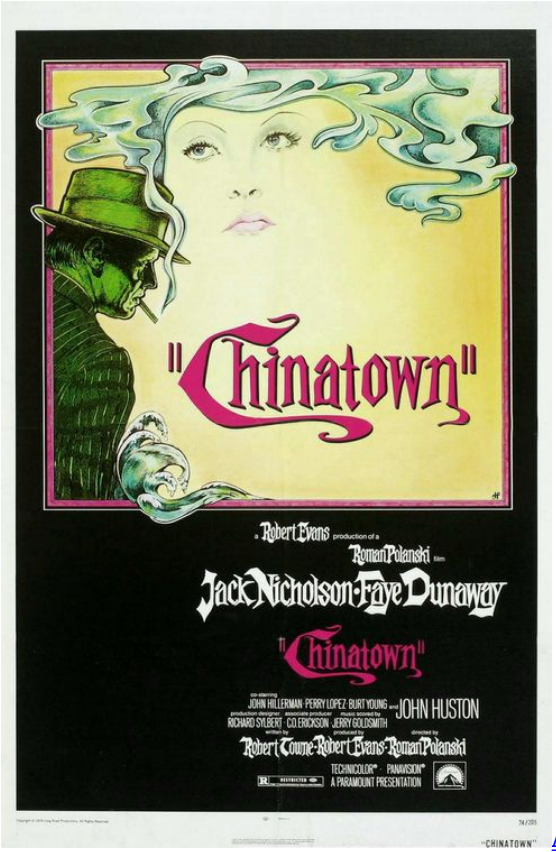

Ann proposes *Chinatown* as the greatest environmental movie of all time. Now, *Chinatown* is my favorite movie: the poster above is currently hanging on my office wall. it is a great movie. But *Chinatown* can't be a great *environmental* movie for one simple reason:

It gets the environment wrong.

The conceit of *Chinatown* is that a diabolical mogul, Noah Cross, essentially invented a water shortage so that the city of Los Angeles could build an aqueduct. Cross then secretly bought up land in the San Fernando Valley, knowing that this land would be extremely valuable. This is at best a half-truth, and the part that is false continues to have debilitating impacts in California water policy.

It is true that a consortium of downtown businessmen, led by the likes of Moses Sherman and Harry Chandler, did buy up Valley land, knowing that the City was going to have to store the water somewhere, and the empty aquifer under the Valley's alluvial plain was the perfect place.

But to say that Los Angeles built the aqueduct due to private greed is simply nonsense. The city built the aqueduct because it wanted to be a big city. And no: it didn't "rape the Owens

Valley" in the least. The federal government made a very open, very transparent decision to transfer water from the Owens Valley to Los Angeles because of a policy decision to bring water to where it could serve the most people — perhaps the only instance in US history where agricultural interests lost a water battle. Indeed, the Owens Valley acqueduct might well have been the environmental savior of the Owens Valley: without it, the Owens Valley would have turned into the equivalent of the San Joaquin Valley, whose air quality is as bad as Los Angeles'.

Chinatown, and the fake state "report" upon which it was based, have led to the pernicious myth that Los Angeles "stole its water from the Owens Valley. (The best source on the whole controversy is Abraham Hoffman, Vision or Villainy?: Origins of the Owens Valley-Los Angeles Water Controversy). This myth is permicious because it has led to the unfounded belief that somehow agricultural uses are more environmentally sensitive than urban ones (which they are not), and that somehow Los Angeles cannot be trusted. Thus, whenever California water policy is considered, agricultural interests are unified, but urban interests are not, because self-righteous Bay Area people refuse to cooperate with the evil southern Californians:

So no: *Chinatown* is a fantastic movie, but I think we should look elsewhere.