

Sternberg, Hilgard. *A água e o homem na Várzea do Careiro*. 2 vols. Belém: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, 1998.

Interest is growing in the vitality of watersheds around the world, especially in light of all the stresses human society is imposing on them ranging from dam building, to deforestation, industrial pollution, and run off containing pesticides and fertilizer. Riverkeeper movements have rallied to the defense of numerous water courses in the United States and Europe, such as the Hudson and Thames, but the mighty tropical rivers that often snake through a half dozen countries and traverse thousands of kilometers of varied terrain are virtually defenseless. Hilgard Sternberg's pioneering work on the Amazon floodplain is thus particularly timely.

First published in 1956 by the University of Brazil in Rio, "Water and Man on the Floodplain of Careiro" is a path breaking study of human-induced landscape change in ecologically sensitive floodplains of the middle Amazon. Focusing on the island of Careiro near Manaus, Sternberg explores the seasonal rhythm of economic activities in response to fluctuating water levels. Rooted in a profound understanding of the dynamic geomorphology of the restless Amazon, Sternberg explores the history of land use, the cultural ecology of diseases, and the impact of increasing market integration on patterns of livestock and crop production. Sternberg's field-intensive study quickly emerged as a classic, the first in-depth examination of peoples' use of floodplain resources along the Amazon from an holistic viewpoint. Unfortunately, the work was extremely rare, and accessible to only a handful of scholars. For example, none of the libraries at the University of Florida have a copy of the work, even though UF boasts a prominent Latin American studies program and embraces the largest concentration of researchers working on Amazonia outside of Brazil.

The Goeldi Museum in Belém is therefore to be commended for reprinting this valuable work. Thanks are due also to the regional development agency (SUDAM-Superintendência do Desenvolvimento da Amazônia) for providing financial support so that a new generation of scholars and development planners can benefit from the numerous insights in the Careiro Island study. A popular image of Amazonia is that it is mostly inhabited by indigenous groups. But with massive depopulation along the Amazon soon after the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, Sternberg points out that settlers fleeing the parched Northeast of Brazil have had the greatest cultural imprint on the Amazon floodplain near Manaus. For example, a settler from drought-plagued Ceará introduced a number of technologies and land use practices in the 19th century that altered the way people view natural resources. A *Cearense* planted sugarcane on Careiro to distill numbing cachaça; he also introduced seine nets, a widely used, and in some cases over-efficient, method for catching large numbers of fish. He also instigated large-scale cattle ranching. At first, ranching was dual purpose: raising beef and milk for the Manaus market. Although some forest clearing took place to create pasture, the smaller herds were kept on raised or floating corrals to weather the annual flood. Hired ranch hands and family members gathered floating grasses to feed the imprisoned cattle during the several month-long high water season.

As Sternberg explains in the preface and posface to the second edition, cattle ranching today is geared mostly to meat production and most of the herds are taken to upland pastures as the waters rise. Much of the floodplain forest and intricate agroforestry systems established by small farmers have long since made way for extensive pastures. The spectacular growth of Manaus — now a city with over one million inhabitants — has hardly benefited river dwellers, but has nevertheless triggered potentially serious environmental changes. Most people in Manaus eat food produced on farmlands thousands of kilometers from the Amazon, but that does not mean that forests have been spared the axe. The rural population on Careiro declined by half from 1950 to 1996; most of them drawn to the allure of a more promising life in bustling Manaus. But during the same period, the size of the