



Bay Cities and Water Politics: The Battle for Resources in Boston and Oakland (Development of Western Resources) (Development of Western Resources (Hardcover))

Sarah S. Elkind

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Near the end of the nineteenth century, the cities of Boston and Oakland each faced environmental crises of water contamination and shortages that existing regional agencies could not solve. How these two cities resolved their water problems is the basis of a comparative history that provides valuable insights into urban development and explores the political implications and environmental impacts of regionalism.

Water defined the limits to growth of these bay cities and, as Sarah Elkind demonstrates, water supply and sewage disposal were two aspects of a single problem. Each city opted to abandon municipal water and sewer networks for metropolitan systems that crossed county lines and were administered by regional agencies. These agencies increased the cities' access to water resources, but, as Elkind shows, urban expansion and adoption of regionalism also decreased voter control over utilities and policies, and spread the environmental costs of urbanization far beyond city limits.

Combining insights from urban, western, and environmental history, Elkind examines the ways that people's reactions to their natural surroundings drive both demand for improved public services and political reform. She traces public works development in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era to explain how these programs united each city with its suburban neighbors, creating new political entities and allowing Boston and Oakland to appropriate rural resources and thus overcome the environmental limits to their continued growth and prosperity. She also shows how, when the power of regionalism is turned to urban development, environmental and social costs are sometimes overlooked.

Bay Cities and Water Politics provides a comprehensive view of the transformation of cities, their natural surroundings, and their politics. Elkind applies urban history to environmental concerns, as well as environmental history to urban problems and human needs. The book offers new insights into the importance of metropolitan special districts and their role in urban expansion, and it sounds a warning regarding the ability of regional water systems to maintain a balance between continued urban growth and delicate ecosystems.

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