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"Isthmus in the World: Elements for an Environmental History of Panama"

Castro, Guillermo H.

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This article proposes a framework for the study of interactions between human societies and the natural world in the Isthmus of Panama, and the consequences of these interactions over time. It also wants to encourage a new reading of the best-known sources and authors associated with this issue—from the reports of early Spanish travelers to the writings of contemporary specialists such as Dolores Piperno, Richard Cooke, Omar Jaén Suárez, and Alfredo Castillero Calvo—, as well as the adoption of a new perspective on the deep origins of the environmental problems the country faces today. After a general characterization of the Isthmus' ecoregions, the author proposes a historical periodization reflecting successive human strategies of interaction with the natural world, differentiated in terms of the technologies employed and the corresponding social relations; the expression of these strategies in environmental culture and values; modes of land management; and the impact of all this on the natural world. Special attention is given to the ecological footprint of interoceanic transit from the 16th century onward, and to the search of alternatives allowing more sustainable ways of relating to nature in Panama. (Author's abstract at The White Horse Press)

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