

Borderland



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Suburbia, claims Stilgoe, is a catch-all term that misleadingly lumps together all sorts of regionsscruffy frontier settlements, villages that sprang up along well-traveled roads, planned communities, towns built on their accessibility via horsecar and, later, streetcar. This leisurely foray into the history of U.S. suburbs shows that 19th and early 20th century Americans fled the cities for a wide variety of reasons. For the genteel, Shaker Heights, eight miles east of Cleveland, offered nostalgic appeal combined with natural beauty and urban convenience. But the railroad and steamboat opened up the hinterlands around New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere to the lower and middle classes. Harvard professor Stilgoe concentrates here on visual topographyEnglish-style cottages, commuter platforms, porches, woodlands, antiquing. By combing rural journals, local newspapers, diaries, real estate ads and period drawings, his pleasantly illustrated ramble fills in the historical backdrop of the post-WW II mass exodus from urban decay.

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目录:

[Borderland_下载链接1](#)

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