

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states

Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States - A Critical Analysis

Author: James C. Scott, Sterling Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University. Scott is renowned for his insightful work on power, state formation, and the relationship between humans and their environment. His expertise in Southeast Asian history and political theory provides a unique lens through which to examine the development of early states in "Against the Grain."

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Challenging Conventional Narratives: A Deep Dive into "Against the Grain"

James C. Scott's *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* is not just another historical account; it's a powerful critique of established narratives surrounding the rise of the earliest states. The book directly challenges the long-held assumptions of the "hydraulic hypothesis," which posits that large-scale irrigation projects were the primary drivers of state formation. Instead, "Against the Grain a deep history of the earliest states" offers a compelling alternative, arguing that state formation was a complex process influenced by a confluence of factors, many of which were far from beneficial to the majority of the population.

Methodologies and Approaches in "Against the Grain"

Scott employs a multi-faceted methodology in *Against the Grain a deep history of the earliest states*, drawing on a wide range of disciplines. His approach can be described as:

1. **Deep History:** Scott utilizes a "deep history" perspective, extending his analysis far beyond the conventionally studied periods of early state formation. He delves into the long-term

processes, including pre-state societies, to understand the context within which states emerged. This approach allows him to examine the gradual evolution of social structures and power dynamics, avoiding the limitations of focusing solely on the readily available written records of later periods.

1. **Comparative Approach:** The book engages in rigorous cross-cultural comparison, examining diverse early states from Mesopotamia to the Andes. This comparative perspective helps to identify commonalities and divergences in state formation processes, preventing generalizations based on a single case study. By examining societies across geographic regions, *Against the Grain* a deep history of the earliest states highlights the diverse paths to statehood.
1. **Ethnographic Insights:** Scott draws upon ethnographic studies of contemporary societies, particularly those in Southeast Asia, to illuminate the dynamics of power, social organization, and resistance in pre-state and early state contexts. This approach helps bridge the gap between ancient history and the lived experiences of human societies. The book uses these contemporary examples to understand the complexities of social organization and power.
1. **Archaeological Evidence:** While acknowledging the limitations of archaeological data, Scott judiciously integrates archaeological findings to support his arguments. He uses archaeological evidence to reconstruct past environments and social structures, thereby providing a material basis for his historical interpretations. The integration of these elements in *Against the Grain* a deep history of the earliest states helps paint a vivid picture of the past.
1. **Critical Analysis of Existing Theories:** A crucial element of "*Against the Grain* a deep history of the earliest states" is its critical engagement with existing theories of state formation. Scott systematically dismantles commonly held assumptions, challenging traditional narratives and presenting alternative explanations. This critical approach is essential to the book's innovative and thought-provoking nature.

Core Ideas of "Against the Grain"

Against the Grain a deep history of the earliest states presents several core ideas that challenge conventional wisdom:

The benefits of settled agriculture were far less pervasive than previously assumed: Scott argues that the transition to settled agriculture was not uniformly beneficial, often leading to increased

workloads, nutritional deficiencies, and a higher susceptibility to disease.

Early states were not always beneficial to their populations: Contrary to the idea of states as inherently progressive forces, Scott demonstrates that many early states exerted significant control over their populations, often leading to exploitation and suffering. This challenges the common notion that larger, more complex societies are inherently “better” than smaller ones.

The rise of states is linked to the ability to extract surplus from the population: Scott emphasizes the role of taxation, corvée labor, and military conscription in financing the activities of early states.

These mechanisms of extraction often came at the expense of the populace's well-being. This analysis of the role of surplus, central to “Against the Grain a deep history of the earliest states,” reveals the often exploitative nature of early states.

Resistance to state control has been a consistent feature of human history: Scott highlights the ways in which populations resisted state control through various means, including flight, evasion, and rebellion. This perspective emphasizes agency and resilience in the face of state power. The book meticulously chronicles such resistance throughout history.

Zomia, a region of Southeast Asia, serves as a crucial counter-example: Scott uses Zomia as a case study to illustrate the existence of alternative forms of social organization outside of state control, highlighting the diversity of human societies and their varied paths of development.

Conclusion

Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States is a landmark work that significantly alters our understanding of the development of early states. Through its innovative methodology, meticulous research, and compelling arguments, the book challenges long-held assumptions and provides a more nuanced and critical perspective on one of the most transformative periods in human history. Scott's work encourages a more critical and comprehensive approach to studying state formation and offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between power, environment, and human agency.

FAQs

1. What is the central argument of *Against the Grain*? The central argument challenges the traditional view of early state formation as a uniformly beneficial process, arguing instead that state formation often involved exploitation and coercion and was not always preferred by the populations affected.
1. How does Scott use the concept of "Zomia"? Zomia serves as a counter-example, highlighting how large swathes of populations avoided state control for millennia, demonstrating the existence of alternative, non-state-based social organizations.
1. What are some of the methodologies employed in the book? The book employs deep history, comparative analysis, ethnographic insights, and a critical examination of existing theories.

1. How does Scott challenge the "hydraulic hypothesis"? He argues that the focus on large-scale irrigation projects oversimplifies the complex factors that led to state formation and often neglects the downsides to early state development.
1. What role does resistance play in Scott's analysis? Resistance to state control is presented as a consistent feature of human history, demonstrating the agency of populations in shaping their own destinies.
1. What are some of the limitations of the book's approach? Some critics argue that Scott's focus on resistance may downplay the positive aspects of early state development, such as increased social complexity and technological advancement.
1. Who is the intended audience for *Against the Grain*? The book is aimed at academics, students, and anyone interested in history, anthropology, political science, and the development of early states.
1. What is the significance of "deep history" in Scott's work? "Deep history" allows Scott to examine long-term processes and contextualize the emergence of states within broader historical trajectories.
1. How does the book contribute to our understanding of power dynamics? The book sheds light on the complex power dynamics involved in early state formation, demonstrating the often coercive nature of state control and the persistent resistance to it.

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the beginnings of Gorbachev's glasnost campaign--the political electricity generated among oppressed groups when, for the first time, the hidden transcript is spoken directly and publicly in the face of power. His landmark work will revise our understanding of subordination, resistance, hegemony, folk culture, and the ideas behind revolt.

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: The Art of Not Being Governed

James C. Scott, 2009-01-01 From the acclaimed author and scholar James C. Scott, the compelling tale of Asian peoples who until recently have stemmed the vast tide of state-making to live at arm's length from any organized state society For two thousand years the disparate groups that now reside in Zomia (a mountainous region the size of Europe that consists of portions of seven Asian countries) have fled the projects of the organized state societies that surround them—slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare. This book, essentially an “anarchist history,” is the first-ever examination of the huge literature on state-making whose author evaluates why people would deliberately and reactively remain stateless. Among the strategies employed by the people of Zomia to remain stateless are physical dispersion in rugged terrain; agricultural practices that enhance mobility; pliable ethnic identities; devotion to prophetic, millenarian leaders; and maintenance of a largely oral culture that allows them to reinvent their histories and genealogies as they move between and around states. In accessible language, James Scott, recognized worldwide as an eminent authority in Southeast Asian, peasant, and agrarian studies, tells the story of the peoples of Zomia and their unlikely odyssey in search of self-determination. He redefines our views on Asian politics, history, demographics, and even our fundamental ideas about what constitutes civilization, and challenges us with a radically different approach to history that presents events from the perspective of stateless peoples and redefines state-making as a form of “internal colonialism.” This new perspective requires a radical reevaluation of the civilizational narratives of the lowland states. Scott's work on Zomia represents a new way to think of area studies that will be applicable to other runaway, fugitive, and marooned communities, be they Gypsies, Cossacks, tribes fleeing slave raiders, Marsh Arabs, or San-Bushmen.

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: Two Cheers for Anarchism

James C. Scott, 2014-03-10 A spirited defense of the anarchist approach to life James Scott taught us what's wrong with seeing like a state. Now, in his most accessible and personal book to date, the acclaimed social scientist makes the case for seeing like an anarchist. Inspired by the core anarchist faith in the possibilities of voluntary cooperation without hierarchy, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* is an engaging, high-spirited, and often very funny defense of an anarchist way of seeing—one that provides a unique and powerful perspective on everything from everyday social and political interactions to mass protests and revolutions. Through a wide-ranging series of memorable anecdotes and examples, the book describes an anarchist sensibility that celebrates the local knowledge, common sense, and creativity of ordinary people. The result is a kind of handbook on constructive anarchism that challenges us to radically reconsider the value of hierarchy in public and private life, from schools and workplaces to retirement homes and government itself. Beginning with what Scott calls the law of anarchist calisthenics, an argument for law-breaking inspired by an East German pedestrian crossing, each chapter opens with a story that captures an essential anarchist truth. In the course of telling these stories, Scott touches on a wide variety of subjects: public disorder and riots, desertion, poaching, vernacular knowledge, assembly-line production, globalization, the petty bourgeoisie, school testing, playgrounds, and the practice of historical explanation. Far from a dogmatic manifesto, *Two Cheers for Anarchism* celebrates the anarchist confidence in the inventiveness and judgment of people who are free to exercise their creative and moral capacities.

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D. Wengrow, 2018 A vivid new account of the 'birth of civilization' in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia where many of the foundations of modern life were laid

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: Agrarian Studies

James C. Scott, Nina Bhatt, 2001-01-01 This book presents an account of an intellectual breakthrough in the study of

rural society and agriculture. Its ten chapters, selected for their originality and synthesis from the colloquia of the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University, encompass various disciplines, diverse historical periods, and several regions of the world. The contributors' fresh analyses will broaden the perspectives of readers with interests as wide-ranging as rural sociology, environmentalism, political science, history, anthropology, economics, and art history. The ten studies recast and expand what is known about rural society and agrarian issues, examining such topics as poverty, subsistence, cultivation, ecology, justice, art, custom, law, ritual life, cooperation, and state action. Each contribution provides a point of departure for new study, encouraging deeper thinking across disciplinary boundaries and frontiers.

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: *The Dawn of Everything* David Graeber, David Wengrow, 2021-11-09 INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER A dramatically new understanding of human history, challenging our most fundamental assumptions about social evolution—from the development of agriculture and cities to the origins of the state, democracy, and inequality—and revealing new possibilities for human emancipation. For generations, our remote ancestors have been cast as primitive and childlike—either free and equal innocents, or thuggish and warlike. Civilization, we are told, could be achieved only by sacrificing those original freedoms or, alternatively, by taming our baser instincts. David Graeber and David Wengrow show how such theories first emerged in the eighteenth century as a conservative reaction to powerful critiques of European society posed by Indigenous observers and intellectuals. Revisiting this encounter has startling implications for how we make sense of human history today, including the origins of farming, property, cities, democracy, slavery, and civilization itself. Drawing on pathbreaking research in archaeology and anthropology, the authors show how history becomes a far more interesting place once we learn to throw off our conceptual shackles and perceive what's really there. If humans did not spend 95 percent of their evolutionary past in tiny bands of hunter-gatherers, what were they doing all that time? If agriculture, and cities, did not mean a plunge into hierarchy and domination, then what kinds of social and economic organization did they lead to? The answers are often unexpected, and suggest that the course of human history may be less set in stone, and more full of playful, hopeful possibilities, than we tend to assume. *The Dawn of Everything* fundamentally transforms our understanding of the human past and offers a path toward imagining new forms of freedom, new ways of organizing society. This is a monumental book of formidable intellectual range, animated by curiosity, moral vision, and a faith in the power of direct action. Includes Black-and-White Illustrations

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born of accumulations of domestications: first fire, then plants, livestock, subjects of the state, captives, and finally women in the patriarchal family--all of which can be viewed as a way of gaining control over reproduction. Scott explores why we avoided sedentism and plow agriculture, the advantages of mobile subsistence, the unforeseeable disease epidemics arising from crowding plants, animals, and grain, and why all early states are based on millets and cereal grains and unfree labor. He also discusses the barbarians who long evaded state control, as a way of understanding continuing tension between states and nonsubject peoples.

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James Suzman, 2017-07-11 "Insightful and well-written . . . [Suzman chronicles] how much humankind can still learn from the disappearing way of life of the most marginalized communities on earth." -Yuval Noah Harari, author of SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMAN KIND and HOMO DEUS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOMORROW WASHINGTON POST'S 50 NOTABLE WORKS OF NONFICTION IN 2017 AN NPR BEST BOOK OF 2017 A vibrant portrait of the "original affluent society"-the Bushmen of southern Africa-by the anthropologist who has spent much of the last twenty-five years documenting their encounter with modernity. If the success of a civilization is measured by its endurance over time, then the Bushmen of the Kalahari are by far the most successful in human history. A hunting and gathering people who made a good living by working only as much as needed to exist in harmony with their hostile desert environment, the Bushmen have lived in southern Africa since the evolution of our species nearly two hundred thousand years ago. In *Affluence Without Abundance*, anthropologist James Suzman vividly brings to life a proud and private people, introducing unforgettable members of their tribe, and telling the story of the collision between the modern global economy and the oldest hunting and gathering society on earth. In rendering an intimate picture of a people coping with radical change, it asks profound questions about how we now think about matters such as work, wealth, equality, contentment, and even time. Not since Elizabeth Marshall Thomas's *The Harmless People* in 1959 has anyone provided a more intimate or insightful account of the Bushmen or of what we might learn about ourselves from our shared history as hunter-gatherers.

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incurred by our dependence on sand, which has received little public attention. Not all sand is created equal: Some of the easiest sand to get to is the least useful. Award-winning journalist Vince Beiser delves deep into this world, taking readers on a journey across the globe, from the United States to remote corners of India, China, and Dubai to explain why sand is so crucial to modern life. Along the way, readers encounter world-changing innovators, island-building entrepreneurs, desert fighters, and murderous sand pirates. The result is an entertaining and eye-opening work, one that is both unexpected and involving, rippling with fascinating detail and filled with surprising characters.

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against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: *Development Drowned and Reborn* Clyde Woods, 2017-07-01 *Development Drowned and Reborn* is a "Blues geography" of New Orleans, one that compels readers to return to the history of the Black freedom struggle there to reckon with its unfinished business. Reading contemporary policies of abandonment against the grain, Clyde Woods explores how Hurricane Katrina brought long-standing structures of domination into view. In so doing, Woods delineates the roots of neoliberalism in the region and a history of resistance. Written in dialogue with social movements, this book offers tools for comprehending the racist dynamics of U.S. culture and economy. Following his landmark study, *Development Arrested*, Woods turns to organic intellectuals, Blues musicians, and poor and working people to instruct readers in this future-oriented history of struggle. Through this unique optic, Woods delineates a history, methodology, and epistemology to grasp alternative visions of development. Woods

contributes to debates about the history and geography of neoliberalism. The book suggests that the prevailing focus on neoliberalism at national and global scales has led to a neglect of the regional scale. Specifically, it observes that theories of neoliberalism have tended to overlook New Orleans as an epicenter where racial, class, gender, and regional hierarchies have persisted for centuries. Through this Blues geography, Woods excavates the struggle for a new society.

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against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: Oceans of Grain Scott Reynolds Nelson, 2022-02-22 An incredibly timely global history journeys from the Ukrainian steppe to the American prairie to show how grain built and toppled the world's largest empires (Financial Times). To understand the rise and fall of empires, we must follow the paths traveled by grain—along rivers, between ports, and across seas. In Oceans of Grain, historian Scott Reynolds Nelson reveals how the struggle to dominate these routes transformed the balance of world power. Early in the nineteenth century, imperial Russia fed much of Europe through the booming port of Odessa, on the Black Sea in Ukraine. But following the US Civil War, tons of American wheat began to flood across the Atlantic, and food prices plummeted. This cheap foreign grain spurred the rise of Germany and Italy, the decline of the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, and the European scramble for empire. It was a crucial factor in the outbreak of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. A powerful new interpretation, Oceans of Grain shows that amid the great powers' rivalries, there was no greater power than control of grain.

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: Weapons of the Weak James C. Scott, 2008-10-01 Weapons of the Weak is an ethnography by James C. Scott that studies the effects of the Green Revolution in rural Malaysia. One of the main objectives of the study is to make an argument that the Marxian and Gramscian ideas of false consciousness and hegemony are incorrect. He develops this conclusion throughout the book, through the different scenarios and characters that come up during his time of fieldwork in the village. This publication, based on 2 years of fieldwork (1978-1980), focuses on the local class relations in a small rice farming community of 70 households in the main paddy-growing area of Kedah in Malaysia. Introduction of the Green Revolution in 1976 eliminated 2/3 of the wage-earning opportunities for smallholders and landless laborers. The main ensuing class struggle is analyzed being the ideological struggle in the village and the practice of resistance itself consisting of: foot-dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance and sabotage acts. Rich and poor are engaged in an unrelenting if silent struggle to define changes in land tenure, mechanization and employment to advance their own interests, and to use values that they share to control the distribution of status, land, work and grain.

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: Restoring Heritage Grains Eli Rogosa, 2016 Including recipes for baking with Einkorn Wheat is the most widely grown crop on our planet, yet industrial breeders have transformed this ancient staff of life into a commodity of yield and profit--witness the increase in gluten intolerance and 'wheat belly'. Modern wheat depends on synthetic fertilizer and herbicides that damage our health, land, water, and environment. Fortunately, heritage 'landrace' wheats that evolved over millennia in the organic fields of traditional farms do not need bio-chemical intervention to yield bountifully, are gluten-safe, have rich flavor and high nutrition. Yet the robust, majestic wheats that nourished our ancestors are on the verge of extinction. In Restoring Heritage Grains, author Eli Rogosa of the Heritage Grain Conservancy, invites readers to restore forgotten wheats such as delicious gluten-safe einkorn that nourished the first Neolithic farmers, emmer--the grain of ancient Israel, Egypt, and Rome that is perfect for pasta and flatbreads, rare durum that are drought-tolerant and high in protein, and many more little known wheat species, each of which have a lineage intertwined with the human species and that taste better than any modern wheat. Restoring Heritage Grains combines the history of grain growing and society, in-depth practical advice on landrace wheat husbandry, wheat

folk traditions and mythology, and guidelines for the Neolithic diet with traditional recipes for rustic bread, pastry and beer. Discover the ancient grains that may be one of the best solutions to hunger today, and provide resilience for our future.

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against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: *Fordlandia* Greg Grandin, 2010-04-27 From Pulitzer Prize-winning author Greg Grandin comes the stunning, never before told story of the quixotic attempt to recreate small-town America in the heart of the Amazon In 1927, Henry Ford, the richest man in the world, bought a tract of land twice the size of Delaware in the Brazilian Amazon. His intention was to grow rubber, but the project rapidly evolved into a more ambitious bid to export America itself, along with its golf courses, ice-cream shops, bandstands, indoor plumbing, and Model Ts rolling down broad streets. Fordlandia, as the settlement was called, quickly became the site of an epic clash. On one side was the car magnate, lean, austere, the man who reduced industrial production to its simplest motions; on the other, the Amazon, lush, extravagant, the most complex ecological system on the planet. Ford's early success in imposing time clocks and square dances on the jungle soon collapsed, as indigenous workers, rejecting his midwestern Puritanism, turned the place into a ribald tropical boomtown. Fordlandia's eventual demise as a rubber plantation foreshadowed the practices that today are laying waste to the rain forest. More than a parable of one man's arrogant attempt to force his will on the natural world, Fordlandia depicts a desperate quest to salvage the bygone America that the Ford factory system did

much to dispatch. As Greg Grandin shows in this gripping and mordantly observed history, Ford's great delusion was not that the Amazon could be tamed but that the forces of capitalism, once released, might yet be contained. *Fordlandia* is a 2009 National Book Award Finalist for Nonfiction.

against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: *Dissent* Ralph Young, 2015-04-24
Finalist, 2016 Ralph Waldo Emerson Award One of Bustle's Books For Your Civil Disobedience Reading List Examines the key role dissent has played in shaping the United States, emphasizing the way Americans responded to injustices *Dissent: The History of an American Idea* examines the key role dissent has played in shaping the United States. It focuses on those who, from colonial days to the present, dissented against the ruling paradigm of their time: from the Puritan Anne Hutchinson and Native American chief Powhatan in the seventeenth century, to the Occupy and Tea Party movements in the twenty-first century. The emphasis is on the way Americans, celebrated figures and anonymous ordinary citizens, responded to what they saw as the injustices that prevented them from fully experiencing their vision of America. At its founding the United States committed itself to lofty ideals. When the promise of those ideals was not fully realized by all Americans, many protested and demanded that the United States live up to its promise. Women fought for equal rights; abolitionists sought to destroy slavery; workers organized unions; Indians resisted white encroachment on their land; radicals angrily demanded an end to the dominance of the moneyed interests; civil rights protestors marched to end segregation; antiwar activists took to the streets to protest the nation's wars; and reactionaries, conservatives, and traditionalists in each decade struggled to turn back the clock to a simpler, more secure time. Some dissenters are celebrated heroes of American history, while others are ordinary people: frequently overlooked, but whose stories show that change is often accomplished through grassroots activism. The United States is a nation founded on the promise and power of dissent. In this stunningly comprehensive volume, Ralph Young shows us its history.

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against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: *Debt* David Graeber, 2014-12-09
Now in paperback, the updated and expanded edition: David Graeber's "fresh . . . fascinating . . . thought-provoking . . . and exceedingly timely" (*Financial Times*) history of debt Here anthropologist David Graeber presents a stunning reversal of conventional wisdom: he shows that before there was money, there was debt. For more than 5,000 years, since the beginnings of the first agrarian

empires, humans have used elaborate credit systems to buy and sell goods—that is, long before the invention of coins or cash. It is in this era, Graeber argues, that we also first encounter a society divided into debtors and creditors. Graeber shows that arguments about debt and debt forgiveness have been at the center of political debates from Italy to China, as well as sparking innumerable insurrections. He also brilliantly demonstrates that the language of the ancient works of law and religion (words like “guilt,” “sin,” and “redemption”) derive in large part from ancient debates about debt, and shape even our most basic ideas of right and wrong. We are still fighting these battles today without knowing it.

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against the grain a deep history of the earliest states: *The Grand Chessboard* Zbigniew Brzezinski, 2016-12-06 Bestselling author and eminent foreign policy scholar Zbigniew Brzezinski's classic book on America's strategic mission in the modern world. In *The Grand Chessboard*, renowned geostrategist Zbigniew Brzezinski delivers a brutally honest and provocative vision for American preeminence in the twenty-first century. The task facing the United States, he argues, is to become the sole political arbiter in Eurasian lands and to prevent the emergence of any rival power threatening our material and diplomatic interests. The Eurasian landmass, home to the greatest part of the globe's population, natural resources, and economic activity, is the grand chessboard on which America's supremacy will be ratified and challenged in the years to come. In this landmark work of public policy and political science, Brzezinski outlines a groundbreaking and powerful blueprint for America's vital interests in the modern world. In this revised edition, Brzezinski addresses recent global developments including the war in Ukraine, the re-emergence of Russia, and the rise of China.

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Moffett, 2019-04-16 The epic story and ultimate big history of how human society evolved from intimate chimp communities into the sprawling civilizations of a world-dominating species. If a chimpanzee ventures into the territory of a different group, it will almost certainly be killed. But a New Yorker can fly to Los Angeles--or Borneo--with very little fear. Psychologists have done little to explain this: for years, they have held that our biology puts a hard upper limit--about 150 people--on the size of our social groups. But human societies are in fact vastly larger. How do we manage--by and large--to get along with each other? In this paradigm-shattering book, biologist Mark W. Moffett draws on findings in psychology, sociology and anthropology to explain the social adaptations that bind societies. He explores how the tension between identity and anonymity defines how societies develop, function, and fail. Surpassing *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *Sapiens*, *The Human Swarm* reveals how mankind created sprawling civilizations of unrivaled complexity--and what it will take to sustain them.

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