Amazonian Societies and the Environment (Rosineide Bentes, Winter 2002)

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LALC 147
AMAZONIAN SOCIETIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

WINTER 2002

Maril College, Room 1.20

Monday, Wednesday 2:30-3:55 PM

Merrill College, Room 15

Professor Rosineide Bentes

Monday, Wednesday, 3:30-5:15 PM

Amazonian Societies and the Environment is, in some ways, a history of the Amazon. It will consider the diverse cultures, economic and natural contexts in which Amazonian Societies perceive their natural world and relate it to it. From the perspective of both history and the natural world, diversity is the key to understanding the world’s largest tropical rain forest. Being aware of this environmental diversity, Amazonian created distinctive modes of occupying and using each ecosystem. From the 17th century onwards, their methods and techniques of production developed from a blend of different traditions: Native Peoples, Portuguese, Spanish, French, English, Italians, Arabs, Asians and many others. The Amazon is composed of parts of nine countries - Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Suriname, French and English Guiana. Especially in the Brazilian Amazon, the population originating in the land of indigenous Peoples with Portuguese, Africans and immigrants from all over the world. Today, class, group or race, perimeters of their natural world, occupy and use it within distinctive contexts. At the same time, they are intimately related to events and people elsewhere in the world. This gives a fascinating dimension to the environmental history of the Amazon. Many of its environmental problems are caused by it, and may affect not only Amazonians, but all its inhabitants. For all time, having built a variety of methods and techniques of production that do not precipitate the massive destruction of nature, Amazonians have also learned to live in harmony with nature. The Amazonians' perception of nature is reflected in their mode of life and their traditional practices. They have a lot to teach to the world.

The course explores the social dimension of what W. Cronon calls “nature and environment” problem and how this is defined the international debate on the Amazon. We will focus on the diversity of Amazonian environmental history and draw attention to the distinction between what might be environmental problem per se from the different ways of approaching it through a diverse set of readings. We will study Amazonian environmentally friendly activities and environmental problems. The emphasis will be in finding out to what extent the ways in which conflict and environmental relate to it, organized and interact with one another create and maintain these activities, as well as resolve environmental problems.

The Course Objectives:

1. To develop a basic understanding of Amazonian environmental history and its implications for the debate on environmentally friendly activities in Amazonia.
2. To develop an appreciation of the diverse ways in which Amazonians understand and deal with nature from different social class, ethnic, and national perspectives.
3. To improve our understanding of how actions taken at the local level are related to events in other nations.
4. To consider perspectives on major Amazonian environmental problems and examine possible difficulties in the way in which we address them.
5. To discuss the ways in which Amazonians can teach the world to more clearly define its own perspectives about how environmental problems may best be lived with or resolved.

The Course Activities and Assignments

Class participation: 30 pts.
Two papers (35 points each) 70 pts.

The Course Objectives:

A. Discover what the Amazonians can teach the world about understanding and managing environmentally friendly activities and environmental problems.
B. Consider how the Amazonians understand and deal with nature from different social class, ethnic, and national perspectives.
C. Improve our understanding of how actions taken at the local level are related to events in other nations.
D. Consider the Amazonian perspective on major Amazonian environmental problems and examine possible difficulties in the way in which we address them.
E. Discover what the Amazonians can teach the world about understanding and managing environmentally friendly activities and environmental problems.

Required Texts

- Posey, D.A. & Balee, W., (Editors), Process to Power: Native Peoples and Forest Reform in Amazonia. People of the Floodplain and Forest: The Struggle for Accountability by Anthony Anderson and Darrel A. Posey (1 p.)
- Padoch, Christine, Ayres, Jose Marcio et al (Editors), (1999), Amazonian Societies and the Environment (Rosineide Bentes, Winter 2002)
- Lima, Deborah M. Lima, Equity, Sustainable Development, and Biodiversity Preservation: Some Questions about Ecological Partnerships in the Brazilian Amazon (16 p.)
- Kolk, Ans, (1996), The Quest for Accountability: Forest, Land Tenure Reform and Inequity in the Brazilian Amazon. In: Forests in International Environmental Politics: Indigenous Organizations, NGOs, and the Brazilian Amazon.
- Kolk, Ans, (1996), The Quest for Accountability: Forest, Land Tenure Reform and Inequity in the Brazilian Amazon. In: Forests in International Environmental Politics: Indigenous Organizations, NGOs, and the Brazilian Amazon.