

Ward, E. R. 2000. The irrigated oasis: Transformation of the Colorado River Delta, 1940-1975. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Georgia.

This study chronicles Mexican and U.S. efforts to develop a capital-intensive agricultural oasis in the Colorado River Delta between 1940 and 1975. It is divided into three thematic sections that deal with the different stages of development of the region. Section I, "Creating the Irrigated Oasis, 1850-1940" (chapters 1-2), illustrates not only how conquest of land and water has been a central theme in the delta since the mid-nineteenth century, but also how these interactions have shaped regional aspects of U.S. Mexican relations during the twentieth century. Section II, "Florescence of the Irrigated Oasis, 1940-1975" (chapters 3-7), examines the most intensive phase of water resource development in the region, as well as the recognition by regional and national officials that unmanaged growth on both sides of the border could not continue without severely damaging the environment that sustained the irrigated oasis. Nevertheless, while the salinity crisis of the 1960s and 1970s compelled the United States and Mexico to reach a diplomatic solution--which involved building a desalination plant in Yuma, Arizona--it did not fundamentally change the developmental mindset of regional or national leaders. Section III, "Beyond the Irrigated Oasis" (chapters 8-9), moves geographically beyond the irrigated oasis in order to illustrate the fundamental unity of water use throughout the Lower Colorado River Basin. This section discusses ways in which water users throughout the basin, particularly in the urban oases of Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Las Vegas, have inadvertently contributed to the decline of the delta. This section also explores how ecological studies at Kesterson Wildlife Refuge in California moved scientific investigation of contamination in the delta beyond an exclusive emphasis on salinity. Finally, this final section explores the mechanisms through which change might be affected in the region, and compares water problems in the delta to similar situations around the globe.