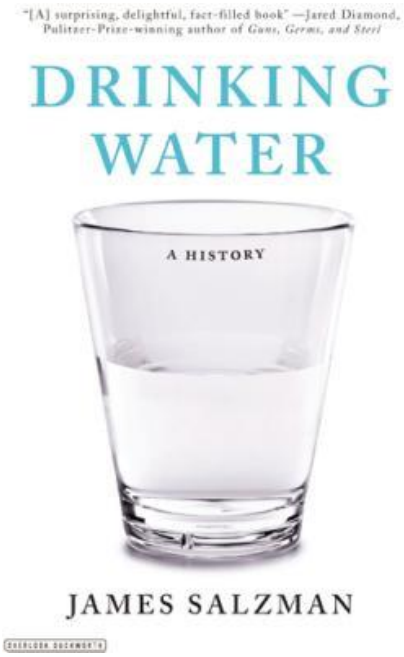


# Drinking Water: A History

*James Salzman*

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**Drinking Water: A History** James Salzman
The completely revised and updated edition of the definitive book on one of the most important and controversial topics of our time: drinking water

When we turn on the tap or twist open a tall plastic bottle, we probably don’t give a second thought about where our drinking water comes from. But how it gets from the ground to the glass is far more convoluted than we might think.

In this revised edition of *Drinking Water*, UCLA professor and environmental policy expert James Salzman shows how drinking water highlights the most pressing issues of our time. He adds eye-opening, contemporary examples about our relationship to and consumption of water, and a new chapter about the tragedies that occurred in Flint, Michigan. Provocative, insightful, and engaging, *Drinking Water* shows just how complex a simple glass of water can be.

## Drinking Water: A History Details

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| Date | : | Published November 8th 2012 by Harry N. Abrams (first published October 25th 2012) |
| ISBN | : | 9781590207208 |
| Author | : | James Salzman |
| Format | : | Hardcover 320 pages |
| Genre | : | History, Nonfiction, Science, Culture, Society, Economics |

# From Reader Review Drinking Water: A History for online ebook

### Victoria Haf says

Interesante e informativo, te hace sentir que toda el agua que bebes está sucia, habla de que en NY es super segura pero como estoy en el DF no sé que pensar.
Desmitifica al agua embotellada y cuenta como hemos conseguido el agua para beber a lo largo de la historia, habla de los manantiales de Europa que tenían fama curativa (y como a veces era real y otras veces no, como en una ocasión en que un científico tomó el agua Perrier para comparar la pureza del agua con esa agua de manantial francés y descubrió que tenía arsénico ) y de la inminente crisis de agua (y como muchos tienen planes de capitalizarla) mi parte favorita fue una chiquita donde habla de que en Venecia usaban pura agua de lluvia y tenían unos pozos/cisterna en las plazas.

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### Chris Leuchtenburg says

This book contains many interesting anecdotes about drinking water, but in no coherent order. The historical references yo yo between the Old Testament, to the twentieth century, back to the Middle Ages and ahead again to the 19th century for no particular reason accept that they all seem to have come from a pile of note cards sorted by chapter heading. These poorly digested facts are not organized by historical period, but by modern concerns such as safety and availability. Although the book is titled A History, it is more of a presentation of modern concerns with random references to people in the past with similar problems. This book reflects the interests of a lawyer, not a historian.

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### Jul says

So, I have a thing for water. I love swimming in it, I love taking baths and I especially love drinking it, so naturally, I found this book to be quite interesting.

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### Becky says

I want to start by saying that this book contained a lot of interesting information, there are now many topics which I feel compelled to research further. Ultimately the problem with this book is that I would have loved an entire book about any single chapter, especially the chapters towards the end. It all felt rushed, and since I felt that Salzman was giving me a pretty fair and balanced dialogue about private vs. government ownership of water, water safety (both chemically and physically), etc., I really wanted him to explore more in depth so that I could have felt like I had an even better understanding of the topics. There was just too much in this book for me to do anything than to feel like I came away from something introductory. Additionally- I felt too much time was spent on the beginning discussing the cultural heritage of water. This would have been allowable and even interesting on its own, but I don’t feel that it was adequately tied in enough later to warrant the time spent on it. Then the whole book ended so abruptly that I thought Audible had glitched and I tried to go back a chapter and listen through. The story telling over all seemed disjointed, a series of articles that were not woven together. But we do NEED books and authorship on this topic, so I would recommend

this as a place to start, and will be trying to find books on the same subject to learn more.

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### Michael Huang says

Some interesting factoids about drinking water throughout history.

Historically, people don’t really drink water, they drink beer, wine etc. Romans were the first to systematically deliver water to the city into public basins every 150 feet within the city. To remind people the Empire is good, they put “Water in the name of Caesar” on these basins. Not until the mid 19th century did people finally realize many diseases spread through contaminated water (not air as thought). Currently there are so many sources of pollutions to water, treating it is still a challenge. For instance, there are high levels of chemical compound in water ultimately from pharmaceuticals. Distribution stage is vulnerable. Case in point: a bunch of teen decided to pee in public water supply and cost the public $40,000 to flush the water and test it. Bottled water is not found to be better and create problem of plastic waste. Today, access to drinking water is considered a basic human right, even appearing in S. Africa’s constitution. Some company was shipping fresh water from the Great Lakes to Asia, tanker style, but was later banned by the states surrounding the lakes. Researcher even studied feasibility of moving a 7 million ton iceberg from Greenland.

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### Shahab says

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### Sherry says

Informative, interesting and practical. One portion of the book is immediately useful to me, in developing policy around agricultural runoff. Surface water and groundwater interaction are a part of my work. This book should be of interest to anyone.

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### Steve Moseley says

Typically, books like these tend to be preachy and political and I find that quite annoying, especially when a book has a non biased title like this one has. I found this book to pretty interesting, informative while presenting various different views about regulating water or the lack thereof fairly.

The book discusses the history of drinking water and how civilizations have tried to keep it plentiful and safe from the stories of in the Bible, to the Romans, to current day.

Questions of whether safe drinking water is a basic human right or a commodity to be sold as water bottles, etc, as well as the possibility of it being compromised by natural events or some terrorist attack are discussed.

The issues surrounding drinking water are much more complicated than I realized.

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### James Robinson says

Drinking Water, by James Salzman, is an informative read, though the end of the book is much more interesting than the beginning. If you already have a good understanding of the water treatment industry, and are short on time, I would recommend reading chapter 3 and the final two chapters. Please see below for a brief summary of each chapter.

The first few chapters (1, 2) detail the history of drinking water, as well as the history of the laws governing its uses. While somewhat interesting, I felt that these chapters were the weakest. They were basically just a number of anecdotes strung together, and didn't really tell me much that I didn't already know.

The middle of the book (chapters 3-5) is devoted to the safety of our drinking water. There is a chapter on biological pollutants, one on chemical pollutants, and one on possible terrorist attacks on the drinking water system. The key thing that I got out of these chapters is that it is impossible to make water (or anything else) 100% safe. Therefore, our society needs to decide how much risk is acceptable, and how much we are willing to pay to achieve that risk-level. I think this is the correct way to look at the drinking water issues in our country, as well as many other topics being debated in the news every day. While Drink Water re-iterated this risk versus expense point a number of times, I think that the topic is important enough to merit the amount of focus it was given.

The final chapters are, in my opinion, the best in the book. Salzman gets into various technologies and companies that are trying to revolutionize the drinking water industry in the coming years. Salzman does a good job of summarizing the advantages and disadvantages of privatizing the water systems, and gives good examples of cases where privatization both worked and didn't work. I liked that fact that both points of view are presented, as many sources on the subject that I have seen have a definite agenda either for or against privatization. I think that these final two chapters are by far the strongest and most interesting in the book, and they bumped the ranking from 3 to 4 stars.

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### Sajith Kumar says

Water is essential for all life forms. Perhaps that is the reason why we treat it in such a cavalier fashion often. We assume it to be a fundamental right of every human being to have access to clean drinking water. However, the cleanness of the water we consume is not a guaranteed entitlement in many parts of the world. Public opinion is divided in the middle on how to handle the issue of drinking water. Some say it is a basic human right that is to be fulfilled by governments free of cost, or if at all, with a nominal price tag. On the other hand, there are people who point out that water is a commodity just like food, even though both are equally essential to life. The quantity and quality of water will be improved if and only if more capital is

infused into it. This mandates private enterprise and competitive pricing. However, the side that opposes privatization enjoys greater popular support and political backing. This is amply illustrated by the revoking of rights granted in many parts of the world to entrepreneurs. This book presents a brief history of how drinking water was distributed in households of ancient civilizations, how the distribution system took shape, and the several issues related to the handling, distribution and marketing of water. It also provides a brief glimpse on the methods of purification at the end point, that is, our homes. James Salzman is a distinguished professor of Environmental Law at UC Santa Barbara. He has addressed topics spanning drinking water, trade and environment through his books and articles. Consensus among scholars points him out as the fifth most cited environmental law professor in the world. This book is a must read for environmental enthusiasts and students of public administration.

Salzman begins with a general discussion on the need of any society to ensure its supply of drinking water, which involves source identification, its protection from enemies, purification by suitable treatment, and distribution to end users. Water is essential to life, but the question of whether to treat it as a commodity is still not settled conclusively. Ancient communities recognized the Right of Thirst, in some cases, even to outsiders of the tribe. If a person was thirsty, water was given to him, without any monetary obligation. On the other hand, there is a group that argues that even though food is equally essential to life, that is held as a commodity that can be bought and sold freely. Why water should be singled out then? The issue of free water supply dogged private investment in water treatment and distribution for a long time with its repercussions felt in the bottled water industry also. Strange as it may seem, but bottled water is making its second appearance now. It flourished at the end of the 19th century, when water treatment plants were unheard of, or in its infancy. By the middle of the next century, efficient treatment schemes were in place, making tap water safer. This forced bottled water companies into hibernation. Now, as the public perception on the safety of tap water has again hit a bottom, they are back in the game. Chlorination was the most effective technique that removed biological contaminants from drinking water. Salzman notes with concern the widespread practice in Asia of using a common water cup. This is a recipe for inviting contagious diseases, but we are oblivious of the darker side of this common custom. The book includes posters of information campaigns that sought to end the use of a common cup in public places. Disposable cups known as Dixie Cups were developed as a solution to this menace. At the same time, sharing of water, especially at a holy place like Lourdes in France, Zamzam well in Mecca or numerous Hindu pilgrimage sites was quite common across the world.

The second part of the text deals with transportation, sale and distribution of water on an industrial scale. The emergence of bottled water owed its origins surprisingly to marketing charades of shrines and religious places which certified a bottle of water with special seals to denote that it was taken from a source considered to be holy. People venerate water from springs, which explains the liberal use of snow-clad mountains and streams on the bottles of water we purchase from shops in the city. Depending on the minerals dissolved in it, water from springs can offer therapeutic value, as Lithium salts in solution are helpful for alleviating mental illnesses. So, Salzman is hinting that there might be some truth behind miraculous cures claimed by holy water. He also notes with irony that tap water is regulated more closely than bottled water. Stringent rules on the safety of tap water exist, whereas bottled water is treated as packaged food and lax rules apply. Besides, the use of PET bottles pause biohazards as well. Notwithstanding the pollution caused by discarded bottles, manufacturing of one bottle that can hold one liter of water requires the use of three to four liters of water. Storage and distribution of drinking water raises some interesting problems as well. Threat of terrorism in the wake of 9/11 has forced many U.S. cities to considerably enhance the physical security thrown in for their water treatment plants and distribution pipelines. The author lists many plausible scenarios of attack, each more fanciful than the previous one.

The book throws some light on a raging issue that exercises the minds of many people across the world –

that of whether water is a marketable commodity or a human need. Those who assert that water is a gift from god get the stinging rejoinder that He had forgotten to lay the pipes to distribute it! Politicians and public anywhere in the world generally side with the altruist cause. This was the real reason in reversing the decision to allow private companies to participate in water distribution projects. Only the constitutions of India and South Africa recognized water as a fundamental right of a citizen. However, the ground reality is far removed from the idealistic banter. Salzman explains a number of technologies currently available to improve water conditions at the point of use. Even though a bit costly, this ensures the best value for money for speedy implementation. An informative discussion on treatment of sewage as recycled water for potable use is presented. This may feel disgusting for the casual reader, myself being one of them. But on second thoughts, what is so revolting in the idea? The water we consider as pure and drinkable took its liquid shape long, long ago, and many plants and animals might've ingested and then discharged it!

Nobody can fail to notice the immense significance of the topic in our daily lives when we remember that drinking water is the single largest killer today in the form of communicable diseases spread by contaminated water. However, the author's lament that there are no books on the subject is not borne out by facts. Philip Ball's eminently readable book, 'H2O – A Biography of Water' is one such. Interested readers can read a review in this blog itself. Having written the book for an American audience in mind, most of the units are not represented by their more familiar international equivalents. Gallons and ounces confound the reader in place of liter and gram. By the same token, the author takes a condescending attitude towards other poor countries, by even remarking at one place that 'even' the United States don't have such a system in place! Repetition of the same idea verbatim at two places may be attributed to the need for better organization of conceptual design. The book is accompanied by an impressive collection of Notes at the end and a good index. Even though the book is compiled with due care for the major political issues that are plaguing drinking water systems in the world, lack of sharp focus and depth of research is disconcerting at times.

The book is highly recommended.

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### Kirk says

Pretty informative read. It is unnerving to know that we are so susceptible to having our water contaminated. The history of water and how the Romans and other ancient civilizations receoved, purified, and valued water was a real treat as well. I don't think I'll be keen to be downing bottled water as much as others. I may be just sticking to my traditional tab water.

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### Jill says

Many parts of this book were interesting and informative, but the author's continual promotion of progressive politics was neither.

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### Bettie? says

G B Ep

To Heather

Opening: **IN THE WINTER OF 1512, JUAN PONCE DE LEÓN HAD IT ALL. Two decades earlier, he had set off for the New World as a raw seventeen-year old deckhand on Christopher Columbus's second voyage. When Columbus returned home, Ponce de León chose to stay on and seek his fortune. As his biographer later described, Ponce de León was a fierce fighter, hard and ambitious: "a man spirited, sagacious and diligent in all warlike matters." These were valuable qualities in Spain's emerging empire, where fabulous wealth was waiting to be taken, and they assured his rapid advance. He led the conquest of Puerto Rico, claiming the island for Spain, and was appointed governor in 1509. With lands and wealth to his name, he had officially arrived.**

01:06:2015: Having put this on the back burner for a few months, it is time to resurrect it. The reason? I have spent the day reading about water in Victorian Old Town Edinburgh, and Victorian era Tibet. *shudder*

I am lucky to have my own well fed by a 35m deep icy cold water table; unfortunately it is not a Fountain of Youth, which seems to have been covered extensively in the art world...

> *'INTERESTINGLY, MANY CULTURES HAVE A STRONG MYTHIC TRADITION that presents the very opposite of the Fountain of Youth and spiritual rebirth. Rather than drinking water to provide eternal life, water now provides the means and a balm for death.Rivers serve as the crossing point between life and afterlife in many cultures. In Greek mythology, for example, the spirits of the recently deceased must cross five rivers. The River Styx is the first boundary between earth and Hades, the domain of the Underworld. It was guarded by Phlegyas, and gods made oaths upon its waters.'*
> - page 26

Dante's Phlegethon

River Archeron

River Cocytus

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### Patrick says

Looks like this will be right up my alley as the author was inspired by Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World and Salt: A World History, two books that I loved, though the first chapter describing legends about magic water was not very informative or interesting.

OK, finished. This is good...BUT disappointing. The content is mostly 4 star, but the writing style is mostly 2 star. I'd give this a 2.5 if I could, but fudged to the 3 stars. didn't live up to Cod and Salt.

The chapters feel a little like a really well-researched high schooler plugging his facts into the same formula over and over again. Grab the reader's attention with an interesting anecdote, explain the problem, explain how the common questions aren't useful or common perspective is misinformed, list your own 3 or 4 "better" questions that somehow sounded exactly the same in each chapter, answer those questions, and end with a summary of those answers and repeating the fact that the issues are complex. I know that sounds like much good writing, but his rote repetition of the questions and answers really was weird.

So I was annoyed many times while reading and found myself approaching this as a chore to be finished rather than a reading pleasure. BUT, I really do feel much better informed and enjoyed sharing many of the anecdotes and issues with Shauna. I especially enjoyed the last few chapters discussing the economics of safe water delivery and modern dilemmas both in 1st world and 3rd world settings. I just think the author's expertise is at a much higher level than his formulaic writing style, and it really does get in the way of appreciating the content of the book.

The overarching relevant issue, whether water should best be approached as an economic commodity or as a common community resource/human right, is fascinating. The pragmatic reasons to support either view often largely cancel each other out. It has made me think, and I'm not sure where I fall, though I would always be against major profits preventing easy access. The multiple perspectives detailed in the book will definitely frame my thinking when community water issues are debated.

So a worthwhile read not written especially well.

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### Kendra says

Several reviewers compared this one to Kurlansky's Salt, which filled me with dread when I cracked open this book. Luckily, while Salzman says he was inspired by Kurlansky, this book reads nothing like Salt. Drinking Water is well organized and well written. Salzman provides a very balanced approach to the topic and explains contentious issues (private vs. public good) with equal weight given to each side. He makes good use of recent examples (The Marcellus Shale being of particular interest to me) to further explore what we really mean and think when we talk about "safe" and "clean" water. The book ends with a chapter on new technologies and hopes for ensuring access to clean water for generations to come. I would definitely recommend this book.