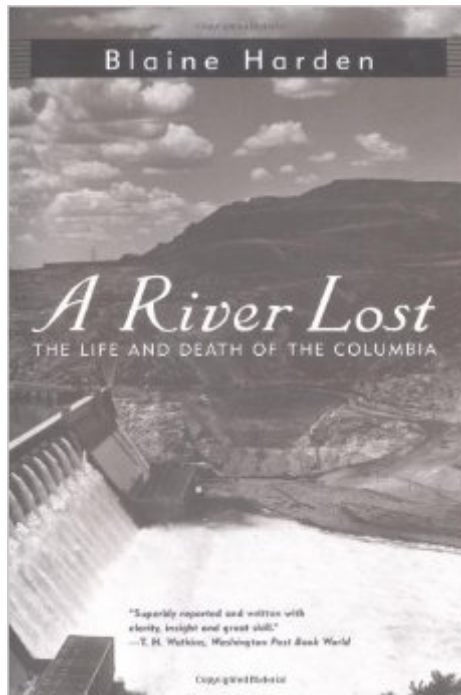


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A River Lost: The Life And Death Of The Columbia



Synopsis

"A River Lost is superbly reported and written with clarity, insight, and great skill." •Washington Post Book World After a two-decade absence, Washington Post journalist Blaine Harden returned to his small-town birthplace in the Pacific Northwest to follow the rise and fall of the West's most thoroughly conquered river. Harden's hometown, Moses Lake, Washington, could not have existed without massive irrigation schemes. His father, a Depression migrant trained as a welder, helped build dams and later worked at the secret Hanford plutonium plant. Now he and his neighbors, once considered patriots, stand accused of killing the river. As Blaine Harden traveled the Columbia-by barge, car, and sometimes on foot-his past seemed both foreign and familiar. A personal narrative of rediscovery joined a narrative of exploitation: of Native Americans, of endangered salmon, of nuclear waste, and of a once-wild river now tamed to puddled remains. Part history, part memoir, part lament, "this is a brave and precise book," according to the New York Times Book Review. "It must not have been easy for Blaine Harden to find himself turning his journalistic weapons against his own heritage, but he has done the conscience of his homeland a great service."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A River Lost is about much more than just a book about the making of the Columbia River into a barge friendly irrigation system. Harden weaves autobiography, tales of everyday life, unchecked government power, the dynamic tension between the urban and rural in the Pacific Northwest. The book reveals how the River washes over and changes, some would say corrodes, everything it touches. The heart of the book is more the river as it describes the unintended consequences that

flows from good intentions and how affluence changes the political landscape from a focus on jobs to concern about the quality of life. The book should be read not as a conclusive picture of what has happened to the Columbia but as a starting point for further exploration. The book has two weaknesses. The first is that it ignores the changes brought in the region's ecosystem when the salmon runs ceased in the upper Columbia. Millions of pounds of salmon were food not just for the Indians but for a variety of wildlife. A few words about what those changes have meant to the region's biota would have helped the reader to understand that far more than Indians were affected. The second weakness is when Harden brings contemporary politics into a tale of written with a historic perspective. Harden pointedly blames Republicans for stopping what he sees as beneficial change but puts no emphasis on how Democrats designed, sold and implemented the dams and irrigation as an beneficial scheme of social engineering. The book would have been stronger had that part been omitted. Neither party can claim to be on the side of the Gods when it comes to the Columbia.

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