



Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership

By Andro Linklater

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Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership By Andro Linklater

Barely two centuries ago, most of the world's productive land still belonged either communally to traditional societies or to the higher powers of monarch or church. But that pattern, and the ways of life that went with it, were consigned to history by, Andro Linklater persuasively argues, the most creative and at the same time destructive cultural force in the modern era-the idea of individual, exclusive ownership of land.

Spreading from both shores of the north Atlantic, it laid waste to traditional communal civilizations, displacing entire peoples from their homelands, but at the same time brought into being a unique concept of individual freedom and a distinct form of representative government and democratic institutions. By contrast, as Linklater demonstrates, other great civilizations, in Russia, China, and the Islamic world, evolved very different structures of land ownership and thus very different forms of government and social responsibility.

The history and evolution of landownership is a fascinating chronicle in the history of civilization, offering unexpected insights about how various forms of democracy and capitalism developed, as well as a revealing analysis of a future where the Earth must sustain nine billion lives. Seen through the eyes of remarkable individuals-Chinese emperors; German peasants; the seventeenth century English surveyor William Petty, who first saw the connection between private property and free-market capitalism; the American radical Wolf Ladejinsky, whose land redistribution in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea after WWII made possible the emergence of Asian tiger economies-*Owning the Earth* presents a radically new view of mankind's place on the planet.

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Editorial Review

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In this careful, comprehensive historical study, Linklater (*Measuring America*, 2002) reviews centuries of expansion and settlement to explore how the ownership of land has negatively affected society. From the sixteenth-century assertions of British rights to survey and collect rent in St. John's, Newfoundland (wryly characterized as "absurd" by the author); to more prosaic discussions of fences and mapping; and up to a bracing review of Che Guevara's fight for land redistribution, *Owning the Earth* casts a wide net over the subject of property. Linklater discusses politics, agriculture, colonialism, slavery, democracy, communism, and even intellectual property. His geographic view is wide, including North America, Latin America, Europe, Russia, China, and the Middle East. Linklater's shifting narrative can, on occasion, be dizzying or dense, but the subject matter is so important and his dedication so thorough that this singular work should be welcomed by all readers interested in land-use history and future global concerns. --Colleen Mondor

Review

"The dilemma of liberty and ownership takes center stage in polymath Andro Linklater's exhilarating *Owning the Earth*...[It] is a magnificent achievement, a fascinating survey of what it has meant at various times to own or take possession of land, and of how landowning has shaped the way we perceive the world and our place in it...There is something almost boyish about the execution and energy of this book, the way it races on makes the reader feel as if transported on a Phileas Foggian adventure through the history of ideas." ?*Wall Street Journal*

"[A] masterly work...[Linklater's] intellectual range is as wide as his geographic or temporal range. This reinterpretation of global history will give readers of history will give readers of history, politics, and economics much to think about." ?*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"[A] careful, comprehensive historical study...the subject matter is so important and his dedication so thorough that this singular work should be welcomed by all readers." ?*Booklist*

"A pertinent, wide-ranging comparative study...vast, evenhanded and worthy of rumination." ?*Kirkus*

About the Author

Andro Linklater is the acclaimed author of *Measuring America*, *The Fabric of America*, *An Artist in Treason*, and *Why Spencer Perceval Had to Die*. He lives in England

Users Review

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Anthony Edwards:

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