

How to Tell If You're a Palmey

By ekesleight

A format borrowed from Mark Rosenfelder's ["How to Tell If You're American"](#) page.

This "culture test" describes the culture of an alternate-history Florida which took over the real-world roles of Sierra Leone and Liberia as a destination for the repatriation of freed slaves starting in the 18th century. This former British Dominion, called the Union of Palmera, won Home Rule status alongside Canada's emergence into Responsible Government in the mid-19th century, and has since evolved into the sole Black-majority nation in the developed world.

The snapshot of middle-class Palmey life we get here is from the early 1980s, specifically the year 1983. Palmera is an urbanized country with a total population of just about 9.3 million.

If you're Palmey...

- You're likely to live in a city: either in a small house, a townhouse or an apartment. You don't have a dirt floor. If your family has been resident for more than a decade or two, you probably own it.
- You have a refrigerator, a telephone, a few radios, a TV and possibly a VCR at home.
- Your place has its own bathroom, with a basin, a shower and bathtub.
- You do your laundry in a washing machine. You probably don't have a machine dryer, though: most households still line-dry their clothing, an after-effect of a government energy efficiency push back in the Sixties.
- You eat at a table, sitting on chairs, and you don't kill your own food.
- You don't consider insects, dogs, cats, monkeys or guinea pigs to be food.
- Your household probably owns one or two small motor-scooters for commuting purposes. It's just as common to use some combination of bicycle and public transport.
- Public transport isn't glamorous, but it's clean, efficient and reliable unless you live in some really obscure, outlying district. It uses a variety of methods depending on the city: for instance, Daltonville and Hillsborough have famous (and loud) cable car networks; Eleutheria with its canals has a system of water taxis; Helena has its futuristic El-Train.
- If you own a car, it's mostly used for emergencies, special excursions with friends or family, grocery shopping, or road trips to other towns or cities. It's probably a Patterson, Palmera's national automobile brand going back to the early century. If you're extra-prosperous, it might be an American or European import. Real high-rollers might favor a Cadillac, a Benz, a Rolls-Royce, or one of a few Patterson luxury models.
- You drive on the right side of the road. You stop at red lights, even in the unlikely event that nobody's around.
- You're accustomed to having access to public parks or green spaces close to home. Cookouts are practically a national institution. Everyone has their own special recipes.

- You can make use of public beaches on vacation and you can rent a boat or (as of the last decade) a few jet-skis at pretty reasonable prices. Boating excursions into the Caribbean are almost as common a pastime as taking a road trip.
- Central heating is rare, but home air conditioning is becoming increasingly common.

Health and Wealth

- You take unemployment insurance, a national pension and various forms of safety net programs for granted. Some of these social programs are out of date or under-resourced, but nobody really seems to have an answer for this.
- You expect your drinking water to be clean and potable, and you don't expect to die of cholera or other Third World diseases.
- You expect serious measures to be taken to save the lives of infants or the elderly if needed. Dying at 65 *should* be a tragedy.
- You count on high-quality universal healthcare. The system is something you learn about in school: it dates back to the late 1940s and emphasizes localized preventative care.
- If you're a natural-born citizen, you were probably born at home with the aid of a midwife. If your mother's pregnancy was mid- to high-risk, you were born in a hospital with the aid of a midwife and the supervision of a doctor.
- You seriously expect to conduct private business, to interact with government agencies, to pay bills and access services, without paying bribes.
- Power and telephone systems are publicly run. They're pretty reliable outside of the not-infrequent intervention of hurricanes. Getting a new phone is routine.
- Progressive taxation is a norm that only crazy fringe libertarians rail against. An income tax rate upward of 50 percent is reasonable if you're rich enough to pay it. Most aren't.
- You don't expect unemployment and inflation to be high at the same time. The nation did experience an inflationary crisis just about three decades ago, which still looms over the political landscape today.
- You get thirty days of paid vacation every year and have a five-day working week. It's not uncommon to work overtime to get some extra money.
- If you're a working adult, there are better than four chances in five that you're in a trade union. There have been big nationwide strikes in recent memory.
- Women have been solidly established in the workforce for over seven decades, and equal pay legislation was passed in 1974.
- Your union can't dictate your politics, but it *can* endorse specific candidates and has a big effect on that kind of conversation in the workplace.

The National Nurrey

- The biggest meal of the day is in the evening: dinner, supper, or sometimes *manjeh*.
- McDonald's and other fast-food chains "from foreign" are cheap food. They'll do in a pinch, but local chain equivalents mostly do it better.
- You can find a wide variety of cultural cuisines in walking distance. Aside from restaurants, mobile food carts and trucks are commonplace.
- You're accustomed to a wide variety of choices for just about anything you buy.

- Co-op grocers are pretty common and similar to American supermarkets, combining the functions of a butcher, a bakery, a fish market, a farmer's market for produce and spices, and a pharmacy.
- It's just as common to get all these things from separate, specialized shops in your neighborhood, though. Fresh ingredients from around the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico are readily available.
- Milk comes in glass bottles (regulations won't let stores sell it in plastic bags or cardboard, for safety reasons). Shaving cream comes in small jars comparable to those used for shoe-polish. Mustard and mayonnaise come in jars of glass or plastic.
- Home cooking is a big deal; even bachelors pride themselves to some extent on being able to cook at least a couple of favorite dishes.
- Palmera has a distinctive national cuisine that combines influences from American "soul food," almost every kind of Caribbean cuisine, Middle Eastern and Indian food – including vegan and kosher dishes – and a few other sources besides. Fish, seafood and chicken play a prominent role, and breakfast is typically hot cereal or grits.
- You associate poverty with living on the cheapest products on the shelves: "instant," pre-processed and pickled foods.
- You probably have specific and strong opinions about how certain dishes should be done. If someone's food doesn't measure up, you won't talk about it to their faces or send the meal back in a restaurant, but you'll definitely vent about it to others.
- You're likely not a farmer, but you probably at least know someone who knows a farmer. Or a fisherman. There are still plenty of people in the country who make a living at agriculture. In the Chatta vernacular of the nation, they're *kampa-yeh*.

Sport and Spectacle

- "Football" means Association Football, a.k.a. soccer: the true national religion. If you're male and have been in-country for any length of time, you can argue intricate points about the rules and you have definite opinions about the lineup of the national team.
- The historic World Cup run that landed Palmera in the Top 4 for the first and thus-far last time in 1938 — dismissed by the rest of the world as a fluke — is the kind of world history even history-averse people get excited about. To this day there is still no shortage of books, documentaries and retrospectives about it.
- Other popular sports include baseball, rugby, basketball, horse racing, American football, professional wrestling, and cricket. There are at least a few famous Palmeys competing in all of them both locally and abroad. You know how at least two or three are played.
- Aquatic sports are a big deal, too, especially swimming, sailing, rowing, and increasingly, competitive kayaking. Beach volleyball has gained in popularity in the last decade.
- Television consists of seven broadcast channels run by a cluster of public broadcasting networks and three or four commercial ones. Cable TV is highly-regulated and very limited, but everyone expects that to change soon: there's just too much demand.
- Within this framework, you get to see a lot of rebroadcasts of American and British television content. You're familiar with major media figures and hit shows from both the US and the UK, and with localizations of some shows from each..

- The public networks produce a large number of local Palmey shows, a lot of which are noticeably lower-budget but some of which are fairly high-quality and popular. There's a host of television and media stars in this local milieu that are household names.
- Movies are a similar mixture of foreign and locally-produced content. The Palmey releases appear in local theaters alongside their bigger-budget counterparts (which requires special subsidies, but most people aren't aware of that).
- Movie rentals are becoming popular despite (mostly failed) attempts by movie studios to block the practice through lawsuits. There's a thriving underground market for bootlegs of content from all over the world.
- Subtitling is far preferable to dubbing when it comes to cinema.

Culture and Sophistication

- Poets and novelists, philosophers, artists, journalists and distinguished ex-statesmen are commonly seen among the ranks of Palmey celebrity figures. Even if their various projects aren't your thing, there's at least a few names you'll recognize.
- Former cops, private detectives and Secret Service hands – symbols of protection for the nation against terrorism, subversion and crime – also have an unusual celebrity profile. They turn up on the talk show circuit with regularity.
- You know that once upon a time, working with the civilian branch of the Secret Service was a surprisingly common occupation in Palmera, but you're less likely to know that this is still the case today.
- Opera, orchestra, ballet and live theater (including musical theater) are “bougey” entertainments, an occasion for a fancy night out, but they're not priced out of range. You can take the family to dinner and a quality show without breaking the bank.
- The music scene in Palmera is dynamic and forms one of the nation's major cultural exports.
- The most enduringly popular genre is “roots” music — which combines country, folk, reggae, soul, and the Palmey version of reggae known as “boka” — but rock, punk rock, heavy metal, rhythm and blues, gospel and jazz, funk and “disco” are all big business.
- A new kind of music from New York, called hip hop, made its way here in the mid-to-late 70s and by now has been blowing up the airwaves and rocking the nightclubs for years.
- Comics are popular with all ages. They contain everything from horror tales to cowboy heroes, superheroes to soap operas, and detective stories to historical epics.
- Partly, this is because mid-century attempts to censor the comics market in Palmera had limited success: mostly seen in the extent to which racist caricatures are forbidden (a government regulation aimed at anti-Semitic, anti-Asian and anti-Native caricatures).
- Long tales or comic collections are published in “graphic albums.”

A Country with a Mission

- You live in a country with a specific mission in the world, or rather a group of missions. It's the Land of Freedom, which is also the Black Zion and the Rainbow Nation. All three monikers are a source of pride.

- Although Palmera has been largely at peace for decades and is overall reasonably successful and prosperous, there is still a pervasive sense of being an underdog country to which much of the world is hostile. Even supposed allies, sometimes.
- Conspiracy theories about plots against the nation aren't uncommon and mostly, they're absurd... except the one or two that ring true to you..
- Yours is a *free* country above all. Freedom isn't some abstract concept, especially if you're *whyrah-kiyeh* (a person of African heritage who has come to Palmera to seek succor from racism elsewhere). It's not just about freedom to do certain things but also freedom *from* certain things. If you know, you know.
- Freedom of expression, travel and assembly are cornerstone values. If you attended secondary school in the Union, you were taught (at length) specifically why.
- For most people, there's no contradiction between this and the fact that you're also expected to put in Mandatory National Service (which may mean military service) either at the age of eighteen or a few years after immigrating.
- Whether you're a newcomer or a generations-deep *laruna* (natural-born citizen), politics matters. People from all walks of life run for public office or get involved through activist organizations, fraternal societies or their local church: sometimes all three.
- There's a left, center and a right in politics, but everything's relative: in a lot of ways, Palmera's "right" would hardly be recognizable as such in other countries.
- The far left used to be a *really* far left of the kind that hoped to abolish capitalism entirely, and for a while the local Communist party was a real force in politics, but that vision has lost much of its steam.
- There are two major political parties and a host of minor ones, and there's an even chance that you're a card-carrying member of one or more.

Except for All the Others

- Multiparty Parliamentary democracy is a system that isn't perfect, but it's generally better than what's available elsewhere. Palmera's specific version is the best, obviously.
- Voting is mandatory. Inconvenient but ultimately to the good. Your kind of people probably aren't listened to enough in Eleutheria, but your vote is your voice.
- You think most problems can be solved by good-faith dialogue and with enough collective will.
- That's problems among *Palmeys*, though: problems with outside parties (including both enemies and "frienemies") are a lot less tractable and may need to be solved with equal parts bravado, stubbornness, guile and pragmatism.
- The military – the various branches of the National Militia Service – is important, even if most of what it does these days is disaster relief. Military men and women are admired and often have an edge in elections once they get into civilian life.
- That said, you expect the military to do... whatever it does when it's not making war, and not get involved in politics.
- The latest wave of feminism simultaneously champions gay rights (at least in *theory*), the rights of sex workers, anti-imperialism, and the place of women in the combat ranks of the military. That package as a whole is something of an enigma to predecessors, but if you're under 30, it all makes sense.

- Palmera is allied with the United States, but the relationship is thorny: no small chunk of the populace in any generation are direct refugees from American racism in some form.
- Outside of Palmera's partners in the Alliance of Caribbean States, its closest foreign ally is Israel. Most Palmeys think of the two countries as having comparable senses of mission and a close historical link going back to the Second World War.
- Palmera has fairly close relations with Britain and the other Commonwealth countries. There are some Palmeys who still make a big deal about the British monarchy, though this is an older-generation thing for the most part.

Race, Language & The “N-Word”

- You'd be impressed by someone who speaks French, German, Spanish, or Japanese. You likely don't speak them yourself.
- Palmera's home-grown language is a patois called *Chatta*, grammatically similar to Jamaican patwah with an extensive vocabulary borrowed from other creole languages.
- For a long time, people were reluctant to admit it was a language at all (it was dismissed for decades as a “mongrel street slang”) but by now it's undeniable that Chatta has done too much to shape Palmeys English and the nation's identity to be ignored.
- Still, most people think schools should teach standard English. Chatta is still the language of the streets (and for the lower ranks in the National Service who don't want to be understood by “lifer” higher-ups). It's important to people who aspire to street cred.
- It's even more important in Calusa — the parishes south of the Masterman Line — where it was born and still has a stratum of primary and monolingual speakers.
- The “Black Zion” mission of Palmera was originally about providing a home for ex-slave freemen or deported slaves, but expanded to being a refuge for and ally to the global Black population (though numerically, much of the country originates in the States and especially in the “Marches,” the Southern States).
- Despite Palmera's lowland geography, the term for Black people immigrating is *making whyrah* (from the Garifuna *awaira*, meaning “to climb”), a direct reference to the old tradition of *aliyah* in Zionism that later became an officially recognized practice in Israel.
- Relieved of outside pressures, Palmeys think of their country as multi-ethnic, a “Rainbow Nation.” Insofar as race comes into it, you'll tend to think of race in Chatta terms: roughly “blaney” or “white,” “bassey” or “black,” and “lanney” meaning some mixture of the two. None of these terms are derogatory unless you *really* work at it.
- Class or ethnic terms are often more common. “Hacktey” refers to descendants of the old white British Loyalists, mostly affluent. “Gitchey” and “Landey” refer to the black and white working-class, “Maron” refers to the “brown” working class (often meaning Latino), and “Asiatic” generally refers to South Asians (also sometimes called “Cooleys”). Some of these may be derogatory depending on the context and the delivery.
- New American *whyrah-kiyeh* often use the “n-word” with a degree of abandon that shocks *larunas*, or even other *whyrah-kiyeh* who've been around for a couple of years. It's considered low-class and ignorant: it doesn't draw outrage so much as memorably pitying looks and silences that serve as a powerful disincentive.
- Blaney tourists who try to get away with the same thing can, on the other hand, expect pretty severe hostility and pushback. From *them*, it's very much still a fighting word.

Sutcheys and Other Awkward Realities

- “Sutchey” is definitely derogatory, but... dammit all, there just isn’t another word. It refers to a small population of poor whites descended from people who tried to overthrow Palmera and join the American Republic back in the 19th century.
- You will usually have learned the history of the Sutcheys in vague outline as a footnote: mainly that their revolt failed and eventually its perpetrators were stripped of lands and property and have never recovered.
- It’s a damned shame their descendants are still impoverished generations later, but they also *still* have a known fondness for Confederate flags and white nationalist politics. So it’s hard to sympathize.
- Blaney foreigners are *really* obsessed with the Sutcheys, which given the group’s small numbers is pretty annoying. Palmera’s far bigger problems with prejudice stem from colorism, anti-Asiatic sentiment, and anti-Semitism. (Not that you have much patience with outsider perspectives on those issues, either.)
- Admittedly, Palmeys do also have a serious “fighting word” slur for Sutcheys *or* anyone deemed to be acting like one. It’s *peck*, abbreviated from “peckerwood,” and like the “n-word” is guaranteed to kick off some serious shit if said with sufficient venom. It’s the kind of slur that simply needs no translation.
- You’re not *supposed* to care what family someone comes from. And that’s *mostly* true. Although inter-*class* marriage is a lot less common than “mixed” marriage, it’s crass behavior to call attention to it.
- By the same token, it’s usually obvious that someone darker-skinned marrying someone lighter-skinned is “marrying up,” but nobody talks much about it.
- You expect marriages to be arranged for love, not brokered by third parties. Obviously, men only get one wife.

Contributions to World Civilization

- Your country has never been conquered by a foreign nation, despite a few early attempts. More notably, it has (at least ostensibly) never been conquered from *within* by its White minority, which was arguably the far more serious threat.
- In secondary school, you learn about Palmeran history, Caribbean and African history, and various overviews of British, American, and European history.
- The curriculum devotes specific short units to the Aztecs, the Ancient Egyptians, the First and Second World Wars, and the founding of Israel. You don’t learn much about Asia, Latin America, Canada or Oceania.
- Pretty much everyone who goes through this education knows that Palmera is the foremost hero country in the story of slavery’s abolition and the advancement of true racial equality. (Britain, fine country though they are, mostly went along in the hopes that the Union would remain under the control of a White minority.)
- Palmera’s history firmly disproves the claims of racism in a spectacular way. The White-ruled world angrily resented this for a long time. Every Palmey school child learns about the First Border War and the death of the marauding American freebooter Andrew Jackson in much the same way that every American school child studies Paul Revere..

- World War II was a just and necessary war against evil, in which Palmera played a key role in multiple theaters, especially against the Italians. The Secret Service still partners today with Israel's Mossad in hunting down escaped Vultists from the war years.
- For some decades, Palmera was home to exiled royals from the African continent and even for a time to the Romanovs of Russia. There's a certain glamor associated with this period, and some of these figures or (more often) their descendants went on to become major political figures both in Palmera and abroad. Today, this niche is inhabited by a galaxy of exiled Haitian politicians and African activists.
- One of the nation's physicists, Daniel Mallick (a Bene Israel Jew), was part of the Hudson Project that produced the first A-Bomb. He's as famous a person as the country ever produced: caricatures of him are instantly recognizable to anyone from Palmera in much the same way as is globally true of Albert Einstein.
- School is free from the primary to the undergraduate post-secondary levels (the latter of which is three years long).
- Mandatory National Service intervenes after high-school for native-born citizens. You can wind up doing everything from working in national parks and tourism to serving in the military. The service pays into a trust for university tuition or trades apprenticeships. Where possible, some people do their degrees by correspondence while serving.
- Tuition is subsidized for post-grad degrees if you have the right grades. Otherwise you need to invest your own money.
- If you want to be a doctor, you need both a bachelor's and a master's degree first.

Crime & Punishment

- Major scandals about police corruption rocked law enforcement in the last couple of decades and sparked reform efforts. It's not yet clear how well these have worked.
- Since the early Seventies, cops are expected to have a college education. They are armed, but not with submachine guns.
- The job of prisons is to reform inmates, not to punish them. As of the last fifteen years, it's illegal to run prisons or jails of any kind for private profit.
- You take a strong court system for granted, even if you don't use it. If you go into business and have trouble with another party, or if you have a dispute with an employer, you can take them to court – although most such disputes get settled out of court.
- It doesn't matter much if a politician cheats on their spouse (except, of course, to the spouse).
- It *does* matter if they commit actual crimes, whether they're "white collar" crimes or not. No matter their party, a politician who crosses that line ought to be forced to resign and should not be immune from jail time. Efforts to make this stick are a work in progress.
- Organized crime is a big problem: especially drug traffickers, whose tendrils extend from Mexico and South America across the Caribbean and into America. A new problem is the football hooligan firms – a multi-generational scourge on the national sport – who are now themselves becoming an arm of organized crime.
- There are definitely parts of your town or city you avoid at night. Everybody says that crime these days is worse than it was twenty years ago, but on the other hand, you can remember your elders saying the same thing.

- Guns are only legal for the purpose of sport hunting. Only specific types are legal, even their sale and use is regulated, and you need a license to purchase and use one.
- The branch of national service called the Coast & Border Guard pursues gun and drug smuggling as closely linked endeavors.

Wheeling and Dealing

- Any hotel room worth paying for has a private bathroom.
- Estates are normally divided up among the remaining descendants once a couple is deceased.
- It ought to be easier to find a lawyer. On the other hand, it's probably a good thing that the court system is aggressively hostile to anything it perceives as "frivolous" litigation.
- Let there be absolutely no bullshit about "island time" or "African time." The Palmey rule is generally that if you have any kind of official or commercial appointment: "if you're early, you're on time; if you're on time, you're late; if you're late, you're fired."
- For social appointments, you'll mutter an excuse if you're ten minutes late. Come fifteen minutes, though, you're *definitely* saying something. (Beyond that, just don't show up. Contrive an excuse that involves the death of a friend or family member.)
- If you're talking to someone you don't know, you should expect them to approach close, at least for initial greetings. People who are too punctilious about "personal space" usually come across as untrustworthy or aloof.
- "We should get together" or "we should have [lunch/dinner]" is not really an invitation to get together. It's just polite. If someone really wants to hang out with you, they'll say something more like "you really need to come round." A subtle but important difference.
- Do *not* show up at someone's place uninvited unless you're family. Just don't. It's rude.
- Business appointments should take about an hour, unless there's something major under negotiation. If that's the case, be prepared to press the flesh for a couple of hours at least. It should be an occasion.
- Negotiations should be vigorous and frank. Of course, there should be an interlude of getting to know each other and sharing drinks or food before getting down to brass tacks. Once you're there, though, all bets are off.

Letting Your Hair Down, and Up, and Around

- Hair is political. Palmeys — especially the Basseys and Lanneys — have looked down on hair-straightening from time out of mind. It's the mark of Palmey pride to sport your natural hair.
- Sometimes this has meant short, sober haircuts for men and braids and head-wraps for women. It has been particularly so in wartime, and in the halls of the establishment and professions like doctoring or lawyering, this is still the norm.
- That's not what it needs to mean, though. Punk subculture among the youth is aggressively pan-Africanist and sports all manner of second-hand takes on African hairstyles, paired with bright dyes and piercings and paired with leather and studs.
- Elaborate fades and cornrows, long dreads, extra-complex braids with decorations, and almighty Afros are all currently in fashion, too. Albeit mostly for the young.

- If a woman is plumper than the norm, it *may* improve her looks... provided she's plump in just the right places. Not to say there's anything wrong with an hourglass figure or a fashionable skinny frame.
- If you're a woman, you don't typically go to the beach topless. In the old days, it would imply you're a prostitute. These days, it still mostly does: you can only get away with it if you're wealthy and fashion-forward, with plenty of counterculture cachet.
- Comedy is irreverent, and the best comics work crude and blue for maximum shock value to the nation's abundant supply of churchy types.
- Impolitic ethnic humor is a popular guilty pleasure. The most common targets are the Sutcheys, who provide extra mileage given how worried the world professes to be about their status and abundant opportunities to exploit awkward Palmey not-quite-guilt.

Holidays and Holy Days

- You probably believe in God to at least some degree.
- Usually this is some type of Christianity: most often Baptist, Methodist, or Catholic.
- That said, it's generally best to engage all this in an ecumenical spirit. The specific church you go to is less important than what you stand for in practice, and everyone from atheists to agnostics to a wide variety of religious minorities has something to contribute.
- Christmas is in the winter. Of course it's a secular holiday when you get together with family, give presents and put up a tree – even non-Christians get in on it – but there are always a few churches clamoring to put the “Christ” back in “Christmas” and so on. Nobody pays much attention, even their co-religionists.
- Some people also celebrate the quaint but well-intentioned holiday of Kwanzaa (a recent American import).
- The general culture makes a nod to Hanukkah, celebrated in fine style by a long-standing Bene Israel Jewish minority that dates back to the late-19th century, alongside the large numbers of European Jews who arrived during the War.
- Carnival is a big deal, imported from territories and by immigrants from across the Caribbean. It provides multiple street parties a year from Crucian to Mardi Gras to the homegrown Palmey tradition of Pascoe at Easter.
- Palmera doesn't have the biggest of Irish populations, but celebrates St. Patrick's Day in March into the bargain. Why not? No reason to miss out on green beer and round-the-clock happy hour. Palmeys pretty much just celebrate it Carnival-style.
- Labor Day is International Workers Day, the first of May or “May Day.”
- It's one of the truly sacred days of the civic holiday calendar, along with Gustavus Vassa Day in April (commemorating the landfall of the first Black Loyalists at Calusa in South Palmera), Nation Day in June (celebrating the advent of Home Rule), and Armistice Day in October (a relic of the First World War).
- Saving the somber reverence of the last one, these affairs are all about family and friends get-togethers, fireworks, sporting spectacles, and cookouts galore.