

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Waste Land
by David T. Hanson

Foreword by Wendell Berry
Afterword by Jimena Canales

In 1980, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency created “Superfund” to address the catastrophic problem of toxic waste sites. Of some 400,000 contaminated sites throughout the country, the EPA identified 400 highly hazardous locations in dire shape, wreaking ecological disaster on a poisoned landscape.



With the support of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1985, American photographer [David T. Hanson](#) traveled to 67 Superfund sites across 45 states that represented a cross section of industries whose practices have decimated the environment. Now, the series will be published in full for the very first time in [Waste Land](#) (Taverner Press, September 25, 2018).

American artists have long documented the landscape as a space of freedom, heroism, and grandeur—but as Hanson’s work reveals, things have radically changed. Over the period of a year, he visited nuclear weapons plants, nerve gas disposal areas, petrochemical complexes, water-contamination sites, wood-processing plants, mines, smelters, landfills, and illicit dumps, creating a series of photographs that expose the transformation of the American landscape by our increasingly industrialized and militarized culture.

From the industrial waste ponds leaking in to local streams and rivers to a dirt road in the woods that companies used for midnight dumping, Hanson’s aerial photographs survey the scenes of crimes. In the words of sociologist Andrew Ross, “Hanson’s *Waste Land* series is a stunning documentary of a century of organized state terrorism against the North American land, its species, and its peoples.” Driven by our distorted notions of progress, we have realized the logical conclusion of our Manifest Destiny, and have transformed our natural world from wilderness to wasteland.

For this book, the sites are sequenced according to the EPA’s Hazard Ranking System. Each location is presented in a triptych format, with an aerial photograph by Hanson, a modified U.S. Geological Survey topographic map, and a contemporaneous U.S. Environmental Protection Agency site description

detailing the site's history and hazards, as well as the remedial action taken – or not, as some entries reveal the elaborate legal strategies used to avoid responsibility for both the contamination and the cleanup.

Born and raised in Montana, Hanson is one of the most critically acclaimed photographers of our time. When his photographs of the coal-mining town of Colstrip, Montana, were first exhibited by John Szarkowski at The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1986, the work signaled a shift from the cool modernism of the New Topographics and questioned the naïve faith of Alexis de Tocqueville's belief in the "triumphant march of civilization" across the United States.

Waste Land is Hanson's third book in a trilogy that began with *Colstrip, Montana* and *Wilderness to Wasteland* (Taverner Press, 2010 and 2016), which bear witness to the most enduring monuments of Western civilization. Rather than Stonehenge or the Nazca Lines, the United States' most enduring legacy will be the hazardous remains of our industry and technology, permanently etched into the land. For example, the radioactive contamination from American plutonium factories will remain deadly for 250,000 years—that is 10,000 generations into the future, far longer than *homo sapiens* has been in existence.

Waste Land is a haunting meditation on a ravaged landscape. Although the pictures were made in the 1980s, they seem even more relevant today, given our growing concerns about energy production, environmental degradation, and climate change. In the words of poet Wendell Berry, "[Hanson] has given us the topography of our open wounds."

Author Bios:

David T. Hanson was born and raised in Montana. After receiving a B.A. in English Literature from Stanford University, he earned an M.F.A. in Photography from the Rhode Island School of Design and later taught there in the Departments of Photography and Landscape Architecture from 1983 to 2000. He has received numerous awards for his work, among them a Guggenheim Fellowship and two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships. His photographs have been exhibited in many museums—including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art—and are in the permanent collections of museums throughout the world. His previous publications include *Colstrip, Montana* and *Wilderness to Wasteland*.

Wendell Berry is an American novelist, poet, conservationist, cultural critic, and farmer. A prolific author, he has written novels, short stories, poems, and essays, and is the recipient of many awards, including the National Humanities Medal. Berry is an elected member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers and a 2013 Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2012 he delivered

the Jefferson Lecture for the National Endowment for the Humanities. For more than fifty years, he has lived and farmed with his wife, Tanya, in Kentucky.

Jimena Canales is an award-winning author and scholar whose writing examines science in the modern world. She received an M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University in the History of Science and a B.Sc. in Engineering Physics from the Tecnológico de Monterrey. Her books include *A Tenth of a Second: A History* and *The Physicist and the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate That Changed Our Understanding of Time*. Her scholarly work on the history of science and her writings on visual, film, and media studies have been widely published. Canales is currently a faculty member of the Graduate College at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and a Research Affiliate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She was previously the Thomas M. Siebel Professor for the History of Science at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and an Associate Professor at Harvard University.

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