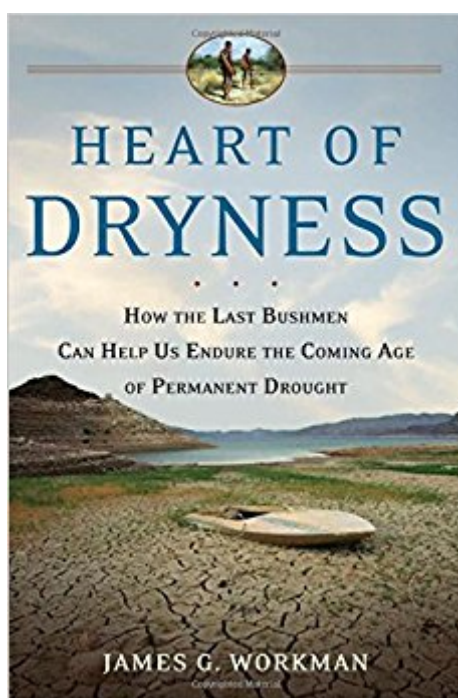


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# Heart Of Dryness: How The Last Bushmen Can Help Us Endure The Coming Age Of Permanent Drought



## Synopsis

The dramatic story of the Bushmen of the Kalahari is a cautionary tale about water in the twenty-first century and offers unexpected solutions for our time. "We don't govern water. Water governs us," writes James G. Workman. In *Heart of Dryness*, he chronicles the memorable saga of the famed Bushmen of the Kalahari remnants of one of the world's most successful civilizations, today at the exact epicenter of Africa's drought in their widely publicized recent battle with the government of Botswana, in the process of exploring the larger story of what many feel has become the primary resource battleground of the twenty-first century: the supply of water. The Bushmen's story could well prefigure our own. In the United States, even the most upbeat optimists concede we now face an unprecedented water crisis. Reservoirs behind large dams on the Colorado River, which serve thirty million in many states, will be dry in thirteen years. Southeastern drought recently cut Tennessee Valley Authority hydropower in half, exposed Lake Okeechobee's floor, dried up thousands of acres of Georgia's crops, and left Atlanta with sixty days of water. Cities east and west are drying up. As reservoirs and aquifers fail, officials ration water, neighbors snitch on one another, corporations move in, and states fight states to control shared rivers. Each year, around the world, inadequate water kills more humans than AIDS, malaria, and all wars combined. Global leaders pray for rain. Bushmen tap more pragmatic solutions. James G. Workman illuminates the present and coming tensions we will all face over water and shows how, from the remoteness of the Kalahari, an ancient and resilient people is showing the world a viable path through the encroaching Dry Age.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 336 pages

Publisher: Walker Books; 1st edition (August 4, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802715583

ISBN-13: 978-0802715586

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1.2 x 0.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 28 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #333,089 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Ecosystems > Deserts](#) #454 in [Books > Science & Math > Nature & Ecology > Natural Resources](#) #950 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Geography](#)

## Customer Reviews

Passing references to water woes along the Colorado River and rainfall shortages in the Southeast that have cut hydropower pepper this dramatic report on the looming American (and global) water crisis. Workman filters his apocalyptic forecast through a slice of micro history: the (almost genocidal) 2002 decision of Botswana to force a minute population of Bushmen— inhabitants of the arid Kalahari Desert for tens of thousands of years— off their ancestral lands by sealing the only borehole that provided water to 1,000 desert dwellers and then dumping stored water into the dry sand. The heart of this numbing report on the government's use of water as weapon is Bushman matriarch Qoroxloo, whose ability to wring precious liquid from deep roots and animal carcasses is testament to a wise elder's gritty determination to help her band survive against formidable political and geographic odds. The author's belief that water-starved Western cultures might adapt to a coming age of permanent drought based on pragmatic Bushmen ways posits an unlikely cultural transformation, but his journalistic depiction of a tribal David's triumph over a governmental Goliath is riveting. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"An astonishing synthesis of human and natural history, folly, scarcity, beauty, dignity and power." —Rick Bass  
"An investigative and story-telling triumph....showing a way back to accountability, sustainability, abundant life, and hope." --David James Duncan  
"Workman's experiences and insights are fascinating, ... a real page-turner." --Elizabeth Marshall Thomas  
"A fascinating read and great adventure story." —Bruce Babbitt  
"A spellbinding tale, it may have implications for us all." Michael E. Campana, WaterWired

This is a good book, worth reading if you have any interest in Africa, anthropology, or the "bushmen" (a.k.a. San). What I found interesting about this book is different from what everyone else thinks this book is about. The blurb, and every review posted here so far, will tell you that this book is about how the Bushmen of the Kalahari desert in Botswana have learned to cope with extreme water shortage, and what we need to learn from them to cope with the upcoming global water shortage that will be caused by overpopulation and climate change. While this is indeed a theme of the book, it is not what I found to be the most interesting part. The Bushmen of the Kalahari are one of the few remaining examples on the planet of people living a pre-civilized (i.e. hunter-gatherer) way of life. Sleeping under the stars, living in the desert, owning only what they can carry with them, and obtaining their food and water by hunting and gathering. For millions of years, that was how all

humans lived. Then this thing called "civilization" came along about 6000 years ago. Civilization basically took over the planet, not because everyone suddenly realized "hey this is better, let's adopt it", but instead because (for reasons brilliantly explained by Jared Diamond in "Guns, Germs, and Steel"), every time civilization came into contact with pre-civilized people, civilization won. Simply put, "civilized" people killed most of the hunter-gatherers, and the few that remain are banished to the most forbidding corners of the planet, like the Kalahari desert. So, what I find most interesting about this book is the glimpse it offers into what life was like for humans during those millions of years they lived as hunter-gatherers. I think the most interesting sub-story in the book is the tale about how the government of Botswana tried to entice the Bushmen off their land by offering them for free all the benefits of civilization: apartments with electricity and running water, even a decent income for doing nothing (except moving out of their homeland, which the Botswana government was eager to develop in various ways, if only they could get the Bushmen to leave). According to Workman, most of the Bushmen initially took up the offer, but within a year they had returned home to live in the desert. Apparently they decided a life of sleeping under the stars and hunting wildebeests was preferable to a life of sitting in an apartment drinking beer and watching Law & Order re-runs. Food for thought. Definitely worth reading.

In *Heart of Dryness*, James Workman has shown how the most prosaic of resources--water--can become a flashpoint for far-reaching political conflicts. Botswana is one of the few African nations that can be said to have had a prosperous post-colonial experience, but as Workman demonstrates, its success has been built, at least in part, on manipulation of scarce water resources. The losers have been the Bushmen, an ancient, nomadic tribe that has long lived a low-impact existence in the Kalahari, using age-old conservation methods. At a time when the problem of water scarcity is taking on increasing importance in the environmental debate, *Heart of Dryness* is not merely another warning--though it is full of alarming portents--but also a fascinating legal drama. The Bushmen end up taking the government to court, asking for an affirmation to the human right to water. Workman spent a great deal of time with the Bushmen during their long fight, and his book bursts with the kind of details and nuances that can only come from lived experience. If you've come to this subject because you're interested in environmental issues, this book will teach you about Africa; if you've picked it up because you're fascinated by Africa, as I am, this book will open your eyes to a budding--but with political will, addressable--world water crisis. And if you are merely a fan of well-told stories, full of vivid characters and surprising insights, Workman's masterful book will not disappoint. There's nothing dry about it.

Incredible eye opener! I just got back from a safari in southern Africa, including Botswana and had no idea! It's changing the way I think of and use water. This is compounded by the new headlines about Flint, Michigan and the Water Defenders of North Dakota.

This rather unsettling book is summed up by the author; "We don't govern water; water governs us." While the specific topic is the expulsion of Bushmen from the Kalahari Reserve by the government of Botswana by destroying their access to water, the larger topic is the use and abuse of water throughout the world. I teach Environmental Policy and I have recommended this book to students of mine interested in water policy. The author is, by admission, a conservative, but he also does something you seldom see in policy books; he says with great forthrightness that his interpretation may not be any more valid than a liberal interpretation. I found the book a bit hard to follow at times, and thus the 4 stars. As to overall treatment of the specific issue of abuse of an ethnic minority and to the more general treatment of water policy, it probably deserves 5 stars.

Excellent book that can teach us much about facing the coming drought.

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