of the imperial story, through often conflicting ideas given in their classrooms and experienced through everyday contact with imperial violence.[29] However, my thesis is primarily concerned with how those guaranteed citizenship and power as adults, particularly white middle- and upper- class children, were exposed to ideas about American global engagement. In these cases, the goal was not tutelage into second-class citizenship but preparation as the future faces of the country's foreign relations.[30]

The early twentieth century is a particularly rich time period for analysis of children's culture, as Americans developed a deep interest and investment in ideas of childhood. Children had certainly been considered important symbols of the nation throughout the 1800s.[31] But by the turn of the century, ideas of childhood as a distinct developmental period had gained prominence. Literary scholar Caroline Levander argues that "early-twentieth century configurations of the child" cast children "as a benchmark of the democratic process and its racial contours."[32] Children were not merely symbolic representations of the United States, but future citizens who could be instructed in ideals of the nation. In response, reformers brought

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[29] For examples, see Jonathan Zimmerman, *Innocents Abroad: American Teachers in the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Meg Wesling, *Empire's Proxy: American Literature and U.S. Imperialism in the Philippines* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2011), Stratton, *Education for Empire.*

[30] Notably, girl readers were future citizens in different ways than boys. When Stratemeyer and Perkins started writing, women did not have the right to vote. Even after the passage of the nineteenth amendment, women held a different role in foreign relations than men. As I demonstrate, these gendered differences made themselves apparent in the children's texts.

[31] Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[32] Caroline F. Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. DuBois* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

issues of children and family into the realm of public regulation at the turn of the century.[33] If children were seen as juvenile citizens in need of proper education, then they must also be taught the correct values of internationalism. Educational programs throughout the early twentieth century, therefore, instructed children "to think of themselves not just as citizens of their own country but of a larger world community," although they still often upheld ideas of global hierarchy.[34]

The promotion of internationalist thought was not limited to classrooms. Popular media, meant to both instruct and entertain, also adapted to political and social norms. Mass-market children's books, a medium which arose in the late nineteenth century, reproduced popular, palatable, and recognizable themes.[35] Such books, which appear benign and mundane at first glance, give insight into the popular consciousness. Cheap dime-novel children's literature in the nineteenth century, for instance, reflected dominant ideas of political economy. Horatio Alger Jr., one of the most prominent children's book authors of the second half of the century, wrote rags-to-riches narratives that reflected ideas of individualism and the belief in possibilities for mobility within industrial capitalism.[36] Other "Western" dime novels and magazines targeted at children in this time valorized settler colonialism and westward expansion.[37] Across these texts, authors both reinforced and further developed popular social ideas.

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[33] See Kriste Lindenmeyer, "*A Right to Childhood": The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).
[34] Megan Threlkeld, "Education for Pax Americana: The Limits of Internationalism in Progressive Era Peace Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2017): 519. doi:10.1017/heq.2017.30.
[35] Fiction books for children were highly regulated by reformers concerned about their content and literary quality. This was particularly true in spaces like public libraries. See Esther Jane Carrier, *Fiction in Public Libraries, 1900-1950* (Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985).
[36] There were also dime novels targeted at adults, but for the purposes of my argument I discuss only dime novel literature targeted at child readers. See Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987).
[37] Brian Rouleau, "How the West Was Fun: Children's Literature and Frontier Mythmaking toward the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2020): 49–74. https://doi.org/10.1093/whq/whz099.

Edward Stratemeyer and Lucy Fitch Perkins arose out of the traditions of earlier popular children's books. Their stories moved beyond industrial uplift and continental growth to reflect newly relevant ideologies of US global engagement. Some scholars have engaged directly with the works of Stratemeyer and Perkins through the lens of empire. Brian Rouleau, Karen Sand O'Connor, and Jani Barker, among others, have taken up these works to understand how imperial ideologies were transmitted in the early twentieth century.[38] Scholarship on Stratemeyer and empire tends to examine the ways in which his earliest books justify American territorial acquisition by setting their conflicts in the imperial wars of 1898. Brian Rouleau, for instance, argues that Stratemeyer's series written at the turn of the century valorized overseas territorial acquisition for boy readers.[39] In Perkins' case, scholars focus on how she was interested in the issue of immigration and internationalism, bringing together the world's children through a less explicitly imperialist gaze. Although authors like Karen Dillon note Perkins' liberal view towards people of different races, they also acknowledge that her stories obscure her underlying message of Americanization.[40] These scholars clearly establish that the works of Stratemeyer and Perkins functioned to legitimize a US global presence.

However, Rouleau and others only begin to unfold how Stratemeyer and Perkins narrate a specific *shape* of American empire in the twentieth century. Clearly, the United States had a global presence, which was justified in part through children's literature. But what that global

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[38] Brian Rouleau, *Empire's Nursery: Children's Literature and the Origins of the American Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2021); Karen Sands-O'Conner, "The Stratemeyer Chums Have Fun in the Caribbean: America and Empire in Children's Series" in *Internationalism in Children's Series,* eds., Karen Sands-O'Connor and Marietta A. Frank (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 59-75; and Jani L. Barker, "'A really big theme': Americanization and World Peace-Internationalism and/as Nationalism in Lucy Fitch Perkins's Twins Series," in *Internationalism in Children's Series,* eds., Karen Sands-O'Connor and Marietta A. Frank (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 76-94.

[39] See Chapter 2 of Rouleau, *Empire's Nursery* and Sands-O'Connor, "The Stratemeyer Chums."

[40] Karen Dillon, "'The heft of both countries in your fists': Lucy Fitch Perkins's Foreign Twins as Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," *Children's Literature* 39, (2011): 85-106. https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2011.0017.

presence would look like was a question that needed an answer. I argue that these children's texts present answers about the shape, scope, and scale of global interactions. And, although children's autonomy is not central to my argument about ideologies present in the texts, I will also show how children also embraced these themes. Reading the books in terms of the global imaginaries they employ—for Stratemeyer, transaction, for Perkins transformation—helps to make sense of the differences between the two worldviews and how they were received. The particulars of each of these imaginaries can be found in the books' plots, characters, and themes.

I. Fictionalizing Foreign Relations; Or, Edward Stratemeyer's Vision of Transaction

Edward Stratemeyer was one of the most popular, yet least well-known, authors of the twentieth century. As *Fortune* magazine put it: "Oil had its Rockefeller, literature had its Stratemeyer."[41] Stratemeyer was a pioneer of series fiction, churning out novels with formulaic plotlines by the dozens. Like Rockefeller's dominance of the oil industry, Stratemeyer's syndicate had a monopoly over children's literature, not only finding approval from young fans but also wildly outselling his competitors.[42] One estimate puts Stratemeyer's sales around 20 million by 1934, a staggering number considering the US population in 1930 was 120 million and that sales numbers do not reflect copies circulated among libraries or second-hand networks.[43] Thanks to Stratemeyer's business acumen, the Rover Boys and Don Sturdy were household names for families in the first half of the twentieth century.[44] Beyond their surface-level entertainment value, Stratemeyer's books also peddled ideologies of foreign interaction.

Stratemeyer wrote many books about international adventure in the first half of the twentieth century, a fact overlooked by historians who instead focus on the "career" aspects of these stories.[45] Yet in his syndicate fiction books, Stratemeyer heroes frequently travel and

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[41] "For It Was Indeed He," *Fortune*, April 1934, 87.

[42] Like Rockefeller, Stratemeyer was also interested in oil production, and he repeatedly insisted that child audiences wanted to read about oil fields. He managed to work oil into several of his existing titles, including Edward Stratemeyer, *The Rover Boys in the Land of Luck; or, Stirring Adventures in the Oil Fields* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1921); Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift and His Great Oil Gusher: Or, The Treasure of Goby Farm* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1924); and Alice B. Emerson, *Betty Gordon in the Land of Oil; or, The Farm That Was Worth a Fortune* (New York: Cupples and Leon, 1920). He also proposed a series titled "The Young Oil Well Shooters," that was never published; see "Suggestion for a new series of boys books at a moderate price, October 23, 1924," Outlines, Box 319, Records of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, New York Public Library (RSS, NYPL).

[43] Sales estimate quoted in Deidre Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer and the Stratemeyer Syndicate* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 162; Census data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1930 Census: Volume 1. Population, Number and Distribution, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1931/dec/1930a-vol-01-population.html, accessed 14 March 2024.

[44] Stratemeyer maintained a long list of potential character names, such as "Dusty Dick" and "Lanky Lem," many of which were never put into use. See "Suggested Titles," Box 320, Records of the Stratemeyer Syndicate, New York Public Library (RSS, NYPL).

[45] For example, Deidre Johnson characterizes Stratemeyer's *Old Glory* series as his primary travel stories, and characters like Tom Swift and Ted Scott as inventors and aviators, rather than characters capable of revealing

encounter foreign places and peoples. Characters such as the explorer Don Sturdy and aviator Ted Scott embark on adventures that take place almost exclusively abroad. Tom Swift, the popular character known for his wild (and strangely prophetic) inventions, traveled abroad in half of his stories.[46] The characters in Stratemeyer's other domestic books also travel, including in the *Motor Boys* and the famous *Rover Boys* series. These stories present subtle but distinct visions of foreign relations.

Stratemeyer's series fiction depended on repetitive storylines and familiar boy heroes. As a result, his characters do not face significant personal change; although his they often extract wealth from the places they visit, their wild financial prosperity has little impact on their lifestyles and is almost never a primary motivation for travels abroad. Stratemeyer also devoted little time to discussing the foreign peoples with whom his characters came in contact. Foreign encounters serve as means to personal and financial ends; foreign places serve as playgrounds with limited consequence to the lives of heroes.

Stratemeyer was skeptical of the transformative potential of foreign affairs, but he was by no means an isolationist. On one hand, Stratemeyer himself admitted to using his writing to invoke "a desire to know what is going on in the world," in his young audiences.[47] At the same time, Stratemeyer acknowledged that the shape and form of his books were determined by child readers. History and geography, he claimed, were on their own uninteresting to the average child. Instead, Stratemeyer based his novels on places "in which the boy's interest has already been

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something about Stratemeyer's imperial ideologies. Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 65-73. See also Billman, *Secrets of the Stratemeyer Syndicate,* 19.

[46] Out of 39 *Tom Swift* books published between 1910 and 1941, 19 of them take place beyond the territorial borders of the United States. The ones within the United States sometimes played on ideas of "pioneers" in the West or foreign spies on home soil, other avenues for interpretation of imperialism.

[47] "Newark Author, Great Favorite with Young Folks, Talks of Stories for Boys," *Newark Sunday News*, 14 June 1903, Box 319, RSS, NYPL

thoroughly aroused."[48] Indeed, Stratemeyer's real books and proposed titles often responded to the current events of the day.[49] By writing about foreign places, Stratemeyer also reinforced an interest in the world among his juvenile audiences.

Notably, Stratemeyer's girl series focus significantly less on travel abroad, resulting in a gendered view of foreign relations. As one newspaper explained, boys were interested in "Adventure—mystery—pirates—animals—excitement!" while girls only wanted to read about "Fairy things, ideals, dreams, and plans for when they're grown-up."[50] Stratemeyer's girl series did not completely relegate women to the domestic sphere—series like *The Outdoor Girls* and *The Motor Girls* embraced leading roles for female characters. The syndicate's most popular series is *Nancy Drew,* first published in 1930. But these books rarely gave their girl heroes challenging adventures, and almost took their characters to foreign places.[51] Stratemeyer's fictive imagination was limited by his investment in what Teddy Roosevelt called "the strenuous life," an idea that connected ideals of manhood with imperialism.[52] His boy characters, in fact, often go abroad to *rescue* women (Mary Nestor, Tom Swifts' love interest, is prone to capture, and Don Sturdy spends the first half of his series searching for his mother and sister). Stratemeyer leaned into the daring, exciting, militaristic characteristics associated with adolescent boys and used them to inform his stories on foreign relations—a kind of foreign relations where boys could become men by proving their masculinity in foreign lands.

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[48] "Newark Author, Great Favorite with Young Folks," *Newark Sunday News.*

[49] Stratemeyer's archives are rife with references to current events and news clips that provided inspiration for plotlines or new inventions. His series were often inspired by what he perceived as being interesting to boy readers; for example, he made Don Sturdy's uncle a hunter because of boys' interest in "the tracking of big game." See Edward Stratemeyer, "Suggestions for a New Series," n.d. Outlines, Box 319, RSS, NYPL.

[50] "There's Nothing Like a Good Book," *Los Angeles Times*.

[51] Karen Sands O'Connor gives a few notable examples in "Stratemeyer Chums," 67. For more on girls' series, see Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 111-124.

[52] More on Stratemeyer and the strenuous life in Rouleau, *Empire's Nursery,* 63-68.

Stratemeyer's imaginary of transaction was also geographically specific, as his vision of an extractive foreign relations was targeted towards non-white people. Most of his travel stories take place in the Global South—syndicate heroes travel across South America, the Caribbean, Pacific islands, and Africa. In the *Don Sturdy* books, for example, Don and his uncles travel to South America and Africa in over half the series titles, and venture to Asia and the Artic for the rest.[53] Stratemeyer, at least from his perspective, was responding to demands from his readers for "hair-raising adventures in little known places," an interest inspired by the United States' expanding global presence.[54] Advertisements for Stratemeyer's books took care to note that while "innumerable books, for young and old, have been written about Europe, it remained for Edward Stratemeyer to cover the southern portion of this hemisphere… for in the future our trade relations in this direction are bound to be large."[55] Notably, Stratemeyer wrote little about Europe, or places in Asia like China or Japan, where the United States had formal trade connections; instead he wrote his characters into places where America had mostly informal modes of economic control. While the Global North was not off limits to Stratemeyer characters, the Global South was their primary playground, a place easy to exploit as they made their careers and fortunes.

Stratemeyer Gets His Start

As an aspiring children's writer in the 1880s, Stratemeyer sought to capitalize on the dime-novel model that was the epitome of mass culture in the late nineteenth century.

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[53] Travels to Africa and South America make up 60 percent of the *Don Sturdy* books; Asia represents another 15 and the artic 23 percent of the stories. I excluded from this count the two titles in the series that ambiguously take place on the ocean.
[54] Edward Stratemeyer, "Suggestion for a new series," n.d., Outlines, 319, RSS, NYPL.
[55] John Tupper Brownwell, *Safe and Sane Books for Boys and Girls*, n.d., Box 329, RSS, NYPL.

Stratemeyer's earliest writings echoed Horatio Alger Jr.'s domestic dime-novel plotlines.[56] Like Alger Jr. before him, Stratemeyer's early heroes like Victor Horton were often down on their luck: orphaned, tricked out of a rightful inheritance, or subject to a similarly undeserved misfortune. Yet they overcame a series of obstacles—adults, criminals, and the legal system—to claim what was rightfully theirs.[57] Stratemeyer's early domestic novels reinforced the tales of class mobility and social uplift, providing a tacit endorsement of late-nineteenth-century industrial capitalism.[58]

Stratemeyer was moderately successful with his short "career" stories and urban dime novels. His work, in fact, caught the attention of Horatio Alger Jr., and the two corresponded until Alger Jr.'s death in 1899.[59] Yet as the dime-novel genre grew more crowded in the late 1890s, Stratemeyer found it harder to get published. His career was saved by current events. In 1898, the country was caught up in a patriotic and imperialistic fervor in response to the Battle of Manila Bay and the start of the war with Spain. Encouraged by his publishers, Stratemeyer capitalized on these events and incorporated the overseas empire into his stories.[60] Within months, Stratemeyer had fictionalized the naval battle in the Philippines in his first best-selling series novel, *Under Dewey at Manila; Or, The War Fortunes of a Castaway*. After positive reception, Stratemeyer used the book to launch a six-title *Old Glory* series, featuring four brothers as they fight for the United States in Cuba and the Philippines.

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[56] Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 3.
[57] Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer*, 36.
[58] Stratemeyer was prolific, even in the early years. He began by publishing in magazines, and quickly upgraded to short paper novels, writing 42 dime stories in 1892 and 1893 alone. See Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 18.
[59] He also published Alger Jr.'s remaining manuscripts after his death in 1899. For more see, correspondence in Reel 1 of the RSS, NYPL.
[60] Carol Billman, *The Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate: Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and the Million Dollar Fiction Factory* (New York: Ungar Publishing Company, 1986), 18.

The *Old Glory* books, like earlier dime novels, featured orphaned protagonists down on their luck who experience personal growth and career success through their military service in the Pacific and the Caribbean. In Stratemeyer's own words, his *Old Glory* series follows "a sturdy, conscientious American lad, of good moral character and honest Christian aim, who, compelled through the force of circumstances to make his own way in the world," joins in the US military overseas.[61] In doing so, Stratemeyer offers not only exciting military tales but also moral parables about the character-building quality of territorial acquisition. Where Alger Jr.'s dime novels promote the bootstraps theory of economic uplift, Stratemeyer adapts the theory to overseas empire. Although they take elements from earlier dime novels and career stories, these books are unique for their use of foreign places as a staging ground for their hero's journey.[62] These stories are dependent on conquering people rather than simply moving within capitalist systems, a direct expansion of power that was more assertive than Alger Jr.'s simple stories of economic mobility.

Stratemeyer would continue to write "history" and "geography" books touting the benefits and benevolence of US imperial interventions abroad. Audiences responded well to the *Old Glory*, and the series, along with Stratemeyer's subsequent *Pan-American* series about Central and South America and his *American Boy's Life of Theodore Roosevelt* and *William McKinley*, were his first real success stories.[63] Stratemeyer would continue to hold a special fondness for these series; on several occasions he would suggest that publishers rerun the titles

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[61] Edward Stratemeyer, *Under Dewey at Manila; Or, The War Fortunes of a Castaway* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1899), iv.

[62] Rouleau thoroughly treats the *Old Glory* series in chapter 2 of *Empire's Nursery*.

[63] Rouleau treats the *Pan-American* series in *Empire's Nursery,* 160-178. He rightly notes that these books marked a departure from the *Old Glory* series by emphasizing American business, rather than military operations. Still, Rouleau argues that these books were still concerned with the "transformative power" of the United States, *Empire's Nursery,* 162.

during periods of wartime mobilization, including in response to the United States' invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1916.[64] While Stratemeyer personally wrote these early series, his growing success and his publication of the instantly popular *Rover Boy* series impelled him to establish a publishing syndicate in 1905.[65] Through the syndicate, Stratemeyer hired ghostwriters, and published under pseudonyms to keep up with his growing list of titles. Stratemeyer certainly needed the assistance—between 1910 and 1930, the syndicate published an average of 31 titles a year across tens of series—although he retained creative control over the outlines, plots, and final forms of the books.[66]

Stratemeyer's shift to syndicate publishing was more than just a business decision. It also marked a political shift in the book's contents. Historians writing about Stratemeyer's interest in imperialism tend to focus on texts that obviously endorse direct management of territories overseas. Brian Rouleau, for instance, argues that Stratemeyer's books promoted "an imperial model rooted in the prolonged US management of 'brown brothers' abroad."[67] While it is certainly true that Stratemeyer's earliest works reflected this idea, I argue that Stratemeyer's imperial visions changed, and became more subtle, in the travel books he pseudonymously published under his syndicate. Unlike the early works that Stratemeyer wrote himself, the syndicate books were notably ambivalent about global interaction. Instead of a jingoistic endorsement of overt imperialism, they portray transactional relationships. Across his syndicate books foreign interactions are reduced to their value to the protagonists, and unbothered with

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[64] See Edward Stratemyer to W.F. Gregory at Lothrop, Letter, 26 May 1916, Reel 13, RSS, NYPL
[65] Rouleau, *Empire's Nursery*, 61.
[66] Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 7. For an example Stratemeyer's control over book content see Howard R. Garis to Edward Stratemeyer, Letter, n.d., Reel 2, RSS, NYPL. Stratemeyer's plot generation can be found in Outlines, Box 319, RSS, NYPL.
[67] Rouleau, *Empire's Nursery,* 56.

developing relationships with the Indigenous people with whom they interact. In this shallow view of adventure abroad, interaction had value because of the transaction it could produce.

On Their Own Terms

At the outset of *Tom Swift in the Land of Wonders,* the charming titular character initially turns down an offer to go treasure hunting in Central America. “I've got too many other irons in the fire. I shall have to give the professor a polite but firm refusal,” the inventor argues to his friend Ned. “Well, maybe you're right, Tom; and yet that idol of gold—GOLD—weighing how many pounds did you say?” the sidekick Ned counters.[68] This conversation between Tom and his best friend represents a typical start to a Stratemeyer travel series. Stratemeyer characters engage in global interaction by choice, without threat, and always at the promise of personal or material enrichment. The pattern across the books reveals the conservative impulses of transactional logic. Rather than giving them a sweeping, obligatory role in the world, Stratemeyer empowered his characters to choose when to engage.

Whether reluctant or ready for adventure, Stratemeyer heroes almost always traveled away from the safety of their domestic lives by their own volition. The choice of global engagement was just that: a choice. Sometimes, characters are hesitant to travel, but they are drawn abroad by a desire to find lost family members or by friends who convince them to test the limits of their skills and inventions; oftentimes, they are also drawn in by incentives to defeat either their own recurring rivals, or nefarious enemies of their adult parent figures. In the *Land of Wonders* Tom Swift readily rejects a mission to hunt for a massive gold idol in Honduras

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[68] Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Land of Wonders; Or, The Underground Search for the Idol of Gold* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1917; Project Gutenberg, 1 January 2021), Chapter II, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/499/pg499-images.html.

because he is too busy. It isn't until the professor seeking his help appeals to his sense of competition against his rival, Fenimore Beecher, that Tom agrees to the mission: "'I'm with you now from the start to the finish. I'll show him what I can do!'"[69]

Stratemeyer's emphasis on individual autonomy over global engagement reflected a sense of control and safety in transactional relationships. While the heroes face challenges abroad, the primary antagonist is almost always American or European: in the *Land of Wonders* Tom beats rival his rival Beecher in the hunt for the gold idol; in *Tom Swift and His Giant Cannon*, the antagonist is a German spy; when Ted Scott travels to Mexico, the villains are Mexicans… who have been hired as hitmen by American oil magnates.[70] There is not a distinct external threat from other countries, and American characters hold the power over their own fates; the Global South becomes a playground for pre-existing tensions between characters.

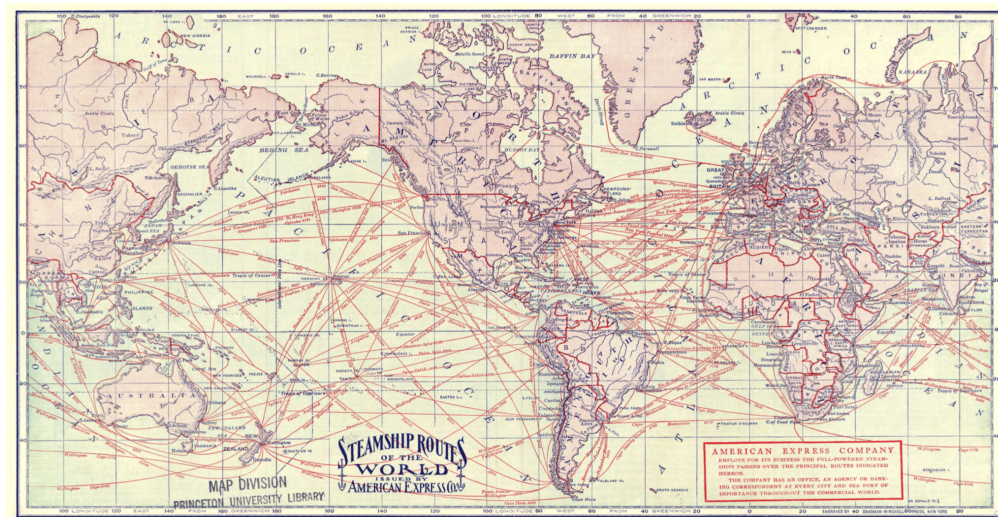

Figure 1.1. Steamship Routes of the World, American Express Company, 1900. American Express Co., "Steamship Routes of the World Circa 1900," Mapping Globalization Princeton, accessed 14 March 2024, https://commons.princeton.edu/mg/steamship-routes-of-the-world-circa-1900/.

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[69] Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Land of Wonders,* Chapter IV.
[70] Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Land of Wonders*; Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift and His Giant Cannon; Or, The Longest Shots on Record* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1913); Franklin W. Dixon, *South of the Rio Grande; Or, Ted Scott on a Secret Mission* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1928).

Despite these individualized decisions to embark on a thrilling adventure in the Global South, Stratemeyer's heroes' mobility depends on existing trade networks and communication. By 1900, the United States had established an extensive global presence through its commercial endeavors (fig. 1.1), which only continued to grow with the proliferation of automobiles and aviation (fig. 1.2). Across the syndicate series, Stratemeyer heroes rely on this existing global network for their travels. In *Tom Swift and His Wireless Message,* for instance, telegraph lines are used to signal for the pickup of stranded Americans on an island.[71] His characters can easily communicate back to the United States, although these routes of communication are not used to talk with foreigners in other places. Lanes of travel and communication only ran in one direction. Stratemeyer heroes also regularly hop onto ships or use air travel to quickly reach their destinations. In *The Land of Wonders*, published in 1917, Tom Swift makes his way to Honduras on "the steamer from New York to Puerto Cortes, one of the principal seaports of Honduras."[72] Notably, the United States orchestrated military interventions and occupations in Honduras in 1907, 1911, 1912, 1919, and from 1924-25.[73] In the *Land of Wonders,* Tom Swift was not only assisted by US commercial networks, but also the imperial maneuvers of the United States government which maintained covert control and favorable governments in the country. While Stratemeyer characters themselves aren't the authors of these forms of informal control, they benefit from their existence and legacies. Through his fictitious storylines, the Stratemeyer's characters, and by extension, the reader, is removed from actual establishment of global networks established through overt and covert imperialism.

[71] Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift and His Wireless Message; Or, The Castaways of Earthquake Island* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1911).
[72] Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Land of Wonders,* Chapter VIII.
[73] Smith, *Talons of the Eagle*, 55.

Figure 1.2. Pan-American Airlines Route Map, 1933. Global flight paths are displayed in the bottom left. Pan American Airways System Map, 1932 Annual Report, accessed 20 April 2024, https://www.panam.org/65-pan-am-90-years-ago/885-pan-am-may-1933.

This dependence on existing international connections suggests that Stratemeyer's vision of global power was not as limited as he outwardly presented. However, Stratemeyer effectively obscures the networks that enable his characters to travel and communicate easily. Thus, he maintained a view that his characters had rightful authority over other places, but not a relationship of responsibility. His books articulated the benefits of transactional interaction to their child audiences—the American characters could choose to engage on their own terms.

Not Like Us

Before setting out for a flight to the West Indies, aviator hero Ted Scott issues a warning to his friends: "'You want to remember, too, that there are some pretty rough human characters

in the island that you may come in contact with. It's just as well to keep an eye out for them."[74] Stratemeyer's portrayal of non-white people, both in the Global South and in his domestic series, were based on crudely racist stereotypes and assumptions commonly held by white Americans at the time. Stratemeyer, however, was not interested in overcoming or celebrating differences, nor was he interested in changing the "rough human characters." While his protagonists encountered Indigenous people in the countries they visited, the interactions were largely surface-level. When native people interacted with the American characters, they came away from the relationships largely unchanged.

Native non-white figures in Stratemeyer series books facilitate transactions but, by and large, are not developed as independent characters. Sometimes, native people are recruited and corrupted by the primary American villains. While competing to discover fields of gold in Alaska, Tom Swift's enemy Andy recruits the local Inuit population to impede Tom's search: "'There's Andy Foger and his father!' cried Ned. 'They've gone and got a lot of Eskimos to help them drive us away.'"[75] In instances where Stratemeyer heroes encounter "savage" people on their own accord, those threats come later in the novel and are secondary to the protagonist's missions.

When Stratemeyer's characters are aided by native people, they show appreciation for their help and sometimes compensate them. In *Tom Swift in the Caves of Ice*, for example, Tom and friends are aided in their competition against Andy Folger by other, well-intentioned Inuit people. They "paid their friends well for the service, not only in gold, but by presenting what was

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[74] Franklin W. Dixon, *The Search for Lost Flyers; Or, Ted Scott Over the West Indies* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1928), 53.

[75] Native Alaskans are consistently referred to as "Eskimos" throughout the books. I use the preferred term "Inuit" when not quoting directly from the series. Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Caves of Ice; Or, The Wreck of the Airship* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1911; Project Gutenberg, April 2, 2012), Chapter XXIII, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3734/3734-h/3734-h.htm.

of more value, the guns they no longer needed." Tom, of course, retains the item of actual importance: his highly valuable electric rifle.[76] The assumption is that gold is not valuable to the native people, and that basic weaponry will suit their supposedly-primitive lifestyles better. The reader does not get to follow the impact of this interaction, returning with Tom and friends to the comfort of their New England homes. They leave the Indigenous people with whom they interacted unchanged beyond the minimal payments they provided. This interaction, however fantastical, allows Stratemeyer characters to interact with foreign people without producing real benefits, or visible harm. The long-term impacts of the visits, moreover, are irrelevant to characters who move on with their lives, untethered to the places they visited previously.

Themes of civilizational development are also limited in the books, and even then, primarily in the context of American administrative colonialism. When Don Sturdy and his uncles travel to Borneo, they stop in Hawai'i and the Philippines, where the US had direct presence. "'Since becoming annexed to the United States the natives are becoming Americanized rapidly," Don's uncle notes.[77] His observation suggests that in Stratemeyer's vision, "Americanization" of non-white people in American territories is possible through direct forms of empire.[78] When Ted Scott travels to Haiti in search of a shipwreck and a massive pearl colony, he contrasts the "settled and well administered" Cuba with Haiti: "the United States marines had introduced a certain amount of law and order in the districts near the coast. But even Uncle Sam's long arm did not reach into the interior, and there were hundreds of square miles

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[76] The electric rifle inspired the name of the electric safety device brand "TASER." The name stands for Tom (A) Swift's Electric Rifle. Quote from Appleton, *Caves of Ice,* Chapter XXV.
[77] Victor Appleton, *Don Sturdy Captured by Head Hunters; Or, Adrift in the Wilds of Borneo* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1928), 106.
[78] There are several exceptions to this overt acknowledgement of American imperialism. When Tom Swift hunts for gold in Alaska, for instance, no mention is made of Alaska's territorial status, and the Inuit people with whom Tom and friends engage have little sign of imperial contact. See Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Caves of Ice*.

where no law but that of might prevailed."[79] Again, Stratemeyer affirms the "civilizing" possibilities of American imperial presence. Yet he does not necessarily endorse these forms of control. Ted and company manage to find their lost friend and extract pearl wealth, and their quest is heightened by the "lawlessness" of the Haitian interior. Stratemeyer's reliance on wild adventures to entertain readers required "uncivilized" settings. Stratemeyer characters were defined in contrast to the untouched places and "backwards" people with whom they interacted. To transform native people would not only be unnecessary, but much less exciting to child readers.

While Stratemeyer rose to prominence writing about overseas empire and territorial acquisition, his shift to a transactional form of foreign relations suggested that directly imperial relationships were not necessary for extraction. This change produced exciting stories, but it also reflected US foreign policy in the early twentieth century, which favored forms of indirect control to direct colonization. Ultimately, his plots and characters are more invested in the resources to be gained from interaction than the possibility of spreading ideology or ideals.

For the Right Reasons

As Don Sturdy prepares to set out to Brazil in the beginning of book series' second title, his uncle reminds him of the goal of their mission: "'As a business proposition, Professor Bruce and I are going into the jungles to collect big snakes and rare drugs. But a thing that's more important to all of us is to find out, if we can, the whereabouts of my brother and his wife and daughter.'"[80] Wealth, represented through gold, ancient artifacts, or other naturally appearing

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[79] Dixon, *The Search for Lost Flyers,* 153-154.
[80] Victor Appleton, *Don Sturdy with the Big Snake Hunters; Or, Lost in the Jungle of the Amazon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1925), 71.

resources like oil, is an ever-present outcome of the Stratemeyer character's transactional adventures. As characters discover treasures, Stratemeyer does not portray them as wrongfully stealing or illegally removing wealth from the places they visit. This exploitation of resources, moreover, is often obscured behind other, more virtuous causes, such as Don's search for family members. By connecting material and personal outcomes, Stratemeyer protects the upstanding moral character of his heroes. He also underscores readers' personal stake in maintaining an extractive relationship with countries in the Global South.

To maintain their morality, Stratemeyer heroes obtain their treasures through noncoercive means. Oftentimes, the objects they seek are either ambiguously free for the taking—such as the offshore wreck filled with gold bullion in *Tom Swift and His Submarine Boat*—or natural occurring—in the case of Don Sturdy "big snakes and rare drugs."[81] These types of wealth lent themselves well to an extractive mindset. Rather than having to develop real relationships with native people who produce materials, Stratemeyer heroes can take the goods without developing commercial connections. They develop relationships with goods, rather than people. If Indigenous people approve and facilitate this transaction, the protagonists assume that what is valuable to them in a Western economy has no real value to the natives with whom they interact.[82] When Tom Swift discovered an ancient city of gold, the native people are "indifferent to the wonders of the underground city," and willingly give up the valuable idol that Tom's

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[81] Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift and His Submarine Boat; Or, Under the Ocean for Sunken Treasure* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1910) and Appleton, *Big Snake Hunters,* 71.

[82] Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart note a similar trend in the Donald Duck comics of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. They mock the duck's extractive endeavors: "Since the noble savage is denied the prospect of future development, plunder never appears as such, for it only eliminates that which is trifling, superfluous, and dispensable. Unbridled capitalist despoliation is programmed with smiles and coquetry. Poor native. How naïve they are. And since they cannot use their gold, it is better to remove it. It can be used elsewhere." *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comics,* trans. David Kunzle (New York: International General, 1971), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv62hf1k.10, 66.

companions seek.[83] These items, although located in the countries that the Stratemeyer heroes travel to, do not explicitly belong to anyone, and therefore are free for the taking.[84] Across the syndicate's series books, the one-sided transactions are justified because the characters are not, in Stratemeyer's view, actually stealing resources that belong to other countries or peoples. Distancing the wealth from its rightful owners belonged to allowed Stratemeyer to contend that Indigenous peoples were not changed (i.e. harmed) by the quests of American adventurers.

Although the potential for the discovery of treasure, valuable mines, or other monetary outcomes was almost always present in Stratemeyer books, it was presented alongside other goals. These virtuous overtones worked to obscure the morally gray treasure-seeking of the protagonists. Across the series, whether it is the discovery of lost relatives, the promise of personal glory, or the need to foil enemies, wealth is secondary to the motivations of the characters. The protagonists' backgrounds also influenced these decisions. Unlike earlier dime novel characters, syndicate heroes were either middle- or upper- class boys whose stories did not center on financial survival. By holding other primary motivations, the heroes can maintain their image of respectability and proper values while still pursuing economic outcomes.

Stratemeyer characters were frequently drawn abroad by the need to rescue Americans from the clutches of foreign people, providing further moral cover to their self-interested intentions. In *Tom Swift and His Electric Rifle,* Tom is originally convinced to travel to "the dark continent" so that he can test the powers of his novel electric rifle against elephants with valuable

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[83] Appleton, *Tom Swift in the Land of Wonders,* Chapter XXV.

[84] In some cases, heroes are rewarded with competition prizes or government awards. While not as directly extractive, characters in these books benefit from international engagement on similarly "moral" terms. For example, Ted Scott wins a first-place prize for breaking an altitude record in Franklin W. Dixon, *First Stop Honolulu; or, Ted Scott Over the Pacific* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927). This adventure has obvious undertones of empire, as Ted meets the territorial governor of Hawaiʻi who labels the islands a "distant outpost of the United States, a sort of step-child of the great country to which it owed allegiance." Dixon, *First Stop Honolulu*, 201-202.

ivory tusks. His primary mission changes when he discovers that a band of missionaries has been taken captive by local African populations: "I have promised to help Mr. Durban in getting ivory, and while I want to try my electric rifle on big game, still we can do both."[85] By the end of the novel, Tom has managed to rescue the missionaries and secure massive sums of ivory. Don Sturdy similarly sets out on missions to recover lost family members. In *The Big Snake Hunters*, he motivated not only by his sense of adventure but also his lost family who are believed shipwrecked in South America. His uncles, on whom he is legally and financially dependent, are a big game hunter and professor of archeology. While Don's personal goal of finding his sister remains a major theme in the text, his uncles are also going on the expedition for professional purposes, giving Don both personal and financial stake in the outcome of their mission.

Like other captive narratives in US history, Stratemeyer's reliance on a trope of relatives-in-need-of-rescue reinforced "a discourse of domination" which defined white characters against "backwards" Other.[86] Stratemeyer's popular series *Bomba the Jungle Boy*, a rip-off of *Tarzan*, is one of the clearest examples of this phenomena. The best-selling series featured a young American boy living in the jungles of South America who discovers he was kidnapped as a baby, and subsequently attempts to reunite himself with his parents. Bomba frequently reiterated the unassailable differences between himself and the native South Americans he encountered: "Bomba's place is not here. He is not a native of the jungle. He has a soul. He is white. Yes, Bomba is white. And Bomba's soul cannot be at rest until he dwells among the white people."[87]

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[85] Victor Appleton, *Tom Swift and His Electric Rifle; Or, Daring Adventures in Elephant Land* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1911; Project Gutenberg, 8 January 2021), Chapter IX, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3777/pg3777-images.html.

[86] Pauline Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 7. Sara L. Schwebel discusses how captive narratives were particularly prominent in children's stories in "Rewriting the Captivity Narrative for Contemporary Children: Speare, Bruchac, and the French and Indian War," *The New England Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (June 2011): 318-346.

[87] Roy Rockwood, *Bomba the Jungle Boy at the Giant Cataract* (New York: Cupples and Leon, 1926; Project Gutenberg, 3 November 2023), Chapter XXV, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/72207/pg72207-images.html.

In Bomba's worldview, Indigenous people are "soul-less" and incapable of deeply interacting with white society.[88] Bomba's story diverges from typical captive narratives, because his captor was a friend of his parents, a mixed-race person, and he was raised in the jungle by an old American naturalist suffering from memory loss. By limiting interactions between Bomba and native South Americans, even as instigators of the conflict, Stratemeyer reinforced his message that Indigenous people are secondary features to foreign adventure.[89] Affirmation of racial hierarchies, in *Bomba* and elsewhere, also legitimized heroes' extra-legal extraction of wealth—Indigenous people were naturally different than white Americans, and therefore could never come to appreciate the value of what was taken.

Series books were dependent on formulaic, easily reproducible plotlines with familiar characters. Thus, although Stratemeyer characters undergo stressful adventures throughout the course of each book, they never fundamentally change through interaction. Yes, they acquire material wealth. But those treasures are usually either given away or put into a savings account, to fund future voyages but never to inhibit the adventurous spirit of the heroes. This enables the characters to move between books in a series seamlessly, as the heroes "remain open for new challenges."[90] The goods obtained by the heroes are often put towards the public interest—either given to museums for their scientific or academic value (such as the snakes in Don Sturdy) or circulated back into the economy when the boys deposit and spend their new wealth. As this further suggests, there is also an implicit public benefit to the transactional relationship. By both

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[88] When updating the *Bomba* series for a new edition, one editor noted the themes of white supremacy: "I have tried to cut any passages that implied white superiority and played down the theme a little. If you think it needs toning down even further, let's do it." In "Edited Manuscripts," 1977, Box 126, RSS, NYPL.

[89] Bomba does befriend one native person, Gibo, who becomes his sidekick in the stories. Like the rest of the "helpful" native characters that Stratemeyer writes, however, Gibo is relegated to the background and never substantially developed as a character.

[90] Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 161.

demonstrating the material outcomes of transactional relationships and obscuring them behind more virtuous but not character-altering outcomes of global interaction, the Stratemeyer series suggests that global interactions are positive when they are limited to the extraction of resources.

The Series Scare

Tom Swift, Stratemeyer's popular traveling character, sold more copies than any of Stratemeyer's other series books. By 1934, the syndicate had sold nearly 6,500,000 books about the inventor's international quests.[91] While Stratemeyer books of all kinds were popular, these sales numbers demonstrate that tales of overseas adventures were some of Stratemeyer's most well-read books. Not only does Stratemeyer's writing illuminate a strain of internationalist thought, but suggest such ideas had widespread resonance and effect on its readers.

Fan mail from child readers affirms that children loved Stratemeyer's books. "I have read a good many books but I found that I like your books best," testified Joseph Schroth, writing to the fictitious Victor Appleton, "There is a lot of knowledge in your books about inventions and different lands."[92] The books, though targeted at boys, were also appreciated by girls, many of whom likely picked up their brother's copies: " I have recently finished the book 'Across the Pacific' and found it most interesting even if I am a girl I enjoy boys books a lot."[93] Robert McIntrye praised the didactic impacts of Stratemeyer series: "I have learned very much about animal reptile and Indian customs. I am happy to say that Since I started to read these books I

[91] Sales estimate quoted in Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 162.
[92] Joseph Schroth to Victor Appleton, Letter, 1 January 1932, Box 56, RSS, NYPL.
[93] Miss Mary Wolstencroft to Franklin W. Dixon, Letter, 1 November 1931, Box 56, RSS, NYPL.

have pulled my geography mark up in school from 70% to 95%."[94] In other words, Stratemeyer's tales had a receptive audience who picked up on Stratemeyer's emphasis on global interaction.

Children also wrote with questions and ideas about their favorite series, recreating Stratemeyer's view of foreign relations through their own imaginations.[95] One reader wrote inquiring if a Pacific island mentioned in a Don Sturdy series was real because "I am very interested in any island which is in the Pacific."[96] Others wrote in with pitches for where the Stratemeyer heroes should travel to next: "would you please take Don Sturdy to the South Pole?"[97] Another keen reader noted that "In the first book entitled 'Don Sturdy on the Desert of Mystery' it said that Capt. Sturdy was going to find the city of brass" and requested a follow up book. The reader was willing to settle, though: "If you don't care to publish any books please send us some copies of Egyptian writing, and pictures if possible."[98] The recommendations weren't always well received. "The author takes note of the suggestions for new books and as it takes time to write even one book, the list of suggestions seemed rather long," was Victor Appleton's curt response to a fan request for more titles.[99] More importantly, this fan mail demonstrates that the syndicate books had an impact on the reader's perception of the world. Stratemeyer's books were not just passively absorbed; they encouraged children to imagine new possibilities for interaction. The readers came to think like Don, Tom, Ted, and the other boy characters who engaged with the world on transactional terms. Still, these children's reactions

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[94] Robert McIntyre to Victor Appleton, Letter, 1 October 1930, Box 56, RSS, NYPL.
[95] Robin Bernstein discusses how children reproduce and relive children's book themes through material culture in *Racial Innocence.*
[96] S. G. Reid to Commander J. T. Watkins, Letter, 6 June 1933, Box 56, RSS, NYPL.
[97] Robert McIntyre to Victor Appleton.
[98] Harold Hess and Harry Parks to Victor Appleton, Letter, 11 January 1929, Stratemeyer Syndicate Papers, University of (SSP, UO).
[99] Victor Appleton, Letter, 1 February 1928, Box 30, RSS, NYPL.

suggest that Stratemeyer's books also had an educational, rather than purely transactional effect, with children seeking out information about the places they visited.

Stratemeyer wasn't always received well, especially by reformers and educators who perceived his works to be sensationalized and repetitive. Moral crusades had already been carried out against dime novels at the end of the nineteenth century, and series books (Stratemeyer's in particular) became the next target of reformer's efforts.[100] A list from the educational *Wilson Bulletin* listed book series not circulated by libraries, almost one fifth of which were Stratemeyer syndicate titles.[101] Stratemeyer's hometown library in Newark, New Jersey, went as far as to remove his titles from their shelves.[102] One of the most vocal critics of Stratemeyer was Franklin K. Mathiews, the chief librarian of the Boy Scouts. He authored an article titled "BLOWING OUT THE BOYS BRAINS," in which he criticized the "mile-a-minute fiction" for their unrealistic heroes for whom "insuperable difficulties and crushing circumstances are easily overcome and conquered as in fairy tales."[103] Such work, Mathiews believed, could have deleterious effects on young imaginations. What is true across the criticisms is a fear, clearly not unfounded, that children would pick up on the adventurous and "unrealistic" themes in the syndicate series, including the in heroes' global engagement. They attacked many of the elements that enabled Stratemeyer to write about transactional relationships: independent characters, formulaic plotlines, and wild adventures that would overstimulate young readers.

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[100] See Mark I. West, "Not to Be Circulated: The Response of Children's Librarians to Dime Novels and Series Books," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 137-139. https://muse-jhu-edu.turing.library.northwestern.edu/article/248404. Interestingly, when dime novels were the target of reforms, critics pointed to series fiction as an alternative recommendation that would capture the interest of young audiences. By the early 1910s, however, the same reformers and educators had changed their tunes and instead criticized series fiction for many of the same reasons they had shunned dime novels.
[101] In Johnson, *Edward Stratemeyer,* 163, and West, "Not to be Circulated," 139.
[102] Emily Hamilton-Honey, "Guardians of Morality: Librarians and American Girls' Series Fiction, 1890–1950," *Library Trends* 60, no. 4 (2012): 765-785. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2012.0012.
[103] Franklin K. Mathiews, "BLOWING OUT THE BOY'S BRAINS," *The Outlook,* November 18, 1914, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112061570278&seq=3.

Stratemeyer was largely unbothered by reformers' criticisms; "'Personally, it does not matter much to me whether or not my books are not put back on the shelves of the juvenile department. . . . Taking them out of the Library has more than tripled the sales in Newark'" he said of attempts to remove his works from libraries.[104] Indeed, just as Stratemeyer portrayed global engagement on transactional terms, he saw his relationship with child consumers as transactional as well. In a moment of particular exasperation with an editor, Stratemeyer admitted:

> The Stratemeyer Syndicate can turn out almost any kind of a juvenile desired. But we want to turn out only 'best sellers.' I have no desire whatever to make a reputation with the syndicate books if there is no money in it. Of course it is very nice to have books brought out in fine style, and put on sale in fine places, but there is little satisfaction if they drag along and go into a speedy dry rot,--as so many so-styled high-class books do.[105]

He lamented further: "Broadly speaking, I do not see how you can sit on two chairs in this matter—that is, satisfy librarians and educational folks and at the same time get the real heart of the boy reader."[106] While other authors wrote within a didactic model, seeking to present to readers stories with a high moral tone, Stratemeyer fundamentally viewed his relationships with his readers as a seller to a consumer. He was just as mercenary as the characters he wrote about. That's not to say that his work lacked ideology, but that the themes in Stratemeyer's books came from his perceptions of what young readers wanted to hear. When they wrote to their favorite authors about their interests in the themes and locations of his works, they affirmed Stratemeyer's choice to write transactional relationships.

Stratemeyer was, by all counts, successful at capturing the hearts of readers. He did so through his adventurous storylines that were, if not entirely wholesome, then at least thoroughly

[104] Quoted in Hamilton-Honey, "Guardians of Morality," 771.
[105] Edward Stratemeyer to L.C. Page & Co., 9 March 1918, Reel 13, RSS, NYPL.
[106] Stratemeyer to L.C. Page & Co.

entertaining. His articulation of a transactional empire, which depended in large part on the form of his series books, promoted an ideology of foreign relations in which engagement was undertaken at the authority of American characters and to personal or financial ends. But pushback against his view demonstrated a strain in the ideologies of foreign relations. This was none more potent than in the writings of other popular authors like Lucy Fitch Perkins.

II. The Politics of Polite Empire; Or, Lucy Fitch Perkins' Ideology of Transformation

Lucy Fitch Perkins authored a very different kind of children's series than Edward Stratemeyer. Spanning twenty-six titles, her series brought American children between the second and seventh grades into contact with the world through stories about twins. Each story featured a boy and girl twin from a different country, following their daily lives and struggles in their countries of origins. The *Twins* series were widely read in classrooms and libraries across the country. A 1930 study of reading in a Chicago school found that thirty one percent of all books read by the fourth graders were *Twins* books.[107] In 1935, Perkins celebrated the sale of her two millionth book, and by 1949 sales of the *Twins* books had climbed to 3 million.[108] "My entire knowledge of cultural geography in those years came from the books by Lucy Fitch Perkins," remembered Lois Lowry, herself a renowned children's author. "I probably thought that all children in foreign countries were twins."[109]

Like the Stratemeyer syndicate's books, Perkins's novels embraced the idea that the United States should be a global power. But, unlike Stratemeyer's works, the *Twins* books viewed foreign relations through a global imaginary of transformation. By making the world in an American image, the US could best maintain and expand its international power. Perkins noted these intertwined goals when reflecting on her rationale for writing the books:

> It occurred to me with an emphasis which has never left me, that anything which would promote mutual respect for the best which other nations bring to this shore would help to some degree in this process of Americanization… It seems equally important to have these foreigners in some way brought into sympathy with the ideals of our own country.[110]

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[107] Barker, "Americanization and World Peace," 78.
[108] Dillon, "Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," 85.
[109] Quoted in Dillon, "Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," 91.
[110] Lucy Fitch Perkins, "The Twins–Their Origin," *Elementary English Review,* May 1936, Lucy Fitch Perkins Papers, Evanston Historical Center, Evanston, IL (LFPP, EHC).

The books not only embodied a process of transformation through their story lines, but also in how Perkins hoped they would be received by readers. If Stratemeyer viewed his book sales as primarily for profit, Perkins intentionally designed hers to transform.[111] From her perspective, the *Twins* series could both bring foreign children into the process of Americanization and provide American children a change in perspective on the world.

Although a dissenter from Stratemeyer's view of foreign relations, Perkins shared his interest in global power. In fact, she viewed the American global presence as more inevitable than Stratemeyer did. Unlike Stratemeyer's stories where protagonists made the choice to travel, Perkins books presumed that children should engage with foreign cultures. Perkins was particularly interested in immigration, and she began writing in 1911, in the middle of a massive immigration wave that had begun at the end of the nineteenth century.[112] Perkins also wrote about places like the Philippines, where the United States had a direct imperial presence, and China, where the country pursued trade interests. Thus, her books responded to events that brought the United States into contact with the world between 1898 and 1941.

[111] She began illustrating children's books in response to her husband's economic troubles, but his eventual success as an architect meant that Perkins was not financially dependent on book sales. See Eleanor Ellis Perkins, *Eve Among the Puritans: A Biography of Lucy Fitch Perkins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), 220-221. She also considers forming a publishing syndicate, like Stratemeyer, but ultimately rejects this idea. See Lucy Fitch Perkins to William G. Chapman, 31 May 1924, Lucy Fitch Perkins Letters, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA (LFPL, UVA).

[112] As Matthew Frye Jacobson discusses in his book *Barbarian Virtues*, processes of imperialism and immigration were linked. He claims "immigration and expansion constitute two sides of the same coin" —each brought Americans into contact with others who generated new questions about American identity. Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues,* 4.

Figure 2.1 An advertisement for the *Twins* books reads "Rub out the war clouds—and let your children see their friends of other nations." The image in the picture is revealed after erasing the cartoon clouds with a pencil. Lucy Fitch Perkins Papers, Evanston Historical Center.

Perkins wrote within a broader strain of Progressive peace activism. Advertisements for her books, especially during the interwar period, emphasized how the twins could promote cultural understanding that would reduce the possibility for war (fig. 2.1). Her vision of foreign relations relied less of violence than that of Stratemeyer, who portrayed his daring heroes fighting off obstacles to their rightful wealth. Perkins' books, instead, imagined peaceful processes of exchange. Even her characters whose plot centers on war and revolution, such as the Belgian and French twins (living through World War I) or the Mexican twins (in the Mexican revolution), never engage in any fighting themselves. Yet, in her books, peace, internationalism, and empire were all related. Perkins herself argued that her books would help in both "process of Americanization, and toward world peace," linking American leadership to a future free of

war.[113] Woodrow Wilson and other internationalists at the time linked world peace to American leadership, and, like Perkins, did not exclude imperialism as distinct from their ideal world order.[114] Extending US global reach could help ensure a peaceful global future.

Scholars interested in foreign relations have looked to Perkins' books to discuss internationalist ideologies. Historians such as Jani Barker and Brian Rouleau rightly note that her efforts to build international goodwill were laudable, especially considering the care she put into her books to present accurate information about foreign cultures.[115] Still, they acknowledge that contemporary ideas of racial hierarchy permeate the book's plotlines and language. Rouleau compares these internationalist books with more overtly imperialistic tales: "Both saw the good in US global stewardship, whether achieved through military or moral force. Each believed that their nation's values were universally aspired to by the world's population."[116] In other words, Perkins' books upheld a "first among equals" approach to global engagement. Such a vision, I argue, was dependent on deep and transformative relationships.

Forging A Global Brotherhood

Perkins' twins were well known for their cuteness. "Can you think of anything nicer in this world than being Twins, and living with a Mother and Father and Grandmother and a Baby Brother, in a dear little house, in a dear little garden, in a dear little, queer little town in the

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113 Perkins, "The Twins–Their Origin."

114 See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2007).

115 Perkins reportedly did extensive research on each volume of the children's series, and although she did not travel to the countries she wrote about, she would contact recent immigrants or rely on library resources for information. The opening cover to *The Chinese Twins,* for example, notes that "This story is based on the experience of a young Chinese girl, who was personally known to friends of the author in China." Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The Chinese Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934).

116 Rouleau, *Empire's Nursery*, 130.

middle of the Happy Islands that lie in the Ocean of Peace?" read the saccharine opening to *The Japanese Twins*.[117] The "Eskimo" twins, Scotch twins, and Mexican twins also live in "little" houses. Perkins' penchant for describing foreign people in pocket-sized terms had a diminutive effect. While Stratemeyer characters only encounter foreigners as threats or background figures, Perkins' emphasis on cuteness made foreign people non-threatening and completely possible to extend authority over.

The books' focus on family also worked to cultivate in child readers a deep sense of responsibility for the foreign-born twins. Perkins' books did not center American characters, a major difference from the Stratemeyer series, whose focus on the journeys of American heroes excluded foreign people from narrative development. By centering foreign-born children, Perkins prompted her American readers to identify with the twin's experiences. Images of the twins' domestic struggles helped children identify with the characters. The Japanese twins' story, for instance, is organized around chapters such as "Morning in the Little House," "How They Went To the Temple," and "Going To School."[118] Perkins placed her stories within simple vignettes of family life, which appear especially mundane next to Stratemeyer's adventures, enabling children to identify more easily with the twins. This domesticity was also more palatable to educators, who praised Perkins' ability to "visualize the life of people in other nations and other times."[119] The reader could not only picture these other children but experience the twins' adventures alongside them. In this way, the stories' transformation of foreign people could parallel the readers' growing pains of American childhood.

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[117] Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The Japanese Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912), 1.
[118] Perkins, *Japanese Twins*, "Contents." The level of adventure the twins face was also dependent on the intended age range. Some books were targeted towards audiences as young as five, while others were meant for older grades. The books intended for older audiences tended to include more action, although still domestic.
[119] "The Perkins Twins", n.d., LFPP, EHC.

The "Suggestion to Teachers" sections listed in the back of Perkins' books encouraged instructors to further connect the stories to readers' lives. In *The Eskimo Twins,* for instance, instructors are encouraged to "tell the children something about the many years of effort before Peary succeeded in reaching his goal; also about the world of subsequent explorers in this part of the world, and around the South Pole as well." By encouraging children to relate the lives of the twins to "explorers and pioneers in the North," they were taught how to visualize themselves participating in global interactions as readers of the books.[120] In the case of *The Eskimo Twins*, this visualization was tied to exploration and colonization, a dynamic of power rather than one of equality. Such suggestions therefore legitimized American presence abroad, as children were taught that they had a right to continue engaging with foreign cultures, both within the books' pages and beyond.

Perkin's tendency towards stories of family also reflected the gendered implications of her writing. Stratemeyer's belief in "the strenuous life" empowered him to write exciting imperialist adventure stories that would imbue his imagined boy audience with the right ideas of masculinity. Perkins, on the other hand, focused on domesticity and family, even when speaking of war. When writing about World War I in *The French Twins,* she takes care to note the "necessary part played by women, children, and old people during the War, and…how the spirit and aims of the soldier's families have been the same as those of the soldiers themselves."[121] This reminder illuminates the same kind of limitation that Perkins, the author, faced: in writing about foreign relations, she was restricted to stories more squarely in the realm of women's

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[120] Perkins, *The Eskimo Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914; Project Gutenberg, January 8, 2021), https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3774/pg3774-images.html.
[121] Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The French Twins,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 206.

work. This limitation also informed the ethos of her work; she was interested in developing deep, familial, relationships between child readers and fictitious twins.

Twin-ship itself also furthered Perkins' view of global engagement. On a practical level, fraternal twinship increased the books' readership. By employing both a boy and girl protagonist, Perkins could appeal to both boy and girl readers. Perkins clearly maintained an interest in her sales records, even as she sought to ideologically affect her reader. However, the twins also served a rhetorical function. While Perkins' series were about foreign-born twins, they cultivated ideas of a global family, made from imagined siblingship and camaraderie between foreign characters and American readers. As Karen Dillon notes, twinship in Perkins' series "embodies an ideal relationship of equality and individuality within a unit identity."[122] Because the twins were fraternal, they were able to maintain a heterogeneity within their pair.[123] As Dillon argues, this allowed for children to embrace the idea of diversity within a community, an importantly inclusive idea as the United States brought foreign people into its sphere of influence. The American readers themselves were not directly a part of this twin relationship, but they were proximate to it as the readers. Plopped down into the twins' domestic lives, the narrators could become a part of their adventures.

Advertisements and reviews of the books affirmed that the *Twins* books effectively created ideas of a global family. Perkins made "children conscious that other children, however far removed geographically, are their brothers," one *Chicago Tribune* article said of the books.[124] Through her intimate portrayal of family lives, Perkins gave her child readers "book comrades in

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[122] Dillon, "Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," 93.

[123] There were a few notable exceptions to this rule of fraternal twinship. Perkins' Spanish twins, for instance, are both boys, and are apparently impossible to tell apart. Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The Spanish Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), ix.

[124] Quoted in Perkins, *Eve Among the Puritans,* x.

far-off lands with whom they can spend many happy hours."[125] One reader, upon learning of potential war with Japan, reportedly "burst into tears of fear, as they said, 'if there were a war with Japan, something might happen to the Japanese twins!'"[126] These kinds of affective relationships were precisely the ones that Perkins sought to cultivate when writing the *Twins* series.

Perkins' creation of affective relationships also worked towards her goal of demonstrating the reciprocity of international engagement. She was not only interested in how to best Americanize foreigners, but also genuinely curious about how other cultures could positively impact the US. She noted that her books aimed to present "the more admirable qualities which may be fairly said to distinguish people of other lands and which we might welcome in our own community life."[127] Perkins was, notably, more overtly interested in the positive effects on the *community* than the individual fortune-seeking Stratemeyer characters were. This focus on national transformation was demonstrated in limited ways in the books' text, as they did not centrally focus on American characters who were themselves culturally enriched by interaction. Instead, Perkins imagined her *readers* as transformed by learning about other people. The books could "rouse a sympathetic interest and some degree of understanding of the qualities which [foreign] people at their best can contribute to the community," helping readers recognize the ways that their lives had already been enriched by global engagement.[128] Although important to the ideologies behind her books, this "transformation" of American culture was still

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[125] Marjorie Barrow, Editor of Child Life, transcript of Lucy Fitch Perkins' Funeral, n.d., LFPP, EHC.
[126] Perkins, "The Twins–Their Origin."
[127] Lucy Fitch Perkins to Anne Laderman, Letter, 26 December 1931, LFPP, EHC.
[128] Lucy Fitch Perkins to Ann Laderman, 26 December 1931.

limited when compared to the effect of Americanization. The simplicity of the twins and their domestic struggles obscured the ways that transformation prioritized American power.

Asymmetrical Change

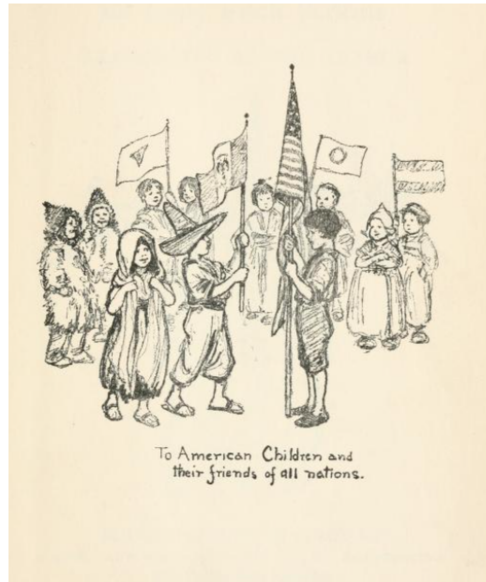

Figure 2.2. The inside cover of *The Mexican Twins* reads "To American Children and their friends of all nations." Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The Mexican Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915).

The frontispiece from *The Mexican Twins* (fig. 3) features an American flag bearer standing as a judge before the Mexican twins, who offer their flag forward in a gesture of solidarity. While the scene demonstrates an act of global unity, the American flag remains remarkably large when compared to the flags of the other nations. Americans retained decision-making power. As she extended child reader's imaginations to include foreign people, Perkins maintained an interest in how Americans could expand their power and promote their interests through processes of transformation. The foreign twins frequently seek out transformation, appreciating American culture and asking for a place within the American sphere of influence. Although Perkins does not portray entire societies being transformed through contact, the sorts of

individual transformations she writes about suggest the possibility for wider society-to-society engagement—engagement on American terms.

The twins' interactions with American characters had a transformative power over their lives. *The Irish Twins,* for example, are directly changed through the process of immigration. In the series the twins, Larry and Eileen, witness the return of their neighbor Michael, who has immigrated to the United States. Michael praises the American ethics of hard work, individualism, and democracy. He boasts of the school systems and widely available land, gleefully saying "All I say is there's a better chance over there for you and your children."[129] Michael himself has been transformed through increased contact, in this case immigration, to the United States. His story inspires others to critique their own society, specifically the ruthlessness of greedy landlords that contrast with the free opportunity that Michael describes in the Western United States. By the end of the story, the twins' family follows Michael's example and immigrates to the US. The last chapter returns to scenes of Eileen and Larry twenty years after they make their Atlantic crossing. Larry is a "King of Crossing," a crossing guard, a successfully assimilated and a productive member of society.[130] The transformation, which notably happened with almost no effort on the part of Americans, has enriched both Michael's Irish community and American society.

The sort of transformative power wrought by American characters served to spread positive images of the United States, and therefore its global power. In *The French Twins* American soldiers come to aid the Allies in World War I. As they pass through the French town, they help rebuild homes destroyed in the war. The twins themselves directly interact with

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[129] Perkins, *The Irish Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), 174.
[130] Perkins, *Irish Twins,* 200.

American soldiers, who manage to charm the French villagers despite their bumbling attempts at the language. In response to the American presence, the town praises the Americans: "Vive l'Amérique" they shout, "relieved to be able to vent their feelings in sound."[131] At the end of the novel, the town is "'adopted' by the great, rich city of Chicago far away across the seas," as the twins seek out further connections to the United States. As an adoptee of Perkins' hometown, the French twins and their community can continue to exist in paternal relation to the United States, "rebuilt by its American friends."[132]

While, Perkins' books expressly promoted the social and cultural value of foreign interaction, the economic benefits of transformation undergirded her storylines as well. *The Dutch Twins,* for instance, opens on the twins fishing with their grandfather. "Where do all the ships go?" Kit asks her grandfather. "To America," he replies, "to take flax and linen from the mills of Holland to make dresses for little girls in other countries…and bring back to us wheat and meat and all sorts of good things."[133] From the outset of the books, Perkins situates her characters within the global economy. They have value to the reader as both producers of raw materials and consumers of foreign goods. Similarly, in *The Chinese Twins,* the upper-class woman who intervenes to allow "Moon Flower" to attend school, is the wife of a merchant. Although the book doesn't mention the type of trade conducted, it is presumed that such trade occurs with the West and has opened the society to new kinds of development. [134] Yes, the books sought to demonstrate the positive effect that American culture could have on others. But, this transformation happened on economic terms where the United States had the trading power. This is distinct from Stratemeyer's extractive tales—whereas his characters are interested in the

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[131] Perkins, *French Twins,* 142.
[132] Perkins, *French Twins,* 202.
[133] Perkins, *The Dutch Twins,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 13-14.
[134] Perkins, *Chinese Twins,* 160.

informal means of growing their own wealth, Perkins focuses on the kind of legitimate, although still potentially exploitative, trade connections.

The economic benefits of transformation are seen clearly in *The Filipino Twins,* Perkins' most overtly imperialistic book. Rita and Ramon, the titular twins, face financial struggle on their family farm. Through the course of the book Rita and Ramon travel to Manila. Curiously, Perkins makes no mention of the American rule in the Philippines. The twins' status as colonial subjects, or indeed any mention of American colonialism, is glaring absent from the book. Instead, Perkins opts to situate Manila as a site of global trade. Just as the twins are uncertain about their family's future, a benevolent American figure directly intervenes to solve the conflict. Rita weaves a basket that wins a school competition, piquing the interest of the visiting American tourist. The woman and her friends admire the basket, and the woman offers to buy it from Rita for ten pesos. This is, apparently, enough to help the family save their farm. Rita and Ramon return to their agricultural lifestyle as a result. Yes, there is contact and transformation. But, in the case of the Filipino twins, it ultimately serves American interests as it restores the twins and their family to productive agricultural laborers who can once again export their goods.[135] Perkins neatly smooths lanes of global commerce and suggests that the Filipino twins are better off for it as well.

The American woman is also interested in the anthropological value of the basket. "I should like to take it home with me to show American children what fine work Filipino children can do all by themselves," she muses to Rita.[136] Beyond the general long-term material benefits that the woman establishes by restoring the farm to its productive value, she also gains an item of

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[135] Karen Dillon writes that Perkins equates "the character of the Philippines with the goods it produces." In Dillon, "Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," 99.
[136] Perkins, *The Filipino Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 143.

educational significance. The woman could not simply give the children money, she had to do so on the terms of trade. While the Filipino twins are changed thanks to their contact with American culture, it only occurs in ways that benefit the American character, and the United States, to a greater extent. Moreover, by concealing the nature of American imperial rule in the Philippines, Perkins implies that these relationships are mutually beneficial, rather than exploitative.

The Limits of Transformation

Perkins ascribed to a global imaginary of transformation that promoted international tolerance, but her stories still upheld ideas of racial hierarchy. She wrote about Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Filipino, and Inuit children, yet they did not face the same kind of inclusion in the American project that the Dutch or Norwegian twins did. Whereas European children faced the possibility of immigration, and therefore integration into American culture on par with the white child readers, non-white characters were kept at arm's length throughout the books. Whiteness was, during Perkins' life, a fluid category. Her writing, however, reflected new understandings that included all Europeans in ideas of whiteness, the beginning of racial categories recognizable today.[137] Although she was racially inclusive of previously "othered" groups like the Irish, she did not extend this same vision to characters like the Inuit twins. Non-Europeans were be included within her series, but contact did not ultimately change their status as quasi-imperial subjects.

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[137]Many Europeans, including immigrants like the Irish twins that Perkins writes about, were considered racially inferior to Anglo-Americans and Western Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Still, within racial hierarchies, "othered" Europeans were more proximate to whiteness than the Asian and Latin American people that Perkins also portrayed. For instance, although the Irish had once been seen as equal to Black people within racial hierarchies, by time Perkins was writing in the early twentieth century ideas of whiteness were becoming more expansive. This was, in part, in response to overseas imperial expansions that defined white Americans against non-white colonized subjects. For more on "whiteness" as a racial category, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Although she mostly wrote about foreign born characters, Perkins did publish books about American Twins; these books functionally equated non-white children with the foreign twins she wrote about, reinforcing the underlying themes of racial hierarchy. *The Pickaninny Twins* were sold alongside her other books about "geography". Set in the deep South, the story follows "Sammy" and "Dilly" who speak in a thick dialect almost beyond comprehension. The story itself relies on racial tropes (an absent Black father gone to the North to find work, and a "Mammy" figure) which were dominant in Perkins' time. By placing the story in the Deep South, rather than the North, Perkins separates her primarily Northern and urban audience of child readers from the twins.[138] Notably, her daughter claims that Perkins traveled within Chicago to observe Black children playing as a part of her research for the book.[139] Yet, by setting her story apart from her lived setting she imagines the Black twins as removed as the rest of the characters in her "geographic" series. At the end of the novel, the Black twins remain on their sharecropping farm, remaining on the periphery of American social and cultural life.

The Indian Twins book was a part of Perkins' historical series, sold as a companion to books such as *The Colonial Twins of Virginia* and *The Pioneer Twins.* The opening of *The Indian Twins* acknowledges the violence of the settler colonial project, as an omniscient eagle narrator observes the "many fierce battles" and earth "strewn with the bodies of both white men and brown."[140] However, Perkins chooses to set her Native American twins in the past, rather than an ambiguous present like the rest of her *Twins* books. The narrator watches an inevitable wave of white settlers "still press forward on its westward way." At the end of the preface, the eagle leaves the settled landscape: "'What is it in the west that lures them on? I too must go and

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[138] Dillon discusses *The Pickaninny Twins* further in "Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," 99-102.
[139] Perkins, *Eve Among the Puritans,* 229.
[140] Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The Indian Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), ix.

see.'... When evening came he lifted his head, spread his great wings, and sailed slowly away into the sunset."[141] The eagle, representative of Native Americans, disappears in the presence of modernity. Instead of embracing the progression of civilization, the eagle flies off into the distance, framed as a part of a past with no relation to the modern American reader. In this way, Native Americans are left out from the imaginary of transformation as an idea isolated to history. By writing Black children and Native children as "foreign" and "historic", Perkins constructs a narrow, exclusionary view of American identity, isolated from any shared geography.

Figure 2.3 The Belgian twins, refugees from World War I, gaze out at the Statue of Liberty as they approach Ellis Island. Lucy Firth Perkins, *The Belgian Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 179.

Perkins' employment of racial hierarchies carried into her descriptions of foreign twins as well. Across her series, European twins are given greater opportunities for transformation. Specifically, the European twins have the possibility of immigrating to the United States, while non-white twins remain in the global periphery. For example, the motherless Belgian twins immigrate to the United States when cast out of their homes by German aggression in World

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[141] Perkins, *Indian Twins,* x.

War I (fig. 2.3). *The Irish Twins* face exploitative conditions at the hand of their ruthless landlord; by the end of the book, Larry and Eileen have immigrated to the United States.[142]

This possibility for transformation is not extended to the Mexican twins, however, who also face oppression at the hands of "the rich and powerful."[143] While their father joins the Mexican revolution, the twins' family does not have the same options for movement as the European twins. Their relationship to the United States is rooted in their "sympathy [for] the ideals of our own country," rather than real material changes.[144] The Filipino twins, who Perkins does not even acknowledge as American Nationals, also face no real possibility for citizenship. Their story and conflict is relegated to the simple task of keeping their farm alive. When they interact with an American woman, her payment only restores their life to the status quo at the beginning of the book. The non-white twins' effect on the United States was relegated to the products that they offered, rather than a perceived cultural value to American society.

The last book published in the geographic *Twins* series was *The Chinese Twins* in 1935. When pushed by her publishers to create more stories, Perkins declined. She had, apparently, run out of ideas. As her daughter remembered, "it seemed final to her that there would not be another Twin book."[145] Yet there were many cultures who were not represented in the *Twins* books. Less than thirty percent of her "geographic" titles take place outside of Europe or the US.[146] Perkins' stories never took place below the equator. There were no endearing tales about any African twins, Middle Eastern twins, or twins from South America. Perkins' imagination was likely restricted in part by the flows of immigration to the United States. But her regional settings also

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[142] Perkins, *Irish Twins,* 200.
[143] Lucy Fitch Perkins, *The Mexican Twins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), 157.
[144] Lucy Fitch Perkins to Ann Laderman, 26 December 1931.
[145] Perkins, *Eve Among the Puritans,* 235.
[146] There were 17 "geographic" books in the series, five of which featured non-European or non-American twins.

reflect a broader limitation in the global imaginary of transformation. Perkins couldn't seem to imagine a relationship with those countries beyond her limited view of American identity.

While Stratemeyer's characters traveled widely throughout the Global South, Perkins' only dabbled around its periphery. Their respective employment of different geographical settings suggests a canonical geography to their ideologies. Global imaginaries of transaction made more sense in the Global South, where economic relations were already skewed in favor of the United States and where the Indigenous people were seen as less worthy of interaction in the first place. Global imaginaries of transformation, on the other hand, were easier to envision with those who were closer to racially exclusive ideas of American identity. And, it was only contact with the *right* kind of people that had a transformative cultural effect on the United States.

Educators' Embrace

Perkin's books were well-received by children and educators alike. As educational texts, the books were circulated widely among lending networks. One South Carolina librarian testified that "In my 1919 report of books yours have led in the children's department, and my fall record was 10,825 books loaned."[147] Perkins' impact was large enough that a Chicago Public School in the Big Oaks neighborhood was posthumously named after her.[148]

Educators much preferred what they viewed as the more authentic, appropriate plotlines of Perkins' work over the mass market series fiction of the Stratemeyer syndicate. Perkins books were praised for being written "quietly, gently but earnestly."[149] Those interested in the didactic quality of children's books eagerly picked up on what they perceived to be instructive texts.

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[147] Mrs. Pratt Pierson, Librarian, Joffrey Carnegie Library, Joffrey, S.C, n.d., LFPP, EHC.
[148] The school, located at 6918 W. Strong St. in Chicago, served K-6th grade and opened November of 1960. It has since been closed. Article, n.d., 3 November 1960, LFPP, EHC.
[149] Robert K. Long, quoting Fanny Butcher, n.d., LFPP, EHC.

While much of the juvenile literature was "poorly written and frequently unwise in their choice of material fitted for childish ears," these reformers argued that Perkins was a "pleasing exception" to the unsuitable material in adventure books.[150] She provided an alternative to the sensationalist series fiction. Praise of Perkins also had elitist undertones—while Stratemeyer's books sold for 50 cents each, Perkins' went for $1.75. Although her books were accessible to children in schools and libraries, educator's criticism likely derived from high-brow ideas that series fiction was the literature of the uncultured masses who had "low and lowering taste."[151]

The perception of the books as authentic was connected to their ability to build relationships between American readers and foreign people. An article profiling Perkins noted that her inspiration for writing the series stemmed from her feeling that "children's books were inadequate, lacking in humor and authenticity and played little if any part in preparing young people for life's problems."[152] Part of preparing children for real-world problems, from Perkins' perspective, was introducing them to children of other countries. Librarians agreed that the Twins books entertained but also gave "accurate, useful information about other times and other countries."[153] Educators perceived the kind of transformative relationships that Perkins described as more *accurate* and more *useful* than Stratemeyer's extractive tales. By commenting on the books' didactic value, critics also provided an implicit endorsement of Perkins' global vision. In

[150] "New Copies of Books Loved by Children." Duluth News-Tribune (Duluth, Minnesota) 51, no. 223, 21 December 1919: 8. https://infoweb-newsbank-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2%3A1156D7F7D713A378%40EANX-119326DDF2556428%402422314-119326DF98F3B5E8%4044-119326EB5695C8B8%40New%2BCopies%2Bof%2BBooks%2BLoved%2Bby%2BChildren.%2BChristmas%2BEditions%2Bof%2BOld%2BStandbys%2BBeautifully%2BIllustrated.
[151] *Library Journal,* December 1905. Quoted in Billman, *Secret of the Stratemeyer Syndicate,* 32. Perkins' books were frequently recommended in educator periodicals like *The Wilson Bulletin.* These same periodicals recommended against series fiction like Stratemeyer's. See West, "Not to Be Circulated," 139.
[152] Arthur W. Shumway, "Lucy Fitch Perkins is Famous for Acquainting Children of Many Lands," n.d., LFPP, EHC.
[153] "Millions of Children Love Them—The Lucy Fitch Perkins Twin Books," n.d., LFPP, EHC.

line with educational ideas about influencing children, her books could provide a tangible way for students to be shaped by foreign relations, and to appreciate how they could inform global culture. This politics was less explicitly exploitative, even if in conflict with the imperialist policies that the United States government carried out in their territories and elsewhere in Latin America.

Children's responses are more difficult to obtain for Perkins' books than Stratemeyer's, as the syndicate kept fan mail in its archival records and Perkins did not. Still, the children's voices that survived suggest, at least in part, that they shared the positive opinions of librarians and educators. "Of all the books I have read I would put Lucy Fitch Perkins at the top of the list," a one young boy gushed, "writer of the twin books, we salute you!"[154] Child audiences also picked up on the accuracy that was so widely praised by educators. In addition to humor and adventure, readers noted that "the books are full of pictures and are very realistic."[155] Perkins tested her series on neighborhood children before publication, juvenile focus groups that she called "the Poison Squad."[156] Her published books, like Stratemeyer's, therefore also reflected the ideas and interests of children.

In line with her goal of Americanization, Perkins' books did not just reach American children. Her stories were translated into European languages and Japanese.[157] Perkins' mission was not only to imbue in her child readers an understanding of the reciprocal relationships yielded through global engagement, but to "help people of alien background to an appreciation

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[154] Vernon Dorjahn, "My Appreciation of Lucy Fitch Perkins," *Daily News Index*, Evanston, June 19, 1939, LFPP, EHC.
[155] Dorjahn, "My Appreciation of Lucy Fitch Perkins."
[156] Perkins, *Even Among the Puritans,* 230-231.
[157] Perkins, *Eve Among the Puritans,* 226. Stratemeyer's books were translated, but to a lesser extent (only later books, and only to German and Czech); see "For It Was Indeed He," *Fortune*, 194.

of American ideals."[158] Her books, however, were not translated into Mandarin, Spanish, or the other languages of her characters located further from ideas of "American-ness." The limitations of her transformational relationships extended to the reach of her books as well.

Across her book series, Perkins was successful in cultivating affective relationships between her child readers and the places they read about, creating an obligation for engagement. Her books were deeply interested in the ways that close interpersonal relations could transform foreign places, thereby bringing them under American influence, and as a result economically and culturally enriching the United States. Unlike Stratemeyer's writing, her books did not portray one-sided benefits, but they did present unequal relationships which ultimately sought to promote American interests. This vision, articulated in her *Twins* series, took on a different form in the age of American hegemonic power in the second half of the century.

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[158] Lucy Fitch Perkins to Ann Laderman, 26 December 1931.

Conclusion

As Lucy Fitch Perkins' daughter reminisced on her mother's life and work, she noted that the author "illustrates the extent of change and spans the years during which America turned from the agricultural to the atomic age…Her books were prepared for in one age and written in another."[159] Both Perkins and Stratemeyer straddled defined eras of American power. Stratemeyer, who first experienced literary fame in 1898, died in 1930. His syndicate continued to publish travel stories after his death, although the popularity of the detective *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* series overshadowed Tom, Don, and other globe-trotting characters by the middle of the 1940s.[160] Perkins, who began writing a decade later than Stratemeyer, died in 1937. Although a British publishing house adapted her "twin" model in the 1950s, there were no more stories published about foreign twins from an American perspective.[161]

Perkins and Stratemeyer did not resolve the tensions between transformative and transactional global imaginaries, however. In 1943, former presidential candidate and statesman Wendell Willkie noted in his popular book *One World*: "We as a nation have not made up our minds what kind of world we want to speak for when victory comes."[162] As the United States rose to new heights of power, questions about the form and function of global engagement continued. Global imaginaries of transformation and transaction also persisted in popular cultural texts. These texts were reflective of US foreign policy that was, often conflictingly, interested in

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[159] Perkins, *Eve Among the Puritans,* vii.

[160] Michael G. Cornelius discusses the foreign relations present in mystery series in his article "Lost Cities: Generic Conventions, Hidden Places, and Primitivism in Juvenile Series Mysteries," in *Internationalism in Children's Series,* eds., Karen Sands-O'Connor and Marietta A. Frank (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 107-124. While there was an internationalist sentiment in some of the later *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* books, these characters were much more domestically oriented than their earlier counterparts.

[161] Dillon, "Cultural Goodwill Ambassadors," 85. New titles included *The South African Twins* (1953) and *The Pakistani Twins* (1960).

[162] Wendell L. Willkie, One World (New York, 1943), 181–182.

developing other places and advancing commercial interests. Unlike the works of Stratemeyer and Perkins, historians have looked these texts to understand the ways that they imagine US global presence in the context of hegemonic power during the Cold War.

While serial fiction stories, like Stratemeyer's, were the most popular children's texts of the early twentieth century, comic books quickly became the preferred form of entertainment by the 1940s. Among the most popular comic series were Disney's *Donald Duck* cartoons, especially the *Uncle Scrooge* spin-off. The comics follow the wealthy Uncle Scrooge and his nephews as they jet off to foreign countries (all fictitiously named allusions to places throughout the Global South) and take material wealth which ostensibly has no real value to the Indigenous people the ducks encounter. Marxist critics Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart discussed the imperial themes of the ducks in their seminal text, *Para Leer al Pato Donald [How to Read Donald Duck]* (1971). Dorfman and Mattelart, writing in the context of a CIA-sponsored coup of democratically elected Chilean president Salvador Allende, argue that the ducks represent a capitalist fantasy of resource extraction in the Global South.[163] Like Stratemeyer's books before them, the ducks were interested in the transactional purpose of imperial relations—they were singularly focused on growing their pools of gold.

The Ugly American (1958) was another popular text of the Cold War period. Although not a children's book, its status as a best-seller speaks to the potency of its ideas. Through the novel, authors Eugene Burdick and William J. Lederer delivered a sharp critique of US foreign policy. They attacked American diplomats who they portrayed as out of touch with their

[163] Dorfman and Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck*. Unlike the Stratemeyer books, the *Uncle Scrooge* characters often created chaos and harm in the countries they visited, demonstrating a new ambivalence about transactional and extractive relationships, and the value of modernization projects. See Daniel Immerwahr, "Ten-Cent Ideology: Donald Duck Comic Books and the U.S. Challenge to Modernization," *Modern American History* (Cambridge.) 3, no. 1 (2020): 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1017/mah.2020.4.

countries of placement—a critical blunder as the United States sought to contain what they perceived as a spreading communist threat. Instead, Burdick and Lederer praise the titular "Ugly American" character, who connects with local people, and therefore successfully spreads American democratic ideals through culturally sensitive community-level engagement.[164] The book purportedly inspired President John F. Kennedy to create the Peace Corps.[165] *The Ugly American,* like Perkins' writing earlier in the twentieth century, was focused on how effectively develop relationships with foreign peoples, albeit still in the context of Cold War power.

My analysis of Stratemeyer and Perkins' works suggests that global imaginaries of transaction and transformation began to take shape before the time of *Uncle Scrooge* or *The Ugly American*. In fact, Americans had been considering these ideas since the global turn in 1898. Giving due attention to their works helps make sense of the kinds of ideological debates over empire and global engagement in the early twentieth century, and how these ideologies bridged the period of continental expansion and the "American Century." Analyzed together, Stratemeyer's and Perkins' books reveal an underlying tension in how Americans imagined their relationship with the world. In Stratemeyer's get-in-get-out perspective, idealized transactional relationships could promote material interests while avoiding the responsibility of direct interaction with foreign peoples. Perkins, on the other hand, was interested in what foreign contact could do for Americans—materially and socially—and how relationship building could foster that interest. For Stratemeyer, the world was a playground; for Perkins it was a classroom.

As I also suggest, these two visions were not entirely incompatible. Yes, both carried patriotic and imperialistic overtones, although they clearly promoted different means to these

[164] William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1958).
[165] See also Daniel Immerwahr, "The Ugly American: Peeling the Onion of an Iconic Cold War Text," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 26, no. 1 (2019): 7–20. https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-02601003.

ends. More importantly, Perkins and Stratemeyer applied their visions to different parts of the world. Stratemeyer's heroes travel primarily in the Global South. Perkins was interested in places closer to the United States in terms of immigration flows and formal trade connections (primarily Europe and Eastern Asia). White Americans like Stratemeyer and Perkins often held a racialized hierarchical view of global relations. Transactions made more sense in non-white, poorer places where people were not deemed worthy of deep relationships. Transformations were easier to envision for and with those closer to the exclusive ideas of citizenship.

It is important to understand early answers to the question of US global engagement because the presence of such robust and conflicting perspectives on the form of imperial presence reveals that Americans had been thinking about their role in the world long before they had achieved hegemonic power after World War II. Historian Brooke Blower points to the need to avoid an exceptionalist narrative that the United States "had undertaken their benevolent reign only after being prodded out of their shell and only because it was a dirty job that somebody had to do."[166] There were certain contingencies that allowed the United States to become of the kind of world power that it was, but it was not accidental, unwanted, or out of character. Understanding that global power was both accepted and debated establishes the agency that the United States had in forging its own hegemonic dominance.

That these debates presented themselves in children's literature lends reveals that the form of engagement was not only considered by state-level leaders but by everyday (predominantly white- and middle- class) American consumers. As a source of scrutiny and regulation, children's books had to reflect ideas that were widely accepted and appropriate for the country's future citizens. Children presented an opportunity for adults to shape the nation's future.

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[166] Blower, "From Isolationism to Neutrality," 347.

Children's literature, then, reflected ideas that adults wanted young people to grow up believing. Authors, parent consumers, and educators who questioned the works of Stratemeyer and Perkins all contributed towards a vibrant cultural debate about the future of US foreign relations, a complexity representative of deep engagement with the ideologies of imperialism.

Importantly, Stratemeyer's and Perkins' visions do not provide critiques of American global power. For all their differences, Stratemeyer and Perkins were remarkably similar in their embrace of an expansive global presence. Anti-imperial critiques, where they existed, were not presented in popular children's texts; they remained on the outskirts of social and cultural life, not welcomed onto the bookshelves of young readers.[167] In this formative period of American foreign relations, it is notable that the visions presented by the two most prominent children's authors were both limited by ideas of power, hierarchy, and imperialism. By 1941, these visions had become entrenched, representatives of two possibilities of American power, but without a strong critique of imperialism the choice remained between extending control over foreign resources or over foreign people.

Critically examining children's texts—a seemingly unassuming medium—demystifies American hegemony after World War II. In the years leading up to this era, there was a genuine and widely held disagreement about how to best project American power. These ideologies were developed in the early twentieth century, but given greater power after World War II, ideas of transaction and transformation had new policy and cultural outlets. To understand children's literature in this time is also to understand how Americans shaped their place in the world, the possibilities of these visions, their implications, and their disappointing limits.

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[167] Ian Tyrell and Jay Sextons, eds., *Empire's Twin: US Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), for instance, contains scant accounts on popular ideologies of anti-imperialism imperialism. Christopher McKnight Nichols, in *Promise and Peril* also discusses how many self-identified "anti-imperialists" were motivated by racist fears of incorporating non-white people into the US.

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