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## **"The Most Exotic of Our Cities": Race, Place, Writing, and George Allan England's Key West**

by Philip Levy

In the late 1920s, a prominent American writer arrived in Key West. He and his wife came to this Florida backwater to escape chilly winters and to carve out time for writing. Once settled in town, the writer gradually eased into the rhythms of Key West life. He built personal connections and began observing local characters who, in time, would re-emerge in his stories. He liked boats and the outdoors life. He had an inclination toward dangerous adventures and enjoyment of killing animals as well as an ability to convey these sentiments to audiences through popular literature. While in the Keys he would visit sites near and distant, and see places and hear stories that would return in his writing. It was, after all, always about the writing. The year was 1927, and the writer was George Allan England.

The above outline will be familiar to anyone acquainted with the fabled story of Ernest Hemingway's 1928 arrival in Key West. The details of this story have endured many retellings, which always include observations about the significance of the arrival for both

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Hemingway and the island itself.<sup>1</sup> While the mutually beneficial decade-long association between Hemingway and his sometime island home is well known, the relationship between England and Key West is more obscure. Indeed, England himself was long ago consigned to the dusty shelves of America's forgotten authors. But in his day, many readers of Hemingway's predecessor in Key West held the author in high esteem. A self-fashioned character, he was a prolific writer, producing an enormous corpus of literature, including socialist tracts, utopianist science fiction, poetry, adventure yarns, and travel writing. A Midwesterner by birth but a New Englander by choice, England strongly identified with Maine, where he once ran for governor, and New Hampshire, where he churned out articles and raised chickens at a retreat he called Camp Sans Souci. Between 1918 and the early 1930s he passed his winters in a home on Key West's lower Whitehead Street, where he became so well-known that local boosters called him the "Key West Ambassador."<sup>2</sup> In the late 1920s, England turned his writer's eye on his adopted winter home and penned one major essay about Key West and several other works that made passing reference to the city.

This essay looks closely at the writing England produced in the 1920s, first to acknowledge England as a unique and influential Key West promoter, but more importantly, to show how he fit the city into contemporary ideologies of racial superiority, American Empire, and modernity. England's pen reconciled modernity and Key West in a unique fashion, and provided an important rhetorical building block in the New Deal reinvention of the city and its more recent tourist promotion.

Many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers touched on Key West's climate, its mix of peoples, and its fine location, often casting the unusual island city as a counterpoint to mainland America.<sup>3</sup> But the larger reality is that volatile industrial

1. The literature on Hemingway is voluminous. The Hemingway Key West arrival story can be seen in James McLeandon, *Papa Hemingway in Key West* (Miami: E. A. Seeman Publishing, 1972); Anne Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in The American Literary Imagination* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1986), 92-106; Maureen Ogle, *Key West: History of an Island of Dreams* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 139-160.

2. *Key West Citizen* (hereafter cited as *KWC*), 3 January 1927: 2.

3. William Barnett outlines the ways that writers shaped Key West as a counterpoint and retreat from "modern" America. See, Barnett, "Inventing the Conch Republic: The Creation of Key West as an Escape from Modern America," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 88, no.2 (Fall 2009): 139-172.

economics, the transformation of state power, and race—in short, modernity—have been the real engines defining Key West.

England uniquely celebrated what others mistrusted or lamented. Whereas most observers fretted over changes in rail and highway access and subsequent visitors that they believed threatened to rob Key West of its uniqueness, England supported more roads and visitors to the region, and he hoped artists of many types would make the city their muse. He saw the development and social mix others observed not as a challenge to, or a retreat from America, but rather as a perfect vision of the nation's innate potential at a time when the United States was expanding its Caribbean, Latin American, and Philippines colonial activities and, as historian Terry Smith has observed, a moment when modernity was in "one of the acknowledged moments of its most brilliant appearance."<sup>4</sup> Key West was, thanks to modernity's steel and concrete, connected to the mainland in dramatic ways. Key West's New Deal reinvention—the turning point in remaking the town into a tourist mecca—itself a project steeped in the logic of modernity's economics, and state power—was presaged by England's vision of a town washed in warm flower-scented breezes yet bustling with roads and industry and flooded with artists and tourists living in refurbished fishermen's shacks.<sup>5</sup> In 1934, Governor David Sholtz and

4. Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 2.

5. Ogle, *Key West*. Ogle's synthetic history is the best of its type even though it does little to challenge the prevailing timeline and narrative. The best recent study is found in the Key West sections of William C. Barnett, *From Gateway to Getaway: Labor, Leisure, and Environment in American Maritime Cities* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2005). Key West has had some scholarly treatment but the literature is diffuse and hard to summarize. Furthermore, the town's tourist industry has led to a large number of popular works that more or less repeat an established narrative while also adding layers of new information and meanings. In short, Key West's past is not a possession of professional scholars: it has many crafters speaking to many kinds of audiences through a variety of small non-academic presses. There are a number of older broad sweep histories still of great use. These include Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New* (1912, repr. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1973); Louise White and Nora Smiley, *History of Key West* (St Petersburg: Great Outdoors Publishing, 1959). Key West's role in the Key's larger history of wrecking has been limned by John Viele in *The Florida Key's Volume 3: The Wreckers* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 2001). Also see Dorothy Dodd, "The Wrecking Business on the Florida Reef, 1822-1860," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 22, no.4 (April 1944) 171-199. There are a number of historical photograph collections that make subtle arguments in emphasis and selection about Key West history. These include John Hays and Thomas Reilly, *Images of America: Key West* (Charleston SC:

Key West's Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) chief, Julius Stone Jr., listed the island city's "natural beauty, its strategic location, unexcelled climate," and "isolation" as the basis for the remaking of Key West, and thereby touched on the exact unique local alchemy, hyperbolic prose, and issues of social—particularly racial—control and balance that first came together most powerfully in England's writing.<sup>6</sup> If historian William Barnett offers us a vision of Key West as a paradoxical "escape from America," and cultural scholar Jani Scandura showed a Depression-era Key West as a place drenched in discussions of death and healing, this essay seeks to show how George Allan England used Key West as an example of high modernity expressing the potential wonders of an American overseas empire.<sup>7</sup> Whereas most scholars of modernity see it as devaluing the "local" or the "place-bound" in favor of universalizing laws and systems, England's Key West reveals how central places

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Arcadia Press, 2000); Stan Windorn and Wright Langley, *Yesterday's Key West* (Miami: E.A. Seeman Publishing, 1973); Joan and Wright Langley, *Key West: Images of the Past* (Key West: Belland and Swift, 1982). The Wright Langley collections are especially interesting as they are based on the author's own rich and diverse private image collection. Tourism has led to a large body of local tales and walking tour literature. Here again, these books provide interesting glimpses into Key West's ever evolving narrative. See, J. Wills Burke, *The Streets of Key West: A History Through Street Names* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 2004); and Joy Williams, *The Florida Keys* (New York: Random House, 1995). For Key West and Cuban history see, Gerald E. Poyo, "Key West and the Cuban Ten Years War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (January 1979), 289-307. Also see Consuelo Stebbins, *City of Intrigue, Nest of Revolution* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2007). Hemingway's time in the city is a manner of subfield in and of itself. All major biographical works devote at least a chapter to these years and several books take on that theme including James McLendon, *Papa Hemingway in Key West* (Miami: E.A. Seeman Publishing, 1972), Stuart B. McIver, *Hemingway's Key West* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1993); and Phil Scott, *Hemingway's Hurricane: The Great Florida Keys Storm of 1935* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006). The cigar industry, particularly its role in immigration and labor unrest, has produced its own literature. See L. Glenn Westfall, *Key West: Cigar City USA* (Key West: Historical Key West Preservation Board, 1984). The only book-length study (albeit a small one) of Key West's African American population is Sharon Wells, *Forgotten Legacy: Blacks in Nineteenth-Century Key West* (Key West: Historical Key West Preservation Board, 1991).

6. *Florida Keys Sun* (6 July 1934), 1. See also, Durward Long, "Key West and the New Deal, 1934-1936," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (January 1968): 209-218; Garry Boulard, "State of Emergency: Key West in the Great Depression," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (October 1988): 166-183.
7. Barnett, "Inventing the Conch Republic," 169; The Creation of Key West as an Escape from Modern America," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (Fall 2009), 169; Jani Scandura, *Down in the Dumps: Place, Modernity, and American Depression* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

can be to the very success of the modern.<sup>8</sup> Key West's mix of peoples, geography, and "improvements" were for England a single, unique, and distinctly local phenomenon offering broader lessons about race and American empire.

Lurking behind what Maureen Ogle called England's "overblown prose" was something more than mere boosterism and a flashy pen.<sup>9</sup> England's Key West reflected the author's broader concerns of ruin and decline, man versus nature, and most powerfully race, empire, and human evolutionary possibilities—particularly in island geography. For England, Key West's mix of beauty, industry, and isolation made it an evolutionarily "perfect" place with enormous implications for empire and Anglo Saxon superiority. In this way England spoke to Americans who could see in a place like Key West far grander issues than local economics and tourism. Recent work on American imperialism has offered a provocative challenge to the long-standing consensus that a logic of Anglo-Saxon superiority informed American overseas adventures. Eric Love, for example, demonstrated that in fact there was considerable fear of tropical climes and the way they might negatively affect racially superior peoples.<sup>10</sup> England's texts are riven with reflections of Americans' own disagreements about the tropics, Anglo-Saxon superiority, and the ups and downs of empire. His overlooked travel writings in particular are exactly the kinds of texts that reveal important tensions in larger imperial rhetoric, and call for reexamination in light of Love's and other work. Given Florida's long history as an object of and a springboard for American imperial activity, England's Key West writings are long overdue for close analysis in light of race and empire.

As Anne Rowe noted, American writers have developed what she called "the idea of Florida" for centuries, stemming from Ponce De Leon's Fountain of Youth all the way through Ernest Hemingway's "last wild country."<sup>11</sup> For Rowe, the image of a tropical, lush

8. Timothy Oakes, "Place and the Paradox of Modernity," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 3 (September 1997): 509-531.

9. Ogle, *Key West*, 141.

10. Eric Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). See also Paul Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880-1910," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 4 (March 2002): 1315-1353.

11. Anne Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

"Good Place" was central to the written idea of Florida. Historian Tommy R. Thompson has argued that this sort of imagery ultimately served to obscure the many ugly realities of a state full of alligators, lynchings, and chain gangs, and allowed promoters to remake Florida as a land of sunshine and opportunity.<sup>12</sup> Jani Scandura has gone farther and shown how, for Key West in particular, "metaphors of death and revival" were central to the discussion of the crumbling town and New Deal-era efforts to turn it into a tropical tourist Mecca.<sup>13</sup> Central to this scholarship is the notion that the written Florida—particularly during the twentieth century—was more than a sideshow to historical realities. In a place so dependent on visitation and outside money, there were (and arguably still are) very real consequences to every written word. Julius Stone tellingly declared that "with a scratch of my pen I started this work in Key West and with a scratch of my pen I can stop it."<sup>14</sup> If, indeed, as Stephen Whitfield argues, Florida has claimed to be (or has been claimed to be) a "kind of hologram of Paradise," it has always been a hologram made up of the written word.<sup>15</sup>

So much of that writing has concentrated on Florida's wild side. Be it Zane Gray's or Henry Carleton's big "game fish of Florida" or Ring Lardner's "garden spot of God's green footstool," the writer's gaze has often landed on Florida's seemingly untamable expansive greenery.<sup>16</sup> Key West has often been a challenge to that norm—being depicted as more troubled and industrial than wild and natural.<sup>17</sup> Visiting writers typically have struggled with Key West as a place. Nineteenth-century readers enjoyed tales of colorful Keys' wreckers and yellow fever, but none of this did much to make Key West seem like a paradise.<sup>18</sup> Its strong industrial base and large

12. Tommy R. Thompson, "Florida in American Popular Magazines, 1870-1970," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82:4 (2003): 1-15.

13. Scandura, 76.

14. Boulard, "State of Emergency," 171.

15. Stephen J. Whitfield, "Florida's Fudged Identity," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 71:4 (April 1993), 413.

16. Henry Carleton, "Big Game Fish of Florida," *Outing Magazine* 29:4 (January 1897).

17. The category of the natural however has been destabilized in recent scholarship. See, Richard White *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995) and William Cronon ed, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995).

18. Bennett, *Key West: Paradise on the Edge of the World*, 257-275.

population also made it a problem for writers seeking a verdant wonderland of alligators and palms.

Prior to the twentieth century, some writers opposed negative images and literary depictions of Key West. Pre-England booster pieces like that in the pages of the *Daily Equator Democrat*, in 1889, praised the "City Without Winter" as "one of the most beautiful places in America," and made the case for the city as a fit place for investment and visitation.<sup>19</sup> But the balance between extolling natural splendor as a lure for visitors and a robust manufacturing sector as a draw for investors was always a difficult rhetorical act to sustain.<sup>20</sup>

Writing in 1894, Charles Richard Dodge dismissed Key West in a *Scribner's Magazine* article which otherwise sang the praises of wild Florida. In the "dusty old town" of Key West, Dodge found "very little of interest here to hold the tourist." The city's buildings were odd, "small and cheap," and only a few could be called "imposing." Among Key West's other uninteresting elements, Dodge listed the cigar, sponge, and turtle meat industries and a curious mix of peoples. But mostly, the city served as a stop-over on the way to what really made Florida a travel-worthy destination.<sup>21</sup>

In 1918, Nevin Winter was similarly unimpressed. He declared "it cannot be asserted that Key West is a beautiful city" although he did call it "quaint and interesting"—something of a step up from Dodge's dim view. Winter noted in matter-of-fact fashion the existence of the cigar and turtle meat industries, the fact that the children of the large population of immigrant cigar workers "speak their native tongue except when English becomes necessary," and that the "large Negro population" of Key West occupies "a section by themselves."<sup>22</sup> While Winter had high praise for the Keys and much of wild Florida, Key West received only a passing glance, in part, because its mix of industry, labor, immigrants, and African Americans was exactly the sort of burgeoning America that Northerners like Winter came to Florida to leave behind. Key West was

19. *Daily Equator Democrat* 1889, 1, 9.

20. Barnett, *From Gateway to Getaway*, 491. Barnett offers an excellent discussion of early twentieth-century promotional writing including a detailed review of Elmer Davis. He skipped over England however and went right on to Hemingway's arrival.

21. Charles Richard Dodge, "Subtropical Florida" *Scribner's Magazine* 15:3 (March 1894), 350-351.

22. Nevin Winter, *Florida, The Land of Enchantment* (Boston: The Page Company,



not all that compelling to many of them precisely because it was too familiar.

This issue came into play most creatively in two essays penned by Elmer Davis. Writing in the mid-1920s, Davis lamented the changes Key West faced due to the Florida land boom and the new highway linking it to the mainland. While Davis mourned for what the city was in the process of losing, he saw it as a lost cause. His Key West was neither Florida nor was it really the United States either—it was its own place with its own rhythms and sounds. Predictably, these were Caribbean and Cuban inflected but all in all, the town itself was unremarkable. Davis's essays were free of superlatives and lacked mentions of beauty. Instead, he described "rows and rows of gray shacks" which "somehow fit the town, fit the flat almost treeless sandbank on which Key West is built."<sup>23</sup> For Davis, what was special about Key West was that it had avoided becoming "American," and consequently maintained its cultural independence in an age of increasing consumer driven homogeneity. Davis wrote not to simply praise Key West but to condemn a rapacious, American, popular consumer capitalist culture.

Against this backdrop, George Allan England offered something unique to debates on Key West images. England's 1928 article in *Travel* magazine, entitled "Island of Felicity," came to Americans amidst an epoch of Caribbean and Latin American adventurism which saw U.S. troops asserting themselves in places ranging from Mexico to Haiti.<sup>24</sup> These interventions raised a number of important racial questions.<sup>25</sup> Among those was whether or not Anglo Saxons could survive and thrive in tropical climates so different from the settings of their racial origins. Americans had long worried about what historian Warwick Anderson called "white male breakdown in the tropics," and had a general fear that warmer climes were a threat to Anglo-Saxon dominance.<sup>26</sup> England's pro-

23. Elmer Davis, "Another Caribbean Conquest," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (January 1929), 172. Davis wrote two essays on Key West. This description post-dates England's essay, but was Davis's clearest statement of the city's appearance and therefore worthy of use here. See also, Barnett, "Inventing the Conch Republic," 160-161.

24. George Allan England, "America's Island of Felicity," *Travel* (1928), 43. (Hereafter cited as "Felicity.")

25. Paul Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions and Anglo-Saxons," 1318-1319.

26. Warwick Anderson, "The Trespass Speaks: While Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown," *American Historical Review* 102:5 (December 1997), 1345. See also, Idem, "Climates of Opinion: Acclimatization in Nineteenth-Century France and England," *Victorian Studies* 35:2 (Winter, 1992), 135-137.

motion of Key West, especially his full-throated advocacy of this island city as a wonderful, even perfect place, promoted his belief that Anglo Saxons could expect to survive and thrive in the tropics.<sup>27</sup>

England's time in Key West produced several essays and a few newspaper articles, all of which came out in print during and just after his 1927 season-long visit. He wrote all of these either in the city or just after his 1927 stay, and all of them stemmed from travels he took using the city as his base of operations. This body of work dealt with places as far away as Cozumel, Mexico and Grand Cayman Island, and as close to the Keys as the Dry Tortugas. All were unified by an interest in what he saw as the distinctness of islands, and how the island plays on the evolutionary status of its residents.<sup>28</sup> They are also all marked by concerns of race and empire, both being themes near and dear to England's heart. In this writing, Key West, with its combination of races and "modern improvements," held the status of the most evolutionarily ideal of all. Additionally, each of the essays kept Key West itself in play in various ways, making the city a secondary subject of each venture. And, all of this writing reached American readers just as the new "Overseas Highway" opened, making the length of the archipelago fully accessible by car—a defining moment in the history of the Keys.<sup>29</sup> This means that the readers England reached through *Travel*, *Harper's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, his essay collection entitled *Isles of Romance*, and other venues, read about Key West right at the moment when it was for the first time possible for them to get in their cars, gas up, and motor down to America's "southernmost city."

England's works reached audiences at a time of extensive U.S. imperial activity in the Caribbean and as part of the attendant debates about those projects. United States involvement in Mexico,

27. Eric Love, *Race Over Empire*.

28. England has not been the only one with an interest in islands. Well before his epoch, Charles Darwin saw in islands the possibilities of unique patterns for animal life. He argued that all islands had once been linked, but gradual dispersal allowed for the isolation of various species. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959) 617-618. More recent scholars as well have seen islands as useful and compelling places for human interaction. See Richard White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980) and Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1980).

29. Ogle, *Key West*, 140-142. See also, Barnett, *Gateway to Getaway*, Chapter 7.

Central America, Haiti, Cuba and the Philippines all raised questions about exactly what Americans could expect to do and become in these alien environments. Opponents and advocates of American overseas empire, as well as racial theorists, wondered about the effects of tropical climates on Anglo Saxons and the viability of American civilization in warm climates. Would

Americans be able to recreate the fruits of northern civilization amidst tropical jungles inhabited by racially inferior others? Or, would the innate danger of these environments literally swamp progress and cause the regression of otherwise stalwart Anglo Saxons? By positioning Key West in relation to other tropical places and emphasizing the success, even the perfection, of this special city, England suggested that not only could Americans overcome the problems posed by the tropics, but with the right blend of circumstances, they could create something truly superior in Caribbean locales.<sup>30</sup> For England, Key West's mix of peoples and environment made the city a test case for just what American civilization could do and become in unfamiliar climes. The result was what he repeatedly called "perfection."

### Thinking of England

To understand England's Key West, we must begin by understanding England himself. This is not the easiest task. There is a very small scholarship about him, and although he was prolific in the extreme, he made no effort to preserve his personal papers.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, we can learn his mind only from his published writing, a few autobiographic pieces, and a cryptic and somewhat misleading family-written biographical sheet stashed away in a Maine local historical society. There is little in the way of England's personal, non-public-consumption writing upon which to understand his worldview.<sup>32</sup>

30. Eric Love, *Race Over Empire*.

31. There is only one published essay dedicated solely to England and that is Mark Pittinger's study of the racial and genocidal dimensions of England's best known book, *Darkness and Dawn* (1914). "Imagining Genocide in the Progressive Era: The Socialist Science Fiction of George Allan England," *American Studies* 35:1 (1994): 91-108.

32. I discovered England as part of my current research on the creation of George Washington, the Cherry Tree, and Washington's boyhood home as joined historical icons. England wrote promotional articles celebrating the Cherry Tree story and the American values embodied in stories about Washington's

He was born in 1877 in Nebraska, the son of a U.S. Army chaplain, but was saved from a frontier life of posts and sod blocks by a wealthy aunt who brought him to Boston to serve as her coachman. He received a Harvard education and found his writing talent early, penning his first published essays while still at university. After graduating he embarked on a career as a New York City insurance salesman, but a bout of tuberculosis and a resulting weak chest caused him to abandon the city for the New England woods, the ancestral home of his wife's relatives, where he had to rely on his writing skills to get by. England always made much of his flight from urban life and his physical and literary salvation in the woods and it is small wonder that turn-of-the-century Rooseveltian themes of fitness (both racial and physical), manliness, rusticity, and survival all play central roles in his writings.<sup>33</sup>

He first turned his pen to pure politics—socialist politics to be precise. In an article and a pamphlet he decried the abuses of the United States' Supreme Court, reviewed the history of the international movement, and prophesized a socialist future for all. "Socialism is the heir apparent of capitalism, the next stage of development, the historical sequel of capitalist production," he assured his readers, in prose that revealed an ability to master the styles and tropes of genre writing and an interest in imagining the future—both attributes which would also later infuse his writing.<sup>34</sup>

Before World War I, England made a name for himself as a writer, activist, historian of American socialism, and admirer and

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Boyhood in the mid-1920s—just before he went to Florida. My research has led me into his copious catalogue and has had me searching out every piece of personal writing I can find in various collections. Three articles and a doctoral dissertation mention England although each of the authors is not particularly interested in England beyond the question at hand in each piece. Maureen Ogle quotes England's 1928 Key West essay, "America's Island of Felicity" in her *Key West*, 141, although she dismisses England as a sappy promoter and privileges Hemingway as a more substantive observer. William Barnett ignores England altogether. "George Allan England—Writer, Linguist, and Sportsman," September 16, 1981, Collections of the Woodstock Historical Society Museum Larry McBride and the Maine Hist Society, Woodstock, Maine.

33. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) particularly chapters 3 and 5.

34. George Allan England, "International Socialism as a Political Force," *Wayland's Monthly* 99 (July 1908), 12. See also, England, "Socialism and the Law: The Basis and Practice of Modern Legal Procedure and its Relation to the Working Class," Fort Scott, Kansas: Legal; Department Appeal to Reason, 1913; England, "Fiat Pax," New York: American Association for International Conciliation,

1914.

ally of Eugene Debs. His career as a public, socialist intellectual and activist culminated with his 1912 run for the Governorship of Maine on the Socialist Party ticket. Politely put, England was trounced, coming in fourth (out of four) just behind the Prohibition Party candidate. Looking back at his attempt at office holding, the chastened former candidate labeled himself, “the most unpopular man in the country, politically” for having been defeated by “the largest pluralities ever given in a state.”<sup>35</sup> Although he never really renounced his socialism, England’s early doctrinal radicalism gradually faded from his writing.<sup>36</sup> In time, he settled into producing a rather formulaic run of mysteries, adventure yarns, and travel writing to pay the bills.

England began wintering in Key West around 1918, when he was in the full flush of his literary fame. He made himself a regular at local settings like the Casa Marina hotel where he was photographed in full golfing togs looming over the far shorter Lou Gehrig.<sup>37</sup> Within a decade, England’s annual arrival in town was heralded by the *Key West Citizen*, which labeled him as a “Key West Ambassador.” England correspondingly offered up choice promotional quotations in reference to Key West, calling the town a “miracle city” and a “little paradise.”<sup>38</sup> The *Key West Citizen*, as the main proponent of Key West boosterism, praised England as a noted writer, a promotion which not only flattered England but also advertised the town as a place of substance and culture. Most of England’s writings penned in Key West were travel pieces, and little mention was made of the deeply complicated work for which he was best known— *Darkness and Dawn* (1914).

The book was part of a body of socialist utopian science fiction, most of which he produced during the WWI years. Following the lead of now-almost-forgotten utopianist Ignatius Donnelly and better-remembered Jack London, whose *The Iron Heel* (1907) vir-

35. George Allan England, “The Fiction Factory,” *The Independent* 74:3356 (27 March 1913), 687.

36. Pittenger suggests that England renounced his earlier pacifism as a result of WWI. This would mean that like many Americans, he accepted Wilsonian rhetoric that the war was essential to preserve democracy—a flagship Anglo-Saxon achievement. Lacking England’s papers makes it hard to know his mind on these matters. What is certain though is that the socialist tone of his writing was largely gone by the end of WWI.

37. Joan and Wright Langley, *Key West: Images of the Past* (Key West: Belland and Swift, 1982), 90.

38. *KWC*, 3 January 1927, 1; *KWC*, 13 June, 1928, 1.

tually created the genre, England took his real-life struggle for a better world into imaginary futures that he created and published in serial form and between hard covers. In somewhat heavy-handed allegories, England showed his readers worlds in which trained professional heroes used logic, physical skill, courage, and a mastery of science and technical knowledge to strike blows against world capitalism. England's was a vanguard literature in which the workers themselves were largely absent. Socialism was presented largely as a gift from well-trained, square-jawed, technologically-savvy white men remarkably well mannered and middle-class in outward manifestations, rather than the result of a messy class struggle.

*Darkness and Dawn* was a trilogy which intellectual historian Mark Pittenger, one of the few scholars to discuss England, described as sitting "at the intersection of several formative discourses and genres" including debates over the nature of socialism, evolutionary theory, and the boundaries between the human and the animalistic.<sup>39</sup> The book is a tale of devastating natural disaster, primitive survival, war, and eventual genocide in which the forces of white American technology and know-how triumph over those of "darkness," racial impurity, primitivism, and disorder. The book centers on capable engineer Allan Stern and his blonde secretary Beatrice Kendrick who awaken in the ruins of their New York City office, having slept for a millennium following a cataclysmic disaster which wiped out civilization. This valiant couple appears to be all that is left of Anglo-Saxon stock, and they use their racial ability and American know-how to adapt, survive, and set about rebuilding what was lost. Opposing them is a "Hoard" of ape-like creatures which Stern and Kendrick contend represents the product of one thousand years of miscegenation between apes and "Negroes" left free, having slipped the leash of white control. England portrays these products of evolution-gone-wrong in the most unflattering terms, and Stern finds himself physically repulsed by their greasy skin and barbaric rituals.

The connection between Blacks and anti-civilization is not a passing one; England in fact goes out of his way to make clear this analogy. In one exchange reflecting on the Hoard's origins, England's characters offer a pointed history lesson and racial allegory. "Perhaps the white and yellow peoples perished utterly in the cata-

39. Pittenger, "Imagining Genocide in the Progressive Era: The Socialist Science of Allan England," *American Studies* 35:1 (1994), 94.

clysm leaving only a few scattered blacks,” a race who Stern reminds Beatrice “are immune to several germ-infections that destroy other races.” Showing her historical acumen (and an innate intellectual ability typical of her race) Beatrice concludes, “so the whole world may have gone to pieces the way Liberia and Haiti and Santo Domingo once did, when white rule ceased.” Indeed, “history shows it” Stern responds, echoing the words of Theodore Roosevelt, “it didn’t take a hundred years after Toussaint L’Overture and Desalines, in Haiti, for the blacks to shuck off French civilization and go back to grass huts and human sacrifice.”<sup>40</sup> If, in this fascinating “history,” Haiti went from canapés to cannibalism in one hundred years, then the last Americans standing in the ruins of Manhattan are confronting the results of over one thousand years’ decline. Stern suggests there may have been a period of continuity “maybe fifty or one hundred years” when the few surviving American Blacks “kept some sort dwindling civilization” and even the “pretense of maintaining the school system, railroads, steamship lines, newspapers and churches, banks” and all the elements of “that wonderfully complex system” now lost.<sup>41</sup> The lesson is simple: the fruits of civilization, denied their racially proper custodians and thus left in the wrong hands, are doomed to decline.

With this realization, England’s heroes set off to set right this abhorrent evolutionary trajectory through a brutal and highly personal race war, and once war is engaged, it cannot end until the error is corrected and white rule reestablished in the ruins of America. They are aided in this task by a small army of albino “Merucaans” (Americans) who have survived the centuries in the heat and darkness at the bottom of an enormous cavern created by the disaster that ended the world Stern and Kendrick had once known.<sup>42</sup> That these last Americans survived in the steamy heat near the earth’s core has a special significance in light of how England would later call tropical Key West a perfect place. Even before

40. George Allan England, *Darkness and Dawn*, Reprint edition (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press Inc., 1974), 112-13; Roosevelt on Haiti quoted in E. Benjamin Skinner, *A Crime So Monstrous: Face to Face with Modern-Day Slavery* (New York: The Free Press, 2008), 14.

41. England, *Darkness and Dawn*, 112.

42. George Allan England, *Darkness and Dawn*, Reprint edition (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press Inc., 1974). Scholarship on England has understandably focused on the implications of this fascinating book. See, Pittinger, “Imagining

he began to winter in the city, England was open to the possibility of Anglo Saxon racial perfection outside the usual latitudes.

Global cataclysm, race war, creative technologies—small wonder that what scholarship there is on England has focused almost exclusively on the profound and disturbing implications of this 225,000-word (England's own count) fantasy of ethnic cleansing. Indeed, one critic asserted that if England is memorable at all, it is for this work alone.<sup>43</sup> Many socialist intellectuals at the dawn of the twentieth century faced a problem in envisioning a socialist American future: how can a more perfect society be built from the imperfect materials of racial others such as African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and immigrants from less-than-desirable European homelands? The solutions varied. Some leaders, like England's erstwhile movement hero, Eugene V. Debs, believed in the essential improbability of mankind. Blacks and others were inferior yes, but at least some of this inferiority was itself a product of capitalist exploitation and was therefore fixable by reversing the worst excesses. Other socialists were less sanguine, and worked to keep minorities of all stripes out of their Unions, parties, and organizations.

But few went as far as England did, albeit in a fictional Utopianist future, to suggest that extermination would be the catalyst for the better tomorrow. Indeed, as Mark Pittenger wrote, "it is a striking if sobering fact" that England's genocidal fantasy was as popular as it was in the years leading up to the twin disasters of two World Wars.<sup>44</sup>

Although England's other fiction works of the period featured Anglo Saxon technocratic heroes similar to Allan Stern, none of that writing brought the problems posed by race and race mixing into such clear focus. Nevertheless, his concern over race did not disappear in subsequent writing. And indeed, once a writer has given such a powerful endorsement of race war, all subsequent statements regarding race are worthy of some scrutiny. It is in England's most overlooked and seemingly innocuous material—his travel writings—where his ideas of race once again came visibly to

43. Walter Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 59; Aileen Krador, *The Radical Persuasion 1890-1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). See also, Goran Theorborn, "Dialectics of Modernity: On Critical Theory and the Legacy of Twentieth-Century Marxism," *New Left Review* 1:215 (January-February 1996): 59-81.



the fore. And in the case of Key West, the presentation of these ideas had echoes beyond England's initial intent.

Scholars have almost entirely overlooked or dismissed this writing and therefore have not seen how this popular author was busy working to construct the boundaries of race and place for the innumerable readers of most American popular magazines in the 1920s. Nowhere is England's racial and evolutionary projecting more visible or more consequential than in his Key West-based writing of the late 1920s. Through these essays, England combined place and race, imbuing a few select destinations and the people he met there with distinct racial characteristics which were themselves a sort of racial parable about the island city which he had made his winter home. England argued that islands presented distinctive evolutionary challenges to which ideal human populations could rise. Nowhere was this more evident than in Key West.

### England and Key West

In the fall of 1927, England packed up his typewriter and tobacco pouch and left New Hampshire for Key West in the company of his wife and a young ingénue traveling companion. The jaunt down the Eastern seaboard was something of an annual event for the Englands, who habitually used the trip as a chance to see sights and collect stories. The editors of *The Key West Citizen* sent a "correspondent" to sit down with George upon his arrival, discuss the trip from Bradford, New Hampshire (which the paper mislabeled as Bradford, New Jersey), and offer readers a peek at the writer's plans. England related that he sought out this "earthly paradise" to "thaw out" and "write, write, write."<sup>45</sup> He also made known his intention to "prepare some stories on local topics" and to use the island as a base of operations for other travels.<sup>46</sup> He then went on to offer up a few distinctive platitudes about his part-time home. "Key West is a miracle city" he effused, allowing Yankees like him to leave behind the North's "snow and pneumonia, sniffing and sneezing, coughs and colds" and arrive in a "charming island city" in mid-winter and "find summer in full sway." Key West, England told the paper's readership, was "the most ideal place" to "spend the winter most delightfully."<sup>47</sup>

45. *KWC*, 3 January 1927: 2.

46. *KWC*, 3 January 1927: 1.

47. *Ibid.*

On its face, these good words were just the kind of boilerplate promotional stuff hoped for by the newspaper's editors, the local chamber of commerce, and the town's specially constituted Advertising Committee, which purchased ad space and placed brochure-bearing representatives on inbound trains in an ongoing attempt to attract tourist dollars.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1920s, Key West embodied an important paradox within the growing state of Florida. The Florida land boom drew visitors and residents to the state who were looking for long beaches, warmth, sunshine, and fragrant flowers. Much of the still-largely-empty state could make good on those promises, if one added in mosquitoes, cottonmouths, and swamps. But at the time of the boom, Key West was far from being the sort of Florida paradise over which pamphleteers effused. Instead, the island city was still a hub of legal and illegal trade, and its population was dwindling as jobs and industry left the declining industrial center. Although the city was still a significant outpost of U.S. military power, even that presence declined after World War I. All of this emptied the city's streets and homes to such an extent that one market-minded observer noted that Key West had been "about as dead and discouraged a town as could be found in the United States."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the city was connected to the mainland only by a single vulnerable thread of rail line always at risk during the annual hurricane cycle and entirely reliant on rain water for its survival. In these respects, Key West was a "frontier" community in the way the New Western Historians have shown American frontiers to be compressed distillations of state power, exploitation, and economic tumult, all teetering on the edge of ecological collapse.<sup>50</sup> Boom-time Florida had no less likely a tourist Mecca than this gritty, down-in-the-mouth port town.

But a steady flow of visitors could change all of that, and the struggle to bring tourists and their greenbacks to the city was as longstanding as it was unsuccessful.<sup>51</sup> Visitors did come, but most

48. KWC, 22 March 1926: 1.

49. "Farthest South: A Florida City that Will Bear Watching," *Barron's*, (15 February 1926): 11. See also, Ogle, *Key West*, 84-97, 90, 100. See also, Robert P. Ingalls and Louis A. Perez, *Tampa Cigar Workers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

50. Patricia Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987).

51. David Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1984).

only passed a night or two on their way to or from Havana via Henry Flagler's Key West rail head.<sup>52</sup> The trick was to make them stay longer—not an easy prospect for a shabby town with little to keep tourists happy. *The Key West Citizen* strongly advocated tourist-minded improvements and brought into focus every bit of positive publicity the city received on the mainland. The editors were well aware that their discarded papers would end up on ferries and in train cars heading for parts unknown, making each page a chance to advertise their town's features. For the benefit of chance readers and potential visitors, the paper frequently carried large set-asides (much of it paid for by a specially constituted local booster group) which sang the town's praises, noting its "delightful and healthful climate" and listing the names of its "leading hotels," as well as featuring headlines blaring statements like "Key West is on the March."<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the paper's role as the Voice of Boosterism meant that it regularly devoted page space to the comings and goings of the many "notables" who passed through town, either by train or in stately yachts. The editors made sure to highlight the laudatory comments of visitors like the influential publisher C. W. Barron, who in a 1926 winter sojourn claimed that "Key West holds advantages not possessed by any city in the state of Florida."<sup>54</sup> Such testimonials from prominent men acted as endorsements of the town and proof that the paper's boosterism was more than just Caribbean hot air.

Viewed that way, England was just one of many "notables" tapped by the paper for a few good words in the proper style. And England knew just the right words to utter. "I have traveled the world over, been in all parts of the United States," England declared. In his mind, Key West was "a garden spot," an "earthly paradise," and most remarkably, "the finest place in the world."<sup>55</sup> It is hard to imagine a more forceful endorsement or a bar set any higher than England's labeling of Key West as simply, "the finest place in the world." Such words, and the promise of similar ones soon to come, were music to the ears of Key West boosters.

52. Les Staniford, *Last Train to Paradise: Henry Flagler and the Spectacular Rise and Fall of the Railroad that Crossed the Ocean* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002).

53. *KWC*, 18 February 1926: 7.

54. *KWC*, 19 February 1926: 1. In 1926 Barron was the owner and publisher of the *Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's Weekly*. He and his son wrote a set of essays about Key West and the health of the Florida real estate market. Barron thought that once Key West had a reliable road connection to the mainland and a better water supply that collected rain, the town would take off.

But England's choice of words signified more than mere hyperbole.<sup>56</sup> Considering the proscriptive bent of England's writings, and the author's demonstrated interest in the evolutionary possibilities for the human race, England was in fact giving voice to a real truth as he understood it. Key West provided just the right mix of factors to produce a sort of a perfect place, one where the benefits of nature and technology fused to produce the "finest place in the world."

As the U.S. extended its reach into lands well beyond its continental borders as the nineteenth century ended, theorists debated the possibilities and perils for Anglo Saxons and their civilization in alien places—particularly those in the tropics. The debate was a simple one, and one that had roots going back into the eighteenth century. It was widely held that tropical places, with their unfamiliar diseases, flora and fauna, as well as their dangerous, albeit inferior, peoples, posed an existential threat to Anglo Saxons accustomed to very different climes. Indeed, the evidence for this was substantial, given the challenges posed by diseases like malaria which hampered European African colonization and was only defeated late in the nineteenth century. Leeches, piranha fishes, and poisonous snakes were just a few of the horrors which also haunted the dreams of would-be imperialists, along with lurking "savages." While there was some consensus that tropical places were indeed dangerous, there was considerable disagreement about their implications. Some imperialists argued that the innate Anglo Saxon superiority would triumph over all obstacles, either through technology like swamp draining, or via heroic medicine like that which had recently ended the malaria threat. Others, though, feared that the tropics would sap Anglo Saxon male vigor, devastating not only the direct agents of imperialism (soldiers, missionaries, traders, etc.) but weakening the metropole as well.<sup>57</sup>

To understand England's race-infused evolutionary boosterism, we need to turn to England's Key West essay and the other essays he penned in the city. As he told the *Key West Citizen*, his plan

55. KWC, 3 January 1927: 1.

56. Ogle, *Key West*, 141.

57. See Eric T. L. Love, *Race Over Empire*, Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1992); Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Routledge Press, 1989).

was to use the island as a base of operation for his travel writing. Without his papers, it is difficult to know the specifics of his travel dates, but the Cozumel, Grand Cayman, and Dry Tortugas trips all appear to have clustered around this visit. Furthermore, England made mention of Key West in each of these essays in ways which not only lock them together in time, but also offer analytical comparisons. England, in fact, believed that islands themselves were special places harboring special human possibilities. In his *Isles of Romance*, England cast his enduring love of islands in distinctly evolutionary terms. He averred that the “hard and unnatural conditions” typifying many islands provided challenges to “human and animal biology” and encouraged “queer shifts and compromises” to “social and economic puzzles” in order to survive.<sup>58</sup>

Adaptation could take wonderful forms and result in visible defining traits which England repeatedly labeled with words like “charm,” “quaint,” and “queer.” In his writing, England used each described island as a racial stand-in. Cozumel was Indian, Grand Cayman was Negro, and even though they lacked the sort of settled population the others had, the Dry Tortugas were the purview of Anglo Saxons. For England, Cozumel, Grand Cayman, and the Dry Tortugas each represented imperfect island worlds, whereas Key West was the ideal.<sup>59</sup> This imperfection was visible in many forms—all clustering around concerns which run throughout England’s writings. The three most important indicators were each island’s position within broader imperial frameworks, the quality of their internal industries, and the racial traits of the inhabitants. Each of these provided evidence of the relative evolutionary perfection of each island.<sup>60</sup>

58. George Allan England, *Isles of Romance*, (New York: The Century Co., 1929), vii. Hereafter cited as *Isles*.

59. The scholarship on the complicated polyvocality of travel writing is quite large. My analysis of England rests principally on a few key works. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Press, 1979) and Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Also crucial is Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); James Duncan and Derek Gregory, eds., *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 1999); Eric Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: from Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). See also, Carol Traynor Williams, ed., *Travel Culture: Essays on What Makes Us Go* (Westport Ct.: Praeger Press, 1998).

60. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge Press, 1995); Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination on the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University

Each essay made specific references to the tools of empire as comforting symbols and even useful and welcome aids to the tourist. England's trip to the Dry Tortugas, for example, was courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard, in the "slim-waisted wasp" form of patrol boat C.G. 293 and its "snappy crew of seven men."<sup>61</sup> These hale fellows were full of colorful jargon and were a source of even more colorful anecdotes like shipwreck tales and ghost stories from abandoned Fort Jefferson. Even though the military was absent from his Grand Cayman narrative, England assured his readers that "King George V is the island's rightful ruler, loved in a far-off, hazy, dutiful way" and the Union Jack flies in Grand Cayman's "tropical breezes."<sup>62</sup>

The Cozumel trip provided the most obviously imperial narrative, written with the themes of U.S. Mexican adventurism and U.S. occupations of Haiti and Nicaragua not so hidden between the lines. Key Westers told England prior to his departure from the town that he had better make the trip heavily armed as "in Cozumel they murder a man for twenty-five cents" and that "those Mayan Indians will probably butcher and eat you on the beach."<sup>63</sup> Unable to find a ship in Key West going to the Mexican island, England made his way west as a passenger guest of a twenty-six-strong U.S. Navy "Scouting Squadron," a happy accident that allowed him to indeed arrive heavily armed, as advised.<sup>64</sup> In language mirroring the flight of his intrepid, racially pure *Darkness and Dawn* heroes, England describes how he "winged a bee-flight to low and mangrove-tangled coasts," seeing sights "from whence fiction and romance are woven."<sup>65</sup> On his landing, the locals did not react well to what was really a show of military force consisting of war planes and a tender ship arriving amidst U.S. incursions in the Caribbean. England treated as comedy the distress of Mexicans who, island by island, believed they were suddenly and at war with and invaded by "Tio Sam."<sup>66</sup> At one stop, threadbare, terrified Mexican officials quickly brought down the Mexican flag and "instantly surrendered at discretion."<sup>67</sup> At another, locals put on a braver face. "Behold, it is war" another official called out, "the Americanos come! We are lost. They can shoot and kill us. Resistance is Hopeless. But we die

61. *Isles*, 6 and 4.

62. *Isles*, 120.

63. *Isles*, 294.

64. *Isles*, 291.

65. *Isles*, 292.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

like brave men!"<sup>68</sup> In each tense meeting, only England's much-prized language fluencies and ample application of American cigarettes calmed the crises. Yet even with "the Stars and Stripes snapping boldly and gaily" England noted that it was nevertheless "disconcerting to land, contrary to all law and order, in a foreign and tropical island under the scrutiny of hundreds of beady black eyes set in hundreds of copper Indian faces."<sup>69</sup> England's version of these rather telling international encounters revealed a casual, though still threatening, display of American force as well as England's own enjoyment of his position within these mini-crises. But it also served to reinvent Key West's military presence (one which his Key West essay itself barely noted) as a benign tool of a tourist empire. England portrayed Anglo Saxon empires and their tools as beneficent, ameliorating and tempering whatever dangers were implicit in these non-Anglo Saxon destinations. In this way, England's invocation of Key West as "Gibraltar of America" was more than a military boast. It was, in fact, a specific invocation of an outpost of, and springboard for, white civilization at the gateway to further imperial objects.

Likewise, England's discussion of industry was more than mere observation. The unpopulated Dry Tortugas offered no opportunity to discuss an operating commercial industry. But the enormous and then abandoned Fort Jefferson was itself an "imagination-stirring" testament to Anglo Saxon skill and ability to bring civilization to the most unlikely of places.<sup>70</sup> The other islands did provide chances to see real island industries at work. On Cozumel, England met the pith-helmeted English colonial entrepreneur Alan Moysey Adams, the "Chicle King." In contrast to the "beady black eyes set in hundreds of copper Indian faces," Adams's "two bright blue and beaming optics" were themselves a tonic.<sup>71</sup> From Adams, England learned the ins and outs of "queer" Cozumel's industry.<sup>72</sup> These "optics" became the lenses through which England saw the island. In contrast to his youthful socialism, England described the local union—the *Liga de los Obreros*—as a principal hindrance to industrial growth. All labor was controlled by the *Liga*, which collected job responsibilities and then divided them amongst laborers

68. *Isles*, 293.

69. *Isles*, 294-95.

70. *Isles*, 17.

71. *Isles*, 294-95.

72. *Isles*, 297.

using a scheme lost on the frustrated Anglo Saxon observers. The scheme ensured that all work—mostly carrying freight between wharves and warehouses—was done by men and not machines or animals. And while he could appreciate the argument of one “old Maya” who reasoned “think of the honest men out of jobs if horses did their work,” England nevertheless sided with his host, averring that “Cozumel employers suffer more than Cozumel workmen.”<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, Grand Cayman had no industry to speak of, but its absence here was not like its total absence in the Dry Tortugas. England cast Grand Cayman’s lack of industry in temporal terms. The island, he claimed, was a contemporary seventeenth century, a place in time, a living relic of “a remote past before machinery came or banks functioned.”<sup>74</sup> In fact, the islanders owned only three industrial machines in total, augmented here and there with a few car and boat engines. The fruits of industrial civilization were marvelous curiosities, as evidenced by the “burned-out electric light bulbs carefully saved in fishermen’s huts as curios.”<sup>75</sup> Lacking the elements of capitalist industry, Cayman islanders eked out a living in more relaxed fashion such as collecting sea turtles—an industry that was also part of Key West’s “charm.”

On both Cozumel and Grand Cayman, island environments stymied industrial growth. Simple extractive industries of gum or turtles might thrive, but these were themselves bounties provided by the same environments which thwarted technological advances. Survival on these islands was possible, and could even be comfortable. But true civilization required the right people, and England devoted considerable effort to exploring the presence and absence of this crucial element.

The racial potentialities of each island’s population mingled with the location’s specific evolutionary challenges to determine the shape of human habitation. Just as superior races could excel in difficult environments, so too could they be pulled down by these, as well as by too much contact with lesser populations. It was not a given that an Anglo Saxon man would thrive in all conditions, but his success was a sure sign of his evolutionary superiority just as his failure served as an indication of how very dangerous some places could be. This thinking was part of why England was so hap-

73. *Isles*, 305.

74. *Isles*, 103.

75. *Ibid.*



py to see an Englishman's "two bright blue and beaming optics" so soon after his dramatic arrival in Cozumel.<sup>76</sup>

The symbols of Anglo Saxon imperialism written into that encounter—the blue eyes, the pith helmet, and the cheery, "Right-O"—were all signs that the cannibalism (be it physical or cultural) that Key Westers warned him of was an avoidable fate.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the reassuring presence of the Union Jack, the islanders' evident love of King George, and the "snowy-white linen" apparel of local officials offset traits like "stove-black" skin as evolutionary proofs.<sup>78</sup> Since acquired traits could be passed down between generations, a proper respect of Anglo Saxon authority had in time settled into the makeup of Grand Cayman Islanders, rendering them partially civilized and therefore full of the "charm" and quaintness that was, for England, a model evolutionary state.

In the Dry Tortugas, England witnessed the hardiness of Anglo Saxons manifested first and foremost in the crumbling massive brick edifice of Fort Jefferson. England wondered aloud "how the devil men ever brought all that brick and stone and iron out here into open ocean," as the isolated fort "loomed up like all eternity."<sup>79</sup> England was singularly impressed with how barren, isolated and dangerous were the islands, touching on his ideas about the evolutionary challenges islands possessed, while the decaying fort brought out much of England's fascination with ruins. Few places were as well suited to England's tastes. But it was the past and current people he found there that brought out his admiration for Anglo Saxons and their ability to live in edge environments.

The "charms" of the Coast Guardsman's dialects and stories, and the warmth and hospitality of the lighthouse keepers were all tales of white men keeping up their spirits and triumphing against adversity. In fact, all of England's musings about the archipelago's inhospitality only served to highlight the difficulty of the challenge mastered by these hardy souls. Even his retelling of the tale of Dr Samuel Mudd, the Maryland physician convicted as a Lincoln assassination conspirator, became one of racial hardiness. Mudd fixed John Wilkes Booth's broken leg, and based "largely on Negro evidence" spent a health-wrecking four years in Fort Jefferson for

76. *Isles*, 294-95.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Isles*, 134.

79. *Isles*, 6, 12.

his troubles.<sup>80</sup> But it was his steadfast care of fellow prisoners during an 1867 outbreak of yellow fever that raged within the prison's walls which most caught England's eye. Despite risk to himself and his own illness, England described Mudd as laboring ceaselessly and selflessly in the worst possible conditions. Furthermore, Mudd even penned a treatise on the disease which, though "illuminating in its utter ignorance," was nevertheless a remarkable achievement in its own right.<sup>81</sup>

Only by understanding the imperfections of each of these islands can we fully appreciate the perfection England saw in Key West. The island city offered a remarkable blend of environment and technological achievements, which enhanced some racial traits and ameliorated others. For Americans still worried about the detrimental effects of the tropics, England's Key West showed that perfection was indeed achievable even without a regular frost. In language which emphasized perfection, wonder, and his favorite content-rich adjectives of "charming," "quaint," and "queer," England took readers through a carefully guided tour of Key West's natural, technological, and human wonders. He presented a perfect tropical place to an American readership more accustomed to seeing the tropics as being filled with malarial swamps, dangerous flora and fauna, and savage evolutionarily racial inferiors.

England declared Key West to be "absolutely West Indian" and covered with a "puzzling confusion" of plants and none of the "usual American trees and flowers."<sup>82</sup> The setting, therefore, was unmistakably different from his New Hampshire home and more akin to Cuba and Haiti—readers would not have missed this reference. And yet, technological marvels showed the possibility of American progress in this tropical setting. He foregrounded in both words and photograph the "Eighth Wonder of the World: Henry Flagler's Overseas Railroad" which he (and many others) saw as "one of the most remarkable engineering achievements of our day."<sup>83</sup> But England also made much of the then-nearly-completed "beautiful" Overseas Highway—soon to be the "Ninth Wonder of the World."<sup>84</sup> As if reflecting his own personal travel history, he noted that once the road opened, motorists would be able to "drive from Maine

80. *Isles*, 50.

81. *Isles*, 58.

82. "Felicity," 13.

83. "Felicity," 14.

84. "Felicity," 18, 49.

directly into Key West.” He asked his audience, “Where else shall you find a marvel quite like this?”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, what other city could boast two Wonders of the World at its very doorstep?

Whereas many Americans were inclined to fear the effects of tropical climates, England revealed that Key West was blessed with “the finest climate in the world.”<sup>86</sup> So healthful was Key West, in fact, that the town’s “one and only undertaker has to work at other jobs to make a living,” although this may have been as much an effect of ten years of population decline as it was due to the environment.<sup>87</sup> That England would muse on the health benefits of the island makes sense in light of his own view that the right climate cured his own illness early in life. He claimed that “epidemics spare Key West” and that “the flu hasn’t a ghost of a chance there; pneumonia is a practical impossibility.”<sup>88</sup> This observation is remarkable for its contrast with prevailing views of such climes, but also for how much it conflicts with England’s own discussion of disease in the Dry Tortugas— islands whose climate was essentially identical to that of the Keys.<sup>89</sup> Disease there was one of the many environmental challenges posed by islands. But Key West itself offered protection from the kinds of illnesses that laid low Fort Jefferson’s prisoners, Spanish American War soldiers in camp and in the field, and even U.S. Marines occupying Haiti at the time of his writing.

Likewise, England immunized Key West from the effects of hurricanes, of which he rather disingenuously suggested “Key West has little fear.”<sup>90</sup> Despite damage from numerous storms over the years, England claimed the city had “never been flooded or washed out” largely because “she is a city built upon a rock” and therefore, “she shall not be moved.”<sup>91</sup>

Whereas many visitors offered their praise of the town, many also recognized local problems, like the editor of *Barron’s* complaint that a reliance on rainwater retarded development.<sup>92</sup> But England turned the water situation created by the city resting upon a bed of coral into a charming virtue. Every city fire hydrant, he related, was

85. “Felicity,” 43.

86. “Felicity,” 44.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*

89. See, Warwick, “Climates of Opinion,” 135-137.

90. “Felicity,” 44.

91. “Felicity,” 44.

92. C. W. Barron, “Farthest South,” *Barron’s* (15 February 1926): 11.

"an independent unit driven down to salt water" which, he added, happened to be "the best kind of water, by the way, for putting out fires."<sup>93</sup> Here England is almost certainly parroting the assessment of in-town friends and may even be indirectly addressing concerns raised in *Barron's*. But he also reveals his ability to turn a failing of the city into a quaint virtue.

It was in England's discussion of Key Westers themselves, though, where his readers could most clearly see the advantages of the place. England focused on the island's non-Anglo Saxon residents in ways that showed that racial failings of Key Westers were softened or even removed, while his choice of words and images reinforced his sense of the "quaint." The ridiculous, impoverished, and disorganized Mexicans of Cozumel contrasted sharply with the industrious and colorful Key West "Latins."<sup>94</sup> To be sure, as England put it in personal terms, "your Latin workmen" were not the equals of "we Nordics," but nevertheless, these people were useful, and even special. He portrayed them as a proud and culturally distinct people who were "friendly, picturesque, likable—in a word, *simpaticos*."<sup>95</sup> The town bore the imprint of their unique tastes for "shiny blue" painted walls, "hard chairs," their "open-fronted shops," and the "flower-clad piazzas" of their numerous coffee-shops and clubs.<sup>96</sup> The sound of their speech was audible all over town as "little fountains of conversation" emanating from "little groceries, drug-stores, and barber-shops."<sup>97</sup> But the centerpiece of Key West Spanish life was cigar production. England told his readers that it was only the "deft fingers" of the island's Latino cigar workers that could "roll the magic cylinders" which ushered forth from the city's factories at a rate of "fifty million" a year "to beautify the world."<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, in what sounds like a jab at Tampa, which had already drawn away large portions of the industry, cigars of this quality could only be made amidst the "warm moist air" of Key West's "tobacco winds" because, when "worked in colder climates," the "precious Cuban leaf crumbles."<sup>99</sup>

93. "Felicity," 44.

94. "Felicity," 16.

95. "Felicity," 17.

96. *Ibid.*

97. "Felicity," 27.

98. "Felicity," 16.

99. *Ibid.* See also, Ingalls and Perez, *Tampa Cigar Workers*.

Just as Key West's environment nurtured tobacco leaves into something beautiful, exportable, and profitable, the city's Latino population itself also became something special in the island's warm humid breezes. The same was true of the city's African Americans. "The Key West negro" England related, "seems a good negro."<sup>100</sup> Unlike Grand Cayman Islanders' pervasive lassitude, Black Key Westers were "reasonably industrious." The evidence of this was all over town through England's shape-shifting gaze. One example was the eagerness of "black boys along the wharf" to dive into the "blue green crystal waters" to catch coins tossed in by spectators. For England, these half-naked black bodies disappearing into magical waters at the whim of far wealthier white people was not a view into a rather grim exploitation of impoverished children, but rather a mark of desirable traits seen in unexpected places. Likewise, England's description of laboring African American women turned the toils of the island's Black working class into charm, quaintness, and evidence of Key West's perfection. "Aunt Dinah" England wrote, could be seen "boiling a huge kettle outdoors under a banana palm" while other "aunties" of "majestic gait" were visible hustling along with "huge baskets of laundry" or firewood or beams "on turbaned heads."<sup>101</sup> England invoked distinctly Afro-Caribbean imagery of banana leaves and head bundles, but here all was contained within the safe control of white authority and an idealized capitalist work ethic, all of which pointed to the unique racial balance (not to say harmony) that prevailed on the Island of Felicity. This made quite a contrast to not only the underdeveloped laziness of England's Grand Cayman Islanders, but to the sort of stories produced by Haitians' resistance to U.S. domination as well.

Even the supernatural could be domesticated and made charming in Key West. Unlike Haiti's spawning of Voodoo tales, England showed fear of "ghosties" and magical practice as a quaint attribute of otherwise charming and industrious blacks. One woman in particular, whom England called Aunt Rachel Munnings, told him that "ghosties" and other spirits "don't bodder me none, sah" because she artfully used careful placement of coffee grounds in the corners of her rooms to ward them off.<sup>102</sup> The result was that the spirits would be slowed down as "dem ha'nts got to stop an'count

100. "Felicity," 43.

101. "Felicity," 43.

102. *Ibid.*

all dem coffee grounds."<sup>103</sup> Aunty Rachel may have been pulling England's leg or she may have been offering a real glimpse into magical thought and practice. She may also have been offering a subtle commentary on acquisitiveness and busy work. But in England's hands she offered readers a view of the supernatural on Key West, domesticated and employed under proper supervision, in a setting unique for its perfecting abilities.

England's tale positioned the ritual magic in Key West as nothing fearful, but rather something harmless—even useful. In this story as in others, he situated the products of the Caribbean (in this case coffee) as a charming part of a friendly domestic tableau. Coffee grounds in the corner, like the coffee drunk by Key West Latino cigar workers, were part of a larger ongoing colonial process whereby U.S. interests and soldiers struggled to ensure American control over Caribbean economies and the flow of their goods. That process raised concerns over how well Northern Americans could function in tropical environments and what was the proper role of non-Anglo Saxons within an imperial framework put in place by a democracy, as well as many others. As an advocate of Anglo Saxon imperialism, England saw great potential in the tropical places he visited. But he was also aware of the social and evolutionary dangers many of his countrymen and women saw in steaming mangroves and long white coastlines. The Key West that England presented to the American reading public was a place carefully fashioned to show the possibilities for the great things his "Nordics" could achieve in the right settings. By contrasting Key West with other similar tropical places and focusing on interrelated issues of race, industry, and technology, England positioned Key West as a model—a perfect place—partly unique in its meeting of circumstances, and partly a vision of what an Anglo Saxon Caribbean world might achieve. Beyond that, though, England enlisted language for his project which anticipated decades of promotional writing that shared the goal of promoting Key West as a desirable travel destination, while simultaneously dropping his incepting and larger interest in the evolutionary potentials of human races and the goal of achieving a very real earthly paradise.

England wrote of Key West just as it was rapidly sliding into its

worst days. By 1927, more than half of its earlier population had quit town as its industries left or died out. Within a few years of England's hope that "50,000 people should live here," the bankrupted city had slipped into receivership and become a ward of the Roosevelt administration, overseen by its own New Deal viceroy, Julius Stone.<sup>104</sup> Stone's plan was to transform the city into one large tourist destination, a project that would both bring needed dollars to town and put its vast numbers of unemployed to work painting homes, cleaning streets and beaches, and planting trees. This was the birth of the Key West Americans best know. But while Stone had the authority and money to enact this transformation, and although he became one of the town's most ardent boosters, he did not invent the vision he promoted, nor was his administration the first to bring Key West to American readers. That vision had a significant, if unlikely, genesis in George Allan England's interests in race, the evolutionary potential of island environments, the role of place in modernity, and Anglo Saxons' abilities to thrive and perfect otherwise dangerous tropical environments.

In 1934 Key West's New Deal reinvention as a tourist destination was getting into full swing led by local FERA director Stone., He took out ads in national newspapers and oversaw the printing of promotional pamphlets to bring people and investment to the struggling city. Stone fully grasped the value of the written Florida and Key West whose outlines had been already well drawn. These included the usual invocations of the climate, the mix of peoples, and the presence of amenities. But when Stone turned to describing Key West, he was using the resources of the federal government to echo England's own praises. Via Stone, Key West's long time 'ambassador's' vision became a policy of the state. Stone described a place of "fantastic plants, Spanish limes, sopadillas, anemones, dates, pomegranates and cocopalm" rich with an "atmosphere of romantic history." He celebrated the city's "sun streamed, shuttered, balconied houses, the aroma of ardent tropical flowers and the salty sea air."<sup>105</sup> England had wondered why no painter had yet "immortalized himself" by capturing on canvas "the brown and white sails" of the city's "fishing fleet a-wing," and had assured his fellow scribblers that "so many phases

104. KWC, 3 January 1927: 2.

105. *New York Times*, (3 December 1934), 6XX; Boulard, "State of Emergency," 174.

of Key West life would make complete stories."<sup>106</sup> But it was Stone who saw to it that federal money went into making sure that that dream would become a reality.

For both Stone and England before him, Key West was a triumph of modernity's mix of commerce, state power, racial categorizing, and landscape balance even though both came to that realization in very different ways and towards rather different ends.

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106. "Felicity," 15.