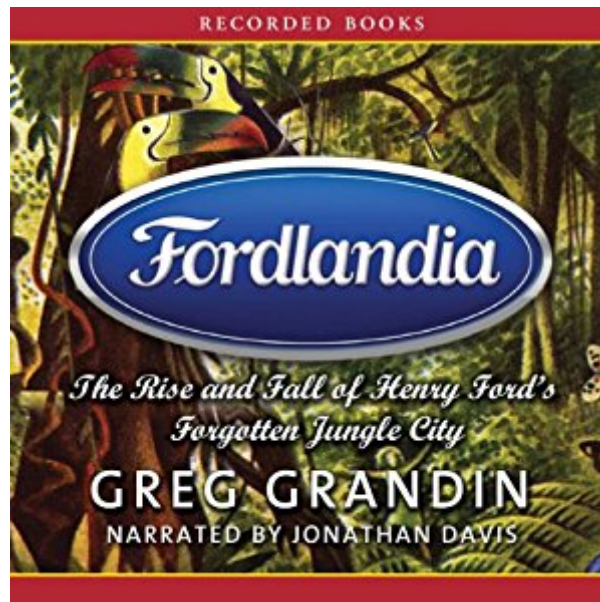


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# Fordlandia: The Rise And Fall Of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City



## Synopsis

In 1927, Henry Ford, the richest man in the world, bought a tract of land twice the size of Delaware in the Brazilian . His intention was to grow rubber, but the project rapidly evolved into a more ambitious bid to export America itself. Fordlandia, as the settlement was called, soon became the site of an epic clash. On one side was the lean, austere car magnate; on the other, the , the most complex ecological system on the planet. Indigenous workers rejected Ford's midwestern Puritanism, turning the place into a ribald tropical boomtown. And his efforts to apply a system of regimented mass production to the 's diversity resulted in a rash environmental assault that foreshadowed many of the threats laying waste to the rain forest today. More than a parable of one man's arrogant attempt to force his will on the natural world, Greg Grandin's Fordlandia is "a quintessentially American fable". (Time).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book offers a rare and fascinating look into Henry Ford's grand economic experiment in the jungle. In 1927, approaching his 65th birthday, Ford sent his first two ships to the area. He had purchased 2.5 million acres of land - roughly the size of Connecticut. He planned not only to plant rubber trees, but also to mine the land for gold; drill for oil; and harvest timber. In addition, he hoped to bring his American-style sensibilities to the region: the production line; sanitation; buildings such as Churches, cottages; a hospital; a movie theater; and the idea of fair wages for hard work. What he didn't bring was an expertise in growing rubber trees, or an understanding of the land and its people. One other thing Ford never brought to Fordlandia was himself. Between the inception of

Fordlandia in 1927 and Ford's death in 1947, he never set foot in the . This is the story of the creation of "Fordlandia", amazing in itself. But, it is also the story of Henry Ford (a man of sharp contradictions); the struggles of the American and Brazilian laborers who worked in the City; and of the . It also speaks of a different era, when seemingly impossible things could be attempted. Very well written and researched. Lots of old photographs. I can find no flaws. Highly recommended.

One of the best books I have read on Henry Ford, and I've read most all of them. The author provides a fascinating rendition of so many topics, including the , Diego Rivera's Detroit murals, the booming 1920s and the hard times of the 1930s. The book is epic in scope, a really wonderful journey that takes readers from Detroit to the wilds of northern Michigan, the Tennessee River Valley (I didn't know that the idea for the TVA came from Ford!) and then to the . I fully recommend this book.

Fordlandia is that rare non-fiction written by an historian that is a great read. Author Greg Grandin takes the reader on a wonderful voyage down the as he uncovers a magical mystery escapade of Henry Ford. Not unlike many of the recent forays into Southeast Asia and the Middle East, Ford's desire to claim the hearts, minds and raw materials of Latin America, specifically Brazil seem very modern and familiar. He seems to have made all the classic errors of neo-colonialism: ignoring the host culture, trying to impose an inappropriate culture and economic system, sending personnel not schooled in the language or culture. On top of this, the was an unfriendly climate for those used to the cold winds of Michigan and the Puritan work ethic of the United States. Insects, diseases, "indolent" workers, lack of modern conveniences and the very essence of the area combined to doom Ford's dream of establishing a town/plantation devoted to cornering the market on rubber. Ford's efforts to transplant his River Rouge auto plant to the jungle of Brazil makes for fascinating and thought provoking reading.

Being a Detroitier whose grandfather and mother who worked at the Rouge, and who worked in the Iron Foundry and on the trains beneath the Rouge, who later in life researched Ford's schools in the US, who studied with great care the relationship between the Fords and the workers, I thought I knew Ford. I did not. In this brilliant and carefully documented (read the footnotes for sure) study of not just Fordlandia, but the social relations people form in their struggle with nature in order to create life, means of production, knowledge, and freedom, the author investigates one form of capitalism that mostly likely Ford and others believed would create abundance, hence equality and

harmony. How that worked out is done in well written detail in this wonderful book that I am urging everyone to read as we witness other Fordlandias growing---as nations under fire.

Henry Ford, a man who had successfully developed the industrial technique which would raise the living standards of America and much of the world, tried to create his own "rubber state" in the depths of the Brazilian jungle (they call it a "rain forest now, for PR purposes). Having gotten his hands on iron mines for steel, forests for lumber and copper mines for wiring "Fordlandia" was an attempt by Ford to get access to the one material still out of his reach: rubber. At the time, rubber was mostly coming from European colonies in Asia. Attempts to grow it in Florida were not very successful so Ford looked to Brazil, where rubber-bearing plants originated from. The Ford company convinced the state and federal governments to give him a stretch of territory the size of Connecticut for the purposes of growing rubber trees. Ford spent millions of dollars on Fordlandia, creating a small American town in the wilderness, complete with swimming pools, a modern hospital, a powerplant, sawmill, etc. However, Ford had a habit of forming opinions and then not listening to experts. His efforts to grow rubber were doomed because rubber plants in Brazil are subject to a host of diseases and pests (rubber plants in Asia do not have this problem) which makes large-scale, industrial collection of rubber impractical. The book is well-written, discussing Henry Ford's eccentric ideas and the experiences of many of his employees who were involved in Fordlandia. The research is first-rate. However, the book does diverge significantly from the subject at hand, comparing Ford's attempts to conquer the Brazilian jungle to the War in Iraq (!!!) and devoting several unfortunate pages to a rant about capitalism, global warming and globalism. Otherwise it would rate full five stars.

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