

Paul Charles Milazzo. 2006. *Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972*. The University Press of Kansas. 340 pages.

In his book, Paul Charles Milazzo presents a fascinating and complex analysis of the eventual passing of the Clean Water Act in 1972. The author provides a detailed exploration of the factors that led, at times it seems almost by accident, to perhaps the most important Congressional action on the environment in the twentieth century. I strongly recommend this text to any faculty teaching an upper division course on US environmental policy and politics.

Milazzo does the reader a favor by organizing the material into three distinct contextual parts: “Water control and accountability,” “systems discourse and total environmental thinking,” and “synthesis.” In each of these sections Milazzo demonstrates how the political and policy approach to water as a resource morphed from a practical consideration of water usage, control, and distribution to considering the necessity of protecting water for the sake of the overall natural environment. The last section demonstrates how the newly formed environmental movement, through the subsequent formation of various groups and the inclusion of experts and technicians, began to inform and influence the political discussion regarding the need to protect water resources from pollution and other degradations.

In part one, Milazzo chronicles the early post war water policies that primarily centered on the availability of water and flood control through the development of large public works projects. During this period, the emphasis was not on the regulation of the resource, but the creation of means by which water can be consumed by the public. Oklahoma’s own Robert Kerr, the uncrowned king of the Senate, figures prominently in this particular area. John Blatnik, a New Dealer from Minnesota, and far from a committed environmentalist, used his position on the public works committee to distribute tangible benefits (pork) to secure passage of early water pollution legislation. Milazzo describes how the public works projects designed for delivery and control of water began to evolve into pollution control for safe consumption. This period was

dominated by influential members of the US Senate using institutional power to bring about these projects. In other words, this era was about pork barrel projects and economic development.

By the 1960s and 1970s, other important figures began to emerge. Maine Senator Edmund Muskie entered the fray as a somewhat unlikely champion of clean water. Muskie was a former New Deal Democrat, and while he was well versed in the give and take of the Senate, Muskie was not eager to enter the water policy arena. Muskie did eventually recognize the problem of clean water effecting the availability of water for development, but was much more concerned with water as a vehicle for economic development. Political forces began to become more acute, with the advent of the concept “natural beauty,” and the growing environmental movement threatened to render Muskie irrelevant. Muskie began to be regarded as “captured” due to his perceived closeness to polluting interests, basically business and industry. Through all of this, Muskie was able to adapt his legislative style and approach, responding to new demands from the environmental movement effectively enough to eventually earn the nick name “Mr. Clean.”

Section two describes a shift in thinking and approaches in response to the demand for clean and available water. The approaches were variously described as “systems discourse,” “total environment” or “systems thinking.” These systems of thought came out of corporate America and the military. This ushered in a new and diverse cohort of experts and technicians who were brought to the task of managing water. These new experts were accompanied by a growing grassroots movement and what came to be known as ecosystems ecology. Of course it should be noted that Earth Day burst on to the scene in 1970. Milazzo asserts convincingly that the coupling of these new systems of analysis allowed for a more rational approach to the management of water policy. Milazzo argues that members of Congress were amenable to this approach due to their experience with both the military and corporate America. When taken as a whole, the new analytical approach to water management led to what could be considered the beginning of the environmental regulatory state, especially when one considers the creation of the National

Environmental Protection Act (1970) and the Clean Water Act (1972) as the two landmark legislative products from that era.

The last section of the book describes the synthesis of the actors, forces and policymaking approaches that grew out of the process that unfolded from the preceding years. Milazzo asserts that the value of ecological concepts finally worked their way down to the Senate and beyond. What transpired was the development of policy entrepreneurs at the staff level. Staff workers for various members would engage in a new form of policy formulation, often working across political parties. Ideas were developed and exchanged at the staff level. These new approaches were based on rational, scientifically established criteria, which for a brief period of time bridged the partisan divide.

Milazzo concludes his account of the environmental policy process during this period by reminding the reader the purpose of the book's title. Those concerned with economic development, pork barrel projects, and technocratic approaches to policy could not be considered environmentalists by themselves. Through the interaction of members of Congress, with the need to advance agendas and deal with the problem proactively, policy was created out of a complex political environment, with significant input from the grass roots. Moreover, Milazzo points out that the complex nature of the legislative process, with all its "moving parts" provides a superior way for "balancing the knowledge of experts with the will of the people for the sake of nature."

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