


Mississippi River Water Quality

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•01• Timeline of River Use

History of River Use & Contamination



1810

Water was described as “entirely colorless and free from everything that would render it impure, either to the sight or taste.”

•1817•

The area was officially open to settlement

•1838•

•1841•

St. Paul was established

1850

Minneapolis was established

•1867•

Minneapolis built its first waterworks

•1871•

•1871•

City of Minneapolis began to pump untreated water from the Mississippi River into businesses and homes

1880

Typhoid fever outbreak began from contaminated river water

•1891•

Minneapolis waterworks was pumping 43 million gallons of untreated water per day to the city

•1897•

1900

Harriet Island beaches close as pollution becomes more severe

•1915•

•1907•

State Board of Health recognized that river water was unsafe for humans or livestock to touch, let alone drink

1920

State legislature established organizations to address the problem of sewage treatment

•1927•

•Early 1920s•

The river had reached its limit as a sewage disposal

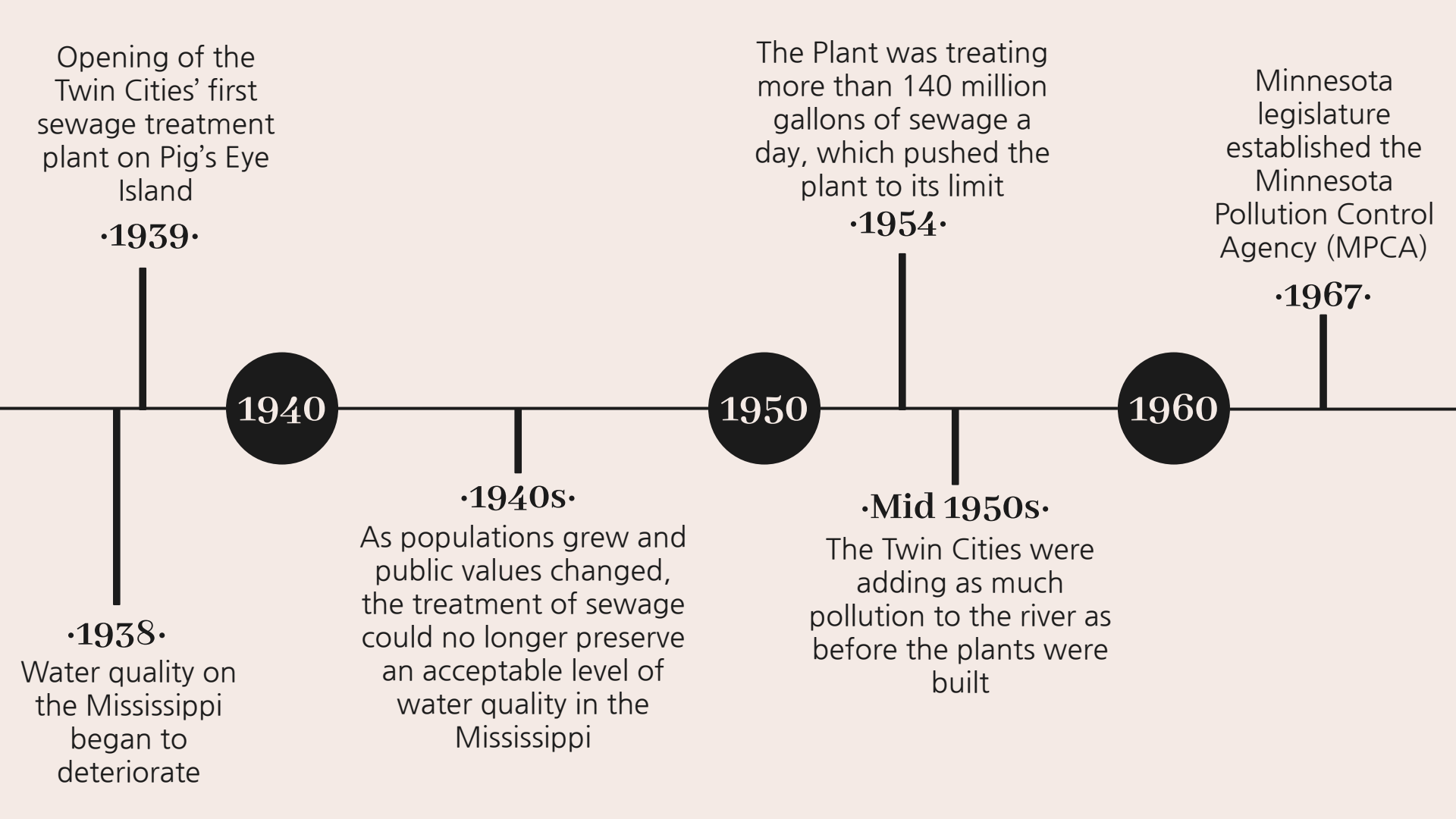
1930

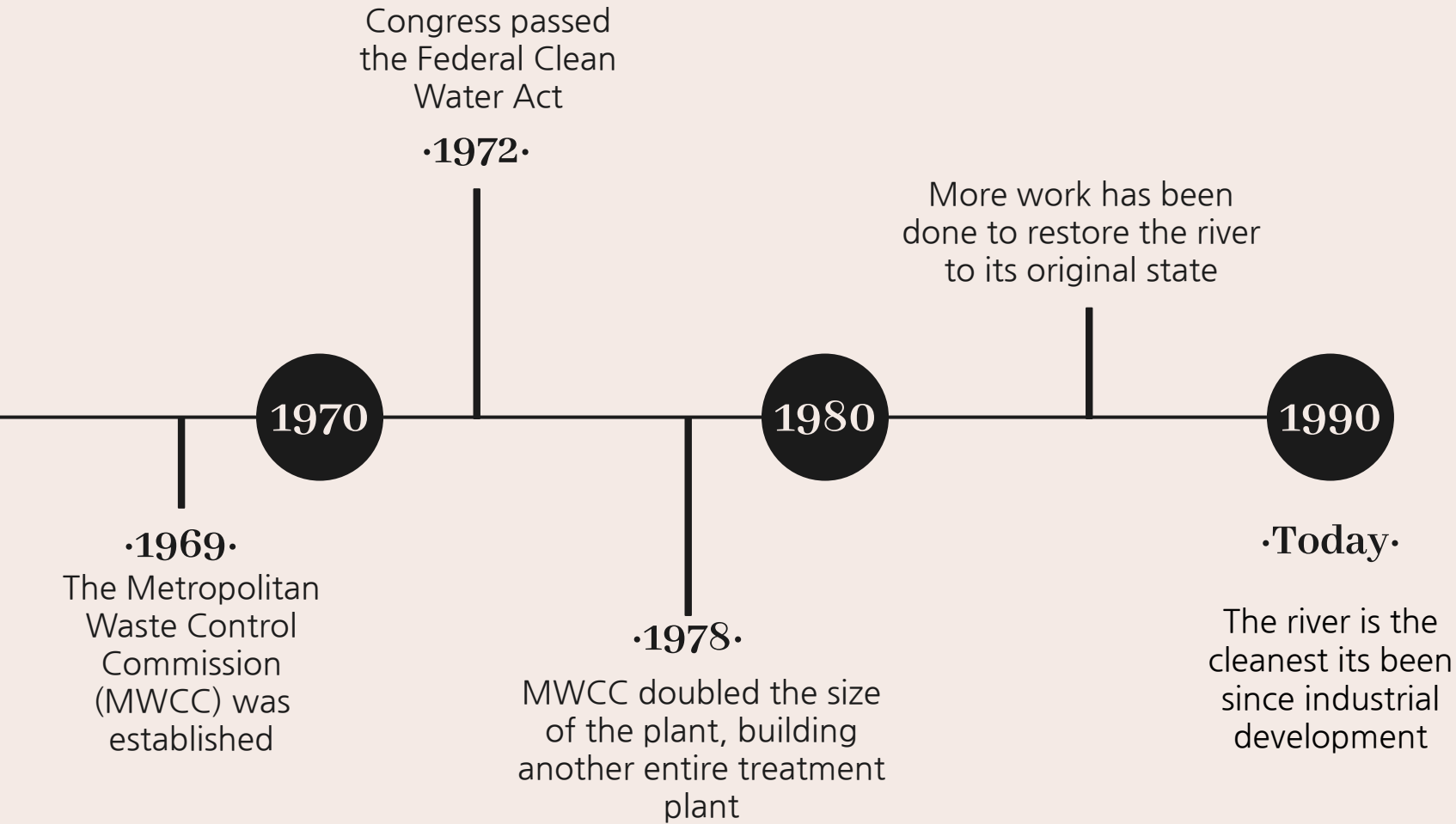
3 Sanitary Commissions formed

•1933•

•1930•

The combined capacity of the sewers emptying into the Mississippi within the Twin Cities was 2.5 times the normal flow of the river





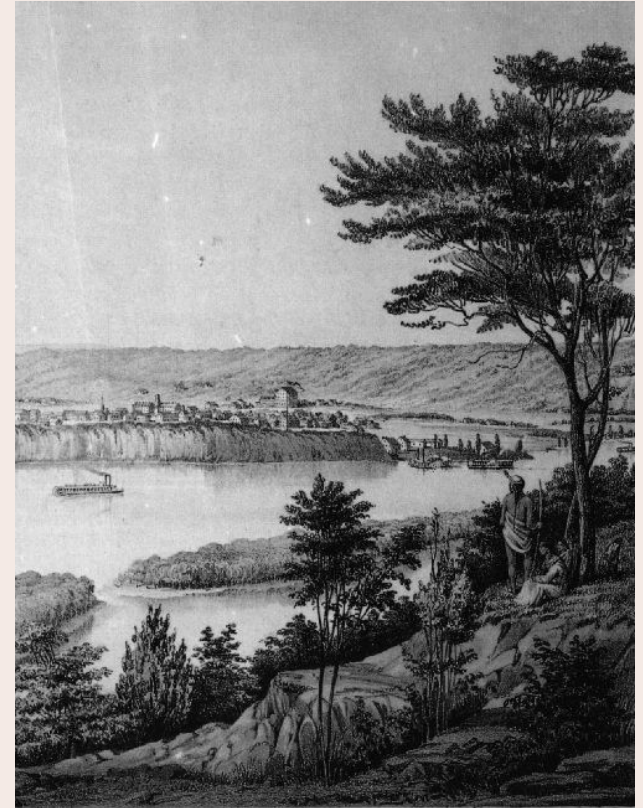
•02• Analysis

Analysis of Events in Timeline



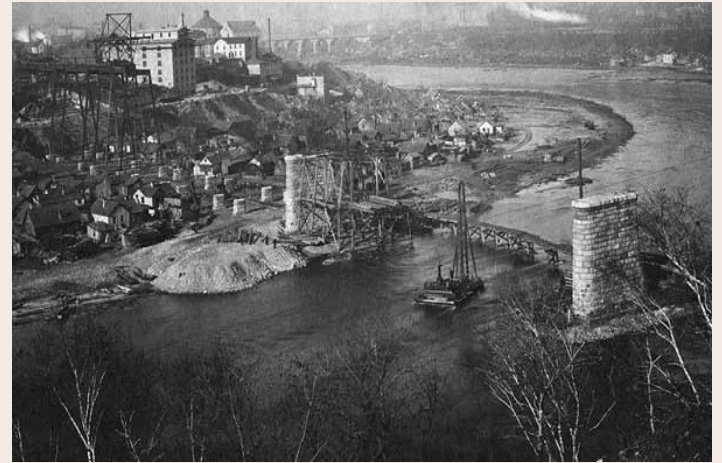
1817

Before settlers came to the area, the Mississippi river that goes through the Twin Cities was much wider, shallower, and the water was a lot clearer. In 1817 Major Stephen Long described the water of the Mississippi River as “entirely colorless and free from everything that would render it impure, either to the sight or taste.” The river’s geography was also very different.



1850-1900

During this time period, the Twin Cities were new and developing quickly. The health of the river rapidly declined because of this. In 1871, the city of Minneapolis began to pump untreated water from the Mississippi River into businesses and homes. While the city continued to pollute the river by dumping raw sewage, and garbage into it. As the city grew, their need and reliance on the river grew as well, and they continued to overuse the river's resources. With more people coming to the city every day, more and more water was needed. Pretty soon, Minneapolis discovered the consequences of drinking from polluted water.



Bohemian Flats, 1887

1900-1950

In 1923, the Board of Health determined that the river was a “public health nuisance; river water was unsafe for humans or livestock to touch, let alone drink.” Regardless of the river’s horrible condition, nothing was done for 13 years. By 1938, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Sanitary District finished the construction of the Twin Cities’ first sewage treatment plant. Minneapolis and St. Paul became the only major metropolitan area on the Mississippi to treat their sewage before dumping it into the river. During the early years of the plant, it was very successful.



Two women at Indian Mounds Park, 1910

1950-2000

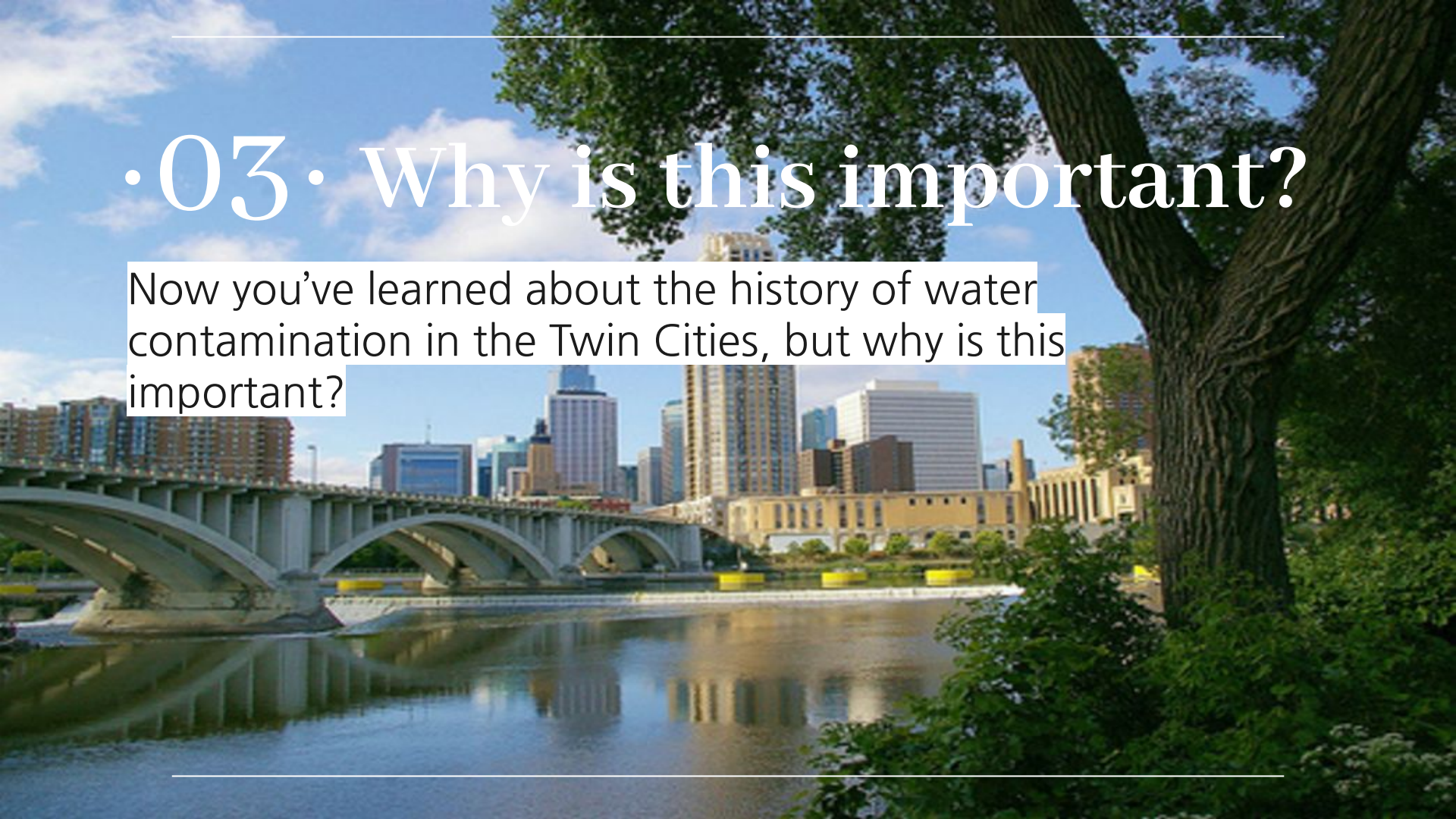
By 1954, the Metro Plant was treating more than “140 million gallons of sewage a day”, causing the plant to reach its limit. The water quality began to deteriorate for the first time since the plant’s opening. By the late 1960s new state and federal laws set stricter standards and the Sanitary District struggled to keep up. The evolving standards for environmental protection brought a change in the public's perception of its sewage treatment organization. As time went on, the public become more aware of river water quality and its importance. Since then, a lot has been done to make the river cleaner and restored back to a healthy state.



Stone Arch Bridge, 1960

·03· Why is this important?

Now you've learned about the history of water contamination in the Twin Cities, but why is this important?



Why is this important?



Learning about the history of pollution and the eventual restoration of the Mississippi River is crucial so we can ensure nothing like this happens again. Educating the public on the importance of river conservation is how we can continue to protect the river for future generations. Along with that, keeping the public interested and connected to the river means more people are willing to help preserve it. Studies show that having a strong connection to a place makes people more enticed to protect it. Telling stories about the history of the river can help shed light on the horrible history of contamination and ensure that the river is protected for future generations.

•04• Conclusion

Final Thoughts & Wrap Up



Conclusion

In conclusion, the history of river pollution in the twin cities is a large one, but it's important to recognize so it does not happen again. Educating people about the importance of river pollution helps ensure the river is protected for generations to come.



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