We All Need Water
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Everyone uses water -- for drinking, for showering, for watering the lawn. Even the human body itself is 75% water. It’s important for all forms of life, the large trees that grace the Earth with their shade, the animals and plants which provide nutrients, but how much of the water is safe to consume? How much of that portion itself is wasted?

In 2014, The city of Flint, Michigan switched its water supply from Detroit’s system to the Flint River in an attempt to save costs. This led to health issues that were ignored by government officials, despite complaints about smells, discoloration, and strange taste. Studies were later conducted and according to an article written by AJPH Research, which stated, “The aging Flint water distribution system contains a high percentage of lead pipes and lead plumbing, with estimates of lead service lines ranging from 10% to 80%.” Previously, the Flint River had been used as a dumping site for local industry and has been victim to both urban and rural runoff and other various toxins. The people of Flint began to protest the change in water, however an article from Detroit Free Press states, “The city maintains the water — pulled from the Flint River rather than the Detroit water system that had served the city for years — is safe.” Flint residents made their way into court and it paid off. An article from NRDC states, “Federal judge David M. Lawson today ordered the Michigan state officials and the City of Flint to deliver bottled water door-to-door to homes in Flint [...].” NRDC also adds, “That means homes must receive bottled water delivery unless the government verifies, on a regular basis, that the home has a properly installed and maintained faucet filter, or the home declines delivery.” In 2018, Governor Rick Snyder announced that the city would no longer be providing its residents bottled water. However, as of 2018 there are residents of Flint who still receive their water in lead pipes.

Contaminated water isn’t just exclusive to Michigan. A study done by the University of Kentucky reveals that 96% of Martin County residents rely solely on bottled water for drinking. Like Flint, residents report water tasting poorly, discoloration, odors, and burning skin after contact. Issues with the water first came to light in 2000 when a local coal company spilled slurry, containing high levels of arsenic and mercury. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Neurological and behavioural disorders may be observed after inhalation, ingestion or dermal exposure of different mercury compounds. Symptoms include tremors, insomnia, memory loss, neuromuscular effects, headaches and cognitive and motor dysfunction.” Additionally, the WHO states, “Long-term exposure to inorganic arsenic, mainly through drinking-water and food, can lead to chronic arsenic poisoning. Skin lesions and skin cancer are the most characteristic effects.”

An article in The Guardian added, “In the wake of the disaster, regulators found the water system in disarray and recommended root and branch reforms to fix the broken infrastructure and management system. Yet over the next two decades, the utility failed to invest in crucial water infrastructure [...]”
State Representative Chris Harris predicts Martin County’s problems could soon affect
the entire country. According to a Washington Post article, “The network of more than 1 million
miles of pipes includes many that are a century old and have a 75-year life expectancy. Across
the country, 14 percent of treated water is lost through leaks and here in Martin County, that
figure has at times reached more than 70 percent.”

In the United States, Native Americans have also been denied clean water, an article by
The Guardian says, “An estimated one in 10 Indigenous Americans lack access to safe tap water
or basic sanitation [...]” and “several CRB tribes suffer from plumbing poverty, including 30% to
40% of all Navajo Nation residents, who are 67 times more likely than other Americans to live
without running water.” The Navajo tribe was hit the hardest, especially during times of illness,
like the recent outbreak of Covid-19, many were ill and even died. The unclean water didn’t help
the conditions of the sickness, as hydration is an important tool to combating any illness. Like
the previous examples, the government still does little to help the people. While there was
government money offered, it wasn’t close to being enough to replace the old pipes on the
Reservation.

Whether the result of systemic racism or classism, the water supply issues are sure to
belong to the rest of the nation unless there is an attempt to protect and conserve our water
sources. The general population needs to be more aware of how they are using water. The state
of California recommends recycling water used indoors to water plants and to limit time
showering due to drought prone areas in the state. These measures can be integrated into
everyday life, even without the threat of dry seasons. Water conservation helps not just the
people engaging in the practice, but spills into the lives of everyone because we all need water.
Works Cited


