

Southern Waters: The Limits to Abundance. CRAIG E. COLTEN. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014. Pp. xiv+264, maps, diagrams, figures, tables, notes, index. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-8071-5650-6.

Craig Colten traces the geographic history of the US South's relationship with water in *Southern Waters: The Limits to Abundance*. Using extensive research of court cases, federal and state agency documents, and historical sources, Colten examines the South's policies and procedures related to water quality, conservation, and management. He carefully outlines how the South differs from the West in policy and procedure, explaining why, despite the fact we assume that the humid South is a region of abundance, there is a limit to the precious water resources, a limit that becomes more real every year.

The book begins with a brief introduction placing it in the context of other water studies both within and outside the South and situates water in the southern narrative. Colten examines how settlers viewed water as a resource, but also a risk that brought floods and waterborne disease. He then briefly addresses the changing situation from abundance to shortage in the South in modern times. Colten clearly outlines the thesis for the book: how and why has the South undergone this extreme transformation from surplus to emerging shortages. He claims this squarely places *Southern Waters* inside a larger body of literature in sustainability, asking how we can define long-term trends as a means of predicting future needs and supplies.

Before examining the two different states of water in the South (abundance and shortage), Colten uses Chapter one to examine water's differing meaning to various groups from Native Americans to European explorers to African slaves. Each group's opposing views shapes and impacts the interactions they had with one another regarding water. This chapter also introduces the methodological and ideological frameworks the author blends and uses to interpret historic documents, setting the stage for what will follow.

Chapters two, three, and four address the issues of excess water in the South, examining wetland management policies, flood control policies, and public health measures to control waterborne disease. In Chapters five, six, and seven, Colten then addresses issues of shortage in the South, focusing on conflicts over shipping lanes, limits to the abundance of fish, and issues of shortage not in quantity, but in quality. The concluding chapter brings the story of water in the South to the present, focusing not only on the increase in awareness of shortage in the South by the entire US, but also the escalation in unsustainable water use in the region, despite mounting evidence that there are limits to abundance.

Colten admits in *Southern Waters* that regional studies have fallen out of fashion in geography. Yet, he justifies his decision to write a regional study, stating that the climatic and cultural cohesiveness of the South makes it an ideal framework for understanding the changing narrative of water abundance and shortage throughout the US. He also defends his choice of the South as a framework, citing numerous calls for work in the region. Most water sustainability studies have been done in the arid West. The reality in the humid South is decidedly different and the history of policy and practice is longer. Conflicts over water in the South are couched in issues of race and socioeconomic status. To understand water rights and access in the region today, you have to merge the Old South with the New South. No other region of the US faces these types of cultural and historic challenges.

Southern Waters presents an interesting history of the South's changing relationship with its water supply. For those seeking a book focusing on water policy in a region where shortage was traditionally not an issue, this is a good read. If someone is looking for good examples of presenting massive amounts of information effectively, this may not be the appropriate book. The author does do a number of things well. Each chapter begins with a clear introduction of the issues

it will tackle and the point that is being addressed. In many cases Colten is able to effectively pull together research by geographers in numerous sub-disciplines to craft a well-honed message that looks at both the historical and legal context. For each issue examined in *Southern Waters*, whether it is flood or drought, the author presents a number of examples from different states, never focusing solely on one state over another. These examples sometimes drone on to excess, however, repeating themes over and over again. In other places, the narrative seems lacking of good concrete examples, such as the discussion of European toponyms for water bodies that were discarded by governments in favor of the Native American place names.

In another case of excess, each chapter has a concluding section, often a nice feature to summarize important ideas. Colten's concluding sections in each chapter are, however, redundant. Ironically, the entire book has no real conclusion, though. The last chapter, titled Conclusions, actually reviews the current limits to abundance of water in the South. There is no concluding section that pulls together all the author's thoughts to tell us what it means, not only for the future of the South, but what other regions can learn from the southern experience. Colten's extensive research on water policy and history in the South would have been more effective if he had put as much time and effort into summarizing the book in the last pages as he did in summarizing each individual chapter. After the lengthy introduction that placed the book into a larger literature of geographic studies of water, it would have been nice to have a solid conclusion that tied everything together.

In short, *Southern Waters* is an excellent piece of research and an important part of the regional narrative of the South. It is, however, a book that you may want to take apart. Individual chapters provide excellent historical and legal context with a rich set of examples, but the book as a whole lacks a clear conclusion to tie it into the larger body of research on water sustainability policy and practice in the US. In the introduction Colten claims that his thesis places *Southern Waters* in the core research area of sustainability, but there is no concluding evidence to support the book's connection to a larger sustainability narrative. In the end, it is simply another disconnected regional study that lacks a broader context.

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