



Engineering Nature: Water, Development, and the Global Spread of American Environmental Expertise

Jessica B. Teisch

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Focusing on globalization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jessica Teisch examines the processes by which American water and mining engineers who rose to prominence during and after the California Gold Rush of 1849 exported the United States' growing technical and environmental knowledge and associated social and political institutions. In the frontiers of Australia, South Africa, Hawaii, and Palestine--semiarid regions that shared a need for water to support growing populations and economies--California water engineers applied their expertise in irrigation and mining projects on behalf of foreign governments and business interests.

Engineering Nature explores how controlling the vagaries of nature abroad required more than the export of blueprints for dams, canals, or mines; it also entailed the problematic transfer of the new technology's sociopolitical context. Water engineers confronted unforeseen variables in each region as they worked to implement their visions of agrarian settlement and industrial growth, including the role of the market, government institutions, property rights, indigenous peoples, labor, and, not last, the environment. Teisch argues that by examining the successes and failures of various projects as American influence spread, we can see the complex role of globalization at work, often with incredibly disproportionate results.

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