Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water Study Guide

Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water by Marc Reisner

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Introduction

Historians of the West have typically focused on events that opened the great landscape of the American Desert to settlers. Such events included the Lewis and Clark Expedition, wars with the Indians of the Great Plains, and the Homestead Act of 1862. New historians of the American West have been employing a political environmentalism to develop an environmental history, which has led to a number of revisionist approaches to American West narratives.

Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert* is such a revisionist history. His focus on the creation of infrastructure to support Western settlement exposes a history, not of rugged individualism and romantic cowboys, but of the construction of a heavily subsidized and tremendously expensive "hydraulic society," founded on and maintained by the greed and competitiveness that is behind the American Dream. Reisner examines the West's ecologically dangerous, and ultimately harmful, dependence on dams and aqueducts, as Americans pursue the ideal of taming the Great American Desert. The author focuses on the relentless building of dams and irrigation systems, as well as the corruption behind these developments, to show how the American need to control the environment has affected (and still does affect) the ecological welfare of national resources. Reisner also describes the rivalry between two governmental powers, the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in their attempts to transform the nature of the American West.

The year it was published, Reisner's book became a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 1999, Cadillac Desert was placed sixty-first on the Modern Library list of the most notable nonfiction English books of the twentieth century. Reisner' s book has inspired an entire generation of historians and historically aware environmental activists.

Author Biography

Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on September 14, 1948, Reisner grew up in the American Midwest and graduated in 1970 from Earlham College. He spent some time in Washington, D.C., working for Environmental Action and the Population Institute. From 1972 to 1979, he was a staff writer and communications director for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Reisner was awarded an Alicia Patterson Journalism Fellowship in 1979, when he began the research into water policy in the United States that resulted in *Cadillac Deser*t. In 1986, the book was published and immediately received wide attention; many reviewers saw it as a seminal text on the impact of Western water projects on the environment.

Three years later, Reisner coauthored *Overtapped Oasis: Reform or Revolution for Western Water* with Sarah Bates, analyzing Western water policy and offering recommendations for change. In 1991, Reisner published *Game Wars: The Undercover Pursuit of Wildlife Poachers,* which he wrote while observing the work of an undercover agent for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. After the book's publication, poachers put out a contract on one of Reisner's informants, who ended up killing the hit man and is now in hiding.

Reisner served as a member, cofounder, or consultant to many environmentalist organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy of the Riceland Habitat Partnership, the Institute for Fisheries Resources, and the American Farmland Trust. He was also a consultant to the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, working to remove old dams in California, and a director of the Vidler Water Company, promoting environmentally benevolent water programs. He wrote for magazines and periodicals and lectured internationally on many environmental subjects. In addition, Reisner was a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of California at Davis.

Reisner was working on a book about California's propensity for natural and man-made disasters, when he died of cancer on July 21,2000, at the age of 51, in California.

Plot Summary

Discovering and Pioneering the American West

The book's opening chapters describe the discovery of the American West by the Europeans; the first Spanish explorers searching for El Dorado found the continent hostile and unusable. After the United States purchased the land, they sent in survey expeditions to research and evaluate it. The 1804 Lewis and Clark expedition resulted in an uneasy ambivalence toward the West: every "fertile prairie" stood in stark contrast to a "forbidding plain."

Nevertheless, the perception of the West as "the Great American Desert" drastically changed by the late nineteenth century. John Wesley Powell, after a scientific expedition down the Colorado River in 1869, put forth a program for settlement that imitated the pseudo-socialism of the successful Mormon irrigation systems in Utah. Powell's advice was ignored. By 1876, Powell could already see the results: "Speculation. Water monopoly. Land monopoly. Erosion. Corruption. Catastrophe."

The warnings of experienced Westerners were ignored as the American West attained the definition of an untouched frontier full of promise. Soon, the settlements began to change the landscape, challenging the harsh desert conditions with the belief that "rain follows the plow." This slogan was the lead of a promotional campaign with the political goal of making the West more appealing and of encouraging relocation of settlers from Europe and the East. The government sold them land cheaply, and according to the original Homestead Act from 1862, 160 acres was "the ideal acreage for a Jeffersonian utopia of small farmers."

Reclamation Act of 1902

In the taming of the western plains for agricultural purposes, the Mormons played an important role: they introduced the irrigation system, which was foreign to American farmers, and individual water projects began to pop up all over the hostile land. Soon, the government realized it had to regulate the development of water systems in order to support its desire to settle the arid region; in 1902, the United States Congress passed the Reclamation Act, forming a government agency in charge of water projects in the West. Thus began the ongoing struggle between the "rugged individualist" western states who did not want to be told what to do by Washington, D.C., and the government that had to espouse a cooperative approach in taking care of its land: "the big growers wanted all of the water for themselves, they wanted the government to develop it for them, and they didn't want to have to pay for it."

Bureau of Reclamation versus Army Corps of Engineers

The two government agencies, "Rivals in Crime," began to compete against each other as representatives from western states made deals with eastern states to bring as much money as possible to their home districts for water projects; the two rival agencies would spend that money. Both the Bureau of Reclamation (formed in 1923 out of the Reclamation Service) and the Army Corps of Engineers developed into massive bureaucratic machines; within both, there was suspected, or even proven, corruption. These two bureaucracies within the United States government fought to provide dam "sites for the reservoirs needed to support future growth."

The inherent problem, of course, was the idea of growth. A number of dams were built because the site was good; a reservoir would be created and the users enticed into the region to make use of the cheap water. However, the lack of rainfall necessarily made the farmer dependent on irrigation. The cycle would continue, as the users wanted more and more water. This self-manufactured dependency had another downside: the water returned from irrigation systems had a greater concentration of salt, which created two problems. First, the fields became saturated with salt and had to be taken out of production (or given expensive drainage systems), thus ending the land's agricultural use after only a brief period. Second, the salty water, when returned to the river, would be of little use for those downstream which, in the case of Mexico, led to international disputes over Colorado River water.

The Colorado

The most famous water struggles occurred over the Colorado River. After routing the entire flow of the Owens River for its municipal use, Los Angeles looked to the Colorado to supplement its water supplies. Unlike the western states, where big growers with friends in Congress played the water game, Los Angeles was a booming city inside a populous state with money and legislative representation on its side. Los Angeles chose to grab the Colorado's water in order to avoid a fight over water supplies with Northern California.

Political struggle ensued over the water in the Colorado River between the states bordering the river. The struggle was won by Los Angeles because it could demonstrate water needs and it could finance the projects - with above- and below-board methods. As a direct consequence, Arizona, a sparsely populated state mostly self-sustaining in its water use, developed a municipal infrastructure in order to claim its legal share of the Colorado River. Thus, a political fight over water led to a boom in Southwestern suburbs, when developers took advantage of that infrastructure, beginning in the late 1970s.

Dams, Dams, and More Dams

Almost a century after the Reclamation Act of 1902, nearly every possible dam site on every river in the West is occupied by a dam generating electricity and supplying water for irrigation; there are "water developers and engineers who cannot rest while great rivers ... still run free." The West has enjoyed an economic boom, but there are growing signs of problems. Sinkholes in the region of the largest aquifer in the West, the Ogallala Aquifer, appear with increasing regularity. The dispute with Mexico over the Colorado River ended when the United States finally built a desalination plant and took other measures to guarantee that the river would reach Mexico at all. Further, dams are not long-term solutions to water problems in the arid West because they fill up with silt; Hoover Dam will eventually become a waterfall. More alarmingly, seismic readings in the vicinity of dams and the strain of floods conjure nightmare scenarios of bursting dams.

Characters

Cecil Andrus

Andrus served as Secretary of the Interior in the Carter administration; his lack of negotiating skills disabled Carter's proposals on water policy.

sub Wayne Aspinall

Aspinall was a Congressman from Colorado who served as chairman of the House Interior Committee in the late 1960s; he denied California and Arizona water projects because they voted against his state's projects.

David Brower

A hard-core conservationist, Brower strongly opposed dams and repeatedly fought the Bureau of Reclamation. He battled then-Commissioner Floyd Dominy over Grand Canyon dams, and won. He founded Friends of the Earth in 1969.

Edmund G. Brown Jr.

Pat Brown's son, Jerry, was instrumental in putting together the State Water Project, California' s most expensive water supply system; he hoped it would be environmentally safe.

Edmund G. Brown Sr.

Brown was a California governor who facilitated the State Water Project and later opened a questionable law practice, working for the biggest corporate growers in the state.

Jerry Brown

See Edmund G. Brown Jr.

Pat Brown

See Edmund G. Brown Sr.

Jimmy Carter

President Carter developed a "hit list" of water projects he wanted Congress to eliminate; he made many enemies as a result, including the press, and couldn't get reelected.

Jim Casey

Casey served as deputy chief of planning for the Bureau of Reclamation in the 1960s; he was also crucial in the Texas Water Plan. Casey realized the danger of overusing the Ogallala Aquifer and recruited Texan bankers to support his conservation efforts. Casey left the Bureau because he was disgusted by Floyd Dominy's leadership.

Harry Chandler

Chandler came to Los Angeles for his health and discovered money-making opportunities; he first acquired newspaper routes, then he became Harrison Otis' circulation manager for the *Times;* he used his power in the media to help run the scam that brought the water from the Owens River to Los Angeles. Like his co-conspirators in the plot, he became phenomenally rich.

Wilbur Dexheimer

Dexheimer, the Bureau Commissioner before Floyd Dominy, is described as "good-natured, somewhat bumbling, uninterested in politics, and therefore inept." Dominy easily pushed him out.

Floyd Elgin Dominy

Commissioner of Reclamation from 1959 to 1969, Dominy was one of the most ruthless, powerful, manipulative, and efficient people in the Bureau's history. He started out as a county agent in Wyoming during the Depression, where he built 300 small dams to save cattle from drought. Arriving at the Bureau in 1946, he quickly achieved the position of chief of Allocation and Repayment. Hardworking and sharp, Dominy soon became close with top officials. Although he was not an engineer (he had a masters degree in economics), Dominy considered that to be his great advantage in the Bureau; among engineers (mostly pious Mormons who knew nothing about politics) he was eloquent, knowledgeable, and a good politician. His breakthrough happened in 1955 when he testified about the Bureau projects in front of the Appropriations Committee. Immediately thereafter, he became the agency's contact man for Congress members desiring water projects in their states.

Authoritarian and self-assured, Dominy practically ran the Bureau for three years before he was appointed commissioner. With strong ties to congressmen and a contemptuous attitude that he took with superiors, he soon realized he was indispensable. Dominy eventually became commissioner and ruthlessly competed with the Corps of Engineers for projects. Criticizing governors and politicians as well as engineers, he soon created a few enemies, a few friends, and a large group of supporters that feared him.

Dominy eventually got caught up in the web of corruption: while farmers were "illegally irrigating excess acreage with dirt-cheap water [to] grow price-supported crops" and in the process ruining the Bureau's standing, Dominy decided to ignore the violations, believing that the protests of the conservation movement would not generate enough attention for substantial problems. He was wrong, and, after losing many battles with environmentalists and tarnishing his own and the Bureau's reputation, he was fired.

Daniel Dreyfus

The "house intellectual" of the Bureau of Reclamation, Dreyfus was part of the plot to improve the Bureau's reputation by compromising - which Dominy would not hear of. Dreyfus left the agency embittered about Dominy's leadership.

Fred Eaton

Coming from a family that founded Pasadena, Eaton was a Los Angeles native who began his career in water projects as superintendent for the city's Water Company. He was aware of the expanding city's mounting lack of water resources and, before moving on to a political career, advised his successor William Mulholland to target the Owens River. Eaton eventually became the mayor of Los Angeles; after retiring, he helped Mulholland build the aqueduct.

Dwight Eisenhower

Like most other presidents, Eisenhower tried to get rid of some of the projects pushed by the Bureau and the Corps with his "no new starts" policy, but he failed. The United States Congress forced him to fire then-Commissioner Wilbur Dexheimer so Floyd Dominy could get the job. Despite his conservative principles, Eisenhower had to support the Colorado River Storage Project.

Carl Hay den

A senator from Arizona who held an almost despotic rule over the Bureau's authorizing committees, Hayden had enough power on the Appropriations Committee to negotiate water deals for his state. Hayden was a part of the group of Western legislators that had a tight grip on Congress and successfully pushed for more dams; Eisenhower often had to support what he opposed in principle because Floyd Dominy was Hayden's protege.

Harold Ickes

An ex-newspaper man, Ickes ran the Interior Department and the Public Works Administation during FDR's presidency; he selected Mike Strauss as the new Bureau Commissioner. Under his rule, the Bureau grew into a massive bureaucracy and built several large dams. Ickes also took part in the developing rivalry between the Bureau and the Corps in the late 1930s, fighting many bureaucratic battles with Congress.

Lyndon B. Johnson

Johnson was one of the politicians "who had climbed to political power up the wall of a dam" - the Marshall Ford Dam for which he helped get funding. Later, when he became president, and since he was spending a lot of the federal budget on the war in Vietnam and antipoverty programs, LBJ tried to dump water projects that the Bureau and the Corps were both vying for - and failed. He ended up signing into law the Colorado River Basin Project Act, which was "the most expensive single authorization in history."

Clarence J. Kuiper

Recruited from the Corps as a young engineer to work under Mike Strauss in the Bureau, Kuiper witnessed the end of the agency's era of great projects. He was involved in the Klamath Diversion plan, one of the last big projects; it ultimately did not pass. During the 1970s, while working as the Colorado state engineer, Kuiper became involved in the Narrows Project - the only water project he would ever publicly oppose because it was disastrous.

Joseph B. Lippincott

A young engineer disappointed when he couldn't join John Wesley Powell's Irrigation Survey (which was denied funding), Lippincott built a lucrative business in Los Angeles as a consulting engineer. When the Reclamation service was founded in 1902, he was hired as the California district engineer; however, he kept his private business. Through masterful manipulations, such as hiring Fred Eaton as his chief engineer, Lippincott helped Los Angeles get the aqueduct for the Owens River water.

William Mulholland

An Irish sailor, mercenary, and entrepreneur, Mulholland came to Los Angeles and decided to become an engineer after working on a well-drilling crew. He was quickly promoted within the Los Angeles City Water Company and became good friends with Fred Eaton. As the city's water deficiency became apparent, Mulholland preached soil and forest conservation; but with tremendous population growth, he realized that the water from the Owens River was the city's only solution. With Eaton, he visited the

Owens Valley; the city soon purchased enough land in the valley for the aqueduct. Aware of the possible speculation, the Bureau tried to save its reputation, but the city officials always managed to support their project, even by illegal means.

Ambitious, ruthless, and manipulative, Mulholland became one of the city's most powerful figures; he was instrumental in the creation of the Los Angeles water system, but in thirty years of corruption and political battles, he became a hardcore developer (who would build a dam in the Yosemite Valley to "stop the g-dd-d waste") and became exceedingly harsh in dealing with everyone who went against his agency. By this time, however, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power was beyond corrupt, "using secret agents, breaking into private records, and turning neighbors into mortal foes" to reach its goals and get the projects it wanted completed. As an engineer, Mulholland was reckless and arrogant. In 1928, Saint Francis Dam, built under his supervision, collapsed and wiped out everything in the San Francisquito Canyon, killing some 450 people, demolishing 1,200 homes, and stripping the top soil from 8,000 acres of farmland; it also destroyed Mulholland's career.

Frederick Newell

Newell was the first Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamations; he supported the Owens Valley project as he wanted a guaranteed success.

Richard Nixon

Nixon cared little for water projects; he was mostly interested in foreign affairs. In an attempt to use the budget process for his interests, he placed certain environmental restraints on the Bureau; further, he ran an investigation of the administration's top officials and, upon receiving a huge file on then-Commissioner Floyd Dominy, immediately fired him. Yet, he had to deal with some projects: when Mexico threatened to bring the United States to the World Court at the Hague for giving them paltry amounts of salty water from the Colorado River, Nixon had to work out a salinity-control treaty to resolve the issue.

General Harrison Gray Otis

Arriving in California in search of a comfortable job, Otis found power, riches, and notoriety as a participant in one of the largest scams in United States' history of land development. Otis admired hustlers and adventurers and decided to make a new start in the then-small town of Los Angeles, where he became a partner in the newspaper *Times and Mirror*. He soon became the sole owner and, in taking control of circulation routes, befriended Harry Chandler.

A passionate opponent of socialism and the Democratic Party, he engaged in tremendously eloquent brawls with his rivals. Since William Mulholland and Fred Eaton wanted to keep the Owens Valley scheme secret until they worked out the legal details,

the Los Angeles newspapers were under a self-imposed gag order; however, Otis could not contain himself and ran the unauthorized story, resulting in protests and trouble for all involved. He supported the project with all his might, and for the first time his opponents were on the same side because everybody in Los Angeles wanted more water. Like the others involved in the project from its very conception, Otis became incredibly rich.

Major John Wesley Powell

Powell, a scientist who in 1869 began a survey expedition into the American West, is described as a Renaissance man. He grew up on the western frontier, acquiring "a vagabond's education" and reverence for nature, during which he managed to pick up solid knowledge of Greek, Latin, botany, and philosophy. He earned the rank of major in the Civil War, where he lost an arm. After the war, he helped found the Illinois Museum of Natural History.

Powell recorded everything he saw during the expedition (which, despite a mutiny by some of the crew's members, was a success) and upon return testified to the land's breathtaking beauty and harsh, but promising, character. However, by 1876, he became convinced that the governmental policies in the settling of the West were turning the place into a land of monopoly, fraud, and corruption. That year, he published *A Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States, with a More Detailed Account of the Lands of Utah* - a documentation of the West's problems with water that is relevant to this day. He also proposed a revolutionary settling plan, which found icy reception with the Congress because of their imperial drive for expansion. The disasters he predicted have happened and are plaguing the West today.

Ronald Reagan

Reagan had a reputation as a conservative; as a governor, he stalled the Dos Rios Dam for four years. As a president, he threatened to veto many projects, but he was a westerner and the western Congress members expected him to approve their water developments; he eventually joined in the bureaucratic tradeoff.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

During his administration, FDR was one of the most popular public figures in the country's history and had great power over Congress. Wanting to be remembered as both the greatest conservationist and the greatest developer, FDR favored large water projects: after the Dust Bowl, he had the Bureau take over the Central Valley Project and many dams, including Shasta, Friant, and the projects on the Columbia River. Further, he turned the Bureau into an enormous bureaucratic machine, leaving the actual construction of dams to be contracted out to engineering firms that became rich. Also, the nature of the commissioner changed: FDR wanted a political fighter and a good salesman to push the Reclamation projects, a person he found in Mike Strauss.

FDR was instrumental in propelling a "forty-year binge" of federal dam-building programs.

Theodore Roosevelt

A utilitarian conservationist and "a bugaboo of monopolists," Roosevelt admired John Wesley Powell's observations on the West but also wanted to make natural resources as efficient as possible; he reformed the Reclamation Act, but the problems with politics and money remained. Roosevelt opposed the aqueduct that would give Los Angeles water from the Owens River; he approved of it only for irrigation purposes.

Michael Strauss

A Bureau Commissioner under FDR, and a former newspaper man with wealth and social connections, Strauss was a good salesman who persuaded many Congress members to approve reclamation projects. During his eight years at the head of the Bureau, he became "responsible for as many water projects as any person who ever lived."

Stewart Udall

Interior Secretary in the Kennedy-Johnson administration, Udall spent his political career attempting to "reconcile his conflicting views on preservation and development" and ended up bargaining a great deal on water projects. As a result, he had a highly strained relationship with Floyd Dominy.

William Warne

California's director of water resources, Warne was involved in the controversial Central Valley Project and played "both ends against the middle," acquiring cheap water for his state through many lies and manipulations of the law.

The Watterson Brothers

Brothers Wilfred and Mark Watterson, bankers in the Owens Valley, were the strongest opponents of the Los Angeles plan to take their water; they even participated in blowing up part of the aqueduct. They ended up in jail for embezzlement and fraud after their opponents conducted an investigation of their bank; they had used the bank's money to fight the water takeover.

Themes

Nature versus Technology

The recently popularized genre of revisionist history signifies a shift in the conceptualization of historical narratives, examining thematic structures of the past and present rather than a chronological grand narrative, retelling events through a selected viewpoint of, for example, technological development and theory. Reisner's book, one of the most popular of this kind, embodies this new approach in its thematic selection of events used to tell a new history of the West. The theme of nature versus technology is an obvious choice in writing from an environmentalist perspective.

In its very title, *Cadillac Desert* contains an ideological dualism that Reisner explores in his book: one symbolized by a car brand, as an all-American emblem of transportation and exploration, and the other equivalent to nature's most hostile habitat for humans - and the most difficult one to adapt to their use. The fact that the Great American Desert has been populated and drastically changed to fit human needs is criticized throughout the book, in keeping with a developing environmentalist tradition. Reisner condemns taming the desert and tampering with nature because it can only result in severe damage - to the landscape and to the society attempting to live outside its environmental means.

Although it criticizes all human efforts to conquer the West's most precious resource, *Cadillac Desert* also suggests that dams are the most visible points of the conflict between nature and technology. In his descriptions of the water projects in the West, Reisner acknowledges they are both majestic and hideous: "When visitors were led to the canyon rim to watch Boulder Dam on the rise, there was usually a long moment of silence... that expressed proper awe and reverence for the dazzling, half-formed monstrosity they saw. The dam defied description; it defied belief."

While he acknowledges the benefits of water systems, such as the role that hydroelectric power plants had in winning World War II, Reisner places more emphasis on the devastating effects of these developments on the various ecosystems and the land itself. In the Afterward, he describes recent "natural" disasters in the West and points out that they were either worsened by human activity or were entirely man-made.

American Dream

Through his examination of the history of the West and its water, Reisner deconstructs the American Dream by pointing out what is wrong with American mythology when applied to the development of the West. In the political creation of the Dream, the media plays an important part: Reisner reveals the ways in which public opinion was shaped and manipulated to attract settlers to the arid West. For example, the newspapers carried editorials and accounts bordering on the fantastic. The papers proclaimed the

new frontier a paradise for farmers; some even "promptly published a map of Desert that contained an inset map of Palestine ('The Promised Land!'), calling attention to their 'striking similarity.'"

Reisner further describes how the U.S. government "discovered" and, in time, destroyed the land already occupied by Native Americans, all the while advertising the westward move as a step into uncharted, "virgin" territory. Unlike the premise of the American Dream, the land was already inhabited when the settlers began to pour in. The atrocities committed against the native tribes are best represented in the government's purchase/takeover of 155,000 acres of the best land from the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. At the document signing in 1948, the chairman of the Tribal Council burst into tears saying: "The members of the Tribal Council sign the contract with heavy hearts... Right now, the future does not look good to us." These facts, however, had a slim chance of being included in the American narrative, precisely because they conflicted with the ideals of the American myth.

In the chapter "Red Queen," Reisner describes the irony of the very idea of taming the West, since the new society has to run just to stay in place - or, keep developing new water projects in order to sustain the unsustainable yet heavily populated oasis in the Great American Desert. The cost of turning a desert into paradise through conquest of nature eventually turns into imminent danger for those living in it, because nature reclaims its space at a tremendous cost to society. Thus, the dream of persistent and blind conquest inevitably turns against the conqueror; as Reisner points out, "the West's real crisis is one of inertia, of will, and of myth."

Style

Personification

In *Cadillac Desert,* rivers and the land are repeatedly personified in descriptions; this way, Reisner creates more empathy in the reader for nature as it undergoes tremendous change with numerous water projects. For example, when he describes the changes in the Colorado River flow due to silting, Reisner writes that "the Colorado slipped out of its loose confinement of low sandy bluffs and tore off in some other direction, instantly digging a new course . . . The river went on such errant flings every few dozen years." He then describes the many water projects built on the Colorado River, and sadly notes:

Today, even though [it] still resembles a river only in its upper reaches and its Grand Canyon stretch... it is still unable to satisfy all the demands on it, so it is referred to as a 'deficit' river, as if the river were somehow at fault for its overuse.

Tone

The tone of *Cadillac Desert* is set by the Percy Bysshe Shelley poem *Ozymandias* in the book's beginning, as well as with the chapter titles: "A Country of Illusion," "Rivals in Crime," "Those Who Refuse to Learn ..., " "Things Fall Apart," and "A Civilization, if You Can Keep It." Reisner sounds didactic throughout, and his rhetoric reveals a strong environmentalist agenda. In repeated evaluations of the American West development, he discusses some benefits of the development but always counterweights them with judgmental statements such as: "The cost of all this, however, was a vandalization of both our natural heritage and our economic future, and the reckoning has not even begun." He refers to certain key figures in the massive water projects as "shameless," "manipulative," and "arrogant" and sums up the waste saying: "The point is that despite heroic efforts and many billions of dollars, all we have managed to do in the arid West is turn a Missouri-size section green."

One of the devices that Reisner uses is a repeated foreshadowing of doom, which is found in much of environmentalist literature. The immensity of the problem in the West is backed up by numbers; Reisner provides a plethora of statistics in the book as evidence for his analysis. The numbers paint a threatening picture for the western states and the nation as a whole, showing a great discrepancy between the actual and the value-cost of water, the overdraft statistics, and the money spent on projects that would shortly outlive their usefulness. One of his most effective warnings numerically states that "only one desert civilization, out of dozens that grew up in antiquity, has survived uninterrupted into modern times. And Egypt's approach to irrigation was fundamentally different from all the rest."

Reisner also provides emotional accounts of disasters that have already taken place, as well as terrifying predictions of those that he believes will occur in the future. In his account of the collapse of the Saint Francis Dam in 1928, Reisner uses graphic detail and tells stories of individual tragedy to emphasize his point: "A brave driver trying to outrace the flood could not bring himself to pass the people waving desperately along the way; his car held fourteen corpses when it was hauled out of the mud." Reisner also hypothesizes about failures of projects and man-made disasters. Even the flow of his sentences suggests the inevitable succession of tragedies along the line of development in the West:

But then catch a flight to Salt Lake City and fly over Glen Canyon Dam at thirty thousand feet, a height from which even this magnificent bulwark becomes a frail thumbnail holding back a monstrous, deceptively placid, man-made sea, and think what one sudden convulsion of the earth or one crude atomic bomb or one five-hundred-year flood (which came close to occurring in 1983 and nearly destroyed a spillway under the dam) might do to that fragile plug in its sandstone gorge, and what the sudden emptying of Lake Powell, with its eight and a half trillion gallons of water, would do to Hoover Dam downstream, and what the instantaneous disappearance of those huge life-sustaining lakes would mean to the thirteen million people hunkered down in southern California and to the Imperial Valley - which would no longer exist.

However, Reisner tempers this with hope and advice for reform, saying that "the age when [large water projects] might have been built seems to have passed" and looks at future projects that could repair some of the damage.

Historical Context

Environmentalism

During the early 1980s, the energy of the environmental movement took a detour through the peace movement that had begun to undertake direct action against military stations and nuclear missiles. Catastrophes of the mid-1980s and the publication of books detailing the state of environmental degradation, such as the first *State of the World Report* in 1994, inspired new environmental awareness. The catastrophes of the mid-1980s include the worst industrial accident in history in Bhopal, India, in 1984. The Union Carbide plant exploded and a cloud of gas released from the plant killed 2,500 people. In 1986, a series of catastrophes brought environmentalism to the forefront of media concerns. The NASA Challenger Shuttle explosion reignited concerns about the deployment of space vehicles□especially those carrying radioactive materials□because they could blow up or fall down, spreading radiation over populated parts of the globe. In the Soviet Union, the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl began decades of suffering amongst the Ukrainian locals as well as sending radioactive fallout over Europe. And then, a chemical spill in the Rhine River erased life from miles of river. In addition to these local events, the global warming debate began as more information was gathered about the hole in the ozone layer, first reported by British scientists studying in Antarctica in 1985.

Water Resources Development Act

President Ronald Reagan negotiated an end to wrangling over water resources and authorized legislation that had stalled the Army Corps of Engineers and created a backlog of work since 1970. Reagan's settlement was unprecedented in many ways. Its most important feature was a funding accountability mechanism. Instead of pork barrel authorizations from the federal government, the 1986 Water Resources Development Act demanded steep matching funds from non-federal interests. Projects were categorized and given cost-sharing equations that demanded certain percentages of cash up front and then additional percentages over 30 years, plus interest. This radically altered past systems that demanded land contributions. Additionally, the Act automatically eliminated projects from the Corps of Engineer's backlog that had been without funding for ten years. Further, any projects with authorization after the Act would be eliminated if not funded within five years.

In addition to the new level of stringency, the Act established the importance of wetland mitigation. For the first time, the Corps of Engineers became active in restoring natural water filtration systems as part of its water development mission.

Irrigation

Reports began to flow in the mid-1980s showing nearly 40 percent of the land receiving subsidized water grew crops that were in oversupply. Such reports led to a 1987 self-reassessment by the Bureau of Reclamation. As a result of this assessment, the Bureau concluded it had fulfilled its mission and would focus on maintenance of existing facilities. This change followed an alteration wrought by the Reclamation Reform Act of 1982, which demanded that landholders of more than 960 acres pay the full cost of services.

Critical Overview

Except for an exceptional handful, reviewers of *Cadillac Desert* have been so persuaded by Reisner's work as to become unabashed acolytes of his position. This number of devotees has grown over time, as the book has remained immensely popular. Early reviewers, however, immediately compared the book with *Rivers of Empire,* by Donald Worster, and were more objective. The two works are both revisionist histories. Reisner's work was welcomed as a good enhancement of Worster's book; many critics, like Grace Lichtenstein in the *Washington Post,* say the work "is a highly partisan, wonderfully readable portrayal of the damming, diverting and dirtying of Western rivers."

Dean E. Mann compares the two in some detail in his "Water and the American West." He notes that while Worster goes to great lengths to work the history of the American West into the theoretical construct of Karl Wittfogel's "hydraulic society," Reisner is motivated by his environmentalism to point out the "wrongheadedness of federal water policy." Thus, where Worster might see federal agencies as tools of a ruling class, Reisner sees stupidity. Mann's critical objection that the Eastern United States is as " wrongheaded" as the West and other objections are rare among reviews.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Hubbell is pursuing a Ph.D. in history with an emphasis on American history of infrastructure development at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In the following essay, he explores how Reisner's romantic preconceptions tarnish an otherwise splendid revision of American history.

Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert* operates more as a "call to arms" than a solid historical analysis of plumbing the Great American Desert. This is not to undermine the incredible array of research mustered by the book or to question Reisner's conclusions. However, it is worthwhile to notice how the book functions well enough to convert its critics and work as a "cult classic" of environmentalists; the deployment of an aesthetic technique combined with the creation of an exclusive genealogy support the militant fear of technology of radical environ-mentalism. This is unfortunate, because Reisner's interpretation of history supports recent Marxist reconceptualizations of democratic technology development. Reisner's aesthetic technique uses qualities of doom and fantasy. First, Reisner's text does for the history of the water problem in the West what the novels of Edward Abbey do for the environmental imagination. Secondly, his choice of John Welsey Powell as founder of the West without mention of Josiah Gregg highlights the author's bias; a genealogy based on Powell will be elitist and critical. Further, Reisner wants activists to become more involved with technical matters like water policy through an understanding of water history, but he leaves little space for imagining that the West has become precisely what its inhabitants wanted - for good or ill. And finally, any acts performed to question water policy - like the Watterson brothers struggles to save the Owens Valley - continues the same history of struggle to live in a desert.

Throughout the book, Reisner has nightmares about the impact of dams and water diversions on the environment. His descriptions of the dams and the environments they destroyed are excessive. After relating the side effects of dams - the loss of beauty, the salting of the earth, and poisoned ducks - Reisner's description of dams as "Frankenstein's monster" becomes more than rhetoric. Having put the problem in those terms, Reisner imagines what might happen should "one crude atomic bomb" destroy the Glen Canyon Dam and liberate Lake Powell. Such a suggestion must be contextualized within the ideology and action of environmentalists. As Russell Martin writes, in *A Story That Stands Like a Dam: Glen Canyon and the Struggle for the Soul of the West,* six masked people broadened the political repertoire of Earth First! by virtually cracking the Glen Canyon Dam. The dam had come to signify, according to Martin, the destruction of the West and had, he continues, spurred Dave Foreman to organize the militant group Earth First! Their stunt was to evade security at the dam in the spring of 1981 to crack it - the six saboteurs unfurled "300 feet of tapering plastic meant to resemble a crack."

Earth First! had read the novels of Abbey. Their favorite was a novel entitled *The Monkey Wrench Gang,* in which a group of environmentalists blow up dams and assault environmental degraders. Reisner' s inflammatory text must be situated within this

context of frustration, which has bordered on militant actions against the government and corporations - the same context as the Unabomber. The West has long viewed the government as predator and protector, predator when times are bad and protector when times are good. With their pioneer heritage, people living in the West pride themselves on having created life in a harsh environment, so acknowledging any degree of subsidy is difficult. This is not to say that Reisner's work gave rise to environmental terrorism but that the frustrations evident throughout Reisner's work as he decries any destruction of wilderness arise out of a context of general frustration among environmentalists. His sympathy with that frustration clouds his message. Martin's evenhanded and removed text is heavily indebted to Reisner's work in the 1970s, which most likely brought him into contact with Dave Foreman and Edward Abbey. *Cadillac Desert* does not mention Earth First! or their 1981 stunt. Clearly, Reisner does not advocate violence but he is warning that if the bureaucratic machines are not reformed and water policy changed, then either time or terrorists will wreak havoc on the West.

The situation of Glen Canyon dam allows for a nice segue to John Wesley Powell for whom the dam's reservoir lake is named. Powell, as Reisner explains, surveyed the West. He proposed a system of settlement similar to those that made the Mormons successful: cooperative, small scale, and sustainable irrigation systems. Sadly, Reisner neglects the part of the story that distinguishes the Mormons as being an exceptional case. Instead, the family heading out to make a claim in the West was probably armed with a technical manual on the art of dry-land farming or read enthusiastic descriptions inspired by the earlier work of Gregg. Dry land farming taught the easterner how to farm drier soils until agricultural settlement would grow large enough to attract the rains. The rains never came and the Dust Bowl resulted, creating a mass of refugees and abandoned homesteads. Those who survived the Dust Bowl and were able to continue to eke out a living due to irrigation were simply trying to live. To suggest that they were misinformed or pawns of water policy does a disservice to their livelihood. It would be more constructive to engage those farmers in a technical discussion that completely changes agricultural practice in the West than to scourge them with having destroyed Powell's whitewater sport.

Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* was not an instructional manual about farming. Rather, Gregg, a pre-Civil War botanist whose work centered on Santa Fe, wrote about the West as he found it. Gregg's West is full of wonderful plant life and birds - what Reisner and Earth First! want in the West - as well as the humans making a living. Gregg makes the argument that commerce in the West needs the same protection that the ships on the ocean receive in order to expand America's trade. Gregg's request matches most of the other requests from the West for help while desiring independence. Consequently, an uneasy relationship started between the West and the federal government. The westerners have wanted protection so long as they are enabled to do as they wish, but they view the government as a predator whenever it trespasses on their perceived liberty or asks them to pay for services. Reisner, with his focus on Powell, depicts the government as an unwanted predator. The tradition of Gregg, however, views the government as a necessary evil; a force whose protection could help the West prosper.

The focal point of this historical tension becomes the dam, a form of technology requiring sophisticated organization and industrial supports. Dams are engineering marvels made possible by a rich nation capable and desirous of building them. Once constructed on the scale of, say, Hoover Dam, it is nearly impossible to remove them. However, the attitudinal shift from loving dams to monkey-wrenching them also reveals a shift in perceptions of technology. Neo-Marxist Andrew Feenberg, in *Questioning Technology,* theorizes this problem as he reconfigures the site of technology not as a place of tension but as a positive space for democratic participation. Feenberg writes, "Technological development is constrained by cultural norms originating in economics, ideology, religion, and tradition." Too often, Feenberg continues, technology exists as an "unquestioned background to every aspect of life." Therefore, to question the background supports is to question the form of life based on that background: " 'We the People' are simply not mobilized as a whole around technical issues to a degree that would make a constitutional approach plausible." Reisner would agree with Feenberg; by writing about the history of water policy, he encourages an education of the public about the necessary supports to its lifestyle. While Reisner highlights the dam, the destruction it causes, and the future problems of water policy, he does not go far enough for Feenberg. Questioning the West's plumbing involves questioning the way of life in America and its reliance upon those dams. As Feenberg says, "technical design standards define major portions of the social environment. . . The economic significance of technical change often pales besides its wider human implications in framing a way of life."

Reisner's work has enabled an entire generation of historians to ask new questions about history, though they seldom cite Reisner specifically. ,em>Cadillac Desert has enraged and excited a new era of environmentalists. However, neither group has been able to articulate or create a milieu of discussion about the ultimate conclusions Reisner leads to and that Feenberg has articulated - facing the unsustainability of the American lifestyle. Instead, it became a hobby throughout the 1990s to join Earth First! in defense of poster-megafauna, like wolves and bears, while leaving the question of the dam alone. The mid-1980s interest in water, reflected by *Cadillac Desert,* meanwhile evaporated so that the Water Resources Act of 1999, as well as extraordinary energy demand, have steadily eroded the responsible Reaganite reforms.

Source: Jeremy W. Hubbell, Critical Essay on *Cadillac Desert,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing and is a copyeditor and published writer. In this essay, she examines the dramatic and literary elements used in Reisner's book to determine why so many reviewers refer to the novel-like quality of Reisner's nonfiction writing.

From the first chapter to the last, Marc Reisner pulls his readers into his extensive and thought-provoking research on the exploits and consequences of water depletion in the West in his classic environmental treatise *Cadillac Deser*t. His pulling is done subtlety, like any great storyteller. Reisner involves his readers so completely that most won't notice his techniques. They may only note that the thick book, which is packed with historical, economical, and statistical facts, is one of the easiest nonfiction books to read. It is engaging, suspenseful, and even comical. But Reisner never loses his focus. He is an environmentalist concerned about the land that he loves. He is also very much aware that facts and figures don't tell the whole story, don't compel people to action. Therefore, Reisner employs dramatic effect. He fills in the gaps between the statistics and historical facts with the excitement of a novel, the spectacle of a Broadway play, the thrill of an Academy Award-winning movie, while simultaneously exposing the story that surrounds the misuse and abuse of some of America's grandest rivers. It is through his dramatic techniques that Reisner slowly draws the reader more deeply into the information that he has painstakingly gathered.

The book begins with Reisner recounting a personal experience of flying over the vast western deserts. This account gives the reader a literal overview of the remaining chapters of the book, and by using a personal style, Reisner invites his reader in. He gives the story a face, allowing the reader to identify with it. This is not just a story about the desert and the rivers that flow down the face of the earth, it is the story of that desert and the rivers as seen through the eyes of a very intelligent and sensitive man. By using this technique, Reisner gives his story not only a narrator, but a reference point to which the reader can return when the comprehensive details become too overbearing. That reference point is introduced to the reader as a very uncomplicated man□someone who flies tourist class and takes an aisle seat without grumbling when he would much rather sit next to a window. He is also a man who obviously loves history. He knows a lot of facts. He recognizes the landmarks, is aware of the people whose lives are affected by those landmarks, and he's anxious to share all his accumulated stories. He is also a tease. He hands out tidbits, like someone tempting a wild animal to eat out of his hand. He mentions names like John Wesley Powell, telling the reader that Powell knew something that no one else seemed to know, but he relates only part of the story, as if saying that he, Reisner, also knows something that others don't know. He hints that there is a great drama building up at the Mexican border, as well as in California, Arizona, and Colorado. He talks about unrenewable groundwater supplies that are drying up, freshwater rivers that are turning to salt, and great rivers of water that are being forced to run uphill. Then he states that maybe these are not unusual things. Maybe they do not spell out a doomsday scenario. Maybe everything will work out all right. But of course, as the dramatist, as the storyteller that he is, his readers are put on

edge, knowing that it is exactly the opposite of these sentiments that Reisner believes. Reisner is, of course, baiting his readers, coaxing them to turn the page.

Reisner begins a history of the exploration of the West by telling stories of some of its most interesting characters, none more so than Jedediah Smith whom Reisner describes by saying "no explorer in the continent's history was more compulsive and indefatigable" than this wild mountain man. The story about Smith reads like a script for an adventure movie starring a leading man who combines the on-screen personalities of Harrison Ford and Sylvester Stallone. Smith is too big for real life. He had to have been invented. No one could have accomplished as much as he did, outsmarting death at least a dozen times. But Reisner didn't invent anything in retelling Smith's story. He just dug up the facts and presented them as any good novelist would. Reisner must have known how compelling Smith's story was. Reisner, himself, must have been drawn to it and then found some place to stick it in his book. And it works so well. What a great distraction. What a great device to use, to keep pulling that reader along.

Reisner also fills in the details of the life of John Wesley Powell, whom he briefly mentioned in his introduction. He introduces Powell with this sentence: "John Wesley Powell belonged to a subspecies of American that flourished briefly during the nineteenth century and went extinct with the end of the frontier." The immediate response to this sentence is: What is Reisner talking about? What does he mean when he uses the word *subspecies?* What is he inferring when he says that this type of American is now extinct? Reisner is, of course, leading the reader once again. He knows that these questions will pop up in the reader's mind. He knows that if he can put these questions into the reader's consciousness, the next logical step is for the reader to seek out the answers. And Reisner is ready with the answers. He wants the reader to understand, to share in the passion that has driven Reisner to dig into the history behind the facts in order to answer his own questions. Reisner has dug up a lot of material. If he doesn't include his readers in the dramatic details of how he found the material, the reader might become overwhelmed or worse, bored with the mountains of information. So Reisner colors his information with not only interesting characters, and fantastic stories, he also phrases his writing in such a way that even the more mundane pieces of information come alive. He engages the reader with dramatic affect. He stirs the reader's imagination. And he engages the reader's curiosity with statements that conjure up questions that scream out to be answered. Like a great mystery story writer, he first gives his reader, not the answers, but the clues.

Next, Reisner offers intrigue, as exhilarating as any contemporary spy thriller. He tells the story of the birthing of the two great cities of California: San Francisco and Los Angeles. But he tells their stories by exposing the motives behind the men who molded the cities' futures. He uncovers tales filled with ferocious competition, unforgiving revenge, and insatiable greed. He refers to one of these founding fathers, William Mulholland, as a modern-day Moses, who "instead of leading his people through the waters to the promised land, he would cleave the desert and lead the promised waters to them." As Reisner states, Mulholland, along with Fred Eaton, are popularly credited with stealing the waters of the Owens River, which lay 250 miles east of Los Angeles. Without this river, Los Angeles would have dried up a long time ago. But to tell the story

of how Mulholland and Eaton carried off this feat, Reisner doesn't simply use a running narrative, he adds dialogue. The reader feels that she not only is being told a story, she is in the room, listening, as this deal goes down. "We want the deed back," says one man. "What do you mean?" answers another. "The deed by which your city is going to try to rape this valley," comes the retort. At this point, the reader has got to be thinking: Does this sound like a good old western movie, or what?

As for Reisner's sense of humor, it comes through□for example, when he begins chapter seven with the following sentence: "When Emma Dominy, writhing and shrieking, finally evicted her son Floyd, the doctors dumped him on a scale and whistled." This is not typical writing for an environmental essayist, but it is an example of Reisner's wit, and also of his talent as a storyteller. Details of government usurping, wasting, or otherwise destroying some of the most dynamic and pristine rivers of the West is not easy reading. To counter the frustration and anger that Reisner's reportage might stir, he breaks the tension, as Shakespeare himself was known to do, with comic relief.

Floyd Dominy ends up rising, at an accelerated rate, to a powerful position in the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the government agency whose responsibility it was to build dams, reroute rivers, and help plan and support irrigation projects in the desert. In referring to Dominy's climb up the ladder inside the bureau, Reisner writes: "His [Dominy's] strategy was simple. He would settle in a branch [of the Bureau] with a weak man as chief and learn as fast as he could. Then he would flap up to the ledge occupied by the chief and knock him off." According to Reisner, Dominy was not only big at birth, he was big in ambition. "Dominy had the instincts of a first-rate miler. He could pace himself beautifully, moving on the margin of recklessness but always with power in reserve. He knew when to cut off a runner, when to throw an elbow, when to sprint." Here is another literary device that Reisner uses well to set up the sense of drama. Reisner brightens his writing with metaphors. He does not always rely on single word modifiers like competitive, ambitious, or ruthless. Rather, he draws a picture using words. He shows the reader what Dominy's ambition looks like; he describes it with imagery.

Not all of Reisner's dramatic devices are used on people. He also gives the reader a dramatic vision of the Colorado River in his chapter called "An American Nile (I)." Reisner does not use personification, per se (personification in this case would mean attributing human qualities to the river). However, he does paint a majestic picture of the Colorado, referring to its strength (before it was all dammed up) as being capable of flipping a small freighter. He states that if it suddenly stopped flowing, most of southern California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming would have to be evacuated because people would be dying of thirst. He writes that it "grows much of America's domestic production of fresh winter vegetables" and lights "the neon city of Las Vegas." The way Reisner writes about the Colorado makes the river appear as a once powerful and, although currently enslaved, benevolent goddess. By defining the Colorado in this humanistic way, when Reisner is able to turn his story to the details of how much the river has been abused, the emotions of the reader are brought to the surface. This once-grand dame is now the "most legislated ... and most litigated river in

the entire world. The river is so used up that by the time it reaches the Gulf of California, it is no more than a "burbling trickle." To many environmentalists, the Colorado has become the symbol of "everything mankind has done wrong." To the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, however, the river is a "perfection of an ideal." How can the reader not feel empathy for the Colorado when Reisner paints this image of the river as a dethroned goddess, who has been caged with dams and had her life-blood drained from her veins.

Why does Reisner use literary and dramatic devices in his writing? It could just be that he is a good writer, and things like metaphor, humor, and personification come to him naturally. But in the last chapter of his book, Reisner talks about abstraction. He says that it's not easy to get people to think about ecological disasters like the ones that the United States might be facing for having built huge cities, like Phoenix and Las Vegas, in the middle of the desert, or Los Angeles on land that does not have enough water to support its huge population. He says it is hard because these kinds of issues remain abstractions. People don't like to think of catastrophes. In the heart of Las Vegas, on the strip, a passerby can look to either side of the road and see huge water fountains spewing. People don't see the need for water conservation. They don't see that an earthquake could destroy the great aqueducts that deliver water to their kitchen taps in Los Angeles. So Reisner has written a book that is part play, part novel, part motion picture. He has used metaphor and humor to help put a face, an image, on the abuse of the great waterways of America. Because without that face, no one may have seen it.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Cadillac Desert,* in *Nonfiction Classics for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

In the following review, Rowley commends Cadillac Desert *for exposing problems surrounding desert communities, but disagrees with Reisner's suggestion that the United States should leave those areas as Nature intended*.

When the United States expanded across the continent in the 19th century, its landed empire claimed the arid expanses of the American West. Refusing to accept the limitations that aridity placed on the region, American enterprise used science, technology, and heavy capital investment to overcome the obvious environmental restrictions that "the Great American Desert" placed on agricultural and industrial development. The result was western irrigation, extended ditch water delivery systems, big dam projects, and massive urban growth during and after World War II. The story is impressive.

Some have not been so impressed. John Wesley Powell, in his *Report on the Arid Lands of the American West* (1878), laid the foundation for a "desertification critique" of western development. At mid-20th century, western historian Walter Prescott Webb offended regional boosterism and local chambers of commerce when he declared in "The American West, Perpetual Mirage" that the West would be forever limited by the desert. Now the most contemporary restatement of this view is found in a highly critical piece of historical journalism bearing the provocative title *Cadillac Desert*. Like its forerunners, the book asserts that water was and is the key to western development. The West achieved great water projects not by itself but by campaigning for assistance from Congress, finally receiving the Bureau of Reclamation in 1902. Herein was the beginning of many a problem for the West and the nation that involved fraud, needless expenditure of monies, and, most distressing, the costly development of cheap (subsidized) water supplies for the rich and powerful.

Marc Reisner's muckraking view of the career and ambitions of the Bureau of Reclamation in western waters also extends to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The two agencies pursued unconscionable rivalries at the expense of the public safety and the public purse. He contends: "No one will ever know how many ill-conceived water projects were built by the Bureau and the Corps simply because the one agency thought the other would build it first." The story portrayed here is not new. It is just stated in a more strident and certainly less balanced way than scholarly studies that carry the burden of footnotes.

Both the value and the weakness of this book are in its conceptualization. It is commendable to expose careerism, bureaucratic waste, and environmental degradation. But it is also hollow to suggest that man should stand idle in nature's imperfect world as is suggested by the observation that "... God had left the perfection and completion of California to the Bureau of Reclamation." In this same state the bureau learned its most valuable lesson, in the Owens Valley in the struggle between farmers and the city of Los Angeles: small farmers do not count, but large farmers and growing desert cities are the masters to be served.

Not only do concepts fit the muckraking framework of this writer, so do the personalities of Reclamation, especially the longtime bureau director Floyd Dominy, who is described at the end of his career as "a zealot, blind to injustice, locked into a mad-dog campaign against the environmental movement. ..." Unlike other works on the subject, the writing in this book makes reclamation history contagious and infectious. It holds the attention of the reader like a newsstand scandal sheet. Reisner decries the sins of the built environment against the natural environment and those who profit from these transgressions in the West. The image of doom for a civilization built around western water projects is as overwhelming as the sands covering the ancient ruins of desert kingdoms. In October 1987, the *New York Times* ran an announcement by the Bureau of Reclamation that its dam-building days were over and it would become a maintenance organization rather than a creator of new dreams and projects. The announcement makes the material of this book both timely and ominous.

Source: William D. Rowley, Review of *Cadillac Desert,* in *Technology and Culture,* Vol. 30, No. 2, April 1989, pp. 493-94.

Adaptations

In 1997, PBS, in association with KCET/Los Angeles, aired a four-part documentary called *Cadillac Desert*. The first three episodes of the series, "Mulholland's Dream," "An American Nile," and "The Mercy of Nature," were based on Reisner's book, while the fourth episode ("Last Oasis") was based on the book of the same name by Sandra Postel. The series, a production of Trans Pacific Television and KTEH/ San Jose Public Television, won a Silver Baton for the filmmakers (Reisner, Jon Else, and Sandra Itkoff) at the 1998 Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Awards ceremony.

Topics for Further Study

What is the state of the Florida Everglades ecosystem? What happened to the plans for restoration and repair of the Everglades in the 1996 renewal of the Water Resources Development Act?

Beginning with the Water Resources Development Act of 1999, what sort of history can be told about water policy in the eastern United States? For example, what is the state of the Delaware River and what plans exist for this river?

What repercussions have stemmed from the Central Valley Improvement Act of 1992? How did the act come about, and does it address the history of water use in the valley?

Research the impact of turning water into a commodity on the environment. For example, what impact does a bottling plant at the head of the Everglades have on that water system? What are the issues involved with the attempt to sell water from Lake Superior?

What experience do other countries have with their development of water? What kinds of competitions were water engineers engaged in during the Cold War? What is the state of Russian Dams, and what happened to the Aral Sea? How did the Aswan Dam make locals sick? Does water play a role in the Middle East Peace Process? How extensive is water development in China?

Compare and Contrast

1980s: The cost-sharing component of the 1986 reform (by the Water Resources Development Act) radically constrains construction of new water projects.

Today: Twenty dams are currently being constructed worldwide. Approximately forty dams are being proposed for sites worldwide□the largest proposed enterprise is Brazil's plan to construct a series of sixteen dams in the Amazon Basin. Meanwhile, six dams are being considered for demolition.

1980s: Environmental concern ushers in an era of dam demolition and wetland mitigation.

Today: Efforts to remove dams in the United States have been stymied, and electrical demand has led to a relaxation of pollution controls and an increase in hydroelectric reliance.

1980s: Disgruntled environmentalists form Earth First!, a radical and direct action oriented group. This group begins a series of direct confrontations with logging and construction companies. They are especially active against road construction in wilderness areas.

Today: Inspired by the Earth First! protest repertoire, groups worldwide attempt to broaden media discussions about globalization. The most famous such action occurred when environmentalists marched with blue collar workers in protest. In 1999, the action, named the "Battle in Seattle," raised the cost, drama, and violence for any city hosting a globalization summit meeting or conference gathering of biotech scientists.

What Do I Read Next?

Marc Reisner and Sarah Bates, from Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, constructively analyze water policy in the west and suggest changes in *Overtapped Oasis: Reform or Revolution for Western Water* (1989).

Reisner's 1991 work *Game Wars: The Undercover Pursuit of Wildlife Poachers* investigates the problem of poaching through the experiences of detective Dave Hall, who works the field from Alaska to Louisiana. The book reflects a new interest in the problems of hunting by the public due to growing environmental awareness as well as battles between sportsmen and Indians over Native American treaty rights.

The United States Society on Dams is an organization made up of career dam builders and maintainers. Their website at http://www2. privatei.com/~uscold (March 2001) contains up to date information on U.S. dams.

The Army Corps of Engineers maintains the inventory of U.S. dams at http://crunch.tec.army. mil/nid/webpages/nid.cfm (March 2001) as authorized by the original Water Resources Act and its update in 1996. This site contains maps of all American dams.

Published in 1984, Donald Worster's examination of water infrastructure in the West, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West,* depends on Karl Wittfogel's notion of "hydraulic society." According to Worster, dams and diversions helped America realize its dream of harnessing nature.

Last Oasis, published by the Worldwatch Institute in 1992, was written by Reisner's partner on the film version of his work, Sandra Postel. Her book focuses on the ways in which policy changes and new technologies can improve the water supply and the environment of the West.

Historian Richard White's *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (1995) is a model work for applying an understanding of ecological regionalism to a historical subject. White investigates the interaction between humans, salmon, and the river over time.

Water resource deficiencies are global. Rivers cross international boundaries and water rich areas are sparsely populated while dense areas are dry. Marq De Villiers brings a global perspective to the water problem in *Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource* (2000).

Further Study

Davis, Mike, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster,* Vintage Books, 1999.

Critically acclaimed author Mike Davis exposes the foibles and wrongheadedness of the city of Los Angeles. Davis' insight into Los Angeles includes an examination of fictional self-destructions performed by films and novels in the city as well as an awareness of a secret of geology□the center of Los Angeles sits over a large aquifer. In this text, Davis focuses on the way the city deals with nature in the form of mountain lions, fire, and the landscape.

Herbert, Frank, *Dune,* Mass Market Paperback, 1999.

Herbert's classic science fiction tale revolves around Duke Paul Atreides and his struggle to avenge his father's death. Atreides exploits the myths of a desert people and leads them to take over the planet. He hopes to realize their dream of making the inhospitable planet into a world of lakes and rivers by releasing the water that the people have condensed from the air over centuries.

Landes, David S., *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations,* W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

Using a global approach to the history of technology and civilization, Landes discusses the reasons behind economic disparity between nations. Such a history stems in part from an unequal distribution of natural resources, like fresh water.

Limerick, Patricia Nelson, *Something in the Soil,* W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

The leading figure of western history revisionism is Patricia Nelson Limerick. In ,em>Something in the Soil, Limerick presents a series of essays on "Great Men," current mining problems, understanding the West, and environmentalist activities.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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