

SETH GARFIELD: *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States and the Nature of a Region*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

As the Roosevelt administration (1933-44) geared up for what FDR understood to be an inevitable U.S. engagement in the European conflict, Washington policymakers faced a major challenge in dealing with South America's largest nation. Would Brazil remain neutral or become a wartime ally? Throughout the mid-1930s, President Getúlio Vargas (1930-45, 1951-54) had remained ambiguous about his intentions vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. Sectors in the Brazilian armed forces supported the fascist regimes that had risen to power in Europe. Government officials, relying on the comparative trade advantages of both countries' economies, favored exchanging Brazilian coffee for German armaments. In doing so, Brazil's military believed it could shore up its national defenses against Argentina, its regional archrival, and Germany could import a luxury item without depleting its hard currency. Moreover, sympathizers of the Third Reich had influence in German immigrant colonies located in the south, and the Brazilian-born Integralists movement, while distinct from European fascists, had a significant following throughout the country.

After Vargas decreed the *Estado Novo* (New State) in November 1937, the closing of the Congress and the outlawing of all political parties made it hard to imagine that authoritarian Brazil might ever become an ally of the United States and join the broad front against European fascism. Even as members of the Roosevelt administration courted Vargas, promising infrastructural support to develop a national steel industry in exchange for the use of Brazilian soil for U.S. naval and air force operations, Vargas remained elusive. Only after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the sinking of Brazilian ships by the German U-boats did Vargas finally end the country's neutrality. Not only did Brazil promise to send troops to fight in the European front, but Vargas also agreed to assist the United States in mobilizing Brazilian workers to extract Amazonian rubber as part of a larger effort to supply the Allies' desperate need of strategic raw materials.

Garfield brilliantly brings to life this complex relationship between the United States and Brazil during the mobilization to extract Amazonian rubber for the Allied cause in a meticulously researched and beautifully written account of a highpoint in the cooperation between the two countries. His book combines the careful examination of this unique transnational mid-twentieth-century effort with a consideration of the larger frameworks of state and nation building and the multifaceted reconfiguring of regional and national identities in Brazil under the Vargas regime. *In Search of the Amazon* offers a sophisticated analysis of the process of labor mobilization and resource extraction that is carefully balanced

with a thorough study of the uncertainties and promises of Brazil's attempts at establishing a partnership with the United States.

Latex extraction from the region ended up playing a secondary role in the drive to produce significantly more rubber for the Allies' cause. U.S. wartime planners, politicians, businessmen, and scientists pushed for increased production of synthetic substitutes produced in the United States, and Brazilian exports never reached the lofty goals set by government bureaucrats. Nonetheless, just as during the late nineteenth-century rubber boom that lasted from 1879 to 1912, tens of thousands of Brazilians, largely from the Northeast, migrated to the region, transforming its economy and regional self-identity.

Garfield tackles international myths and long-held stereotypes about the lush, mysterious, and allegedly dangerous Amazon rainforest, where the rubber tappers extracted their prized product. U.S. technicians tried to rationalize extraction, and experts attempted to address the serious health conditions endemic to the Amazonian "Green Hell." They largely failed. Yet the scientific collaborations tied the two countries closer together even as their common production goals faltered.

In Search of the Amazon also looks at traditional national narratives that portray the super-exploitation of laborers and supposedly nefarious government plans to populate the region with Northeasterners who had become lethargic and passive as a result of droughts and poverty in their homeland. While the Vargas administration might have seen the state-sponsored transfer of tens of thousands of impoverished workers from the Northeast to the Amazon as a means of addressing endemic poverty while at the same time populating the region with an army of industrious workers, Garfield convincingly reveals how most of those who left for the Amazon did so willingly and consciously, with specific plans for economic and social advancement. Many failed to achieve their goals, but their decision to migrate was not simply a top-down government imposed program that manipulated the nation's citizens into flaccid compliance.

Dedicated Brazilian government officials also attempted to implement newly enacted labor laws and work standards, which while only partially carried out, represented a decided effort to improve the rubber tappers' working conditions. With limited financial resources and a state bureaucracy inadequate to the task, the Vargas administration, nevertheless, showed a concern for these workers that in part explains a lasting popular appeal among the poor and traditionally dispossessed toward this controversial political figure.

Garfield also shows how the Vargas administration managed to leverage economic and technical assistance from the Roosevelt administration that aligned with strategic development goals laid out under the *Estado Novo*. Many of the programs administered during World War II had been on the agenda of

Brazilian policymakers since the 1930s, but it was only through the additional resources channeled to the country as part of the war effort that they managed to carry them out.

Moreover, as the book convincingly points out, the North-South debates about the use and misuse of the Amazon did not originate in the 1970s when an environmental consciousness swept through the industrial countries. Instead, it was rooted in experiences and concerns about the appropriate exploitation, utilization, and preservation of the region that were debated by multiple interests several decades before the demand to save the Amazonian rainforest became a popular issue in the United States, Europe, and Brazil.

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JUDITH LAIKIN ELKIN: *The Jews of Latin America*. 3rd ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014.

When Elkin's important survey of Jewish society in Latin America was first published in 1980 (based on her 1976 doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan), it established the field of Latin American Jewish Studies. Elkin served as founding president of the Latin American Jewish Studies Association, which is now a major organization in the field, with a rich array of researchers in the humanities and social sciences devoted to examining the significant extent of Jewish life in Latin America. Her scholarly protocols helped to systematically profile Latin American Jewish life. Elkin's work went beyond the mostly anecdotal evidence (albeit sometimes quite considerable, especially in the case of Argentina) to ground the subject in acceptable academic terms. Toward this end, Elkin was mostly conservative in her assessment of populations and influence, thereby effectively countervailing the sometimes overly enthusiastic appreciations of the Jewish presence and its influence and permanence. Corresponding to a period of considerable threat to some of these communities, notably with the authoritarian and neofascist governments in the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly Argentina, Elkin's work also reflected the disintegration of Jewish society in Latin America under the effects of repression and persecution. Not altogether uncontroversially, there are those who speak of the Argentine Holocaust at the hands of the 1976-83 neofascist tyranny; the political and then economic diaspora that occurred during the dictatorship (if not the return to Israel, then the flight to the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere in Latin America)