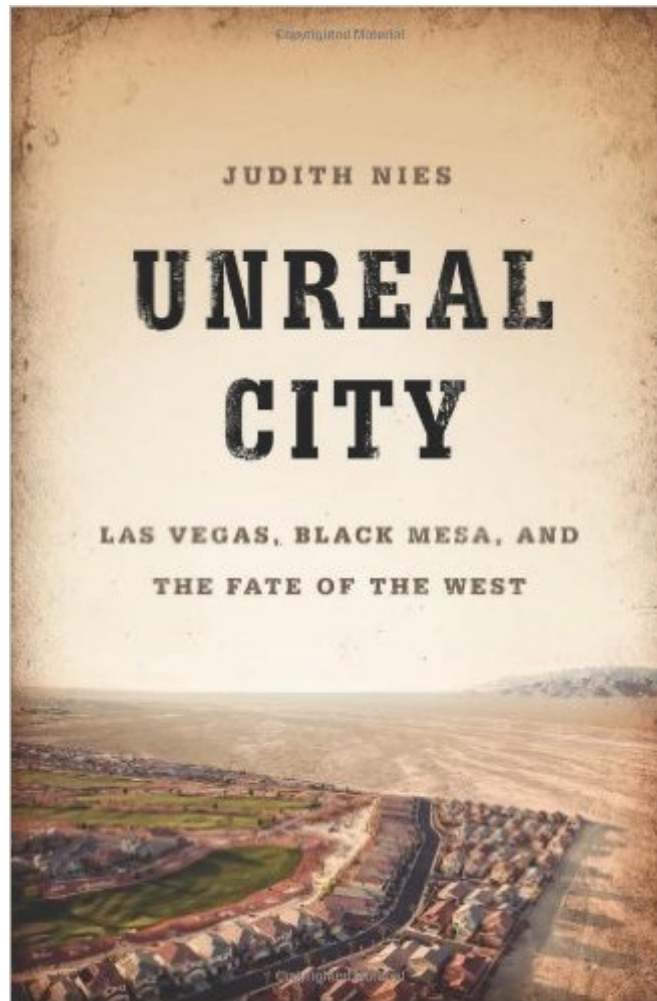


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# Unreal City: Las Vegas, Black Mesa, And The Fate Of The West



## Synopsis

An epic struggle over land, water, and power is erupting in the American West and the halls of Washington, DC. It began when a 4,000-square-mile area of Arizona desert called Black Mesa was divided between the Hopi and Navajo tribes. To the outside world, it was a land struggle between two fractious Indian tribes; to political insiders and energy corporations, it was a divide-and-conquer play for the 21 billion tons of coal beneath Black Mesa. Today, that coal powers cheap electricity for Los Angeles, a new water aqueduct into Phoenix, and the neon dazzle of Las Vegas. Journalist and historian Judith Nies has been tracking this story for nearly four decades. She follows the money and tells us the true story of wealth and water, mendacity, and corruption at the highest levels of business and government. Amid the backdrop of the breathtaking desert landscape, *Unreal City* shows five cultures colliding—Hopi, Navajo, global energy corporations, Mormons, and US government agencies—resulting in a battle over resources and the future of the West. Las Vegas may attract 39 million visitors a year, but the tourists mesmerized by the dancing water fountains at the Bellagio don't ask where the water comes from. They don't see a city with the nation's highest rates of foreclosure, unemployment, and suicide. They don't see the astonishing drop in the water level of Lake Mead—where Sin City gets 90 percent of its water supply. Nies shows how the struggle over Black Mesa lands is an example of a global phenomenon in which giant transnational corporations have the power to separate indigenous people from their energy-rich lands with the help of host governments. *Unreal City* explores how and why resources have been taken from native lands, what it means in an era of climate change, and why, in this city divorced from nature, the only thing more powerful than money is water.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Nation Books (April 8, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1568587481

ISBN-13: 978-1568587486

Product Dimensions: 1 x 5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (43 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #241,931 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #31 in [Books > Business & Money](#) > [Industries > Energy & Mining > Natural Resource Extraction](#) #184 in [Books > Politics & Social](#)

## Customer Reviews

Judith Nies has managed to give me some sleepless nights this week. Nies has been involved in the research and the events of her book, *Unreal City*, for decades, and it shows. She knows the players, the terrain, the dirty secrets and the truth and she tells it in an engaging, forthright and credible style that reads like a thriller, but unlike fiction, makes you stop and stare at the wall when you get to the scary parts, while your mind is grappling with the stupefying injustice and corruption you've just read about and never knew. *Unreal City* is about water, coal, energy, money, power, politics, corruption and most of all betrayal -- of the Native American people, the land and western states, and the very future of the West itself. Mormons, Indians, politicians from Barry Goldwater to Harry Reid, greedy profiteers, government hacks, corporate robber barons all have played and are still playing their parts in this ongoing horror show that will ultimately turn the Southwestern desert into a dry dead husk, and that includes the Los Angeles basin. Watch out Oregon and Washington, they'll be after your resources next and if people don't wake up, they'll probably get them. I've lived in Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Phoenix, and I have witnessed those three cities waste more water and electricity than any three places on the face of the earth. The brilliant overkill lights of Las Vegas can be seen from Spacelab, and the golf courses, lawns, vegetation and swimming pools of these towns use more water than anywhere else - ignoring the fact that by all the laws of nature, people shouldn't live like this in a desert climate, a fact that's been ignored and in fact, the victory over nature has been erroneously celebrated by what man could do, which sure as hell doesn't mean he should.

In "*Unreal City*," author and reporter Judith Nies has written a wide-ranging history and cultural analysis of what made possible and sustains the three major population centers of the American Southwest. The three population centers she is talking about are Las Vegas, Phoenix and Los Angeles. The first two cities, respectively, became major urban centers only after World War II and only because water and energy could be found and delivered to them. Los Angeles has a slightly longer history but is no less a party to this same pattern. The American Southwest is dry, mostly desert. Las Vegas, Phoenix and Los Angeles are dependent upon water from elsewhere and electricity generated from elsewhere. In the case of the water, it is delivered by tapping the Colorado River via huge dams, the first and largest of which is Hoover Dam. The water is piped for hundreds

of miles. The energy comes in large measure from coal from Black Mesa, a major coal formation on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations in northeastern Arizona. Strip-mined and slurried or put into hopper cars for transport by rail, the coal is the fuel that powers major electricity generating stations along the Colorado and elsewhere and is then transmitted for miles to these major urban centers. Perhaps Las Vegas is the most unreal of the three cities, hence the title. However, Phoenix and Los Angeles are likewise sustained by distant water and distant energy. Residents of these places are almost willfully ignorant of what it takes in terms of water and energy to sustain such vast numbers of people. These are among the most artificial of American cities. The environmental costs and the costs to afflicted groups like the Navajo and Hopi Nations is almost beyond measure.

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