

From vividly colored underwater photographs of Australia's Great Barrier Reef to life-size dioramas re-creating coral reefs and the bounty of life they sustained, the work of early twentieth-century explorers and photographers fed the public's fascination with reefs. In the 1920s John Ernest Williamson in the Bahamas and Frank Hurley in Australia produced mass-circulated and often highly staged photographs and films that cast corals as industrious, colonizing creatures, and the undersea as a virgin, unexplored, and fantastical territory. In *Coral Empire* Ann Elias traces the visual and social history of Williamson and Hurley and how their modern media spectacles yoked the tropics and coral reefs to colonialism, racism, and the human domination of nature. Using the labor and knowledge of indigenous peoples while exoticizing and racializing them as inferior Others, Williamson and Hurley sustained colonial fantasies about people of color and the environment as endless resources to be plundered. As Elias demonstrates, their reckless treatment of the sea prefigured attitudes that caused the environmental crises that the oceans and reefs now face.

"Ann Elias's *Coral Empire* is as intoxicating as a plunge into a reef lagoon: a refreshingly original and compelling analysis of how the underwater coral realm has evolved from a planetary space of fathomless mysteries and alien terrors to become a complex technology-driven spectacle that feeds the rampant imaginations, pleasures, vices, and curiosities of modern humans."—**IAIN McCALMAN**, author of *The Reef: A Passionate History: The Great Barrier Reef from Captain Cook to Climate Change*

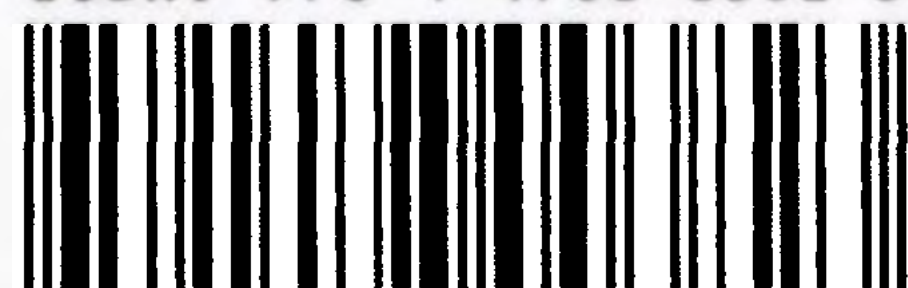
"*Coral Empire* is a brilliantly researched, aesthetically nuanced study of early photographic and film imagery representing coral reefs, one of the most gorgeous areas of the undersea, which is the least explored dimension of the blue humanities. Focusing on how coral came to be captured and exhibited in visual media of the twentieth century, and expanding to coral's transformed presence in museological displays, Ann Elias shows the power of imagery and exhibition to create our imagination and relation to the inaccessible undersea. In the process, *Coral Empire* tracks changing human interactions with the environment of the coral reef that became a tourist destination in the early twentieth century and that is at the forefront of exhibiting the devastating impact of climate change today."—**MARGARET COHEN**, author of *The Novel and the Sea*

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.dukeupress.edu

Cover art: Frank Hurley, "A harmonious group of soft and stony corals seen through the transparent water," ca. 1950. From Frank Hurley, *Australia: A Camera Study* (1955), 94.

ISBN: 978-1-4780-0382-3



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