

Colossus – Michael Hiltzik 2010 408pp

What did I get out of the book?

Hoover Dam and Lake Mead was massive undertaking to provide storage to lower basin states. Author Michael Hiltzik exposes the tremendous hardships and accomplishments of the men on the ground-and in the air-who built the dam and the demonic drive of Frank Crow, the boss who pushed them beyond endurance. It is a tale of the unfailing will exerted from start to finish, detailing the canny backroom dealings by Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the herculean engineering Crowe faced, and the courageous union strikes by the men who daily fought to beat back the Colorado River. Colossus tells an important part of the story of America's trials to pull itself out of the Great Depression by harnessing the power of its population and its natural resources.

Would I recommend it to class members?

Yes – it is an excellent read, well written, with interesting stories providing depth and texture.

Key points for class discussion.

1. Hoover Dam fueled the development of the isolated cities of the Southwest into bustling Sunbelt metropolises, which continue today drain Eastern cities of money, population and talent.
2. Had the dam never been built, the West would look very different today. The growth of urban areas most dependent on water and power – Los Angeles, Phoenix, Denver, Salt Lake City and San Diego would have stunted, leaving them a fraction of their current size.
3. Was it right to build Hoover Dam? The region's cities and population now face the sobering truth that the river's water was never as much as generations of reclamation promoters had promised. In recent decades the Colorado has reached its limits. The question now is how to conserve the river's water in an era of drought and increasing demands.