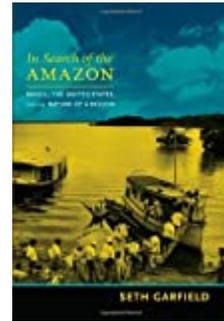




Seth Garfield. *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region.* American Encounters/Global Interactions Series. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. 369 pp. \$94.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-5571-7; \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-5585-4.



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Commissioned by Donna Sinclair (Central Michigan University)

Not Your Typical War, Political, or Environmental History

Seth Garfield's *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region* is an extensively documented text that not only presents the history and politics of the rubber trade between the United States and Brazil but also directs the reader's attention to the importance of the Amazon for the history of the region, as well as the nation. The book is an intriguing combination of political, economic, natural, and social history. With a thirty-page bibliography, seventy-four pages of notes, and extensive photographic evidence, it is an accessible piece for the novice and the scholar.

Garfield begins by drawing the reader's attention to the enormity of his task, both geographically and historically. He identifies the unique position in which the Amazon sits with regard to historiography. It is inside Brazil but outside of the "grand narratives of empire and the nation-state," and at times placed within the realm of frontier literature (p. 4). The magnitude and diversity of the Amazon region, in ecology and culture, prompts Garfield to use a multilevel analytical approach, borrowing from several disciplines to explore local, regional, and

national factors.

The task is not as daunting and unwieldy as it first seems, since Garfield focuses on the impact of US-Brazil relations specifically dealing with the rubber trade during World War II. Garfield begins with Gertulio Vargas, in 1930, and ends with eco-activists, grassroots movements, and international environmental concerns in the 1990s. Additionally, he intertwines important historical factors that predate Vargas when their inclusion furnishes necessary background information. This approach not only provides the historical context but also serves to link the importance of the book to present-day politics and economic ventures. In addition, it avoids unnecessary jaunts into other realms of US or Brazilian history as he anchors all information through its relationship to the Amazon region.

For Garfield, the rubber trade was much more than a capitalist venture between private interests and national governments. He poignantly addresses the social stratification, economic disparities, and racial problems that co-

existed in the region. He illuminates ecological problems and describes their impact on boom and bust economic cycles in the region, while tying it all to development and progress throughout the basin—which was defined by the rubber trade.

At times, Garfield slips into the traditional narrative of how the United States needed rubber to meet wartime needs, but he only does so as a setting for the importance of Amazonian resources. He positions the United States as being dependent on the crop due to the loss of Asian resources, but does not neglect to include evidence of US policy that gave primary access of rubber imports to private industry prior to World War II. These policies compounded the dependency of the United States on Brazil, propelling the region into one of critical importance to the United States during the war.

Wartime saw the United States promoting increased exploitation and propagation of rubber trees. Bilateral agreements between the United States and Brazil favored methods of increasing the labor population as well as the crop. This introduced health-care workers into the equation, along with engineers, doctors, and a slew of other professionals aligned with these US-driven goals. Garfield rightly draws attention to the environmental and sociocultural impacts this has had on the region. He dedicates an entire chapter to “binational wartime efforts at remaking Amazonian workers and their relationship to the natural environment” (p. 87).

Garfield provides the setting for dramatic change in the Amazon by carefully making connections between economic action and environmental impact throughout the text. For example, when discussing the ramifications of government-sponsored migration of laborers from Ceara to the Amazon, he includes data on droughts and expanding trade within the region. Sociocultural factors are also connected as Garfield describes the changes brought on by importing single men into the region, who ultimately stayed in Amazonia. The overall result of these connections was dramatic change at the societal, economic, and environmental levels.

The geographical area in which these changes occurred was rife with problems. The author explains how a combination of external and internal factors led to a series of struggles, still present today. Power, representation, and natural resource access are currently critical issues that began with the expansion of the rubber industry and became entrenched during the World War II era. The history of these struggles, Garfield argues, cannot be understood solely through dependency theory, as internal factors affected the region as much as US rubber needs. Private interests competing with Brazilian governmental interests, coupled with conflicts between tappers and migrants, contributed to the situation. In all cases, the Amazon and its resources served as the foundation of the difficulties within the region.

The clarity of the text is a tribute to Garfield’s dedication and research. Only one area might allow for confusion and that resides in the epilogue. He uses the epilogue to show links between the problems created during World War II and current issues. The connection is valid; for example, he does demonstrate the transition from tapper to “green guerrilla” (p. 213). Yet it becomes disjointed when he expands the discussion into green movements and international actors. For readers who are familiar with modern environmental Brazilian history, the connections are clear and easily understood. Readers who are not as knowledgeable about the topic might concur with me that Garfield has set up a second book in his epilogue—one that would benefit greatly from the care he gives to aligning connections across economic, environmental, and social networks throughout the text.

Garfield provides a relevant and well-researched work on the importance of the Amazon, for both Brazil and the United States. Most impressive is his ability to integrate multiple disciplines to delineate the degree in which the Amazon affected the political economic relations and the impact of these relations on environmental and sociocultural aspects of the region. For anyone interested in the Amazon, Brazil, the United States, World War II, or political economy, this book is worth the read.

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