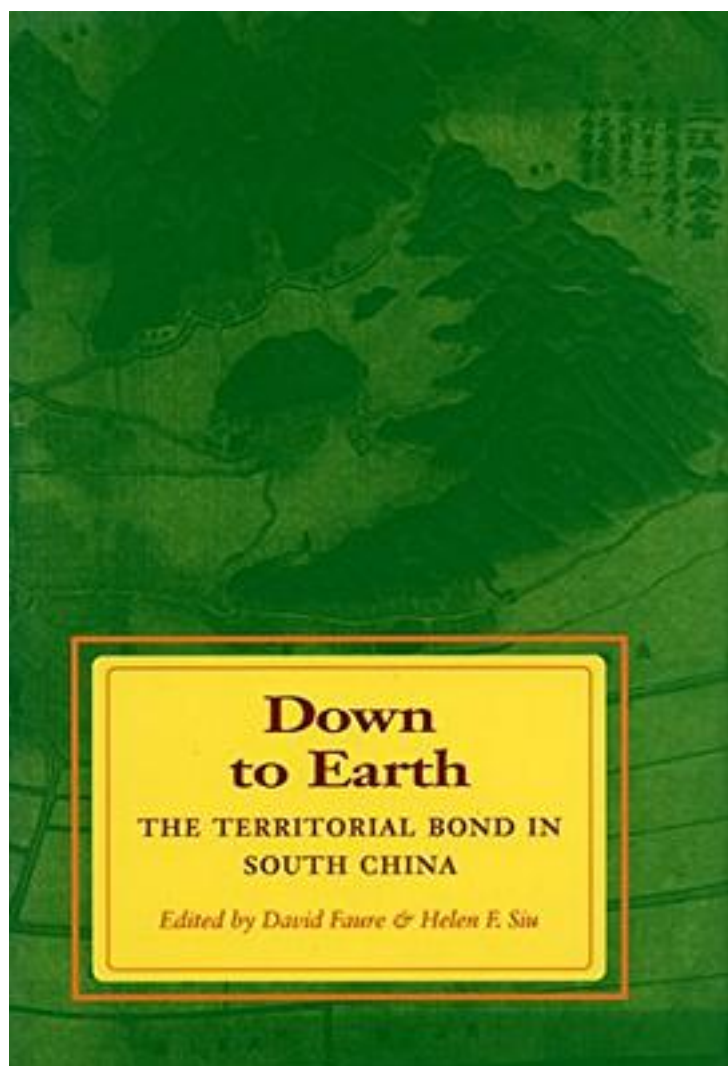


Down to Earth



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著者:Ted Steinberg

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"This book will try to change the way you think about American history," writes Ted Steinberg in the opening line of *Down to Earth*. That's an ambitious claim, but not far off the mark. His fascinating book is essentially an environmental history of the United States, with the author paying particular attention to how elements of nature became commodities and thereby isolated Americans from the natural world. Readers don't have to subscribe to this neo-Marxist concept in order to appreciate Steinberg's observations about everything from the old-time urban problem of horse excrement ("the nineteenth-century equivalent of auto pollution") to the massive amounts of garbage produced by fast-food chains (McDonald's, he says, requires "an area equivalent in size to more than 450,000 football fields" to supply its paper needs). He also tells what may be the first-ever natural history of the Civil War. This may sound idiosyncratic, and to some extent it is, yet Steinberg weaves it all together and makes the underappreciated point that "it is quite simply wrong to view the natural world as an unchanging backdrop to the past." It changes all the time, he writes, and it has shaped Americans in ways that few of them understand. --John Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly

Steinberg, an environmental historian at Case Western Reserve University, examines the dynamic interactions between America's economic, political and cultural institutions and its geography, plants, animals and natural resources. He presents two predominant themes. The first is that the ecological balance is precarious and can be undermined, even completely destroyed, by unintended changes that flow from the smallest of events. The second is that the capitalist impulse to treat everything within its horizon as a commodity, and the corollary compulsion to assign a dollar value to every commodity, is fundamentally at odds with the existence of the diverse and healthy ecosystems that existed prior to the country's settlement. Steinberg makes a strong case, choosing examples that range from the environmental changes that followed the mysterious extinction of the carrier pigeon to the ecological effects of the mundane garbage disposals, lawns, highways, pesticides and even the salt spread on roads to melt snow to demonstrate his points. He is a historian with strong opinions, and in later chapters political commentary is increasingly prominent. Much of his commentary will offend conservative readers, who will disagree with Steinberg's harsh attacks on American business. For example, he chides the meatpacking industry for "corporate slaughterhouses [that] dehumanized workers" and the biotechnology industry because "feeding the malnourished has never been the driving force behind [it]. Profits, more than people, motivated this bold new science." Interestingly, he is also critical of mainstream environmental groups, who he believes have been coopted by contributions from corporations. Steinberg (*Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*) is provocative, backing up his opinions with facts and well-honed arguments, and it will be hard to ignore his major theses. The writing is professional although occasionally stilted. 65 b&w photos, 5 maps not seen by PW.

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书评

I think the key of environment history is critical thinking. to see the human activities on environment in a critical way. pig in the city did good to city , pigless or sewer hide the bad consequence effect of human activites. so good and bad is not that cl...

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