The abrogation of these land rights led to war in 1795 and the defeat of the Black Caribs, which forced their mass relocation first to Roatan and then British Honduras (now Belize).

Young attempts to explain the slaves' allegiance to their masters by depicting plantation society as a “source of cultural identification” for slaves, which is difficult to comprehend given their oppressed status on the estates. The peasantry in the English-speaking Caribbean may have come to admire the law and order established by Westminster-style democratic politics compared to the violence in Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and other countries. Admiration for British culture also served to maintain a Eurocentric orientation, however, especially among the elite. Eurocentrism almost certainly stifled the sense of national identity and denigrated the African-derived components of Caribbean culture. A sense of national identity may be emerging in St. Vincent among the peasantry, but it does not appear to be shared with the elite. Thus Young's challenge to the prevailing view that national identity is weak in the English-speaking Caribbean remains unconvincing, at least to this reader.

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Cultivating Crisis: The Human Costs of Pesticide Use in Latin America, by Douglas L. Murray; University of Texas Press (1994); xiv, 177 pp.

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Cultivating Crisis came to me for review at a time when I had been reading a couple of other books on related themes (S. Stonich 1993, J. Vandermeer and I. Perfecto 1995) as well as reflecting on my own impressions gained from recent anthropological fieldwork in Central America. All three books--Murray's, Stonich's and Vandermeer and Perfecto's--deal with the political ecology of agrarian crisis in Central America. My recent fieldwork in Honduras put me dramatically back in touch with that crisis after a ten-year absence. What is evident from these books, and from my own experience, is that despite an overall reduction in political violence, which has allowed Central America to vanish from the headlines of U.S. newspapers, the region is gripped in its most serious crisis in recent history. This crisis is driven by multiple factors including population growth, extreme levels of social and economic inequality, and the exhaustion of both contemporary development models and the natural resources that support household incomes and agricultural exports in the region.

As Murray's book (and the others) make clear, it is not a pretty sight when viewed in human terms--from the perspective of the people living this crisis--or in ecological terms--from the point of view of the survival of nonhuman species and ecosystems. And unfortunately, the complexity of the interlocking crises leave little cause for optimism.

Development funds are being withdrawn from Central America as USAID and other donors move on to other more pressing crises, leaving the aid-dependent economies of the region to stumble through the denouement of the political and economic crisis of the 1980s, including: a surfeit of guns (now in criminal hands) left over from various insurgencies and counter-insurgencies; "free trade" zones of maquiladora sweat shops; and various regional versions of "Economic Structural Adjustment Packages." Murray's book makes one wonder if the withdrawal of USAID is an entirely negative phenomenon, given the human and environmental costs of USAID's predominant development paradigm: export agriculture.

To confess, I picked up Murray's book prepared to be disappointed. What more can be written or said about pesticide abuse in the Third World after the classic, Circle of Poison (D. Weir and M. Schapiro 1981)? How serious could pesticide poisoning be, in the context of the need to intensify food production on a limited, unequally distributed and deteriorating land base? But Murray's book is convincing regarding the magnitude and importance of pesticide abuse in both human and ecological terms. The premeditated, profit-driven, evil practice of dumping dangerous pesticides on Third World markets (meaning Third World people) continues unabated, despite Circle's devastating critique. Murray effectively analyzes the forces underlying this phenomenon and begins to document its seriousness.

Cultivating Crisis focuses on two main cases of pesticide abuse: cotton and non-traditional exports (NTAX). Geographically, the focus is on Central America with additional material from the Dominican Republic. The subtitle of the book is quite misleading in this sense. The book does not offer comprehensive coverage of Latin America--aside from a few sketchy references to the Cañete Valley in Peru, South America is barely mentioned. There is also little discussion of the use of pesticides in the banana industry, a major user of pesticides and the subject of recent lawsuits throughout Central America by thousands of workers sterilized by the use of the herbicide, DBCP. Murray has also missed the story on the chemicals most widely used by small farmers in Central America: herbicides, especially the notorious paraquat (Gramoxone). My fieldwork in Honduras indicates that this class of chemicals is the pesticide most widely used and abused in Central America, with excessive rates of application, unsafe handling and tremendous potential for negative health effects among the small farmers who use it. If anything, however, these oversights should only serve to increase our alarm regarding pesticide abuse in Central America. The situation as described by Murray in cotton and NTAX is extremely serious. That this is only the partial story is truly alarming.

Murray has done an exemplary job in documenting the rise and fall of cotton in Central America. This boom began in the late 1950s and continued until the late 1980s. The boom was centered on the Pacific Coast of Central America: in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. The boom was made possible by pesticides; its undoing was largely caused by pest resistance and the rising costs of production driven by increasingly heavy and frequent doses of pesticides. Live by the sword, die by the sword. Sadly, while fortunes were being made and lost, those who suffered from pesticide use were the hundreds of thousands of workers--mostly seasonal, poorly paid, migrant laborers--exposed to increasingly toxic chemicals. Cotton is the heaviest user of pesticides, both in the U.S. and the Third World. When inserted into the social context of Central American agriculture, cotton proved extremely dangerous. Poor working conditions, low educational levels, rapid turnover among workers, and other conditions conspired to increase pesticide exposure rates among workers in the region. Also, pesticide companies and salespersons are the main source of information on pesticide use, an obvious conflict of interest. Field research reported by Murray demonstrates that official statistics “so dramatically under represented the actual rates of [pesticide] poisoning that they were almost meaningless” (p. 46).

The second case treated by Murray is the boom in nontraditional exports, or NTAX as they are often referred to in the literature (see B. Barham, et al. 1992 for a recent review). NTAX include fruits, vegetables, and flowers for export to northern markets. NTAX were widely promoted by USAID in the 1980s as the solution to the Central American agrarian crisis. High value products, it was claimed that they were scale-neutral, or even scale-negative, and thus appropriate for small farmers in Central America and the Caribbean. (This view has been challenged by P. Rosset 1991). NTAX have grown dramatically in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, not to mention Chile, Colombia and some other South American countries. Unfortunately, these crops are highly susceptible to pest damage, especially when monocropped in tropical environments. Thus, NTAX cultivators have been forced and/or encouraged to jump on the “pesticide treadmill” as means of guaranteeing yields and meeting the cosmetic standards of exporters selling to finicky U.S. consumers, just as cotton producers did thirty years ago. Murray documents the health effects of the principal pesticides used by farmers and farm workers in the NTAX industry. He also documents the increasing problem of pesticide residues on produce imported into the U.S. from the region. U.S. government controls of contaminated imported produce are scandalously lax. Remember that next time you eat an imported melon or snowpeas from the region.

What's to be done? Murray disparages the “safe use” movement --the attempt by chemical companies to curb the worst of pesticide abuse through programs of education and the promotion of safer handling and application of chemicals. According to the author, there are too many structural barriers to safe use practices in the region. Promotion of safe use must come from third parties, not connected to the chemical corporations who have a vested interest in selling more chemicals or the growers who have a manifest unconcern for worker safety. The logical candidate for such a role is the government. But governments lack the human resources, infrastructure and, in many cases, the will to tackle this problem. If anything, in the era of structural adjustment and shrinking state budgets, the prospect for effective control over and education regarding pesticides, is slim indeed. Integrated pest management (IPM) has great potential in the region (as elsewhere) but has been hampered by a lack of commitment and many of the same structural barriers plaguing safe use. Who will pay for IPM? Governments? Growers? Non-government organizations? Until a commitment is made to reduce pesticide use through IPM and other regenerative agricultural techniques, the people and environment of Central America will continue to suffer the ravages of chemical poisoning.

In summary, Murray's book is informative and thought-provoking, if incomplete. It adds yet another piece to the drama of deteriorating human well-being and environmental degradation in Central America. It does little, however, to move us beyond chronicles of a crisis foretold or toward a solution to this crisis -- or rather the interlocking, multiple crises, of which pesticide abuse is but one symptom. As social scientists, we are very adept at documenting these crises. What can we contribute to their solution?

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Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation, by Andrew Armitage; Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1995. xiii + 286 pp.

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This is a comparative study, as the title suggests, covering three colonial jurisdictions; Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The focus for the work is `assimilation,' a policy more readily associated with the late 1950s than with the present in Australia and New Zealand, at least. The author defines the assimilationist years for Australia as “1930-70” (p. l4), which helps to provide some time frame within which to judge this account. It is not clear from what follows, however, whether this is a historical account or a contemporary one, nor whether policies based on welfare, assimilation and integration are differentiated.

The book starts with a general introduction to the subject of colonialism and a brief explanation for the choice of the “comparative” method. Reasons are also provided for the choice of the three study areas, along with a description of sources and methods. Chapters Two through Seven describe the Australian (pp. l4-69), Canadian (pp. 70-135), and New Zealand (pp.136-184) situations. For each area, Armitage devotes one of the chapters to “Child Welfare Policy,” giving clear direction to his approach to the subject. As he notes in