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Shelton H. Davis

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*Development and the Indians
of Brazil*

SHELTON H. DAVIS

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*To the memory of my father, Robert Davis,
and to my mother, Fannie Secher Davis,
for their compassion, generosity, and concern.*

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Preface and acknowledgments

Over the past few years, several books have been written on the controversial question of Indian policy in Brazil. In 1973, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, founder of Survival International of London, published a book titled, *A Question of Survival for the Indians of Brazil*. This was followed by a report for the Aborigines Protection Society of London by Edwin Brooks, René Fuerst, John Hemming, and Francis Huxley, titled, *Tribes of the Amazon Basin in Brazil*, 1972. More recently, two American scientists, Robert J. A. Goodland and Howard S. Irwin, have published a small monograph, *Amazon Jungle: Green Hell to Red Desert?*, which includes a chapter on the situation of Indian tribes in the Amazon Basin of Brazil. The present book differs from all the above accounts in emphasizing the political and economic factors that are bringing about the uprooting and demise of Brazilian Indian tribes.

The central contention of this book is that the massive amount of disease, death, and human suffering unleashed upon Brazilian Indians in the past few years is a direct result of the economic development policies of the military government of Brazil. In broadest terms, what I wish to demonstrate is how the present situation of Brazilian Indians is structurally related to the much acclaimed, but little understood, “economic miracle” in Brazil. In order to do so, I focus major attention on the economic development policies of the Brazilian military regime.

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In the pages of this book, I provide detailed documentation of various instances where large private, state, and multinational corporations, the principal ingredients in the Brazilian model of development, have systematically expropriated Indian resources. I also argue that Brazilian Indians are only the first victims (albeit the most powerless) of a particular economic progress that also includes the victimization of hundreds of agricultural and high-way workers in the Amazon, thousands of dispossessed rural migrants from the Brazilian Northeast, and millions of poor and hungry people who live in the large Brazilian cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Finally, through an analysis of the ecological chain reaction set in motion by the deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon, I show what the implications of this program are for the biosphere and the earth.

Most generally, this book attempts to analyze what happens when modern forms of capitalist development begin to penetrate one of the last and largest frontier regions of the Americas. Like the notion of “Civilization” that was so popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century, “Development” is one of those terms that is taken for granted as a necessary good by most governments, planners, and publics today. The mystique surrounding the notion of “Economic Development” is so great that most people tend to assume that it will benefit all peoples, regions, and nations throughout the world.

Nowhere is this uncritical acceptance more prevalent than in the case of present-day Brazil. The impressive growth rate of the Brazilian economy, surpassing that of the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century and that of Japan in the postwar period, is accepted by most foreign observers as indicative of a positive good for the people of Brazil. As a result, few observers have analyzed the institutional structure of the Brazilian political economy: the alliances that have emerged in Brazil between domestic capitalists and multinational firms, the dominant role of a repressive military government in generating capital formation and economic growth, and the significance of tech-

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nological transfers and international aid in bringing about the Brazilian “economic miracle.” Similarly, little consideration has been given by outside observers to the social implications and costs of this economic growth. Few observers, for example, have questioned who has benefited from the Brazilian “economic miracle” and which social sectors have necessarily suffered and lost.

In this book, I analyze the human and ecological consequences of neocapitalist development in the Amazon region of Brazil. Rather than assume that the economic development of the Brazilian Amazon is a positive good, I attempt to assess what this particular model of development has meant for the peoples of the region, and what will be the long-term effects of this development on the delicate ecology of the Amazon rain forest.

Most contemporary accounts of conditions in the Brazilian Amazon have failed to trace the specific linkages that exist between the development policies of the Brazilian government and the threats posed to Indian peoples and the environment. These linkages, I believe, are critical. Hence, in this book, I have focused upon what processes of neocapitalist development in the Amazon have meant for the welfare of Indian communities, the large rural and urban populations of Brazil, and the tropical ecosystem. To the reader who is familiar with recent activities in other frontier areas of the world, generated in large measure by the supposed energy, food, and resource crises, it will be obvious that the processes that I describe go far beyond the single case of Brazil.

By way of preface, I wish to acknowledge the many friends who assisted me in the conception of this book. My original concern with the situation of Brazilian Indians dates back to 1969, when I was a visiting instructor in anthropology at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. At that time, I had just completed two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Guatemala and was interested in the study of agrarian systems in Latin America. During the final

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months of my work at the National Museum, I met a Brazilian physician named Noel Nutels. Noel Nutels had spent more than twenty-five years providing medical assistance to Brazilian Indian tribes, and during the last months of the government of Brazilian President João Goulart served as director of the Indian Protection Service in Brazil.

In October 1970, Noel Nutels came to the National Museum seeking support from Brazilian and foreign anthropologists in order to protest the new Brazilian Indian Statute that was announced at the time of the inauguration of the Trans-Amazon Highway. The general political climate in Brazil at this time made it difficult for my Brazilian colleagues to take any organized action against Indian policy along the new Amazon roads. My own position as a foreign anthropologist, however, was different, and I said that I would assist him in making these issues known. He was particularly concerned that continuing attention be focused upon Brazilian Indian policy by anthropologists in Europe and the United States.

During my final weeks in Brazil, I talked to Noel Nutels on several occasions and through his personal knowledge gained an immense amount of insight into the history of Indian policy in Brazil. In February 1973, Noel Nutels died of cancer, a few days after Orlando and Claudio Villas Boas, two of his closest friends and Brazil's best-known Indian agents, made contact with the Kréen-Akaróre tribe. In seeking the causes for the misnamed "Indian Problem" in Brazil in political and economic factors, I have drawn heavily upon the ideas and work of Noel Nutels. My debt to the Brazilian anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, another close friend and colleague of Noel Nutels, is discussed in Chapter 1 of this book.¹

In January 1971, I returned to the United States, and began to carry out systematic research on Indian policy in Brazil. During this time, I also began to collaborate with two anthropologists who had done field research in Brazil. One of these anthropologists was Kenneth Brecher of the Institute of Social Anthropol-

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ogy at Oxford University, who at the time was living with the Waurá tribe in the Xingu National Park. The other was Patrick Menget, an instructor at the University of Nanterre in France, who had lived with the Txikão tribe, also in the Xingu Park.

The appreciation I possess of the Indian societies of Brazil comes through long discussions with Kenneth Brecher and Patrick Menget. The rich tribal ways of life that they described to me often led me to reflect upon my own experiences in the Mayan-speaking community of Santa Eulalia in Guatemala where I lived for two years. My debt to these two anthropologists is lasting and great. They are not, however, to be held accountable in any way for the statements made in this book.

In September 1971, I began to teach at Harvard University, where I gave a course on the Indian tribes of the United States. During this period, I made contact with a number of Native American students, and began to see the parallels between the historic situation of Indians across the American continent. At the same time I also made contact with Marie-Helene Laraque, who was mobilizing support for the cause of Brazilian Indians among native leaders in Canada and the United States.

In 1973, I moved to Berkeley, California, and was there a cofounder with Marie-Helene Laraque of a documentation and information center on these issues called INDIGENA. INDIGENA is the Spanish and Portuguese word for Native American and was established for two purposes. First, to generate international concern for the critical situation of Indians in the Amazon Basin of South America; and second, to create a reciprocal exchange of information between native peoples and organizations across the American continent. Marie-Helene Laraque and her husband Walter Carlin, who was born on the Cheyenne River (Sioux) Reservation in South Dakota, contributed in numerous ways to the development of the position expressed in this book.

While working with INDIGENA in Berkeley, I also collaborated with two other organizations, the North American

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Congress on Latin America (NACLA) and the *Brazilian Information Bulletin* (BIB). All these organizations shared a concern with the role of U.S. foreign policy and multinational corporation activities in Latin America. Most of the documentation from business journals contained in this book, as well as my general research methodology, came through the collaboration of the staffs of INDIGENA, NACLA, and BIB.²

Through the assistance of these organizations, I began to collect a file of documents on the contemporary political economy of Brazil, the scope of foreign aid and investment in the Amazon, and the nature of development and Indian policies in Brazil. This material was drawn from trade journals, government reports, and newspapers; hence, they differ in quality and reliability from the primary materials gathered through ethnographic fieldwork by anthropologists. I have tried to alleviate these problems of reliability by working like a historian or investigative journalist interested in a contemporary social issue. This involved double checking my sources of information and corresponding with persons who have been to the Amazon and could verify certain facts. I have intentionally provided a detailed documentation in the notes at the end of the book for the reader interested in checking the accuracy of my sources, data, and facts.

The discussions of recent mining projects in the Amazon contained in Chapters 3, 6, and 7 of this book could not have been written without the original research on this subject done by Fred Goff and Marsha Miliman, which first appeared in *NACLA's Latin America and Empire Report* (April 1973). Likewise, almost everything contained in Chapter 8 on agribusiness activities in the Brazilian Amazon came from long discussions with my close friend, Paul Silberstein. The latter shared with me his experience growing up on a farm in the birthplace of modern agribusiness (Southern California) and his several years of research on the structure of commercial agriculture in Brazil.

Three anthropologists who teach in the University of California system also encouraged me in this work. The first was Joseph

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G. Jorgensen, director of the Program in Comparative Culture at the University of California at Irvine. Joseph Jorgensen was the first American anthropologist to analyze conditions of poverty and underdevelopment on American Indian Reservations in terms of the expanding political economy of the United States. He was also the first anthropologist to use Andre Gunder Frank's "metropolis-satellite" hypothesis, developed in Latin America to explain class and ethnic inequalities in the American West. For several years, my own work has benefited from Joseph Jorgensen's commentary, criticism, and advice. In many respects, this book can be seen as an international extension of the conceptual framework contained in his North American research.³

The other two anthropologists who provided encouragement for my work were Laura Nader and Gerald D. Berreman of the University of California at Berkeley. The emphasis I place on government and corporate activities in the Brazilian Amazon reflects Laura Nader's notion that anthropologists should be studying "up" rather than "down," and investigating the powerful political, economic, and legal institutions that have created so much "endemic powerlessness" in the modern world.⁴ The idea of relating events in the Brazilian Amazon to wider social issues arose from several discussions with Gerald Berreman on the value of critical anthropological research.⁵ Gerald Berreman was particularly helpful in a careful reading of an earlier draft of this book.

Over the past several years, I have also benefited from long discussions with Paul Shankman of the University of Colorado at Boulder. In editing the final draft of this book, I have been assisted by Timothy Buckalew, James Ito-Adler, and Robert Mathews. Robert Mathews provided me with invaluable assistance in questions of argument, presentation, and style.

Finally, I wish to thank Ralph Nader and Ruth Fort of the Center for the Study of Responsive Law in Washington, D.C. As far back as 1970, Ralph Nader spoke out on the need for international action to counter the atrocities being committed against

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Indians in South America. Then, in February 1974, he asked INDIGENA to prepare a report for him on the scope of American aid and investment programs in the Brazilian Amazon. This was followed in November 1974 with a press conference in Washington on the subject of "Brazilian Indian Policy: The Need for International Action and Concern."⁶

Perhaps more than any other experience, working with Ralph Nader and Ruth Fort taught me that information in and of itself is of minor importance. In any society that claims to be based on the democratic participation of its citizenry, such information must be translated into strategies of public action, accountability, and change. The information and documentation contained in this book is written from exactly this point of view.

The spelling of tribal names in this book follows the convention instituted by the First Reunion of Brazilian Anthropology, published in the *Revista de Antropologia*, vol. 2 (São Paulo, 1954), pp. 150–2. In a small number of cases, I have changed the spelling of tribal names in accord with suggestions made by Robert Carneiro of the American Museum of Natural History. For conventional English spellings of Brazilian tribal names, the reader should also consult the maps and tables in Janice H. Hopper (ed.), *Indians of Brazil in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1967).

S. H. D.

Cambridge, Massachusetts
April 1977