



PROJECT MUSE®

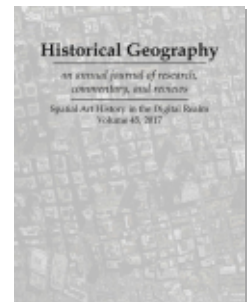
---

*In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the  
Nature of a Region* by Seth Garfield (review)

David M. Cochran Jr.

Historical Geography, Volume 45, 2017, pp. 260-261 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/716043>

As a whole, there is little fault to be found in this book. It is well researched and the arguments Gallaher presents about displacement are all well supported with her historical, ethnographic, and interview-based evidence. What I found particularly helpful and even refreshing were the ways this book personalizes the process of gentrification. We often encounter gentrification research through the lens of more dramatic forms of resistance, such as Neil Smith's work on the Tompkins Square Park riot of 1988 (Chapter 4 in A.D. King, ed. *Re-Presenting the City*, NYU Press, 1996). In contrast, Gallaher presents the more everyday contradictions of anti-displacement activism in a compelling way. For example, the explanation of buyouts on pages 138-146 presents an interesting conundrum: when a tenant takes a buyout from a developer, they are effectively displaced, but the buyout amount can also be life changing. One interviewed tenant described his buyout as enough to make a down payment on a house (p. 145). The politics and morality of actually existing gentrification never seemed so muddled.

By way of sympathetic critique, Gallaher's discussion of the role of non-profit developers in Chapter 7 felt not as well thought out as the rest of the book. However, the role of non-profits in contemporary urban governance is understudied and is ripe for new investigations. Gallaher provides some good food for thought here, though, and a potential avenue for a sequel. Finally, scholars of gentrification, displacement, and urban governance will no doubt find this book useful and insightful, especially for its excellent ethnographic methodology. I would also recommend this book for a lay audience, as its review of gentrification is concise and easy to understand for non-experts, with the book's empirics being well grounded in the theory, but with little needless jargon. Overall, *The Politics of Staying Put* is a welcome and timely contribution.

Patrick Oberle  
Syracuse University



*In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States, and the Nature of a Region.* SETH GARFIELD. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. Pp. xiii+343, maps, illustrations, tables, notes. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-8223-5585-4.

The Amazon has been regarded simultaneously as an isolated frontier, an unprotected border region, a promised land for the rural poor, and an uncharted wilderness whose biological and cultural diversity is of global significance. The Amazon has long captured the imaginations of a myriad of actors and stakeholders, not the least of whom were the Brazilian political elites, who have collaborated and competed with each other for centuries to realize their visions for the region. *In Search of the Amazon* is a well-written and meticulously researched study that focuses on the Amazon in the 1940s, a pivotal decade of political-economic and environmental change in which the region first came into focus as an integrated and integral part of modern Brazil.

Timed about halfway between the rubber boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and environmental crisis of the late twentieth century, the 1940s represent a watershed in the history of modern Brazil. The rise of Imperial Japan and its conquest of Southeast Asia left the United States cut off from critical supplies of rubber and other strategic commodities at the beginning of the Second World War. The *Good Neighbor Policy* espoused by Franklin Roosevelt promoted free trade and economic development across Latin America in an effort to shore up the alliances between the United States and its southern neighbors, and to ensure their support for the Allied cause. Getúlio Vargas, President of Brazil, realized that greater ties with the United States might further his own authoritarian goals of economic nationalism and help him transform Brazil

from a pre-industrial plantation society into a modern, industrial economy. *In Search of the Amazon* provides a detailed account of how the development of the Amazon during the Second World War was a critical component of the *Estado Novo* (New State), a nationalist project of the Vargas regime that sought to jumpstart industrialization and bring about the economic and territorial integration of Brazil.

Drawing from meticulous archival research, Garfield provides a detailed account of how the Brazilian government, backed by the United States, undertook a massive effort to expand rubber production in the Amazon. Central to this process was the national-scale mobilization of labor, which brought individuals from all over Brazil. Many came from the environmentally marginal northeast where severe drought brought agricultural collapse in the 1940s and left much of the population ready for a new life and a new home. Enticing the rural poor to the Amazon, however, was not enough to create the modern industrial work force Vargas hoped would fuel his *Estado Novo*. Despite financial and logistical assistance from the United States, the socio-environmental realities of the Amazon persistently hampered efforts to expand rubber. The humid, tropical climate of the region and the difficult work conditions associated with the rubber industry resulted in high mortality among workers. Others simply left. The unique nature of rubber production also worked against the Brazilian elite to transform the industry. Unlike other plantation-style crops, the production of rubber is a decentralized activity. Rubber tappers range over large areas of forest, enjoying a great deal of autonomy in their work. The Brazilian elite found themselves limited in their ability to force rubber tappers to increase production. Garfield astutely notes that similar tensions continue to characterize arrangements of labor and production within the Amazonian rubber economy to the present day, as is illustrated in the life and activism of Chico Mendes. Ultimately, like so many other grand development schemes undertaken in the Amazon, efforts to expand rubber during the Second World War met with limited success. Vargas was unsuccessful in creating the *Estado Novo* as he had hoped and the United States got only a limited return on its investment in Brazil. The campaign nevertheless had long-lasting impacts. Some of the migrant workers stayed in the Amazon and settled down into land-based subsistence and market activities, including rubber tapping, that have sustained them and their descendants ever since. Likewise, the political-economic processes designed to integrate the Amazon with national society brought about permanent transformation of the region and helped to further the dreams of the Brazilian state to finally take control of its vast tropical frontier to the north.

*In Search of the Amazon* is an eminently readable book and I highly recommend it. The narrative is well-researched and supplemented by almost a hundred pages of detailed endnotes and references. Additionally, Garfield has included dozens of well-reproduced photographs and propaganda posters that greatly contribute to the narrative and portray a sense of life, especially in the city of Manaus, during the 1940s. A series of well-crafted maps contribute to the overall interpretability of the book and provide readers with portraits of settlement, infrastructure, political administration, and rubber production across the Amazon. *In Search of the Amazon* is most relevant to historical geographers and political ecologists with expertise in Latin America and Brazil, but anyone interested in the Second World War will find a fascinating and largely untold chapter of the war. Likewise, *In Search of the Amazon* would make for ideal reading material in upper-level undergraduate courses and graduate seminars that focus on Latin America or political ecology.

David M. Cochran, Jr.  
*University of Southern Mississippi*