



Political Waters: The Long, Dirty, Contentious, Incredibly Expensive but Eventually Triumphant History of Boston Harbor-A Unique Environmental Success Story

Eric Jay Dolin

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Boston Harbor served as a colonial gateway to the world, witnessed the Boston Tea Party, and helped the community transform itself from an outpost of a few hardy settlers into a bustling metropolis and self-proclaimed hub of the universe. Yet for hundreds of years Boston Harbor was also a cesspool. Long before Bostonians dumped tea into the harbor to protest English taxes, they dumped sewage there.

As the Boston area grew and prospered, its sewage problems worsened, as did the harbor's health, to the point where in the 1980s it was considered the most polluted harbor in the country and ridiculed as the "harbor of shame." Then, in one of the most impressive environmental comebacks in American history, Boston Harbor was dramatically cleaned up. All it took was two lawsuits, two courts, dozens of lawyers, the creation of a powerful sewage authority, thousands of workers, millions of labor hours, and billions of dollars.

Sewage management is rarely as compelling and exciting as higher profile environmental issues such as global climate change, preserving endangered species, or protecting tropical rainforests. But it can be, as Eric Jay Dolin shows in this engaging narrative account. Boston's struggle to deal with its sewage is an epic story of failure and success, replete with colorful characters, political, bureaucratic, and legal twists and turns, engineering feats, and massive amounts of money. In the end, success hinged on the often overlooked yet monumenally important act of responsibly disposing of the waste people produce every day.

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