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David Lebedoff. *Cleaning Up: The Story Behind the Biggest Legal Bonanza of Our Time.* New York: The Free Press, 1997. x + 321 pp. $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-684-83706-2.

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On March 24, 1989, the oil tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef outside Valdez, Alaska. After a two-day delay due to an absence of effective containment equipment, Exxon began off-loading the forty-two million gallons of oil remaining in the tanker. By then, however, eleven million gallons of North Slope crude oil had spilled into Prince William Sound, creating the largest oil spill in U.S. history (Schneider, 1989, p. L22; Phillips, 1998, p. A8). Almost ten years after this cataclysmic event, the legal wranglings resulting from the spill are far from over. On July 31, 1998, a federal court judge rejected Exxon's latest request for a new trial, rendering the most recent ruling in Exxon's ongoing challenges to the $5 billion judgment jurors leveled against them in fall 1994 (Phillips, 1998, p. A1). *Cleaning Up* explores the Exxon Valdez case, tracing the path of Joseph Hazelwood and his crew on the fateful day leading up to the spill, following the story through to the judgment against the corporate behemoth.

Lebedoff attempts to provide an even-handed look at the Exxon Valdez spill and the subsequent construction of the legal case. He employs a wide range of legal documents, nearly 8,000 pages of court transcripts, and interviews with many key players in this environmental and legal drama. Lebedoff spoke with Hazelwood and his attorneys. He had access to the plaintiffs' lead counsel, Brian O'Neill, a partner with the Minneapolis firm of Faegre and Benson. The firm represented some 30,000 victims in this case and bankrolled the multi-million dollar suit, no small matter when one considers the depth of Exxon's pockets. Lebedoff explains that he has ties to Faegre and Benson through his wife, a partner there, but notes that she will not benefit from any judgment against Exxon. Citing pending appeals, Exxon declined Lebedoff's requests for information.

Cleaning Up is interesting on a variety of levels. Lebedoff's writing style is engaging; he does a fairly nice job of weaving a compelling story from the legal minutia in this case. The book sheds light on the general events leading up to the spill, the process behind the construction of the suit and the unique issues in this case, the difficulties associated with having work consume one's life, and even the challenges faced by the jurors. For example, one juror was apparently close to suicide as a result of the case, and has been cited in Exxon's appeals.

Cleaning Up also offers a highly detailed account of Brian O'Neill's involvement in the case, beginning with his belief that he was destined to handle the case from the first time he heard a news broadcast about the spill. Lebedoff also explores O'Neill's work in securing a client-base, telling of interaction with an Alaskan firm that already represented a large commercial fishing clientele. While O'Neill is clearly cast as the hero, Lebedoff gives credit to an army of others, ending with an epilogue explaining what has happened to the attorneys and members of their staff since the trial. However, he does not fully discuss what has happened in Alaska since the spill, nor does he reveal much about what has happened to the thousands of plaintiffs who continue to wait for the resolution of this case.

Lebedoff's attempt to provide a balanced telling of the tale is limited by his lack of access to Exxon, making the story somewhat one-sided. While this does not necessarily detract from the book and is not the author's fault, it is important to note for readers who may wish to gain insight into Exxon's strategies for defense or their public relations efforts. While the author seems to have done significant research, he does not reference any other works on the subject of the spill, an event that has been the subject of study in a wide range of disciplines. Those with a scholarly interest in the spill may find more useful bibliographic information in journal articles or other texts. Finally, as someone who resides in Alaska, I was frustrated by the repeated incorrect spelling of Alaskan locations. The majority of the client-base came from the Robinson firm in Soldotna, Alaska, but throughout the book it's written "Soldatna." Two of the jurors are described as living in the "Mar-Su Valley," which should be

correctly identified as the Mat-Su Valley, an abbreviation of Matanuska-Susitna. These misspellings may not frustrate readers unfamiliar with Alaska, but are likely to annoy those who know the state and, more importantly, call into question the author's and editor's attention to detail.

Cleaning Up is worth reading for those with an interest in the spill, corporate or environmental law, or even corporate ethics. Sadly, appeals are likely to continue for years to come. While Alaska Natives, the commercial fishing industry, and others wait to receive the money for damages caused by the spill, Exxon continues to hold the money in its coffers, earning $9.40 per second or nearly $800,000 million a year in interest on the $5 billion set aside to pay for the judgment (Phillips, 1998, p. A1). At this rate, Exxon will have earned the amount of the judgment in interest long before those whose lives were devastated by the spill will ever see a dime.

Works Cited:

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