



Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas (Nature and Culture in America)

Catherine Cocks



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As late as 1900, most whites regarded the tropics as "the white man's grave," a realm of steamy fertility, moral dissolution, and disease. So how did the tropical beach resort—white sand, blue waters, and towering palms—become the iconic vacation landscape? *Tropical Whites* explores the dramatic shift in attitudes toward and popularization of the tropical tourist "Southland" in the Americas: Florida, Southern California, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Drawing on a wide range of sources, Catherine Cocks examines the history and development of tropical tourism from the late nineteenth century through the early 1940s, when the tropics constituted ideal winter resorts for vacationers from the temperate zones. Combining history, geography, and anthropology, this provocative book explains not only the transformation of widely held ideas about the relationship between the environment and human bodies but also how this shift in thinking underscored emerging concepts of modern identity and popular attitudes toward race, sexuality, nature, and their interconnections.

Cocks argues that tourism, far from simply perverting pristine local cultures and selling superficial misunderstandings of them, served as one of the central means of popularizing the anthropological understanding of culture, new at the time. Together with the rise of germ theory, the emergence of the tropical horticulture industry, changes in passport laws, travel writing, and the circulation of promotional materials, national governments and the tourist industry changed public perception of the tropics from a region of decay and degradation, filled with dangerous health risks, to one where the modern traveler could encounter exotic cultures and a rejuvenating environment.



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