

Book Reviews

Richard P. Tucker. 2000. *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World*. Calif.: University of California Press.

Reviewed by Paul F. Steinberg
Johns Hopkins University

Historical analysis is an indispensable tool in the study of politics. When building theories, it allows us to evaluate the explanatory power of our carefully-delineated models in light of their broader (*ceteris non paribus*) social context. From a methodological standpoint, historical analysis is receiving renewed attention in efforts to devise rigorous qualitative methods for establishing cause and effect. For these reasons the emerging field of environmental history merits close study and emulation by researchers in international environmental politics and policy (IEP). In addition to offering worthy examples of how to conduct historical research, environmental history directly engages many of the central concerns of IEP, from the environmental consequences of globalism, to the nature of transnational scientific communities, the impact of environmental institutions, and the origins of environmental concern.¹ Particularly for IEP, in which prehistory is generally construed as anything predating the 1972 Stockholm conference, the rich perspective offered by the rapidly expanding environmental history literature is a timely development that should be enthusiastically embraced.

Richard Tucker's book *Insatiable Appetite* is a well-written and thoroughly researched contribution to this literature. Providing a sweeping historical account of the impact of American capitalism on tropical ecosystems, this book fills a crucial gap in a field that has thus far been dominated by studies of European colonialism. The historical documentation alone represents a significant accomplishment. Because American imperial power has only rarely assumed the form of outright colonial administration, there is no equivalent to the meticulous records kept by European colonial powers. Tucker fills this gap by drawing on a wide range of alternative primary sources, including company newsletters, trade journals, and personal diaries, and combines this with a broad command of the historical literature on particular places, crops, and companies.

1. See, for example, William Cronon. 1993. The Uses of Environmental History. *Environmental History Review* Fall: 1–22; Alfred W. Crosby. 1993. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; J. McCracken. 1982. Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi. *African Affairs* 81: 101–16; and Richard H. Grove. 1990. The Origins of Environmentalism. *Nature* 345 (6370): 11–15.

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The book is organized according to the major categories of commodities developed by American capitalists abroad, with chapters devoted to sugar, bananas, coffee, rubber, cattle, and timber. Tucker provides the reader with a fascinating and erudite tour from the rubber plantations of Liberia to export crop production in Jamaica, Cuba, the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, Hawaii, and elsewhere. Across all regions we see a similar pattern of biological transformation, with uniform commercial agriculture replacing comparatively diverse biotic systems (either natural areas or multicrop production systems). The pattern of political economy is generally that of well-endowed merchants and bankers creating or commandeering markets for tropical products, frequently by dubious means (such as land speculation or collusion with local elites) and with the help of political and military intervention by the United States government. Absent a more complete ecological record, the reader is often left to imagine the precise effects of the documented land transformations on ecosystem components such as water quality and species diversity. But this book serves as excellent background reading for those who wish to conduct more detailed evaluations of the historical transformation of particular landscapes.

There is one significant weak point in this otherwise exemplary work: The findings revealed by Tucker's painstaking research do not support his central thesis that America's "insatiable appetite" has been a significant cause of ecological degradation in the tropics. On the contrary, in case after case we learn that American consumption patterns and commercial activities have been only one influence—and frequently a minor one at that—in a conglomeration of trends in production and trade for geographically dispersed markets. There are some notable exceptions, such as the unequivocal role of US banana consumption in transforming the Central American forests and the impact of American sugar consumption on Hawaii and the Caribbean. Much more typical of the cases presented in this book, however, is that of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, where American commercial interests were latecomers playing a minor role in markets dominated by Europe and China. If we think in terms of nested subsets of causal factors driving the transformation of tropical landscapes—from human economic activity writ large, to capitalism, to multinational corporations, to American multinationals, to the role of American consumption in driving these multinationals' activities—and array these from left to right on a page, the evidence presented in the book provides progressively less convincing evidence for causal agency as we move from left to right.

Teasing out the American contribution to the effects of expanding commercial agriculture on tropical ecology is a daunting task, and I cannot imagine anyone tackling it with more finesse and intellectual honesty than Tucker. Indeed it is only because the author has carefully and explicitly situated American activities in the broader current of historical influences that we are able to critically evaluate his central claim. In specific instances, Tucker is careful to point out where the American influence is only one of many. He does not, however, take the next step and consider the cumulative implications of these findings for his central argument. There is a broader lesson here. Just as IEP stands to benefit

from historiography, the practice of environmental history can be strengthened by resorting to the more systematic testing of causal claims that is the bread and butter of positivist social science. Although historians frequently do just that, in practice the systematic evaluation of causal claims is to history what historical analysis is to political science: optional.

While the theoretical propositions could be further developed, *Insatiable Appetite* represents a significant advance in our understanding of the political economy of the global environment. It offers valuable insights for graduate or advanced undergraduate courses in sustainable development, trade and the environment, political ecology, and environmental history. The book can be assigned in whole or in part, as the individual chapters stand alone quite well. It also provides instructive background reading for those with applied interests in tropical agroecology and conservation biology.

Phoebe N. Okowa. 2000. *State Responsibility for Transboundary Air Pollution in International Law*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Reviewed by Daniel C. Turack
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There currently exists substantial regulation of air pollution problems covered in treaty regimes, however, general international law does not provide a specific regime that deals with transboundary air pollution. In this work, Dr. Okowa examines the extent to which general principles of international law are effectively applied to transboundary air pollution, that is, her focus is on the reservoir of norms, concepts and principles that comprise customary international law to see how far their application encompasses transboundary air pollution. Gaps that require the development of new normative principles receive particular attention. Hence, emerging principles and standards, required by the international community, receive in-depth scrutiny, especially those that impose on states specific duties of a procedural character, such as environmental impact assessment, exchange of information, notification, and consultation.

The scope of the study is confined to air pollution emanating from a state's territory, and does not include areas beyond national jurisdiction unless incidentally relevant to the main issues under consideration. Neither are effects of pollution on global climate and depletion of the ozone within the scope of this study. Three principal sources of pollutants are in focus: firstly, pollution from industrial activities, such as particular acid deposition from sulphur and nitrogen emissions; secondly, atmospheric nuclear testing, although not a major concern in the last decade, did spawn legal issues from those tests that still persist; and thirdly, accidental radioactive contamination from the civil uses of nuclear energy, as in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The legal issues flowing from contamination of the aerial environment as a result of underground nuclear testing are also addressed by the author.