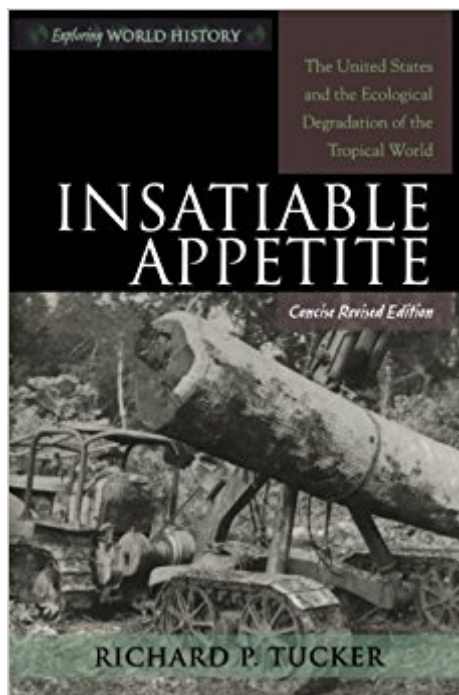




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Insatiable Appetite: The United States And The Ecological Degradation Of The Tropical World (Exploring World History)



Synopsis

Now in a concise edition created expressly for students and general readers, this widely hailed study traces the transformation of the tropics in modern times. Exploring the central role of the United States in the ongoing devastation of tropical lands, Richard P. Tucker shows how, in the late 1800s, American speculators first became participants in the centuries-long history of European economic and ecological hegemony in the tropics. Beginning as buyers in the tropical ports of the Atlantic and Pacific, they evolved into land speculators, controlling and managing the areas where tropical crops were grown for carefully fostered consumer markets at home. As corporate agro-industry emerged, the speculators took direct control of the ecological destinies of many tropical lands. Supported by the U.S. government's diplomatic and military protection, they built private empires in the Caribbean, Central and South America, the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and West Africa. Yankee investors and plantation managers mobilized engineers, agronomists, and loggers to undertake what they called the "Conquest of the Tropics," claiming to bring civilization to benighted peoples and cultivation to unproductive nature. In competitive cooperation with local landed and political elites, they not only cleared natural forests but also displaced multicrop tribal and peasant lands with monocrop export plantations rooted in private property regimes. In a masterful narrative, Tucker highlights the unrelenting pressure that the demands of U.S. consumerism placed on fragile tropical lands. The forced domestication of widely varied natural systems ultimately led to a devastating decline in biodiversity. The author brings his analysis to life with a series of vivid case studies of sugar, bananas, coffee, rubber, beef, and timber—each a virtual empire in itself. All readers who are interested in environmental degradation and its links to the world economy will be enlightened by this nuanced history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This insightful work condenses and updates the original 2000 edition. Tucker explores the ecological destruction of tropical environments by US capitalists and corporations. . . . The author largely attributes tropical degradation to the insatiable appetite of the American consumer. Recommended. (CHOICE) Richard Tucker has drawn on a lifetime of scholarship to produce a critical account of the ways American companies and consumers have contributed to the environmental degradation of tropical countries. Anyone interested in the American impact on the third world will benefit from the insights and information in this wide-ranging and remarkable study. The abridged paperback will find a place in a variety of classes, bringing this important story to a broader audience. (David S. Painter, Georgetown University) This investigation creates space for big history, using consumption to bring economy and environment together. (Anthony Amato, Southwest Minnesota State University)

"This is a fascinating book. Tucker draws together an amazing amount of material to demonstrate how the U.S., through exploitation, consumption, and demand over the past several centuries, has had a major impact on the ecology of tropical landscapes. It is a sobering, much-needed wake-up call to those who view the tropics as an endless cornucopia of resources." --Charles M. Peters, The New York Botanical Garden "This well-written book presents a critical and much-needed new insight into an important problem." --Otto T. Solbrig, Bussey Professor of Biology, Harvard University

I purchased this book for a graduate class. It supported what I learned in the class very well. Tucker has a way with words though he can be long winded. He is clear on his biases which I find appealing in a historic writer. It does make you think about how our society came to this state and the toll we are still extracting from it. If you don't mind how slow it can be to read at times this is a must read for those interested in environmental history.

I think that this book should be required reading for all American and most British students. Know the facts about where certain goods originated in their consumption patterns and expand in your own

thinking through this college text.

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