

A Glass of Water

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Imagine, your child is watching their favorite movie, and a couple of minutes later they ask for a glass of water. Quickly, you give them tap water, thinking no harm will come of it since the water appears clean. But what you don't know is that the water is contaminated with high levels of lead, extremely harmful to children's development. All because of bad decisions made by those who should protect you. In the article, "Flint vowed to replace lead pipes by 2020. We're still waiting" from *Bridge Michigan*, Allen Overton & Melissa Mays (2023) claim that Flint, Michigan, is now famously known for having lead-infected pipes. Overton & Mays (2023) believe their home is why people talk about "America's poor water manufacture," subtly, pointing the finger at their government. The Biden Administration, promised to install new pipes, however, Overton & Mays (2023) believe the proposal was another empty promise for the people of Flint. Both Flint residents point out that the "Flint leaders" are "untrustworthy," which leaves the people to protect themselves and their children. Overall, both imply that the Flint officials are the cause behind the water contamination and the reason it's still contaminated. Also, they argue that they are denying them their "fundamental human right" to drink clean water. I agree with Overton & Mays (2023) argument against Flint officials, but neither go into depth on why they are to blame nor explain how fatal and detrimental to someone's livelihood consuming lead can be, especially to young children. Additionally, neither include other safety precautions that can be taken in the meantime.

Near the beginning of the article, Overton & Mays (2023) write, "Flint has become synonymous with contaminated drinking water, poor governmental response [...] Our hometown put a spotlight on America's poor water infrastructure [...]" I wholeheartedly agree with Overton and Mays (2023) that "poor governmental response" is the reason behind Flint's unsafe water. In

fact, in this article, neither of them elaborates further on the government's role during the water crisis. Melissa Denchak (2018), a contributor for the *Natural Resources Defense Council* notes, "A story of environmental injustice and bad decision making, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, began in 2014, when the city switched its drinking water supply from Detroit's system to the Flint River in a cost-saving move." As the population of Flint, Michigan, began to double, the appointed emergency manager was given the task of cutting city expenses. One area of deduction was Flint's water system. For years, Lake Huron was the city's source of water, however, after the deduction, Flint River would be the new water source. Even though, Flint River was the dumping ground for factories toxic waste. Nonetheless, on April 25, 2015, Flint's mayor hit the button to switch the city's water source. Officials saw the switch as a simple solution but did not grasp the severity of switching the water supply to a landfill river.

After the April 2015 switch, people made comments about feeling unwell, and the water appearing brown with a strong odor. Denchak (2018) writes "The river water was highly corrosive, Flint officials failed to treat it, and lead leached out from aging pipes into thousands of homes." The officials "failed" to include corrosion inhibitors, which are used to reduce the rate of corrosion. The possibility of corrosion was completely overlooked and because of this, lead was able to get into the "aging pipes." Due to the government's inability to regulate the city of Flint, many young children fell ill, faced irreversible damage, or died. Overton & Mays (2023) said, "They ignored water laws and told us our water was safe even when they knew it wasn't." Lives have been and will continue to change due to "poor governmental response." Officials only thought about saving money and didn't think of the consequences that would follow. Even after the fact, officials denied claims of the water being contaminated. Beloved Flint would now famously be known as a place with "poor water infrastructure." Additionally, the most

heartbreaking thing about Flint is that it could have easily been you or me. When I was younger, my parents didn't have money for bottled water, because of this, tap water was my main source of drinking water. Drinking tap water was normal, and the possibility of it being dangerous never crossed my mind. However, one day I was watching the news about Flint's crisis, and I still remember feeling so terrified of that happening here, and the worried look in my mom's eyes. Immediately after hearing the news, my mom scheduled an appointment with the doctors to check my health, along with only giving me tap water that had been boiled. If the crisis happened here, I could have easily been one of the lead-infected children.

After shifting the blame to Flint officials, Overton & Mays (2023) go on to say, "The country's severe problem with lead, a potent neurotoxin that is especially harmful to the developing brains of infants and children." While I agree with Overton & Mays (2023), both do not emphasize enough how truly dangerous lead can be to infants and children. Although they lightly mention that it's harmful to developing brains, both fail to demonstrate how much a child will change if they consume lead. After hearing the stories of Flint children's lives before and after the crisis, Erica L. Green (2019) from *The New York Times* identifies the reason for the sudden change: "The contamination of this long-struggling city's water exposed nearly 30,000 schoolchildren to a neurotoxin known to have detrimental effects on children's developing brains and nervous systems." One of the children, six-year-old Jaylon, mentioned in the Green (2019) article, was once an active and happy young boy. But after the crisis, he began lashing out. In 2015, Jaylon's mother found out Jaylon, along with other children in the neighborhood, had been drinking a "neurotoxin," also known as lead. Many children who consume lead become more aggressive and develop behavioral problems. Green (2019) says, "[...] special education services has nearly doubled, to 28 percent, from 15 [...]" The common denominator between those kids in

special education services, and those mentioned in the article, is that they're all from Flint, Michigan. Consequently, "developing brains" who consume lead, will have their school life impacted negatively, and possibly carry onto their adulthood. Overton & Mays (2023) did well in pointing out the fact, but not in explaining how quickly lead consumption could change a child's behavior.

In the middle of the article, Overton & Mays (2023) address what has been going on behind the scenes: "Our leaders have proved themselves untrustworthy since this crisis first began in 2014. [...] We had to take matters into our own hands by collecting water samples, educating ourselves about lead contamination [...]" It's true that Flint's relationship with the government has been completely broken, and many still don't think the water is safe to use. This results in them finding other methods to obtain water. However, neither Overton & Mays (2023) include other safety precautions that can be done, such as installing a water filter. In her article about Flint's water crisis and many other areas from *The New York Times*, Dana G. Smith (2023) writes, "[...] forcing people to rely on bottled water or on boiling their tap water to rid it of pathogens." Flint sees their state officials as "untrustworthy" since they're the reason people are afraid to drink tap water. She then goes on to say, how installing a water filter system can be an alternative since bottled water might not always be available. Smith (2023) writes "Most filters contain activated carbon to capture contaminants, which can be used in pitchers [...]" Activating carbon helps remove most of the bacteria in the water. However, Smith (2023) does note that it does not remove everything. Dr. Knappe and his co-authors created a study that suggests more expensive and advanced filters will provide cleaner & safer water by "90 percent." (as cited in Smith, 2023) The community of Flint must spend additional money to drink something they are entitled to. One of my mom's long-time friend, lived in Michigan during the water crisis, and

after some time, she ran out of water bottles. So, she started saving up for a water filter, but after months of saving, she still didn't have enough money. This caused her to ask my mom and her other family members for money, just so she and her children could use clean water. But even with the filter installed, she told me that the fear of accidentally drinking contaminated water could never completely go away.

Following the comments on how the Flint community must find methods to protect themselves, Overton & Mays (2023) also shed light on the fact that water is not something anyone should be stripped of. This statement cannot be said enough, in all honesty, access to clean tap water in a home shouldn't be a topic of discussion. Overton & Mays (2023) end the article with a single sentence that pulls on people's emotions, and that statement alone gives you a moment to reflect: "Safe drinking water is a fundamental human right." Water is not a want. It is a need and a right. The people of Flint pay their mortgage bills, and taxes, and abide by the laws. For those reasons, the people of Flint should be able to use their tap water; however, they please. Kelly Vaughen (2023), a reporter for *CBS News Detroit* shares the story of Flint residents, "neighbors still only drink bottled water and use bottled water to brush their teeth, water their plants, and give to their pets." The community still doesn't believe the water is safe to drink and wouldn't even feed it to their plants or pets. Vaughen (2023) also includes comments from the community about the cold tap water smelling like "chemicals" and the hot tap water smelling like "dirty feet". It has been 9 years; residents should not have to beg their government for clean tap water inside their homes. The possibility of lead getting inside their water should never be a thought that crosses their minds or something that should have ever happened. The people of Flint should not worry about getting sick anymore. They should be able to use tap

water for brushing their teeth, showering, drinking, and cooking, without a care in the world. It's 2023, the community should not still be this fearful of tap water.

In this article, Overton & Mays (2023) express their frustration on still not having access to clean tap water and both express their disappointment in their government for failing to protect them. Flint's city officials caused a crisis that was preventable and altered the lives of many young children, along with those who could have been. This led the community to take additional steps to obtain something that is their right. However, possibly I'm looking too deeply into Flint, Michigan, and maybe it's not that serious. To some, I might sound like a conspiracist, who always wants to place the blame onto the government. But I must say, if I had to live in a place without clean water, I would never stop fighting. I would continue to use my voice to speak out against those causing this, like Overton & Mays (2023) did. Nonetheless, I have yet to have children, but when I do, I don't ever want to worry about giving them a glass of water filled with lead. While they watch their favorite movie at home.

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