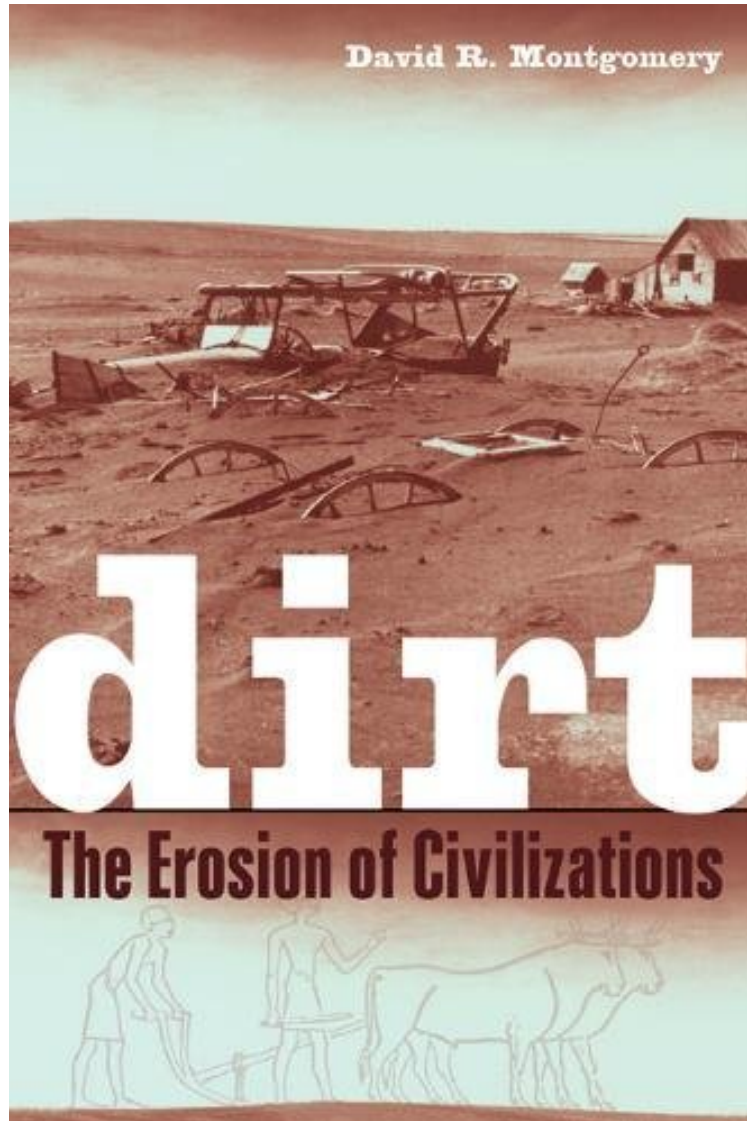


Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations

David R. Montgomery
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David R. Montgomery : Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An Island of GreenBy Brian Bowman[[VIDEOID:moS7SUHAWQWVO2]]Although it took several years and lots of mistakes, expensive replantings, and heartache, I've switched my farm from row-crop agriculture to pasture to reduce erosion and restore the natural fertility of the soil. It's healthier, more beautiful, and even more profitable with the growing awareness of

sustainability. This book corroborates everything I've learned the hard way. No words need be spoken, the evidence speaks for itself. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Best 'dirty book' I ever read...By Book Reader I'm probably more fascinated by the subject of soil in relation to civilization and society than most people are. That said, this is one of the most interesting, absorbing, well researched books that I've ever read. Professor Montgomery's book should be read by every high school and college student that is interested in a little known, but pertinent reason why civilizations fail...remember the Cedars of Lebanon? That area of Lebanon is desert now, why, because they cut down all the trees to build ships and the soil eroded...simple. Professor Montgomery makes a point that whenever economists are in charge of a society it goes downhill as they recommend unsustainable practices...and give numerous examples. In a perfect world this book would sell as many copies as a Harry Potter adventure does...however as the book points out, the world isn't perfect...but, in my opinion, this book is! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A+ intro: History of soil, and the need and potential for its conservation By J. D. Halabi In less than 250 pages Montgomery does a pretty good job of explaining what soil is, the history of what people thought about it, and the history of how people used (and mostly destroyed) it. "It's like the earth's skin" he keeps saying. And as a non-scientist, the analogy is appealing. When he deals with the past, the pattern he lays out is simple: a civilization uses up its soil, and moves on to other soil to use up; or a civilization uses up its soil, and the civilization declines. Problem: we don't have much new soil to move on to, all the best stuff is in the temperate zone (the soil in the tropics is not as good and gets depleted much more quickly), and we don't really want to decline. He makes the case for farming in different ways, smaller farms, less monoculture, drastic reduction in pesticide and fertilizer, more labor intensive farming, mulching/manure, contoured plowing, etc. etc. It is both radical, and reasonable. - - - - - Units! Units are the worst part of the book. He's only got four things to measure, but he makes it so hard to follow. We have depth of soil. That one he handles ok. He uses inches, and he uses feet. Reasonable. Time. He uses years. Tens of years. Hundreds of years. Thousands of years. And generations. He should dump those generations. Unnecessarily confusing. But I'm being picky. Areas. Acres. Hectares. Square miles. Size of _____ (fill in the country). This drove me nuts. Pick a small measure (acre or ha.) and stick with it. For larger areas, pick one familiar area, and compare all others against it. I like France. "An area one tenth the area of France" "an area half as large as France" "a bit larger than France" - If France is the wrong unit, pick another. But pick one, and stay with it. Otherwise the reader just gets confused. Most people do not offhand have the ability to compare lots of areas. How fast does soil erode? Montgomery uses inches per century. Or years per inch. Or inches per year. Or inches per thousand years. The concept itself, that soil disappears, is foreign. Shifting units on top of this is confusing for no reason. I should have converted each figure to inches per century. Instead I just got frustrated as I read. - - - - - Soil erosion is important. Soil is a resource that is disappearing like oil. We should know more. Montgomery makes this information accessible. He emphasizes the importance, at a level technical enough for the science-interested layman. Aside from the units (just convert to inches per century) it is a relatively easy read. It is worth knowing more about this topic, and Dirt is an excellent intro.

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 Publishers Weekly Montgomery (King of Fish), a geomorphologist who studies how landscapes change through time, argues persuasively that soil is humanity's most essential natural resource and essentially linked to modern civilization's survival. He traces the history of agriculture, showing that when humans exhausted the soil in the past, their societies collapsed, or they moved on. But moving on is not an option for future generations, he warns: there isn't enough land. In the U.S., mechanized agriculture has eroded an alarming amount of agricultural land, and in the developing world, degraded soil is a principal cause of poverty. We are running out of soil, and agriculture will soon be unable to support the world's growing population. Chemical fertilizers, which are made with lots of cheap oil, are not the solution. Nor are genetically modified seeds, which have not produced larger harvests or reduced the need for pesticides. Montgomery proposes an agricultural revolution based on soil conservation. Instead of tilling the land and making it vulnerable to erosion, we should put organic matter back into the ground, simulating natural conditions. His book, though sometimes redundant, makes a convincing case for the need to respect and conserve the world's limited

supply of soil. Illus. not seen by PW. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Anyone interested in environmental issues should read this book. . . . Entertains and stimulates thought.