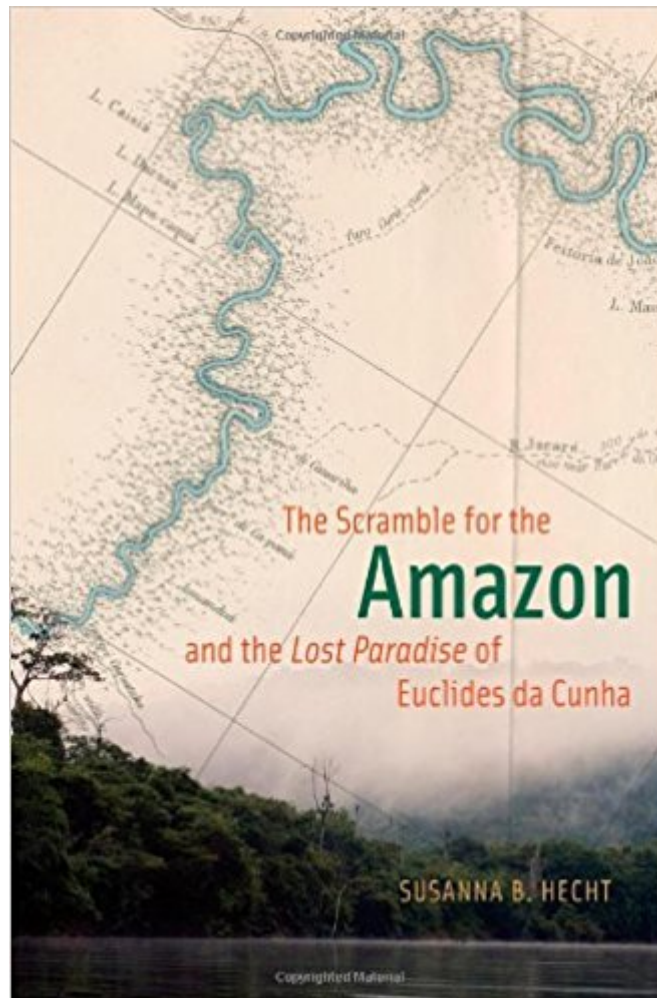


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The Scramble For The And The "Lost Paradise" Of Euclides Da Cunha



Synopsis

The fortunes of the late nineteenth century's imperial and industrial powers depended on a single raw material—rubber—with only one source: the Amazon basin. And so began the scramble for the Amazon—a decades-long conflict that found Britain, France, Belgium, and the United States fighting with and against the new nations of Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil for the forest's riches. In the midst of this struggle, Euclides da Cunha, engineer, journalist, geographer, political theorist, and one of Brazil's most celebrated writers, led a survey expedition to the farthest reaches of the river, among the world's most valuable, dangerous, and little-known landscapes. *The Scramble for the Amazon* tells the story of da Cunha's terrifying journey, the unfinished novel born from it, and the global strife that formed the backdrop for both. Haunted by his broken marriage, da Cunha trekked through a beautiful region thrown into chaos by guerrilla warfare, starving migrants, and native slavery. All the while, he worked on his masterpiece, a nationalist synthesis of geography, philosophy, biology, and journalism he named *The Lost Paradise*. Da Cunha intended his epic to unveil the Amazon's explorers, spies, natives, and brutal geopolitics, but, as Susanna B. Hecht recounts, he never completed it—his wife's lover shot him dead upon his return. At once the biography of an extraordinary writer, a masterly chronicle of the social, political, and environmental history of the Amazon, and a superb translation of the remaining pieces of da Cunha's project, *The Scramble for the Amazon* is a work of thrilling intellectual ambition.

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Customer Reviews

“Hecht launches this feast of a book with a moving account of the Canudos rebellion. . . . Monumental. . . . Compelling and elegantly written. The author’s deep knowledge of the and its history bursts from every page with the exuberance of a tropical rainforest. The Scramble for the is a revelation of a period, region, and cast of characters unknown to many readers. It will long remain the definitive account of this episode of South American history.” (John Hemming Times Literary Supplement) “A journey into South America’s heart of darkness.” (Nature) “A vividly detailed account of the complex interactions of the diverse dwellers of the late 19th through early 20th centuries, including native people, descendants of runaway slaves, rubber barons, peasant rubber tree tappers, ranchers, scientists, explorers, and the Brazilian military. . . . This scholarly but accessible work about an individual now somewhat forgotten to history will be of greatest interest to scholars and . . . Brazilian and Latin history enthusiasts.” (Elizabeth Salt Library Journal) “Hecht writes not only with extraordinary historical assurance about her remarkably complex subject, but also with great passion and literary elegance. The book is, like da Cunha’s own work, the product of years of mediation, and brings together Hecht’s political-ecological research on and in Latin America with a lot of archival spadework. There is also elegance of characterisation: not all academic authors would dare to describe their subject as having ‘the lambent eyes of a nocturnal animal.’ Hecht does, she is right, and the reader is grateful for her authorial courage. . . . Da Cunha’s remarkable fusion of the scholarly and the literary with all its acuity and also its eccentricities is matched by Hecht’s; style mirrors subject.” (Robert J. Mayhew Times Higher Education) “This is an exhaustive and highly original book that sheds light on little-known aspects of both da Cunha’s life and the region’s history.” (Patrick Wilcken Literary Review) “In part the biography of [an] unjustly forgotten figure. Hecht hails da Cunha as a frustrated literary and scientific genius who was actively involved in Brazil’s political transitions before being gunned down in 1909, at age 43, by his wife’s young lover. . . . Hecht places da Cunha’s quirky personal tale inside the more ambitious story of a country at the crossroads, freed from colonialism and monarchy, ready-fractured in class and ethnic terms, and coming into existence as a republic within the global commodity economy that had always shaped it.” (Lorna Scott Fox The Nation) “Every so often a book comes along that forces all of us to shift perspectives, embrace new paradigms, deny much of what we have learned in order to relish in the wonder of the new. Susana B. Hecht as a scholar and author has always been a catalyst of fresh dreams, a fountain of new and raw intellectual insights. Her latest book is a work of wonder, a fusion of literary history, poetic reflections, and unshackled anger. I cannot say

enough in praise of her scholastic audacity, integrity, and devotion. (Wade Davis, National Geographic Society) “Hecht seamlessly integrates generous portions . . . of da Cunha’s writings into his riveting narrative. Both authors are acutely aware of the costs, to humans and nature alike, of incorporating *ia* into wider political economies. While da Cunha should not remain a minor figure outside Brazil, Hecht is a major interpreter of *ian* and environmental history. . . . Essential. (T. P. Johnson Choice) “Hecht distills major historiographic lines of inquiry spanning precolonial to contemporary Latin America: from the sociocultural history of quilombos and the economic legacies of plantation complexes, to the development of geography and the biological sciences as disciplines nurtured by expansionist state ideologies, to the political and military contingencies of late Imperial and early Republican Brazil. Likening the transnational circuits of capital relying on extractive enterprises in the to the contemporaneous European Scramble for Africa, Hecht evokes the interplay of socio-ecological landscapes from the perspective of an exceptionally capable participant-observer. (Gabriel de Avilez Rocha *Terrae Incognitae*) “This majestic book is a monumental labor of love is like nothing else written about *ia*. A richly detailed survey that locates regional history in the complex matrix of colonial competition, it vividly brings to life a singular and singularly important figure in Brazilian literary history. There is a standard hyperbole that a book will change our view of a given topic, but this time, in many ways both large and small, it is unquestionably true. (Hugh Raffles, author of *In *ia*: A Natural History*) “Susanna Hecht’s wonderfully ambitious book unveils an unknown chapter in the history of the —indeed, the history of the world. The Scramble for the would be important if it merely showed how Euclides da Cunha, almost unknown to Americans but one of Latin America’s greatest writers, was also a significant figure in political and environmental history. But it uses da Cunha and his unfinished masterwork, *Lost Paradise*, to show how *ia* played a central role in global politics a century before rock stars began staging “save the rain forest” concerts. As a bonus to readers, her translations of da Cunha’s brilliant *ian* writings are excellent, and the sadly moving love story at the center of his life is key to understanding his work is artfully woven into the rest of the material. (Charles C. Mann, author of *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*) “Susanna B. Hecht’s extraordinary book is as penetrating and graceful as its subject matter: the lost writings of Euclides da Cunha on the . Indeed, Hecht is our modern-day da Cunha, presenting the miraculous forest and its people in all its complex wonder. And she throws in a tragic love story to boot. The Scramble for the and the *Lost Paradise* of Euclides da Cunha is a truly remarkable book, destined to be a

classic. (Greg Grandin, author of *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*)

Susanna B. Hecht is professor in the School of Public Affairs and the Institute of the Environment at the University of California, Los Angeles, and coauthor, with Alexander Cockburn, of *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the* .

This book is an impressive achievement: a narration of Euclides da Cunha's voyage to chart the - in both Professor Hecht's and da Cunha's own (translated) words - and a broader history of exploration and competing imperialisms in the rainforest in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Hecht bookends da Cunha's journey with details of his life before and after the expedition - including a fascinating series of chapters on the Canudos war and da Cunha's book about it, *Os Sertões*; and the tragedy of da Cunha's murder by his wife's lover before da Cunha could finish his planned novel about the . Highly recommended reading. The only critique that I have of this book has nothing to do with Hecht's scholarship or narrative, both of which are first rate, educational and entertaining. Unfortunately, the text is riddled with missing prepositions, pronouns, and articles, and has occasional misspellings (e.g. Shouldn't the Treaty of San Idelfonso of 1777 (p. 95) be spelled Ildefonso, as it is in the accompanying map (and elsewhere in historical writings)? And though I'm no expert on historical Portuguese, shouldn't "undiscovered," on p. 87, rather than "no descoberto," be "nÃo descoberto"? In chapters on the Canudos war, sometimes the Baron of Jeremoabo becomes the Baron of Jemoabo... Finally, in several places in the text sentences are missing the appropriate "the" or "of," etc.). The University of Chicago Press may need to outsource its copy editing and proofreading to a more reliable company.

This is several books in one: a fascinating blend of geography, politics and history. It focuses on period of Brazilian history - the rubber boom - that has been amply covered in the literature, but rarely perceived as a full-blown scramble by imperial powers similar to that in Africa. In both cases, the imperial powers perceived the continents as essentially empty and its natural resources there for the taking. The Scramble for the also brings to life the portions of an unfinished book by one of Brazil's greatest authors, Euclides da Cunha, whose profound insights and lyrical writing reveal unique aspects of the region that challenge romantic misperceptions, such as the strange sensations of traveling through it, and the miserable existence of rubber tappers - who less than a century later became

global heroes as defenders of the forest. The Scramble weaves a complex but rich tapestry of themes that will enchant those readers who already are fascinated with the region.

A riveting, thoughtful, and brilliant story, an engaging and intelligent voice. History, politics, race, culture, imperialism, exploits of capital and romance. And the events described parallel today so closely, it's hard to tell if the history is ripped from today's headlines, or the other way around.

This is a beautifully written work by a careful researcher of geography, politics, and now, history. It's scope is epic, and while it may be required reading for ists or Brazilianists, it is not for the general public.

Dad loved it!

Here is a near-ideal blending of current scholarship with the brilliance of a literary/historical figure. It will positively shape future understandings of imperialism, and many other topics, though not without controversy. Mostly known for his landmark "Rebellion in the Backlands" on the destruction of a millenarian community in the 1890s Northeast, da Cunha also contributed to expanding Brazil's western frontiers. His surveys and writings ultimately helped make Brazil the largest and dominant nation in South America. Why controversy? Not all will acknowledge an Scramble similar to the late-19C Scramble for Africa, but Hecht offers solid evidence for her interpretation. More significantly, she challenges (as did da Cunha) the cherished myth that Sao Paulo's intrepid 17C bandeirantes (i.e. slave raiders) mostly defined its modern borders, arguing persuasively that actual occupation by hardscrabble settlers, often Nordestinhos, was the key factor in securing most of the region for Brazil. This markedly populist outlook will be unsettling (sic) in some quarters, but let the debates proceed.

This is a book that spreads its arms wide and welcomes you into the wondrous world of the , suffused with all the sunlight and shadow of a rainforest clearing. Pages are populated by emperors, and tappers, scientists and scoundrels, and they are all given full voice by Hecht's deft hand. And the literary voice changes too, with the topic. Sometimes it is as formidable as the buttress roots of a ceiba tree, and at other times, as delicate as the colorful, rootless epiphytes that nestle in a rainforest's mid-canopy. The amazing personal tale of da Cunha--largely unknown to most American readers-- is woven into the larger, richer

tapestry of Brazil's "discovery" and development. The author addresses this huge area of Brazil's history with an enthusiasm that admits massive amounts of detail, yet leavens that deluge with wit and elegance that leaves the reader simultaneously filled and refreshed. Although a daunting read at 484 pages, *Scramble For the* is at once a scholarly masterpiece and a delight to read.

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