

People, Plants, and Justice: The Politics of Nature Conservation. Charles Zerner, ed. New York: Columbia University Press. 2000. Pp. 416. \$49.50 (cloth).

People, Plants, and Justice: The Politics of Nature Conservation makes three major contributions debates on the ethics of nature conservation. First, the theoretical and methodological approaches presented by the contributing authors to this volume advance political ecology scholarship. Second, the book suggests alternative models, principles, and perspectives that, if adopted, will enable conservation organizations to improve rather than abuse human rights. Third, it boldly exposes potential and actual human rights abuses caused by conservation projects by critiquing specific guiding models, principles, and perspectives. The data that are presented in this book support the proposition that the conservation of biodiversity does not necessarily coincide with the protection of human rights. In other words, the objectives of conservationists are not always the same as the objectives of indigenous and/or local people. It is possible to reach common ground, however, if conservationists can become less ethnocentric, learn from past mistakes, and—as is repeatedly emphasized throughout the book—relinquish control to local people.

The contributors to *People, Plants, and Justice* contextualize conservation programs in the political economic struggles that characterize the contemporary world. Their substantial evidence includes data on historical and contemporary social relations involving natural resource management in Africa, Latin America, Oceania, and Southeast Asia. Many of the authors juxtapose the perceptions and practices of local communities to those of conservation organizations, examining social relations between actors who are internal and external to environments that house valuable resources. Rather than romanticizing indigenous peoples or demonizing the multiple other groups of actors who are subjects of analysis, the book presents a non-essentialized, empirically-based analysis of the social relations of conservation. Nonetheless, either because of the realities of our contemporary world or the bias of the authors, the “scales of justice” (Zerner 2000:17) weigh heavily against conservation organizations.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One, “Across the Terrain,” consists of three chapters that define the subject matter, establish the book’s approach, set the prevailing tone for the writings, and review other chapters in the book (sometimes applaudingly and other times harshly). The organization of this book is quite unique among edited volumes since three chapters and three authors perform tasks that are typically accomplished in just one chapter. Far from being mere summaries of the chapters in Part Two, “On Location,” however, the three chapters in Part One combine critical commentary with rich data from the authors’ own research in insightful comparisons. In the official “Introduction” (subtitled “Toward a Broader Vision of Justice and Nature Conservation”), Charles Zerner, the editor, leads the reader through the volume’s major issues of hierarchical social formations, community dynamics, culturally constructed images of nature, the commodification and global circulation of nature, and democratic reform of resource management regimes. Zerner challenges his audience to conduct further critical research, design “better” social-ecological-political-economic institutions, and re-align the political economy with human rights. In Chapter 1, “Contested

