

1-1-2008

Maude Barlow, Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water

Alan Curtis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/wlr>

Custom Citation

Alan Curtis, Book Note, Maude Barlow, Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water, 11 U. Denv. Water L. Rev. 441 (2008).

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Denver Sturm College of Law at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Water Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. However, like their domestic counterparts, many of these projects encountered tensions between industrialism and agrarian polices. Industry prevailed in this struggle, as well. Phillips argues that industry triumphed for the same reasons it happened in the United States: countries sought the prosperity associated with industry and had little interest in conservation programs designed to help poor rural populations.

This Land, This Nation is a fascinating, yet difficult, study. The numerous acronyms and players involved in New Deal conservation policies can make the book difficult to follow at times. Accordingly, Phillips is most clear in Chapter 3, which uses President Johnson as a main character and traces the history of recovery and reform with his early career in Washington. This approach gives the reader a main character to focus on and provides for a better understanding of the evolution of New Deal conservation policies and attitudes. Additionally, linking this evolution with Johnson and historical events clarifies the underlying causes of such policies. In the end, Phillips has produced a thorough and enlightening portrait of the New Deal using a different lens than most other New Deal histories. *This Land, This Nation* is a great resource for those interested in historical environmental policy; more importantly, this book is a requirement for those interested in future environmental policies as it offers a chance to learn from the successes and shortcomings of the past.

Matt Larson

Maude Barlow, *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*, The New Press (2008); 196 pp; \$24.95; ISBN 1595581863, hard cover.

In *Blue Covenant*, Right Livelihood Award-winner Maude Barlow provides insight into the issues surrounding global freshwater. The book depicts the problems with privatization of water, and the emerging technologies designed to “reuse” water. *Blue Covenant* focuses on how grassroots movements have fought off privatization and demanded that government treat water as a basic human right, and not a freely traded commodity.

Chapter one, *Where Has All the Water Gone*, describes the most pressing issues facing global water as a resource. It begins by outlining three disastrous scenarios that the world faces unless we as a planet change course. The theme of immediacy expressed by the scenarios carries throughout the book: Scenario 1, the world is running out of freshwater; Scenario 2, every day more and more people are living without access to clean water; and Scenario 3, a powerful corporate water cartel has emerged to seize control of every aspect of water for its own profit. The third scenario exacerbates the problems unfolding in the first two scenarios.

The bulk of the chapter describes the mechanisms by which the world rapidly loses its freshwater. First, the polluting of surface waters on a global scale reduces the amount of clean water available to drink. Second, the author addresses impact of depleting groundwater sources through industrial and agricultural practices in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Third, the issue of how the planet is drying up through melting glaciers, the virtual-water trade (water used and lost in growing food), and the impacts of urbanization and deforestation illustrate some wasteful global practices. Finally, a discussion of how technological solutions, such as dams, diversions and desalination actually further the problem. The author concludes the chapter with a discussion of how world leaders have failed to alleviate these problems, or even address them to create public awareness.

The second chapter, *Setting the Stage for Corporate Control of Water*, describes how national and international organizations have moved water policy toward privatization, and discusses the management and motivation of these organizations. First, the author provides an overview of the types of privatization contracts (concession, leases, and management) that the World Bank supports. The World Bank successfully promoted the private model of water delivery to key individuals through private companies operating in the global South. The success in promoting water privatization in the global South required the support of the United Nations. Here, the author explained the role of the United Nations and a host of other organizations in developing a model for privatizing water in developing nations. The author then discussed how giant global forums, such as the World Water Forum and World Summit on Sustainable Development, influenced this policy. The chapter concludes with examples of how privatization has failed to supply water to the poor.

The premise of chapter 3, *The Water Hunters Move In*, centers on the fastest-growing area of the water market, providing clean water for industrial and municipal use and cleaning the associated waste water. The chapter begins with an overview of both the prominent and emergent companies in the field. It analyzes desalination, nuclear desalination, nanotechnology, emerging technologies, and the bottled water industry in relation to environmental impacts and the potential, though limited, benefits of providing safe water. Next, the author provides an overview of the investment opportunities in water through stocks, indexes, and mutual funds. The chapter concludes by addressing the three major problems with increasing corporate control of water: (1) disincentives to stop pollution; (2) disincentives to serve people that cannot pay; and (3) disincentives to protect the natural world.

The fourth chapter, *The Water Warriors Fight Back*, outlines the water privatization resistance movement from the grassroots level to international organizations. The overview of the resistance movement covers Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Australia, Africa, United States,

Canada, and Europe. Each area illustrates local communities' desire to retain public control of water and to remove the private companies at one level or another. Next, the author examines how rallying and speaking at international meetings has prompted the transition from grassroots movements to a coordinated and effective international justice movement. The chapter concludes with examples of local and national resistance to foreign bottling companies, and how the bottling companies have attempted to counter the bad press through charity initiatives.

The final chapter highlights the issues that have manifested as a result of the current push for privatization of water, and how to potentially resolve the issues. In *The Future of Water*, the author stresses the need to have water declared a right for all of humanity. Showing how privatization of water has created conflict within nations and also across national borders illustrates the need to resolve these issues. Addressing the three disastrous scenarios from chapter 1, the author pushes for an internationally-enforceable covenant based on (1) water conservation, (2) water justice, and (3) water democracy. The United Nations has the ability to make this covenant and enforce it. In order for the covenant to succeed, the United Nations must reject the basic tenets of market-based globalization.

Blue Covenant attempts, and ultimately succeeds, in highlighting the need for greater public awareness of the humanitarian issues that the mismanagement of global water has created. By using a vast array of statistics and local examples, *Blue Covenant* shows how privatizing water may not be the solution to the problems the world faces.

Alan Curtis

