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Deforestation and Land Use in the Amazon

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Guss provides a fascinating and well-researched history of certain aspects of Venezuelan performance culture. He demonstrates with impressive knowledge the elements affecting various interpretations of the festival performances. Curiously, Guss neglects to include detailed conclusions. An end summary of his main points with explicit comparisons made between the detailed examples described in earlier chapters would have made a much more satisfying finish to what was otherwise an interesting, thought-provoking book.

David Guss' well-written book provides further support for the contention that what is defined as traditional and authentic is constantly being negotiated, ascribed, altered, and even invented by both insiders and outsiders. Interpretations of festive events are likely to be variable both within and through time as competing interests utilize such performances for their own purposes. Furthermore, the identity of the cultural consumer does not necessarily diminish the cultural meaning attached to the object or behavior (though it may alter it). Early in the book Guss issues an important challenge to anthropologists by suggesting that we need to constantly look for better ways to describe and analyze complex social processes such as the negotiated meaning of festive performance.

Deforestation and Land Use in the Amazon. Charles H. Wood and Roberto Porro, editors. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xiii + 385 pp., index. \$75.00 (cloth), \$34.95 (paper). ISBN 0-8130-2464-1, ISBN 0-8130-2465-X. [www.upf.com]

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This volume is an outgrowth of the forty-eighth annual conference of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. The goal of the conference, whose theme was "Patterns and Processes of Land Use and Forest Change in the Amazon," was to promote a constructive dialogue among specialists who interpret satellite images, researchers who focus on the processes that drive resource use decisions, and scholars and activists engaged in community mapping efforts. The volume consists of selected essays from that conference, as well as contributions specifically written for the publication.

The result is a path-breaking volume that combines sophisticated remote sensing, computer mapping, and quantitative analysis with traditional qualitative fieldwork. The fourteen contributions are organized under four headings: National Policies and Regional Patterns; Land Use Decisions and Deforestation; Fires, Pastures, and Deforestation; and Community Participation and Resource Management. Many of the studies employ color

satellite images to document Amazonian land use change, and the statistical data are summarized in forty-nine tables. The greatest contribution of the volume, then, is not the nature of the subject matter—for the study of land use change in Amazonia has long been a focus of Latin Americanist concern—but rather its methods of analysis and its treasure trove of current data.

We learn, for instance, that between 1988 and 1998, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon averaged around 15,000 square kilometers per year. Most of the deforestation has occurred in a spatial arc that extends north to south along the boundary of Pará with the neighboring states of Maranhão and Tocantins, and thence westward across southern Mato Grosso and into much of Rondônia. Surprisingly little deforestation has taken place in central and western Pará, Amapá, Roraima, Amazonas, and Acre states. While the volume confirms the long-held perception that most deforested land is eventually planted to pasture rather than to annual or perennial crops (Wood), we also learn that a strong correlation exists between deforested land use and soil fertility, with areas characterized by more fertile *terra roxa* soils being used more for the cultivation of food and fiber crops, and regions characterized by less fertile soils being used primarily for animal grazing (Moran et al.). We come to understand further that small farmers in the Amazon are diverse in their backgrounds and capacities, that they consequently respond to similar exogenous forces in different ways, and that often there is no predictable sequence of land uses along the settlement frontier (Browder). Another study (Perz) documents the increasing urbanization of Amazonia, with 67.2 percent of the population of the “Legal Amazon” residing in cities by 1996. The persistence of unequal land tenure patterns is meticulously documented in Porro’s study of land ownership in Maranhão, which in 1996 contained 262,207 properties of five hectares or less in size, totaling 322,289 hectares, and 1,681 properties of 1,000 or more hectares in size, totaling 4,565,617 hectares. The average size of the *minifundios* was 1.23 hectares and that of the *latifundios* was 2,716 hectares.

Each of the studies is generously referenced, and the excellent editing results in a consistent writing style and clarity of expression. The printing is also of high quality. While there are some high-interest topics that receive scant attention—such as the loss of biodiversity and the potential contributions of agroforestry and other forms of intercropping to sustainable land use—the volume nevertheless constitutes a welcome addition to the literature and will likely be consulted widely by scholars and policy makers.