



## How Dams Fall: On Representing the Colorado River in the First-Ever American Lawsuit Seeking Rights for a Major Ecosystem

**Will Falk**

Little Bound Books (Aug 6, 2019)

Softcover \$12.95 (78pp)

978-1-947003-46-0

Will Falk's touching ode to a major ecosystem *How Dams Fall* personifies the Colorado River.

This essay-length book has a big goal: to dramatize the plight of the Colorado River in its fight against human intervention. Falk, who brought the first federal lawsuit against a state on behalf of a river, veers away from discussing the case itself, instead imagining a conversation with the river: "She, like life, speaks in fluid, shifting patterns, gestures, and themes that must be teased out."

The poignant story the river tells is one of enslavement by the Grand Valley Diversion Dam. Falk ponders the manner in which the Colorado River is manipulated by humans, considering the broader implications of slavery. He lyrically wonders whether "the end of human slavery led to an intensification of the enslavement of the natural world." He describes how he visits the river, hears her speak, and shares her fears, empowering him to write and to pursue a legal case on her behalf.

In Falk's view, the Colorado River is an ecological symbol. "Each generation accepts a more impoverished planet," observes Falk. "Not only are species being destroyed at an accelerating pace, but the humans causing the destruction don't even remember who they've destroyed." These are strong words anchored in a harsh reality. The book's fervent hope—and guarded optimism—lies in the permanence of the force of nature: "No dam can stand against the power of the Colorado River forever."

There is a magical, mystical quality to these words, bleak though they are at times. *How Dams Fall* is a brief and impactful essay that celebrates the Colorado River's majesty while cautioning human beings against further damaging its beauty and its purpose,

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (July/August 2019)

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