

Kerstein

## Key West on the Edge

Inventing the Conch Republic

How the unique island city came to be a major tourist destination Key West lies at the southernmost point of the continental United States, ninety miles from Cuba, at Mile Marker 0 on famed U.S. Highway 1. Famous for six-toed cats in the Hemingway House, Sloppy Joe's and Captain Tony's, Jimmy Buffett songs, body paint parade "costumes," and a brief secession from the Union after which the Conch Republic asked for \$1 billion in foreign aid, Key West also lies at the metaphorical edge of our sensibilities. How this unlikely city came to be a tourist mecca is the subject of Robert Kerstein's intrepid new history. Sited on an island only four miles long and two miles wide, Key West has been fishing village, salvage yard, U.S. Navy base, cigar factory, hippie haven, gay enclave, cruise ship port-of-call, and more. Duval Street, which stretches the length of one of the most unusual cities in America, is today lined with brand-name shops that can be found in any major shopping mall in America. Leaving no stone unturned, Kerstein reveals how Key West has changed dramatically over the years while holding on to the uniqueness that continues to attract tourists and new residents to the island.

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