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Atlas Ambiental de Puerto Rico (review)

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Tania del Mar López Marrero and Nancy Villanueva Colón.
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At first look, the *Atlas Ambiental de Puerto Rico* appears to be a book of factoids reiterating data from a variety of existing sources under the guise of an environmental Atlas. However, closer scrutiny of the book reveals a timely and well constructed volume on the current and fragile state of Puerto Rico's natural environment. The book is divided into three parts: a brief introduction, eleven chapters (forming the body of the work) and a concluding section consisting of five case studies. The book totals 160 pages (including a four-page index) numbering approximately 10 pages per chapter. The case studies are brief and are about four to five pages each. Readers will find this book interesting and a useful reference.

In the introduction the authors offer a brief overview of systems theory and the implications of human action on the natural environment. This introduction is clear and concise; however, I found the conceptual background wanting for more detailed discussion of the Systems Ecology framework the authors employ and rely on throughout the book. In this chapter, the authors set the stage for the rest of the volume by focusing on Puerto Rico within a broader pan-Caribbean framework in which they emphasize population.

The first two chapters characterize the physical geography and social demography of the island. These chapters are central for contextualizing the rest of the volume, and in particular Chapter 2, by showing how the island has grown over the past two decades. In Chapter 3 the implications of population and physical environment become apparent through a presentation regarding the natural hazards that the island is susceptible to. However, the discussion portion in Chapter 3 is limited and it is not until the first case study that we see the effects of natural hazards on human populations.

In chapters 4 through 7 the authors begin to introduce the reader to the impact of human activities on Puerto Rico's natural environment. In Chapter 4 these activities deal with energy consumption, in Chapter 5 land use, and in Chapter 6 agriculture. The discussion portion of these chapters is more detailed than the previous three as the authors begin to

build the systemic connections between human activities and the natural environment. These chapters are strategically positioned within the book to show the cause and effect of human activities on the island—the later being the topic of the proceeding four chapters.

In Chapter 7 the ramification of human impacts on the landscape fully emerges through an examination of trash and waste disposal. Although not readily discernable at first, this is one of the most important chapters of the book. The authors do well in underscoring the notion that the consumables used by the islands populations have to end up somewhere and that on an island space is limited. Regardless, the proceeding three chapters (8, 9 and 10) are no less important and informative. These chapters deal with human impacts on air (Chapter 8), water quality (Chapter 9) and coastal environments (Chapter 10). The text in these chapters is succinct offering brief introductions to the data that maintains a systemic perspective in examination of the resource data. The final chapter, Chapter 11, focuses on conservation and provides information related to resources that are currently protected. This is also an important Chapter because it underscores the problems set forth previously which are the determining factors of geographical space and the increasing risks posed by continuing population expansion.

Following Chapter 11 are five case studies. In general these are extremely brief and I would have liked to see longer or more extensive discussions in these sections. For instance, the first case study (mentioned previously in this review) deals with the effects of tectonic activity (i.e. earthquakes) on the human environment. While an important aspect in the discussion of natural hazards for the island, I found the lack of attention paid to hurricanes or landslides, which are more frequent and destructive phenomenon, to be an oversight.

Nonetheless, these case studies are useful in tying the volume together. The second case discusses the implications of development on the periphery of El Yunque which speaks to larger issues of zoning and urban planning. This was followed by a discussion of illegal dumping which is a large problem on the island and relates very well back to Chapter 7. The fourth case study dealt with river habitats and the effects of human activates on river wildlife habitats. The final case study discusses the social implications of environmental activism on the island. This brings the volume to its logical conclusion by showing how important communities are in the process of preserving the island resources.

What really makes this book are its visual aids. This volume is well illustrated with over 100 maps displaying recent (most data between 2000 and 2004) and relevant data for each chapter. As the data are presented in such a visual manner, this book has the potential to reach a wide audience of multidisciplinary researchers and lay people alike. Importantly,

the volume is a catalyst; it forces us to consider human impacts on the island's environment and what needs to be done to preserve it for the future. While particularly focusing on Puerto Rico, this book punctuates the growing relevance of these issues for the rest of the Caribbean. López Marrero and Villanueva Colón should be commended for their efforts. The maps and raw data in this book offer a wealth of compiled data that will serve researchers as an important reference for the future.

Teo A. Babún and Víctor Andrés Triay. 2005. *The Cuban Revolution: Years of Promise*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida. 117 pp. ISBN: 0-8130-2860-4.

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As the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 draws near, new assessments of its origins, course, and legacies are clearly needed. Fortunately, while state archives and most records related to this period in Cuba remain closed to historians and citizens alike, a growing number of private institutions and individuals have begun to make previously unknown collections available to researchers. While written sources of a primary nature remain rare, the release of photographs documenting the rise to prominence of Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement in the anti-Batista struggle of the 1950s and the early years of the Revolution are increasingly common. Thus, along with Yale University's recent on-line release of thousands of digitized images taken by U.S.-based Hungarian journalist Andrew St. George, Teo Babún and Víctor Andrés Triay's publication of a small but equally fascinating set of political portraits offer a much needed visual reprise. Although most of the photographs in Babún and Triay's book focus on Fidel Castro's guerrillas in the mountains, it also includes a number of scenes from the bloody struggle of the middle-class urban underground and the early euphoric days of January 1959. However, after offering a series of photographs that depict one of the revolutionary government's many executions of Batista's intelligence and security agents on January 2, 1959, the book inexplicably skips ahead to focus on the exodus of exiles to Miami and the CIA-directed invasion force (known as Brigade 2506)