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First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking
by Shawn C. Bean

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First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking. By Shawn C. Bean (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. x, 193 pp. Acknowledgments, introduction, B/W illustrations, photographs, film listing, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50, cloth)

The era of silent films has received little attention from scholars of Florida cinema. In 1983, Richard Alan Nelson opened the research hatch to cinema production in Florida with his two-volume study *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 1898-1980*, and other scholars, like Susan Doll and David Marrow with *Florida on Film: The Essential Guide to Sunshine State Cinema and Locations* (2007), joined the effort. With his insistence on historical context in *First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking*, Shawn Bean—twice named Writer of the Year by the Florida Magazine Association—takes audiences deeper into the topic.

A 1901 fire in Jacksonville that destroyed 2,368 buildings and left ten thousand people homeless enabled the city to recast itself, just as the 1871 fire had in Chicago and the earthquake of 1906 would do in San Francisco. Henry Klutho, a New York architect inspired first by H. H. Richardson and later by Frank Lloyd Wright, moved his practice to Jacksonville and partnered with an Atlanta architect, J. W. Golucke, to kick-start an architectural renaissance. J. W. Hawkins, Ransom Buffalo, and others followed to create a patchwork of architectural styles—Mission, Neoclassical Revival, Gothic, Romanesque, and Prairie. Filmmakers disgruntled with the inhospitable weather, short outdoor shooting season, sickness, static electricity, and tight and expensive space in the Northeast were looking to relocate.

Jacksonville had several features that proved magnetic to the burgeoning film industry: a moderate climate, 272 sunny days per year, proximity to New York, accessibility by steamship and railroad, inexpensive real estate, access to lumber, grand hotels, low labor costs, a variegated landscape ranging from ocean and beach to sawgrass and forest, a wide variety of architectural styles, receptive public officials (i.e., Jacksonville mayor J.E.T. Bowden), and a stop on burlesque, vaudeville, theater, sports, and other entertainment circuits. The Kalem Company sent the first film crew to the “Gateway City” in 1908 and built the first “location studio” (48) in 1909, predating the first West Coast studio (Nestor Co.) by three years. During its first season in Florida, Kalem produced eighteen films, including *A Florida Feud; or, Love in the Everglades* (1909) and *The Cracker’s Bride* (1909). Other studios—Biograph, Lubin, Vitagraph—followed the migration. By 1914, thirty production companies had set up shop in Jacksonville. By 1930, nearly three hundred movies had been shot in the state. The first Technicolor film, *The Gulf Between*, was made in Jacksonville in 1917. Cinema production brought big names to town—Oliver Hardy, D. W. Griffith, and Mary Pickford. The city advanced cinema aesthetically and technologically, earning the nickname “The World’s Film Capital” (91).

Bean's most significant chapter is on Richard Norman. After making money in soft drinks, "town films" (locally produced movies intended to raise interest in cinema), and comedy plays, the white producer became a pioneer in making black films and molding black culture. "My dad, of course, was a business man. But an underlined thought in his mind was the desire to do something constructive to better race relations," Richard Norman Jr. said. "Through his films he was committed to helping black players live up to their potential and show what they were capable of as performers and human beings" (117). In addition to creating black heroes, Norman also innovated the use of public appearances by the actors, decorative lobby cards, and sexual themes. He cast Bill Pickett, a rodeo cowboy and star of the Miller Brothers Wild West Show, and Anita Bush, a noted actress in black drama, in the benchmark black western *The Bull Dogger* (1922). The advent of sound in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), starring the greatest mammy singer of all time, Al Jolson, brought an end to the silent era.

The implosion of filmmaking in Jacksonville and the switch to Hollywood came as rapidly as had Jacksonville's rise. World War I caused railroads to redirect their services to the military; actors and technicians enlisted; extras were paid low wages; and the cost of living rose. Fly-by-night operations entered the industry and gave it a bad name. The public became irritated by irresponsible stunts such as pulling fire alarms in order to shoot fire engines racing through city streets, and orchestrating a car's plunge off a pier into the St. Johns River without informing observers that the incident was staged. The last straw came in a mob scene staged for *Clarion* (1916) in which extras not only busted up a saloon but also consumed the available whiskey. While the studio paid two thousand dollars for the damage, the "liquor, anger, anarchy, and annihilation scared residents" (97). The election of John Martin as mayor swept in an antifilm administration. And, finally, a ban on indoor public gatherings that was imposed as a result of the flu epidemic of 1918 delivered Jacksonville's film industry its coup de grâce.

Bean's prose can sometimes get the best of him. He employs the inventive phrase "Dixie kakistocracy" (48) to capture Kalem's view of Florida, and he uses the term "tsunami" (93) to describe World War I. There are also times when he goes off on tangents, most notably in his discussion of the first talkie made in Florida, *Hell Harbor* (1930), and of the cult science-fiction movie *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). Bean could have made a more powerful statement about blacks in popular culture, for example, by relating his discussion to other representations of race in the writings of Thomas Dixon, D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), music, and the minstrel show. Nevertheless, *The First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking* is very well written. Illustrated with striking images culled largely from the Florida Photographic Collection in Tallahassee and well researched in collections like the Black Film Center/Archive and the Richard Norman Papers at

Indiana University, the book brings together a great deal of important and interesting information. Bean received a 2009 Gold Medal in nonfiction from the Florida Book Awards for his study, and he was profiled in the magazine of the Florida Humanities Council, *Florida Forum*, which published an excerpt from the book. The acclaim is well deserved.

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Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising. By Tim Hollis (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. 337 pp. Introduction, color illustrations, bibliography, credits, index. \$34.95, cloth)

To Florida residents, Sunshine State visitors, and Florida history scholars, advertising is an accepted feature of the state's past and present tourism industry. Tim Hollis explains that in previous Florida tourism advertising studies, analysis often overshadows imagery. He reverses this trend in *Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising* by encouraging readers to view this work as "the most elaborate Florida vacation scrapbook ever assembled" (3). Hollis succeeds in this effort, and the postcards, publicity photos, travel brochures, souvenir placemats, and other Florida tourism trappings, many of which are from the author's personal collection, illustrate the colorful history of the state's evolving tourism industry. Readers also learn that the advertisements and attractions highlight what promoters wanted prospective visitors to believe they would experience when choosing Florida as their vacation destination.

The monograph's subtitle describes the work as a "Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising," but Hollis also points out the transitory nature of certain tourism destinations like the Johnny Weissmuller–endorsed Tropical Wonderland, which proved unable to compete with Disney. Brochures and advertisements often imply nothing but glossy successes. The book's captions also reveal a different side to Florida, as interstate construction, larger theme parks, and other forms of development rendered some attractions, like Sanlando Springs, obsolete. Hollis briefly draws attention to another duality of Florida tourism advertising by including a sign for American Beach, the "Negro Ocean Playground" (130). An advertisement for "Paradise Park" encourages viewers to "See Florida's Silver Springs from Paradise Park for Colored People" (179). This imagery reminds readers that not everyone enjoyed equal access to Florida tourism.

After an overview and general introduction to the state's advertising in the first chapter, Hollis divides the book into regional sections that correspond with a 1966 Florida tourism guide. This guide sectioned Florida into seven different regions: