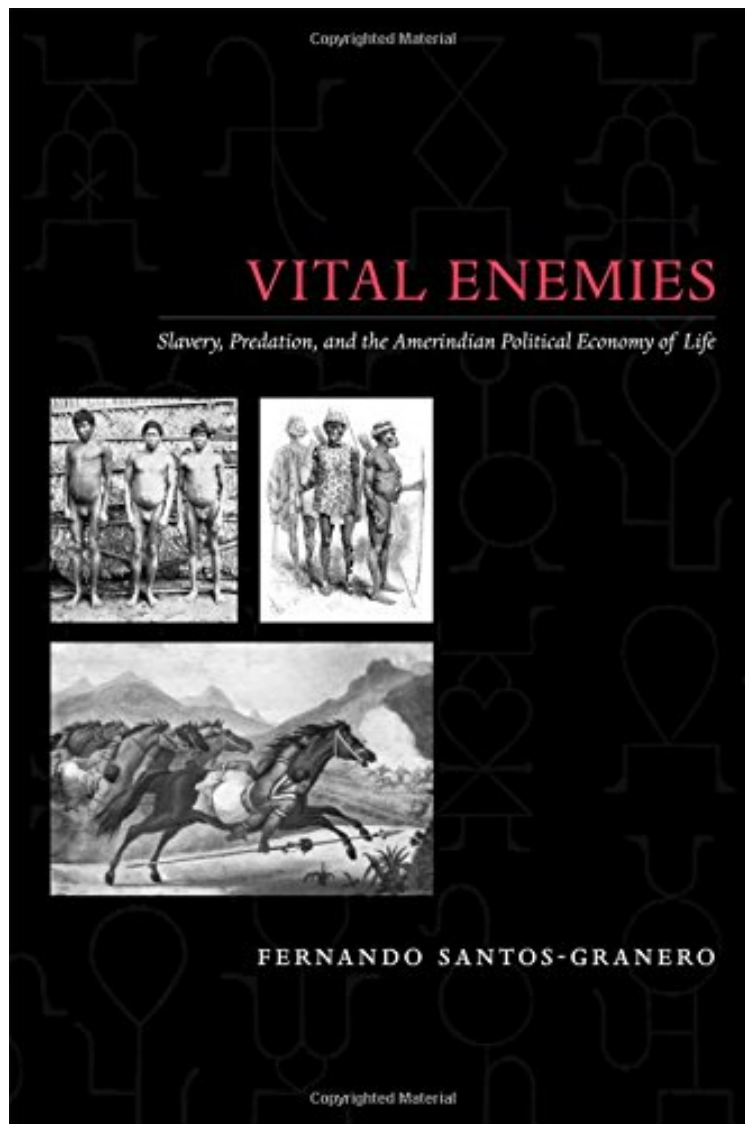


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Vital Enemies: Slavery, Predation, and the Amerindian Political Economy of Life

Fernando Santos-Granero

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Fernando Santos-Granero : Vital Enemies: Slavery, Predation, and the Amerindian Political Economy of Life before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Vital Enemies: Slavery, Predation, and the Amerindian Political Economy of Life:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Important well-written book By Mary Jane West-Eberhard This book is a deeply scholarly contribution. It takes advantage of multiple historic accounts written primarily by Spanish and

French explorers of the "New World," to piece together fascinating descriptions of the treatment and assimilation (or non-assimilation) of captive peoples, focussing on detailed information for several different cultures whose similarities and differences illuminate general patterns and idiosyncratic features at the same time. It discusses the reluctance of some authors to use such accounts and gives convincing reasons to use them, with specific criteria regarding how this was done critically in the research reported by this book. This book could only have been written by a person who, like the author, is fluent in Spanish, French, and English and familiar with the antique language of the accounts used, as well as being erudite in knowledge of previous literature on these topics. The accounts are fascinating, including such things as how clothing and body markings were employed to distinguish captives; how some economies depended on repeated enslavement of particular subordinated neighbors; how sex differences in treatment and assimilation of captives was carried out, etc.. It also discusses the errors and misunderstandings that can occur if the slave-making systems of native American societies are superficially compared with the more familiar phenomenon of African-American slavery.

Analyzing slavery and other forms of servitude in six non-state indigenous societies of tropical America at the time of European contact, *Vital Enemies* offers a fascinating new approach to the study of slavery based on the notion of "political economy of life." Fernando Santos-Granero draws on the earliest available historical sources to provide novel information on Amerindian regimes of servitude, sociologies of submission, and ideologies of capture. Estimating that captive slaves represented up to 20 percent of the total population and up to 40 percent when combined with other forms of servitude, Santos-Granero argues that native forms of servitude fulfill the modern understandings of slavery, though Amerindian contexts provide crucial distinctions with slavery as it developed in the American South. The Amerindian understanding of life forces as being finite, scarce, unequally distributed, and in constant circulation yields a concept of all living beings as competing for vital energy. The capture of human beings is an extreme manifestation of this understanding, but it marks an important element in the ways Amerindian "captive slavery" was misconstrued by European conquistadors. Illuminating a cultural facet that has been widely overlooked or miscast for centuries, *Vital Enemies* makes possible new dialogues regarding hierarchies in the field of native studies, as well as a provocative re-framing of pre- and post-contact America.

About the Author Fernando Santos-Granero is a staff researcher at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama and has worked with the Yanéscha of the Peruvian for three decades.