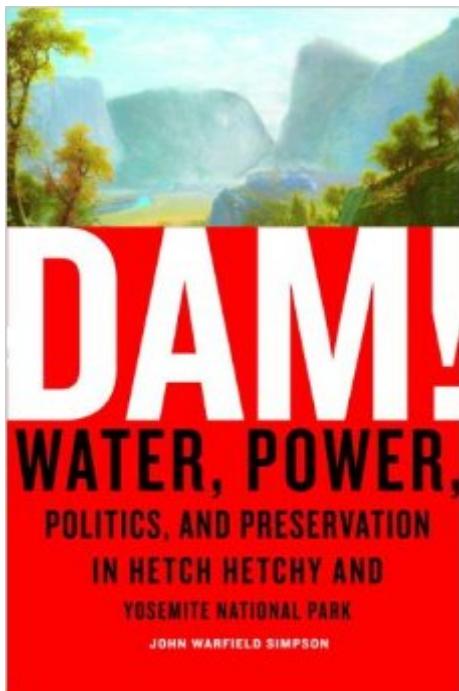


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# Dam!: Water, Power, Politics, And Preservation In Hetch Hetchy And Yosemite National Park



## Synopsis

A vivid account of America's first environmental cause célèbre, which illuminates our attitudes toward fundamental questions of growth, development, and our place in nature. The building of the O'Shaughnessy Dam and Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in the middle of Yosemite National Park "despite the availability of less expensive, less technically challenging, and less politically complicated possibilities" set off a defining controversy in American environmentalism. From the early 1900s to 1913 Americans argued about proposals to dam the Tuolumne River and transform the extraordinary Hetch Hetchy Valley into a giant source of water and hydroelectric power for the San Francisco Bay Area. It is a story of intrigue replete with political scandals and suspect tactics played out in the corridors of Congress, in San Francisco's City Hall and its corporate boardrooms, and in the national media. The colorful cast of characters includes Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Muir, as well as a host of political bosses, West Coast boosters, East Coast patricians and publishers, big-business interests, newly formed environmental groups, and the American public. Simpson also takes us through the building of the enormous dam and the extensive tunnels and aqueducts that carry water to the Bay Area, and the even more controversial hydroelectric project that still fails to deliver the à œpublic power that Congress mandated and about which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled. He recounts conversations with an array of people currently involved in the ongoing controversy over whether to manage, refurbish, repair, and enlarge the system, or to tear down the dam and restore the valley to its prior splendor. Simpson concludes with a reflection on what all of this reveals about American attitudes toward growth, development, and environmental stewardship.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Portions of this book will be of great value to anyone interested in the history of the environmental movement, and the shifting political realities that environmentalists have had to deal with over long periods. Simpson explores the history and issues surrounding the Hetch Hetchy dam at Yosemite National Park, which was built to supply San Francisco with water and power even though the site was already protected within the national park. The unsuccessful fight against the dam, which flooded a beautiful valley that was the near-equal to the tremendous Yosemite Valley nearby, was the first major battle conducted by the American environmental movement. Simpson starts with a history of the national park and the twisted politics that resulted in the construction of the dam and its reservoir. This leads to some real insights into environmentalist history in America and the politics of the early 20th century, when the fight for and against the dam took place over several contentious decades. After this enlightening start, the majority of the book covers the politics and issues behind water and power utilities in modern San Francisco. There is much to be learned here, though the specifics on San Francisco's unique challenges and practices become rather tedious and may not be that enlightening for anyone outside of the region. However, one of the great insights of this book is how San Francisco behaves like an empire, controlling far-away colonies for the extraction of resources that it can't obtain locally, especially fresh water. All of this was accomplished through strong-arm political tactics and flaunting the wishes of both the Federal government and millions of affected citizens. [~doomsdayer520~]

In a short book (356 pages) the author covers a lot of territory all centered around the damming of Hetch Hetchy valley in Yosemite National Park. There is a brief but interesting account of the history of the National Park Service and Yosemite; a quick sketch of John Muir; and then a history of the politics of San Francisco as it relates to Hetch Hetchy and the city's water supply. And then to make it even more interesting the latter part of the book discusses the concept of wilderness. All in all it was a much better book than I thought it would be.

After the great earthquake and fire of 1906, San Francisco was in desperate need of a reliable water source - and proposals were made to damn the Tuolumne River and transform the Hetch Hetchy Valley into a giant hydro-electric supply for the city. Others protested the changes to the

environment. The two groups sparked one of the biggest controversies in American environmental history, and Damn! Water, Power, Politics And Preservation In Hetch Hetchy And Yosemite National Park charts the conflicts and eventual resolution, from changing attitudes towards growth and water issues to the American public's evolving interest in preservation. A lively account of controversial battles which continue into modern times.

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