

8-1-2002

## Review: Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World

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### Recommended Citation

Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World, Richard P. Tucker, University of California Press, 2000. Reviewed by Paul F. Steinberg in *Global Environmental Politics*, 2002, 2(3):124-126.

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# Book Reviews

Richard P. Tucker. 2000. *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World*. Calif.: University of California Press.

Reviewed by Paul F. Steinberg  
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Historical analysis is an indispensable tool in the study of politics. When building theories, it allows us to evaluate the explanatory power of our carefully-delineated models in light of their broader (*ceteris non paribus*) social context. From a methodological standpoint, historical analysis is receiving renewed attention in efforts to devise rigorous qualitative methods for establishing cause and effect. For these reasons the emerging field of environmental history merits close study and emulation by researchers in international environmental politics and policy (IEP). In addition to offering worthy examples of how to conduct historical research, environmental history directly engages many of the central concerns of IEP, from the environmental consequences of globalism, to the nature of transnational scientific communities, the impact of environmental institutions, and the origins of environmental concern.<sup>1</sup> Particularly for IEP, in which prehistory is generally construed as anything predating the 1972 Stockholm conference, the rich perspective offered by the rapidly expanding environmental history literature is a timely development that should be enthusiastically embraced.

Richard Tucker's book *Insatiable Appetite* is a well-written and thoroughly researched contribution to this literature. Providing a sweeping historical account of the impact of American capitalism on tropical ecosystems, this book fills a crucial gap in a field that has thus far been dominated by studies of European colonialism. The historical documentation alone represents a significant accomplishment. Because American imperial power has only rarely assumed the form of outright colonial administration, there is no equivalent to the meticulous records kept by European colonial powers. Tucker fills this gap by drawing on a wide range of alternative primary sources, including company newsletters, trade journals, and personal diaries, and combines this with a broad command of the historical literature on particular places, crops, and companies.

1. See, for example, William Cronon. 1993. The Uses of Environmental History. *Environmental History Review* Fall: 1–22; Alfred W. Crosby. 1993. *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; J. McCracken. 1982. Experts and Expertise in Colonial Malawi. *African Affairs* 81: 101–16; and Richard H. Grove. 1990. The Origins of Environmentalism. *Nature* 345 (6370): 11–15.

*Global Environmental Politics* 2:3, August 2002  
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The book is organized according to the major categories of commodities developed by American capitalists abroad, with chapters devoted to sugar, bananas, coffee, rubber, cattle, and timber. Tucker provides the reader with a fascinating and erudite tour from the rubber plantations of Liberia to export crop production in Jamaica, Cuba, the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, Hawaii, and elsewhere. Across all regions we see a similar pattern of biological transformation, with uniform commercial agriculture replacing comparatively diverse biotic systems (either natural areas or multicrop production systems). The pattern of political economy is generally that of well-endowed merchants and bankers creating or commandeering markets for tropical products, frequently by dubious means (such as land speculation or collusion with local elites) and with the help of political and military intervention by the United States government. Absent a more complete ecological record, the reader is often left to imagine the precise effects of the documented land transformations on ecosystem components such as water quality and species diversity. But this book serves as excellent background reading for those who wish to conduct more detailed evaluations of the historical transformation of particular landscapes.

There is one significant weak point in this otherwise exemplary work: The findings revealed by Tucker's painstaking research do not support his central thesis that America's "insatiable appetite" has been a significant cause of ecological degradation in the tropics. On the contrary, in case after case we learn that American consumption patterns and commercial activities have been only one influence—and frequently a minor one at that—in a conglomeration of trends in production and trade for geographically dispersed markets. There are some notable exceptions, such as the unequivocal role of US banana consumption in transforming the Central American forests and the impact of American sugar consumption on Hawaii and the Caribbean. Much more typical of the cases presented in this book, however, is that of Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, where American commercial interests were latecomers playing a minor role in markets dominated by Europe and China. If we think in terms of nested subsets of causal factors driving the transformation of tropical landscapes—from human economic activity writ large, to capitalism, to multinational corporations, to American multinationals, to the role of American consumption in driving these multinationals' activities—and array these from left to right on a page, the evidence presented in the book provides progressively less convincing evidence for causal agency as we move from left to right.

Teasing out the American contribution to the effects of expanding commercial agriculture on tropical ecology is a daunting task, and I cannot imagine anyone tackling it with more finesse and intellectual honesty than Tucker. Indeed it is only because the author has carefully and explicitly situated American activities in the broader current of historical influences that we are able to critically evaluate his central claim. In specific instances, Tucker is careful to point out where the American influence is only one of many. He does not, however, take the next step and consider the cumulative implications of these findings for his central argument. There is a broader lesson here. Just as IEP stands to benefit

from historiography, the practice of environmental history can be strengthened by resorting to the more systematic testing of causal claims that is the bread and butter of positivist social science. Although historians frequently do just that, in practice the systematic evaluation of causal claims is to history what historical analysis is to political science: optional.

While the theoretical propositions could be further developed, *Insatiable Appetite* represents a significant advance in our understanding of the political economy of the global environment. It offers valuable insights for graduate or advanced undergraduate courses in sustainable development, trade and the environment, political ecology, and environmental history. The book can be assigned in whole or in part, as the individual chapters stand alone quite well. It also provides instructive background reading for those with applied interests in tropical agroecology and conservation biology.

Phoebe N. Okowa. 2000. *State Responsibility for Transboundary Air Pollution in International Law*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

*Reviewed by Daniel C. Turack*  
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There currently exists substantial regulation of air pollution problems covered in treaty regimes, however, general international law does not provide a specific regime that deals with transboundary air pollution. In this work, Dr. Okowa examines the extent to which general principles of international law are effectively applied to transboundary air pollution, that is, her focus is on the reservoir of norms, concepts and principles that comprise customary international law to see how far their application encompasses transboundary air pollution. Gaps that require the development of new normative principles receive particular attention. Hence, emerging principles and standards, required by the international community, receive in-depth scrutiny, especially those that impose on states specific duties of a procedural character, such as environmental impact assessment, exchange of information, notification, and consultation.

The scope of the study is confined to air pollution emanating from a state's territory, and does not include areas beyond national jurisdiction unless incidentally relevant to the main issues under consideration. Neither are effects of pollution on global climate and depletion of the ozone within the scope of this study. Three principal sources of pollutants are in focus: firstly, pollution from industrial activities, such as particular acid deposition from sulphur and nitrogen emissions; secondly, atmospheric nuclear testing, although not a major concern in the last decade, did spawn legal issues from those tests that still persist; and thirdly, accidental radioactive contamination from the civil uses of nuclear energy, as in the wake of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The legal issues flowing from contamination of the aerial environment as a result of underground nuclear testing are also addressed by the author.

The reader first encounters the factual background on which the nature and features of different forms of transboundary air pollutants are based. This section of the book highlights the special characteristics of environmental harms, and why these pose problems for the traditional rules of international law. States contribute unequal amounts of the pollutants based on such factors as geographical location, level of industrialization and economic capability. Against this background, only international cooperation can help to address problems associated with transboundary air pollution. The author then offers a review of the international community's response via treaties and standard-setting rules, and then discusses their effectiveness with respect to meeting the goals of environmental protection. These include the 1979 Economic Commission for Europe Convention and its four Protocols, the treaty arrangements applicable to North America, the 1974 Nordic Convention, the 1994 Convention on Nuclear Safety, as well as rule-setting within the European Community.

Operation of the treaty regimes is shown to be dependent on existing and emerging principles from customary international law, such as state responsibility for damage, e.g. from radioactive contamination due to civil use of nuclear energy. Dr. Okowa provides insight into progressive developments in the law, and critiques some of the emergent principles. Special attention is devoted to radioactive fallout rather than to other instances of transboundary air pollution, given the qualitatively different character of the risks involved, long-term and irreversible somatic and genetic injuries. She reviews the incidence of state practice and liability associated with atmospheric testing before and after the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the damage caused to Canada by the Soviet nuclear-powered satellite, Cosmos 954, and the Chernobyl nuclear plant accident.

The focus of the first part of the book is on the substantive obligations of states. Further on, the emphasis switches to obligations of a procedural character that come into play before any harm has occurred, or even before the potentially polluting activity takes place. Here one meets up with obligations to conduct environmental impact assessments, notification of potential victim states of user activities—perhaps best summed up by the principles of consultation and fairness to those potentially affected.

The vicissitudes of state responsibility are undertaken admirably by the author, in the many attendant problems that can arise as impacted by the application of causal principles, determination of what constitutes damage, and apportionment of responsibility when the environmental harm is due to multilateral sources. As there is a paucity of international jurisprudence on these issues, suggested solutions are based on *lex ferenda*. An aggrieved state will have to consider the possible judicial remedies when seeking redress. The range of public international law remedies that can be given by an international tribunal, and the conditions for their availability are outlined in detail. There is also a discussion of access to national courts and administrative tribunals when breaches of international obligations occur. Although some treaties direct aggrieved states and individuals to municipal tribunals, long-range pollution or the Chernobyl

type of accident cases should be brought at the international level. The author also reviews the various forms that reparations might take.

Aside from the adjudicatory process, the author also analyzes a broad range of institutional frameworks for supervising compliance and monitoring mechanisms in different sectors of the environment. These non-judicial methods of supervision and enforcement provide a form of governmental accountability to a supervisory organ. Okowa goes beyond simply documenting existing frameworks and mechanisms for enforcing compliance, suggesting other approaches to encourage adherence to international treaties.

This comprehensive work of excellent scholarship contains a detailed index, a rich bibliography, most useful tables of treaties, conventions, protocols, agreements, national and international cases, and statutes. The book will appeal to all who are interested in environmental law problems, though the price is somewhat prohibitive.

John Barry, and E. Gene Frankland, eds. 2002. *International Encyclopedia of Environmental Politics*. London: Routledge.

*Reviewed by Steve Charnovitz*

This encyclopedia of environmental politics fills a gap in reference material. Newly published in 2002, it presents 502 entries in alphabetical order. The editors have aspired to provide "a map" of environmental politics that can be a "first place" to start one's research. To a large extent, they succeed.

Encyclopedias like this are large endeavors. This volume had a team of 12 editors who solicited individual entries from analysts around the world. As published, it is drawn from 165 contributors. The overall length is 530 pages, including the "thematic entry list" at the beginning and the index at the end. A book like this should be judged for its value to the occasional user. Does it contain the right topics? Are the essays informative and balanced? Is it readable? Is it user-friendly for finding answers quickly?

The editors present entries of four lengths: approximately 150, 750, 1500, or 3000 words. The 150-word items are definitional (e.g. coral reefs). These short entries are often about important topics, but such shortness is not itself a flaw as many of these definitions can be easily searched on the Internet. Perhaps the greatest value of the encyclopedia is its longer entries that attempt to synthesize multifaceted issues.

The encyclopedia has a number of presentational strengths. In general, the entries are clear and to the point. Jargon is kept to a minimum, and this will help readers new to a field. The book is surprisingly free of international relations jargon, which is a strong plus. The editors intended the pieces to be interdisciplinary, which required a good deal of integration to achieve. The index is also well done.

Substantively, let me highlight some of the best attributes. The editors have included many entries about the environmental policy and politics of par-

ticular countries, such as Canada and Russia, and this will prove useful. Another positive feature is attention to issues at all levels, from local to global. The inclusive approach is also seen in the volume's broad coverage of international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, individuals, concepts, and historical events.

By way of illustration, a few of the essays that are especially noteworthy for their clarity and depth of coverage. They are: brownfields, debt-for-nature swaps, green accounting, and the Three Gorges project. In an encyclopedia of politics, a reader would expect to see good coverage of green political parties, and the book delivers.

As for criticism, I will begin with two observations. First, the encyclopedia could have been more balanced. The second is that any collective project of this sort is bound to reflect some editorial judgments that will be puzzling to some readers.

The imbalance—to put it simply—is that the book is too green. The editors were sensitive to this potential problem and note in the introduction that “we hope to have succeeded in producing an encyclopedia of international *environmental* politics and not an encyclopedia of international *green* politics.” Nevertheless, the green emphasis suffuses the entire book. By way of illustration, the book includes entries on topics that are of questionable salience such as eco-anarchism, eco-socialism, and eco-philosophy/ecosophy. This coverage comes in addition to more valuable entries on bioregionalism, eco-centrism, eco-feminism, environmental ethics, green political theory, new age, new politics, and new social movements, and vegetarianism. Another example is the inclusion of entries on Earth First! (US) and the (US) Association of State Green Parties, while leaving out the League of Conservation Voters and the role of US environmental grantmakers.

In overemphasizing the self-styled green views, the encyclopedia underemphasizes competing views in environmental politics. The biggest gaps are economic perspectives. While there are good entries on “eco-taxes” and risk assessment, the concept of externalities gets the shortest possible entry and leaves much unsaid. Ronald Coase is barely mentioned and only in a way that would confuse any reader that did not already understand Coase's contribution. The Tiebout hypothesis is not mentioned at all even though it would have fit in the entry on “federalism and decentralization.” Free-market environmentalism gets only 150 words. The entry on the Brent Spar controversy offers no assessment of the scientific merit of Greenpeace's objections.

The book is also weak on business perspectives. While the book does contain a balanced entry on “business and the environment,” it also includes somewhat unbalanced essays on “anti-environmentalism” and “greenwashing.” Environmental management gets only 150 words and the book barely mentions ISO 14000. Eco-labeling is totally omitted. Key business leaders, such as Stephan Schmidheiny, are not reported on.

Another weakness is environmental law. The entry on environmental law and litigation is only 1500 words and important issues, like class action suits,

are not discussed. The weakness is exacerbated at the international level. For example, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is not mentioned. The essay on the European Union elides the issue of Community competence. The Snail Darter decision is discussed but not Trail Smelter.

A final avoidable problem is that the thematic entry list leaves out much that is in the book and therefore is an unreliable window into what follows. The book does contain numerous cross-references that are useful, but they do not substitute for a good schematic of what is available to the reader.

As for unavoidable lapses, it is easy to pick at a book of this depth and ambition. Just to give a couple of examples, the encyclopedia has entries for people who should be forgotten like James Watt and Anne Burford, but not leaders who should be remembered like William Reilly or Mostafa Tolba. Even worse, it totally omits René Dubos and barely mentions Barbara Ward. The encyclopedia of politics also leaves out the Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment. And amusingly, Norway gets the shortest size entry while Luxembourg is spread across two pages.

Notwithstanding these flaws, this project has produced a useful and reader-friendly encyclopedia. It is a valuable, extensive reference work that warrants a place in every research library that covers the environment.

Jennifer Clapp. 2001. *Toxic Exports: The Transfer of Hazardous Wastes from Rich to Poor Countries*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

*Reviewed by Ronnie D. Lipschutz,  
University of California, Santa Cruz*

Globalization has not been kind to the environment. Growing levels of production and consumption around the world have generated growing volumes of nasty stuff, which no one wants in his or her back yard. Where to put it? In the old days, toxic wastes were dumped hither and thither, often with unedifying and unhealthy results. As regulations got tougher during the 1970s and 1980s, the costs of "safe" disposal began to rise precipitously. It became cheaper to ship the stuff abroad—out of sight, out of mind, out of the back yard. But everywhere is somebody's back yard, and nasty stuff has a way of biting back, turning up in unexpected places.

In the long-awaited *Toxic Exports*, Jennifer Clapp provides us with a guidebook to the business of making, moving, and managing all of those hazardous wastes generated by contemporary industrialism and capitalism. The picture she paints is not a pretty one. Many of those backyards were in developing countries, and many times those wastes were dumped without the recipients' knowledge. The endless voyages of toxic flying Dutchmen during the 1980s made headlines, as did the consequences for peoples' health and the environment.

In response, a growing number of countries and organizations determined to do something about the problem. During the 1990s, a growing number of

the countries agreed that it would be a good idea to control international trade in toxics from some countries to other countries and they even cobbled together a ban on waste shipments from developing to developing countries. Unfortunately, the Basel Convention and Ban were not strongly supported by either industry or the United States. And, while the Convention is international law, the Ban has been ratified by less than half of the countries required for it to go into force. The Convention has had some positive effects: "illegal" international shipments of toxics appear to have been halted almost completely. Still, there are so many loopholes in the law that any sufficiently inventive producer or trader can find some way around it. And industry has found new ways to continue and even increase exports of toxic materials from North to South while claiming that these represent a net environmental benefit to the world!

Such artful sleight-of-hand rests on the question: When is waste not waste? When it is "recyclable." Much toxic waste consists of a hodge-podge of chemicals, metals, and materials, and something in the mix is bound to be useful, if it can be extracted. Old computers are laced with toxic stuff, but they also contain small quantities of gold and other precious metals. Some things that are garbage to us, such as dead lead acid car batteries, are valuable to others. All of these things can be shipped to developing countries under an appropriate label, where the "good" stuff is extracted, usually under very unsafe conditions, while the rest is thrown out the back. Needless to say, this is not healthy for people and other living things.

But there's more! Why go to all the trouble of exporting waste? Why not export the waste producing processes themselves, to places with lax environmental regulations and enforcement? That's another loophole discussed by Clapp. There is a long-standing debate about whether polluting industries actually relocate to countries with weak environmental standards. The data are none too clear on this point. Environmental costs are generally assumed to be a rather small part of doing business but, as Clapp shows, they might be sufficiently large to tip the balance in many cases. And arguments that production in developing countries is more likely to be "clean," since companies building new plants will use the best available technology, also appear to hold little water. A growing number of older, dirty factories are being dismantled and moved, while the uncertainties associated with clean innovations may well put off investors in them.

Finally, there is the problem of regulating these activities: who is going to do it? Performance-based environmental standards promulgated by governments are being discredited more and more for being "costly" and "inefficient" (and smacking of Soviet-style command-and-control). In their place, Clapp writes, market-based self-regulation is being touted by business and states alike as the answer. Although no one has yet had the nerve to propose tradable toxic waste permits (it's only a matter of time), industry is being encouraged to set its own rules for environmental management. The best known of these arrangements is the International Organization for Standardization's ISO-14000,

which stipulates only that companies develop their own internal performance standards and periodically assert that they have been met. We can rest easy, seeing the ISO sticker. This seems rather like having the fox certify that the hens he is guarding are certainly quite tasty!

At the end of the day, Clapp remains rather skeptical that the various regimes, conventions, protocols, laws, standards, and regulations designed to safely “manage” toxic wastes are having much effect. She offers a cogent chapter of policy recommendations for improving their regulation and reducing their volumes, a necessity for a volume decrying environmental mismanagement. As is often the case, however, we know *what* to do about the issue. *Why* these things are not done is the problem, and that is a question that Clapp never really confronts. It is, in any event, a subject for another book. But for that small criticism, *Toxic Exports* is an extremely informative and useful book. It belongs on everyone’s shelf and ought to be required reading in every class on global environmental politics.

