

# Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations

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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.

"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* 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*.  
Other Books

*The Fate of Food*, Is the future of food looking bleak - or better than ever? At a time when every day brings news of drought and famine, Amanda Little investigates what it will take to feed a hotter, hungrier, more crowded world. She explores the past along with the present and discovers startling innovations: remote-control crops, vertical farms, robot weedkillers, lab-grown meat, 3D-printed meals, water networks run by supercomputers, cloud seeding and sensors that monitor the microclimate of individual plants. She meets the creative and controversial minds changing the face of modern food production, and tackles fears over genetic modification with hard facts. *The Fate of Food* is a fascinating look at the threats and opportunities that lie ahead as we struggle for food security. Faced with a perilous future, it gives us reason to hope.

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