



# A Future for Amazonia: Randy Borman and Cofán Environmental Politics

*Michael Cepek*

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Blending ethnography with a fascinating personal story, *A Future for Amazonia* is an account of a political movement that arose in the early 1990s in response to decades of attacks on the lands and peoples of eastern Ecuador, one of the world's most culturally and biologically diverse places. After generations of ruin at the hands of colonizing farmers, transnational oil companies, and Colombian armed factions, the indigenous Cofán people and their rain forest territory faced imminent jeopardy. In a surprising turn of events, the Cofán chose Randy Borman, a man of Euro-American descent, to lead their efforts to overcome the crisis that confronted them.

Drawing on three years of ethnographic research, *A Future for Amazonia* begins by tracing the contours of Cofán society and Borman's place within it. Borman, a blue-eyed, white-skinned child of North American missionary-linguists, was raised in a Cofán community and gradually came to share the identity of his adoptive nation. He became a global media phenomenon and forged creative partnerships between Cofán communities, conservationist organizations, Western scientists, and the Ecuadorian state. The result was a collective mobilization that transformed the Cofán nation in unprecedented ways, providing them with political power, scientific expertise, and a new role as ambitious caretakers of more than one million acres of forest. Challenging simplistic notions of identity, indigeneity, and inevitable ecological destruction, *A Future for Amazonia* charts an inspiring course for environmental politics in the twenty-first century.



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