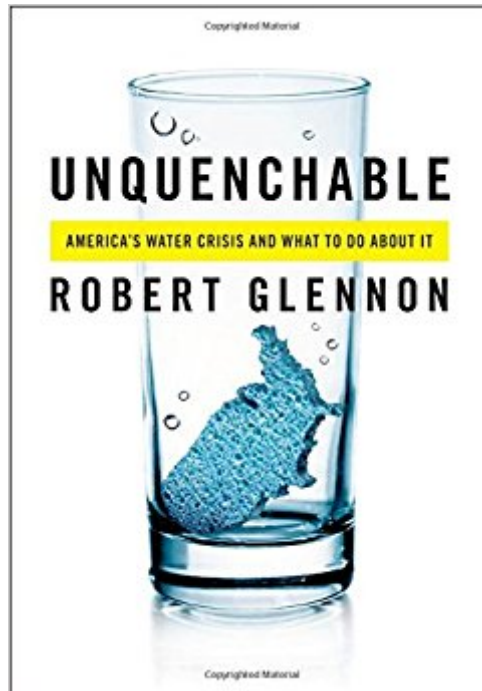




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# Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis And What To Do About It



## Synopsis

In the middle of the Mojave Desert, Las Vegas casinos use billions of gallons of water for fountains, pirate lagoons, wave machines, and indoor canals. Meanwhile, the town of Orme, Tennessee, must truck in water from Alabama because it has literally run out. *Unquenchable* Robert Glennon captures the irony and tragedy of America's water crisis in a book that is both frightening and wickedly comical. From manufactured snow for tourists in Atlanta to trillions of gallons of water flushed down the toilet each year, *Unquenchable* reveals the heady extravagances and everyday inefficiencies that are sucking the nation dry. The looming catastrophe remains hidden as government diverts supplies from one area to another to keep water flowing from the tap. But sooner rather than later, the shell game has to end. And when it does, shortages will threaten not only the environment, but every aspect of American life: we face shuttered power plants and jobless workers, decimated fisheries and contaminated drinking water. We can't engineer our way out of the problem, either with traditional fixes or zany schemes to tow icebergs from Alaska. In fact, new demands for water, particularly the enormous supply needed for ethanol and energy production, will only worsen the crisis. America must make hard choices and Glennon's answers are fittingly provocative. He proposes market-based solutions that value water as both a commodity and a fundamental human right. One truth runs throughout *Unquenchable*: only when we recognize water's worth will we begin to conserve it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

America faces a water-supply crisis. Profligate consumption of water for agriculture, power generation, industry, and homes has led to reduction of groundwater, threats to rivers, and mortal danger to many of the nation's lakes. Much of the blame for this state of affairs lies with uncontrolled growth in the nation's South and Southwest. Desert cities such as Las Vegas use fountains as decorations. Phoenix households draw down the finite resources of ever-shrinking Lake Mead. In great detail, Glennon documents present and future water crises in Georgia, California, and even seemingly water-rich Michigan, noting that states generally end up competing with one another over water allocation and that international conflict follows in short order. Desalination offers little immediate hope because of economic and ecological barriers. Glennon submits a list of possible reforms to decrease water consumption. Some, such as waterless toilets, are technological innovations. Others, such as restructuring sewer systems, require governmental intervention. --Mark Knoblauch --This text refers to the Unknown Binding edition.

"Robert Glennon makes immediate and specific the most urgent point of crisis threatening the health and welfare of the American environment. The wells of the American dream stand a good chance of running dry, and to read Glennon's necessary book is to know that without water there will be no wine, no roses, nothing over Dorothy's rainbow except a pillar of salt." (Lewis Lapham, editor, "Lapham's Quarterly") "Robert Glennon is a leading-edge legal scholar and passionate water advocate whose thinking is central to an intense debate on the path forward to a water-secure world. I heartily recommend his provocative, information-packed, and highly readable new book Unquenchable." (Maude Barlow) "Unquenchable is a worthy successor to Cadillac Desert that ably demonstrates how our most valuable resource is being squandered, ignored, and flushed away. Although it reminds us that water is indeed finite, Unquenchable clearly shows us the solutions to the greatest threat of the 21st century are limited only by politics and greed." (Terry Tamminen Cullman Senior Fellow, New America Foundation and former secretary, CA EPA) "Glennon brings home the global problem of availability of drinking water...interesting and timely...recommended." (CHOICE) "Glennon illustrates the depth and complexity of our country's water problems." (Audubon) "Top Ten Environmental Book of 2009" (Mother Nature Network) "If you use water, you need to read this book. It's akin to Cadillac Desert" (Water Wired) "Several books have been published recently addressing the global water crisis, but none has offered such in-depth analysis." (New York Review of Ideas) "Thought-provoking and insightful book that offers an informed and articulate review of the enormous water issues facing Arizona, and the United States as a whole. It should be on the bookshelves of attorneys, environmentalists, public policy managers, and others

interested in natural resources." (Journal of Arizona History)"In Unquenchable, Glennon offers a parade of anecdotes to argue that we need urgent, fundamental changes in the way we use water in the United States." (BioScience)"Author Robert Glennon connects the dots between our water woes and climate change, energy, growth, the environment, and agriculture. He makes a compelling case that we need to re-think how we use this prized resource and provides a number of thought-provoking solutions. Informative, insightful, and very interesting." (U.S. Senator Mark Udall Colorado)

I was torn between a four and a five and came down on the side of five because this is a real book with real facts and real interviews and it covers a vital topic very ably. I was tempted to drop to a four for two reasons: this book desperately lacks visualization, something publishers are going to have to learn to integrate if they want to survive (see the TED Briefing "Data is the New Dirt" by David McCandless); and because this book is part of a twelve-book read and review series started for UNESCO, I don't see all the solutions well represented at the end--the book ends weakly. Still, it is a vitally serious, desperately serious book, a sequel to the author's *Water Follies: Groundwater Pumping And The Fate Of America's Fresh Waters*, and should be read with *When the Rivers Run Dry: Water--The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-first Century* and *The Blue Death: Disease, Disaster, and the Water We Drink*. At Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog you can do what does not provide for: see all of my reviews on all books on water with one click, and explore my integrative summative reviews of non-fiction books and DVDs in 97 other categories. Published in 2009, this is a current book that should be completely redone with proper visualizations including state by state visualizations and accompanying data sets, and then issued in paperback along with lists of "who to call" state by state. The author impresses me greatly with his mix of detailed facts and face to face interviews woven into a story, but it is not an easy story to follow and time, space, water reality just does not come across in plain text. Notes that stayed with me: + Las Vegas is the icon of irresponsible behavior and ran out of water in 2001 + Hoover Dam made Las Vegas possible, built by the Mob after gambling legalized for the dam workers + Today Las Vegas spends \$1 million per hotel room in total construction and service costs to create + \$2 billion pipeline is planned from the Mississippi, this is an example of money over thinking + Hotels use only 3% of the Las Vegas water--this was an eye opener for me. The hotels and casinos have been totally responsible, have understood the crisis, thrown money at it, and represent state of the art water recycling and gray water utilization as well as water conservation. Observation: If Las Vegas truly runs out of water one day and the USG Government

chooses to bail it out at our expense, it will be ten to a hundred times more costly than the Wall Street bailout. It's time we reestablished public control over the public purse.QUOTE (17): Water lubricates the American economy just as oil does. It is intimately linked to energy because it takes water to make energy and it takes energy to divert, pump, move, and cleanse water. Water plays a critical role in virtually every segment of the economy, from heavy industry to food production, from making semiconductors to providing Internet service. A prosperous future depends on a secure and reliable [and clean] water supply. And we don't have it. To be sure, water still flows from taps, but we're draining our reserves like gamblers at a crap table.+ Droughts are a threat to URBAN areas, I really appreciated the insights in this section+ Private wells are not understood or monitored, they are consuming a lot and also have chloride & other concentrationsMuch of the book covers ground I have walked in other books. For the US audience, I would certainly recommend this book and the others above. For the international audience, I recommend instead, in this order:The Atlas of Water, Second Edition: Mapping the World's Most Critical ResourceWater: The Fate of Our Most Precious ResourceBlue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's WaterWater Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and ProfitAs a general observation, although the author scared me at first with his advocate of placing an economic value on water, in the end he proves to be an advocate of a REGULATED marketplace, not a "free" market where costs can be externalized to the public. Of course this requires public intelligence in the public interest, something that does not exist today in structured reliable form.+ People simply do not know where their water is coming from+ Rivers have massive amounts of sewage effluent, mercury from power plants, and concentrated contamination on the river bed from past era+ Mixing storm and sewage in one infrastructure was a HUGE mistake that needs to be rectified+ Pesticides and nitrogen fertilizers are into the water so fast, the public has no clue, government is not seriousDespite my four pages of notes I found the Solutions portion of the book disappointing but still valuable.+ Business as usual is still in vogue+ No one has inventoried dried up rivers and springs--simply not documented+ Dams don't add water, they just redirect it+ Federal government is out of money, municipal bonds are a hard sell+ Shocking number of dams still being proposed today+ Dam removal is WORKING, restoring ecology and especially fish+ Legal rules have not kept pace with technology+ One quarter of US water supply comes from pumping groundwater+ Rights of USE IN COMMON versus rights of EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP are two different things+ Everyone talking about "moving" large amounts of water artificially is generally ignorant or unethical+ Cloud seeding does not work+ On desalination does not fully address the toxic outputs+ Water requires complex engineering, we are not there [I am reminded of my friend Chuck Spinney's comment on how national "defense" has spawned an entire generation of

engineers who know only "government spec, cost plus" engineering, which is to say, very bad engineering. His book, *Defense Facts of Life: The Plans/Reality Mismatch* applies to every aspect of our national domestic and global policies--Washington is out of touch with realities, the Governors are in denial. + Drugs in water are miniscule but mixed--the science is not there **GIVING AWAY CONSERVATION TOILETS IS BOTH THE CHEAPEST AND THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF CONSERVING WATER.** Intel is a case study in understanding and addressing the problem, the author partially addresses my concerns over computer toxicity (see for example, *High Tech Trash: Digital Devices, Hidden Toxics, and Human Health*). Water rights and water pricing are an emerging area of study and not yet in the policy and legal arena in proper form. I am impressed by the author's depiction of how developers **WILL** pay for water rights as part of the deal, it just has to be documented and presented. **QUOTE (251):** For privatization to be successful, governments must regulate water as a social good, ensuring access to all. PUCs must carefully monitor the financial returns to the private company and link any rate increases to agreed-upon improvements in service, conservation programs, or environmental stewardship. ... In any event, government should retain ownership of the water resources. I buy in to the author's views that only by charging for water can we press forward in modernizing archaic infrastructure including farming infrastructure where cheap water has incentivized the life extension of very leaky inadequate water routing systems. Farmers still use 70-80% of the water in any given state, but at the same time, their share of the food dollar has dropped from 40 cents to 20 cents. My own observation: we clearly need to do holistic analysis to optimize food growing (not meat growing) in relation to where the water is and how best to keep the water clean--at the same time, and the author documents this brilliantly, we need to understand the "return on investment" that water yields, for example, under \$300 for an alfalfa unit and over one million dollars for a computer chip using the same amount of water. The section on conservation movements and land trusts is impressive and carried the book to a five. I am especially impressed by the combination of **HYBRID** consortiums and **SHARED INFORMATION**. J. F. Rischard understood this and articulated it in his book, *High Noon 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them*. We have antiquated governments, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and universities, all nearly brain-dead for having been in the "rote" by regulation mode for so long. **INFORMATION IS THE FACILITATOR, HYBRID COALITIONS ARE THE ACTORS.** The author speaks of "an unlikely coalition of farmers, environmentalists, and business interests...." and on closer examination this boils down to persistent informed personalities showing each group, from that group's point of view, the economic, social, and ecological advantages in their own terms. **PUBLIC INTELLIGENCE LEADS TO SELF-REGULATION THAT IS EFFECTIVE.** **QUOTE (303-304):** We must break the

relentless cycle of overuse by restricting new access to the public resource, by protecting existing users with quantified water rights, by making these water rights transferable, and by insisting that new users purchase and retire existing water rights in exchange for permission to place a new demand on the resource. A truly deep book rich in detail, lacking in visualization. My bottom line is that we have not done our homework. WE have not inventoried the history of water zip code by zip code, we have not quantified and evaluated the return on investment for water use at every location and in relation to every product, and therefore we have no basis for intelligent policy making from the zip code level to the national, regional, and global levels. There is a lot of common sense and professional research in this book--to me as a professional intelligence officer it shouts out: COLLECT, PROCESS, ANALYZE, SHARE. Public intelligence in the public interest--that's the missing link in Water, and in relation to the other eleven core policies itemized by Earth Intelligence Network (Agriculture, Diplomacy, Economy, Education, Energy, Family, Health, Immigration, Justice, Security, Society). See the strategic analytic model--and the impact of CORRUPTION on all matters, at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog. A solid five, needs more work, and a follow on book that visualizes and quantifies and compares, state by state, district by district.

I read the Audible version of this book supplemented by the Kindle version where I put highlights and notes. Found this book after viewing the equally thought provoking documentary "Last Call at the Oasis". The water crisis as described by Robert Glennon is complex. The book does a good job of describing it and highlighting that in most cases, it isn't caused by a single problem but rather is a result of the interconnection of multiple causes (in other words, it looks at the entire system and how it is failing). The solutions are equally thorny and again Robert provides a good overview of the pros and cons of various solutions to give a very balanced understanding of the issues. It closes with a list of individual action items that we can each consider and (at least partially) act on so that we can help to start addressing the problem.

Glennon has a compelling writing style that makes me wish he had been my professor in college. We think of water shortages as either very local or a western desert problem (why did they build there again?). Glennon brings home that water supply-- access to safe reliable drinking water-- is a national issue, a national problem, and a national victim of short-sighted policy. The healthier our rivers, the healthier our supply-- the more sustainable our use, the more cost-effective it will be. So little of our planet is fresh water, and solutions such as desalination have such high economic and environmental costs (have YOU thought about what happens to the condensed salt that is

removed?), we need to focus on how to re-frame our use of freshwater in a way that ensures the present and the future. Glennon presents the issues and the solutions in a way that is accessible to everyone who needs water-- and those who cannot speak up for their own needs who live in the trees, the ground, and the streams around us. This is a terrific follow on to his first book and a more useful read in the ways in which it addresses solutions.

Before reading this book, I had some familiarity with America's water crisis, but I was still surprised by its extent and urgency as presented by Robert Glennon. He covers all parts of the country, and all sectors of activity from residential to agricultural to a variety of industries. He also enlightens us on the sorry state of aquifers, water distribution, and water treatment. And he does all of this with an appreciation for the cross-cutting effects of water problems on a range of societal needs and individual behaviors. Glennon discusses an assortment of near-term and long-term solutions. The urgency of the problem leads him, in my opinion, to underemphasize some long-term efforts, particularly a dramatic expansion of desalination. Nonetheless, it's refreshing that the author presents some thoughtful solutions rather than just wringing his hands about the problems. Glennon's writing is well-researched, and numerous photos and maps help clarify the text. His style is enjoyable, which helps the reader get through the rather depressing message. A must-read for those who care about finding solutions to problems of national scope.

Dr. Glennon does a fantastic job of outlining key water rights issues in the United States and proposing strategies to address them. He shares his impressive knowledge of the intricate workings of water rights deals and transactions that don't always receive the media attention that they deserve. This accessible well-written book is a valuable way to educate yourself about U.S. water issues in the coming future. This book reminds us that water scarcity is a problem that the U.S. will need to address, it is not only a problem of undeveloped countries.

Good book with many aspects of the coming water problem that I was not aware of. Uplifting note that there are possible solutions.

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