VISIONS OF AMAZONIA

Marshall C. Eakin
Department of History
Vanderbilt University
THE METHOD TO MY MADNESS

Week 1: March 27  What Is Amazonia?
Week 2: April 3   Native Peoples
Week 3: April 10  The Naturalists
Week 4: April 17  The Anthropologists
Week 5: April 24  The Novelists
Week 6: May 1    The Environmentalists
WHAT IS AMAZONIA?
THE RIVER (IN BRAZIL)

Amazonia – 45% of land, 7% of population

❖ 40% of that 7% is in two cities (Belem & Manaus)
❖ 3,900 miles in length
❖ Drops 18,000 feet in first 400 miles
❖ 2 inches per mile over next 3,500 miles
❖ 15 miles across at some points
❖ 250 feet deep
LOTS OF AGUA

- River-Sea: 160,000 cubic meters per second into the Atlantic
- About 15% of fresh water emptied each day into the world’s oceans
- Daily discharge could supply all homes in U.S. for five months
- Eight times the volume of the Mississippi River
- 10-20 foot shift in river levels by season
- November to June is rainy season
COLONIAL AMAZONIA

Francisco de Orellana (1541-42)
Gaspar de Carvajal
LOPE DE AGUIRRE (1510-61)
RUBBER BOOM
(1860-1920)

- *Hevea brasiliensis*
  - caucho
  - caoutchouc
  - borracha
  - seringa

- Seringueiros (rubber tappers)
THE BOOM

Rise of automotive industry (& bicycles)

1890-1915 – The Golden Age
1911 – 45,000 tons (vs. 3,000 in 1860)
1892 – 60% of world production
1910 – 50% of world production
POPULATION EXPLOSION

- 1800 – 85,000 inhabitants
- 1862 – 275,000 inhabitants
- 1900 – 700,000 inhabitants
- Manaus – 40,000 inhabitants in 1900
PARIS IN THE AMAZON

- Rubber Barons
- First tram system in Brazil
- First electric tram system in Brazil
- French cobblestones on the streets
- Customs house from New Delhi
- Opera house in 1896
- Cost of living – 3 to 4 times New York City
The fall of the rubber-price threatens the subsistence of the Seringueiros.

A queda do preço da borracha ameaça a subsistência dos Seringueiros.

Durch den Verfall des Gummaprospekts die Lebensgrundlage der Seringueiros.
STOLEN RUBBER?

- Henry Wickham
- 1876 – 70,000 seedlings to Kew
- 2,000 survive
- Transplanted to Malaysia
- Mass production plantations
- 1900 – 5,000 trees
- 1910 – 1,500,000 trees
GOLD & IRON
CATTLE & SETTLERS
DESTRUCTION

- 80,000 fires per year
- 7,000 square miles per year
- Area the size of Belgium
- Soot equivalent to volcanic eruption
- Peak in mid-1990s
- Peaking again now
- 15-20% of forest destroyed