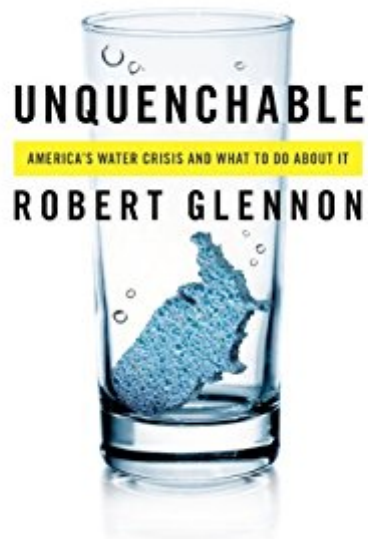


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# Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis And What To Do About It



## 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. 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

There are no shortage of crisis situations facing our world, yet nothing seems so elemental as water. It is such an integral part of our daily existence that it can be hard to understand how deep our dependence on water really is. That we need to drink water is understandable, but that it takes 2,500 gallons of water to produce 1 pound of beef will make you look at that quarter pounder a bit differently. Of course, concern about water is as ancient as life itself. In the United States water disputes have influenced settlements and governance, as any good Western movie will show you. More recently we've dealt with acid rain, but with the plethora of water bottles showing up on store shelves, do we really have a water crisis? Robert Glennon's well laid out argument first establishes that there is a crisis and then offers suggestions on how to address it. The argument that there is a water crisis is becoming easier to make, in no small part thanks to Glennon's ongoing work in this area. Major media outlets are also now pointing out that the concern for water is not just an issue for other parts of the world, but the United States as well. Glennon's strengths in this book are many. First, he lays out the arguments by telling stories and backing them up with facts. We not only see numbers, but more importantly we see the people impacted by the numbers. Glennon understands that this is not simply an environmental issue, but a human issue. Plus, he is not interested in browbeating naysayers into submission; he clearly wants to attract people to his way of thinking. While he does not suffer fools kindly, he assumes the reader is an intelligent person with an interest in understanding the issue at hand. Second, Glennon is well organized in his presentation, something many people passionate about a subject forget to consider. He breaks the book into three sections ("The Crisis," "Real and Surreal Solutions," and "A New Approach") and he keeps them separate. When presenting the information he lets the data speak for itself, sometimes showing his hand toward the end, at other times leaving the reader to their own conclusions. Third, Glennon knows that rational people can disagree. He refuses to demonize those he may disagree with, instead looking at their arguments and refuting as he sees fit. Several times throughout the book he acknowledges that there is no easy solution to a problem and that two opposing views both carry valid arguments. In other words, this is a scientist who understands in reality we do not have all the answers. He also does not expect everyone to adopt an extreme point of view and shows himself as a passionate, if not radical, water enthusiast. Toward the end of the book he notes his mother-in-law takes "navy showers" (get wet, turn the water off and soap up, and turn the water back on to rinse) -- he prefers the more wasteful but also more pleasant full shower treatment. Finally, one of Glennon's surprising strengths is his sense of humor. While he never loses sight of the seriousness of his topic, he can rarely resist a good laugh; as a reader it is surprising to

find yourself laughing at a "heavy" book. When discussing the race for a more powerful shower head (with costs hitting \$6,000) he cannot resist noting that Kohler, although their ad features a product with seven heads of water, "none...get the female catalog model's hair wet" (40). His ideas for solving the water crisis are intentionally wide ranging. Sure, he wants you to turn off the water when brushing your teeth, but he also wants to talk about pricing models, buying water rights, using government incentives, and stimulating alternative waste technologies, just to mention a few. In other words, we cannot solve the water crisis by simply taking shorter showers, but it is a start. Glennon offers input to Congress and local and state governments, and offers a website for the reader to get water-saving tips ([...]) As his subtitle implies, this is a book about the water crisis in the U.S., not the world. To see him apply this thinking to worldwide issues in water would be equally helpful, but this book is simply not that place. Instead, we get a well reasoned presentation of an issue with clear and reasonable ideas on how to address the problems, all with a well written and humorous style, which make this a must read.

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.

Glennon gives a very clear and thorough description of the state of freshwater in the U.S. Written extremely well, with illuminating and thought-provoking stories explaining what is happening in Las Vegas, Atlanta, and across the country. Glennon tells a great nonfiction story which explains the complexities of what is happening in the country, and why people who aren't yet worried about freshwater should be.

This was an excellent follow-up to *Water Follies*. From droughts in the "wet" East to the excessive use of the Southwest, the author gives a good wake up call that water issues are everywhere. Glennon emphasizes the important ways of avoiding an American water crisis, such as finding new sources and conservation. I especially liked to see a chapter devoted to rainwater harvesting. I recommend that you read this book, but more importantly that you tell others about their water. The word needs to be spread to the public so that they know more about water beyond the tap.

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