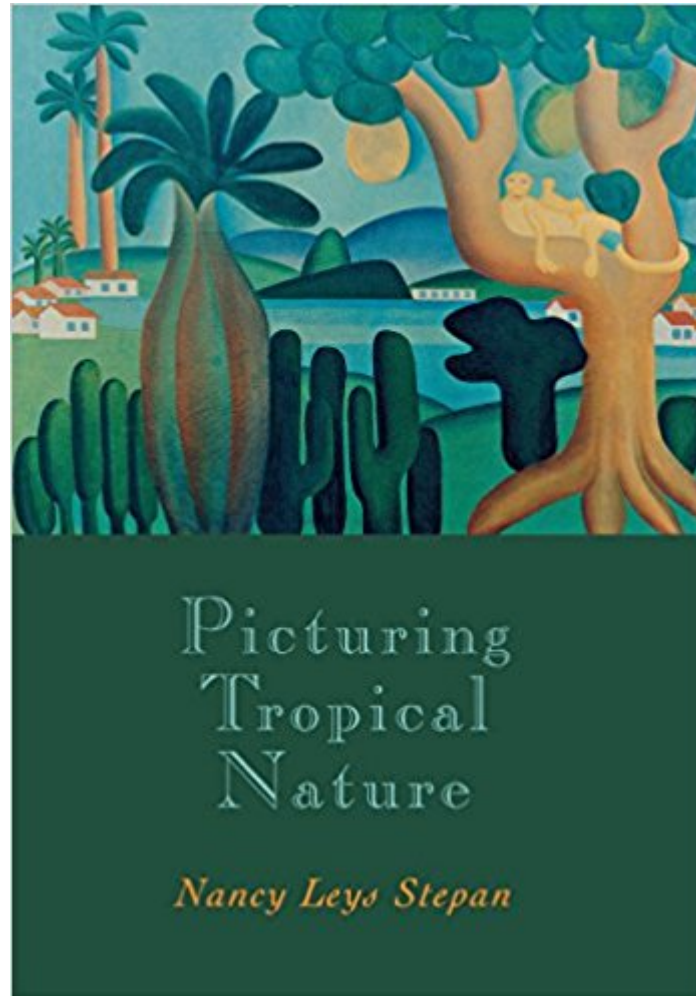




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# Picturing Tropical Nature



## Synopsis

Whether as sublime landscape, malignant wilderness, or a site for environmental conflicts and eco-tourism, tropical nature is to a great extent an American and European imaginative construct, conveyed in literature, travel writing, drawings, paintings, photographs, and diagrams. These images are central to Nancy Leys Stepan's view that a critical examination of the "tropicalization of nature" can remedy some of the most persistent misrepresentations of the region and its peoples. *Picturing Tropical Nature* reflects on the work of several nineteenth- and twentieth-century scientists and artists, including Alexander von Humboldt, Alfred Russel Wallace, Louis Agassiz, Sir Patrick Manson, and Margaret Mee. Their careers illuminate several aspects of tropicalization: science and art in the making of tropical pictures; the commercial and cultural boom in things tropical in the modern period; photographic attempts to represent tropical hybrid races; anti-tropicalism and its role in an emerging environmentalist sensibility; and visual depictions of disease in the new tropical medicine. Essential to Stepan's analysis are the responses to European projections of artists, scientists, and intellectuals living in tropical regions. She examines the long-standing Brazilian fantasy of the tropics as a racial democracy, and offers an evaluation of the impact of tropical plants and European conceptions of the jungle on the anti-mimetic, modernist aesthetics of the brilliant landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx. In a fascinating inquiry into the aesthetic and political, Stepan demonstrates the conflicts over meaning that have shaped the emergence of the tropics, and in doing so questions the nature of representation itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A fascinating examination of how the tropics have come to be represented since the eighteenth century, drawing mostly on a marvelous array of materials from Brazil. . . . Some of the images she brings to light are truly gruesome, but she uses them well to demonstrate how the tropics became 'a place of peculiarity' and how indelible many of these perceptions remain." •Foreign Affairs, Vol. 80, No. 6, September/October 2001

"In *Picturing Tropical Nature*, Nancy Leys Stepan offers a beautiful and fascinating portrait of a subject many people have rarely taken the time to consider." •Virginia Quarterly Review, Vol. 78, No. 1

"In this lucid and well-researched book, Nancy Leys Stepan, an expert on both Latin America and the history of race . . . analyzes the range of visual practices through which South American nature was represented in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Organizing her study around depictions of tropical nature, diseases, and races, Stepan convincingly argues that the entire Victorian understanding of the tropical was profoundly shaped by sophisticated visual strategies and genres, and that South America, more than any other region, functioned as the site of tropical nature par excellence." •Robert D. Aguirre, Wayne State University, *Victorian Studies*, 45:4, Summer 2003

Nancy Leys Stepan, whose books on race and eugenics have been rightly acclaimed, has now moved into the field of analysis of illustrations to add to this growing literature on the tropics. . . . Stepan marshals some intriguing material, and it is all handled with verve and style. The sections on medicine and medical photography are particularly acute." •John M. MacKenzie, University of Aberdeen, *American Historical Review*, February 2003

"Important historical scholarship offers insights by examining underdeveloped subjects, periods, or areas; by demonstrating new methodological approaches; or by drawing connections between seemingly disparate fields and disciplines. *Picturing Tropical Nature*, by Nancy Leys Stepan, succeeds on each of these levels. With images of the South American tropics as her focal point, Stepan demonstrates the significance of this neglected region and several largely ignored scientists, while locating the common ground between environmental history, history of science, and history of medicine. . . . In short, *Picturing Tropical Nature* breaks new ground in revealing the significance of images in the analysis of scientific, medical, and cultural beliefs regarding tropical spaces, peoples, and diseases. One can only hope that others will follow Stepan's lead and begin to explore the fertile territory of imagery in the tropics." •Frederick R. Davis, *Journal of the History of Biology*, 35, 2002

Nancy Leys Stepan is Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University. She is the author of *Eradication*, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* and *Picturing*

Tropical Nature, all from Cornell.

very well organized book! you honestly dont need to read the whole thing to get the jist of it. The Intro does an amazing job at outlining ideas, concepts and arguments. Very interesting book.

Almost brand new book, exactly what i needed at a lower price than the book store!

MORTAL SECRETS: Truth and Lies in the Age of AIDS is a book that is much needed as we read about the disheartening upswing of the AIDS pandemic. Now that so many new drugs are available and now that living with AIDS is a reality instead of an unachievable goal (as we all wait for a vaccine and a cure), this is an opportune moment for addressing the psychological and ethical issues faced by both HIV positive and HIV negative persons. What Drs. Klitzman and Bayer (a Psychiatrist/Bioethicist and a professor of sociomedical sciences) set out to do is make observations based on interviews with gays, bisexuals, straight people with histories involving drug use and prostitution (or partnered with one from these groups) on several topics: transmission of the disease, attitudes about getting tested, about being positive, about disclosure to partners, parents, extended family, co-workers, and the public at large, and the painful struggle about making moral judgments as to when to disclose positivity to sexual partners, etc. The introduction is levelheaded, the interviews are isolated paragraphs instead of two-way conversations, and the presentation of the data and the opinions of the writers is fairly dry and flat. Knowing this is an investigatory, extended paper makes the reader finally absorb the material as though for a class in college. Not that this is at all bad: I think this book will provide a good reference for future works whether they be fact based or novel enhanced. One wishes for more writing like the following sentence in the closing paragraph: "Shame, desire, passion, fear of abandonment, lures of secrecy, vicissitudes of moral character, and qualities of relationships all mold private life and individuals' willingness to talk about HIV. Policy Makers can shape the context of private choice, but the exercise of such choice remains beyond their control." In writing about this most devastating of diseases one hopes for more passion on the part of the writers. How do these men really feel about the pandemic? There really are no "Conclusions" here. But then, again, this is more a dissertation than a support session.

This book is a welcome respite from the "damn or defend" approach usually taken to hot-button issues like HIV disclosure. Rather than inserting themselves as authorities who tell people with HIV what to do, the authors let people who are wrestling with all the complexities of HIV disclosure--with

casual partners, with long-term partners, even with parents and friends--speak for themselves . The result is a portrait that won't satisfy those who want to mandate how it is people with HIV who live their lives, but also doesn't pander to people who want to whitewash away the uncomfortable truths about how people infect one other. Many of the voices here capture the complexity that gets lost in sound bites about HIV. This is just how it should be with a book about an issue that is simultaneously so everyday and so freighted with consequence for many of us. Get it. Read it. It will make you feel human, and appreciate the humanity of others.

This book is a disappointing read. The data are old: the epidemic has moved on from pre-HAART days so that the narratives about disclosure are distorted by the time warp. The material isn't organized well either, so that the social patterning of disclosure (e.g. by gender, social class, race etc.) is never revealed. The book needed a better and deeper theoretical analysis to elucidate the connections between social patterning, HIV transmission and disclosure. Further, the material presented here is a little too rosy. Many people do not disclose their HIV-positive status in the short term and often not in the long term either. It was difficult to get a sense of the meaning behind the material in a way that would be useful for dealing with issues of disclosure in the field.

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