



The Struggle for Water: Politics, Rationality, and Identity in the American Southwest (Chicago Series in Law and Society)

Wendy Nelson Espeland

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Nearly fifty years ago, the Bureau of Reclamation proposed building a dam at the confluence of two rivers in Central Arizona. While the dam would bring valuable water to this arid plain, it would also destroy a wildlife habitat, flood archaeological sites, and force the Yavapai Indians off their ancestral home. *The Struggle for Water* is not only the fascinating story of this controversial and ultimately thwarted public works project but also a study of rationality as a cultural, organizational, and political construct.

In the 1970s, the three groups most intimately involved in the Orme Dam—younger Bureau of Reclamation employees committed to "rational choice" decision making, older Bureau engineers committed to the dam, and the Yavapai community—all found themselves and their values transformed by their struggles. Wendy Nelson Espeland lays bare the relations between interests and identities that emerged during the conflict, creating a contemporary tale of power and colonization, bureaucracies and democratic practice, that asks the crucial question of what it means to be "rational."

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