

# California Salton Sea And The Consequences Of Colonialism Many Wests

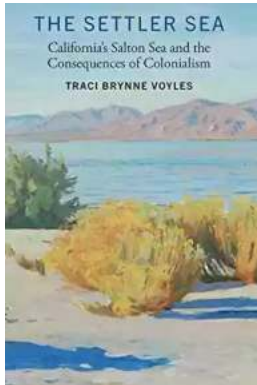
The California Salton Sea is a fascinating and complex natural wonder with a deep-rooted history that traces back to the consequences of colonialism in the American West. This vast saline lake, located in Imperial and Riverside counties, has seen significant changes over the years, both natural and man-made. Understanding the impact of colonialism on the Salton Sea and the multiple perspectives surrounding it is essential to comprehend its present condition and envision a sustainable future for this incredible ecosystem.

## A Tale of Colonialism and the Birth of the Salton Sea

In the early 20th century, the region now occupied by the Salton Sea was a vast, dry desert known as the Salton Sink. The area, once a part of the Colorado River's floodplain, lay below sea level and had no substantial water sources. However, the ambitious endeavors of settlers and developers would forever change its destiny.

Under the influence of an idea to divert water from the Colorado River into the Salton Sink for irrigation and create viable agricultural land, a series of engineering projects were initiated in the early 1900s. One of the pivotal projects was the construction of the Alamo Canal, intended to redirect water from the Colorado River into the sink. However, due to insufficient engineering and maintenance, the canal breached in 1905, leading to a catastrophic flood that lasted for over a year.

**The Settler Sea: California's Salton Sea and the Consequences of Colonialism (Many Wests)**



by Traci Brynne Voyles(Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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The breach in the canal resulted in the formation of the Salton Sea, as the uncontrolled flow of water from the Colorado River filled the sink. This accidental lake quickly became a focal point for developers, drawing people from all walks of life, including Hollywood stars and vacationers who sought refuge by the "Sea in the Desert." The Salton Sea was an emerging oasis, positioned as the next hotspot for real estate development and recreational activities.

## **Consequences of Unregulated Development and Environmental Neglect**

Amidst the initial influx of settlers and the promise of prosperity, the long-term consequences of unregulated development and environmental neglect started to emerge. As more water flowed into the Salton Sea due to agricultural runoff and other sources, the lake's salinity levels increased rapidly, leading to the destruction of its delicate ecosystem.

The Salton Sea, lacking any significant outlets, gradually turned into a toxic body of water, accumulating pollutants such as pesticides and fertilizers. The rise in salinity made it unsuitable for most fish and other aquatic life. Countless fish died,

creating foul-smelling shores lined with fish carcasses, causing a public health hazard and disrupting the once-flourishing recreational activities.

The environmental challenges faced by the Salton Sea can be directly linked to colonialist ideologies that prioritize human exploitation of natural resources without adequate consideration for sustainability and ecological balance. The intent to transform the desert into agricultural land led to unintended consequences, forever altering the region's natural order.

## **An Environmental and Humanitarian Crisis**

Today, the Salton Sea stands as both an environmental and humanitarian crisis. The lake's continuous shrinking has exposed vast stretches of dry lakebed, which contain fine particles and pollutants. As these dry lakebeds are carried by the wind, the surrounding communities face significant health risks, especially respiratory issues due to the dust pollution.

The communities residing near the Salton Sea, predominantly low-income and minority populations, often face higher rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses. The environmental injustice surrounding the Salton Sea crisis highlights the disproportionate burden borne by marginalized communities as a result of historical colonial practices.

Additionally, the decline of the Salton Sea has had severe economic ramifications for the region. With the diminishing tourism and recreational activities, the local economy has suffered. The ecological devastation has also impacted the livelihoods of local fishermen who relied on the lake for sustenance.

## **The Future of the Salton Sea**

Efforts are underway to address the Salton Sea crisis and create a sustainable future for this unique ecosystem. Various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and local communities, are coming together to tackle the multiple challenges faced by the lake.

The Salton Sea Management Program, launched in 2017, aims to develop a comprehensive plan to mitigate the environmental, health, and economic impacts of the lake's decline. The program focuses on dust suppression, habitat restoration, and sustainable water management to revive the ecological balance and improve the quality of life for the communities surrounding the Salton Sea.

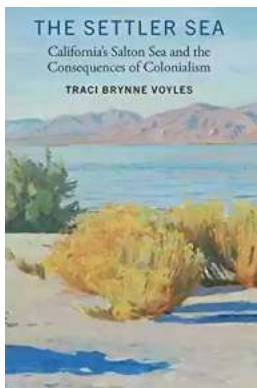
Collaborative initiatives, such as the Salton Sea Action Committee and the Salton Sea Authority, advocate for sustainable solutions while actively involving and empowering local communities impacted by the crisis. Through community-driven engagement and the establishment of long-term restoration and conservation strategies, there is hope for the revival of the Salton Sea's natural splendor.

The California Salton Sea represents a remarkable example of the consequences of colonialism in the American West. Initiated with the intention of harnessing natural resources and transforming the landscape, the unintentional creation of the Salton Sea led to a series of environmental, health, and economic challenges.

Understanding and addressing the historical and contemporary implications of the Salton Sea crisis is crucial for creating a sustainable future. By prioritizing environmental justice, community engagement, and collaborative efforts, it is possible to restore the Salton Sea's ecological balance and uplift the communities affected by decades of environmental neglect.

The story of the Salton Sea serves as a powerful reminder of the need to approach development with caution, considering both short-term gains and long-

term consequences. It is an opportunity to learn from past mistakes and strive for a more harmonious coexistence between humans and the environment.



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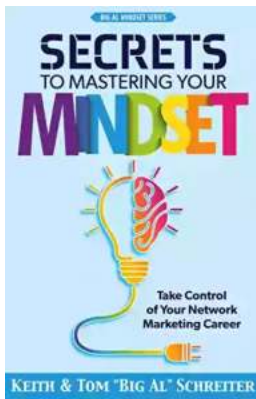


Can a sea be a settler? What if it is a sea that exists only in the form of incongruous, head-scratching contradictions: a wetland in a desert, a wildlife refuge that poisons birds, a body of water in which fish suffocate? Traci Brynne Voyles's history of the Salton Sea examines how settler colonialism restructures physical environments in ways that further Indigenous dispossession, racial capitalism, and degradation of the natural world. In other words, *The Settler Sea* asks how settler colonialism entraps nature to do settlers' work for them.

The Salton Sea, Southern California's largest inland body of water, occupies the space between the lush agricultural farmland of the Imperial Valley and the austere desert called "America's Sahara." The sea sits near the boundary between the United States and Mexico and lies at the often-contested intersections of the sovereign lands of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla and

the state of California. Created in 1905, when overflow from the Colorado River combined with a poorly constructed irrigation system to cause the whole river to flow into the desert, this human-maintained body of water has been considered a looming environmental disaster.

The Salton Sea's very precariousness—the way it sits uncomfortably between worlds, existing always in the interstices of human and natural influences, between desert and wetland, between the skyward pull of the sun and the constant inflow of polluted water—is both a symptom and symbol of the larger precariousness of settler relationships to the environment, in the West and beyond. Voyles provides an innovative exploration of the Salton Sea, looking to the ways the sea, its origins, and its role in human life have been vital to the people who call this region home.



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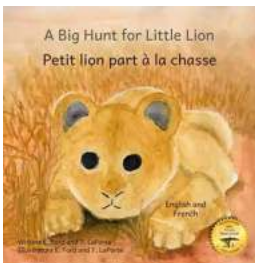
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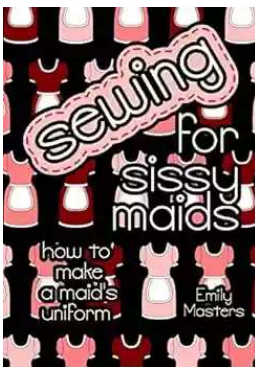
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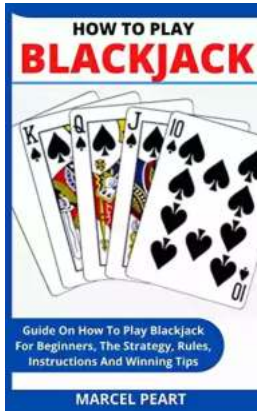
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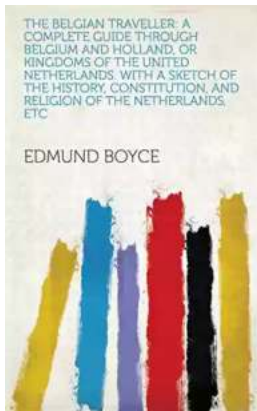
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