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Interview with Jonathan Robins, author of *Oil Palm: A Global History*

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Carpenter, Cathryn B. "Jonathan Robins, 'Oil Palm: A Global History.'" *New Books in Environmental Studies*, August 17, 2021. Mp3, 50:17.

> Oil palms are ubiquitous—grown in nearly every tropical country, they supply the world with more edible fat than any other plant and play a role in scores of packaged products, from lipstick and soap to margarine and cookies. And as Jonathan E. Robins shows in *Oil Palm: A Global History* (UNC Press, 2021), sweeping social transformations carried the plant around the planet. First brought to the global stage in the holds of slave ships, palm oil became a quintessential commodity in the Industrial Revolution. Imperialists hungry for cheap fat subjugated Africa's oil palm landscapes and the people who worked them. In the twentieth century, the World Bank promulgated oil palm agriculture as a panacea to rural development in Southeast Asia. As plantation companies tore into rainforests, evicting farmers in the name of progress, the oil palm continued its rise to dominance, sparking new controversies over trade, land and labor rights, human health, and the environment. By telling the story of the oil palm across multiple centuries and continents, Robins demonstrates how the fruits of an African palm tree became a key commodity in the story of global capitalism, beginning in the eras of slavery and imperialism, persisting through decolonization, and stretching to the present day.
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> (Source: New Books Network)

In this episode of *New Books in Environmental Studies*, Kathryn B. Carpenter interviews Jonathan Robins, author of *Oil Palm: A Global History*.

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- Jonathan Robins, "Humans and Other Pollinators in the Oil Palm Plantation Complex," *Arcadia*, 2021. https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/9229

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Interview with Jonathan Robins, author of *Oil Palm: A Global History*
Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/9336
Print date: 05 November 2026 17:27:18