

# **TERRA NOVA: THE NEW WORLD AFTER OIL, CARS, AND SUBURBS BY ERIC SANDERSON**

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The New World After  
Oil, Cars, and Suburbs

**ERIC W. SANDERSON**

Author of *Mannahatta*

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## **About the Author**

Eric W. Sanderson is a senior conservation ecologist in the Global Conservation Programs of the Wildlife Conservation Society. He is adjunct faculty member at Columbia University and New York University and has lectured at Princeton, Harvard, and Oxford universities, and at TED.

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Many experts agree that energy is the defining issue of this century. Economic recessions, foreign wars, and foreclosures are only a few of the results of America's dependence on oil. In *Terra Nova*, ecologist Eric Sanderson elucidates the interconnections between oil and money, cars and transportation, and suburbs and land use. He then charts a path toward renewed economic growth, enhanced national security, revitalized communities, and a sustainable environment: a new form of the American Dream.

Taking a uniquely cross-disciplinary, accessible approach, Sanderson delves into natural history, architecture, chemistry, and politics, to show how the American relationship to nature shaped our past and predicates our future. Illustrated throughout with maps, charts, and infographics, the book suggests how we achieve a better world through a self-reinforcing cycle of tax reform, retrofitted towns and cities, bicycles and streetcars, and investment in renewable energy.

Praise for *Terra Nova*:

"If you're going to read one book on the end of oil and the future of energy, make it this one. Eric Sanderson has thought deeply about the impact of our petroleum-dependent economy, how we got here, and where we're headed. You may not agree with everything you read here, but this book should be the launching point for a desperately needed discussion about our modern way of life." —Daniel H. Pink, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Drive* and *To Sell Is Human*

"The highly readable text is complemented by illustrations, including maps, statistical tables, and extensive notes. VERDICT: The information supplied here would be difficult to find elsewhere. This book is recommended for all readers interested in the future of the United States and for both public and academic library collections."

—Library Journal

"Likening oil, cars, and suburbs to modern-day Sirens, those 'beautiful winged monsters' that tempted Odysseus with their songs, conservation ecologist Sanderson (Mannahatta) discourages an over-reliance on these things in this well-intentioned cautionary volume. The comparison is an ambitious one he employs throughout, believing they could doom Americans the way the Sirens would have doomed Odysseus, had he succumbed to their choruses . . . Sanderson commendably outlines 'a new way of life . . . designed to sustain American prosperity, health, and freedom for generations to come,' but whether his suggestions or admonitions will be taken seriously is another matter entirely."

—Publishers Weekly

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#### About the Author

Eric W. Sanderson is a senior conservation ecologist in the Global Conservation Programs of the Wildlife Conservation Society. He is adjunct faculty member at Columbia University and New York University and has lectured at Princeton, Harvard, and Oxford universities, and at TED.

#### Most helpful customer reviews

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

A new way of living based on creativity, due diligence and optimism.

By Paul Tognetti

"The presumption is that there is always more to be had. More oil, more land, more air, more water, more soil, more nature, so that it doesn't matter how much you consume or appropriate, there is always more to be had over the next hill, in the next valley, on the frontier--a frontier that no longer exists." - page 138

Over the past 100 years a confluence of circumstances led oil, cars and then suburbs to define the American lifestyle. It was all too good to be true and it seemed to most of us that the ride would last forever. But alas, here in the second decade of the 21st century people are waking up from the great American Dream and coming to the realization that the way we have chosen to live is simply unsustainable. We are all going to have to make some drastic changes in the coming years. For many of us the thought of having to downsize and streamline is much too painful to contemplate. Eric W. Sanderson is a senior conservation ecologist at the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York City. He has a clear vision of what America could look like in the 21st century and beyond and presents it in his compelling new book "Terra Nova: The New World After Oil, Cars, and Suburbs." If you are prepared to read this book with an open mind you just might come away excited by the myriad possibilities that await us in the future.

But to know where we are going it is imperative to understand what has driven our past. In the opening third of "Terra Nova" Sanderson offers up a detailed account of how we got to where we are today. We learn that in 1917 there were more than 44,000 miles of streetcar lines in cities and towns all across America, which is comparable to today's Interstate Highway System. With the emergence of the mass-produced Ford Model T the Good Roads Movement spawned a rapidly expanding network of paved roads and highways. Ironically the first suburbs were actually facilitated by the streetcar companies. But streetcars would prove to be no match for the automobile. After World War II the G.I. Bill offered low-cost mortgages to returning soldiers. With gasoline selling for about 26 cents a gallon America's love affair with oil, cars, and the suburbs would firmly take root. But as Sanderson points out the exodus to the suburbs came with a cost: "Americans largely stopped going to church, belonging to clubs, participating in service organizations. Many people seemed to fold into their homes, caring mostly about private concerns, and neglecting public ones." There was a genuine loss of community. In the new world the author envisions people will once again be encouraged to emerge from their humble abodes to spend time with friends and neighbors and to once again become involved with public affairs.

In the second section of "Terra Nova" Eric Sanderson offers for your consideration his grand vision for the future of our nation. He suggests a radical new tax scheme he dubs "gate duties" that would essentially discourage waste and encourage recycling and reuse. Perhaps his most intriguing proposal is something he calls "New Town" districts that would encourage neighborhoods to mix work, residence, and shopping and discourage and perhaps one day eliminate automobile use. It may not be as far-fetched as it sounds. The

author also proposes creative new "location-efficient" mortgages and a "home-to-work" payroll adjustment that would encourage companies to hire workers who live close by. I was also excited by the idea of a Superfund for Real Estate whereby owners of under-performing or non-viable properties would be offered financial incentives to raze the buildings and restore the land to its highest potential natural state. As far as I am concerned we can start that right now. Being an ecologist Eric Sanderson is a huge proponent of renewable energy sources. He firmly believes that the key to our energy future lies with a combination of wind, solar and geothermal energy. He enumerates in great detail how this might happen and enhances his presentation with a series of clear and highly informative illustrations. Sometimes I get the feeling he is being much too optimistic about these alternative energy sources but after all of the "doom and gloom" books I have read over the past 20 years I will give him the benefit of the doubt.

"Terra Nova: The New World After Oil, Cars, and Suburbs" is at once an entertaining, thought-provoking, well-written and beautifully illustrated book. Sanderson wisely keeps politics out of his book. He presents his rather comprehensive vision in clear and concise terms and leaves no doubt where he stands on these important issues. Regardless of your political persuasion, if you have the least bit of interest in these issues I urge you to read "Terra Nova". There is lots of food for thought here. I just happened upon this book at my local bookstore the other day and at this point I would have to say that this is one of the best books I have read thus far in 2013. Very highly recommended!

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

An interesting read with a lot of useful information, but a very simplistic outlook on how ...

By T. Brink

An interesting read with a lot of useful information, but a very simplistic outlook on how Americans will "have" to live. For example, his information on alternative, greener sources of energy and the smart grid in particular was well researched and presented, and are ideas that we desperately need to move toward.

However, his ideas about everyone moving and living in cities or towns? I hate to break it to him, but a lot of people don't want to live that way. And people won't just give up independent living and automobiles for the good of the country or other people. The only way this would occur is if there is a total energy collapse, and perhaps not even then.

While there are useful ideas to be taken from this book, his overall vision is a bit naive.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Rare insight into how we got to this point in American culture

By William E. Baird

Eric Sanderson has captured the story of how events merged to bring us to the lifestyle we "enjoy" as Americans today. He is a good writer, and provides just enough background to make this story spellbinding. Oil led to cars, and the combination led us to settle far from our work, shopping, schools, and social centers. As we exit the era of cheap oil, we face the task of changing in ways that will require courage and awareness of limitations. I recommend this book to all who would seek an understanding of how our future will look different from the past 100 years in America.

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