**Toby Jones,** Associate Professor of History, Rutgers University

**“Who Controls Water?”**

Teaching Water: Global Perspectives on a Resource in Crisis

August 5‐8, 2013, Harvard University

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**Minute 00:00 - 7:20**

Introduction

**Key Content**

Professor Jones describes how he came to research water in Saudi Arabia and some of the perspectives he brings to his work.

**Discussion Question**

What values, beliefs, and perspectives shape your approach to thinking and learning about water?

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**Minute 7:20 - 16:30**

Approaches to question of “Who Controls Water?”: The big picture

**Pre-Viewing Questions**

How many different ways have you accessed water today or this week? (Water fountain? Convenience store?) Do you know who owns the water you accessed? Who do you guess owns this water?

**Key Content**

Control of water is in the hands of an increasingly small number of actors.

Disparity in resources between the West and the Global South shapes the choices available to individuals in response to this shifting control.

**Discussion Questions**

Professor Jones names three different groups that make up the “increasingly small number of actors” who control water today. Did any of these groups surprise you? Why or why not? What kinds of responsibilities do you think each of these groups have to individuals and communities who need access to water?

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**Minute 16:30 - 24:45**

Where are we and how did we get here?

**Key Content**

The state of freshwater today impacts the health and daily lives of individuals in the Global South in significant ways. Half the hospital beds in the world are filled with people whose diseases are associated with a lack of access to clean water.

The language of scarcity and competition used when speaking about resources shapes the kinds of conversations we have. This language and these frameworks emerged from particular historical moments and forms of political power.

**Discussion Questions**

What do you think of when you hear the words “scarce” and “scarcity”? What associations do they evoke?

What other kinds of frameworks might be used for thinking about global resources?

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**Minute 24:45 - 30:50**

The current freshwater crisis is partially shaped by the particular historical moment that precedes us.

**Key Content**

In the Global South the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970’s brought about a shift from patronage states to an emphasis on open markets and free trade.

Large corporations created alliances during this historical moment.

**Discussion Questions**

Describe Neo-liberalism in your own words. How does it differ from the economic systems that preceded it?

In the Global South, what characterized the relationship between citizens and leaders prior to the shift to neo-liberalism in the 1970’s? What role did resources play in this relationship?

What are other ways in which leaders gain and maintain legitimacy? What role do resources play into these relationships between citizens and leaders?

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**Minute 30:50 - 36:10**

The current freshwater crisis is partially shaped by the nature of political power in the era of modern nation states.

**Key Content**Water and politics mutually shape one another. Relationship to water can form the type of political power structure that then controls that water. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Minute 36:10 - 42:15**

The current freshwater crisis is partially shaped by pollution.

**Key Content**

Industrialization results in environmental consequences that impact water drinkability and public health.

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**Minute 42:15 - 57:25**

Case study of Saudi Arabia

**Key Content**

The social contract between the Saudi state and its citizens is characterized by patronage made possible by wealth. This is often understood in terms of the state’s relationship to oil, but water is a critical part of this history. Control of water played a role in creating the conditions necessary for autocratic power structures to develop.

Today, the Saudi government is using its own oil reserves to power desalination plants and seeking “virtual water,” in the form of food and other goods, from countries in the Global South.

**Discussion Questions**   
What features characterize the relationship between citizens and leaders of the contemporary Saudi state? In what ways does water contribute to this dynamic? What responsibilities do you think a state has to its citizens for providing resources such as water?

What tensions or conflicts does Professor Jones describe at the end of his talk? How is water shaping the relationship between the Saudi state and other countries?

What are other ways in which “water-rich” and “water-poor” nations might work with one another? What potential conflicts might this present? What potential opportunities? **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**