



Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations

By David R. Montgomery

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Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations By David R. Montgomery

Dirt, soil, call it what you want—it's everywhere we go. It is the root of our existence, supporting our feet, our farms, our cities. This fascinating yet disquieting book finds, however, that we are running out of dirt, and it's no laughing matter. An engaging natural and cultural history of soil that sweeps from ancient civilizations to modern times, *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations* explores the compelling idea that we are—and have long been—using up Earth's soil. Once bare of protective vegetation and exposed to wind and rain, cultivated soils erode bit by bit, slowly enough to be ignored in a single lifetime but fast enough over centuries to limit the lifespan of civilizations. A rich mix of history, archaeology and geology, *Dirt* traces the role of soil use and abuse in the history of Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, China, European colonialism, Central America, and the American push westward. We see how soil has shaped us and we have shaped soil—as society after society has risen, prospered, and plowed through a natural endowment of fertile dirt. David R. Montgomery sees in the recent rise of organic and no-till farming the hope for a new agricultural revolution that might help us avoid the fate of previous civilizations.

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Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations By David R. Montgomery Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #92864 in Books
- Published on: 2012-04-10
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .70" w x 6.00" l, 1.05 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 296 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“Anyone interested in environmental issues should read this book. . . . Entertains and stimulates thought.”
(*Times Higher Ed Sup (Thes)* 2007-08-03)

“Fascinating insights into what be our most precious natural resource and gives important pointers toward sustainable land management.”
(*Bioscience* 2008-04-01)

“How societies fare in the long run depends on how they treat their soils. Simple. Concise. You are your dirt.”
(Carol Ekarius *Hobby Farms* 2009-02-17)

“Sobering. . . . A timely text that will no doubt stimulate the discussion of this issue, and its potential solutions, for years to come.”
(*Environment & History* 2009-11-01)

“Strengthen[s] appreciation for how important the soil is to our existence.”
(*Great Plains Research* 2009-05-19)

“This book is a thorough and enlightening treatment of the topic.”
(*The Perennial Bookworm* 2011-03-07)

“Sounds an ever timely and necessary clarion call.”
(*Vadose Zone Journal* 2010-05-17)

From the Inside Flap

"From this gritty and compelling state-of-our-earth report comes the inescapable truth that we are nothing if not dirty-minded. A brilliant and essential book."—Roger Swain, science editor of *Horticulture* magazine

"The relationship between soils and societies has been crucial for humankind for 10,000 years. David Montgomery brings a geomorphologist's eye and a world-historical vision to the subject, showing why it demands our attention."—J.R. McNeill, author of *Something New Under the Sun*

“In our cyber-charged age, it’s easy to forget that all six billion of us stand on the thin skin of the earth. Humanity is agriculture and agriculture is soil, just as it has been for 10,000 years. David Montgomery—a competent digger of dirt and an engaging storyteller—shows how a close look at the soil can reveal a surprising amount about who we are and where we are headed.”—Richard Manning, author of *Against the Grain: How Agriculture Has Hijacked Civilization*

About the Author

David R. Montgomery, Professor of Earth and Space Sciences at the University of Washington, is author of *King of Fish: The Thousand-Year Run of Salmon*.

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