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Book Review

Underdeveloping the Amazon: Extraction, Unequal Exchange and the Failure of the Modern State. S. G. Bunker. University of Illinois Press, 54 E. Gregory Dr., Champaign, IL 61820. 1985. 280 pp. \$24.50.

Numerous books are now appearing on the Amazon, but it is seldom that the problems of this vast tropical region are met and discussed so straightforwardly as in Bunker's treatise. Although he is a sociologist, his outlook and coverage are interdisciplinary and are indicative of extensive experience in the tropics and a mastery of the literature.

The primary thrust of the book concerns the social and ecological disruption of the region by extractive economies that have characterized the manipulation of the Amazon for 350 years and which are still in progress on an even greater scale due to a variety of ill-conceived, often mismanaged and frequently corrupt governmental programmes. He proposed a novel model based on “the use and depletion of energy values in natural resources as the key to understanding the disruptive forces at work in the Amazon basin.”

Inasmuch as great emphasis is placed throughout the book on useful plants, Bunker's arguments that extractive economies have degraded both the natural and human environments constantly touch upon economic botany. Specialists in this field will find in his treatment much of a thought-prevoking and practical nature.

The book can be recommended without reservation to economic botanists interested in the development not only of the Amazon but of most humid tropical regions in ways that will conserve the environment and the human element living and exploiting the area.

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