

Seth Garfield (2013) In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 368 pp. (ISBN 978-0-8223-5585-4). Paperback US\$27.95. (ISBN 978-0-8223-5571-7). Cloth US\$99.95.

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Seth Garfield's *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region* provides a compelling and thoroughly researched account of the political and environmental history of the Brazilian Amazon during World War II. The book is a contribution to the region's environmental history and a welcome addition to Brazilian political and social history, as it explores issues of regional development, national-scale internal migrations, labor, and commodity-driven economies. Moreover, being part of Duke University Press' series *American Encounters/Global Interactions*, edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Emily S. Rosenberg, the book provides new insight into Brazil-U.S. relations by examining the ways negotiators on both sides of the relationship delineated and disputed the nature of the Amazon for their own national ends during World War II.

Understanding region as a place experienced and constructed by different actors in a complex interaction of material and symbolic aspects, *In Search of the Amazon* analyzes shifting cultural representations of the Amazon region and its nature, observing local, regional, national, and global actors. Discussing the views of rubber companies, high-ranking government and military officials, rising professional classes, rubber bosses and rubber tappers, the author depicts a complex network of interests related to the Amazon region. Besides serving as a material commodity, rubber serves a crucial social function by connecting the uneven actors of the network in a commodity processing chain that begins with tappers deep in the rainforest in a semi-capitalistic setting, and ends as an essential component in war equipment and the most modern artifacts materializing modernity.

The first chapter, "Border and Progress: The Amazon and the Estado Novo," explores the convergence of political and social aspects that led to increased state intervention in the Amazon during Vargas' Estado Novo. Amazonian development in

this era was driven by national economic and geopolitical goals, and it was shaped by a growing professional class. The government promoted subsidized migration, agricultural research, the rationalization of the rubber market, improvements in the transportation and public health infrastructure. The analysis of the role of different groups in Brazil is key to this chapter. Garfield shows that the military's geopolitical concerns provided a justification for the state-led transformation of the Amazon. Public health physicians played a fundamental role in advocating for the improvement of sanitation and eradication of malaria. Engineers, agronomists, botanists, biologists, and geographers composed the new professional classes that mobilized the knowledge necessary for deepening the state's roots in the Amazon. Garfield discusses briefly the modernist movement in the arts and the government's use of radio and newsreels to promote the Amazon as a "national question," a region that should be of concern to all Brazilians, shaping the nation as much as the nation sought to shape the region.

The second chapter, "'The Quicksands of Untrustworthy Supply': U.S. Rubber Dependency and the Lure of the Amazon", discusses the history of the U.S. interest in the Amazon region and reflects on the centrality of rubber in American society. Revisiting aspects of the Amazon rubber boom of the 1850s-1910s, and the later shift to Southeast Asia as the primary supplier of rubber to the United States, Garfield argues that by the mid-1930s concerns about overdependence on Asian supply worried American companies and the military. However, early efforts of diversifying rubber sources had failed, and Japan's growing threat and eventual control of the rubber producing zones prompted the United States government to invest in the Amazon. Under the Washington Accords of March 1942, Brazilian and American agencies sought to coordinate the efforts to increase the Amazon's rubber output.

Chapters three and four, "Rubber's 'Soldier': Reinventing the Amazonian Worker" and "The Environment of Northeastern Migration to the Amazon: Landscapes, Labor, and Love", explore aspects of the history of rubber tappers' labor and the social experiences of the workers themselves in the wartime Amazonian environment. Both American and Brazilian officials recognized that the primary challenge of increasing rubber output was the regulation of labor. The nature of rubber tapping, fundamentally determined by the nature of rubber trees themselves, scattered in the rainforest, challenged efforts of standardization and promotion of work discipline. To increase productivity, and following the regime's new labor laws, the Brazilian government sought to transform labor relations between rubber bosses and tappers by creating a

standardized contract to be followed by both parts, and establishing price controls over the supplies necessary for the tappers.

Nationally, public campaigns symbolically transformed a once ignored class of workers into “rubber’s soldiers,” as essential to national security as the military itself. Seeking to attract more workers, official propaganda depicted the Amazon as new promised land. However, it did not simply mislead migrants into a green hell. Northeastern migrants composed the bulk of the newly arrived workforce, and a complex set of social and environmental issues explains their migration to the Amazon. Droughts in Ceará, combined with the Northeasterners’ difficult access to land tenure, previous migration experiences and interregional networks of kinship, and the perspective of real social upward mobility in the Amazon contributed to the migration. Garfield questions the narrative that portrays rubber’s soldiers as sheer victims of the Vargas dictatorship and American imperialist designs. Rather, he emphasizes workers’ agency and their calculated strategies of survival and life improvement, still while restrained by social and environmental structures. The author’s discussion of labor reveals the breadth of his research as he was able to locate in local archives the histories of individual workers and landowners.

Chapter five, “War in the Amazon: Struggles over Resources and Images”, ties together the previous chapters, synthesizing the interconnected struggles over resources, representations, and power in the Amazon through the perspectives of different brokers. U.S. mediators maintained their pragmatic focus on obtaining rubber throughout the war. However, the Amazon’s rubber output did not increase to the expected levels quickly enough, and by 1944 U.S. interest in the region had waned, and many of the planned infrastructure projects never came to fruition. Rubber bosses saw the Amazon as a major source of revenue, and many did not respect the new standard contracts with tappers. By the end of the war, rubber bosses fought to maintain government subsidies for rubber production. Tappers and migrants experienced the Amazon as a complex space, dictated by the availability or scarcity of rubber trees, food, supplies, medical care, merchants and urban markets. Their negotiations and conflicts with rubber bosses, as well as their search for alternative paths in public works and insertion in urban labor markets were critical to their experiences and the making of the Amazon. At this point, Garfield questions the idea that the Estado Novo regime did not enforce the standard labor contract because the federal state maintained its alliance with local oligarchies. According to Garfield’s findings, the state also generally did not

enforce the law against workers who broke their contracts, which suggests, in this case, the limits of state power rather than its straightforward association with local landowners and rubber bosses. Finally, for the Brazilian government, the Amazon was not just a rubber extraction space; it was a region to be colonized and developed through the migration of families who could settle and develop the region. On occasions, this conflicted with the U.S.'s push for bringing single male laborers to the Amazon. Reestablishing the connection between the histories of the region and the nation, Garfield argues that the history of wartime mobilization in the Amazon highlighted to Brazilian policymakers the importance of state-led regional planning and development, which would have lasting impacts on the nation's history in the following decades.

In the Epilogue, the author examines the rise of international and transnational environmentalism and its impact on the social meanings of the Amazon from the late 1970s to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In an interesting and somewhat unforeseeable manner, rubber tappers have been playing an important role in environmental protection and maintenance of legal extractivist reserves since the 1980s.

The book's focus on rubber is justifiable since the commodity has played a fundamental role in the development of the region's history. However, readers looking for a broader analysis of the Brazilian Amazon's history should be aware that the book focuses more on rubber and its transnational networks. Moreover, it is worth noticing one aspect that could have added relevant reflections to the discussion. According to Garfield, infrastructure is a central aspect of the transnational network that engulfed the Amazon during wartime, yet the information about that infrastructure is scattered throughout the book, without a systematic assessment of the issue. While Garfield thoroughly discusses the social and cultural aspects of the Amazonian networks, one is left to wonder about the material aspects and the politics of infrastructure. This, however, is not detrimental to the book's arguments. Seth Garfield delivers a well-researched and insightful book on relevant aspects of the history of Brazil, the Brazilian Amazon, and Brazil-U.S. relations.