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Passing the Torch? Anglo-American Encounters in the British West Indies and Negotiating White Supremacy, c. 1865–1914

ALEX GOODALL

This article explores encounters between U.S. tourists and British imperial actors in the British West Indies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Drawing on published traveller accounts from the period, it argues that literary cross-fertilization and practices of colonial sociability encouraged shared understandings of the Caribbean framed around visions of global white supremacy. Although these supported the Anglo-Saxonist project that underpinned the geopolitical rapprochement between the two powers between the 1890s and First World War, there were also tensions and disagreements, especially over which nation was best placed to defend the racial order in the Caribbean in the new century. As the volume of U.S. tourists grew, these disagreements became clearer, as revealed in the accounts given of the aftermath of the diplomatic crisis that followed the Kingston earthquake of 1907. Traveller accounts on the ground contrasted with efforts in Washington and London to resolve the crisis amicably. In this sense, the cultural politics of inter-imperial sociability did not always perfectly align with geopolitical imperatives.

KEYWORDS: British West Indies, Anglo-American relations, history of tourism, U.S. expansion, imperial encounters.

GIVEN its industrial expansion in the half century following the Civil War, the growth of U.S. power in the Caribbean may well have been an inexorable historical process, but it was certainly not smooth. Rising American power caused consternation among local populations, resistance from European empires and postcolonial nations, and was in

the final event underpinned by force, with the United States intervening militarily on multiple occasions to promote its interests and the threat of violence shaping its diplomacy on many others. In the British West Indies, however, the rise of the United States did not lead to military action. Between the 1890s and the First World War, Britain and the United States navigated a series of potential sources of conflict without coming to blows, including the Venezuela boundary dispute, the end of the British protectorate in the Mosquitia, the naval blockade of Venezuela, tensions over the exploitation of British West Indian workers in the Panama Canal zone, and disagreements over Mexican policy during the revolution. Despite persistent talk of annexation to the United States from frustrated Caribbean planter elites, sovereignty remained with Britain even as the lines of economic control shifted.

Although the strength of the British navy and comparative stability of British colonial institutions were powerful deterrents to U.S. expansion, historians have identified the expressed cultural affinities between British and American ruling elites as an important factor in sustaining peaceful relations. These had roots in the old imperial relationship, but were revived in the later nineteenth century through new racialized framings of Anglo-American identity. Indeed, rather than seeing Britain as a rival, in the years surrounding the war with Spain, American expansionists promoted the idea of a shared Anglo-Saxon destiny to justify their ambitions.¹ In this sense, important roots of the twentieth-century “Special Relationship” can be traced here.

Anglo-Saxonist rhetoric was used on both sides of the Atlantic to mobilize domestic publics behind imperial expansion. As Paul Kramer has argued, “it was reinforced by the more and more frequent rendezvous between Americans and Britons in the colonial world”—and it is such encounters that are the focus of this article.² In the

¹ On Anglo-Saxon rapprochement, see Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895–1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895–1904* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981); Paul A. 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 (2002). For United States and British cultures of imperialism, see Bill Schwarz, ed. *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, eds., *Drawing the Global Color Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

² Kramer, “Empires, Exceptions and Anglo-Saxons,” 1327.

Caribbean as elsewhere, British colonial spaces became venues for friendly interactions between U.S. citizens and British subjects that enabled the development of shared views on history, politics, and race. The literature, material culture and architecture of British Caribbean colonialism, in which the tourist economy, military infrastructure and imperial bureaucracy often overlapped, allowed British imperial actors to present themselves as partners in defense of the global color line, a view that was reciprocated in the positive accounts of British colonialism found in an emerging body of U.S. travel literature on the Caribbean. Much as anti-Asian politics brought Australians, U.S. citizens and Canadians together in a “white Pacific” that intertwined U.S. settler notions of Manifest Destiny with ideologies of British imperialism, the circulation of North Americans in the British Caribbean encouraged a sense of affinity between white elites perched, in their minds, on top of a patchwork of Latin, African and indigenous people.³

Nevertheless, if Anglo-American imperial encounters in the late-nineteenth century Caribbean formed a cultural front in the “great rapprochement,” this affinity was nevertheless based on specific, and distinct, interests on either side of the Atlantic: in the case of Britain, a desire to reinvigorate the empire after the dislocations of abolition and the turn to free trade, and in the United States to overcome the divisions of the Civil War by asserting new white solidarities on the overseas frontier. As powerful as the language of Anglo-Saxon fraternity was, these different interests permitted subtle forms of competition within the broader pattern of collaboration, especially over which partner was best placed to take the lead in enforcing the racial order in the Caribbean, and while both sides tended to agree the British empire played a positive role in the Caribbean’s past, Americans rarely showed much interest in British hopes for future imperial renovation. Indeed, as the volume of tourism grew in the early twentieth century, British influence over U.S. visitors declined. American tourists socialized increasingly with their compatriots, sidelining British colonial actors and, by extension, British perspectives on empire and whiteness. British imperial elites reacted to this with ambivalence, hoping that U.S. tourism would reinvigorate the islands’ depressed economies while simultaneously trying to orient the islands back toward the metropole.

³ Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Tensions generally remained hidden behind assertions of mutual esteem, but on rare occasions they spilled into the open, as in the wake of the 1907 Kingston earthquake—an event that rarely appears in histories of U.S. expansionism but merits attention as arguably the closest the United States came to military intervention in the territories of the British Caribbean. After the earthquake hit, the U.S. landed troops to offer humanitarian assistance but, as had become its custom, paid little regard to political sovereignty. The British governor responded by demanding their withdrawal, and the two nations were forced into a delicate diplomatic effort to head off a bruising contretemps.⁴ Meanwhile, low-level tensions between Britons and Americans in Jamaica were brought to international attention, amplifying and extending the crisis. Rather than reminding them of their supposed bonds of blood, Americans and Britons on the ground used the shared discourse of the “white man’s burden” to challenge each other’s competence to rule. U.S. tourists complained that the British elite put aristocratic class interests ahead of their racial duty to protect white Americans, while Britons suggested that pampered American tourists failed to appreciate the complexities of managing a mixed-race colony in an emergency. The two powers ultimately resolved the incident by scapegoating the governor, but the cultural politics of the clash suggests that a shared rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon affinity did not always preclude a degree of inter-imperial rivalry over which nation was best placed to bear the torch of Anglo-Saxon supremacy into the twentieth century. Indeed, this pattern of post-colonial deference giving way to U.S. assertiveness, and of British condescension trailing into wounded pride and muted competition, would be repeated in many other peaceful but not always amicable contexts in the coming century.

TRAVEL WRITING AND THE BRITISH WEST INDIES

In the later nineteenth century, U.S. citizens began travelling in large numbers to the British Caribbean. Previously, journeys had been expensive, uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous, but with the improvement of steam transit routes to Bermuda, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Jamaica they became cheaper and easier. At first only a

⁴ On the diplomacy of the crisis, see William N. Tilchin, “Theodore Roosevelt, Anglo-American Relations, and the Jamaica Incident of 1907,” *Diplomatic History* 19, no. 3 (1995); Julia Irwin, *Catastrophic Diplomacy: U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance in the American Century* (Forthcoming), 11–16.

relatively small number of individuals—typically members of the political, diplomatic, commercial and military elite, and those travelling for health reasons—made the journey, but by the turn of the century, many thousands were going every year, particularly from the cities of the North enriched by the unprecedented industrialization of the era.⁵ Luxury services such as the Hamburg-American's Atlas Line and the United Fruit Company's Jamaica line began to offer versions of the package and cruise ship holidays that would dominate Caribbean tourism in the next century.⁶ Tropical travel opened to a wider circle of Americans with the cash and employment flexibility to head abroad in search for winter sun, members of what Theodore Dreiser called the "great American upper class – the first grade below the luxuriously rich."⁷

This rising tide of tourism was part of a larger expansion of U.S. influence in the Caribbean. After a century of destructive inter-imperial rivalries and bloody independence struggles, many old empires had shrunk and in the colonies that remained European rule was tainted by neglect.⁸ U.S. investment in the region, by contrast, expanded rapidly and new commercial enclaves were established through which, as Jason Colby has noted, the United States "transplant[ed] domestic racial and labor practices into the Caribbean Basin," a description that applies arguably as much to tourism as the extractive economy.⁹

This transplantation of domestic norms did not come overnight, however. When U.S. tourists first began visiting the Caribbean in the 1870s and 1880s, British influence was dominant; indeed, it was established before tourists even set sail due to the relative paucity of

⁵ Paul Gottheil, "Historical Development of Steamship Agreements and Conferences in the American Foreign Trade," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 55 (1914): 68–73.

⁶ Histories of Caribbean tourism include Frank Fonda Taylor, *To Hell with Paradise: A History of the Jamaican Tourist Industry* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993); David Timothy Duval, *Tourism in the Caribbean: Trends, Developments, Prospects* (London: Routledge, 2004); Polly Patullo, *Last Resorts: The Cost of Tourism in the Caribbean*, 2nd ed. (London: Latin American Bureau, 2005); Anita M. Waters, *Planning the Past: Heritage Tourism and Post-Colonial Politics at Port Royal* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); John S. Hogue, "Cruise Ship Diplomacy: Making U.S. Leisure and Power in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1900–1973" (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013); Timothy Rommen and Daniel T. Neely, eds., *Sun, Sea and Sound: Music and Tourism in the Circum-Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁷ Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 44.

⁸ Christopher Taylor, *Empire of Neglect: The West Indies in the Wake of British Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

⁹ Jason M. Colby, "'Banana Growing and Negro Management': Race, Labor, and Jim Crow Colonialism in Guatemala, 1884–1930," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 4 (2006): 599.

U.S. literature on the region. Nearly all antebellum and Civil War era American writing on the British West Indies was shaped by the debate over domestic slavery, and under Reconstruction writers evaluated the Caribbean in the context of policy toward the occupied South.¹⁰ These books contained valuable information about the islands, but did not speak directly to the new class of leisure tourists. As such, many turned to an extensive body of nineteenth-century British writing, including Caribbean histories by Bryan Edwards, Thomas Southey, Robert Montgomery Martin, and William James Gardner, and personal narratives by figures such as Daniel McKinnen, Pierre Franc McCallum, John Amphlett, James Sibbald David Scott, Charles Henry Eden, and Anthony Trollope, as well as Michael Scott's fictionalized account of his experiences in Jamaica, *Tom Cringle's Log* (1833).

Three British texts seem to have been particular influences on U.S. visitors later in the century: Charles Kingsley's *At Last: Christmas in the West Indies* (1871), detailing the author's seven week stay in Trinidad; Spenser St. John's, *Hayti, or the Black Republic* (1884), a derogatory report on Haiti that became a foil for discussing the British colonies; and James Anthony Froude's narrative of his tour through the region, *The English in the West Indies, or the Bow of Ulysses* (1888). These writers were deeply shaped by their affiliations with the British Empire. Kingsley and Froude were eminent members of the Victorian establishment and Oxbridge professors, and St. John had been Ambassador to Haiti between 1863 and 1874. Their writings spoke to the debates over the future of British power in the West Indies that grew in the decades after the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865—indeed, Kingsley sat on Thomas Carlyle's committee to defend Edward Eyre, the governor who had brutally repressed the Jamaican uprising.¹¹ Each tended to idealize British imperial history in contrast to other European

¹⁰ Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); Edward B. Rugemer, "The Southern Response to British Abolitionism: The Maturation of Proslavery Apologetics," *Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 2 (2004): 247; Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Nichola Clayton, "Managing the Transition to a Free Labor Society: American Interpretations of the British West Indies During the Civil War and Reconstruction," *American Nineteenth Century History* 7, no. 1 (2006).

¹¹ Thomas A. Thompson, *James Anthony Froude on Nation and Empire: A Study in Victorian Racialism* (New York: Garland, 1987); Julia Markus, *J. Anthony Froude: The Last Undiscovered Great Victorian* (New York: Scribner, 2005); J.M.I. Klaver, *Apostle of the Flesh: A Critical Life of Charles Kingsley* (Boston: Brill, 2006); Ciaran Brady, *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

empires and the region's post-colonial states, and were eager to see its renewal. Kingsley wrote that the West Indies had been an object of romantic fascination for him since childhood and painted his Caribbean journey as tracing the footsteps of "old sea-heroes" like Drake, Hawkins, and Raleigh.¹² For Froude, the West Indies was where the British navy was born fighting King Phillip II's Spain in defense of the English Reformation, its successes opening the door to a Protestant maritime empire that would eventually span the globe.¹³ St. John dismissed indigenous histories of Haiti that offered critical narratives of imperialism as hopelessly biased by "prejudice against the whites", and, though he considered French colonialism superior to post-colonial Haiti, claimed that the French had practiced as harsh a form of slavery "as ever disgraced the worst system of servitude."¹⁴

Such Anglocentric views were hardly unusual in British imperial literature. What was more distinctive, however, was the racial framework that came to the fore in the second half of the century. As Thomas C. Holt has shown, the decades following the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies saw imperial ideology shift "from nonracist to racist premises, at the same time that the destruction of slavery cleared the way for [the British] elite's more robust embrace of imperialist ambitions."¹⁵ Formerly enslaved West Indians had withdrawn their labor from the plantation economy that had been the source of such historic misery.¹⁶ For capitalist elites, reversing this became a crucial imperative, and new forms of racial thinking served to legitimate their efforts. Paradoxically, then, "racialist ideologies came to be essential to sustaining the overarching ideology of freedom."¹⁷

Kingsley, Froude, St. John and others therefore positioned their narratives of British imperialism within schemas of racial progress and

¹² Charles Kingsley, *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (London: Macmillan, 1871), 5.

¹³ James Anthony Froude, *The English in the West Indies; or, the Bow of Ulysses* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 9–10.

¹⁴ Spenser St. John, *Haiti; or, the Black Republic* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1884), 306, 08, 29–30.

¹⁵ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xviii.

¹⁶ Sidney M. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). See also Kevin D. Smith, "A Fragmented Freedom: The Historiography of Emancipation and Its Aftermath in the British West Indies," *Slavery & Abolition* 16 (1995).

¹⁷ Holt, *Problem of Freedom*, xxiii.

decay that matched neither the abolitionist nor the pro-slavery perspectives of earlier periods. Kingsley wrote that a phase of post-abolition crisis was coming to an end due to large-scale South Asian migration, but argued for the continuing need for systematic education to inculcate sentiments of “loyalty and order” among Black West Indians.¹⁸ Froude was more extreme in his racism, claiming that African Caribbean people lacked the character to make a success of free labour. He drew upon St. John’s ghoulish caricature of Haiti to warn of what might happen if white dominance unraveled. The choice, he caustically summarized, was “either an English administration pure and simple like the East Indian, or a falling eventually into a state like that of Hayti, where they eat the babies, and no white man can own a yard of land”.¹⁹

Few books have demonized a nation so comprehensively as St. John’s *Hayti*. Structured as a guide to the country, with chapters on geography, history, politics, culture, and economic life, the primary attraction to readers was the salacious section on Vodou in which the author argued that “fetish worship and cannibalism” were ubiquitous.²⁰ He characterized Haitian Vodou as a corrupt half-religion in which a sacerdotal elite kept the masses in a state of terror through magical ceremonies and threats of poisoning. Cannibalism was commonplace, he argued, and growing in frequency due to the barbaric effects of Black rule. St. John claimed his book was based on detailed evidence collected in Haiti, but in truth it was little more than an assemblage of second-hand gossip taken from the island’s white expatriates and a few members of the local elite, reports from a controversial mid-century Vodou trial that even St. John admitted fell below reasonable jurisprudential standards, and an equally problematic book written a century earlier by the French lawyer and slaver, Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry.²¹

Through such books, U.S. tourists were drip-fed British narratives on race, empire and Caribbean history. To give a sense of their influence, it might be noted that of twenty-one published U.S. travel books on the West Indies used in researching this article, more than a third explicitly cited Kingsley. Nearly as many referenced either Froude

¹⁸ Kingsley, *At Last*, 351.

¹⁹ Froude, *English in the West Indies*, 56.

²⁰ St. John, *Hayti*, vi.

²¹ Médéric Moreau de St. Méry, *Description Topographique, Physique, Civile, Politique Et Historique De La Partie Française De L'isle Saint-Domingue* (1789).

or St. John (or both), despite the two being published a decade later.²² Often their names were dropped with a tone that assumed a degree of readerly familiarity. Indeed, knowledge of British writings came to be seen by some as a crucial marker of regional expertise. Former Speaker Joseph Gurney Cannon, who toured the Caribbean in 1907, for instance, liked to establish his credentials by quoting Froude and Kingsley in conversation.²³ St. John's *Hayti* went through two editions in the 1880s, selling several thousand copies in Britain and the United States, as well as being translated into French.²⁴ The thinness of its evidence had little impact on its spread among U.S. citizens eager to see the worst in the hemisphere's only "Black republic." Froude found virtually every American he met in the West Indies endorsed St. John's account of Vodou when the topic came up.²⁵

St. John's book arguably became the primer for nearly every white-authored text on the island produced in its wake. Many simply repeated his spurious claims wholesale. Such indirect information flows meant that British thinking almost certainly spread more widely among American readers than can be quantified by counting citations alone. To illustrate, Charles Ives's *Isles of Summer* (1880) was the first U.S. travel book on the Bahamas published after the Civil War. A New England lawyer, Ives went with his wife to Nassau over two winters for health reasons. He relied almost exclusively on British sources for his

²² Samuel Hazard, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Publishing Company, 1871), 472; Charles Ives, *Isles of Summer; or, Nassau and the Bahamas* (New Haven: Published by the author, 1880), 91; William Agnew Paton, *Down the Islands: A Voyage to the Caribbees* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1888), 72, 214; Amos Kidder Fiske, *The West Indies* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), v, vi, 358; Susan de Forest Day, *The Cruise of the Scythian in the West Indies* (London: F. T. Neely, 1899), 254–255; Anson Phelps Stokes, *Cruising in the Caribbean with a Camera* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), 5, 17, 26; Charles August Stoddard, *Cruising among the Caribbees: Summer Days in Winter Months* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 10–11, 12, 108, 59, 79, 211, 22–23; J. Hampton Moore, *With Speaker Cannon through the Tropics* (Philadelphia: Book Print, 1907), 49; William Thomas Corlett, *The American Tropics: Notes from the Log of a Midwinter Cruise* (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1908), 70.

²³ Moore, *With Speaker Cannon*, 49.

²⁴ Jack Daniel Webb, "The Travelling Travel Narrative: The Communication Circuit of Spenser St. John's *Hayti*; or, the *Black Republic*," *Book History* 20 (2017): 261–262. See also Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Kate Ramsay, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Marlene L. Daut, *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Diana Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jack Daniel Webb, *Haiti in the British Imagination: Imperial Worlds, 1847–1915* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

²⁵ Froude, *English in the West Indies*, 126–127.

background information. Five years later, the *New York Times* correspondent William Drysdale produced *In Sunny Lands* (1885), a more characteristic piece of tourist literature: lighter, more boosterish, and weighted toward personal experiences and human color rather than history and politics. Drysdale conducted little research, and his historical material came instead from Ives.²⁶ In this way, the original British sources were obscured from readers of Drysdale's text like laundered money.

CIRCUITS OF INTER-IMPERIAL SOCIABILITY

Such literary influences, combined with a more general orientation toward the "mother country", ensured that many U.S. tourists arrived in the Caribbean already having internalized a heroic account of British West Indian empire-building. This was strengthened by encounters with British imperial actors during their stays. Particularly in the early years of the tourist boom, many Americans received generous hospitality within elite circles of colonial government. General James McQuade, who sailed with a party through the Caribbean in 1884, was one such figure, pulled into a lively social scene in Bermuda of "dinners, luncheons, drives, 'moist' chats at the Club, visits to the barracks and dock-yard," excursions to countryside residences of retired officials, reciprocal events hosted aboard their yacht, and a particularly memorable party on a private island owned by the Bermuda Yacht Club in which the attendees traded toasts until midnight. The social invitations, McQuade recorded regretfully, "greatly exceeded our capacity of acceptance."²⁷

Alongside military institutions and yacht clubs, British imperial networks of sociability in the West Indies centered on governors and their wives, the latter being expected to deliver a soft power underpinning to their husbands' official duties, and it seems they were eager to impress American visitors. Colonial officials were a tiny expatriate community sitting on top of societies they struggled to understand, usually occupying their offices for brief terms after rotating in from other colonial postings. Using Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson's helpful distinction, they were a dominant cultural force, but

²⁶ William Drysdale, *In Sunny Lands: Out-Door Life in Nassau and Cuba* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1885), 25.

²⁷ James McQuade, *The Cruise of the Montauk* (New York: Thomas R. Knox, 1885), 62–70.

not part of the mainstream. Even white planters sometimes found officials “aloof and pompous”, though they “nevertheless placed enormous social value on socializing with them”.²⁸ Playing gracious host to wide-eyed visitors from the United States offered an opportunity to pretend to greater knowledge and authority than was the reality. In exchange, being invited to join such exclusive circles allowed visitors to feel that they were having a truly authentic encounter with the West Indies—something that went beyond mere tourism.²⁹

Accounts from the time suggest that American travellers were sometimes confused by the peculiar manners of their hosts and struggled with stodgy British fare, but were otherwise seduced by the warm welcome, fascinated by the ornate symbolism of monarchy and empire, and awed by displays of military power.³⁰ “The first man I saw on landing was a soldier,” the journalist William Augustus Croffut wrote of a visit to Bermuda in 1885. “The last men visible as I looked out of the window just now were thirty or forty soldiers. Everywhere are uniforms, flags, cannon, stacked arms . . . I never saw so much pomp and circumstance in my life.”³¹ During his layover in Bermuda, McQuade was moved by a speech from a British officer expressing his hope the divisions between North and South would come to be as distant a memory as the Wars of the Roses were in Britain. McQuade admitted, “I will confess that during this symposium the hatred of ‘England’s cruel red,’ which ought to burn fiercely in my Celtic breast, was but a puny and laggard flame.”³²

For postcolonial citizens still negotiating their relationship with their former sovereign a century after independence, immersion in the British imperial world could be thrilling, especially given the ostentatious cult of monarchy developing in the last decades of the century as part of a general attempt to restore British cultural primacy in its empire.³³ Ives joked, “The more we study the royal institutions of the Bahamas, the more satisfied we become that our boasted republic is a failure, popular governments a mistake, and that it is about time to

²⁸ Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), xiii, 7.

²⁹ Cf. James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to “Culture”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 4–6.

³⁰ Drysdale, *Sunny Lands*, 18.

³¹ “A Day in Bermuda,” *Washington Post*, April 26 1885.

³² McQuade, *Montauk*, 73, 80.

³³ Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led nor Driven*, 272.

give some of our most skilful artists a liberal order for crowns, scepters, thrones, and all the gilded trappings necessary to set up one of those lofty imperial governments which are ‘ordained of God.’”³⁴ American visitors praised the order and efficiency of imperial institutions, which they came to see as responsible for a climate of physical safety and racial deference that, they felt, contrasted with the social disorder in Cuba or the restrictions on foreign property ownership in Haiti.³⁵ The orderliness of the West Indian colonies was understood as a sign that American visitors could trust British authorities to prioritize the interests of whites over non-whites in a spirit of inter-imperial racial solidarity, even if the latter were British subjects. “When an American is far away from home it is pleasant to see his own bright flag at some mast-head,” wrote William Drysdale. “But where he sees the British flag floating he is sure of order and protection.”³⁶

Much of this reciprocal back-rubbing took place in informal discussions over drinks or between rallies on colonial tennis courts and has been lost to history. However, a *New York Times* correspondent’s visit to a party at Government House in Barbados in 1890 gives a sense of the way white supremacist rhetoric circulated freely in such social encounters, and how ostentation and hospitality bound elites together. During a disquisition against democratic reform in the Caribbean colonies, the Governor, Sir Charles Cameron Lees, claimed that enslaved Africans brought to the Americas were “the weakest and most cowardly . . . The blacks, therefore, that are here clamouring for equal rights with the whites are not even average negroes.” Later, in the gardens, the island’s Attorney General told the correspondent that “devil worship was a fact in most of the islands, and even here under the eyes of an Anglican bishop.” Although the American correspondent affected a dispassionate tone in narrating the event, he seemed impressed by the opulent lifestyle of the imperial ruling class and flattered by the solicitous attention he received, which seemingly marked him out as a special guest. Even an “illustrious footman”, he believed, showed “some appearance of having made more haste than usual.”³⁷

Although there were many places where tourists could interact with colonial officials and appreciate colonial symbolism, the luxury hotels in which Americans spent much of their time were particularly

³⁴ Ives, *Isles of Summer*, 61.

³⁵ McQuade, *Montauk*, 63.

³⁶ Drysdale, *Sunny Lands*, 4.

³⁷ “Happiest of Many Isles,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1890.

significant spaces. At its most prestigious, a grand hotel functioned as an extension of imperial power. The Queen's Park Hotel, located in the center of Port of Spain, for instance, was on the southern edge of the Savannah, a large parkland area that was the focal point of imperial society in Trinidad. "You cannot know anything about life there unless you know the Savannah," a British writer explained.³⁸ The park was the venue for the various sporting activities that shaped the social lives of the ruling elite, the army would assemble and parade there, and orchestras would perform. On the opposite, northern side to the hotel was Government House, surrounded by a large botanical gardens that served as another important tourist location. British officials would use the hotel for official functions, so the institutions of government and tourism blurred. In this context, a white-run grand hotel, in which staff had been trained in the performative as well as practical dimensions of hotel operations, promised a kind of tropical fantasy of imperial order and stability. Sufficiently "civilized" to have adopted white dress codes, behaviour and manners, yet accepting their subordinate place within the social microcosm of the hotel, disciplined employees seemed to reconcile the contradiction running through the heart of racial imperialism, which claimed people of color benefited from white tutelage yet were incapable of internalizing the lessons of civilization sufficiently to merit equal treatment. The British writer E. A. Hastings Jay claimed that, "in the capacity of waiter the coloured man seems to bridge over the gulf between himself and his white brother more than in any other position."³⁹

The impact of such touristic-imperial structures on American visitors was, however, limited—because there were so few of them. Travellers from both sides of the Atlantic agreed that the relative absence of luxury accommodation in the West Indies was a matter of concern, and an impediment to the growth of the tourist trade.⁴⁰ In most places, there were plenty of places to stay, but white foreigners preferred hotels run by white owners, generating a false sense of shortage as well as diverting income away from non-white locals. Many racist arguments were made to justify this. For instance, proprietors of color were said to be unable to deliver the service culture Americans and Europeans expected—which may have been true in a sense, since

³⁸ Filson Young, "A Tropical Island," *Saturday Review*, April 2 1910, 428. See also Corlett, *American Tropics*, 80.

³⁹ E. A. Hastings Jay, *A Glimpse of the Tropics; or, Four Months Cruising in the West Indies* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1900), 205.

⁴⁰ Froude, *English in the West Indies*, 129; Frederick A. Ober, *In the Wake of Columbus* (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1893), 282.

the elaborate racial deference expected by many white tourists was understandably distasteful to Black West Indians.⁴¹

As the profitability of tourism became clear, American corporations began to move in independently, building luxury hotels that would become central spaces for tourist life up to the First World War. These were typically U.S.-dominated bubbles, in terms of the nationality of guests, and in patterns of ownership, control, and culture. Nevertheless, they often sought to retain the affective dimensions of British colonialism that previously appealed to tourist sensibilities.

The Royal Victoria Hotel in Nassau offered perhaps the best example.⁴² An impressive four-storey building perched on the top of a hill, it was opened in 1861 and during the Civil War catered to the travel boom produced when the islands became a stop-off point for Southern blockade-runners. The hotel was later resurrected under the stewardship of Lewis Cleveland, brother of the president, before his death at sea, then passed to a New York hotelier named Morton, who entrenched its position as the center of U.S. tourism on the island for a generation.⁴³

From the outset, the hotel had been designed to insulate visitors from any discordant indicators of life on the island. Aside from day trips to the countryside, neighboring islands, or carriage journeys through Grantstown, tourists enclosed themselves within its protective walls. Ives described the Royal Victoria as “a little miniature world in which we were satisfied to live and revolve, making but few outside acquaintances, and those slight and casual.”⁴⁴ The exclusive guest roster—“plenty of money or a good letter of credit” was the “essential requisite” for a warm welcome – was, moreover, a source of attraction in itself.⁴⁵

At its heart was a large courtyard in which fantasies of British imperialism were re-enacted for the benefit of the guests. The space notionally functioned as a souvenir and fruit market, but was policed in a way that ensured tourists would experience none of the negotiations or insecurities that an external venue might deliver. Drysdale described it as “like an Oriental bazaar”:

⁴¹ John Amphlett, *Under a Tropical Sky* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1873), 143.

⁴² Henry Serrano Villard, *The Royal Victoria Hotel* (1976).

⁴³ Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *A History of the Bahamian People: From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 2 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 80.

⁴⁴ Ives, *Isles of Summer*, 289.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70; “New Yorkers in Nassau,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1886.

Colored men and women, boys and girls, some of them so nearly white you could hardly tell the difference, and many of them exceedingly pretty, filled the open archways when we reached the hotel, offering for sale all the sorts of curiosities that people usually buy in strange lands and throw away as soon as they get home – canes, baskets, straw hats, shell-work, coconuts, spongers, flowers, queer fish – nearly everything imaginable.⁴⁶

Local children would perform tricks for pennies, and singers would deliver spirituals. At one point, the yard became the venue for a bizarre “joke” when Drysdale, the U.S. consul T. J. McLain, and the New York businessman and politician Daniel Manning (later Secretary of the Treasury), drove a carriage around the Black districts of Nassau telling people they wished to buy a dog and would pay handsomely for it. The next day the courtyard was filled with dozens of hopeful owners and their barking animals. Despite having no intention of buying, Manning carefully inspected each one, then announced he would need more time to make his final decision and sent the locals home with a small amount of cash.⁴⁷ It seems for some American guests, part of the appeal of sojourning in a British imperial colony came from adopting the high-handedness they assumed British elites took towards their colonized subjects. This served to reinforce their understanding of global racial hierarchy as well as bind them to their imperial hosts. Tourists would argue that submitting to such treatment reflected West Indians’ subservient character, but in truth the placidity they witnessed was underpinned by violence. If a seller became too voluble or threatened to break the image of a smoothly-functioning racial order in the courtyard, an employee of the hotel “with a long unsentimental whip” stood ready to impose discipline.⁴⁸

DIVERGENCE, RECEPTION, AND TRANSFORMATION

Whether through the literature, interpersonal interactions or material culture and architecture of the colonies, U.S. visitors to the Caribbean had ample opportunity to situate their understanding of the West Indies within British colonial norms, and by extension see the British presence in the region as less problematic or threatening than either

⁴⁶ Drysdale, *Sunny Lands*, 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸ Ives, *Isles of Summer*, 78.

the Spanish or independent Caribbean states. After decades of Southern propaganda blaming the problems of Reconstruction on non-white weakness and corruption, the idea of an orderly British tropical empire ruled by sagacious white elites resonated with Northerners eager to move on from old divisions at home into a new era of white solidarity.⁴⁹

These encounters strengthened the spirit of Anglo-Saxon co-identification, but U.S. citizens and British imperial subjects did not agree on everything. Indeed, as U.S. writers began producing a corpus of travel literature of their own, subtle differences of perspective emerged. At first, American journalists wrote travel stories for newspapers catering to interested but presumably passive readers, and often repeated British talking points. Latterly, however, U.S. travel writers began producing guide books for potential tourists with more direct and distinctive interest in the question of what it would be like to be *an American* travelling in the Caribbean. These books in particular began to lay out a subtly different view of the empire to those found in older accounts.

For one thing, the British view of the Caribbean tended to be constrained by imperial geography, which, especially as multi-island cruises became popular, Americans sometimes found to be insular. In 1899, in the wake of an explosion of interest in the Caribbean stimulated by the war with Spain, the New York lawyer and journalist Amos Kidder Fiske complained that it was “hard to find a systematic account, good even for its time, of all the islands regarded as a whole and in their relation to each other,” and resolved to write a book on the West Indies that was less Anglocentric.⁵⁰

When Cuba in particular was brought into the mix, a wider frame of reference could lead to diverging views of Caribbean history and politics. There was a separate and healthier tradition of U.S. travel writing on Cuba, some of which drew on Spanish sources. Samuel Hazard, the author of *Cuba with Pen and Pencil* (1871), identified José García de Arboleya, author of the *Manual de la Isla de Cuba* (1852), as his “guide and teacher”, for instance.⁵¹ Unlike British narratives of West Indian history, García de Arboleya disputed the conquistadors’ sanguinary reputation and emphasized their “spirit of humanity and

⁴⁹ John David Smith, “Introduction,” in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, ed. John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 24–25.

⁵⁰ Fiske, *West Indies*, iii.

⁵¹ Hazard, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil*, iv.

innate sentiments of justice.” He argued the decline of the indigenous Cuban population was due to “the devastation of pirates in the areas of the island that remained open and undefended, and their mixing with Spanish and African races.” Rather than heroes of legend, the English had been brigands who set about “robbing, burning and killing.” Instead of apostles of abolition, Arboleya argued it was during the brief period of British rule in Cuba that large numbers of enslaved people had been introduced.⁵²

Arboleya’s influence gave Hazard’s book a different tone to U.S. texts on the British colonies. However, Spanish writings were, for linguistic reasons, not generally as influential as British ones. Arguably, a more significant point of divergence was the way that U.S. travellers received and reinterpreted British imperial writings to suit their own purposes. Judging from what was omitted as well as included in their tourist literature, it seems American visitors were more interested in British narratives of the past than their visions of the future. Partly this resulted from the vagaries of genre: serving a tourist market rather than an imperial public, U.S. travel writing was superficially depoliticized. American readers were less interested in the question of the Empire than British readers. Texts such as Kingsley’s, written explicitly as interventions in the debate over British imperial policy, were studied for their descriptions of history, geography, society, and sightseeing rather than politics and policy. Especially in their travel books, U.S. authors deployed accounts of the imperial past to add color to their narratives, but were primarily concerned with the mechanics of travelling. Indeed, many Americans focused on historical aspects of the British presence, such as the old forts dating back to the age of inter-imperial Caribbean warfare, or the infrastructure of the old slave plantation economy, now fallen into disrepair, rather than modern sources of imperial power. Allan Eric, a Bostonian who twice travelled to Jamaica at the end of the century, described a landscape of imperialism dominated by ruins: sugar mills crumbling and grown over by vines, water wheels rotten and falling to pieces, chimneys cracked and tumbled down. These formed “one of the most picturesque features of the landscape; but, alas, recalling memories of a once great industry, the source of almost untold wealth, but since greatly declined.”⁵³ Even positive descriptions of British power in the Caribbean often framed it as timeless or unchanging, implicitly contrasting the empire with the

⁵² José García de Arboleya, *Manual de la isla de Cuba* (Havana: Imprenta del gobierno y Capitanía general por S.M., 1852), 27–28, 30, 36.

⁵³ Allan Eric, “*Buckra*” *Land: Two Weeks in Jamaica* (Boston 1896), 62.

restless, forward-looking spirit of the United States. As the writer and adventurer Richard Harding Davis wrote after visiting Belize, a British colony was “always civilized; it is always the same, no matter what latitude it may be, and it is always distinctly British.”⁵⁴ This made the Caribbean colonies appealing places to escape the stresses of industrial life, but were not exactly an unqualified endorsement of a British imperial future.

Such interpretive differences can be seen in the way colonial decline was represented in the writings of Froude and Frederick A. Ober. Ober was a writer and ornithologist whose journeys through the American tropics resulted in more than a dozen books between 1880 and 1914, making him arguably the foremost U.S. writer on the region in the first age of tourism. Both authors admitted the obvious signs of neglect in the colonies. Froude described conversations with despondent local planters who were fed up with British imperial neglect and wanted to be admitted to the Union.⁵⁵ The principal impediment to such a transition, he claimed, was no longer residual loyalty among West Indian whites but resistance among the Black majority, who preferred British indifference to the interventionist hand of the United States. This argument could appeal to American readers, but aimed at a British audience it was intended to be salutary. “For England to allow [the colonies] to drift away from her because they have no immediate marketable value,” he wrote, “would be a sign that she had lost the feelings with which great nations always treasure the heroic traditions of their fathers.”⁵⁶ Ober echoed Froude’s descriptions, but came to a very different conclusion: that the islands had been irretrievably damaged by “the dry-rot of foreign domination.” Despite its laudable historical contributions, Britain was no longer able to provide a market for West Indian goods and yet insisted upon maintaining a costly colonial bureaucracy. This was “a clog upon their progress, retarding their development and draining their life-blood.”⁵⁷

Such divergences were exacerbated by the growing separation of American tourists from British social and cultural influence. The kind of exclusive access that made imperial circles seductive in the 1870s and 1880s was, by definition, a commodity that could only be provided in limited quantity, and as the volume of U.S. tourism moved from a

⁵⁴ Richard Harding Davis, *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), 5–6.

⁵⁵ Froude, *English in the West Indies*, 20, 189–190.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ Ober, *Wake of Columbus*, 112.

trickle to a flood, personal contact with the highest echelons of British officialdom became harder to sustain. With a regular steamer line and a luxurious hotel to stay in, U.S. tourism expanded in the Bahamas first, transforming the island's patterns of inter-imperial sociability.⁵⁸ Even in 1880, Charles Ives detected a sense of desperation among U.S. ladies who tried "to mingle on terms of social equality with the aristocracy of Nassau." With "a steamboat load of fresh arrivals in a small town once a week during the winter months, what can the poor islanders do?" he asked. "Hospitality withdraws appalled, if not disgusted, while Avarice and Cupidity stalk boldly to the front, and . . . scramble for the greenbacks and gold of the new-comers."⁵⁹

In the late 1890s Governor Haynes Smith entered into negotiations with the Florida railroad and hotel entrepreneur, Henry Flagler, to further expand U.S. travel to the Bahamas.⁶⁰ Flagler acquired the Royal Victoria and began renovating it. Among other changes, he closed the "oriental" yard: it seems he preferred segregated tourist sociability over the interracial fantasies of the imperial "bazaar". In 1901, he opened a second hotel: the six-storey Colonial, designed to the specifications of his Florida chain. Its location on the Western Parade had once been the site of Fort Nassau, and subsequently the local police barracks. Aptly symbolizing the shift from British imperial to U.S. commercial power, the barracks were moved to the rear of the city to make way for Flagler's building. With a vast ballroom, a dining hall to seat six hundred, and accommodation for five hundred guests, it represented, to the U.S. writer G. J. H. Northcroft, "a significant change in the attitude of the Bahamas towards the outside world . . . a thorough-going acceptance of its *status* as a modern Winter Sanatorium".⁶¹

The Colonial continued to promote a stylized and idealized vision of the British colony. According to an enthusiastic write-up in *Vogue*, the Colonial was tastefully decorated, boasting a beautiful tropical garden and "views out over the water from its wide terraced piazzas."⁶² Krista A. Thompson notes the garden had been carefully curated to offer a manicured version of the island's botanical life.⁶³ However, the hotel

⁵⁸ Ives, *Isles of Summer*, 289; G.J.H. Northcroft, *Sketches of Summerland* (Nassau: Nassau Guardian, 1902), 63.

⁵⁹ Ives, *Isles of Summer*, 292–293.

⁶⁰ Gail Saunders, "The Changing Face of Nassau: The Impact of Tourism on Bahamian Society in the 1920s and 1930s," *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 72 (1997): 22–23.

⁶¹ Northcroft, *Sketches*, 15–16.

⁶² "Travel: Nassau, Bahamas," *Vogue*, 16 February 1905.

⁶³ Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 118.

was also more fully Americanized than even the Royal Victoria, and more solipsistic: endless musical performances, games, tennis matches, and dances were organized to fill guests' schedules with opportunities for mutual socializing. The most important center of activity now became a new nine-hole golf course.⁶⁴ Guests would "swarm to the links daily, spending the greater share of their time there."⁶⁵ Golf had, according to Northcroft, "come, seen, and conquered Nassau."⁶⁶ Meanwhile, as the Briton Wilfred Bendall wrote, "a travelling Englishman" became "quite a *rara avis*, [and] every stranger is assumed to be American until he proclaims his nationality."⁶⁷ The hotels continued to host British official events, but the balance of cultural attention shifted. The celebrations around George Washington's birthday developed into a key moment in the island's calendar. In 1902, they were so extensive—including a ball hosted by the U.S. consul, sporting events, a regatta, and a week of dinner parties—that they cast the ceremonial opening of the Bahaman legislature into shade.⁶⁸

Although the Bahamas was the first to witness this change, a similar pattern was repeated elsewhere in the West Indies. By the 1890s, so many Americans were heading to the British Caribbean that, according to the Briton H. F. Abell, hoteliers were "taxed to their utmost to provide the necessary accommodation."⁶⁹ During the harsh winter of 1890–1891, tourists arrived in such numbers that the management of one hotel in Bridgetown, Barbados, reportedly collapsed under the strain.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the British presence was increasingly noticeable for its absence. When Susan de Forest Day stayed in Bridgetown in 1899, her visit coincided with a tour by the British colonial undersecretary, Edward Gray, and at an associated dinner she was able to admire the "Englishwomen in low-cut gowns and Englishmen in dress clothes," but such encounters were uncommon.⁷¹ "And so here we are in Kingston," Ida Starr wrote during a visit to Jamaica in 1903, "owned by the English, governed by the English, bullyragged by the English, — but where is he, the Englishman, where the English-woman?"⁷²

⁶⁴ "Charms of the Bahamas," *New York Tribune*, 22 November 1914.

⁶⁵ "In the Bahamas," *New York Tribune*, 17 February 1901.

⁶⁶ Northcroft, *Sketches*, 60.

⁶⁷ Wilfred Bendall, "Six Weeks in the Bahamas," *Pall Mall*, May 1896, 63.

⁶⁸ "A Winter Holiday," *New York Tribune* (1881); "Liveliness at Nassau," *New York Tribune*, March 2 1902.

⁶⁹ H. F. Abell, "The West Indies as a Winter Resort," *Westminster Review* (1892): 278.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁷¹ Day, *Scythian*, 198.

⁷² Ida Starr, *Gardens of the Caribbees* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1903), 221.

Imperial governors were aware of the economic potential of tourism, but in the light of imperial anxiety at home and frustrations among local populations about the transformative effects of large-scale tourism, they did not always receive these waves of visitors with equanimity.⁷³ Froude's description of Havana in the 1880s, subjected to U.S. tourist power from an earlier stage in its history, offered a worrying glimpse of the potential future of the islands. During a visit to the city, the historian was repelled by the horde of Americans staying in his hotel.⁷⁴ "Individually I dare say they would have been charming," he wrote, but together "they drove me to distraction. Space and time had no existence for them; they and their voices were heard in all places and at all hours. The midnight bravuras at the pianos mixed wildly in my broken dreams."⁷⁵ Even some members of the U.S. elite bemoaned the influx of *nouveaux riches* Americans, who, according to the poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox, made little effort to integrate with local societies but instead "boast always and everywhere of the superiority of America over every other country, and talk much of their possessions and the cost of living."⁷⁶

As the United Fruit Company remade Jamaica into a banana economy, the split between the island's political orientation toward Britain and its economic orientation toward the United States generated increasingly noticeable cultural tensions. Hoping to benefit from the growth of tourism, the Jamaican government passed a Hotels Law in 1890 that offered investment guarantees and tax exemptions for hotel construction, and the following year hosted an international exhibition to solicit global attention. U.S. companies built a number of hotels to host the anticipated influx. However, the two grandest—the new Myrtle Bank Hotel, built on the site of an older, Scottish hotel, and the Constant Spring—failed to deliver the experience U.S. guests expected and struggled to attract guests. At Myrtle Bank, the management was reputedly persistently drunk; at the Constant Spring, guests complained that the hotel was unclean and the staff were rude.⁷⁷

Hastings Jay claimed that, "A strong white manager is a necessity to keep the black servants up to the mark", but in fact both hotels operated under white U.S. management.⁷⁸ The problem was more

⁷³ Bonham C. Richardson, "Depression Riots and the Calling of the 1897 West India Royal Commission," *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 66, no. 3-4 (1992).

⁷⁴ Froude, *English in the West Indies*, 280.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁶ Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Sailing Sunny Seas* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey, 1909), 190-191.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *To Hell with Paradise*, 79.

⁷⁸ Jay, *Glimpse of the Tropics*, 224.

systemic. In the racial language of the era, it was said that Jamaica had a “servant problem,” a term that reflected white anxiety about Black Jamaican resistance to white supremacy.⁷⁹ As the historian Frank Fonda Taylor suggests, Jamaican hotel employees saw the servile behavior demanded of them as an attempt to effectively return them to the conditions of slavery. They were sensitive to condescension from white guests, and fought with their employers over their duties in “an arena of subtle black-white confrontation in which the specter of past struggles came to life in a new guise.”⁸⁰ Unable to impose the kind of racial discipline that American tourists were used to at home, visitor numbers remained low. Within a few years the U.S. companies abandoned both hotels. They fell back into government ownership, angering Jamaicans who saw public money wasted on loss-making private ventures that prostrated the island before the United States while providing little commercial benefit.⁸¹

Much as Flagler had done in the Bahamas, the United Fruit Company took a more radical approach on the north of the island when it built its own hotel, the Titchfield, in Port Antonio: it imported U.S. service staff wholesale. Although the building resembled a “look-alike Victorian stately home”, in operations it was more comprehensively Americanized than either the Myrtle Bank or Constant Spring: “owned by Americans, run by Americans, and staffed (from chef to waitresses) by Americans – in sum, it was totally symbolic of the new economic imperialism ushered into the Caribbean by Americans,” Taylor writes.⁸² Tourists now had the choice between notionally “British” hotels in which fantasies of racial dominance knocked up against the resistance of local people to their assigned roles, and an “American” style enclave hotel that excluded Jamaicans altogether.⁸³ Indeed, it seems the Titchfield was as solicitous at keeping local residents off the property as from staff rosters.⁸⁴

Benefiting from United Fruit’s integrated advertising and transport networks, the Titchfield soon found itself as full of white Americans as the Constant Spring and Myrtle Bank were short of

⁷⁹ “The Elder Dempster Hotels,” *Jamaica Gleaner*, 29 November 1904.

⁸⁰ Taylor, *To Hell with Paradise*, 89.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁸² Patullo, *Last Resorts*; Taylor, *To Hell with Paradise*, 87.

⁸³ “Constant Spring Hotel at Kingston to Be Closed,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 March 1911.

⁸⁴ Such exclusionary practices generated disquiet when the Titchfield Company sought to acquire public land to build another hotel in Kingston in 1906. “Proposal for Large Hotel,” *Jamaica Gleaner*, 16 August 1906; “The Hotel Proposal,” *Jamaica Gleaner*, 22 August 1906.

them.⁸⁵ In 1901, the British government sought to imitate United Fruit's success by persuading the British shipping firm of Elder, Dempster & Co. to open a new line from the British Isles to Jamaica, and lease the Myrtle Beach and Constant Spring. The hope was that streams of packaged British tourism would match the American flood.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the effort failed to stimulate transatlantic holidaymaking, simply too distant for most British tourists, while U.S. guests continued to opt for the Titchfield.

TOURISM IN JAMAICA AND THE 1907 EARTHQUAKE

The growing distance between British and U.S. travellers in the West Indies in the new century should not be overstated: narratives from both sides of the Atlantic up to the First World War continued to be dominated by expressions of mutual affinity. Muted American criticisms never came close to acquiring the emphatic tone directed against the Spanish or many of the independent states of the region. Nevertheless, the tension between British political control and U.S. economic ascendancy could still occasionally fuel conflict, as witnessed during the earthquake that hit Kingston, Jamaica, in early 1907 and killed approximately a thousand people.

The earthquake struck on Monday 14 January and wrought massive destruction. Buildings collapsed and fires broke out. Thousands of people were made homeless. Many fled the city for safety; others were forced to search through the rubble to survive. The water supply was threatened, and fears grew that hunger and disease would spread. Kingston was soon dominated by the stench of rotting corpses and witnesses reported nightmarish visions of bodies being unceremoniously burned and buried.

The disaster exposed the limits of British imperial state capacity on the island. The Governor, Sir Alexander Swettenham, was overwhelmed, not helped by considerable loss of life among the soldiers of the British West Indian regiment. Following a naval reorganization in 1905, the nearest British vessel able to offer assistance was over a thousand miles away in Barbados. However, the United States was able to quickly dispatch a torpedo boat and two battleships under the command of Rear Admiral Charles H. Davis from Guantánamo Bay,

⁸⁵ "Meeting of Legislative Council," *Jamaica Gleaner*, 12 April 1899.

⁸⁶ "Jamaica's Opportunities," *Jamaica Gleaner*, 22 October 1902.

arriving at Kingston early on 17 January. Davis landed a contingent of U.S. marines that set about pulling down unstable walls and buildings, distributing food and relief supplies, and guarding the asylum and jail. The U.S. press proudly reported that the “streets of this city are now picketed with American guards.”⁸⁷ A steamer with food relief was dispatched from Santiago by the International Brotherhood League, previously engaged in relief work in Cuba, and Americans at home began soliciting aid donations.⁸⁸

These humanitarian efforts unfolded in the shadow of the U.S. war with Spain and Roosevelt’s Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, in which the President had asserted the United States’ right to intervene unilaterally in Caribbean territories unable to manage their own affairs. The earthquake thus put the British in the humiliating role of failed state, implying that the baton of white rule in the Caribbean had been handed over to the United States. An editorial in the *Baltimore Sun* noted that although it was strange to see U.S. troops patrolling a British city, “Uncle Sam is getting into the habit of doing police duty in the West Indies, and in landing marines at Kingston he is merely keeping his hand in. Besides, there are some statesmen, not visionaries, who believe that ‘manifest destiny’ will one day find us in possession, through the methods of peace and purchase, of all the islands in the West Indies.”⁸⁹

Governor Swettenham, a Tory and an old-hand colonial administrator, was undoubtedly aware that humanitarian rhetoric preceded the occupation of Cuba. He was certainly suspicious of U.S. motives. On the day after Admiral Davis’ arrival, animated by some combination of exhaustion, strategic anxiety, and wounded national pride, he ordered Admiral Davis to re-embark his troops, using strikingly ill-chosen language:

I may remind your Excellency that not long ago it was discovered that thieves had lodged in and pillaged the town house of a New York Millionaire during his absence for the summer; but this fact would not have justified a British Admiral in landing an armed party to assist the New York Police.

Although Davis acceded to the demand, Swettenham’s un-diplomatic diplomatic letter was released to the press. The revelation that the

⁸⁷ “U.S. Marines Landed,” *Hartford Courant*, 19 January 1907.

⁸⁸ W. Ralph Hall Caine, *The Cruise of the Port Kingston* (London: Collier, 1908), 244–245; “Boston Relief Committee,” *Boston Globe*, 18 January 1907.

⁸⁹ “American Marines Police Kingston,” *Baltimore Sun*, 20 January 1907.

Governor had demanded the U.S. withdraw during an emergency caused outrage in Jamaica and the United States, and considerable embarrassment in Britain. Reporting that U.S. bluejackets had been driven from Kingston “while engaged in succouring stricken people,” the *Atlanta Constitution* declared that a “mercy mission” had been “frozen by British frigidity.”⁹⁰

Both governments were eager to put the controversy to one side. Telegrams fluttered back and forth, the British issued an apology, and Swettenham was eventually forced to resign. This successful crisis management effort no doubt explains why the incident has received little coverage from historians. However, in the context of the ongoing shift of power within the British colonies, the event takes on larger significance, not least since a closer examination makes clear that British and U.S. travellers in Jamaica played a different role to metropolitan actors, extending the conflict beyond the wishes of either government.

The earthquake took place at height of the tourist season, and there were hundreds of U.S. citizens on the island. The United Fruit Company was able to reassure Americans that its steamers were at sea when the quake hit and that the Titchfield Hotel was unaffected. Nevertheless, the Constant Spring was badly damaged and the Myrtle Beach was almost completely destroyed, to the loss of many lives, mostly among the staff.

British officials claimed the situation was in hand. However, panic set in as soon as reports of the disaster arrived in the U.S. Local newspapers started listing the names of missing citizens. Journalists contacted travel agencies for estimates of the total number of Americans on the island. Inflated initial reports suggested there could be as many as 2,000, many of whom might be dead.⁹¹

From the outset, this newspaper coverage was steeped in the white supremacist thinking that had characterized Anglo-American discourse on the Caribbean for decades, framing the crisis as a threat to the racial order rather than simply a humanitarian disaster. British and American newspapers began reporting shared lists of Anglo-Americans killed, a tiny fraction of the total number dead—the *Chicago Tribune* described theirs explicitly as a “white death list.”⁹² As evacuating

⁹⁰ “American Bluejackets Driven from Kingston While Engaged in Succouring Stricken People,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 January 1907.

⁹¹ “Jamaica Full of American Tourists,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1907; “Many Americans Killed in Kingston,” *Boston Globe*, 18 January 1907.

⁹² “Kingston’s Dead May Reach 1,000,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 January 1907.

tourists were met by reporters at home, their accounts reinforced this racialized view of the crisis, presenting Black Jamaicans in demeaning terms. As Matthew J. Smith has shown, the catastrophe drew upon the resources of Jamaicans widely and its aftermath saw many extraordinary moments of generosity, spirituality and mutual solidarity.⁹³ U.S. tourists, however, offered a completely different account, claiming that while the white population of Jamaica “rendered splendid assistance”, Black Jamaicans turned to looting and violence. They suggested in contradictory terms that Jamaicans of color were “paralyzed with fear” yet simultaneously “possessed by a sort of religious mania.”⁹⁴ Evacuees told horror stories “of drunken negroes fighting in the streets for plunder taken from the dead; of ghouls who slashed and stabbed each other for the possession of rings that had been hacked from the fingers of women who had been killed, and of negroes walking in the ruins searching for liquor.”⁹⁵

Similar attitudes were detected among Britons. A large party of several hundred British dignitaries—including MPs, aristocrats and businesspeople—was visiting at the time, brought over on the steamer *Port Kingston* by Sir Alfred Jones, a major shareholder in Elder Dempster (and by extension the Myrtle Beach and Constant Spring), as part of the ongoing effort to reinvigorate British commercial ties with the island. W. Ralph Hall Caine, a British writer and one of the dignitaries, recalled that “the days following the earthquake were full of dread anxiety, that the sense of grave apprehension was widespread among the white population, and that some display of the white man’s strength and resource was eagerly sought and expected.”⁹⁶ For this reason, he and many of the other delegates initially received the news that U.S. marines had landed with relief and joy.

These early accounts placed the disaster within the language of the global color line that had done so much to cement Anglo-American elite cooperation. However, these racial affinities did not entirely eclipse national pride. Caine noted, for instance, that relief at the arrival of Admiral Davis’ battleship was tempered by a “grievance in the fact that the ship was not British.”⁹⁷ At the same time, U.S. tourists

⁹³ Matthew J. Smith, “A Tale of Two Tragedies: Forgetting and Remembering Kingston (1907) and Port-Au-Prince (2010),” *Karib-Nordic Journal of Caribbean Studies* 4, no. 1 (2010).

⁹⁴ “Fire and Panic,” *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1907; “Ruined City,” *Manchester Guardian*, 17 January 1907; “Many Painful Sights,” *Boston Globe*, 19 January 1907.

⁹⁵ “Tell of Work of Ghouls,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1907.

⁹⁶ Caine, *Port Kingston*, 238.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

began complaining that Britain was failing to hold up its share of the “white man’s burden”. J. W. Ponder, a lawyer who made it back to New York on an Atlantic Fruit Company vessel, alleged that the Governor had shut himself up in his mansion after the earthquake struck, permitting a wave of looting to unfold because he was struck dumb with terror.⁹⁸ John D. Avil, a publisher from Baltimore, told pressmen that he thought the Governor was an “idiot” for rejecting American aid. Everywhere, he said, “were signs of ineptitude and incompetence . . . the thing most badly needed in the whole city was a squad of American marines.”⁹⁹

These tensions came to a head over the role of the *Port Kingston* steamer. According to most accounts, until it evacuated its guests on 17 January, Sir Alfred Jones turned it over to be used as a hospital ship. When it reached capacity, the ship’s surgeon and a number of volunteers began treating casualties on the wharf. However, a group of U.S. tourists who arrived in New York on 23 January claimed that U.S. tourists sought aid aboard the ship and were refused by the captain. They added they were treated poorly by the British authorities on multiple other occasions and concluded that the “much-talked of ‘bonds of blood and language,’ when tested, [turned out] to be a mockery and a diplomatic phantom.”¹⁰⁰

Falling back on older stereotypes, the tourists complained that the British elite prioritized aristocratic loyalties over racial solidarity. Rather than being full of injured people, they alleged there was plenty of room on the *Port Kingston*. One said that as the disaster was unfolding, “Sir Alfred and his fine ladies and gentlemen wined and dined and made merry. The high-bred ladies hopped across the bloody decks regardless of the dreadful scenes about them,” complaining about the shrieks of the injured.¹⁰¹ One press cartoon, entitled “Ye knightly hospitality of Sir Alfred,” depicted injured Americans being marched down the gangplank under the stern eyes of a British officer. “Well, sir,” said the satirist Finley Peter Dunne’s fictional Irish-American, Mr. Dooley, “a hand acrost th’ sea has been extended to us again. We rayceived it under th’ ear.”¹⁰²

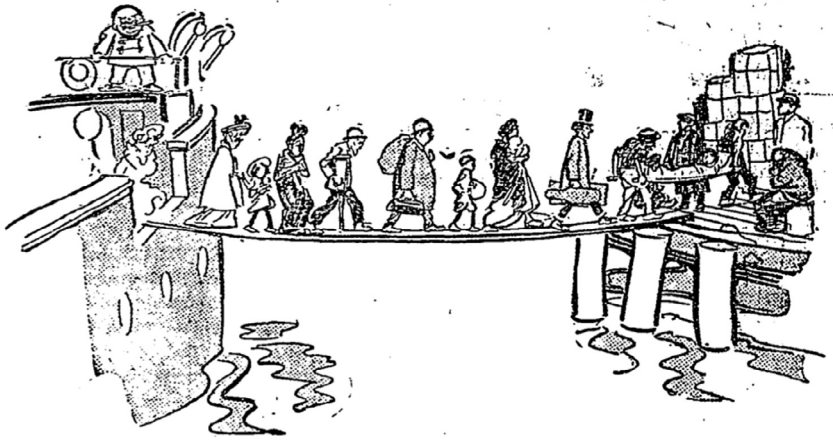
⁹⁸ “Work of Ghouls.”

⁹⁹ “No Leadership, He Says,” *Baltimore Sun*, 22 January 1907.

¹⁰⁰ “American Refugees from Kingston Tell of Rough Treatment by Britons,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 January 1907; “Refugees Driven Off Ship by Englishmen,” *Boston Globe*, 23 January 1907.

¹⁰¹ “Refugees Driven Off.”

¹⁰² “Mr. Dooley’ on Sir Aleck,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 February 1907.



Ye Knightly Hospitality of Sir Alfred.
(Copyright, 1907, by The New York Times.)

FIGURE 1. “Mr Dooley’ on Sir Aleck”, *New York Times* February 3, 1907. Public domain.

These disputes seem to have been fuelled by tensions predating the earthquake, which otherwise would have never gained wider attention. For instance, one of the U.S. complainants had attended a dinner hosted by Sir Alfred at the Constant Spring the night before the earthquake struck. A British guest, Lord Fitzmaurice, delivered a speech that expressed his sincere regret the Titchfield Hotel was in U.S. hands and, to widespread applause, urged those present to defend Jamaica for Britain.¹⁰³ It seems this evidence, that Britons had no intention of ceding their position in the Caribbean to the United States, encouraged the witness to doubt the sincerity of the Anglo-Saxon inter-imperial bond.

After the *Port Kingston* evacuated, it docked in Barbados, where Sir Alfred responded to the claims raised by the American tourists that Britain had failed in its duties. He said the allegations were “monstrous” fabrications and that the steamer had provided shelter to over 200 people, many of whom died from their wounds. A Canadian witness also disputed the accounts, saying that the question had simply been whether to prioritize Jamaican “residents who had lost their all and with no prospect for the future, or a number of panic-stricken

¹⁰³ “Refugees Driven Off.”

American tourists who had lost only their trunks, and who in a few hours' time were to leave the island for their homes".¹⁰⁴ As the *Port Kingston* sailed home across the Atlantic, London and Washington sought to tamp down the controversy, but thanks to the anger of the tourists who had been in Jamaica, the disagreements continued to fester. Arriving in Bristol in early February, the British dignitaries mounted another vigorous defense of Sir Alfred Jones and Governor Swettenham that further extended the controversy. In one particularly inflammatory statement, Hamar Greenwood, MP for York, said that Swettenham's departure meant "the might and majesty of the British Empire" had been "prostituted to an outburst of Yankee bosh." He also claimed that Swettenham's demand for the withdrawal of the marines was necessary and responsible, because of the widespread hatred felt by Black Jamaicans toward white Americans:

It must never be forgotten that the whole dark population of Jamaica abhor the Americans and the American flag, because they stand for everything that is most wretched in the history of the African race. To send on shore armed Yankee sailors was the most provocative act that could have been done to a black population which was on the edge of frenzy.¹⁰⁵

The language of racial affinity often heard in tourist circles thus fragmented as questions of nation and class came to the fore. Despite its obvious functional incapacities, Greenwood insisted that Britain's imperial knowledge meant it, not the United States, was better placed to manage the complex racial politics of a Caribbean society. The idea that British historical experience gave it a facility with colonial management that the United States lacked would become a theme in Britain's efforts in the twentieth century to present itself as Greek advisor to the United States' new Rome. In this context, however, it was a barb aimed at what were seen as the pretensions of its upstart former colony, a maneuver that sought to associate the long history of racial exploitation in the Americas with the United States rather than the supposedly "abolitionist" British.

The resolution of the Swettenham incident showed that both Washington and London ultimately preferred to persist with a system of

¹⁰⁴ "Attitude of Sir Alfred Jones," *New York Times*, 25 January 1907; "Americans Not Mistreated," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January 1907; "Deny Ill-Treatment of American Refugees," *New York Times*, 27 January 1907; "Monstrous Statement," *Boston Globe*, 1 February 1907.

¹⁰⁵ "Very Edge of Hell," *Evening Express*, 1 February 1907.

divided influence in the British West Indies. Calculations of mutual interest and geopolitics ensured the Corollary would not be applied to British possessions in the way it would elsewhere in the region. But if the incident confirmed that the British would not be displaced from the West Indies as the Spanish had been, it also marked the death knell for dreams of British-centered economic renewal and, in the long run, an acceptance of U.S. economic primacy in the region. Indeed, in the wake of the earthquake, the United Fruit Company's grip in Jamaica only tightened. The Myrtle Bank Hotel was purchased by United Fruit and rebuilt. After it was destroyed by a fire in 1910, the company also renovated the Titchfield, but in 1912 the Constant Spring, unloved, was shuttered for good.¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

Although the diplomatic crisis in 1907 provided grist for Britons who wished to use Anglo-American tensions as an impetus to strengthen British imperial sentiment at home, the rashness of the governor's letter and the fact that the crown government refused charitable assistance in a crisis meant that anger over U.S. high-handedness did not endure. The intellectual and cultural connections built between British and U.S. elites in the Caribbean clearly did more to paint the two powers as partners in a shared project of racial management than it did to divide them. Over the coming decades, the British West Indies would continue to follow a distinctive path to those territories in the Caribbean that had to endure U.S. occupations, customs receiverships, and protectorates.¹⁰⁷

Tracing the divergent attitudes and occasional disputes between Britons and Americans in the Caribbean may therefore seem like unpicking the narcissism of small differences. Nevertheless, subtle differences of opinion, especially over the cultural politics of race, could on occasions point to a muted rivalry over which nation was best placed to take the lead within the shared Anglo-Saxon mission. Britain's self-regarding imperial history had been adopted by U.S. citizens over previous decades, but not to justify a revived empire in the Caribbean,

¹⁰⁶ James W. Martin, "The United Fruit Company's Tourist Business and the Creation of the 'Golden Caribbean', 1899–1940," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 8, no. 2 (2016): 245.

¹⁰⁷ Jason C. Parker, *Brother's Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1937–1962* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

as many Britons assumed. When the British government sought to prioritize the needs of Jamaican imperial subjects during the earthquake of 1907, older republican feelings re-emerged among U.S. tourists. British colonial administrators became aristocrats putting class ahead of race. Britons responded to these criticisms by presenting themselves as the true experts in colonialism. Although these divergences never reached the point of threatening the great rapprochement or permitting military conflict, they do reveal the ways in which a shared language of racial mission contained within it distinctive calculations of national self-interest on either side of the Atlantic and a degree of leadership rivalry. Indeed, this dynamic would be repeated on many occasions in the twentieth century elsewhere in the world, ensuring that the prickly affection generated by Anglo-American encounters deserve the description given to it by David Reynolds, of “competitive cooperation”.¹⁰⁸

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¹⁰⁸ David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937–1941: A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).