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City of Mountains: Denver and the Mountain West

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City of Mountains: Denver and the Mountain West

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For Erica and Grant

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City of Mountains: Denver and the Mountain West

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This study is an urban history of Denver, Colorado, viewed through the lens of its constantly evolving physical, political, cultural and economic relationship with its mountain hinterland. From the town's early years as a 19th century mining and ranching depot to its 20th century emergence as a hub of tourism and technology, that relationship informs every aspect of the city's urban, cultural and environmental history.

This study seeks, first, to analyze Denver's historical appropriation and utilization of its mountain hinterland, whether for water, wealth, recreation and cultural identity. Second, it highlights how access to and control over the Rocky Mountain hinterland shaped Denver's evolving political, class and racial landscapes throughout the city's history.

Integrating the methodologies of environmental, urban, and social history, it demonstrates how different social groups competed for access, control, and the ability to

assign value to the mountain hinterland. Every Denverite in the city's history, regardless of station, has lived within the context of this tense and constantly changing relationship. Since the city's founding, that relationship has been the constant object of human agency, accommodation, and change, and in it can be read the story of Denver itself.

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*So long ago my father led me to
The dark impounded orders of this canyon,
I have confused these rocks and waters with
My life, but not unclearly, for I know
What will be here when I am here no more.*

—Thomas Hornsby Ferril, "Time of Mountains," 1974

Introduction

I. *Vox populi, vox dei*

When Colorado voters went to the polls on November 7, 1972, among the choices awaiting them was a much-debated statewide ballot initiative that would prohibit the use of state funds for Denver's 1976 Olympic Winter Games. After a year and a half of ferocious back-and-forth between proponents and opponents of the Denver Olympics, culminating in an all-out barrage of political messaging in the weeks prior to the election, it would have been difficult for any voter to remain entirely ignorant of the controversial ballot measure. For all of the technical details and elaborate arguments for and against the Games, however, the argument essentially boiled down to competing visions of apocalypse. Opponents of the Games warned that they would further "Californicate" Colorado by destroying mountain ecologies and encouraging more in-migration, while continuing to emphasize the potential of the Games to create an untold future tax burden on Colorado. The Denver Olympics Committee (DOC) and its backers acknowledged past mistakes and promised that future planning would remain aboveboard and under budget. But if Colorado voters forced Denver to renege on its Olympic bid, warned Denver airline executive and former DOC member Don Magarrell, it would be "the worst international disgrace in American history."¹

Welded together by the fears and resentments accompanying rapid urban and population growth along Colorado's "Front Range," the anti-Olympics coalition

¹ Magarrell, it should be noted, made this sweeping claim three years after the public disclosure of the My Lai massacre and cover-up, and five months before the first Watergate-related resignations. Bill Bruns, "Will Colorado Scrap Its Own 1976 Olympics?," *Life Magazine*, November 3, 1972, 81.

transcended established political boundaries.² It was nominally led by a political action committee called Citizens For Colorado's Future (CCF), a come-from-nowhere organization fronted by the fiery state representative Richard Lamm, and steered by a small group of left-leaning political wunderkinds who had cut their teeth on Eugene McCarthy's 1968 campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Politically skilled and media-savvy, the CCF's young activists ran circles around the ponderous political machinery of the DOC and its allies. At their prodding, a local media that might have managed to overlook the Denver Organizing Committee's (DOC) missteps ten years earlier had become far less forgiving. By 1971, the DOC was taking a near-daily pummeling in the newspapers (although not the editorial sections) for its perceived incompetence, lack of credibility, and blinkered civic priorities.

Olympics advocates often painted their opponents in the anti-Olympics coalition as a small, Denver-based faction of unreasonable "zero-growthers" and environmentalists who—despite living in the state's largest and fastest growing city—wanted to close off the rest of the state to population or economic growth.³ Although this was certainly a politically expedient oversimplification of the Olympics opponents and their concerns, there was some truth to the notion that the opposition to the 1976 Winter Games, and indeed politicized environmentalism in general, was primarily an urban phenomenon in Colorado. By 1970, 65 percent of Coloradoans lived in the cities of the Front Range, and

² As used here, the "Front Range" refers to a sub region of Colorado within which the Great Plains meet the easternmost foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Situated longitudinally, this long but relatively narrow strip encompasses most of Colorado's largest cities, and consequently, contains the majority of the state's population. Alternatively, the "Front Range" can refer to the easternmost mountain range of the Colorado Rockies.

³ H. C. Wallich, "Zero Growth," *Newsweek* 24 (January 1972): 62.

5000 more settled there each month. Those who lived in or near those cities dealt directly with the consequences of rapid growth, including the constant threat of water shortage, increased air pollution, and the urban form of sprawl, which many citizens claimed to have moved to Denver to escape. The political consensus favoring local growth and development in Denver, long thought to be nearly indestructible, had melted like a snowball in a hot oven. Quite suddenly, urban growth had instead become synonymous with water shortages, air pollution and sprawling development, and those who promoted it with "knee-jerk boosterism."⁴

By the spring of 1972, what had begun as a seemingly quixotic attempt to forestall the inevitable had itself acquired an aura of inevitability. In April of 1972, anti-Olympics activists submitted over 76,000 petition signatures to Colorado's Secretary of State in order to place a measure to block public funding from the Olympics on the statewide ballot in the upcoming November election. By then, even the most die-hard Olympics partisans could no longer ignore the writing on the wall.⁵ Under increasing pressure from the International Olympic Committee to stabilize the situation, DOC and its corporate allies mounted a contrite public relations campaign to reassure voters that past problems had been fixed, and attempt to resell Coloradoans on "their" Olympics. It

⁴ Such sentiments were not confined to the lay public. In one 1972 interview with *Fortune* magazine, Colorado Springs mayor Andrew Marshall echoed the common refrain among many recent transplants in the region. "Too steep a growth curve threatens to spoil the things most of us came here to find," Marshall explained. "Unless we look out, we'll become another Los Angeles." Juan Cameron, "Growth Is a Fighting Word in Colorado's Mountain Wonderland," *Fortune*, October 1973, 149; Richard Starnes, "'76 Winter Olympics--Victim of a Political Alliance?," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO, April 2, 1972), 5.

⁵ The Olympics opponents needed only to get the issue on the ballot, predicted DOC president Carl DeTemple, and the IOC would take the Games away from Denver on their own, rather than risk a negative outcome in a general and well-publicized election. Starnes, "'76 Winter Olympics--Victim of a Political Alliance?," 5.

was too little, too late. In November of 1972, voters in Denver, and in Colorado generally, soundly rejected further public funding to plan and host the 1976 Winter Games. It was the first and only instance in modern Olympic history in which a city declined the host the Games after submitting the winning bid.

The election represented a stunning reversal for the coalition of pro-growth interests behind the Olympics effort in Colorado, and seemed to portend a sweeping political realignment in the state on the basis of preserving the state's "quality of life." The trend continued into 1974, when former state representative Dick Lamm, a fiery environmentalist and anti-growth advocate, parlayed his prominent role in the anti-Olympics movement into a successful gubernatorial bid, while fellow environmentalist Gary Hart won election to the US Senate. It appeared as if environmentalism had become the new political orthodoxy.

In retrospect, however, the Olympics defeat and subsequent election of high profile environmentalists did not constitute as great a political sea change as many thought. As governor for instance, Lamm found himself constrained by the need to balance competing constituencies and interests. Meanwhile, in Colorado's rural areas, a movement called the "Sagebrush Rebellion" challenged the notion of wilderness preservation as a legitimate use of federal land, and helped guide the national Republican Party toward an increasingly anti-environmental stance.⁶

Nevertheless, the defeat of the Olympics was a formative moment in the modern history of Denver and Colorado, and a definitive symbolic break with the early post-war governing ethos of pro-growth boosterism. In a sense, the vote was a marker of how

⁶ See R. McGregor Cawley, *Federal Land, Western Anger: The Sagebrush Rebellion and Environmental Politics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

much the state had matured as a polity since World War II; its democratic machinery now tasked with containing and managing multiple powerful and incompatible civic visions. The rejection of the Olympics shattered the illusion of an enduring pro-growth consensus among Coloradoans, and showed the state for the roiling social and political cauldron that it in fact had become.

Indeed, by the time Colorado voters went to the polls in November of 1972 to decide the fate of the Olympics, the controversy was so imbued with symbolism as to approach the realm of epistemological struggle. The pro-Olympics faction fought to preserve their idealized vision of pro-growth consensus in the state, while anti-Olympics activists sought to expand and redefine notions of participatory democracy and civic identity. While the financial and political stakes were high, the emotional stakes of the Olympics voter were higher still.

At CCF, the youthful activists who had taken on and beaten the most powerful political and business interests in the state appeared gratified but unsurprised by the outcome. For those who had been most active in promoting and planning for the Games, however, it was as if the earth had suddenly reversed its axis. Though many considered themselves progressively-minded, they found it difficult to understand precisely what kind of impulse drove the sudden urge toward anti-growth—particularly when so many of the most vociferous opponents to new immigrants were themselves recent transplants to the region. Defeated and now embarrassed on the world stage, Denver's business and growth-minded civic leaders could no longer indulge in the comforting fiction that anti-growth was just a harmless byproduct of the city's recent economic success. The fight

over the Olympics had caught Denver's boosters unprepared, but that would not happen again.

The battle over the 1976 Olympics remains an enticing topic for historians precisely because it seems to crystallize so perfectly the countervailing forces that dictated the patterns of urban and regional growth in the modern American West. Yet while it shows off the rhetoric surrounding issues of urban and population growth to excellent effect, it is also quite easy to over-simplify the Olympics fight, and to mischaracterize its adversaries as static emblems of dichotomous political ethics. The fight was really never over the Olympics at all. It was over public space and resources: how each should be utilized, and who had the right to decide. And while most of the proposed Olympics sites at issue were deep in the mountains and well outside the Denver metropolitan area, the complex, class-inflected dynamics made the struggle all but indistinguishable from a fight over *urban* space. Moreover, for all the heated rhetoric, the nature of the argument was deeply speculative. There was no way to tell how the Olympics would affect the state—and thus the space over which the two sides were fighting also existed as a function of political narrative and cultural imagination.⁷

⁷ This argument draws upon the work of Henri Lefebvre, whose theories of the social construction of space included not only the 'physical,' but also "products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias." Space, according to Lefebvre, was socially constructed in order to "serve as a means of production...a means of control, and hence domination, of power; yet...as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it." Read through this analytical lens, the speculative argument over how the Olympics would change the landscape carried concrete significance, even though the argument took place on speculative and abstract grounds. The fight over Denver's hinterland as an imaginary landscape was, as Lefebvre put it, "also 'real' in the sense in which concrete abstractions such as commodities and money are real." When it comes to chronicling the history of place, the abstract frequently impinges on the "real," even if it bears little resemblance to what is, or what will be. How people feel about

Those who remained supportive of the Winter Olympics in Denver envisioned a showcase for their vital and dynamic city and its alpine backyard. In the prospectus prepared for the IOC, Denver Olympic planners described the Rocky Mountains as having "long offered a refuge to city dwellers from the steel and concrete environment of urban living. Those attending the...Olympic Games for any reason will find the beauty of Denver and the mountains, coupled with the excitement of Olympic competition, a stimulating experience."⁸ The state would present its best face to the world, showcasing youthful athletes soaring gracefully against a showcase alpine backdrop, receiving its reward in the form of jobs and revenue. Meanwhile, anti-Olympics activists painted a bleak picture of once pristine hillsides trampled into dust, mountain highways choked with Olympic traffic and reeking of exhaust, and hordes of new residents rushing to the overpopulated state because it looked pretty on television.

Despite their fundamental disagreement, these two prophecies of Colorado's Olympic future shared much in common. Both placed people rather than "nature" in the foreground. Both were valuatively categorical; one implying the perfectibility of the relationship between people and their environment, the other questioning whether human development could coexist with nature at all. And finally, both were no more than speculation. As *Rocky Mountain News* journalist Richard O'Reilly observed, there was no way of telling which side was right, and that determining where one stood on the

landscape strongly determines what they do with it. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 26–27.

⁸ Denver Olympic Committee, "The Denver Story: Denver U.S. Candidate for the XII Winter Olympic Games 1976," Archival/Mixed materials (Denver, CO, 1967), Denver Organizing Committee for the 1976 Winter Olympics Records, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

Olympics ultimately came down to a matter of “faith.”⁹ The episode demonstrated that the political struggles over which groups had the right—and the power—to determine the nature and character of Denver’s urban and hinterland imaginaries could be every bit as consequential as fights over control of physical land itself.

II. The City-Hinterland Conundrum

This dissertation concerns the relationship between Denver and its Rocky Mountain hinterlands. That relationship, in all its manifestations, is arguably *the* central shaping force of Denver's environmental, urban, and cultural history. To say that there is a "relationship" between city and hinterland, however, is only to posit the existence of a connection between two anthropogenic and constantly changing conceptions of space—an observation that seems at first to be blindingly obvious. Yet as historians, we continue to understand these two spaces of city and mountain hinterland as entirely separate entities, and perhaps even (still) as opposites.¹⁰ What is the *stuff* of that connection? How is it maintained? How and why has it changed over time, and how has it in turn impacted the experiences of those who lived within those spaces?

These questions form the central problematic of this dissertation, which uses Denver as a laboratory to examine the linkage between city and mountain hinterland as spaces and landscape, and to extrapolate from that linkage to add new dimensionality to existing knowledge the city’s cultural, environmental, urban and political history. The analytical framework around which this thesis is built borrows heavily from the central

⁹ Richard O’Reilly, “Growth, Funds Key Issues in Olympics Controversy,” *Rocky Mountain News*, November 1, 1972.

¹⁰ Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* opens with an examination of the roots of the dichotomy between "wilderness" and civilization in western thought. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

contention of Denis Cosgrove's seminal *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*; that landscape constitutes a form of "discourse," through which "identifiable social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations with both the land and with other human groups..."¹¹

This dissertation argues that the relationship between various social groups and the landscapes of city and mountain has historically mediated the distribution of social, economic and political power within Denver itself. In other words, how land is claimed and used in the mountain hinterland directly affects how political and economic power is projected within the city. In Denver, this mountain-city continuum separates classes of urban dwellers based on their level of access to hinterland resources. This dissertation views mountain and city in the Denver context as a single Cosgrovian discursive landscape for contesting the cultural and moral meaning of place and local identity, and periodizing place in history; witness the "old" West of the mining era vs. the "new" West of tourism. Such a construct helps transcend the stubborn dichotomy between natural and built landscapes, and mitigates the teleological declension narrative typical to urban-environmental histories in which 'urban growth' is the equivalent of nature's cancer. Most importantly, it strives for a fuller and more systematic understanding of place-as-process.

III. Linkages

Denver is not an easy city for which to claim any sort of metropolitan exceptionality. Although it now exhibits many of the urban forms that are endemic to Western cities, including edge nodes, beltways, and super-suburbs, it is archetypal of very few of these. Despite starting out as a mining depot, Denver did not long remain a

¹¹ The formulation of space and landscape as separate borrows from the central contention of Denis Cosgrove's *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, that landscape constitutes a form of "discourse through which "identifiable social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations with both the land and with other human groups..." Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), xiv.

one-industry town like Houston, or successfully cloak itself self-perpetuated myth like Dallas.¹² In terms of both the timing and patterns of its rapid urban growth, Denver followed in the footsteps of other Western cities, including Los Angeles and Phoenix, yet resisted the encroachment of outside capital and politics with a sustained single-mindedness that the former cities never did.¹³

Yet Denver's relationship to its mountain hinterland *is* an exceptional fact of its urban and environmental history, and demarcates it in profound ways from even its closest regional peers. Denver is the historical accumulation of many different relationships between its residents and the land around them. Its mountain hinterland has and continues to serve as a means of production, a site of consumption, a source of civic, cultural and personal identity, and a place for working out difficult questions about the nature of property. This relationship is integral to the city's existence; made tangible even before its founding by the minerals and metals pulled from the hinterland ground and sent to the city for assay, refining and export. Though it grew more complex with time, economic diversity and population growth, that dynamic continued to shape Denver through its formative history.

Historian Patricia Limerick and many others have noted the tendency of gold rush

¹² Harvey J. Graff, *The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹³ Despite Denver's comparatively low profile in the historiography of Western regional urbanization, there is much fine history on the city's development from its earliest days to the present. Among the best are Elliot West's sweeping *Contested Plains* and Stephen Leonard and Thomas J. Noel's *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*. See Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1990); Elliott West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, & the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Richard Hogan, *Class and Community in Frontier Colorado* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1990); Gunther Paul Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver*, Urban Life in America Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1975); Lyle W Dorsett, *The Queen City: A History of Denver*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1986); William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

miners, when thrown together in the diggings, to bring order out of potential chaos on the basis of property rights.¹⁴ While these informal arrangements did not forestall all conflict over land and resources in the gold mining camps of the frontier American West, they were hailed by observers of the era as examples of the peculiarly European genius for social organization. Fighting over property after it had been claimed, Limerick writes, was “clearly not in the interests of the dominant goal, the developing and marketing of available resources.”¹⁵ In practice, achieving that goal meant first clearing the land of competing conceptions of land use.

For many scholars of “new urban history,” urbanization-as-process has become a key framework for positing a theoretically unified post-war American West. Works such as Carl Abbott’s *Metropolitan Frontier* emphasized “common patterns in Western urban development, and strove to stimulate further investigation of suggested regularities and patterns.”¹⁶ For Abbott and other “regionalizers,” Denver generally falls somewhere in the middle of the pack—a composite of regional urban archetypes like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas or El Paso, but not, in itself, a trendsetter. The fusion of environmental and urban history, along with the more recent movement toward urban specificity, allows Denver to claim a fuller and more nuanced space in the historiography of Western urbanization. The revised and expanded notion of conservationism advanced

¹⁴ The importance of control in this analysis builds on Patricia Limerick’s seminal *The Legacy of Conquest*, which became a key text in the “New West” movement during the 1980s. Limerick sought to replace the classic Turnerian Frontier Thesis, which separated the history of the West into pre- and post-frontier eras, with a new framework that emphasized Western history’s essential continuity of American and white conquest and domination of native land and people. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, NY: Norton, 1987).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

¹⁶ Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (University of Arizona Press, 1995), xxii; Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities*, Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), xxii; Carl Abbott, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America*, Reprint. (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2010); *The Urban West* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 2000).

in this dissertation offers new insights into the development of both Denver's hinterland resources and urban power. The result is a story that, among other things, complicates the traditional bifurcation of modern Western urban history into pre- and post-World War II eras, and challenges the notion that conservationism was always inimical to urban growth.

In adopting this approach, *City of Mountains* joins other recent environmental urban histories that follow and build upon the insights of William Cronon's seminal work on Chicago and its hinterland, *Nature's Metropolis*. First among American historians to systematically analyze the historical relationship between a city and its hinterland from an explicitly environmental vantage point, Cronon's book set a new standard for scholars seeking to understand how urban agglomerations historically claimed—and developed in tandem with—their resource bases.¹⁷ Kathleen Brosnan's 2002 book *Uniting Mountain and Plain* adopts elements of Cronon's approach to explain how Denver emerged on top in the 19th century scramble for “urban primogeniture” among the “Front Range” cities of Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo.¹⁸ Matthew Klinge's *Emerald City* on the environmental history of Seattle, Michael Logan's *Desert Cities* on Phoenix and Tucson, Robert Gottlieb's *Reinventing Los Angeles*, Martin Melosi and Joseph Pratt's *Energy Metropolis* on Houston and the Gulf Coast, and Char Miller's *On the Border* on the environmental history of San Antonio, have announced the emergence of a new scholarly trend toward “urban particularism” in the environmental history of the urban American

¹⁷ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1991). Cronon's work builds upon previous scholarship on metropolitan-hinterland relationships that focused on the politics and economics of urban imperialism. For a strong historiography of earlier literature on regional urbanization, see Carl Abbott, “Frontiers and Sections: Cities and Regions in American Growth,” *American Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (January 1, 1985): 395–410.

¹⁸ Kathleen A. Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

West.¹⁹ Each of these works focuses to some degree on the unique relationships between specific cities and their hinterlands, using it to place urban and environmental history in new and fruitful conversation. Taking a related approach, historian David Stradling's *Making Mountains* examines the influence of New York City's urban growth on the Catskills region of New York, and charts the area's gradual transformation from a "wild" to a semi-urbanized environment.²⁰ Jennifer Light's recent book, *The Nature of Cities*, interrogates the historical relationship between the science of ecology and urban planning in the early 20th century, offering yet another model for writing integrated environmental and urban history.²¹

In joining this emerging strain of scholarship, *City of Mountains* emphasizes the importance of particularism and place for both environmental and urban studies. It is possible, of course, to view post-war environmental activism in Colorado, including the effort to defeat the 1976 Olympic Winter Games, as just another NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) movement, with analogues in Salt Lake City, Portland, or Boise. But this approach cannot account either for the strongly local and place-based contours that shaped the debate, or the unique consequences of such an episode. Pan-regional and global urbanist surveys and comparisons have made and will continue to make important contributions to our existing understanding of cities as cogs in the larger systems of

¹⁹ Matthew W. Klinger, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Michael F. Logan, *Desert Cities: The Environmental History of Phoenix and Tucson* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Robert Gottlieb, *Reinventing Los Angeles: Nature and Community in the Global City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Martin V. Melosi and Joseph A. Pratt, *Energy Metropolis: An Environmental History of Houston and the Gulf Coast* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007); Char Miller, *On the Border: An Environmental History of San Antonio* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

²⁰ David Stradling, *Making Mountains: New York City and the Catskills* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007).

²¹ Jennifer S. Light, *The Nature of Cities: Ecological Visions and the American Urban Professions, 1920-1960* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

commerce, politics and culture, yet it is difficult to fully account for the histories of American cities, or of American environmentalism, without placing them within a relative context. For most of American history, that context has been local.

Borrowing insights from Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, this study also adopts and refines the concept of an "urban imaginary;" a sense of urban place that extended far beyond the city's physical borders.²² Many of the fiercest and most consequential battles over hinterland resources, including the 1976 Winter Olympics, took place largely within this cultural, political, and entirely notional realm. The borders of Denver's urban imaginary ranged far beyond its physical boundaries, and fed Denverites' sense of their city as a regional powerhouse. The emergence of a powerful conservation movement in Denver during the early 1960s offers another example of the power of imagined landscape. Seeing the mountains as an extension of the suburban backyard, these activists pushed for changes in land use policies in accordance with their priorities of outdoor recreation and wilderness preservation.

The story of the mountains tells the tale of the city. Denver's early years are essentially a tale of consolidation, as the people who ran the city gradually came to control the mines, the railroads, the water and the banks. A furious first few decades of growth and boosterism saw this accomplished, allowing Denver's business, financial, and political elites to choose a markedly different path of urban development for Denver than their peers in other up-and-coming Western cities like Los Angeles, Dallas and Phoenix. The experience of Denver's early urban elites taught them that the surest path to personal wealth and urban stability was in "mining the miners," and parlaying the valuable ore

²² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

they brought back from the high country into transportation, infrastructure, financial and communication networks.²³ By the 1890s, they had gathered enough capital to self-finance truly remunerative undertakings, such as large mining operations, railroads, and municipal water delivery.²⁴ As Kathleen Brosnan has shown in *Uniting Mountain and Plain*, each of these investments closed the distance between city and hinterland, enhanced Denver's autonomy, and strengthened the municipal and regional grip of its tight-knit elites.

The linkage between hinterland and urban power is particularly visible in the historical evolution of Denver's water resources. From a motley collection of fly-by-night ditch companies eventually emerged a single, powerful and privately held water monopoly, which wielded immense power over the city's politics and development. After becoming a public utility in 1918, the Denver Water Board nonetheless continued to strengthen and consolidate its control over the region's water. In both its direct and indirect impacts, the Denver Water Board and its predecessors have powerfully shaped the physical and social space of Denver as a city, while expanding its sphere of influence deep into the interior reaches of the Colorado Rockies. As a "public monopoly," the Denver Water Board amassed the clout and authority to strongly shape the city's growth patterns, and deal an important blow to federal reclamation efforts in the post-war West.²⁵

²³ Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*, 1–9; West, *The Contested Plains*, 207–235; Stephen J Leonard and Thomas J Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 1st ed. (Niwot, Colo: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 22–42.

²⁴ Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*, 10–38.

²⁵ Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1999); Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s-1990s* (Berkeley, CA: University of

Post-war suburban growth also changed Denver's urban-hinterland relationship. Suburbanization exacerbated racial segregation in the city. As the federal government offered inducements to middle class whites in many American cities to move toward the urban fringe, it simultaneously erected barriers to other racial groups.²⁶ Denver's Mexican-American, Japanese, and African-American communities experienced this segregated post-war exodus to the urban fringe not just in their immediate communities, but in their access to the hinterland. Prior to World War II, Denver's African-American community, though small by the standards of cities like Los Angeles and Houston, sustained a thriving outdoor culture of hunting, fishing, and other forms of mountain recreation. The concentric expansion of suburbia, coupled with the city's purposive

California Press, 1992); Douglas E. Kupel, *Fuel for Growth: Water and Arizona's Urban Environment* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Donald J. Pisani, *To Reclaim a Divided West: Water, Law, and Public Policy, 1848-1902*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1992); Donald J. Pisani, *Water and American Government: The Reclamation Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 1902-1935* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York, NY: Viking, 1986); Jessica B. Teisch and Ebooks Corporation Limited, *Engineering Nature Water, Development, and the Global Spread of American Environmental Expertise* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1995); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁶ For more on the segregated nature of post-war suburban growth, see Andrew Wiese, "'The House I Live In,' Race, Class, and African American Suburban Dreams in the Post-war United States," in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin Michael Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 99–119; David M. Freund, "Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America," in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, *Historical Studies of Urban America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11–32; Mike Davis and American Council of Learned Societies, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, New ed. (London, UK: Verso, 2006); *Residential Apartheid: The American Legacy* (Los Angeles, CA: CAAS Publications, 1994); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

transition to automobility as the prime mode of transportation during the 1950s, made it more difficult for African-Americans to access the mountain hinterland.²⁷ As a result, the pre-war culture of mountain recreation in Denver's African-American communities largely disappeared, and the hinterland itself became increasingly inscribed as "white space." As they did during the Olympics debate, these communities fought back, using the political tools outlined by environmental justice scholars like Andrew Hurley, not only against social and cultural disinvestment in their neighborhoods, but also against their isolation and voicelessness in matters pertaining to the use of the mountain hinterland.²⁸ Indeed, each of these historical sites tells a story of consensus and competition over the use of the hinterland, and of continual refinement of allocation of power and the meaning of place. None of Denver's history is truly explicable without reference to its mountain hinterland. In fact, Denver does not exist without it.

Lastly, by expanding current notions of conservation, this study uses Denver as a case study for challenging the conventional partition of natural and constructed environments. It demonstrates the changing aims and methodologies of urban-based claims to the hinterlands of the American West after World War II, while contributing to

²⁷ In its consideration of how highways transformed the transportation geography of Denver, this work builds on that of historian Owen Gutfreund, who chronicled Denver's transition to a car-based city after World War II. Owen Gutfreund, *20th Century Sprawl: How Highways Transformed America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also, *Ibid.*; *Just Transportation: Dismantling Race and Class Barriers to Mobility* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1997); *Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism & New Routes to Equity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2004); Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York, NY: Viking, 1997).

²⁸ Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). For a perceptive analysis of how Colorado's mountain landscape has been "whitened" since World War II, see Annie Gilbert Coleman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing," *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 4 (November 1, 1996): 583-614.

existing scholarship on Western urban, environmental and water history, as well as the history of social movements and land use planning. This approach allows a fuller understanding of how urban and environmental histories interact, while recognizing that no space on earth is either completely synthetic or completely wild.

This work attempts to avoid adopting a teleological approach that ends in a declension of conquest, growth, or any of the other oft-used tropes of Western history. It strives to recognize that while Patricia Limerick's argument of continuity continues to remain relevant, the history of the American West also constantly disrupts itself; its trends and themes stopping suddenly only to pop up in a different form somewhere else. This dissertation instead adopts the approach of carefully picking sites of contest and negotiation over the purpose, use, and moral meaning of land to demonstrate the non-linear nature of the Mountain West's change over time.

Informed by the tools of cultural geography, this dissertation fits within a large and growing body of academic work in cultural geography, literary criticism, environmental psychology and environmental and urban history. It specifically seeks evidence of the use and manipulation of space to claim power, identity and meaning, and dusts off an old term, "conservation" to describe the manner by which various groups and individuals assign meaning, lay claim to, and make use of specific geographies in and near the city of Denver.²⁹ While not an environmental history of Denver per se, this dissertation recognizes the role that the environment plays in the history of city and hinterland.

IV. Conservation in Context

How does one craft a place history that ties urban and hinterland together? This study approaches the task by refining the meaning of conservation to encompass both the

²⁹ Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (April 1, 1995): 182–192.

appropriation and utilization of natural resources, and the relationship between control of hinterland resources and urban social control. In short, conservation is how this study conceives of, and articulates, the relationship between Denver and its hinterland. In Denver, urban power was won and lost in the mountains.

The meaning of conservation changed profoundly over the past 150 years of American history. Once the primary referent for those who advocated on behalf of reform in humans' relationship with their environment, the word has since been assimilated under the broader and less ideologically coherent banner of environmentalism. Even in its heyday, from the early 20th century through the 1960s, self-proclaimed "conservationists" continually debated what the word meant, and who could lay true claim to the title. This dissertation represents yet another evolution for a word with a long and storied history.

The redefinition of conservation begins with a short lexicographical detour. The word "conservation" is an example of what is known as a verbal noun, meaning that its root is an action; in this case, to conserve. The verb root itself from the Latin *conservare*, which means to keep, or to preserve. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word found its way into English usage in the 15th century, and sprouted derivations into politics ("conservatism") and music ("conservatory") during the mid-19th century. It was not until the 20th century in fact that the term assumed an explicitly environmental meaning.

Within the last 20 years, environmental scholars have begun tracing the origins behind the pervasive and stubborn dichotomy that most Americans place between themselves and what they consider to be "nature." Environmental historian William

Cronon has argued that this binary owes itself in part to ancient human conceit of “wilderness;” a Norse-derived cognate denoting those places beyond the reach of human civilization. But as that reach lengthened over the 19th century, writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and especially John Muir, began to alter the term’s meaning from something threatening and dangerous to something precious and fragile.³⁰ But this revised view of wilderness left the dichotomy between humanity and nature intact—merely assigning new social and cultural value to the same extrinsic and primeval qualities that had made wilderness seem so forbidding to past generations. This formulation still uses wilderness as opposite of civilization, only now for the purposes of critiquing rather than exalting the latter, and seems to be the byproduct of dissatisfaction with industrialization and urbanization.

In a country increasingly characterized by its voracious development of land and resources, such a conceit required ever-greater effort and argument to sustain. And therein, argues Cronon, lies the crux of the wilderness conundrum: “If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall.”³¹ Ultimately, Americans (and indeed, most Westerners) must either halt further development of landscape (even as parks), or come to accept that our received cultural notions of “howling wilderness,” as shaped by writers and thinkers

³⁰ William Cronon, “The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co, 1995); Stephen R. Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Samuel P Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999).

³¹ Cronon, “The Trouble With Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” 80–81.

living in far different eras, no longer describe the world we inhabit.

Cronon's insight traces a fault line that runs back to the formative years of American conservationism, when the country was still coming to grips with the breadth and magnitude of the resources that technological innovation and westward expansion continued to yield. But if Thoreau, Emerson, and especially Muir argued for the preservation of a kind of wilderness predicated on its independence and remoteness from any human presence, there were other kinds as well.

One of them, articulated by forester and politician Gifford Pinchot, explicitly rejected the notion that unpeopled wilderness represented the highest and best use of any land. Rooted in the teachings of Dr. Bernhard Fernow and European forestry techniques, Pinchot's notion of conservation bore close philosophical resemblance to Benthamite utilitarianism. While Muir spoke of "precious mountain temples" in his thundering condemnations of Hetch Hetchy Dam, a contemporary Pinchot thought of land more in terms of "sustained yield" and "wise use."³² Offended by the heedless clear cutting of American forests for lumber, and by the unscrupulous monopolies that such exploitation permitted, Pinchot made it his mission to create a powerful, federal regulatory structure for natural resource management, and to end the federal government's distribution of public land into private hands.³³ A man of the world and student of politics, Pinchot's

³² Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, Conservation Classics (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1987); Donald J. Pisani, "Forests and Conservation, 1865-1890," in *American Forests: Nature, Culture, and Politics*, ed. Char Miller (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

³³ Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*; Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington, D.C: Island Press/Shearwater Books, 2001). For more on fraud and the establishment of railroad monopolies in the American West, see Richard White, "Information, Markets, and Corruption: Transcontinental Railroads in the Gilded Age," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 1 (June 2003): 19-43.

conservationism strove to impose a measure of progressive-era rationality, integrity and justice to the human relationship with nature. Muir, by contrast, was what historian Donald Worster characterized a “frontier evangelist,” affirming the “rights of nature to be free of the arrogant rule of ‘Lord Man.’”³⁴ Though they saw the relationship between people and nature from fundamentally different viewpoints, the two men became instant friends upon meeting in 1892, with Muir adopting the informal role of mentor to the younger Pinchot. But the politics of conservation began to intrude over the following decade, as Pinchot’s political career took off. The drawn-out controversy over Hetch Hetchy Dam in Yosemite National Park merely completed their schism.³⁵

Yet Muir and Pinchot, credited as standard-bearers (if not progenitors) of the respective “aesthetic” and “utilitarian” branches of American conservationism, were in fact not nearly so far apart as they tend to appear in retrospect. Both Muir and Pinchot were, as environmental historian Donald Pisani has written, “nineteenth-century Cassandras.”³⁶ Pessimists in an age of optimism, they were united in their shared

³⁴ Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 194–195.

³⁵ Both Muir and Pinchot saw the Hetch Hetchy fight as a matter of social as well as environmental equity. Pinchot, who maintained that he wished it could be otherwise, argued on the dam’s behalf from the utilitarian principle that the Yosemite acreage at issue would be of greater value to a much larger number of people as a reservoir than if preserved in its natural state. Muir believed the entire project to be the the undemocratic and unnecessary brainchild of greedy San Francisco developers and officials. Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*, 138–144; Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 122–198; Gerald D. Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West*, The Modern American West (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 135–140; Joseph M Petulla, *American Environmentalism: Values, Tactics, Priorities*, 1st ed. (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1980), 24–42.

³⁶ Pisani, “Forests and Conservation, 1865-1890,” 28. For an in-depth treatment of an even earlier environmental pessimist, see David Lowenthal, *George Perkins Marsh, Prophet of Conservation* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2000).

appreciation of the limits of both nature and human progress. As men of notoriety and privilege, both moved easily among the nation's elite.³⁷ Similarly, they both divided their time between city and hinterland—a comparative rarity in pre-automotive America. Finally, both were fundamentally creatures of politics, who developed and advanced their ideals in the crucibles of the press and public policy.

It does a historical disservice to the American tradition of conservation, however, to overlook its organic development among the people who settled, even if only temporarily, the mining towns, lumber camps, and early cities of the American West. Like Muir and Pinchot, they too faced the question of how to impose social and economic order over the resources ranged before them. There were few specific precedents, or even general traditions, from which they could draw upon in apportioning land and water, giving rise to the brief but legendary period of anarchy for which the West was becoming known.³⁸ But violence and uncertainty were inefficient, and miners, farmers, ranchers and loggers quickly began developing rudimentary systems of apportionment of natural resources.

Like other Westerners of the era, from the time of their city's founding in 1859, Denverites grappled with how to properly order their complex relationship with the city's

³⁷ It is hardly coincidence, for example, that as a young forester, Pinchot was able to hone his craft on the huge estate of George W. Vanderbilt in North Carolina—employment he secured through his family's friendships with the estate's architect, Richard Morris Hunt and its landscape architect, Frederick W. Olmsted. Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*, 101–105.

³⁸ Historian Karl Jacoby offers an excellent primer on “outsider” conservationism in his book, *Crimes Against Nature*. Whether poaching or stealing lumber, transgressions against American conservation laws and customs, Jacoby argues, are as important in shaping American traditions of conservation as were its “prophets.” Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

hinterland, which contains some of the most rugged, picturesque, and productive areas in the mainland United States. They negotiated the same ancient binaries pitting town against hinterland, nature against civilization, and primitive against modern, leaving little room for any middle ground. Yet it is in the middle ground between these dichotomies where much of Denver's history unfolded.

Among the most historically consequential of these systems was the doctrine of prior appropriation, which assigned water rights according to claim date and usage—the basic framework of a legal system that remains in use today in many of the Western states.³⁹ The emergence of this doctrine serves as a prime example of conservation as it is outlined above, as it ordered the claiming and use of the one resource that is requisite for all human activity. Shaped by the social, economic, and environmental conditions of the early mining camps, the Doctrine became the legal basis for many of the most important subsequent battles over water in the American West, from the division of the Colorado River in 1924 to the fight against the proposed Grand Canyon dams in the 1960s.

Organized both thematically and chronologically, this study focuses on strategic events and sites of consensus and conflict over the appropriation and use of mountain land and resources. Chapter One chronicles the settling of Denver and the emergence of its early mining-based human geography and political economy. Borrowing from an extensive collection of excellent scholarship on early mining in Colorado, including Kathleen Brosnan's *Uniting Mountain and Plain*, this thesis explores how Denver

³⁹ See Fiege, *Irrigated Eden*; Hundley, *The Great Thirst*; Pisani, *To Reclaim a Divided West*; Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

positioned itself among the booming mountain mining towns to establish its dominance over the mountain region, and in turn, how its early development reflected the economic and social forces at work in the alpine diggings themselves. The collapse of the silver economy following the panic of 1893 becomes a turning point of sorts, confirming Denverites in their suspicion of outside capital and federal interference, and informing the state's slow turn toward tourism as a major industry in the years to come.

Chapter Two views the development of Denver's mountain tourism industry against the twin backdrops of mining deindustrialization in the Colorado Rockies, and the development of an urban hierarchy within the confines of the city itself. It recounts how Denverites made their city a center of tourism during the early 20th century, and examines in depth the lengths to which traditionally excluded urban classes—particularly Denver's African-American communities—went to claim their own portion of mountain hinterland, with all of the urban benefits that conveyed. Specifically, Chapter Two examines the micro-history of Lincoln Hills, the only African-American resort community west of the Mississippi River, which was established in 1922 and endured until the mid-1960s.

Chapter Three traces the 20th century history of Denver's business class, and the role of the city's geography in their strategies to claim and maintain urban and regional dominance. What emerges from the story of the early years of Denver's elite is a tale of claiming mountain land to impose and preserve internal urban hierarchy. Through mining, railroads, banks, and public service industries, Denver's wealthiest were at once able to secure their place at the top of the urban heap, and to shield Denver itself from incursions by predatory eastern capital. Denver's first generation of business and

political leaders established a pattern of urban development that would persist through the end of World War II, in which economic and political power was won in the mountain hinterland, and exercised in the city.

The pattern also served to keep Denver relatively compact throughout the interwar years, when cities like Los Angeles and Phoenix were expanding by leaps and bounds. Because Denver's elites derived the bulk of their wealth from its hinterland, they were less inclined than their peers in other Western cities to exploit urban growth for profit. In fact, Denver's tight-knit banking community actively discouraged Denver's expansion through its control of a tight money supply, which helped to minimize urban land speculation. The banks received support in their negative control efforts from the Denver Water Board, which also took a comparatively conservative approach to expanding its water service beyond Denver's city limits. The picture that emerges from this history challenges the notion that urban growth was a perpetual or universal imperative in the cities of the American West. By emphasizing how Denver's economic relationship with its mountains served to indirectly slow its urban and population growth in the years before World War II, this chapter adds to current understanding of how the landscapes of their surrounding regions have shaped the historical development of Western cities. This chapter also traces the first emergence of a full-speed ahead pro-growth mindset in Denver, which was associated with progressive business interests, characterized by a newly revitalized Denver Chamber of Commerce. World War II often serves as a sharp dividing line between a pre-war rural and post-war urban West. Most Denverites, however, did not experience the early post-war years as an instant boom of pent-up economic energy. Facing shortages of water, capital and construction materials,

Denver's post-war demobilization was more a limp than a gallop, as residents, journalists and businessmen worried about a possible slide back into financial depression. The city's elites used the years of the late 1940s to retrench behind their banking and industrial bulwarks. But a new constituency, announced by the election of a dynamic young mayor named James "Quigg" Newton in 1947, signaled the rising discontent of Denver's middle and business classes with the deliberately slow pace of the city's economic growth. Pressure to liberalize bank lending, and new real estate development competition in Denver's downtown from "outsiders," like New York real estate mogul William Zeckendorf, began to shake the foundations of Denver's pyramid-like political and economic structures. By the mid-1950s, as the explosive growth of relatively new industries like tourism, technology and federal administration made clear, Denver's business elites could not reprise their pre-war role as the arbiters and limiters of urban growth.

Chapter Four examines the racial dimensions of Denver's sudden rapid growth, and catalogs the city's increasingly rigid residential segregation. It evaluates the way in which suburban growth, along with the racially exclusionary financing tactics of the FHA and homeowners associations gradually imposed a concentric geography on Denver, with non-whites and poverty both concentrated toward the center, barricaded from direct cultural or geographic contact with the mountain hinterland.

Chapter Five evaluates the reactions of Denver's city government to the social, economic and political changes of the early post-war era. The Denver planning department's misplaced faith that automobiles would promote urban infill and limit urban sprawl helped to fuel growth and civic fracture along its urban fringe. It catalogs the

efforts of municipal planners to cope with the fallout of Denver's rapid urban growth, and the development of a true, 20th century American "inner-city" of ghettos and blighted, racialized neighborhoods. Denver's attempts to alleviate these divisions through the use of highways and other widely used mid-century tools of urban planning, far from muting the discord and divisions between city and suburb, made them more acute. In Denver's case, highway-based planning essentially turned center and suburban city culturally and economically away from one another, the former focused inward, and the latter increasingly focused on the hinterland. The gradual alienation of these populations would continue throughout the 1950s and 1960s, only to explode into violence during the bussing controversies and Denver-based Chicano activism of the early 1970s.

Chapter Six considers the Denver Water Board's historic legacy as a steward and conservator of water, autonomy and regional influence. Notably, the Denver Water Board is the only major metropolitan water authority in the arid West to achieve and maintain vertical integration from source to tap. The Water Board's operational independence stems from its history of aggressively appropriating water rights in the Colorado Rockies, self-financing its physical expansion, and emphasizing wise water use. Each, in its own way, is an example of conservation as described above. Throughout the 1950s, for example, Denver's water managers sharply curtailed new service outside city limits, buying the Denver Water Board enough time to overcome the Bureau of Reclamation's resistance to its proposed construction of new raw water capture facilities on the opposite side of the Continental Divide. While Water Board lawyers legitimized the agency's expanded claims to mountain resources in federal court and Senate hearings, its service restrictions helped it weather the drought and population growth of the 1950s

without asking other water agencies or the federal government for help, as had happened in Phoenix, Las Vegas, and other cities. With the completion of its Blue River Project in 1963, the Denver Water Board emerged from self-imposed austerity with its independence fully intact. As incompatible as conservation and urban growth seem today, my work demonstrates that the Denver Water Board consistently and profitably pursued the former as an effective means of promoting the latter well into the 1960s.

Denver's water history entered a new era with the emergence of a powerful, middle- and professional-class environmental movement in Denver during the late 1960s and 1970s. While the Denver Water Board's model of conservation claimed the mountain hinterland to advance urban expansion and local sovereignty, this new strain of grassroots conservationists claimed the same landscape for its intrinsic recreational, scientific, cultural, and spiritual value. Its highest use was not, they argued, as a source or storage site for drinking water, but as primeval wilderness purposely unchanged by human hands. The Colorado environmental movement also democratized state water politics in ways that the Denver Water Board found deeply unsettling.

Chapter Seven contrasts the use of space by urban activists with the emerging conservation movement in the predominantly white, middle-class suburbs of Denver and the Front Range. This movement, concerned at first with preserving the area for recreation, became increasingly connected to a larger ecological critique of American industrialization and use of land during the 1960s, while simultaneously asserting increasing political control over the meaning and use of land in Denver's mountain hinterland. Denver-based activists took the lead in redefining popular understandings and approaches to industrial ecology, federal reclamation, and ultimately, to humans

relationship to land and nature itself. The Rocky Mountains served as their mascot, laboratory and battleground, making Colorado's 1960s-era conservation movement one of the most organized and powerful in the country. Finally, this chapter considers the reform movement characterized by new town development in Denver's suburbs as a reaction to the increasing cultural heterogeneity of the central city. It focuses on the developments of George Wallace, who built the Denver Technological Center so that suburbanites would have no need to travel to the city for work or for leisure. My dissertation recounts the numerous clashes between these competing visions of conservation, concluding with the rejection of the 1976 Winter Olympics, and the rise of the Sagebrush Rebellion in the late 1970s.

Chapter Eight considers the cultural context of Colorado's environmental movement, and puts the aforementioned simultaneous, urban-based reform movements into conversation with one another, and reveals important insights about the way in which Denverites developed their identity of place during these crucial years. The results were as mixed and variegated as the movements themselves, and their impacts are still very much present in the modern geography of the city of Denver and its hinterlands.

Finally, the epilogue recounts the gradual dissolution of all of these reform movements against the backdrop of a rising conservative backlash against all things urban in the West. Critiques which began with the so-called "Sagebrush Rebellion" became the intellectual and ideological bedrock of the peculiar Western style of conservatism, which was then adopted by the suburbs as a critique of the racialized "inner city." While seeking to avoid falling into the trap of declension, or overemphasizing the transformative importance of the conservative movement of the

Reagan years on the American West, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that environmentalism, urban-based civil rights activism, and even “New Town” building ceased to be operative types of urban reform by the onset of the 1980s. Using records from the movements themselves, this dissertation offers hypotheses as to why the “space and place” question relinquished its role as the most important political question in Denver and the West during these years, and what that turn portends for the future development of the region.

Original research for this project includes previously unexamined legal, engineering, and statistical materials, as well as personal correspondence, recordings, and news reports from a number of archives, including the Western History Collection of the Denver Public Library, the archival holdings of Colorado State University, the University of Denver, the University of Colorado at Boulder, University of Colorado at Denver, and Colorado College. It also utilizes records from state and federal archives, and, for the latter years of this study, from the personal files of the historical actors themselves. The author interviewed many historical subjects for this study, and their recollections help to inform the context of this dissertation as well.

By expanding current notions of conservation, this study highlights Denver’s environmental history in order to challenge the conventional partition of natural and constructed environments. It demonstrates the changing aims and methodologies of urban-based claims to the hinterlands of the American West after World War II, while contributing to existing scholarship on Western urban, environmental and water history, as well as the history of social movements and land use planning.

Chapter 1: Beginning, 1859-1900

I. Pride of Place

For most city histories, to begin at the beginning implies answering a seemingly simple question: “Of all places, why *here*?” What combination of natural and human-created circumstances allowed for the development and persistence of human habitation on this particular plot of ground? Sometimes the answer is made manifest in a city’s geography. Chicago, for instance, was a naturally advantageous meeting and trading ground in the American frontier economy long before becoming a hub of transportation and industry.⁴⁰ As a port city on the Mississippi River, and as a “gateway to the West,” St. Louis’ creation story hinges on the movement of goods and people in all four directions. Dallas emerged out of commercial necessity, as both a depot and marketplace for prime commodities like beef and wheat. In each instance, “first reasons” eventually sublimated into foundational civic myths, which in turn helped to create lasting notions of place and urban identity. These foundational myths became closely linked to the emerging economic and cultural relationships between these cities and their hinterlands.

Denver’s foundational myths are somewhat cloudier. Denver did not win its eventual position at the top of what historian Kathleen Brosnan has called Colorado’s “system of urban primogeniture” on the strength of its geographic location.⁴¹ The South Platte River, which courses just to the south of city’s original site, is too shallow to navigate. From where the first tents and shacks stood, a treeless and largely waterless

⁴⁰ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*.

⁴¹ Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*, 8.

expanse of high plains (which explorer Zebulon Pike famously called the “Great American Desert”) stretches north, south, and eastward for hundreds of miles. Immediately to the west, the forbidding peaks of the Rocky Mountains rising over 14,000 feet, hinder easy travel.

Like many other Western towns, Denver sprouted and took root because of gold. The first discovery determined its location, and the second its long-term viability. The initial strike came in early 1858, when a small group of prospectors from Georgia stumbled upon trace amounts of gold in Cherry Creek, near the heart of Denver’s modern downtown. They set up a small mining camp, naming it Auraria in honor of a small goldfield in their home state. Word quickly spread, and the purported amount of gold in Cherry Creek and the nearby South Platte grew with each retelling. The lingering effects of a financial panic in 1857 encouraged many to try their luck out west. Roughly reprising the early stages of the California Gold Rush a decade earlier, hopeful prospectors began streaming into the Front Range, along with merchants and town promoters, intent on “mining the miners.”

In mid-1858, two town companies claimed plots on opposite banks of the Cherry Creek, near the original gold findings. The west bank settlement was founded by a group of prospectors from Georgia, which they named Auraria after a goldfield in their home state. On one side was St. Charles, formed by a group of prospectors from Lawrence, Kansas. Leaving a single man to guard their claim, they returned to Kansas later that same year to petition for a town charter from the territorial governor. In their absence,

another Kansas party, led by General William Larimer, moved in and took over their claim, renaming it in honor of the territory's former governor, General James Denver.⁴²

By March of 1859, the rush was on, as hundreds, and eventually thousands of people made their way into the area. But even as they continued to arrive, it was clear that the so-called "Pikes Peak Gold Rush" would not be a repeat of the California Gold Rush ten years earlier. Many of these immigrants, after braving the difficult high plains crossing in the middle of winter, had the bedraggled look of refugees.⁴³ Moreover, despite all of the building activity on the banks of Cherry Creek, gold in Colorado remained more of a rumor than an established fact. The trace gold deposits in the creek beds near Denver and Auraria had played out quickly, and although prospectors were trawling the nearby hills and mountains, there were no reports of a significant strike.

It was a recipe for social instability. Far from the accustomed comforts of civilization, captive to rising prices for food and other necessities, no clear reason for being there and yet no place else to go, a growing number of desperate and angry prospectors milled around Denver's dusty streets. Some opted to risk the long and

⁴² Larimer's party almost certainly renamed St. Charles settlement after the Kansas governor in a bit of politically minded flattery. They hoped that that Gov. Denver would make their new town the county seat of massive Arapahoe County, which comprised most of present-day eastern Colorado. The gesture was for naught, however, as Denver had resigned from the governorship shortly after Larimer's group originally departed from Kansas.

⁴³ The Smoky Hill Trail was the most direct—but also the most dangerous—route from Kansas to Denver. Lack of water and food led to instances of starvation and cannibalism. One immigrant, having chosen a different route, described meeting survivors of the Smoky Hill route along their trail: "Some of them started with horses, some with mules, and some with oxen, but the most of them now were without either. Their teams having been deprived of food and water, perished, and their wagons were burned to cook with...One of the lady emigrants here became a mother. Her child lived but a few hours, was buried upon the margin of a convenient brook, which from this circumstance, has taken the name Infant Creek." Ralph Moody and Mark L. Gardner, *Stagecoach West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 162–163.

difficult journey back east, while others threatened to burn the town, or even to hang its promoters, whose glowing descriptions had lured them so far from home.⁴⁴ Finally, in May of 1859, word of a strike in Gregory Gulch, a promising new placer field in the foothills west of the city, emptied the town, relieving tensions and restoring a measure of optimism.

As it suddenly became clear that the Rockies did indeed contain enough gold to sustain another large gold rush, the rivalry between Auraria and Denver City assumed more serious and lasting consequences. Many believed the winner would become the *entrepôt* to a rich mining region. During Denver's first two years, the tension between the towns frequently found expression in violence. One early resident recalled having to take a rifle with her on even the most menial errands because of the "potshots being taken at each other by the public spirited citizens of both sides."⁴⁵

The community's strains were immediately visible to 28-year-old William Byers upon his arrival at the banks of Cherry Creek in April of 1859. Byers had come from Omaha, a town he had helped to plat and promote. But his real estate investments there had languished due to the 1857 financial panic, and the mere possibility of gold in the Rocky Mountains had been sufficient to lure him further west. While most newcomers to Colorado came to work with pick and pan, Byers and two partners came with a printing press, planning to start a daily newspaper. Byers' experience in Omaha had convinced him that town promotion was largely a game of perception. For new and unknown

⁴⁴ S.J. Leonard and T.J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (University Press of Colorado, 1990), 11.

⁴⁵ Edmund W. Carr, interviewed by Donald Baldwin. March 20, 1972. "Oral history." Denver: Denver Public Library/Western History Collection, 6.

settlements like Denver, overly boastful claims of hinterland riches, civic order, and urban sophistication were often the best means of attracting people and capital. Byers got his newspaper, called the *Rocky Mountain News*, up and running in matter of months, establishing himself as the “voice” of the new town. Among the first of his many services to the fledgling town, Byers helped end the breach between Denver and Auraria towns.

In the summer of 1859, Denver hosted its first high profile visitor, *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, who had stopped there on his trip from New York to San Francisco so that he could inspect the Colorado diggings, and render "disinterested" judgment on whether all of the excitement was justified. Upon returning from his examination of Gregory Gulch, Greeley acknowledged having "seen gold plainly visible in the riffles of nearly every sluice...and pan," before appending a limp warning to would-be gold seekers of the moral perils and physical hardships of prospecting life.⁴⁶ Recognizing the tremendous value of Greeley's pronouncements, Byers quickly hand-pressed 500 copies of the New York editor's report as his paper's first special feature, and sent them eastward on the next stagecoach.⁴⁷

II. An “Instant City”

In his comparative work on the early urban development of San Francisco and Denver, historian Gunther Barth notes that both the California Gold Rush and the Pikes

⁴⁶ The high plains ranked highly on the editors' list of hazards. "To attempt to cross this desert on foot," they wrote, "is madness—suicide—murder." Horace Greeley, A.D. Richardson, and Henry Villard, “The Pikes Peak Gold: Flattering Accounts from the Mines--Statement from Mr. Horace Greeley and others--A Caution,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY, June 28, 1859).

⁴⁷ Wilbur Fiske Stone, *History of Colorado* (S. J. Clarke, 1918), 783–786.

Peak Gold Rush had the peculiar and disorienting effect of compressing the human experience of time.⁴⁸ Milestones of urban development achieved over generations in other cities unfolded in San Francisco and Denver on a timescale measured in months—almost too quickly even to notice. Paced by the torrential influx of people and capital, early Denver's urban development permitted little time for reflection or planning, and deeply imbued the city's history with the qualities of evanescence, expedience, and chance.⁴⁹ Denver advanced under the constant threat of what Barth calls "spectacular collapse," perfectly exemplified by its precarious first months. Without the reassuring weight of history, or even a compelling rationale for their city's location, Denverites coalesced instead around a shared civic project of autonomy and local control.

Focused on winning the battle of what environmental historian Kathleen Brosnan has called "urban primogeniture," Denver's urban development took place within the context of its gradual capture of ever more hinterland resources—both in the mountains and on the high plains. This capture paved the way for further urban growth in Denver, which in turn created a rationale for new resource claims at ever greater distances.⁵⁰ From the very beginning, Denver's development as a city was governed by the nature and success of its hinterland resource claims, which shaped its urban growth, and allocated wealth and power.

Geology dictated that, among other things, Denver would never become another San Francisco. The majority gold deposits in the mountains nearest Denver were approximately half the age of those in the Sierras of California, and far more difficult and

⁴⁸ Barth, *Instant Cities*, xxi–xxv.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵⁰ Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*, 8.

expensive to access. Stymied in their hopes of rich surface strikes like those in California, by the middle of 1860, many of the so-called "59ers" were already leaving Colorado in bitter disappointment. Yet money from eastern investors continued to roll into Colorado by way of Denver, funding industrial-scale operations in the emerging foothill mining districts of Central City and Blackhawk. To the extent that any "gold rush" implied the movement of both people and capital to a specific locale, the Colorado gold rush differed most visibly from its California predecessor by being weighted heavily toward the latter.

Many stayed despite the region's failure to live up to the heady standards of the California Gold Rush. They built communities in the territory, as well as the rudimentary regional transportation and communication infrastructure to tie them together. Bumpy stagecoach roads wending up through the foothill canyons established permanent corridors of movement between Denver and the mountain mining districts of Blackhawk and Central City. More than any parcel of land or amount of mineral wealth, this rudimentary network of rough stagecoach roads served as the economic and political foundation of Denver's emerging class of elites.

III. The Princes of Mountain and Plain

Rocky Mountain News founder and editor William Byers soon gained allies in his quest to make Denver a regional powerhouse. Among them was John Evans, who came to Denver from Illinois in 1862 to serve as the Colorado territory's second governor. He inherited the post from William Gilpin, who was widely considered to have been a failure in the position. Evans was 48 years old when he moved to Denver from his hometown of Chicago. Born into a prominent Chicago family, Evans had already achieved success as

a medical doctor, real estate investor, and railroad promoter. As had been the case with Byers, Evans had been drawn to Colorado not on the promise of gold, but of power and influence. He hoped, in fact, that his Denver sojourn might become a stepping-stone to national politics, and the U.S. Senate.

As a territorial governor, Evans was only a marginal improvement over his predecessor. He did, however, turn out to be a masterful local and regional booster. He allied himself, both socially and politically, with William Byers and local railroad impresario David Moffat. In turn, those men brought Evans into contact with other early Denver elites, including moneymen like Jerome Chaffee, Bela Hughes, and Luther Kountze. As a group, these men formed the united core of Denver's booster community, which actively courted Eastern capital, the federal government, and the railroads. Their common fight to solicit and allocate Eastern capital during Denver's first years laid the foundation for an extraordinarily durable power structure.

For a number of years, the survival of the new town remained somewhat in doubt. The embryonic city was sorely tested by a series of natural and human-caused calamities throughout the 1860s, including successions of epidemics, floods, fires, as well as the chronic, grinding disorder that generally accompanied the mining industry.⁵¹ Denver also soon found itself in a fight with nearby Golden for railroad dominance; each vying to become a way station on the proposed transcontinental railroad being built by Union Pacific.

⁵¹ The social climate was even harsher for the few Blacks and Latinos who lived or passed through Denver. They were completely barred from accessing even the most rudimentary of city services or schools. From chance encounters on the city's dirty streets to a frontier justice system determined to ignore the very existence of minorities, racism seemed encoded in the town's DNA.

The struggle over rail was believed by all stakeholders to be a high stakes, zero sum fight for future regional dominance. In truth, however, there were few good options for building a transcontinental rail line through the mountains west of either city. The best and easiest transcontinental route anywhere in the central Rockies ran through the settlement of Cheyenne, well to the north. As it became clear that neither Denver nor Golden would be able to secure the first transcontinental line, Golden's boosters quickly began putting together the plans and funding for a spur to the main railroad, wherever it might eventually run. Denver, led by John Evans and his close associates in the Denver business community, countered with a spur railroad of their own.

Much like the fight between Auraria and Denver town companies, the race between Golden and Denver to become a railroad hub resolved itself anticlimactically. By 1870, both railroads had been built and connected to one another (outside the boundaries of both cities, of course), as well as to the national east-west line that ran through Wyoming.⁵² Denver's continued path to regional dominance was not, therefore, determined by the placement of railroads.

The year 1870 seemed to mark an end to the plagues of the previous decade, and usher in a new era of prosperity and growth. In the coming decade, Colorado's population increased by a factor of five, from just under 40,000 in 1870 to almost 200,000 ten years later.⁵³ During this same period, Denver's booster club worked to strengthen the city's nascent Boards of Trade and Immigration, a state-funded chamber of

⁵² Le Roy Reuben Hafen, *Colorado and Its People; a Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State* (New York, NY: Lewis Historical Pub. Co, 1948), 642; Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*.

⁵³ Hafen, *Colorado and Its People; a Narrative and Topical History of the Centennial State*, 78.

commerce prototype. From the ranks of Denver's swelling business community came a new crop of boosters, including James Duff, Walter Cheesman, William Gray Evans (son of former governor John Evans), and Charles Boettcher.

By the close of the 1870s, the roster of men and families who would control Denver for decades had solidified. The source of their influence was twofold: first by setting the agenda for their town by placing Denver on a path of urban growth in competition with other frontier towns, and by securing the capital to fuel that growth. It was not their personal assets that made them powerful. Although they were uniformly wealthy, they did not possess sufficient resources to finance the city's growth on their own, nor did they need to.

Instead, they financed. In fact, most of the infrastructure to sustain Denver's early expansion was purchased on credit—either from the federal government or Eastern banks. Everything from Denver's railroad to its basic city services depended on flows of cash from the East, which in turn pigeonholed the town in an enduring relationship of economic dependence that would continue well into the following century. But that dependence did not extend to Denver's emerging business elite themselves, who more often than not saw themselves as equal partners with Eastern capitalists. They secured the trust of Eastern financiers on the basis of their credit-worthiness, and in turn offered the undeniable value of their firsthand knowledge of—and physical presence in—the region.

For the first two decades of the city's existence, Denver's powerbrokers met with one another at their various places of business. In 1880, however, at native Scotsman James Duff's suggestion, a select group of them incorporated a club to serve as a sort of

unofficial headquarters, patterned quite consciously in the fashion of the famous British men's salons of the era. The Denver Club, as they called it, gave the city's upper crust a physical address, and began to weave them into more than just a group of financial and political leaders, but a true, interlocking social and business elite. The Denver Club quickly became the central locus of power in the city, and conferral of membership became a golden ticket of admission into the city's power structure. The Denver Club would continue to operate in the manner of a social front gate until well after World War II.

IV. Denver as a Family Affair: Philanthropy and Succession

Patronage played a crucial role in defining the social functions of Denver's aristocrats. Elizabeth Sumner Byers, William Byers' wife, saw Denver through different, and almost assuredly more jaundiced eyes than did William. "Libby" Byers had followed her husband to Colorado only grudgingly, and had endured the heartbreak of losing two of their children to disease in as many years. Although she could see the opportunity and potential that her husband saw in Denver, Libby was perhaps better able than the boosterish William to countenance the human misery that was characteristic of a mining camp. In 1860, she organized the first charitable institution in the city, the Ladies' Union Aid Society. The members of the Society produced linens and bandages for Colorado's contingent of Union soldiers during the Civil War. After the war, Libby Byers and Margaret Gray Evans, wife of the former territorial governor, renamed their organization the Ladies' Relief Society in 1874, and reorganized it as a social relief organization for Denver's poor, sick, and indigent. Two years later, the Society erected the Old Ladies

Home to care for impoverished widows and elderly women. They soon built an industrial school for girls, and offered services to the community from kindergarten to a medical dispensary. Margaret Evans already operated an orphans' home, which she had founded in 1872. According to Denver historian Thomas Noel, Margaret insisted that her son William's transit company offer free "excursions" for her "children."⁵⁴

But no amount of good works for the community and its poor could immunize any member of Denver's elite community from excommunication, as the Byers family soon found out. In 1876, William Byers attempted to extricate himself from an extramarital affair with a wealthy divorcee, to which she responded by accosting him, gun in hand, on a public downtown street. Shots were fired, and although Byers himself escaped unharmed, the spectacular scandal that followed destroyed his reputation. His finances fell into disarray, and he quickly dropped from the foremost ranks of Denver's elite. The sins of the father were also visited on his children who, although they lived long and productive lives, were never accepted as members of Denver's second generation aristocracy.

Ties between growing city and hinterland were crucial to the creation of a hereditary aristocracy in Denver. Power and ownership, earned primarily by the movement of goods, people and capital from Eastern metropole to hinterland and back again must be made heritable in order for Denver to truly secure its position at the top of Colorado's urban hierarchy.⁵⁵ Establishing an efficient process of succession was

⁵⁴ Thomas J. Noel, Stephen J. Leonard, and Kevin E. Rucker. *Colorado Givers: A History of Philanthropic Heroes* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 8-10.

⁵⁵ This borrows from Max Weber's three dimensions of stratification, which posits that social status is determined by wealth, power, and property. See Max Weber and Talcott

similarly vital to the construction of a durable urban power structure, and to sustaining family wealth and influence over generations.

William Gray Evans, son of John Evans, became the first son to join Denver's business and political elite as an equal. Educated in England and at Northwestern University (which his father, John, had co-founded), the younger Evans returned to Colorado and began investing in mines and real estate. His was a textbook example of how filial succession would work for the sons of other Denver titans. He was given a seat on the boards of two of Denver's leading banks, and gradually allowed to exercise increasing influence. Friends of his father also offered him a position as chief of a Denver tramway company. William Evans befriended David Moffat, among the youngest of his father's generation of business leaders, and gained his membership into the Denver Club. Within a relatively short time, John Evans' son could boast almost as many financial connections to the hinterland—and to Denver's firmament of elites—as his father. William Evan's experience became something like a default path for the offspring of every businessman or politician in early Denver. Despite the city's rapid increase in population between 1880 and 1900, and the retirement of many of the most important early Denverites, the top names on Denver's social and business register were set in stone.

By the turn of the 20th century, the sons of Denver's first-generation businessmen were stepping into the roles their fathers had created and left for them, with all the implications and trappings of power and influence that inhered. In form and function,

Parsons, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. (New York: Free Press, 1964).

Denver's corporate power structure during these decades resembled some of the most famous American aristocracies, from 18th century Tidewater planters to 19th century New York textile merchants. They had managed to transubstantiate lineage into status. For newcomers who hoped to enter, wealth was often the minimum requirement for membership, but hardly a guarantee of acceptance. Like earlier examples, Denver's aristocracy, as it matured, increasingly wielded and tended to its financial and political dominance as a community, using social exclusion to prevent outside interference and to police its own ranks.⁵⁶

V. When Silver Was King

To illustrate the centrality of the relationship between the city and hinterland to Denver's early development, there were few better examples than that of Colorado's "Silver King," Horace Austin Warner Tabor. A '59er, longtime prospector and storekeeper, and, at one point, the state's wealthiest citizen, Tabor lived what most could only dream, trading obscurity for riches and national fame on a single lucky grubstake. But a final twist of fate near the end of his life turned his already extraordinary tale into the stuff of legend and parable. After losing his standing in Denver society because of a scandalous affair, and his eventual divorce from his first wife, Horace Tabor lost his immense fortune almost as suddenly as he had acquired it, due in part to the devaluation of silver and the Depression of 1893. Even unto his deathbed in 1899—mired in debts he had accrued during better times—Tabor clung stubbornly to the belief that silver would regain its parity with gold as a reliable store of value, and that his remaining mining properties would once again be worth millions.

⁵⁶ Dorsett and McCarthy, *The Queen City*, 57-63.

Horace Tabor's seemingly meteoric rise and fall provided endless grist for the mills of chroniclers and fictionalizers of the American West, who often cast him as a latter-day Croesus, undone by capricious fate and his own hubris.⁵⁷ But this morality tale largely obscured one of Tabor's most significant historical contributions, which was in helping to pioneer the crucial financial linkages that would permanently bind the resource exploitation of the Rocky Mountain hinterland to Denver's urban development.

Tabor and his first wife Augusta had come to the Rocky Mountains from Kansas as part of the first wave of Rocky Mountain gold-seekers in 1859. Yet while most of the "59ers" eventually returned home empty-handed, the Tabors persisted, enduring the harsh winters and privation of alpine mining life in the continued search for a bonanza. Although they rarely prospected for themselves, for nearly two decades, the Tabors scratched out a modest living as storekeepers and post officers in various mining towns and camps. Outgoing, willing to grubstake almost anyone with a claim, and to forgive debts that could not be repaid, Horace earned the respect and appreciation of fellow miners, if little else.⁵⁸ As one of very few women to live full time in the mining camps, Augusta eventually commanded even greater respect than her husband. Admirers cited

⁵⁷ Judy Nolte Temple's fascinating psycho-historical study of Tabor's widow Baby Doe Tabor considers, among other things, the formative role of the "Tabor tragedy" in shaping the cultural memory of the frontier-era American West. Before his death, Tabor instructed his widow to "hold onto the Matchless," a defunct silver mine he still owned near Leadville, promising that one day it would again produce millions. Estranged from her daughters, Baby Doe Tabor spent the last 36 years of her life honoring his request, living in impoverished solitude near the old mining works. She was found frozen to death on her cabin floor in March of 1935. Judy Nolte Temple, *Baby Doe Tabor: The Madwoman in the Cabin* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ "I have always had people out prospecting," Tabor remarked later. "I would furnish them a stake for a share. I was always assisting the prospector one way or another, mostly in the substantial of life; something to eat; that was all the important thing." Duane A. Smith, *Horace Tabor: His Life and the Legend* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1989), 52–53.

her generosity, industry, and stoicism in the face of hardship.⁵⁹ Neither ever lost faith that the Colorado Rockies would produce a great strike, and they remained determined to be there when it happened.

And finally, it did. Shortly after the Tabor's moved to the promising new silver boomtown of Leadville in 1877, Tabor grubstaked a pair of greenhorn miners with shovels and whisky. The two men hit an immense lode of silver carbonate beneath a hill just east of town, one third of which now belonged to Tabor. In 1879, Horace Tabor sold his share of the "Little Pittsburgh" silver mine for a million dollars, and used the proceeds to snap up two other claims on the same hill, both of which turned out to be even richer than his first bonanza.⁶⁰

Throughout the late 1870s and early 1880s—the height of Colorado's silver boom—Horace Tabor seemed to be omnipresent, serving briefly as Colorado's senator, financing grand construction projects in Denver, and hobnobbing with the country's most powerful Gilded Age politicians, financiers and industrialists. Notorious for his gauche sartorial tastes, his cheerful disdain for the niceties of high society, and for the scandalous affair that led to his divorce from Augusta, and eventual marriage to Elizabeth "Baby" Doe, Horace Tabor for a time became a symbol of the American West's new rich.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 40–59.

⁶⁰ Duane A. Smith, "The Rise and Fall of Horace Tabor, 'Colorado's Silver King,'" in *Mining Tycoons in the Age of Empire, 1870-1945: Entrepreneurship, High Finance, Politics and Territorial Expansion*, by Raymond E. Dumett (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 48.

⁶¹ Tabor's 1883 marriage to Baby Doe in Washington D.C. became both legendary and infamous for its extravagance. The guests included leading politicians of the day, including President Chester Arthur, who looked on as Tabor presented his young bride with the Hope Diamond as a wedding gift. One of Tabor's more unusual obituaries, printed, strangely enough, in the *Butte Weekly Miner*, declared its premise right in its title: "Tabor's Rise and Fall: His Star was Set When He Deserted the Wife of His Youth."

Tabor also made his mark on the developing cities of Colorado. In 1877, at the height of Leadville's silver boom and the peak of his own power and influence, he entered state politics, and began looking for non-mining related investments for his tremendous newfound wealth. By now, Tabor was in a unique position to help determine the winner of the race for "urban primogeniture," simply by deciding where he would direct the massive amounts of rich silver carbonate issuing from his mines for smelting and eventual transit to the east. Tabor chose Denver for these tasks, providing a substantial boost to the town's industrial base, and raising its profile among Eastern investors.

Looking for other uses for his vast wealth, Tabor also became interested in investing in the machinery and infrastructure of Denver's urban development. He completed Denver's Tabor Opera House as a world-class performance venue in 1881, purchased substantial stock in the First National Bank of Denver, and invested heavily in the city's first telephone company.⁶² The money behind these ventures, coupled with their having been made by the state's wealthiest and famous man, played an important role in allowing Denver to further solidify its claims as the preeminent city of industry, culture and finance in the region. Tabor's money also enhanced the power of Denver's nascent ruling class, whose approval he sought, to determine precisely how—and where—the city would grow.

Finally, and perhaps of most lasting importance, Tabor's bi-regional model of investment in both the city and the mountain hinterland served as a template for later

Ibid., 240–241; H.O. Collins, "Tabor's Rise and Fall: His Star Was Set When He Deserted the Wife of His Youth," *Butte Weekly Miner* (Butte, MT, April 27, 1899), 9.

⁶² Smith, *Horace Tabor*, 110–115.

investment in the region. Tabor's money expanded the economic ties between Denver and the mountains that had been forged by mining to encompass both social and cultural realms as well. Tabor's model of regional investment which siphoned investment capital back and forth between Denver and the mountain hinterland, not only profoundly influenced the city's history during his lifetime, but also strengthened a recurrent, bidirectional linkage between city and hinterland. From mining to agriculture to water development and tourism, this dynamic would continue to allow Denver to position itself at the center of hinterland wealth creation—wealth which, in turn, imposed the will of its owners on the city and its denizens.

VI. Silver in City and Hinterland

While Tabor's fall from grace and death confirmed his status as an outcast in the eyes of the city's elites, his misfortunes endeared him to ordinary Denverites in revealing ways. Residents of the young city empathized with Horace Tabor's financial ruin and fall from social grace because the fluctuations of his fortunes so closely mirrored their own. Despite how he was viewed elsewhere, Tabor was more than just an emblem of vulgar wealth or fatuous celebrity in Denver, but rather something akin to a native son. Upon his death, thousands of people reportedly packed the city's sidewalks to pay their respects to the Silver King as his funeral cortege approached Mount Calvary cemetery. They grieved, writes historian Stephen Leonard, for both "the man and the passing of an era... Their hopes and fortunes, like his, had risen and fallen."⁶³ Writing shortly after Tabor's death, Denver historian Jerome Smiley also cast Tabor as a symbol for the city itself, their fates bound by congruities of betrayal, hardship and transcendence. Despite

⁶³ Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 111–112.

being "sadly imposed upon," Smiley wrote, no one had been "more generous, none truer to his friends...in the annals of Colorado" than Horace Tabor."⁶⁴

Although Smiley does not name Tabor's putative antagonists, the barely-masked bitterness in the historian's tone makes for intriguing speculation. After all, the end of bimetallism and the 1893 Depression had dealt a terrible blow to the economy of both city and region, finally revealing Denver's vassalage to the East monied interests for all to see. In the class- and sectionally-inflected conflict between the Eastern states and the rest of the country, Tabor was, for a brief period, one of the Eastern bankers' most visible victims. As a self-conscious city of strivers, Denver naturally shared the bitterness of his humiliation.

In the 1890s, Denverites' resentment increasingly focused on the "hard money" men of the eastern financial capitals of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where the push to abandon silver had originated.⁶⁵ The so-called "sound money" faction, widely associated with Eastern banking interests, argued that the overproduction and resulting depreciation of silver made it unsuitable for coinage, and that the US Treasury's efforts to maintain an artificially stable value ratio between silver and gold threatened the country's solvency. "Silverites," most of them from Western states, countered that a monometallic gold standard, and the tightening of the money supply that would result, would make it

⁶⁴ Jerome C. Smiley, *History of Denver, with Outlines of the Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country* (Denver, CO: J.H. Williamson & Company, 1903), 906.

⁶⁵ For an engaging look at the role of conspiracy within the silverite faction of the Western states, as well as an exploration of their relationship to the populists, see Bradley J. Young's "Silver, Discontent, and Conspiracy: The Ideology of the Western Republican Revolt of 1890-1901," *Pacific Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (May 1, 1995): 242–265.

more difficult to pay down debt, and would benefit a wealthy few at the expense of the many.⁶⁶

Moreover, the Silverites argued, since the start of the silver boom in 1878, the price of silver had remained stable relative to all other commodities *except* gold. "Why do you say that silver has gone down," the pro-silver Representative Joseph Sibley of Pennsylvania challenged his sound-money colleagues during the 1893 House debate over the Silver Purchase repeal. "Why do you not say that gold has...been deified? You do not want an honest dollar...you want a scarce dollar."⁶⁷

Sibley's reasoning resonated with agrarian Populists of the Plains and Southern states, for whom silver represented inflation, and consequently, at least some relief from creditors. But Colorado was the heart of silver mining country, and silver was Denver's chief export. Denverites viewed the repeal of the silver purchase as a direct attack on the foundations of their local economy.

It certainly must have felt like it. Silver had fueled Colorado's population growth, financed the expansion of its railroads, and created ready markets for other sectors of its economy, especially agriculture and manufacturing.⁶⁸ At the heart of the state's

⁶⁶ "Who uses the gold?" Senator Henry M. Teller of Colorado inquired rhetorically in a speech the Senate Committee of the Whole in January of 1892. "The capitalists and the capitalists only. It is the thing with which you store values and with which a limited amount of business may be done, yet the great mass of business that is done over the counter and in the shop and in the mill is done by the men who hand out a dollar at a time and not one hundred or one thousand dollars. So silver all over the world is doing money duty today...in spite of all the opprobrium thrown upon it..." Henry M. Teller, *Silver Coinage Speech of Hon. Henry M. Teller of Colorado* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Reserve Archival System for Economic Research, 1892), 10.

⁶⁷ Richard H. Timberlake, "Repeal of Silver Monetization in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 1978): 36.

⁶⁸ Denver Research Institute and James Mahar, *Economic Forces Behind Colorado's Growth, 1870-1962: With Projections to 1970: Prepared for Colorado State Department*

transportation, finance, manufacturing and communication networks, Denver had benefitted disproportionately from its apparent strength and market stability.⁶⁹ From 1878 onward, silver had been the most important commodity produced in Colorado; its annual value exceeding that of any other product, including gold. In 1890, 60% of America's silver reserves came from Colorado, out of mines owned by the likes of Meyer Guggenheim and of course, Horace Tabor.⁷⁰

The same, of course, was true of the mining towns of the Colorado Rockies. The mountain mining communities were at the end of a boom-and-bust whip of a global market demonetization of silver, which proved even more devastating to the fast-growing mining towns of the Colorado Rockies. The silver boom had propelled the continuous development, industrialization, and integration of the mountain hinterland. In the late 1870s—the silver-driven halcyon years of Colorado mining—there appeared to be no limits to the industry's capacity to drive urban and industrial growth. The mountain mining town of Leadville, where Tabor, Meyer Guggenheim and many others had made their fortunes, served as a case in point. Little more than a nameless encampment to a few hundred prospectors in 1877, Leadville's population shot up to 25,000 by 1880,

of Employment, Resources and Community Development Division (Denver, CO: Industrial Economic Division Denver Research Institute University of Denver, 1963), 9–30.

⁶⁹ In his study of mine financing in Colorado, historian Joseph E. King details the many advantages that accrued to Colorado mining speculators merely by being proximal to the actual diggings. Eastern speculators frequently invested recklessly and ignorantly in Colorado mines, creating valuable properties that more knowledgeable in-state interests could buy or lease for a fraction of their actual worth. Joseph E. King, *A Mine to Make a Mine: Financing the Colorado Mining Industry, 1859-1902*, 1st ed. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 150–170; Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*, 5–6.

⁷⁰ Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 103.

making it the second most populous city in the state behind Denver.⁷¹ By 1880, Leadville boasted five banks, four daily newspapers, industrial smelting furnaces and a three-story opera house. Nearby mines like Horace Tabor's "Little Pittsburgh" and "Chrysolite" ranked among the country's hottest speculative trends; their stocks traded on Leadville's own exchange. Remarkably, all of this development took place without the benefit of rail service, which did not reach to Leadville until 1881. Locals took to calling their town the "Magic City," a moniker that seemed to capture the vibrancy of the sudden boomtown.⁷²

There was, of course, no conspiracy against Denver, or the American West. The region was not the target, but merely a collateral casualty of a struggle with global implications for class and capital. And while silver symbolized opportunity and growth in the American West, the metal was elsewhere generally regarded as a threat to the stability of the federal government, and global currency markets in general. In fact, by 1890, continued demand for silver was only sustained by the federal government's guarantee that it could be exchanged for gold. But increasing political uncertainty about the future of silver began to exert downward pressure on its market price, and to test the strength of federal price supports. Policymakers and financiers in gold standard countries like Great Britain and Germany urged the United States to abandon silver or risk bankrupting itself and destroying the global economy. But even if they recognized the

⁷¹ In his 1880 guide to touring the Colorado Rockies, writer Frank Fossett offered a vivid description of what Leadville's mining boom looked like to its participants. "Leadville by lamp-light fairly 'booms' with excitement and life," Fossett observed. "The miners...drift into town in swarms; a dozen bands are drumming up audiences for the theatres and variety shows, scores of saloons and numerous gambling-houses are in full blast, and the entire scene gives the town and place the appearance of one grand holiday." *Colorado, Its Gold and Silver Mines: Farms and Stock Ranges, and Health and Pleasure Resorts: Tourist's Guide to the Rocky Mountains* (C.G. Crawford, printer and stationer, 1880), 417.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 415.

necessity of taking action, few American politicians were eager to champion such a politically toxic measure.

Unable either to abolish the silver standard or to devalue gold, Congress waffled on the issue, effectively guaranteeing an eventual run on the federal treasury's gold reserves. When it happened in early 1893, the bottom completely gave way beneath the price of silver, dragging a number of the nation's largest banks and railroads into receivership. President Cleveland saw the crisis as an opportunity to end bimetallism with a minimum of political fallout and insisted that the repeal of the silver standard was necessary to stave off federal bankruptcy. At the same time, he also secured a \$65 million loan from financier J.P. Morgan to shore up the depleted gold reserves of the US Treasury.⁷³

The impact of Cleveland's machinations upon Denver was immediate. Annual silver output collapsed, choking off what had been the largest flow of revenue into the region. In the summers of 1893 and 1894, thousands of newly uprooted miners flocked to Denver, where they established transient camps, competed for jobs, and overwhelmed the city's sparse social services. Desperate to get rid of them, Denver's municipal government encouraged the men to join Coxe's Army and even gave them the materials to build flatboats to float eastward on the Platte River.⁷⁴

Beyond Denver, the demonetization of silver completely remade the human geography of Colorado's northern Rockies. Historian and geographer William Wykoff

⁷³ In his instructions to the special congressional session convened to address the 1893 crisis, President Cleveland insisted, "...[that] the government cannot make its fiat equivalent to intrinsic value, nor keep inferior money on a parity with superior money." Timberlake, "Repeal of Silver Monetization in the Late Nineteenth Century," 33.

⁷⁴ Leonard and Noel, *Denver*, 104.

estimated between 1896 and 1920, the value of silver produced in the Leadville area decreased by around 75%. Though the four richest counties of Denver's mining hinterland had once boasted upward of 50,000 people during the late 1880s, by 1920, their combined population had dipped below 10,000.⁷⁵ The swift depopulation of the mountains left eerie reminders of what once was in the form of ghost towns, abandoned adits and tailings that appeared as though they had been left in great haste.

Whether out of genuine conviction or political self-preservation, most of Colorado's leading politicians cast their lots with the Silverites. Henry Teller, a popular and well-regarded Republican senator from Colorado, staged a dramatic split from his party over the silver issue during the Republican Convention of 1896. He ran briefly for president as a "Silver Republican" before endorsing Democrat William Jennings Bryan in the 1896 general election.

Colorado's enraged electorate also took their silver grievances to the ballot box throughout the 1890s, electing militant populist Davis Hanson Waite as governor in 1892, and becoming the first state to approve women's suffrage by popular referendum in 1893. Waite's governorship became a laboratory of populist, and even nullificationist policies. He devised, for instance, an abortive scheme to mint counterfeit "Fandango Dollars" in Mexico out of Colorado silver, and then to reimport them for circulation.⁷⁶ Waite's Lieutenant Governor, D.H. Nichols went even further, publicly calling for the secession of Western states as a means of escaping the "eastern hierarchy."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 75.

⁷⁶ Louisa Ward Arps, *Denver in Slices* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1983), 33.

⁷⁷ Leon W. Fuller, "Colorado's Revolt Against Capitalism," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 21, no. 3 (December 1, 1934): 343-360.

The threat posed by Governor Waite and other Populists to Denver’s existing power structure became explicit in the spring of 1894, when Waite attempted to remove two of his previous appointees as Denver municipal officials. Without a “home rule” provision in the state’s constitution, Denver’s municipal government was essentially an extension of the state’s, and its municipal officials were subject to direct state control. But when the two officials in question refused to step down, Waite sent the state militia to uphold what he believed was his legal prerogative. The specific cause was almost incidental to the larger struggle it implied, which pitted the authority of Governor Waite and the state government against that of Denver’s municipal government, and its political elite.

The conflict morphed into a bizarre standoff, in which heavily armed police and city officials barricaded themselves inside Denver’s city hall, and faced down a surrounding force of state infantry, fielding Gatling guns and other artillery pieces. The siege lasted for nearly a week, during which a self-appointed committee of financial and civic leaders—including William Byers, David Moffatt, and William Gray Evans—personally implored Governor Waite, in the words of one contemporary observer, “to refrain from precipitating civil war in the State’s capital city.”⁷⁸

Governor Waite ended the standoff with—if anything—an even more remarkable executive act: sending the same state troopers he had mustered against Denver’s City Hall directly from Denver to the gold mining district of Cripple Creek—some 100 miles distant—to support striking gold miners against mine owners and Pinkerton agents. Until that point, Cripple Creek had been a rare bright spot in a sea of bad economic news

⁷⁸ Smiley, *History of Denver, with Outlines of the Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country*, 918–928.

across the state. The recent discovery of the Independence Lode—easily the richest gold strike in the state up to that point—had transformed the area into a booming industrial site in a matter of weeks. Because the price of gold remained steady even the midst of a very serious depression, Cripple Creek attracted investment from throughout the country to scour every last ounce of the precious metal out of the rock. The district also attracted thousands of out-of-work and politically radicalized silver miners, further driving down the price of labor.

The mixture of labor and capital in the town and mines around Cripple Creek proved explosive. In early 1894, mine owners, hoping to take advantage of the labor surplus created by the silver panic, extended the workday from eight hours to ten without raising the miners' pay. Already primed for protest, mine workers responded by striking, and eventually, by intimidating scabs and sabotaging mining equipment. The private security forces hired by mine owners to protect strikebreakers and mining property—primarily of out-of-work police and firemen from Denver—quickly shook off the restraining hands of the mine owners, and turned the Cripple Creek Strike into first actual “battle” of Colorado’s “Labor Wars.”⁷⁹

The state militia imposed an enforced calm on Cripple Creek and the surrounding area, and the mine owners' army disbanded as soon as they were no longer being paid. Waite's action marked the first and last time that a sitting governor of any Western state

⁷⁹ Mark Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic: Western Miners and the Industrial Revolution, 1860-1910* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 50.

actively intervened on the side of labor over capital in such a dispute, and one of very few unalloyed victories for organized labor over capital during the Progressive era.⁸⁰

Davis Waite obviously did not believe in hoarding political capital, and as a result, served only a single term as the state's governor. He had come to power almost solely on the issue of free silver, and although no longer the governor by the time of the presidential election of 1896, Waite continued to be an outspoken advocate for free silver, and an unapologetic antagonist to concentrated capital.

For Henry Teller, as well, the cause of free silver ultimately led to political perdition. As Colorado's Senator, Teller was popular and well-regarded both in Colorado and in Washington, known through his efforts to protect Indian lands from federal despoliation as a politician of probity and conscience. For Teller, the issue of free silver was of similar moral importance. In fact, Teller believed so strongly in the free coinage of silver that he staged a dramatic split from his party over the issue in advance of the 1896 election. He briefly ran for president as a "Silver Republican," primarily to increase the issue's national visibility, before eventually endorsing William Jennings Bryan in the general election.

The efforts of Teller and other Western politicians notwithstanding, Bryan's losing campaign proved the high water mark in the national campaign for free silver. One might reasonably wonder why Denver's business elites, for whom mining had been an important source of capital, did not do more to advocate for free silver. That they did not was a strong indicator of how well they had already diversified their wealth through investments in Denver's infrastructure, banking, and other avenues.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 56–59.

In fact, if anything, Denver's history showed the issue to be even more of a red herring than it had been on the national stage. Many of the complaints of working and middle class Denverites expressed through the free silver campaign actually had little to do with the issue of monetary policy per se, and more to do with local politics, and control of the region's resources. By the time of Horace Tabor's downfall, most of Denver's wealthiest families had morphed into urban entrepreneurs, drawing money and power from growth industries like water delivery, electricity, telecommunication, and transportation. Though not entirely immune from the waning fortunes of Colorado mining, these industries made different use out of the hinterland to maximize urban control. By the turn of the 20th century, Denver's elite powerbrokers and money men had never been so financially secure.

Nevertheless, the overlapping nature of Davis Waite's "War on City Hall" and the Cripple Creek Miners' Strike demonstrated both the Denver Cartel's ongoing political vulnerability, and just how closely intertwined were the historical fates of Denver and its hinterland. In this particular case, silver was the thread that bound, but the same pattern would be repeated in countless other contexts throughout the coming decades.

VII. The First Age of Reform

The first generation of Denver's leaders, widely seen as the town's architects and proprietors, had essentially functioned as the city's first government. But as Denver grew, and the number of permanent residents increased, this kind of *ad hoc* administrative arrangement no longer sufficed. Despite having established generational succession, the Denver Cartel still could not be said to completely control the city's

politics, which were shot through with class, race, and sectional tensions... Newly arrived immigrants from southern Europe and Asia further complicated efforts to impose order on the growing and unruly town. Given its ramshackle and provisional infrastructure, spotty utilities and city services, Denver was unprepared to meet the challenges of rapid population expansion—of becoming a “real” city.

More to the point, nobody in city government seemed able or willing to do anything to change this state of affairs. Private interests (including many Denver business magnates) owned and operated Denver’s water and sewage services, along with its streetcars, police, and fire departments.⁸¹ There was no mechanism by which the city could enforce reliable service or fair pricing. And while Denver asked for a fraction of the operating fees that other cities charged their utility providers, it could not compel payment. As a result, Denverites continued to be gouged for poor and spotty civic services and utilities, and popular consensus began to build for change.

In 1902, Denver was granted home rule by a revision of the state constitution. Inspired by the spirit of Progressivism then sweeping the nation’s cities, and sensing a rare opportunity, Denver-based political reformers floated a new city charter that would bring the city’s utilities to heel, and eventually transfer them entirely to public ownership. The proposed charter also aimed to root out the spoils system in Denver’s government, and to place heavy-handed new regulatory burdens on saloons and their patrons. If all of that were not ambitious enough, the charter contained provisions for the prohibition of gambling, and rigid enforcement of existing laws against prostitution. For leadership, Denver reformers looked to Clyde Lyndon King, a recently graduated political scientist

⁸¹ Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver with Special Reference to Its Relations with Public Service Corporations* (Denver, CO: Fisher, 1911), 16–23.

from Pennsylvania. Judge Ben Lindsay, a well-known Denver reformer, and crusading *Rocky Mountain News* editor Thomas Patterson, both provided critical support to the effort to pass a new charter as well.

But even with such big names and the megaphone at Patterson's disposal, passing the charter in the form envisioned by Progressive reformers was a tall order. The proposed changes met with predictable hostility among the city's utility and transportation companies, behind which stood a highly cohesive business elite. In times past, that alone would have been sufficient to doom the venture, but in this new era of idealist and experimental public policy, that was no longer true. The city's middle-class was much more numerous than before, and labor and class-consciousness in Denver's blue-collar neighborhoods was on the rise, fueled by recent campaigns on behalf of free silver, populism and unions. Progressivism seemed poised to upend Denver's status quo.

Denver's business elite was well aware of the shift in the political winds, and thus doubtful that they could defeat the proposed measure by themselves. Perhaps for the first time in Denver's history, the city's banking, utility and industrial cartel had to ask for outside assistance in achieving their political goals. That help came in the person of an up-and-coming civil servant and political power broker in the Democratic Party named Robert Speer. As Denver's City Clerk and then Postmaster General, Speer had cultivated a devoted following among Denver's middle and working classes—voters who would soon become the base of a new and powerful Democratic machine.⁸²

Business leaders worked out a cooperative plan with Speer in which the politician would deliver those “downtown” votes, calling upon his organization's expertise in

⁸² Robert Bonyngé, *Contested Election Case of Robert W. Bonyngé Vs. John F. Shafroth from the First Congressional District of Colorado*. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1903).

political chicanery to defeat the charter. In exchange, Speer exacted pledges from the city's corporate titans that they would pay the city fairer operating fees for businesses like public electricity, public transportation, and water delivery. Speer demanded that their companies provide higher quality and more reliable service for Denver citizens, or he would turn his powerful machine and voting coalition against them. Later investigations showed that participating corporations, including Walter Cheesman's Denver City Water Company, gave thousands of dollars to Speer to pay for the voter rustlers, ghost votes, and repeater votes they believed would be necessary to defeat the charter.⁸³ But the reformist charter proposal turned out to be less popular than its opponents had feared, and was easily defeated. From businessmen to saloon keepers and their tipplers, the proposed reforms simply stepped on too many toes.

Nevertheless, Speer had upheld his part of the bargain, and in 1904, he parlayed his success in helping to defeat Denver's Progressive charter into a successful campaign to become Denver's mayor. As mayor, Speer became the closest thing that Denver had ever had to a political boss. But Speer's machine was no Tammany Hall, able to insulate him entirely from political accountability. Although he controlled the police, and by extension Denver's vice industries, as well as commanding a large bloc of loyal voters among Denver's working class wards, his popularity was contingent upon his performance as mayor. If he lost popularity with Denver voters, he would lose the mayoralty.

Yet Speer was sufficiently adept as a politician to maintain his relationship with the Denver cartel. The arrangement was mutually beneficial. Speer took the cartel's

⁸³ Dorsett and McCarthy, *The Queen City*, 136.

money, and in exchange, guaranteed them a large measure of social and urban stability. Speer's 1907 speech at Denver's swank Brown Palace Hotel summed up his governing philosophy: "I believe," he declared, "city government should be progressive along conservative lines—push needed improvements and add the ornamental at the lowest possible cost. Refuse to be puritanical or used in spasms of reform, yet earnestly strive for betterment year by year along all moral lines."⁸⁴ It was a concise, neat statement of exactly the kind of conservative political stewardship the Denver cartel was looking for.

Robert Speer was not content, however, merely to serve as a buffer and political wrangler for Denver's wealthy. He saw himself as city builder in his own right, and strongly desired to make his mark on the young city. Since viewing the famous "White City" at the Chicago World's Fair, Speer had remained fascinated with and inspired by the concept, process, and aesthetics of city beautification. Though hardly a crusading urban reformer like Jane Addams, Speer strongly believed in the power of beautification to improve urban life, and to inspire moral rectitude among Denver's poor. He understood the power of civic pride as an administrative and political tool. A proud and happy citizenry was far less likely to cause trouble than one that was restive or apathetic.

Not long after becoming Denver's mayor in 1904, Speer embarked on an ambitious plan to remake the face of Denver, an effort that became associated with the national "City Beautiful" movement. During the long course of his mayoralty, Speer presided over the construction of a massive and ornate city library, Elitch Gardens and Lakeside amusement parks, a municipal auditorium, and the Denver Gas and Electric Building, which was completely covered in electric lights. Speer's government also

⁸⁴ Dorsett and McCarthy, *The Queen City*, 138.

embarked on a massive tree planting effort, planting stately elms along every street and sidewalk in the vicinity of Denver's downtown, many of which still stand.

Speer's popularity as mayor proved extremely durable, as Denver voters returned him to the mayoral mansion four times between 1904 and 1916. He died of pneumonia in 1918, halfway through his fourth term in office. As mayor, Robert Speer had also served the Denver cartel very well. By the time of his death, the cartel had forged a stable and mutually beneficial political alliance with the city's Democratic machine that was better able to manage and cater to Denver's working classes. Moreover, they had preserved and enhanced the basic foundation of a hereditary aristocracy through arranged family marriages, interlocking positions on one another's corporate and civic boards, and a Westernized version of English high society that revolved around the hyper-exclusive Denver Club. They had codified in multiple ways who was a member of their set, who was not, and why it mattered. With the help of Mayor Robert Speer, by the dawn of the 1920s, Denver's aristocracy had achieved the kind of political security and stability that had eluded them during the city's early years.

VIII. The Angry West

To a considerable extent, however, that security rested on the Denver cartel's ability to distinguish itself from the deeply unpopular and thus easily demonized "rapacious capitalists" of the East, who many Colorado miners, farmers and ranchers continued to blame for the demonetization of silver. Joined with the continued distrust of immigrants, Hispanics, and the remains of the Plains Indian tribes among working class white Denverites, suspicion and anger were dominant features of Denver's "emotional

landscape.” Indeed, these emotional impulses are at the very root of the modern historical relationship between Denver and its hinterlands since the city’s founding: suspicion that competing groups or interests might be angling for control of lands, resources, or markets, and anger at anything standing in the way of claiming those lands, resources or markets for one’s own.

These unreasoning but powerful impulses are made manifest in the systematic extermination of the Plains Indians, whose mere presence intolerably impeded the flow of goods and capital across the Great Plains. They are visible in the fierce competition for supremacy in Colorado’s minefields, where so few won so much. They underlie Denver’s quest for regional primacy at whatever cost to people and environment of the hinterlands. And while the means by which these emotions were expressed would moderate over time—becoming increasingly adjudicated in courts of law rather than determined on battlefields and massacre sites—they would continued to inform the developing relationship between city and hinterland for the next hundred years. And thus, these emotions are inextricably linked with the development of Denver itself, to which this dissertation now turns.

Chapter 2: Bringing People, 1900-1940

Here it is! The very thing the entire Race has been hoping and waiting for. A real opportunity to secure a mountain home or camp site in the most beautiful spot in Colorado.

--Ad for Lincoln Hills appearing in the *Chicago Defender* national edition, August 27, 1927.

I. A Post-Industrial Wilderness

The collapse of a brief but intense boom in dryland farming on Colorado's eastern plains in the late 1880s, combined with the 1893 Depression and the end of bimetallism inflicted economic devastation on Denver and its hinterland region. Ghost towns became common sights in both the mountains and the plains, as if the products of some transient collective madness. While the era of mining was by no means over, as witnessed by the Cripple Creek gold strike of the 1890s, mining no longer continued to steadily cede ground to agriculture and manufacturing as percentages of the state's gross annual product.⁸⁵ Advances in dry farming techniques would bring the plains back to life by World War I, making permanent the state's gradual transition from a mining- to an agriculture-dominant economy. In ways both perceptible and not, Denver slowly rotated its economic focus from west to east, exchanging smelters for cattle yards.

Yet Denver's mountain hinterlands were slower to recover from the boom that had originally brought the state into existence, both economically and environmentally. Most of the infrastructure built to support the mining industry was of little use otherwise, leading to its abandonment and swift decay. The peripatetic industry had left behind

⁸⁵ Denver Research Institute and Mahar, *Economic Forces Behind Colorado's Growth, 1870-1962*.

everything from sluices, adits, coach roads, and indeed, entire settlements. The evidence of hard rock mining was more indelible still, with tailing piles littering many of the steep hillsides.

Despite the environmental and scenic devastation wrought by the primitive industrial mining techniques of the day, tourism began to develop in the Colorado Rockies even before the height of the silver boom of the 1880s. And while most of the infrastructure built to support mountain mining operations lost its value when the industry moved on to a new site, the railroads that were originally built to truck raw ore to Denver and other Front Range cities for smelting retained their value as arteries of transportation, and were gradually repurposed for tourism, saving a select few mining towns on the main spurs as historical sites—a strange irony for a region not yet half a century old.

The development of Denver’s tourist industry took place against the backdrop of the federalization of forestland. Under the direction of Gifford Pinchot, who envisioned the forests that carpeted much of the American West as a gigantic federal “tree farm,” the federal government had assumed ownership of millions of acres of mountain land across Colorado and other western states. The federal government thus became an important partner in Denver’s gradual development of its mountain hinterland as an industrial-level tourist destination.⁸⁶

From early forays by journalists into the high mountain wilderness through the development of Denver’s Mountain Park System, the selling of Denver’s mountain landscape served an important function in the development of the city itself, and the

⁸⁶ For more on Pinchot, the development of the US Forest Service, and the federalization of the western landscape in the early 20th century, see Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*; and Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*.

allocation of political and economic power among those who lived in it. This chapter considers that development from the city's early years through the 1930s, focusing on sites such as the city's unique mountain parks, and the short-lived but still influential African-American resort community of Lincoln Hills.

II. The Switzerland of America

In the fall of 1866, Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* published journalist Bayard Taylor's series of letters, detailing his month-long travels through what was now the Colorado Territory earlier that year. While the Rocky Mountain goldfields had received plenty of ink in the national newspapers, nobody had yet undertaken a detailed inventory of the scenery in the territory. In his letters, Taylor strove to capture the sights, rhythm and texture of life on the western frontier. Arriving in Denver by stagecoach in June of 1866, Taylor confessed himself to be pleasantly surprised by the city's "air of permanence" and graceful hospitality—contrasting sharply with the rough frontier outpost that Greeley himself had visited only seven years earlier.⁸⁷

His positive impressions notwithstanding, Taylor left Denver the next day, passing through the town of Golden and up the bumpy Clear Creek Canyon stage road toward the foothill mining districts of Black Hawk and Central City. Not far from Gregory Gulch, the site of Colorado's first major gold discovery in 1859, Black Hawk and Central City remained the busiest and most productive gold mining district in the territory. If Taylor had found the town of Denver itself to be surprisingly congenial, its none-too-distant mining districts made a decidedly less positive impression on the visitor.

⁸⁷ Bayard Taylor, *Colorado: A Summer Trip* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 54–55.

Observing the peaks surrounding the towns of Black Hawk and Central City—stripped bare of vegetation and mutilated by adits and tailing piles—it appeared to Taylor as if nature was "suffering from an attack of confluent small-pox."

Taylor was even less complimentary of Black Hawk and Central City themselves. The adjoining towns, he observed, both assumed the same "curious, rickety, temporary air, with their buildings standing as if on one leg, their big signs and little accommodations, the irregular, wandering uneven street, and the bald, scarred, and pitted mountains on either side." While there was no doubt plenty of money was being made there, everything about the settlements, Taylor wrote, was "odd, grotesque, unusual; but no feature [could] be called attractive."⁸⁸

The scenery, and Taylor's spirits, improved dramatically however as he traveled further west, and deeper into the high Rockies. In the log-hewn settlement of Empire, Colorado—the terminus of the stagecoach line and the last outpost of the Front Range gold mining districts—Taylor joined a waiting expedition group, led by *Rocky Mountain News* founder and Denver booster William Byers, with whom he would undertake a two-week wilderness tour of the central Colorado Rockies. The party set out the following morning on mule and horseback, crossing the Continental Divide at Berthoud Pass on the first leg of a 300-mile loop through the park-like valleys of the northern central Rockies.⁸⁹ Taylor continued to faithfully describe the panoramas he encountered, comparing them frequently to the Alps, with which most Americans of the era were more familiar.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 74.

Two weeks and a number of adventures later, Taylor's party returned safely to Denver. In his last dispatch before departing for New York, the reporter ruminated on the significance of what he had seen. It was impossible, he conceded, to predict precisely where the Union Pacific's rapidly approaching transcontinental railroad would cross the Rockies, or what it might portend for young cities like Denver. But, Taylor added, "I hazard nothing, at least, in predicting that Colorado will soon be recognized as our Switzerland. The enervated luxury, the ignorant and imitative wealth, and the overtaken business of our cities, will come hither, in all future summers, for health, and rest, and recreation. The better sort of people will come first, nor be scared away by the rush of the unappreciating. We shall, I hope, have Alpine clubs, intelligent guides, good roads, bridges, and access to a thousand wonders yet unknown."⁹⁰

Thus, Bayard Taylor became one of the first to publicly envision industrial-scale tourism in the Colorado Rockies. His description of the mountains as America's Switzerland would resonate with later travel writers such as Samuel Bowles, who popularized the catchphrase with his travelogue of Colorado, titled *The Switzerland of the Rockies*. Derivative though it was, the phrase evoked clear and powerful imagery in the American imagination, and soon became an enduring marketing slogan for Colorado tourism.⁹¹

For his time, Bayard Taylor was also unusually sensitive to the aesthetic, and even moral tensions between the imperatives of extraction and preservation, and thus between mining and tourism, in the Rocky Mountains. His distaste for the mining

⁹⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁹¹ Samuel Bowles, *The Switzerland of America: A Summer Vacation in the Parks and Mountains of Colorado* (Springfield, MA: S. Bowles & Co., 1869).

districts, and obvious relief at leaving them behind for the "freer out-look and more attractive scenery" of the Rocky Mountain wilderness distinguished him from most of the travel writers crisscrossing the West at the time, who waxed rhapsodic over mine-scarred landscapes as demonstrations of humans' dominion over nature. Taylor's essay put into words the politics implicit behind the paintings of landscape artists like Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran: that the preservation of beauty might itself be considered a legitimate *use* of land, and ultimately a means of power and profit every bit as legitimate as mining.⁹²

Taylor's confident vision of the industrial future of tourism in Colorado turned out to be quite prescient. By the 1880s, affluent tourists were beginning to take notice of Colorado as a vacation spot, and to frequent new resort communities like Manitou Springs, the Royal Gorge, and Estes Park. Intervening events, however, would delay the development of the mountain hinterland into a site of industrial tourism, at least as Taylor envisioned it. It was too radical, too long term, for the kind of industrial development then taking place along the western frontier. Yet when Arthur H. Carhart, a naturalist and recreation engineer for the U.S. Forest Service, took up his pen over fifty years later to urge the city open its eyes to the economic opportunity its mountain hinterland truly represented, he would employ language remarkably similar to Taylor's. "Recreation is a market commodity," Carhart would write, and Denver's nearby

⁹² Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 83; Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado*, 80.

mountains constituted a kind of "manufacturing plant."⁹³ By then, Denver's civic and business leaders were more willing to listen.

III. Urban Progressivism and Mountain Tourism

In May of 1912, Denver voters passed an amendment authorizing the use of municipal monies for the construction of a series of "Mountain Parks" in the foothills to the west of Denver. Partnering with neighboring Jefferson County, the City and County of Denver planned to buy separate tracts of acreage and develop them as a city-owned park system and ultimately, as a tourist destination. The first of these park projects, Lookout Mountain, was completed later that year.⁹⁴ It was, in the words of Denver Mountain Parks commissioner Warwick Downing, an idea without precedent, having "never before been considered by any municipality."⁹⁵

Although Denver's mountain park system was some distance removed from the city proper, in both form and execution, it was very much in keeping with the Progressive-era "City Beautiful" style of urban planning, right down to the ornate gates that greeted park visitors upon their arrival. In terms of their development, the parks were an extension of Denver Mayor Robert Speer's plans for transforming the city, and developing its open spaces to reflect the grandeur of Denver's surroundings, and its own developing maturity as a proper metropolis. As such, Denver's mountain park system

⁹³ Arthur Hawthorne Carhart, *Denver's Greatest Manufacturing Plant*, 1941, 3–5.

⁹⁴ "Mountain Parks Amendment Carries by Big Majority," *Colorado Transcript*, May 23, 1912.

⁹⁵ Warwick M. Downing, "How Denver Acquired Her Celebrated Mountain Parks," *Municipal Facts*, April 1931.

was conceived, designed and utilized as an urban amenity for Denver, rather than as a destination unto itself.⁹⁶

Among the biggest supporters of the development of a Denver mountain park system were Denver's business elites; most prominently a local industrialist named John Brisben Walker. Like most of Denver's top-tier businessmen, Walker owned vacation property in the nearby foothills—a development made possible in the main by the building of roads into the hills, complimenting and gradually coming to replace the railroad lines that served as the primary mode of transportation into and out of the mountains. Walker was, by all accounts, a gifted salesman, regardless of what he might be selling. Since first arriving in Denver in 1879, Walker had spent time in New York, turning the nearly defunct *Cosmopolitan* magazine into a circulation juggernaut, even while helming a string of successful enterprises back in Denver. Recognizing the potential value of the Front Range mountains as a tourist attraction, Walker invested heavily in foothills real estate in 1906. As a powerful member of both the Denver Chamber of Commerce and the Denver Real Estate Exchange, Walker was uniquely positioned to leverage his talents on behalf of the mountain parks project.

As Walker and other early mountain parks proponents recognized, it was vital that the parks system be seen as part of the city, rather than external to it. Thus, the success of the project also hinged on the park boosters' ability to sell the idea of new and improved roads into the mountain hinterland. Walker's efforts became associated with Colorado's

⁹⁶ For a well-drawn and in-depth history of Denver's mountain parks system, see Wendy Rex-Atzet, "Denver's Mountain Playground: The Denver Mountain Parks, the City Beautiful, and the Rise of Modern Wilderness Recreation in Colorado, 1900--1940" (University of Colorado at Boulder, 2011).

influential “Good Roads Association” shortly afterward.⁹⁷ There was, in short, a tidy symmetry between Walker’s various financial interests, all of which would benefit from the publicly funded development of a world-class park system next door to his own mountain property.⁹⁸ Although perhaps to a lesser extent, even those wealthy Denverites whose interests lay elsewhere stood to gain from the development of such a park system, insofar as it would help to preserve at least some of scenery nearest their vacation homes, and possibly create a new revenue stream for the city.

To ensure that the mountain parks retained a quintessential “urbanness,” the city retained the services of the world’s leading authority in creating natural spaces within urban boundaries—Frederick Law Olmsted—whose credits included New York’s Central Park, along with countless lesser known urban parks and recreational facilities around the world. In recognition of the challenge of connecting the mountain park system to the city, Olmsted recommended that Denver’s parks commissioners work closely with the state and affected counties to build a “main circuit” of touring roads that would place Denver at the center of a semi-circular touring route.⁹⁹ Olmsted’s plan, which diverged from Walker’s original conception of a single, large urban park, envisioned a string of smaller parks distributed in a “fan pattern,” with Denver at their epicenter.

⁹⁷ Ibid.; Colorado Department of Highways, *Paths of Progress* (Denver, CO: Colorado Dept. of Highways, 1954); Gutfreund, *20th Century Sprawl*.

⁹⁸ Rex-Atzet, “Denver’s Mountain Playground: The Denver Mountain Parks, the City Beautiful, and the Rise of Modern Wilderness Recreation in Colorado, 1900--1940”; Melanie Shellenbarger, “High Country Summers: The Emergence and Development of the Second Home in Colorado, 1880--1940” (The University of Colorado at Denver, 2008).

⁹⁹ F.L. Olmsted, “Letter to the Board of Park Commissioners, 1912,” Memorandum to Board of Park Commissioners (Denver, CO, 1912), <http://mountainparkshistory.org/Articles/1912Olmsted.pdf>.

The development of Denver's mountain park system continued throughout the early portion of the 20th century, culminating with the acquisition of the Winter Park Ski area in 1939. As historian Wendy Rex-Atzet notes in her dissertation, "Denver's Mountain Playground..." the mountain parks system constituted a rare example of the integration of two developing strains of thought regarding recreation, land use, and the meaning of wilderness. The parks combined such Progressive notions as easy public accessibility, and public enrichment through urban design, with the classically Muirian ideals of natural preservation and spiritual uplift.¹⁰⁰

The Denver Mountain Parks system also functioned as an example of what Harold Rothman has termed the "tourism of hegemony," as he applied the concept to the Grand Canyon and early tourist-era Santa Fe, New Mexico. Although the Grand Canyon and Santa Fe followed different developmental trajectories, Rothman writes, neither site was far removed from "industrial society," and both "showed the rapid codification of the nature of tourism" in fin-de-siècle America.¹⁰¹

Above all else, perhaps the Denver mountain parks represented the city's latest, and perhaps most potent claim to the mountain hinterland: that of mass consumption. Insofar as the desires of the masses outweighed all other land use concerns, Denver's ability to corner the tourist market imbued it with tremendous advantages over would-be competing land users in the mountains.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Rex-Atzet, "Denver's Mountain Playground: The Denver Mountain Parks, the City Beautiful, and the Rise of Modern Wilderness Recreation in Colorado, 1900--1940," 142–150.

¹⁰¹ Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 112.

¹⁰² For more on the social, political and economic history of tourism in the American West, see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity*,

That relationship, however, was not simply a one-way flow of power, influence, people and capital radiating outward from the city into the hinterland. The power to make such hinterland land use claims was amplified in the mountains before being reflected back toward the city. Successful claims to the use of hinterland as property tended to magnify the power of those making such claims to also craft the growing city according to their own designs, and after their own images. If the value of mountain hinterland was indeterminable without the nearby city to define it, so was the city's growth and development similarly illegible without referring to the claims of men like J.B. Walker to a hinterland that only recently had been nothing more than a hybrid, wilderness-postindustrial wasteland.

IV. The Mountains Are the Gateway to the City

In September of 1927, a short article appeared in the pages of the nationally distributed African-American newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*. "Our readers will be glad to know of a great national summer resort and playground located in the heart of the beautiful Rocky Mountain region, only 34 miles west of Denver, Col[orado]," the article began. Owing to its "beautiful scenery" and an "invigorating" climate, the *Defender* reported, "prominent citizens" from all over the country were snapping up lots so quickly that "the entire tract will be sold out in a very short time."¹⁰³ Two years old by then,

1880-1940 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); David M. Wrobel and Patrick T. Long, *Seeing and Being Seen: Tourism in the American West* (Lawrence, KS: Published for the Center of the American West, University of Colorado at Boulder by the University Press of Kansas, 2001); Richelle Winkler et al., "Social Landscapes of the Inter-Mountain West: A Comparison of 'Old West' and 'New West' Communities," *Rural Sociology* 72, no. 3 (2007): 478-501.

¹⁰³ "Colorado Now Has National Resort," *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL, September 3, 1927), National edition.

Lincoln Hills Country Club became the first resort in the Rocky Mountain region to advertise and cater specifically to African-Americans.

Founded and owned by Denver businessmen Robert Ewalt and Edwin Regnier, Lincoln Hills was located 35 miles west of Denver in the heart of the Front Range foothills, and comprised around 100 forested acres bisected by South Boulder Creek and the tracks of the Moffat Railroad. The site of Lincoln Hills had once been the placer mining camp of Pactolus, named after the mythically gold-rich river in Turkey. The Blackhawk mining district lay a few miles to the south. Once the locus of gold mining activity in the state, by the 1920s the mine-ravaged area had since been largely abandoned. Yet the beauty of Lincoln Hills was undeniable, as was its proximity and ease of access from Denver by either railroad or automobile. It was the perfect site for a summer resort community. Ewalt and Regnier platted the property in 1925 and commenced the sale of individual 2500 square foot lots, priced at \$100 each.¹⁰⁴

In marketing their resort both in Colorado and elsewhere, Ewalt and Regnier played upon a *mélange* of cultural, racial, and economic signifiers, and benefited from a number of recent advances in targeted marketing for real estate sales. On one hand, the development of Lincoln Hills reflected the increasing commercial development of the Denver-area foothills for middle-class tourism and recreation, and as a private retreat from the burdens and cares of city life. Estes Park served as a prototype for a number of

¹⁰⁴ As Melanie Shellenbarger notes in her dissertation on the history of second "vacation" homes in Colorado, the purchase of a lot at Lincoln Hills did not necessarily correlate to a specific plot of ground. Instead, prospective customers were encouraged to reserve a lot with their payment, and select its specific location upon their first visit. O.W. Hamlet to Lincoln Hills, Inc., January 24, 1928, Box 1, ff 8, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library; Shellenbarger, "High Country Summers," 252.

new resort communities in the Denver foothills during this time, particularly after F.O. Stanley (of Stanley Steamer fame) built his luxurious and commercially successful Stanley Hotel there in 1903. The addition of major mountain attractions like Rocky Mountain National Park and the Denver Mountain Parks System beginning in 1912 also reflected the heightened status of scenic tourism, and highlighted the increasing political influence of the City Beautiful and urban park movements.¹⁰⁵

According to the imperfect numbers of the 1920 census, there were 6,075 African-Americans living in Denver, a relatively modest number compared to such Great Migration terminals as Chicago and Detroit. Compared to other cities of similar size further to the east, Denver's color line was not particularly rigid, and offered opportunities for advancement not found in other cities of the era. Historian Jesse Moore attributes Colorado's relatively liberal racial regime to the fact that "large numbers of Southern whites did not establish residence there in the wake of the Civil War, as they did in Oklahoma."¹⁰⁶ Most blacks in Denver, both women and men, worked in a service capacity, and the city had a well-developed core of upper middle-class leaders who were

¹⁰⁵ An expanding frame of historical research, much of it on sites in Colorado, seeks a deeper understanding of the economic, political and cultural turn toward tourism-as-industry in the American West during the early 20th century. See Matthew W. Klinge, "Spaces of Consumption in Environmental History," *History and Theory* 42, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 94–110; Rex-Atzet, "Denver's Mountain Playground: The Denver Mountain Parks, the City Beautiful, and the Rise of Modern Wilderness Recreation in Colorado, 1900--1940"; Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*; Shaffer, *See America First*; Shellenbarger, "High Country Summers"; Wrobel and Long, *Seeing and Being Seen*; Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado*.

¹⁰⁶ Jesse T. Moore, "Seeking a New Life: Blacks in Post-Civil War Colorado," *The Journal of Negro History* 78, no. 3 (July 1, 1993): 173.

active in business, religion, the professions and politics.¹⁰⁷ During the busiest years of Colorado's hard rock mining days in the central and northern areas of the Rocky Mountains, efforts to segregate on the basis of race and ethnicity in the mining towns seemed primarily directed against Mexicans, Asians and Eastern Europeans. Considered threats to white labor, they were physically prevented from entering gold mining towns like Cripple Creek during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while African-Americans were permitted.¹⁰⁸ Segregation seemed more pronounced in the resorts and tourist destinations that began to appear during the early years of the 20th century, particularly with respect to lodging.¹⁰⁹ Railroads, however, were not segregated, and African American travelers described them as generally welcoming.¹¹⁰

Though it was the first resort of its kind in Colorado, Lincoln Hills was not the first time that African-Americans had sought to use land as a means of uplift and mutual cooperation. In 1910, Oliver T. Jackson, a Boulderite, African-American restaurateur and former employee of the Colorado governor, abandoned his eatery to become a farmer on Colorado's eastern high plains. But Jackson found that he could not penetrate the established labor arrangements between white farmers, who would cooperate with one another in bringing harvesting and bringing their crops to market. Jackson quickly gathered investors and acquired additional land on the plains northeast of Denver to start

¹⁰⁷ Jessie Fauset, "Out of the West," *The Crisis*, November 1923; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 224.

¹⁰⁸ Jameson, *All That Glitters*, 142.

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Erickson, *Rocky Mountain National Park History and Meanings as Constraints to African-American Park Visitation* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Libraries, 2001), 38–39.

¹¹⁰ Moya Hansen, "Entitled to Full and Equal Enjoyment: Leisure and Entertainment in the Denver Black Community, 1900 to 1930," *The University of Colorado at Denver Historical Studies Journal* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 66–68.

an African American dry land farming "colony," arranged along the same informal principles of shared labor. He named his farming colony "Dearfield."

The enterprising Jackson also secured concessions from the Union Pacific railroad to bring southern black migrants to his property free of charge, as most could not afford the fare. The settlers of Dearfield were, Jackson recalled later, "as poor as people could be when they took up their homesteads."¹¹¹ By the end of World War I, the population of the settlement reached 700, but as historian Quintard Taylor observes, the colony's inability to secure reliable sources of irrigation, together with the economic boom of the 1920s and lure of city life quickly led to Dearfield's dissolution.¹¹²

V. Marketing the Mountains

Lincoln Hills development represented a very different use of land than Dearfield, and appealed to a more affluent and urban class of African-Americans. Ads for Lincoln Hills which appeared in Denver's Black newspapers, including the *Denver Star* and *The Colorado Statesman*, made use of this locally-inflected context by specifically situating Lincoln Hills as a competitor to the prestigious and *de facto* segregated resort of Estes Park; every bit its equal in scenery and superior in terms of its proximity and ease of access from Denver. Just as property values in Estes Park had increased exponentially since its early days as a resort, the circular reminded readers that an investment in Lincoln Hills would net a similarly tidy profit over time.¹¹³ Advertisements also appealed to a burgeoning appreciation among Denver's African-American population of

¹¹¹ Frederick P. Johnson, "Agricultural Negro Colony in Eastern Colorado," *Western Farm Life* (Denver, CO, May 1, 1915).

¹¹² Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 153–155.

¹¹³ Shellenbarger, "High Country Summers," 246; Erickson, *Rocky Mountain National Park History and Meanings as Constraints to African-American Park Visitation*, 36.

the charms of the mountain hinterland. "You owe it to yourself, your wife and your children," one ad read, to "[g]et away from the routine of business life for a day, a week or a month...amid the stately pines, the cool glens and dales, rugged rocks and canyons and gentle slopes beside one of the most beautiful streams in Colorado."¹¹⁴

To all appearances, the campaign to solicit local property buyers for Lincoln Hills was very successful. According to the 1920 census, there were 6,075 African Americans living in Denver. Yet, one undated Lincoln Hills circular (most likely from the late 1920s) lists 208 property owners, all African-American, from Denver alone, many of whom had purchased multiple adjoining lots. Middle-class Black Denverites embraced the opportunity for a safe and welcoming vacation spot so close to home. "It's great," wrote one satisfied Denver customer in a letter to builders Ewalt and Regnier in 1925. "It's the keenest pleasure I have ever experienced. It...fills me with love for the out-of-doors and I am finding more genuine fun, health and happiness for both my friends and myself who visit with me at my mountain home than I expected... It is just what we want."¹¹⁵ A 1928 plat map suggested that almost 400 African Americans had purchased lots at Lincoln Hills.

Yet while it was possible to leverage such localized knowledge in marketing Lincoln Hills to Denver buyers, Regnier and Ewalt also hoped to attract investors from other American cities, who had likely never heard of Estes Park. In targeting more

¹¹⁴ Shellenbarger, "High Country Summers," 246.

¹¹⁵ The letter's author, O.W. "Winks" Hamlet of Denver, would in that same year begin hand-building a lodge house on the Lincoln Hills property, and move there permanently in 1928. Winks Lodge would later host African American luminaries traveling through or performing in Denver, including Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Lena Horne and Billy Eckstein. Hamlet to Lincoln Hills, Inc., January 24, 1928; Andrea Juarez, "A Home in the Hills--Lincoln Hills: An African American Monument In Colorado's Mountains," *Denver Urban Spectrum*, May 2007.

distant customers, they borrowed heavily from the marketing and sales strategies pioneered by African American resort firms like the Idlewild Resort Company in rural northwestern Michigan. Established by four white couples in 1912, Idlewild became by the early 1920s a premier leisure destination for well-to-do African Americans from across the country. If a comparatively unimposing corner of central Michigan could remake itself into a "Black Eden" known throughout the country as a confluence for intellectuals, entertainers, artists and entrepreneurs, what then might be accomplished in a landscape like Colorado's?¹¹⁶

Endorsement letters solicited from a number of Denver community leaders variously praised the resort's scenery, location, and investment potential. "I unhesitatingly advise my clients and my friends to do as I have done and purchase a mountain home because I have every reason to believe it will prove to be a good investment," wrote Denver realtor A.A. Waller. "There is pleasure and profit in abundance for members for our group here."¹¹⁷ George G. Ross, attorney and publisher of the *Denver Star*, echoed Waller's praise, hailing the resort as "one of the greatest future communities that our group will ever know for all around development."¹¹⁸

Lincoln Hills also consciously marketed itself as a communal project for racial uplift. The resort presented an opportunity, wrote Denver baptist minister G.L. Prince, to "show to the Nation a constructive piece of work...in the upbuilding of a great National

¹¹⁶ See Ronald Jemal Stephens, *Idlewild: The Black Eden of Michigan* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2001).

¹¹⁷ A.A. Waller to Lincoln Hills, Inc., March 20, 1925, ARL39, Box 1, ff12, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library.

¹¹⁸ George G. Ross to Lincoln Hills, Inc., March 15, 1928, ARL39, Box 1, ff11, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library.

gathering place for health, recreation, education, and uplift."¹¹⁹ Prominent physician J.H.P. Westbrook wrote of having watched for past two decades as other areas of the foothills, including Bear Creak Canyon, Estes Park, and Daniels Park, were "built up by white people." Lincoln Hills, he insisted, represented "the last opportunity for colored people to get such a location." Nor was there any "segregation about it—only a chance to get a large acreage where we can go in peace and contentment, surrounded by friends and enjoy ourselves...Surely this is our opportunity, we must take advantage of it."¹²⁰

In equating the legal and commercial control of mountain land with racial and cultural imperialism, Westbrook's letter offers a glimpse at the changing relationship between space and power in interwar Denver. As recently as at the turn of the 20th century, Coloradoans in both city and hinterland generally abided by a common understanding of how land created social power: through direct extraction, production, and profit. But as Westbrook's letter suggests, by the mid-1920s, control and use of the hinterland for leisure and consumption had also become an important means by which to measure—and thus to project—social power in the city. To regularly enjoy one's own property in the mountains was to project affluence, health, mobility, and familiarity with local codes of prestige. But these codes did not translate so easily to rural residents who continued to understand the meaning of land primarily in terms of its function, and drew

¹¹⁹ G.L. Prince to Lincoln Hills, Inc., March 17, 1926, Box 1, ff5, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library.

¹²⁰ J.H.P. Westbrook to R.E. Ewalt and E.C. Regnier, July 4, 1925, Box 1, ff3, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library.

less of a distinction between their own activities of commerce and leisure.¹²¹ The growing misalignment between urban and rural understandings of land interposed a stronger and more permanent cultural divide between city and hinterland than before, and added complex new dimensions of land use, power, and cultural identity to Denver's "core-periphery" relationship.¹²²

Ewalt and Regnier altered their marketing strategy for potential investors in other cities. "Here it is!" exclaimed one 1927 Lincoln Hills advertisement in the *Chicago Defender*. "The very thing the entire Race has been hoping and waiting for. A real opportunity to secure a mountain home or camp site in the most beautiful spot in Colorado."¹²³ While some of the language it contained had been cribbed from endorsement letters, these ads made a special point of addressing readers who were skeptical of the wisdom of purchasing property a thousand miles away. Aside from its value as a real estate investment and a pledge of guaranteed title, the ad encouraged readers to think of Lincoln Hills as a down payment on a brighter tomorrow. "Sooner or later," it read, "you will have the opportunity to go to a real place for a real vacation, and

¹²¹ Pristine wilderness held a quite different meaning to those whose livelihoods depended on the extractive industries. Historian Duane Smith uncovers an 1899 quote from a *Summit County Journal* article, expressing "gratitude" to local mining dredge boat crews for having "transformed Swan River from a worthless barren wilderness to scenes of commercial and industrial activity..." A boat superintendent summarized local attitudes even more succinctly, saying simply that "[i]ndustry is always to be preferred to scenic beauty." Duane A. Smith, *The Trail of Gold and Silver: Mining in Colorado, 1859-2009* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2009), 207.

¹²² James Duncan and David Ley's anthology offers an excellent starting point for cultural geography's theoretical consideration of the relationship between space and culture. *Place/Culture/Representation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993).

¹²³ "Display Ad 14--No Title," *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL, August 27, 1927), National edition.

you will be happy to know that you can go right to your own property and have the finest times in the world."¹²⁴

Lincoln Hills also made use of its Denver customers' interstate business, club, and kinship networks to gain access to outside markets. George Gross, who was at the time the only African American employee of the State Highway Department as well as the first president of Denver's earliest NAACP chapter in 1915, owned a number of lots, and heartily supported the enterprise. In a letter to Regnier after his return from the 1927 NAACP convention in Indianapolis, Gross remarked that he had "heard more of its (Lincoln Hills') possibilities [there] than had been discussed here lately."¹²⁵

A similar alliance emerged between Lincoln Hills and Denver's largest African American enterprise of the era, a fraternal order and mutual aid society known as the Supreme Camp of the American Woodmen. Founded in Denver in 1901, the American Woodmen boasted a membership of 50,000 by 1920, and offered licensed insurance services in 24 states.¹²⁶ The organization's seventh quadrennial convention in 1929 brought nearly 1000 delegates and uniformed members of the organization to Denver for a week of meetings, leadership elections, cultural programs and tours. Among the programmed activities was an excursion by rail to Lincoln Hills for a "picnic outing" and,

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ George W. Gross to E.C. Regnier, July 7, 1927, Box 1, ff 7, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library.

¹²⁶ Merah Steven Stuart, *An Economic Detour; a History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes* (Hays, KS: McGrath Publishing Company, 1969), 246.

presumably, the opportunity to purchase property. According to the *Chicago Defender*, the tour was so popular that it "had to be run in three sections."¹²⁷

Strangely, despite the importance of race in defining Lincoln Hills as a social project, and in targeting its customer base, the archival material that still exists gives little indication of the racial identities of the proprietors themselves. Melody Schellenbarger's work on the resort's history turns up conflicting answers to this question, as the census records of 1920 and 1930 identified builders Ewalt and Regnier (as well as their wives and children) as "white." They did not appear to have purchased property in their development. Moreover, the tone and salutations of the correspondence written to them during the 1920s seems to suggest that white officials in Colorado business and government with whom they dealt also identified them as white.¹²⁸ Oral tradition regarding the genesis of Lincoln Hills identifies both men as black.

To Shellenbarger, this ambiguity suggests that perhaps Ewalt and Regnier may have fallen somewhere in-between, able to negotiate both sides of Denver's color line. The success of Idlewild also shows that whiteness was hardly a barrier to establishing successful resorts catering to blacks. It makes sense that, if indeed they were white, Ewalt and Regnier would rely on their most prominent customers to bear the burden of marketing the resort through endorsement letters and personal contacts. By incentivizing customers to sell to their friends and communities, and by allowing them to define the

¹²⁷ "Woodmen Hold Convention in Colorado," *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL, August 31, 1929), National edition, 4.

¹²⁸ Shellenbarger, "High Country Summers," 243; James H. Teller to R.E. Ewalt, June 6, 1925, Box 1, ff2, Lincoln Hills Records, 1925-2006, The Denver Public Library, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library.

meaning of the resort for themselves, Ewalt and Regnier permitted Lincoln Hills to become a genuinely African-American resort community.

VI. A Place to Be

Individual lots sold well through at least the end of the 1920s, and advertisements for Lincoln Hills seemed to both encourage and assume the erection of individual cabins. Yet the resort never experienced a building boom. Although at least 470 lots were sold during the development company's existence, historian Melody Shellenbarger estimates that fewer than 50 cabins were ever actually built on them. Lincoln Hills' ready accessibility to Denverites allowed it to serve as a daytrip and weekend destination, rather than a multiday retreat like Idlewild. Additionally, the vision suggested by the early ads for Lincoln Hills of rows of cabins evoked the typical suburban idyll of privacy and solitude. Yet visitors to Lincoln Hills did not appear to be motivated primarily by a desire for isolation, but rather a desire for community. Private, freestanding cabins were an unnecessary expense for those who used the resort first and foremost as a community space.

Indeed, the community spaces that sprang up on the grounds of Lincoln Hills became its focal points and most important features. They also highlight the significance that Lincoln Hills played in adding dimensionality and spatial meaning to African American urban life in interwar Denver. Obrey "Winks" Hamlet's lodge, known after its completion in 1928 as the Winks Panorama Lodge, became a locus of cultural and community activity for Black Denverites between 1930 and 1950. It functioned simultaneously as black Denver's backyard and front porch, and allowed them to proudly exhibit their city's mountain scenery to the era's famous entertainers and intellectuals,

who routinely passed through by rail. Oral histories of the lodge frequently reference informal readings and concerts, bull sessions over barbeque, communal recreation and worship. The Lodge served as Denver's unofficial guesthouse for artists and musicians like Lena Horne and Billy Eckstein, who would play to packed houses in Denver's Five Points neighborhood before retreating to Lincoln Hills for a more low-key set. In its heyday during the late 1920s and early 1930s, Winks Lodge evoked comparisons to the New York salons of the Harlem Renaissance.¹²⁹

Similarly, Lincoln Hills became the site of the Denver YWCA's Camp Nizhoni for girls in 1927. The Phyllis Wheatley branch of the YWCA had been trying fruitlessly for a number of years to find a mountain space for a girl's summer camp, but white property owners in the hills near Denver were apparently universally unwilling to lease land for that purpose. Camp Nizhoni was the only summer camp for African American girls west of the Mississippi, and offered an entirely unique experience for campers and counselors alike. Interviewed much later in her life, former counselor Marie Greenwood recalled fondly her time as a 15-year-old counselor at Nizhoni. "It was a place where we could hike, play games, swim and learn about nature in an all-girl setting. I loved every minute of Camp Nizhoni. I lived and breathed being outside."¹³⁰

VII. Further Away

Camp Nizhoni lasted only until 1940, when a lack of funds forced the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the Denver YWCA to sell its Lincoln Hills property. Winks Lodge persisted through the early 1960s, but quickly withered after Winks Hamlet died in 1965.

¹²⁹ Juarez, "A Home in the Hills--Lincoln Hills: An African American Monument In Colorado's Mountains."

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Interest in the site revived somewhat in the 1970s, when the dilapidated building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to the death of its proprietor, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act also contributed to the resort's eclipse by removing one of the prime reasons its existence.¹³¹ No longer barred from any public accommodation on the basis of their skin color, African Americans eagerly explored tourist destinations at which they were previously unwelcome.

Changes in transportation also contributed to diminished visitorship of Lincoln Hills over time. The resort had been a perfect train destination, with its own station along one of the central lines leading west out of Denver. Thanks to a massive investment of public money in roads after World War II, however, automobile travel completed its sweeping victory over rail travel to become the dominant (and eventually the only) mode of transportation to and in the Colorado Rockies. New road construction allowed mountain tourists unprecedented range and autonomy, opening up new destinations for daytrips and visitor exploration. And while the old Moffat Railroad passing through Lincoln Hills remains in service even today, much of the trackage that once linked Denver and its mountain hinterland into an integrated transportation network has since been ripped out; rendered superfluous by automobiles and tractor trailers.

The city itself was also changing. After World War II, Denver's growing and overwhelmingly white suburbs began to interpose a geographical and cultural barrier of whiteness between the core city and the mountains, and to make their own powerful claims on the hinterland as "white" space. Not immune to symptoms of "urban crisis,"

¹³¹ It has since been renovated, and now belongs to the James P. Beckwourth Mountain Club, a non-profit Denver organization dedicated to promoting cultural diversity through outdoor education. "The James P. Beckwourth Mountain Club", n.d., <http://beckwourthoutdoors.org/mission.cfm>.

Denver's African American communities saw what few claims to the hinterland they had painstakingly developed gradually fade away. Public modes of transit to the mountains contracted swiftly during the 1940s and 1950s, and Denver planners, the Colorado Highway Department, and the federal government, poured their respective resources into the frantic building of roads.

For African Americans, isolation and alienation from the mountain hinterland represented not merely a loss of access to leisure and enjoyment in the Rocky Mountains, but also a profound loss of prestige within Denver's urban hierarchy. Along with other racialized groups in Denver, African Americans could no longer project their affluence and urban power as a community through the control and use of the mountain hinterland.

No longer considered to be hinterland stakeholders, African-American Denverites found themselves frozen out as a community from important urban decision-making processes regarding how mountain space should be claimed and utilized for urban purposes. They were left out of the booming growth and development of Colorado's ski resorts, which became a multimillion-dollar tourist industry beginning in the 1950s. In a growing city increasingly defined by its control over its hinterland region, the cultural geography controlled and influenced by African Americans as a community actually shrank. This was precisely the outcome that community leaders like J.H.P. Westbrook had hoped that the development of Lincoln Hills might forestall.

Chapter 3: A 20th Century Future, 1940—1960

I. A Cowtown Superego

In 1949, two leading Denver journalists contributed an essay about their city to a new anthology on Western cities by the founder of the *Western Review*, Ray B. West. Robert Perkin, one of the Denver essay collaborators, was the city desk editor of the *Rocky Mountain News*. The other, Charles Graham, was a partner in a prominent local law firm. Their essay, titled “Denver: Reluctant Capital,” was the epitome of tough love in print. They took their city to task on a variety of fronts, most having to do with its continuing hesitance to embrace urban growth, economic expansion, and urban and capital development. Denver, they wrote, was held back by its entrenched, clannish, and retrograde power structure, persistent racism, and ingrained cultural resistance to change. Denver could remain on its current course indefinitely, the writers concluded. To do so, however, would be to spurn all that Denver had once been, and all that it could be again.¹

To the casual visitor who passed through Denver in the late 1940s, Denver’s warts may have been well-hidden. It was clean, beautiful, compact and livable—an increasingly popular destination for tourists and health-seekers alike. During the darkest years of the Great Depression, the city had reached powerfully into its hinterland, building its first water diversion tunnel beneath the Rockies, and acquiring a mountain park system that included the world famous Red Rocks amphitheater, and resort destination Winter Park. All of it had had come without considerable increases to local

¹ Charles A. Graham and Robert F. Perkin. “Denver: Reluctant Capital,” in *Rocky Mountain Cities*, edited by Ray B. West. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1949), pp. 280-317.

citizens' tax burden. If Denver had seemed reluctant to add new people and businesses during the interwar years, neither had it exactly stood still.

But as had been obvious to many Denver observers since at least the end of World War II, beauty and livability would simply not suffice in the new post-war economic climate. Perkin and Graham's complaints included Denver's skyline, which remained squat and humble, not because of a lack of interest in building tall towers, but because of an old ordinance that forbade any new building exceeding the height of the state capital. Denver's neighborhoods were segregated by both class and race, and its industrial areas were dingy, tumbledown, and unproductive. To Perkin and Graham's eyes, early post-war Denver was under-populated, under-developed, and under-industrialized. Even the local steakhouse came in for its share of picayune condemnation: "Look at the menu in any first-rate Denver restaurant or hotel," they suggested to their readers. "You will find the top steak listed: Kansas City cut. Not Denver cut...Kansas City cut. And there's no blushing about it by Denver restaurateurs." Denver, Perkin and Graham chided, had literally taken itself off the menu. Even worse, many Denverites thought this was precisely as it should be.

How far Denver had fallen from its golden age, they lamented. It had once been populated and led by hardy pioneers—men with vision, courage, and fortitude. It was through the good offices of Denver's dynamic first and second generations that Denver won its position of prominence among Western cities in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It beat out competitors for railroad service and became a service and distribution center for a far-flung empire of high country mines and high plains farms. The tragic irony, according to Perkin and Graham, was that these same leading families were also

responsible for Denver's woeful present state. "Daddy, or granddaddy, struck it rich in the mines, or in supplying the mines, or in gambling that Denver would grow, and his progeny are contentedly sitting high astraddle the pile he made." In the years since, the descendants of Denver's founders had fashioned themselves into a small, exclusive and tightly woven aristocracy, "as inbred as the royalty of a second-rate Baltic kingdom."² Hughes...Boettcher... Cheesman...Kountze...these names continued to grace the city's corporate, civic, and charitable boards and dominate the society page. Yet the visionary ambition that they once exemplified was gone. In its place were men who represented only small-bore public policies, cultural and economic provincialism, and jealous conservation of local power. The "golden names" had turned their backs on the market expansion that had been the hallmark of their forebears. They had, in short, become agents of civic decay.

Yet, while Perkin and Graham's essay seemed to sound a note of despair that Denver would ever rouse itself from its complaisance, many of the changes they called for were already well underway by 1949. New residents were coming to Denver in droves, and had been since the end of World War II. These newcomers strained the carrying capacity of Denver's streets, city services, and other infrastructure. In 1947 a young new mayor was elected to replace Benjamin Stapleton, who had been all but embedded in the office since 1923. Post-war economic and industrial conversion had begun to swell the city's industrial base, giving rise to powerful new voices in the city's once-stifling business community. Denverites were already throwing off the economic, cultural, and political yokes of the past, one piece at a time.

² Ibid.

II. Countercyclical Colonialism

Among the great storylines in the history of the American West is that of Eastern financial dominance and Western financial prostration. By the turn of the 19th century, both the consumer and producer markets of the American West had been captured by Eastern capital, as raw materials extracted in the West were spirited away to fuel industrial production in the Midwest, and ultimately, to pad profit margins in the East. This shift took different forms in different industries. By 1900, for instance, the small-claims miners of gold rush lore had long since given way to corporatized, high-dollar mining operations, which transferred wealth out of the region almost as quickly as it emerged from the ground.

Independent dry land farmers found themselves navigating increasingly fickle and inhospitable markets for their produce, even as they fought with railroads over shipping rates and competed against the precursors of today's agribusiness giants. "The Westerner in his madness has experienced the fall of the Republic," Bernard DeVoto wrote in 1934. "The Republic crumbled fifty years ago, about the time a bank took over his first cooperative water-company, and his radicalism consists of inability to see wherein lies the heinousness of trying to get back some part of what was stolen from him at the muzzle of a gun."³ It was not until World War II, and the massive investiture of federal money in the form of military installations, roadways, and dams, that the American West began to shake off the historic bonds of economic servitude.

As the narrative of the American West's misuse at the hands of Eastern capital begins to peter out in the mid-20th century, a new narrative rose to take its place as the

³ Bernard DeVoto, "The West: A Plundered Province," in *The Western Paradox, A Conservation Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 14–15.

dominant thread of Western history: the rise of the so called “urban West,” which dates from the beginning of World War II.⁴ Western historians may finally have buried the persistent periodization of the region according to the fusty Turnerian thesis of the “closing of the frontier.” Yet it is now World War II that seems to divide Western history as neatly as a book’s gutter separates its facing pages, reprising the role that the 1890 Census once played for generations of Turnerians.

Of course, there were Western cities before World War II, and though they were smaller in population and geographical footprint than they would eventually become, they were nevertheless of great significance to the region as a whole.⁵ Nor did the federal wartime investment of the 1940s end the influence of Eastern capital on the economy and resources of the West. Further, the war’s effects on Western urbanization, while abrupt, were not instantaneous. Instead, they unfolded as part of a complex cultural and economic process that wended its way through civic institutions, and slowly changed

⁴ A number of studies, which speak to different sub-disciplines and use different analytical approaches, nevertheless confirm World War II as a catalyst and historical turning point in Western history. In his book, *The Metropolitan Frontier*, urban historian Carl Abbott explores common patterns in the growth of Western cities, and finds that the availability of space gives rise to unique patterns of settlement and land use. Historians of American suburbia like Kenneth T. Jackson, Jane Jacobs, and later, Adam Rome, have confirmed the changes that World War II wrought both on the way Americans built their homes, and how they lived in them. Gerald D. Nash has explored how federal investment transformed the Western landscape, and allowed it to support the emergence of 20th century metropolises in an arid region. Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier*; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 1987); Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961); Adam Ward Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West*.

⁵ Carl Abbott’s has also contributed fine corrective to this bifurcated view of Western history, tracing the emergence of the urban West to the 17th century. See Abbott, *How Cities Won the West*.

cultural identities. The narratives of development and stagnation, economic development and subjugation, paralleled and intertwined with one another for as long as there have been Western cities.

Yet Denver's developmental path began to diverge from those of its peers in other Western states beginning in the early years of the 20th century. Specifically, the city began to moderate its own growth. The reasons for Denver's gradual deceleration and stasis during this era are complex; but they ultimately rest on the emergence of an aristocratic class whose interests lay less in seeing the city grow than in preserving their power over it. Denver's "founders," the men who were most responsible for Denver's top position among Western cities, proved remarkably successful at passing their wealth and influence on to their children. In contrast to the lifelong goals of their fathers, the second and third generations of Denver's leadership, from their perches as the heads of banks and extractive industries, sought to shield the city from outside investment and influence, especially from Eastern financial interests.

They accomplished this goal using a variety of tools acquired over the course of decades. Some had inherited railroads, tramways and water companies from their fathers, which they leveraged to gain influence in city government. From there, they were able to craft byzantine layers of building and land development regulations that made it difficult for would-be outside investors to extract a profit from building, or even speculating, on Denver land.

Some had inherited banks from their fathers. The banking heirs coordinated their lending practices to keep a tight reign on how much money they would loan to customers. An artificially low loan-to-deposit ratio, respected by all six of Denver's great banks,

artificially depressed Denver's credit pool, and its capacity to employ new arrivals. Finally, the heirs of Denver's first visionaries used the classic tools of aristocratic social exclusion, including intermarriage, social clubs, and interlocking company directorates to prevent outsiders from gaining a toehold in their city. Elite fixation with the conservation of influence gave rise to a thoroughgoing conservative worldview that seemed to imbue the rest of the city. For much of the interwar period, Denver was known as much for its backwardness, racism, and resistance to change, as for its mountains and stunning climate.⁶

In sum, Denver's hereditary elites practiced a form of negative control: by foregoing sure profit, and perhaps large amounts of it, they discovered that they could "hide" Denver from outside investors and potential newcomers. They justified their heavy-handed rule over Denver by pointing to aspects that might today be considered as part of the "quality of life," including the city's cleanliness, beauty, the availability of open space, and its sunny, temperate climate. This state of affairs emerged in full form by World War I, and it persisted through World War II and even beyond.⁷

Mobilization for the Second World War, however, would begin to jam the levers with which Denver's aristocracy maintained its control. The war would introduce Denver, and the region more generally, to a generation of young Americans whose familiarity with the West reached no deeper than what they could glean from serial comics and penny arcades. For many, the experience was transformative, and thousands of them vowed to return to Denver when the war was over. These new Denverites would not be as tolerant or as understanding of an elite that seemed to run the entire city in

⁶ Dorsett, *The Queen City*; Barth, *Instant Cities*.

⁷ See Chapter One for a more extensive discussion of Denver's aristocracy.

furtherance of social goals that benefited only themselves. World War II-driven population growth placed Denver back on a path toward market liberalism, and (albeit to a far lesser extent), social progressivism.

The changes taking place during these years were not, however, just among the city's leadership. Denver's demographics were changing, including the reemergence of a political and cultural cohort of Denverites that had not existed since the 19th century: new residents. Denver's new residents needed different services than those who were long established residents. They needed new water taps, new streets, new sewers, and new schools. More than anything else, it was Denver's newcomers that determined the shape and trajectory of Denver's future.

The emergence of a "growth constituency" helped to give courage and comfort to the voices of men like Robert Perkin and Charles Graham—whose sentiments would have made them social outcasts in their own city a scant ten years earlier.⁸ Their essay is itself evidence of a changing urban dynamic in Denver. Even at the time they were writing, Denver was years removed from the sleepy mountain town of the interwar years. It would now be saddled with the challenges that accompanied rapid growth, whether it was ready for them or not.

⁸ "Growth constituency," while the author's term, shares some similarities to Harvey Molotch's well-used construction: the "growth machine." However, while Molotch's model focuses exclusively on political economy and the interlocking web of corporate and official interests who benefited from urban growth (e.g. developers, employers, newspapers, and local governments) the term "growth constituency" is meant to capture the needs and interests of newcomers *as residents*. As such, the term seeks to privilege both local culture and senses of place more than does Molotch's model. Harvey L. Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place," *The American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 2 (1976): 309–332; John R. Logan and Harvey Luskin Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

We can trace the emancipation of Denver from its own elites, along with its gradually increasing reliance on urban growth as a means of accommodating its expanding population, by studying the changes in an interwoven succession of civic institutions, from city hall and the mayoralty to the daily press, and from Denver banks to downtown real estate developers.

Urban and population growth created governing and cultural imperatives for Denver to expand its economy and become more prosperous. The effect was indeed to set in motion a kind of perpetual motion machine offering city leaders only two choices: accommodation of and planning for the influx of people and capital, or inundation beneath the problems created by that influx. The press became the first major Denver civic institution to place significant pressure on Denver's city government to react to the problems posed by population growth. A revitalized press took a more active role in politics, and helped shape the pivotal mayoral election in 1947. The winner of the election, Mayor Quigg Newton, worked to remove city government regulations that prevented growth, and during the course of his tenure, Denver began to physically grow in a manner that more closely resembled that of other growing Western cities.

The early post-war years also saw the development of Denver's first middle-class "pro-growth constituency." City residents largely gave their unqualified support and approval to investments designed to accommodate newcomers from the mid-1940s through at least the early 1960s.⁹ Newspaper circulation numbers increased dramatically,

⁹ Denverites' support of growth during this period, and their willingness to pay for measures to accommodate it, complicates the existing arguments in urban sociology over how American cities grew in the post-war era. The financial and political power discrepancies between Denver's elites and general population were so pronounced in the interwar years that Denver almost seemed pre-modern in its social organization during

and new publications emerged. Denverites supported the efforts of local government to deal with the consequences of growth with their votes, through bond issues, and with their pocketbooks. Liberalized lending practices among Denver banks added to the city's credit pool, and helped to accelerate the city's economy. Nor did most Denver voters need to be convinced to support water bond after water bond over the same period. Stepped up criticism by the Denver press helped lead to liberalization of Denver's lending markets, and a corresponding decrease in the determinative economic power of the city's biggest banks.

The final challenge to the power of Denver's "old guard" came not from Denverites at all, but from dreaded outside real estate investors, who had been held at arm's length for so long. Real estate was the last, and most precious stronghold of influence for Denver's pre-war aristocracy. The stronghold was successfully laid siege by two parties: a high-flying New York real estate developer named William Zeckendorf,

and immediately after World War II. This confounds in some ways the Marxist interpretation of rapid urban growth, best exemplified in the work of David Harvey and Manuel Castells, which pits the privatized interests of landowners against the public interests of the much larger tenant class. Such fights would come later in Denver, but in the late 1940s and 1950s, the impulse toward urban growth was as strong among the general population as it was among Denver's new class of pro-growth elites. David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London, UK: Edward Arnold, 1973); David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2001); Manuel Castells, *City, Class, and Power* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1978). Denver's experience also calls into question the related but distinct analysis of sociologist Harvey Molotch, who identified urban "growth machines" as coalitions of urban elites in business and government who shared a common interest in fostering rapid urban growth in their cities. Denver's pre-war financial and governing elites had been distinctly opposed to urban growth in their city, sensing in it a threat to their comprehensive and carefully-guarded local authority. Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*; John R. Logan, Rachel Bridges Whaley, and Kyle Crowder, "The Character and Consequences of Growth Regimes," *Urban Affairs Review* 32, no. 5 (May 1, 1997): 603–630.

and a group of Texas investors under the leadership of Clint Murchison. The success of these outsiders concludes this chapter, as it finally and authoritatively broke the last major barrier protecting Denver from a flood of outside real estate and speculative capital, and kicked off a spree of urban expansion that would last for decades.

In sum, during this eight-year span at the 20th century's midpoint, Denverites rejected both the city's pre-war power structure, and the philosophies that had been used to justify its existence. Superimposing the history of Denver's development during the 20th century over histories that look to the West on a more regional basis reveals an almost countercyclical aspect. Even as the hinterlands of the West remained in thrall to outside finance in the years leading up to World War II, a small group of hereditary elites in Denver exercised an immense amount of local control over their city. By preventing Denver from appearing profitable to potential outside investors, Denver's power brokers effectively shielded their city from capital investment that they could not control. Through politics, the press, and various civic organizations, Denverites made a concerted effort to reduce the power of Denver's old elites, and to *re-commodify* space within their city proper. Ultimately, they were successful on both counts.

Once done, this act could not be undone. As the Denver cartel gradually exited the scene, no entity in Denver, public or private, ever recaptured the local influence that it had once wielded in steering the city's course of development. Increasingly, outside speculators and consortiums of capital began to determine the course of Denver's growth. This development suggested a new style of colonialism, not just to Eastern capital, but to outside capital in general.

In the mid-to-late 1940s, however, Denver's struggle was as much with its past as with its future. Even as they recognized the changes taking place around their city as the result of population growth, capital development, and technological advancement, Denverites remained focused on the political and cultural issues that affected them most directly. There was widespread support for strengthening city government and making it more responsive, increasing the availability of credit in the city, and expanding and updating infrastructure to accommodate newcomers—but without raising taxes. Denver had “quality of life” in abundance. What was lacking, it seemed, was economic opportunity and self-determination.

The years between 1945 and 1953 represented a decisive shaking off of the “old” and headlong plunging into the “new” for the city of Denver. The city shared in the tremendous prosperity of mid-century America, and became much more intricately connected to an expanding web of national and international trade and commerce. Denverites grew increasingly accustomed to making demands of their local, state, and federal government. As Denver's demographics changed, so did its citizens' cultural understandings of and attitudes toward urban growth, the city's quality of life, and their own relationships with the city's natural surroundings. Within the city itself, “growth” was decidedly the victor, with “conservation” taking a back seat. The sheer magnitude of the cultural changes during this period defies easy description. Yet it is important to try. Like many other Western cities, present-day Denver is a product of post-war haste: haste to modernize, to compete, to be taken seriously. It would not take long, however, for Denver to overshoot the mark.

III. A Population Bomb

The story of Denver's population growth, along with that of the West in general, has been well documented.¹⁰ Federal dollars spent in mobilization for war made what had been a comparatively static American population much more peripatetic, and stimulated the American economy to new heights of post-war productivity and affluence. This population growth, most of it directed at urban areas, constituted the greatest change to the region wrought by the United States' catalytic experience in World War II. Between 1940 and 1950, Colorado's population grew by 18 percent—from 1.1 to 1.3 million people—despite the fact that all of the state's "mountain counties" lost population during the same period.

Most of the growth was concentrated among the cities of the "Front Range," or the string of cities (including Denver and Colorado Springs) along the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains. Denver alone accounted for nearly half of the state's growth during this period—93,000 or so—and the Denver metropolitan area (unincorporated Denver) accounted for almost 80% of all of the growth in the state during the entire decade.¹¹ Who was coming to Denver, and why?

Many thousands of people, most of them young, came to Denver during World War II on a temporary basis, either to train for deployment overseas, or to work in arms and munitions factories. The largest, by far, was the Denver Arms Plant, built in 1941, which employed almost 20,000 workers at peak operating capacity. Workers also toiled at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, producing chemical weapons, and at ordinance and

¹⁰ See, for instance, Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993.)

¹¹ U.S. Census of Population: 1950 Census Report for Denver, Colorado, Volume III, Chapter 16. (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 7.

medical depots to Denver's north and south along the Front Range. Thousands of servicemen also flooded the state for basic training, at sites like Camp Carson just south of Colorado Springs, Lowery Air Base in far east Denver, and Camp Hale, located just above the mountain town of Leadville, where the soldiers of the famed 10th Mountain Division trained for high altitude infantry combat.

For most, this was a "first taste" of Colorado, and of the West generally. Thousands who had trained and worked in the state would make their way back on a more permanent basis after the war was over.¹² The massive influx of new arrivals changed the city's proverbial DNA. Post-war growth changed everything about Denver, including its patterns of production, consumption, and land use, as well as its political and cultural identity.

Shortly after the war was over, Denver began to experience the diseconomies of scale that had been kept in check during the interwar years. Pre-World War II Denver had been widely hailed for its cleanliness, yet by 1946, its streets and alleys were unkempt, with piles of trash persisting for weeks on some street corners.¹³ Its roadways were no longer adequate for the volumes of traffic flowing into the downtown area during the weekdays. Its airport, which many identified as essential to Denver's future, was in a woeful state of disrepair.¹⁴

More ominously, Denver officials suddenly found themselves confronting a serious housing shortage—and its water supply was also rapidly approaching its limits.

¹² Carl Ubbelohde, *A Colorado History*, Rev. centennial ed. (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Co., 1976), 328–329.

¹³ Editors, "Quigg Newton--Candidate of the People," *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, May 18, 1947), sec. C.

¹⁴ Editors, "Silence Is Golden," *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, May 17, 1947).

More people were added to the Denver water system in the year 1946 than had been added in the previous 28 years, and the rate of growth among water customers was four times what it had been in 1940.¹⁵ It became clear almost immediately after World War II that the Denver Water Board, bound by charter to provide water to as many Denver residents as might need it, did not have the existing infrastructure, or the financial resources, to meet the future needs of Denver's growing populace.

All told, the city of Denver was far from prepared for the rate of its post-war population growth. Part of the responsibility for Denver's flat-footedness surely belonged to Denver's longtime mayor, Benjamin Stapleton. By the end of World War II, Mayor Stapleton had been a civil servant in Denver from nearly 50 years—25 or those spent in the mayor's office. During that time, he had developed close ties with Denver's financial powers, particularly the 17th Street banks, whose support he could count on in every election. He had built a political machine manned primarily by the ranks of city workers, who had immense freedom of action to pursue their own ends while ostensibly acting as representatives of the city. And finally, Stapleton had consistently pursued an unspoken policy of urban growth suppression. His office offered no help or support to business interests who expressed interest in locating in Denver, and in fact often fabricated bureaucratic hurdles to discourage them from Denver altogether. Stapleton justified his policies toward growth in Denver on the basis of "quality of life." Smoky factories and crowded thoroughfares would only detract from what made Denver so special.

¹⁵ Alvord, Burdick & Howson. *Report on Future Water Supply: Denver Municipal Water Works, March, 1955*. (Prepared for Denver Board of Water Commissioners), 2.

Yet Stapleton was hardly the only one to blame for Denver's post-war struggles. His longtime political backers, Denver's 17th Street financial community, were collectively quite satisfied before the war with Denver's position, as well as their own. Denver was big enough to exert its market dominance over a wide hinterland, and with no other municipal competitors in the area, seemed certain to maintain its position. Yet it was small enough to offer a large degree of control to Denver's richest financiers, who treated the city, and the state generally, as a wealth-producing fiefdom. There was, in other words, little margin in urban growth, which would only weaken their hold on the levers of power.

Whether Denver was prepared for it or not, by 1946, not only was rapid population growth a reality, but it had become the dominant feature of Denver's politics, culture, and economics. Urban growth and the thousands of new residents descending on Denver represented an immense electoral and policy challenge to the dominance of Denver's existing power structure. But the impact of Denver's population growth was not like that of a tsunami, instantly destroying the city's iron-fisted power regimes in government and finance. Rather, post-war population growth acted as a slowly rising tide of liberalization and influence diffusion, and in sequential order, it reshaped Denver's press, its politics, its banking and financial sectors, and finally, its collective attitude toward growth and industry. The next two decades of Denver's history, from the end of World War II to the early 1960s, would be a story of democratization and dispersal, rapid population and physical growth, and intense civic optimism. These decades would also fundamentally change the ways in which Denverites self-identified, and how they interacted with both government and the global economy.

The immediate post-war political landscape would be a rude awakening for career politicians like Denver's longtime mayor, Benjamin Stapleton, who had in fact used his power to thwart just this kind of urban growth during the years leading up to World War II. Now that such growth was a reality in Denver, Stapleton would be hard-pressed to adjust to, and effectively address, the problems that arose from his city's rapidly changing demography.

IV. The Press Awakens

Denver's *ancien regime* did not organically deteriorate or exit the stage on its own following World War II. Rather, it was increasingly challenged by other elements of the Denver community, and gradually pushed aside. The obsolescence of Denver's pre-war power structure was of a creeping nature, and it happened in a series of stages. The first stage was a post-war transformation of the city's press. For nearly as long as Benjamin Stapleton had been Denver's mayor, the city's political and economic torpor had been mirrored in the pages of its two leading dailies, the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post*. The *Rocky Mountain News* was nearly as old as Denver itself, having been founded in 1859. The *Denver Post* was a newcomer by comparison, co-founded in 1892 by a bartender named Harry Tammen and a lottery promoter named Frederick Gilmer Bonfils. Since then, the two dailies had constantly dueled with one another over circulation, revenue, and influence.¹⁶

¹⁶ The circulation wars between the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post* occasionally became nearly farcical in their ferocity, as when both newspapers offered their want-ad buyers free gasoline. The classified sections of both papers were said to have exceeded one hundred pages in length, while most of Denver's traffic ran on gasoline paid for by one of the two newspapers. David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace. *The People's Almanac* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975).

In 1942, the Scripps Company, publishers of the *Rocky Mountain News*, hired editor Jack Foster to save their newspaper from bankruptcy. Foster managed to increase circulation and thus save the paper from extinction by converting it to a bi-fold tabloid format, introducing Denver newsreaders to the nation's first advice columnist—his wife, Frances. Ad revenues depended on the goodwill of Denver commercial class, and Foster was understandably leery of making waves in the rather repressive editorial environment of World War II. His adjustments on the paper's operational margins were enough to nurse the ailing *Rocky Mountain News* through the end of the war.

In contrast to the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Denver Post* remained in the hands of the Bonfils and Tammen families, who were tightly intermeshed with most of the city's leading financiers and politicians. The *Denver Post* had no editorial page, but its stories demonstrated a consistent political slant toward anti-New Deal conservatism, pro-isolationism, and distrust of outsiders. If the *News* aimed for editorial respectability, then the *Denver Post* aimed to maximize its entertainment value—a formula that proved over time to be the more profitable approach. During World War II, the *Denver Post* faced little of the financial turbulence that had beset its closest competitor. But like the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Post's* editors rarely ventured beyond the comfortable editorial niche of tabloid sensationalism laced with conservative politics. Together, Denver's leading dailies spent the latter years of World War II studiously avoiding any discussion of the manner in which the city was run, and imposed an involuntary brownout on stories that were critical of Denver's most powerful officials and financiers.¹⁷

¹⁷ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 189–191.

As placid as it may have looked on its surface, however, Denver's press was the first to be effectively remade as a civic institution by World War II. "Change" came to Denver's press in the form of a short, irascible ex-beat reporter, who had decided to start his own newspaper, focusing on Denver business development. That man's name was Eugene Cervi. Named after the famed socialist, Eugene V. Debs, Cervi may not have seemed the most obvious person to take up the mantle of Denver boosterism following the conclusion of World War II. Mr. Cervi, however, saw great opportunity in the gaping holes left by the editorial timidity of Denver's leading newspapers. Publishing the inaugural issue of *Cervi's Journal* only four days after V-J Day in September of 1945, *Cervi's* promised to bring to its readers a mixture of content that was wholly novel in Denver.

Much of the paper read like a typical Chamber of Commerce circular, with extensive laundry lists of business and real estate deals, insider trades, and real estate gossip, along with boastful stories of visionary businessmen and the area's rich and untapped natural resources. Although it was only available by subscription, it quickly became an indispensable news source for those who wanted to know what was really going on in the city. What made Cervi's truly unique in Denver's press landscape, however, were the publisher's frequent, thundering editorial broadsides against those whom he deemed to be "enemies of progress:" a revolving rogue's gallery featuring by turns Mayor Stapleton, the Denver city council, the leading dailies, the Chamber of Commerce, and the big 17th Street banks.

Cervi was not a new face on the Denver media scene after World War II. In fact, he had worked in Denver's news business in some capacity for nearly two decades. He

had first made a name for himself as a cub reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News* in 1933, when he scooped even the *Denver Post* on the death of its famous owner, Fredrick Bonfils. He had staked out the palatial Bonfils residence, and watched as a priest entered the house. It was compelling circumstantial evidence that the publisher had in fact expired, but Cervi needed stronger proof to publish. So he borrowed the phone of a relative who lived in the neighborhood and called the city's largest mortuary. "This is the Bonfils residence," he said. "When are you coming to get the body?" "Five minutes," came the reply, and Cervi had his scoop. The *Post* evidently bore him no ill will for this maneuver, later hiring him to work one of their city beats. During World War II, Cervi worked for the Colorado Office of War Information.¹⁸

As a publisher, Eugene Cervi considered himself the best kind of booster—the "honest" kind. He had no compunctions about vociferously criticizing his city when he believed it was falling short of its potential. He wrote in dramatic, clipped prose, and added emphasis with frequent underlining. Generous with both his "blunt truths" and his biting sarcasm, Cervi seemed like a strange hybrid of the past and present: part 20th century urban booster, and part 18th century revolutionary pamphleteer. In December of 1945, Cervi wrote his own version of Denver's (and the American West's) declaration of independence:

The picture, the over-all year-end inventory, of this region is remarkably clear.

For decades we have played a complacent second fiddle to the business and

industrial maestros of the east. We have been content to hold a chord while they

¹⁸ Houstoun Waring, "Eugene Cervi," *Grassroots Editor*, Spring 1987, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:QxkSbSmfWRkJ:www.mssu.edu/iswne/bios/cervi.htm+houstoun+waring+eugene+cervi+grassroots+editor&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-a&source=www.google.com>.

carried the tune. But war opened our eyes to our own abilities, to our great potential. The west speaks today with a new and vigorous voice, and it says: “Move over maestros. It’s our turn.

No longer will this region remain the blind spot in the national economy. No longer will it follow leaders who would like to freeze it in the stagnant charm of a well-run old folks home. No longer will it resist industrialization because smoke is unpleasant. Belatedly but inexorably, the industrial revolution has come to Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, Utah, Idaho and Montana—and all the kings’ horses cannot turn it back.¹⁹

Cervi’s “declaration” was aimed both at Colorado’s financial puppet masters in the east, who owned a great percentage of Colorado’s raw natural resources, and Denver’s own financial and political elites, who continued to enable the region’s financial and political servitude to wealthy interests, even as they preserved the city itself as a kind of fiefdom. Cervi’s combative tone toward Denver’s powerbrokers was a remarkable departure from previous journalistic practices in Denver, and it raised quite a few eyebrows. That was exactly what Eugene Cervi intended. There was, he knew, a large group of younger Denver businessmen who were tired of their city’s equivocal position with respect to eastern capital and political interests, and he tailored his message to speak directly to their concerns.

Cervi also made a show of his editorial independence, as if to rebuke the editors of the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Post* by the force of his example. After his most thorough pen-lashings of 17th Street, for instance, Cervi would jestingly append some

¹⁹ Eugene Cervi, *Cervi’s Journal* (Denver, CO, December 27, 1945), 1.

version of the following: “Note to our timid subscribers: Foregoing was written with both eyes planted firmly on the jury box. Don’t worry about us.”²⁰

Cervi made a sport out of goading his readers. Although his target market was Denver’s professional and business class (the majority of whom were conservative and Republican), Cervi himself was a proud and aggressive New Deal Democrat, whose sentimental touchstone remained the workingman rather than the financier. His frequent ideological skirmishes with his readers on the editorial pages of *Cervi’s Journal* became the stuff of legend among Denver opinion-makers during the 1940s and 50s.

Yet while Cervi shared with his namesake a common interest in the health of the American working class, he was no enemy of capitalism. The first edition of *Cervi’s Journal* explained the newspaper’s mission thusly: “This regional business newsletter is launched...in the American tradition of free enterprise and with deep respect for the profit motive. It is born in an atmosphere of bright hope, optimism and adventure.”²¹ Despite his frequent carping at 17th Street and the Stapleton administration, Cervi’s outlook for Denver was essentially positive. There were many obstacles to be overcome, but few hard and fast limits to Denver’s future financial, political, and even cultural potential. Many of the immediate obstacles were of a physical and practical nature, including shortage of downtown office space, lack of adequate housing, and infrastructure that no longer met the needs of a growing city. As daunting as these problems seemed, they could each be corrected given adequate time and money.

Denver’s most intractable obstacles, however, were of a cultural nature. To the rest of the world, Denver had an unflattering reputation to shake off. “The extent,” Cervi

²⁰ Eugene Cervi, *Cervi’s Journal* (Denver, CO, April 3, 1947), 1.

²¹ Eugene Cervi, *Cervi’s Journal* (Denver, CO, September 6, 1945), 1.

wrote in 1946, “to which Denver is misrepresented and misunderstood by the great majority of Americans is appalling...The myth of an Indian-Cowboy frontier town must be killed. The picture of a thriving, modern, producing Big City must be held up before all the world.”²² Moreover, an attitudinal adjustment was also needed closer to home. Ambivalence toward economic and urban growth was rife not just among the city’s financial and political elites, but across a large cross-section of Denver’s population.²³ Such an attitude, if not dispelled, would ultimately detract from the city’s ability to direct its growth and shape its future. Hesitance in the face of change would also guarantee that many great opportunities for expansion and civic enhancement would be wasted along the way, simply for lack of civic dynamism.

Cervi did not have to wait long for a teachable moment. In November of 1945, the newly established United Nations secretly dispatched a scout to Denver to evaluate its suitability as a site for the UN’s world headquarters, or (more likely) one of its subsidiary branches. To Cervi, the idea of securing a branch of the United Nations in Denver made supreme sense. The city’s stunning and unique geography seemed to offer growth opportunities that were both more exotic, and better-suited to Denver’s unique landscape than run-of-the-mill industrial expansion. A Denver-based United Nations bureau would certainly burnish Denver’s cosmopolitan credentials, and perhaps even put it on the road toward becoming an international center of culture, intellect, and tourism, like Geneva, Switzerland.

²² *Cervi’s Journal*, September 12, 1946, p. 1.

²³ Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson and Duane A. Smith. *A Colorado History: Revised Centennial Edition*. (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Co., 1976), p. 344.

Whatever prospects Denver had were dashed, however, during the course of the U.N. scout's visit. According to one of Cervi's informants, the U.N. representative confided to a Denver friend that the city establishment had treated him "like an interloper." Denver officials seemed uninterested in addressing their city's housing shortage, or expanding its services to meet the needs of an international organization. The scout's assessment, Cervi reported, would be that "...Denver did not have a general attitude which could be considered friendly and sympathetic to the aims and purposes [of the] UN headquarters and its branches."²⁴ Cervi's pessimism about Denver's chances was borne out when it lost what would turn out to be its sole chance at capturing a branch of the United Nations. Cervi did not let the moment slip. It was, of course, important to provide adequate housing for new residents, which had figured prominently in the UN's rejection of Denver as a possible location. But, Cervi argued, "[I]t wasn't only lack of housing that knocked Denver out of contest [sic] for the United Nations headquarters. It was also lack of fully developed cultural facilities," such as top-flight theater, art, and music, or universities that interacted with the general public. "Blunt truth," Cervi continued, "is that Denver's cultural status is far higher than most [E]asterners think, [and] far lower than most Denverites admit."²⁵

In the first week of February in 1946, the *Denver Post* announced a change of leadership at its helm. Helen Bonfils, the august co-owner and legal executor of the *Post* had hired a relatively young, new editor away from the *Portland Oregonian* named Edwin Palmer Hoyt. In light of the *Post's* past editorial policy, the choice of Hoyt to head the paper was a remarkable change in direction. Hoyt was obviously an outsider,

²⁴ *Cervi's Journal*, November 22, 1945.

²⁵ *Cervi's Journal*, March 14, 1946.

and thus had no stakes to uphold and no favors to repay. With the backing of the paper's owners, Hoyt could largely chart his own editorial course. Eugene Cervi was among those who were overjoyed at the news. “[The] importance of the appointment of Palmer Hoyt as publisher of the *The Post* [sic] is staggering...not so much because of Hoyt's undeniable abilities, but because of the end of the most incredibly enduring, inflexible, self-perpetuating editorial policy in the history of journalism...Retiring publisher Shepherd was a trustee of the Bonfils-Tammen personality, an administrator of their psychological bequests...The owners rarely interfered, because they could rely on him to make safe decisions.” Hoyt, Cervi believed, understood that “a newspaper cannot live on profits alone...it must establish an editorial character which justifies its dominant existence in a community.” If Hoyt could “save” the *Denver Post* from its self-imposed irrelevance, then his newspaper could become a mighty force for the political and cultural reform that Cervi believed Denver so desperately needed.²⁶

In fact, the timing of his hiring played an enormous role in giving Palmer Hoyt an even larger megaphone than he might have otherwise had. The half-decade following World War II was an exceptionally busy news time, at home and abroad. Palmer Hoyt, along with his cohort of citywide publishers across the country, would prove quite influential in shaping the post-war American outlook on everything from human rights, to communism and the Soviet threat. Closer to home, however, an important election loomed in which Hoyt himself would play a key role. At the time he was hired, in early 1946, Denver's next mayoral election was just over a year away, yet it was obvious that this would not be a typical coronation of Stapleton for yet another term. How Hoyt, as

²⁶ *Cervi's Journal*, February 7, 1946, 1.

the editor of the city's largest paper, came down on the issue of the mayoral election would have an immense effect on the outcome. The tea leaves were not hard to read. While Stapleton had long been accustomed to benign coverage from the *Post*, Hoyt immediately shifted the newspaper into an adversarial stance against city hall.²⁷ Hoyt's successful makeover of the *Denver Post* also spurred more critical civic coverage from Jack Foster's *Rocky Mountain News*. By 1946, both Denver newspapers were as popular and profitable as they had been in a generation. This historical development owed something to the labors of Eugene Cervi, whose weekly business journal, while far smaller in circulation than either the *Rocky* or the *Post*, had rewritten the rules of acceptable journalism in Denver.

V. A New Champion: The 1947 Mayoral Election

Surprising no one, Denver's incumbent mayor Benjamin Stapleton threw his hat in the ring for a fifth term in 1946. Although in all probability Stapleton recognized that Denver's changing demographics might pose new challenges to his reelection—particularly among newcomers to the city, who were not familiar with him—he still knew that he could count on the backing of 17th Street, city workers and local unions. These assets had always been more than enough to allow Stapleton to maintain his position, and while Denver certainly had more people than it used to, there was no reason to think that things had changed so drastically that they would fail him this time.

By mid-1946, the field of candidates was beginning to take more definite shape. There was Stapleton, of course, who was nominally a Democrat, although his administration was largely non-partisan. Also in the running was the flamboyant Thomas

²⁷ For more on the history of the *Denver Post*, see Bill Hosokawa, *Thunder In The Rockies: The Incredible Denver Post*. (New York, NY: Morrow, 1976).

Morrissey, a longtime fixture in Denver's Democratic Party. The Republicans fielded Judge William Black, whose chances of winning were so slender that he was barely mentioned in most of the newspaper coverage of the race. Finally, there was political independent James Quigg Newton, who some said had been "recruited" to run for the position by *Denver Post* editor Palmer Hoyt.

If one were going to recruit a mayoral candidate for the 1947 election, one could hardly have selected a more perfectly suited candidate than Quigg Newton. He was a known quantity in Denver. His family had first come to Colorado in 1871 and settled in Pueblo, where his father Jim was born. As an adult, Quigg's father Jim had made a name for himself as a banker, real estate speculator, and businessman in Denver, and had even become a member of the prestigious Denver Country Club. Following in the established tradition of many sons of privilege in Denver, Quigg went East for his schooling, completing his secondary education at Andover, and finishing college and law school at Yale. Like those earlier scions, Quigg returned to Denver after an internship with future Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas (then the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission). He married within his class (Virginia Shafroth, granddaughter of a former Colorado governor, John Shafroth).

During World War II, Quigg Newton served as an officer in the US Navy, doing legal work for the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS). Although Newton saw no combat, and in fact never even left the country during World War II, his time with NATS had allowed him to make important contacts in the aerospace and airline industries, both of which would prove crucial to Denver's post-war economic development. After World War II, Newton returned with his family to Denver, where he resumed his law practice.

His impressive résumé, coupled with his deep connections within the community quickly began to pay dividends, and he was soon appointed to the board of trustees of the University of Denver, and named as the board's president not long after. His star rose further still when he was named one of the national Jaycee's Ten Outstanding Young Men of 1947.²⁸ It was not by chance, then, that the up-and-coming Newton caught the eye of the similarly up-and-coming Palmer Hoyt, who managed to gin up a political race between Stapleton and Newton before either one had declared his candidacy. By the time Quigg Newton finally formally entered the race in early 1947, he had already effectively been running for the post for the better part of a year.²⁹

Stapleton's candidacy, meanwhile, enjoyed no such advantage when it came to Denver's press. Hoyt, in particular, seemed intent on Stapleton's ouster. In a reversal of the paper's previous editorial policies, Hoyt brought editorials back to the *Denver Post*, and frequently used them to rebuke the Stapleton administration for its lack of proactivity in addressing the numerous crises plaguing the city. A series of investigative reports excoriated the Stapleton administration for everything from lax health standards at Denver restaurants to haphazard trash collection, which risked preventable outbreaks of polio. When Stapleton's friend and city parks commissioner George Cranmer suggested that Denverites use garbage disposals to remediate Denver's trash problem, Hoyt's *Post* exploded with righteous incredulity in an editorial titled "Who Should Come First, Pigs or Housewives?"³⁰ A failed experiment with street signage, and increasing traffic on Denver's major arteries elicited howls of protest in the *Post's* editorial pages.

²⁸ Foster, *Citizen Quigg*, 82-85.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 99.

³⁰ *Denver Post*, September 9, 1946.

Investigative reporters, of late such a rarity in the corridors of city hall, all of a sudden seemed to be everywhere, looking into everything.

The disclosures fell upon Stapleton's head in a series of successive blows. Revelations emerged that city employees were being paid less than a living wage, even while friends of the mayor in private industry reaped lucrative leasing contracts for their land with the city. Hoyt's *Post* made allegations that the mayor was purposely neglecting the health of Denverites, and showing favoritism in restaurant inspections. The Stapleton administration was also embarrassed by a series of revelations of graft, malfeasance, and general ineptitude in the Denver police department. Matters threatened to spiral out of control for Stapleton when his chief of police pled the Fifth Amendment in a grand jury investigation of two Denver patrolmen. The *Post* rather hastily tied the scandal to the mayor's office: "Because Mayor Stapleton exercises such close supervision over the police department, it is natural to suppose that the chief may have been acting under orders when he refused to testify," Hoyt wrote.³¹

While Stapleton endured a nearly yearlong public lashing from both the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, Quigg Newton worked on assembling the outlines of his campaign. The young challenger styled himself as a political independent, beholden to no interest groups and friendly with no influence peddler. Newton was entirely serious about reforming machine politics out of Denver's government. As part of his campaign, he proposed major revisions to the city's charter—the first since 1904—that would curtail the mayor's ability to hire and fire city workers. Further, because Denver municipal

³¹ *The Denver Post*, October 2, 1946.

employees were among the most poorly paid in the country, Newton vowed to increase salaries where possible.

Candidate Newton also advocated the creation of a citywide commission to study race relations in Denver, in part to trade on Stapleton's publicized record of indifference, and sometimes outright persecution, of Denver's racial minorities. In fact, Denver police regulations had been altered in 1945, which made it nearly impossible for those with Spanish surnames to join the force. Thanks to the critical reporting of both major dailies, Denver's more racially progressive voters also rediscovered Mayor Stapleton's past membership in the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s. One *Rocky Mountain News* reader wrote in a letter to the editor that, "Quigg Newton may not be the ideal candidate (it appears the police certainly think not!) but for my money he is far the best in the field, if only of the stand he has taken on the minority question."³²

Candidate Newton relied on Denver's press for more than just good publicity. The political and intellectual ferment that was then taking place in Denver's press also made it a good recruiting ground for the reform-minded mayor. In early 1947, Newton's campaign "temporarily" hired Ralph Radetsky away from Eugene Cervi's *Journal* to act as its public relations manager for the duration of the campaign. Radetsky, a year Newton's senior, boasted a distinguished resume. He had edited the University of Colorado student newspaper. After working under Cervi at the Colorado Office of War Information during World War II, Radetsky had become a press officer for events like the Bretton Woods monetary conference, before coming to work for Cervi again at his *Journal*.

³² *Rocky Mountain News*, May 8, 1947, p. 12.

Cervi had “loaned” his indispensable man to the Newton campaign, according to historian Mark Foster, in order to “enter the inner-circle of decision-makers in city hall.”³³ Radetsky, however, never came back to the *Journal*, and Cervi did not get any closer to the corridors of power for his “generosity.” The episode set the tone for future misunderstandings between himself and Mayor Newton.

Newton’s relationship with the press notwithstanding, his greatest advantages over Stapleton in the 1947 election rested upon two even more basic distinctions between the incumbent and himself. The first was Newton’s genuine interest in the potential of local government to address the problems of urban growth. The younger candidate’s technocratic air played well amongst an electorate eager for solutions to traffic problems and housing shortages. By contrast, the Stapleton administration, starting with “Interminable Ben” himself, seemed completely unable—practically or ideologically—to directly address Denver’s growing pains. It seemed to pain Mayor Stapleton to even acknowledge the changes that were taking place in his town. When a reporter dropped by his office for an interview in the fall of 1946, he asked Mayor Stapleton how Denver would handle the problems that inevitably accompanied newcomers and expansion. Stapleton moodily rose from his desk to look out his window at the street below, and famously murmured, “If these people would just go back where they came from, we wouldn’t have any problems here.”³⁴ The quote, trumpeted far and wide by Stapleton’s opponents in the press, became the old mayor’s political epitaph, serving as proof that he had lost touch with his city and his time.

³³ Foster, *Citizen Quigg*, p. 101.

³⁴ George V. Kelly, *The Old Gray Mayors of Denver*. (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1974), p. 14.

Such was certainly the interpretation of Stapleton's political adversaries—and of course, this did not sound like a serious solution. Yet in Stapleton's mind, it may well have been. After all, controlling growth had been among Stapleton's chief political aims since his first election in 1923. He was, in fact, merely expressing what had been a political piety in Denver a scant six years earlier. With a rapidity that defied explanation and caught contemporaries almost entirely unaware, World War II had rendered the same kind of controlled growth policies that Stapleton and his financial backers had pursued with such success in the 1920s and 30s a practical, and thus a political, impossibility.

The second advantage accruing to Quigg Newton in the 1947 election was simply the stark disparity between himself and the incumbent. Newton was young, and looked even younger, and his appealing youthfulness contrasted starkly with the wizened and familiar face of Old Ben. Newton was a political neophyte: inexperienced perhaps, but not tainted with the odor of stale machine politics. Because of his youth, because of his progressivism, and because he promised a break with Denver's past, Quigg Newton became a political figurehead and vessel, and he rode a wave of popular sentiment for which he could not claim complete credit. Passages like the following, from the *Denver Post*, were common fare in the run-up to the election: "There is something almost magic in the enthusiasm which has electrified the campaign of Quigg Newton for the mayor of Denver. It is not a political campaign in any normal sense of the word: it is a popular crusade which defies political definition."³⁵ In fact, Newton's very presence in the race was a reproach to the politics of Denver's past:

³⁵ *The Denver Post*, May 8, 1947.

The political wardheelers are bewildered. Their traditional campaign formulas have lost their old power. Pressure, promises and cajolery cannot herd the voters into line. They look for flaws in Newton. Too young, they say; but Newton's youthful vitality is the very fountain of his appeal. Lacks political experience, they say; but to machine-weary voters this is a virtue. In final desperation, they start a skulking campaign of whispers that he is a "radical"—even a "Communist" in some versions—but the charge is so absurd they do not dare make it openly. They have emptied their bag of tricks without stopping him. The confused wardheelers are up against something bigger than any machine. It is a renaissance of civic interest which [sic] has flattened all political fences, a movement so compelling that the attention of the entire nation has been drawn to what happens in Denver [on] May 20.³⁶

Indeed, the race for mayor did draw national attention, thanks in part to the political drama of the face-off between Stapleton and Newton, and thanks in part as well to the political antics of Thomas Morrissey, the Democratic candidate for mayor. While the rhetoric between the Stapleton and Newton campaigns remained moderated and generally respectful, Morrissey launched an all-out fusillade of headline-grabbing (albeit sometimes logically incompatible) accusations against Quigg Newton. Morrissey accused Newton of being everything from a stooge for 17th Street to a stalking horse for the Republican Party, and even a closet Communist. Morrissey's wild jibes prompted *Rocky Mountain News* editor Jack Foster to pen an editorial angrily accusing the Democratic candidate of being "one of the town's most typical politicians...The way

³⁶ Ibid.

Tom is throwing around innuendos and irresponsible indignations is a prime example of the average ward politician. He really ought to be stuffed for posterity as an exhibit of Genus Politicus, ca. 1947.”³⁷

The campaign, it seemed, had consecrated Quigg Newton as Denver’s young, conquering hero. The election’s dramatists in Denver’s political press initially counter-cast Stapleton in the role of crafty villain. But as the election drew near, Stapleton fell prey to a series of mishaps which utterly doomed his chances of reelection, and recast him in the role, not of a feared political fighter, but as a weak and pitiful relic of a time long past. No combination of political muscle or electoral chicanery could prevail against such circumstances.

Nevertheless, Stapleton tried. In the final weeks before the election, he campaigned with a frenzy born of desperation. It was perhaps the most active—and the most miserable—period of his entire political career. While on the stump, he accused Newton of being a “carpetbagger;” an accusation that no longer carried much weight in the fast-growing city. He activated his once-feared political machine, and city workers reported experiencing intense pressure to vote for the incumbent. Newton easily deflected Stapleton’s public attacks, and neutralized his machine by assuring city workers that, as mayor, he would not “inquire into any employe’s [sic] political activity.”³⁸ On the opening day of the 1947 season for Denver’s minor league baseball team, the Denver Bears, Stapleton teamed up with a young Richard Nixon for the ceremonial first pitch and at-bat. Nixon looped a slow pitch toward the plate, but Stapleton’s swing took him off balance, and the old mayor collapsed in a heap to a collective gasp from the crowd.

³⁷ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 16, 1947.

³⁸ Foster, *Citizen Quigg*, p. 104.

Floyd McCall, a photographer for the *Denver Post*, captured Stapleton's embarrassing moment on film, but Palmer Hoyt refused to run it on principle. A week later, *Life Magazine* printed the photograph instead under the caption, "Mayor Strikes Out."³⁹

Benjamin Stapleton also found himself striking out at his old stomping grounds—Denver's city hall. A week before election day, the mayor made a desperate attempt to accomplish something tangible to ameliorate Denver's housing crisis, appearing before the Denver City Council to ram through a last-minute veterans' housing program. Expecting his accustomed rubber stamp from the Counselors, (after all, he had been instrumental in seating most of them) Stapleton could only watch as his proposal went down in defeat. Stapleton's failure to prevail on the City Council, on top of his many recent indignities, provoked a strangely tender *coup de grâce* from the *Rocky Mountain News*:

We cannot rejoice because there is no possible human satisfaction in seeing an old man defeated in what time has declared must be the latter years of his life. [The] action by the Council was merely one of many evidences during the campaign that Mr. Stapleton should have retired after his long service to the city while there was still a chance to retain the esteem in which many of us have held him. Why he didn't no one can say. But because he didn't, we can only add that we are sorry at the tragic spectacle that this campaign has unfolded."⁴⁰

Denver's mayoral election took place on May 20, 1947. The results were as lopsided as they were predictable. Quigg Newton captured nearly 80,000 votes (57%)—

³⁹ Hosokawa, *Thunder in the Rockies*, 265.

⁴⁰ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 14, 1947.

an absolute majority. Thomas Morrissey came in second with 35,080 votes, and Stapleton third with 17,640 votes.⁴¹ The total number of votes cast easily broke all records for an election in Denver, and Mayor Stapleton did not carry a single precinct.⁴² “We, the people of Denver, did an important and thrilling thing yesterday,” the *Rocky Mountain News* exulted on the following morning. “We kicked machine politics into the muddy depths of Cherry Creek with the warning never to return... And we did it with an overwhelming rush of power that is experienced in a city only once in a lifetime—the power of a people, incensed at political domination, who took things into their own hands.”⁴³

Leavening the celebration, however, was a newfound concern for the feelings of the vanquished. “News of Defeat Finds Stapleton Alone,” read one pathos-laden headline.⁴⁴ One reporter even tailed Stapleton two days after the election, describing everything the mayor did. “For the first time in nearly 12 years, [Mayor Stapleton’s] appointment book was empty,” the reporter detailed. “Several other acquaintances paid calls. Their voices could be heard beyond the heavy inner-office door. Then the mayor went home.”⁴⁵ Denver had finally reached the end of a long political epoch.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Foster, *Citizen Quigg*, 105.

⁴² *Denver Post*, May 21, 1947, 2

⁴³ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 21, 1947, 4.

⁴⁴ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 21, 1947.

⁴⁵ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 22, 1947. The 1947 election was also significant for its local initiatives. Denverites passed a large bond issue to expand the city’s water system, and approved funds for the creation of a new city hospital and library, as well as a municipal stadium. The water bond passed with ease, signaling a willingness on the part of Denverites to take drastic steps to accommodate new growth. Voters also narrowly assented to a new city charter convention. A proposal to increase pay scales for city workers, however, was defeated, which, some commentators worried, would make Quigg Newton’s job of fixing city government that much more difficult.

Two days after the election, Eugene Cervi, whose fiery editorials against city hall two years prior had signaled the beginning of the end for the Stapleton regime, took stock of the city's suddenly changed situation. "It's a temptation today," Cervi wrote, "to recite the names of the once powerful individuals in Denver who lost—individuals who never before have lost an election in Denver or Colorado because they were always on the inside of the new-repudiated bi-partisan circle. But the temptation can be resisted easily in the light of the tremendous mandate given the youth of Denver to pursue an affirmative program of industrial and economic development."⁴⁷ For Cervi, as for many other like-minded observers in the Denver business community, Newton's election signified a new openness to growth and industrialization. Perhaps, with the city's governmental machinery finally working for the city's expansion, rather than against it, Denver could begin to shake off some of the economic torpor that had hampered it for so long.

The long-term significance of Quigg Newton's election is, somewhat paradoxically, both attenuated and magnified by the passage of decades. As much as his election represented a considerable shift in governing philosophy from his predecessor,

⁴⁶ Despite his defeat, Benjamin Stapleton's memory remained dear to many Denverites, particularly after his death in 1949. The African American weekly *Denver Star* memorialized him upon his death as a "commoner," who "rose above his Southern prejudices, if he had any. We have disagreed with his methods, but we never doubted his sincerity for we truly believed he loved colored people as he helped so many." "Ben Our Friend Former Mayor Dies," *Denver Star*, May 27, 1950, 1. Glenn Saunders, the influential chief counselor for the Denver Water Board, characterized the old mayor as slow to make decisions because he was an "organized thinker," as well as "a man who, in a torture chamber of the communists would reveal utterly nothing of an American secret." Glenn G. Saunders, interviewed by Jim Harlan Davis, September 1, 1963. Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, C MSS OH1-9 Rg19B;Sec9;Sf6;AVBx7

⁴⁷ *Cervi's Journal*, May 22, 1947, 2.

there was also a strong strain of “restoration” in Newton’s political message: a return to established, Progressive-derived notions of good government.⁴⁸ For example, Newton believed in the ability of a properly functioning municipal government—in concert with academics and other experts from relevant fields—to solve public problems. He promised to restore openness to Denver’s city hall, and to prove it, he even held two press conferences every day during his first weeks as mayor.

Newton had also campaigned on re-establishing the efficacy of city services, from sanitation and water delivery to traffic mitigation and social services, and as Denver’s mayor, he expended a lot of effort and political capital on exactly these issues. In addition, the new administration called public attention to improving public education, citing its ability to ameliorate poverty and delinquency, and to improve race relations. Nevertheless, Newton wished to avoid appearing *too* reformist. In the wake of an inert administration like Stapleton’s, Denver voters welcomed a more active and energetic city government. But it was well to remember that the political aesthetics of Progressivism had never found a natural home in the American West. “[W]e did not...want to be a ‘reform’ government,” Newton told the Yale Law Club in a 1949 speech. “The people...don’t like the cold, objective sternness of reform governments.”⁴⁹

Nevertheless, as an extension of his progressive leanings, Newton also believed in the power of city planning to control and channel growth. Under the Stapleton regime,

⁴⁸ Without mentioning them by name, Newton’s campaign hearkened to past Denver politicians such as Mayor Robert Speer, who had instituted a large beautification program in Denver upon his election in 1904, as part of the Progressive-affiliated “City Beautiful” movement, and Edward P. Costigan who, after founding the Colorado Progressive Party in 1912, subsequently served a single term as Colorado’s senator during the 1930s. Dorsett and McCarthy, *Queen City*, 233.

⁴⁹ Foster, *Citizen Quigg*, 115.

Denver had a small city planning division that was highly influenced by a small number of well-connected local developers, who often seemed more interested in preventing others from building than in doing so themselves. Newton recognized that preventing urban growth in the post-war era was no longer possible or even desirable, as it exerted downward pressure on wages and employment rates. Newton later recalled to biographer Mark Foster that “Denver had been discovered—and we knew it.” His policy, according to Foster, was to use urban planning tools to accommodate what growth would naturally occur, but not in a way that would discourage industrial expansion. Like Stapleton, Newton did not believe that that local boosterism properly belonged within the province of government. Still, Denver’s new mayor considered it his “first responsibility” to “achieve an economy which [sic] will provide steady employment for our population.”⁵⁰ If employment was on the table as a compelling issue for government, then industry could not be far behind.

None of this is to suggest that Newton’s election, of itself, represented a seismic ideological shift within Denver’s electorate. Denver voters may have cast a different demographic shadow in 1947 than they had in 1943, but that did not mean that the city had undergone a complete political makeover. The lingering fiscal conservatism of Denver voters was born out by the ballot initiatives that voters rejected, even as they ushered Newton into the mayor’s office with a supermajority.⁵¹ These initiatives included a modest pay raise for city workers (including the mayor), and money for additional cultural amenities, including a concert hall to house the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, and an expansion for Denver’s zoo. Moreover, those hoping that Newton’s

⁵⁰ *Denver Post*, June 13, 1947.

⁵¹ *Denver Post*, May 21, 1947, 4.

election meant that 17th Street was finally on its heels would be disappointed. They may not have been able to sway elections as they had in years past, but within their own purview, Denver's big banks remained as powerful, and as conservative, as ever.

Newton's election, while it aesthetically resembled a thorough democratization of the city's politics, was more of a glimpse of what could be, rather than an accurate depiction of what already was.

What, then, did Mayor Newton's election represent in Denver history that was truly "new"? The most immediate answer was that the young candidate had galvanized Denver's electorate to political action in a way that was completely unprecedented in the history of the city. The race made for good copy both in Denver and elsewhere in the nation for its satisfying political dichotomies; pitting old vs. young, progressive vs. conservative, and technocratic competence vs. superannuated tradition. The campaign's "electric quality," according to *New York Times* correspondent Marshall Sprague, arose from the certainty of Newton's supports that they would succeed in dislodging "a political figure as firmly fixed in the minds of many as Mt. Evans."⁵²

Yet it was also clear that Newton's election was more than just the toppling of an old political icon. The new mayor's election was the first flexing of political muscle for a vast and growing new constituency of Denverites: young, educated, and largely white newcomers who wanted leadership that reflected their aspirations and values. And his appeal was, if anything, more powerful in Denver's poorer and more racially-mixed precincts.

⁵² *New York Times*, May 18, 1947, E6.

It was the crowds who gathered to hear the young candidate speak during the campaign, and the energy with which volunteers applied themselves to working on Newton's behalf, that made the election of 1947 unique in the annals of Denver's political history. Quigg Newton's political support was a function of the immigration to Denver of a younger generation, many of whom had first been introduced to Colorado during the national mobilization of World War II. Like many of his supporters, Newton was himself a World War II veteran. His youth, his precocious accomplishments, his optimism and his self-confidence resonated deeply with a new generation of Americans who had come of age in a time of economic hardship, and had forged their claims to positions of leadership in the furnace of war.

Newton's election also seemed to mark an about-face, at least politically, in prevailing attitudes toward urban and industrial growth in Denver. More accurately, the election of 1947 served as confirmation of changes that had already been taking place among Denver's voting populace since the end of World War II. For the duration of his time in office, Benjamin Stapleton's political and ideological instincts had been oriented toward maintaining a "care-taker" model of local government, and he had been reflexively cautious regarding rapid urban growth. His famous wish, in 1946, that newcomers to Denver would just return from whence they came had eloquently conveyed to the city's voters that they could not expect solutions to the problems of growth from the Stapleton administration. Quigg Newton's campaign, in contrast, acknowledged the growth that was already taking place, and promised to work toward formulating solutions for the practical problems that arose from it.

Finally, Newton's 1947 election demonstrated the increasing power of Denver's press to influence the city's politics and cultural outlooks. During the 1930s, Denver's major dailies had served almost as a public relations wing for the city government and the local financial mavens whose money and influence stood behind it. After years of draining competition against each other for circulation, it appeared as if the *Rocky Mountain News* had exhausted itself, and it emerged from World War II nearly moribund. The influence of population growth, and the political changes that precipitated from it, created the conditions not only for both papers to rapidly expand their circulations and thus boost their bottom lines, but also to actively influence, in ways previously unthinkable, the trajectory of the city they served. It was at this point, and in this way, that both of Denver's dailies, along with lesser papers like *Cervi's Journal*, became part of what sociologist Harvey Molotch termed "the growth machine."⁵³

The confluence between Newton's campaign and Denver's press also helped to shape the administration to come. In the end, perhaps the most accurate summation of the election of 1947 is that it represented a major milestone in the transformation of Denver from a sleepy, agriculturally oriented city to a modern, multi-nodal Western metropolis. It was not the first step on the journey, and it was certainly far from the last. But Newton's election showed conclusively that the cultural understandings, and attitudes toward urban growth, quality of life, the role of local government, and the relationship of Denver to the national and even world economy, was in rapid flux. Perhaps more than any other single event, Newton's selection as Denver's chief executive marked the dawn of an entirely new era in Denver's history—one characterized

⁵³ Molotch and Logan, *Urban Fortunes*, 50-53.

by both wild optimism and great uncertainty in response to rapid urban, economic, and population growth.

VI. 17th Street Loosens Its Grip

Whether or not it turned out to be smart politics, Thomas Morrissey's accusation against then-candidate Quigg Newton that he was a "tool of the 17th Street bankers" provides some indication of the contempt in which many Denverites held their city's biggest banks. In the run-up to the 1947 election, Denver's press had ensured that voters were thoroughly familiar with the cozy relationship the 17th Street bankers had enjoyed with City Hall during Stapleton's tenure. The relationship offered a ready-made club to Stapleton's political opponents. "The heads of this unholy alliance," Morrissey had thundered during the 1947 mayoral campaign, "are generally known among those who have lived in Denver long enough to understand what goes on behind the scenes. They are the heads of the Republican machine—the men of great wealth and influence who sit in their private offices and pull the strings which [sic] make their puppets dance. The other side consists of the Democratic mayor and his henchmen."

Having drawn blood from the incumbent, Morrissey then tried to spin the same attack in Newton's direction, calling the younger candidate the bank bosses' new "boy Friday."⁵⁴ Morrissey's attempt to smear both Stapleton and Newton as banking lackeys made little sense, given that Newton was Stapleton's most serious opponent in the mayoral race. Morrissey's attempts to link Newton to 17th Street backfired not because

⁵⁴ *Rocky Mountain News*, May 6, 1947, 18.

Denver voters had forgiven the men who Robert Perkin and Charles Graham called “dead pioneers,” but because they reeked of political desperation.⁵⁵

Yet while the specter of the crafty and greedy Denver banker loomed ever-present throughout the election of 1947, it was oddly disembodied from the city’s actual banking industry, which carried on largely as it always had, as a formidable bulwark against outside investment.⁵⁶ Gerald Hughes, chairman of First National—Denver’s oldest and richest bank—was the architect of Denver’s proverbial banking garrison. In 1918, Hughes decreed that he would shutter his own bank if its loan-to-deposit ratio ever exceeded 32%, imposing his own *de facto* limits on the city’s supply of liquid capital. (Compare this to the national average loan-to-deposit ratio of 50%.)⁵⁷ Through the interlocking directory of Denver’s social and financial elite, Hughes was able to impose his orthodoxy on every substantial Denver bank, further constricting the city’s money supply. The combined effect was to gradually turn the entire city away from its erstwhile path of explosive economic and population growth, and instead toward a pattern of stasis and careful husbandry of influence.

Not surprisingly, Colorado’s banking industry struggled during the early 1920s, while the rest of the nation’s economy boomed. The majority of these losses accrued not to the 17th Street banks, however, but rather to the state’s rural banks, which were more vulnerable to fluctuations in the prices of metals and minerals. The trend of rural bank failure and/or consolidation accelerated during the Great Depression, as the state lost

⁵⁵ Charles A. Perkin and Robert Graham, “Denver: Reluctant Capital,” in *Rocky Mountain Cities*, by Ray B. West (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949), 288.

⁵⁶ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 125–146.

⁵⁷ Robert Pulcifer, “Analysis of the Development of Banking in Colorado and the West” (M.B.A. Thesis, Rutgers University, 1971).

another 100 banks. In 1920, there had been more than 400 commercial banks operating in Colorado. By 1945, there were only 145 remaining. Over the course of 25 years, Colorado had lost 259 commercial banks despite adding 176,000 more people.⁵⁸ During World War II, bank expansion took the form of increases in volume at existing banks without an increase in total number of banks. Two and a half decades of compression and consolidation in Colorado's banking industry had immeasurably strengthened both the capital positions of Colorado's biggest banks, and their ability to negatively control the state's economy through their lending practices.

For prospective borrowers in Colorado, the long-term consequences of these practices and trends were rather predictable. Writing in 1949, Charles Perkin and Robert Graham described the regional and local influence of Colorado's most powerful banks, and the predicaments that such influence created:

Closely aligned with Denver's scarcity of risk capital is the absence of a credit pool. The Denver banks do not perform this prime function of banking—at least not in any degree commensurate with Denver's size or the need of its economic hinterland... The Denver banks are superconservative and rock-sound, a situation of comforting short-term reassurance to thousands of depositors, and of long-term blight to the depositors' city and its future.⁵⁹

In short, the ultraconservative lending practices of Denver's top banks were starving the city of venture capital, and thus hampering the expansion of both the local and regional economy. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, countless disappointed

⁵⁸ E. T. Halaas, *The Banking Structure in Colorado; Historic Developments and Recent Changes* (Denver, CO: Division of Research, College of Business Administration, University of Denver, 1969), 33.

⁵⁹ Perkin and Graham, "Denver: Reluctant Capital," 288.

business borrowers could tell personal stories of rejection at the hands of 17th Street. Eugene Cervi certainly had one. He had initially turned to the United States National Bank for seed money to get his newspaper up and running in 1945. “I tried to borrow \$1,500,” Cervi later recalled, “and Tom Dines [president of U.S. National] said no.” Cervi’s anger at what he considered 17th Street’s unreasonable parsimony help to explain his frequent jabs at 17th Street in his editorial columns.⁶⁰ Even Denver’s largest and most stable businesses could not count on 17th Street to underwrite them. For instance, Gates Rubber Company, Denver’s largest corporation during the 1940s, was forced to appeal to New York banks for expansion capital after World War II.⁶¹

Cervi, whom most Denver historians consider among the shrewder observers of 17th Street in the late 1940s and early 1950s, categorized Denver’s banks into different subgroups: there was Denver’s financial nobility, which featured the aforementioned Gerald Hughes, John Evans (grandson of Colorado’s second governor) and Mahlon Thatcher, who together presided over First Bank, the richest and most conservative lending institution in the region. There was Claude Boettcher’s slightly more liberal Denver National Bank, which showed a marginally higher propensity to loan money or adapt to changing times. At the far end of the conservative spectrum, there was Harold Kountze’s bank, Colorado National, which was so stingy in its lending and so resistant to change as to be the “most beautiful money morgue in the west.” Not a single one of the banks in any of these groups had been founded later than 1870.

⁶⁰ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 255.

⁶¹ Perkin and Graham, “Denver: Reluctant Capital,” 289.

And then suddenly, there was Elwood Brooks, with his newly founded Central Bank and Trust.⁶² Central Bank was one of the smaller banks in downtown Denver. In fact, it wasn't even located on 17th Street. Brooks, already a well-respected financial figure in Kansas, came to Denver from Kansas City in 1943, and quietly assumed the reigns of struggling Central Bank. During the course of the 1940s, Brooks began doing something subversive for a Denver banker: lending money. Brooks lent money for businesses, mortgages, and even automobiles (something no Denver banker would have considered prior to his arrival). He allied himself with correspondent banks in Colorado's small towns (there were no branch locations at this time), and by the early 1950s, Brooks had made the once-struggling Central Bank into the second-largest bank in the state.⁶³

The force of his example instantly shattered the gentlemen's agreement behind the tight lending practices of 17th Street, and galvanized Denver's so recently moribund lending market. By 1953, even Gerald Hughes' First National had abandoned its pledge to maintain a loan-to-deposit ratio below 32%, and began loaning at closer to 60% of its deposits.⁶⁴ Elwood Brooks went on to become a member of the Federal Reserve Bank board of directors. When he died in 1965, Cervi hailed his catalytic impact on Denver's financial history. "The record," Cervi wrote in tribute, "the Denver prosperity, the regional scene—all attest to his merit as a man who understood the value of a dollar and what an average man could do with credit considerably extended."⁶⁵ Brooks' example

⁶² Cervi, 2.

⁶³ Neil Morgan, *Westward Tilt; the American West Today* (New York, NY: Random House, 1963), 270–271.

⁶⁴ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 259.

⁶⁵ Eugene Cervi, *Cervi's Journal* (Denver, CO, February 10, 1965), 18.

also demonstrated the extent to which the will and agreements of a handful of financiers had successfully shielded Denver from growth and stifled ready access to capital during the interwar years.

VI. The Taking of Downtown Denver: 1945-1960

“With tongue but partly in my cheek,” wrote New York real estate giant William Zeckendorf in his 1970 autobiography, “I can say that I found Denver brick and left it soaring steel, concrete, and glass—with here and there a touch of marble.”⁶⁶ Loath though he was to pass up any opportunity for credit, “Zeck” was not exaggerating his role in reshaping Denver’s unexceptional skyline in the years following World War II. Zeckendorf’s eventual accomplishments in Denver, including Courthouse Square and the Mile High Center, helped to reshape post-war Denver as a credible capitol of the so-called “Rocky Mountain Empire.” Zeckendorf’s designs for Denver outstripped, in both cost and scope, any real estate development the city had ever seen. But the most daunting element of Zeckendorf’s plan had to do with his chosen location.

Denver was a hostile business environment for “outsiders.” To acquire the land he needed, to gain the necessary permits, and to locate the requisite building materials, Zeckendorf would have to puncture thirty years’ worth of real estate market protectionism by Denver’s small but ubiquitous cadre of business and banking tycoons. The ranks of his opponents included the customary names: Cheesman, Evans, Kountz, Hughes and Boettcher, for which each family had shrewdly acquired land in Denver’s downtown—as they had acquired so much else—during the previous century. They did not know William Zeckendorf, and they reflexively resisted his proposed developments.

⁶⁶ Edward McCreary, *Zeckendorf: The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1970), 107.

Working together, they were prepared to go to considerable lengths to keep him out of town.

In Zeckendorf, however, the Denver cartel had drawn a fearsome opponent. The feisty developer had joined the New York real estate firm of Webb and Knapp in 1938. From there, his rise was nothing short of meteoric. A quick string of successful investments in the 1930s had helped to catapult him to the top of the nation's largest real estate firm, Webb and Knapp. By 1945, the one-time prodigy had secured his position as one of the country's most powerful developers, with far-flung and diverse interests and holdings. Even while he contemplated entering the Denver real estate market, Zeckendorf was already building the United Nations' world headquarters along the East River in Manhattan. He owned a majority stake in the glittering Manhattan nightclub, The Monte Carlo, and valuable commercial properties in Mexico City, Acapulco and Los Angeles. His business associates included David and Nelson Rockefeller, and he counted a young I.M. Pei among his captive stable of gifted architects. Bluff, outgoing, and edgy, with a reputed meat-grinder of a handshake, Zeckendorf was used to success.⁶⁷

He first took notice of Denver in the spring of 1945, at the behest of a renegade Denver real estate broker named B.B. Harding (a distant relative of the 29th president). Sallow, caustic and pushy, Harding nursed his own long-standing resentment toward Denver's first families, and saw Zeckendorf as a potential ally in breaking their hold on Denver's frozen real estate market. To get Zeckendorf's attention, Harding flew to New York, arranged a meeting, and laid out a map of Denver on the developer's desk. He pointed to a block of undeveloped, city-owned land just outside of Denver's existing

⁶⁷ Isadore Barmash, *Great Business Disasters; Swindlers, Bunglers, and Frauds in American Industry* (Chicago, IL: Playboy Press, 1972), 147–148.

downtown. It had once been the site of the city's courthouse, Harding explained, but had stood empty since the structure had been torn down thirty years ago. The city had been half-heartedly trying to sell it for nearly a decade without success. But Harding had recently spoken with Mayor Stapleton, who had expressed his willingness to sell "Courthouse Square" for \$750,000—a relative bargain for a full block so close to a major city's central business district. Harding offered to engineer the deal if Zeckendorf would put up the money.⁶⁸

The attractive price of the land reflected its risk as an investment. The property lay outside the established boundaries of a central business district—but one that had not grown in several decades. Denver's share of federal money during World War II had gone almost exclusively to its fringes: including the Rocky Mountain Arsenal in Aurora, and the Denver Arms Plant in Jefferson County. Consequently, while the metropolitan area was expanding in the early post-war years, nothing of import seemed to be happening in Denver's downtown real estate market. Zeckendorf knew as well that he could not expect much help from what looked to be a shortsighted local business community. But Denver's outward torpor could easily be hiding immense incipient demand, just waiting to be unleashed. Zeckendorf decided it was worth finding out. "We have to get into that town and *make* something happen," he told Harding. He instructed his new Denver agent to offer the city its asking price of \$750,000 that same afternoon.⁶⁹

By his own reckoning, Zeckendorf did not immediately appreciate how differently his Denver opponents viewed their city than he did. With no previous experience in the city, the developer saw Denver as a blank slate—a single, grandly

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ McCreary, *Zeckendorf: The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 110.

ambitious project, of which Courthouse Square was just the first step. He assumed, as did many outside observers, that Denver's relative stasis over the past three decades was merely the byproduct of obtuse and uninspired local leadership, rather than a calculated and organized strategy of city management. He tended to divide neatly between friends and opponents, and preferred to believe that resistance to his plans came exclusively from Denver's aristocrats, in contravention to the wishes and interests of the majority of Denverites. His proposed real estate projects were not just financial gambits, but social and cultural prescriptions for what he saw as an ailing metropolis. For all of its post-war problems, however, most Denverites viewed and experienced their town not as a developer's empty canvas, but as a fully realized city with qualities and amenities that they valued fiercely. Their suspicion of Zeckendorf's motives owed itself less to what he called their "provinciality" than to the widely shared impression that his goals for Denver might not necessarily match their own. The developer would have to win the city over—a difficult task for someone used to purchasing consent.

Early signs foreshadowed the fight to come. News of the purchase roused a volley of protests once it was made public in Denver. Members of the Colorado Women's Garden Club, who had come to regard the empty block as an unofficial city park, were among the first to oppose the planned redevelopment in the pages of Denver newspapers. The loss of Courthouse Square as an open space struck some in Denver as a net loss to the city. Like many of the "instant cities" of the frontier American West, Denver had never possessed a surfeit of open space and urban parkland. The leading authority on municipal parks at the time, the National Recreation Association, recommended a standard ratio of roughly one acre of parkland per 100 people in major

American cities.⁷⁰ As of the 1940 census, Denver had less than half an acre of parkland for every 100 of its residents.⁷¹ Zeckendorf's opponents argued that Denver could not afford to lose Courthouse Square as parkland. The city needed more park space, not less.⁷²

Zeckendorf paid these protests little heed, though he would have been wise to take them more seriously. Denver had long prided itself on not following the horde of other Western cities in their rush to develop and expand, and retained its historically strong preservationist impulse. The Colorado Women's Garden Club had been an active and vital force behind this impulse in local politics and philanthropy for half a century.⁷³ Moreover, although Zeckendorf might not have been aware of it, the Garden Club was (at the time) a province of Denver's social elite. As the developer would soon be able to ruefully attest, very little distance separated the city's high society from its high finance. Some weeks after he made his offer to the city, a counter bid in the amount of \$765,000 came from a hastily assembled group of local realtors. It never became public knowledge precisely whose money funded their competing effort, but it almost certainly came from one or more of the 17th Street banks. Zeckendorf responded by raising his bid for Courthouse Square. The Denver group once again topped Zeckendorf, and a third round commenced.

Even while the two sides battled at auction over Courthouse Square, Zeckendorf's opponents turned, appropriately enough, to the courts, filing a series of lawsuits to

⁷⁰ S.R. DeBoer, *A Master Plan for Denver's Parks: A Study and Plan of Development* (Denver, CO: City of Denver Department of Improvement and Parks, 1949), 37–38.

⁷¹ L.F. Eppich et al., *Denver Planning Primer (Revised)*, vol. 6 (Denver, CO: Denver Planning Commission, 1940), 22.

⁷² McCreary, *Zeckendorf: The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 110.

⁷³ See Chapter One for more on the early history of the Colorado Women's Garden Club.

prevent Zeckendorf from taking possession of the property. The deep-pocketed New Yorker won the bidding war in comparatively short order, but his money was less effective at hastening a legal resolution. Yet as Webb and Knapp continued to prevail (often on appeal) in case after case, the legal maneuverings of his opponents became progressively more desperate. Some nearby property owners even commissioned surveys purportedly demonstrating that Zeckendorf's plans for Courthouse Square would cause their walls to slant.⁷⁴ In all, Zeckendorf successfully defended himself against sixteen separate lawsuits regarding the Denver property. It took Zeckendorf over four years to win clear title to Courthouse Square, which he finally did in 1950 for \$807,000.

Immensely confident, Zeckendorf never seemed to doubt his eventual success in gaining title to Courthouse Square and building what he wanted on it. Zeckendorf was increasingly bemused by what he considered the unreasonable intransigence of his local adversaries. The real estate mogul simply could not credit the logic that would lead otherwise "admirable" businessmen like Gerald Hughes and John Evans to view their city as a patchwork of "individual properties," rather than an integrated whole. Echoing the critiques of many Denverites, Zeckendorf ascribed elite resistance to him, and to urban growth in general, as symptomatic of a near-farcical self-regard. "What was most striking to an outsider about Denver's inner circle," he wrote later, "was its determined shunning of much of the outside world. [Its] local elite, socially inbred and (with individual exceptions) largely inward-looking, tended to share a highly self-conscious illusion of class and pretensions of place, that in much of the East and parts of the West would have seemed ludicrous." Zeckendorf saw nothing funny about Denver's "small

⁷⁴ Neil Morgan. *Westward Tilt: The American West Today*. (New York: Random House, 1961), 269-271.

town snobbishness,” however, calling it “highly undemocratic,” and “deleterious” to the prospects of the entire city. The New York builder also sensed that his Jewish roots only further cemented his status as an outsider, and referred to his opponents as “polite bigots.”⁷⁵

Zeckendorf’s public relations woes did not end with Denver’s elites, however. He had, early on, gotten on the wrong side of both of Denver’s daily newspapers, particularly the *Denver Post*, which skewered the builder as a real estate vulture whose interest in Denver was purely pecuniary.⁷⁶ When the financial and legal wrangling over Courthouse Square finally ended, Zeckendorf was in sole possession not only of the contest properties, but also a number of contiguous lots, which he had been quietly purchasing throughout the latter half of the 1940s. However, the conclusion of hostilities over Courthouse Square did little to mollify Denver’s newspapers. Having spent four years hammering the developer for trying to gain title over Courthouse Square, they smoothly

⁷⁵ Zeckendorf and McCreary, *Zeckendorf*, 116.

⁷⁶ To some degree, Zeckendorf could thank his Denver agent, B.B. Harding, for the enmity of the Denver press. Before Zeckendorf could hire his own Denver staff, Harding served as his local representative. When a reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News* came to Harding in 1946 to ask why his paper always seemed to be getting scooped by the *Denver Post* for news of Zeckendorf’s plans, the erratic Denver realtor snapped that the *News* would never get a scoop from him, even if Jack Foster, its editor, crawled into Harding’s office “on his hands and knees.” But unbeknownst even to himself, Harding was about to rectify the apparent inequity. When the *Rocky Mountain News* reporter hinted that Denver’s Chamber of Commerce might not be pleased that one of its members was openly attacking the town’s leading newspaper, Harding lit into the Chamber as well, going so far as to slur the lineage of its sitting president. The reporter published Harding’s comments with minimal redaction on the following day, and Zeckendorf quickly found himself at the center of yet another uproar. McCreary, *Zeckendorf: The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 112.

pivoted to criticizing him for not developing the property quickly enough. “Let’s Have the New Building,” read one impatient *Denver Post* editorial title in 1951.⁷⁷

Though he gamely endured a maelstrom of elite resistance, negative press, and sporadic popular protests, Zeckendorf’s first several years in Denver were difficult for the New York developer. It was not until 1952, fully seven years after his first appearance in Denver, that Zeckendorf caught his first big break. His stroke of luck came from an unexpected source: Claude Boettcher, the son of Charles Boettcher, who was until recently regarded as among the most visible of Zeckendorf’s antagonists. Heir to separately won fortunes in beet sugar, potash, and concrete, among other industries, Claude Boettcher was not just among the richest men in Colorado, but in the nation. In the fall of 1952, Boettcher proposed to Zeckendorf that they pool their resources and properties to jointly begin developing the downtown area. Zeckendorf brought Courthouse Square to the partnership, and Boettcher brought another highly desirable and undeveloped parcel of land closer to the center of the business district, at the corner of Broadway and 17th Street, across from the Brown Palace Hotel.

The new partnership heralded the beginning of a turning tide in Denver for William Zeckendorf. Jack Foster of the *Rocky Mountain News*, and Palmer Hoyt of the *Denver Post*, lavished praise on Claude Boettcher for the move, implying that Boettcher’s money would help to “repatriate” the Courthouse Square property from the rapacious clutches of the Eastern developer. The anti-Zeckendorf sentiment playing out in the Denver papers recalled an old but still compelling complaint against “colonial” Eastern capital. But Eugene Cervi, whose blunt criticisms had played such an important role in

⁷⁷ *Denver Post*, May 31, 1951, 3C.

revitalizing Denver's press following World War II, dismissed the newspapers' incessant criticism of Zeckendorf as misguided. "Let's face it," Cervi wrote, "Zeckendorf had more faith in Denver, loved the lass more and could see her charm and potential far beyond the local swains." As for the "repatriation" canard, Cervi aimed a pointed jab at the *Rocky Mountain News*, owned by the New York media conglomerate Scripps-Howard: "I used to be an expert on western colonization by absentee landlords and exploiting eastern capitalists. I stopped being an expert on the subject, of course, except in the case of New York ownership of local chain papers."⁷⁸

With that, the irascible publisher became the first major press figure in Denver to endorse Zeckendorf in the fight for Denver's downtown. Just as it had seven years earlier, Cervi's iconoclasm began to work on Denver's press establishment. Within a matter of months, the negative editorials about Zeckendorf in Denver's two leading papers all but disappeared, replaced with sunny pieces celebrating the developer's vision for Denver.

The partnership between William Zeckendorf and Claude Boettcher did not last long, and when it foundered, it did so on a strangely predictable shoal. Zeckendorf was interested in building a modern office building on Boettcher's lot, and asked I.M. Pei to design a modern-looking structure of steel and glass. Boettcher, who owned Ideal

⁷⁸ Zeckendorf was similarly complimentary of Cervi, describing the pugnacious Denver newspaperman as "the very caricature of a crusading, liberal publisher." He was quick to notice Cervi's iconoclastic status in Denver's business community. "If hemlock were still in fashion," Zeckendorf observed, "a certain percentage of Denver's would-be autocrats would be all for having Gene quaff a cup just for his health, but their votes would be negated by the others, who were too curious to see what he might say next." *Cervi's Rocky Mountain Journal*, December 11, 1952, 8, and Zeckendorf and McCreary, *Zeckendorf*, 117-118.

Cement Company—one of Denver’s largest industrial concerns—had expected that the building would make considerable use of his company’s concrete as a building material. As Zeckendorf later recalled their conversation, Boettcher told him, “...as the head of the cement industry, I can’t be connected with a steel building. I can’t go on with it. I’ll buy you out, or you buy me out.” Boettcher sold, and Zeckendorf took possession of his downtown property.⁷⁹

With his combined holdings in Denver, Zeckendorf eventually built two huge projects: Zeckendorf Plaza, and Mile High Center. The two nearby developments included a skating rink, an office building, an oversized parking garage, and an eight hundred and eighty room Hilton Hotel (the first to provide real competition for Denver’s longtime marquee hotel, the Brown Palace). In order to bring retail tenants to his project, Zeckendorf even bought one of Denver’s oldest and best-known department stores, Daniels and Fisher, just so that he could move it to his new plaza. In every phase of the battle for control of downtown Denver, Zeckendorf outworked, outthought, and outspent his local opponents.⁸⁰

Zeckendorf’s zealous incursions into the Denver real estate market served as a beachhead for other developers. Most notable of those to follow in his immediate footsteps was the Murchison family out of Dallas, in the person of John Murchison, son of the family patriarch, oil baron, and noted conservative powerbroker, Clint Murchison,

⁷⁹ Zeckendorf and McCreary. *Zeckendorf*, 128.

⁸⁰ After he bought Daniels and Fisher to secure the department store as a tenant for his new development, Zeckendorf sold it to the May Company of St. Louis. The new chain of stores became known in Denver as May D&F.

Sr.⁸¹ John Murchison purchased the Denver Club; the old and increasingly decrepit building which had long served as the central meeting place for Denver's most powerful business leaders. He planned to tear the old building down and replace it with a modern office building. In exchange, he offered the Denver Club a ninety-nine year lease on the top two floors of the new building. After some hesitation on the part of Denver Club members, the two sides reached an agreement, and the erstwhile owners became tenants in a new, modern skyscraper owned by a Dallas multimillionaire. As if a switch had suddenly been flipped, downtown Denver went on a skyscraper-building spree. Three of Denver's biggest banks built modern new headquarters. Gerald Hughes turned to Murchison to build a new home for Denver's oldest bank, First National. Taken together, these projects were the surest sign yet that Denver's old guard was losing its grip on the physical disposition of the city.

Elwood Brooks' experience breaking into Denver's tightly exclusionary banking sector gave him a unique view on Zeckendorf's travails and eventual triumph. "He never gave up," Brooks said of the developer in 1961. "Some of the old-timers did everything they could to beat Zeckendorf, but he wouldn't be licked."⁸² As usual though, Zeckendorf gave his own best tribute. As he finally opened the Hilton Hotel at Zeckendorf Plaza (once known as Courthouse Square) in 1960, the *Denver Post*

⁸¹ By the middle of the 20th century, the Murchisons had become one of the most powerful of the Dallas family dynasties. They parlayed their East Texas oil money into real estate across the American West, ownership of the Dallas Cowboys (Clint Murchison, Jr.), and the development of the Vail ski resort in the mountains of Colorado. See Jane Wolfe, *The Murchisons: The Rise and Fall of a Texas Dynasty* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

⁸² Morgan, *Westward Tilt*, 270

approached Zeckendorf to see if he wanted to buy some advertising space in the paper to herald the grand opening. The New Yorker's initial impulse was to decline: By this time we had poured some forty-three million dollars into Zeckendorf Plaza...[t]here was not a dollar of local money in the project. I felt we had done just about enough for Denver for the time being, and was against taking out any ads at all. But they showed me a picture taken from Fifteenth Street, looking northeast down Court Place. This photo showed the new May-Daniels and Fisher store on the left, with its overpass connection to the hotel at the right, while two blocks straight down, at the end of the street, was Mile High Center. The caption read: "They Said It Couldn't Be Done." I bought that ad: it said it all.⁸³

⁸³ McCreary, *Zeckendorf: The Autobiography of William Zeckendorf*, 135.

Chapter 4: Becoming City and Suburb: Race and Urban Growth in Denver, 1945-1964

*I owned the land as far as the eye
could see under the crown of Spain,
and I toiled on my earth
and gave my Indian sweat and blood
for the Spanish master,
Who ruled with tyranny over man and
beast and all that he could trample
But. . .THE GROUND WAS MINE.*

-- Rodolfo Corky Gonzales, *I Am Joaquin*

I. The “Spanish-American Problem”

Over the first week of February 1954, the *Rocky Mountain News* published an instantly controversial seven part investigative series on what one of its headlines referred to as Denver’s “Spanish-American Problem.”¹ Long relegated to the margins of Denver’s civic consciousness, the problems afflicting the city’s fast-growing “Spanish-American” population now threatened to disrupt its post-war progress. Something must be done, Perkin wrote, to combat the poverty, delinquency, cultural isolation, poor health and, above all, the apathy of the “Spanish American” population.

Perkin’s statistics appeared to bear out his case. Because they were counted as “white” by the most recent census, there was no official tally of “Spanish-Americans” in

¹Robert L. Perkin, “No Running Water, No Heat,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO, February 3, 1954); Robert L. Perkin, “High Infant Death Rate Plagues Denver’s Poor,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO, February 4, 1954); *Statements Made in Perkins Articles Showing Social and Economic Status of Spanish-Named People in 1953-1955* (Denver, CO: Commission on Community Relations, 1955), Commission on Community Relations Papers, Box 2, ff17, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

Denver in 1954. But based on numbers culled from various municipal social service agencies, Perkin estimated a total number of around 47,000, comprising 10% of the city's total population. For the year 1952, according to Perkin, that same 10% had accounted for half of all inmates in Denver's jails, half of all juvenile court cases, over half of all municipal expenditures for children's aid, 36% of municipal public housing occupancy, 30% of indigent admissions to Denver General Hospital, and nearly a quarter of the Denver Police Department's total arrests.² Further, according to municipal housing agencies, 60% of the city's "Spanish-Americans" lived in substandard housing, and city employment agencies classified 90% of "Spanish-American" clients as "unskilled common laborers."³ Infant mortality rates in "Spanish-American neighborhoods" averaged 37 out of every 1000 live births. And while Denver Public Schools did not categorize student records by race, the dropout rate in high schools with "high Hispanic enrollments" had averaged over 90% over the past 21 years.⁴ Were all of these "coincidental occurrences?" Perkin asked rhetorically. "Most modern Americans would doubt it."⁵

In its sensationalism, stridency, and frequent invocation of statistics, Perkin's series read like a pastiche of classic Progressive journalism. Perkin invited Anglo readers to contemplate the specters of a large and fast-growing racial underclass, an inept and overwhelmed municipal bureaucracy, and their own ignorance of—and complicity in—

² Robert L. Perkin, "Study of Critical Denver Problems," *Rocky Mountain News*, January 31, 1954.

³ Robert L. Perkin, "Can We Blame the Poor After Half-Century of This? Underpaid, Ill Fed, Badly Housed," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 2, 1954.

⁴ Robert L. Perkin, "Schools Can Help If They Are Used," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 5, 1954.

⁵ Perkin, "No Running Water, No Heat."

the social dysfunction just beyond their doorsteps.⁶ Perkin had purposely built his series around the rhetorical conceit of reportorial audacity. No one else in Denver, he claimed repeatedly, had been willing to call Denver's "Spanish-American" population a "problem," or to confront Anglo Denverites with their own complacency over the issue. Any protest by social conservatives or smarting bureaucrats would only confirm that the series had hit its mark. Perkin thereby inoculated himself and his newspaper against a possible Anglo backlash.

Yet despite having written seven long-form articles on the subject, Perkin never once actually gave voice to Denver Hispanics themselves. No quotes from "Spanish-Americans" appeared either in support or opposition to his claims. He offered few insights into the daily lives of Denver Hispanics beyond those that could be gleaned from the records of municipal agencies. While claiming to provide a panoramic view of "Spanish-Americans" in Denver, Perkin had instead manufactured an artificial identity, defined exclusively by ethnicity and social dysfunction. In attempting to define "Spanish-Americans" for his largely Anglo readership, Perkin fell back upon an all-too-familiar language of fear—incarnating inarticulate white fears about Denver's future as a monolithic and inscrutable racial "other" who—until now at least—had hidden in plain sight.

Believing their good intentions to be self-evident, both Robert Perkin and his editor Jack Foster seemed mystified by the outrage the series immediately generated

⁶ In his article on housing, Perkin pointed out the role of restrictive covenants in keeping "Spanish-Americans" clustered in slum neighborhoods. These covenants, while "degrading to a people and a city," were reflective of the attitudes of Anglos in Denver, 70% of whom expressed unwillingness to live next to "Spanish-American" neighbors in one uncredited poll. *Ibid.*

among Denver Hispanics themselves. Before the last installment of Perkin's series had even gone to press, popular Spanish-language radio broadcaster Paco Sanchez had taken up a collection from listeners to publish a rebuttal in the *News*' advertising section, raising nearly \$2000 for the purpose in a single week.⁷ Disproving Perkin's depictions of Denver Hispanics as leaderless and politically inert, a consortium of Denver's Hispanic and human relations leaders organized a public meeting to respond to Perkin's published claims the following week, drawing over 1300 people. Speakers at the event included Denver's first Hispanic city councilman, James Fresques, who characterized the series as "arbitrary and unhelpful," as well as Paco Sanchez, for whom the controversy was becoming a potentially career-defining boon.⁸ At Sanchez' urging, attendees voted to form the "Good Americans Organization" to counter perceived mischaracterizations of Hispanics in Denver's press, naming the broadcaster as its first president.⁹

As the criticism mounted, *Rocky Mountain News* editor Jack Foster took to his own editorial page to defend his battered reporter. Brushing off the avalanche of angry letters, phone calls and cancelled subscriptions as "regrettable...but not unexpected," Foster nevertheless seemed puzzled, and even hurt, by the reactions of Denver

⁷ "Objections Voiced to Perkin Articles--News Offers Full Page to Answer Series," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 11, 1954.

⁸ "Over 1300 Attend Meeting Following News Articles," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 11, 1954.

⁹ Poor leadership and financial mismanagement quickly sapped the GOA's relevance however, and the organization soon faded into obscurity. According to a confidential report circulated with the Denver Commission on Community Relations in 1955, the GAO was already deeply in debt, and in operation, bore a closer resemblance to a commercial "lodge" or "private club" than a true community organization. Ibid.; "Good Americans Organization in Denver--Organizational History" (Denver, CO, 1955), Commission on Community Relations Papers, Box 5, ff44, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

Hispanics.¹⁰ He cited the paper's record as a "friend to the Spanish-American people," and its "obligation" to document the facts of their plight. He insisted that Perkin's reporting only confirmed "what the leaders of the Spanish-American people have been saying for a long time."¹¹ He reminded readers of Perkin's "recommendations" for helping Denver Hispanics address their problems, with "help, sympathy and understanding from other racial groups."¹² Finally, as a gesture of conciliation, Foster offered Paco Sanchez—or any other "accepted leader" of the Spanish American community—editorial space free of charge to contest Perkin's series, suggesting that the money raised by the broadcaster be repurposed for scholarships for "worthy Spanish-American youth."¹³

Not surprisingly perhaps, Foster failed to quell the controversy. And while Paco Sanchez did not respond to the *News*' offer, a rebuttal written by the Denver chapter of the League of United Latin-American Citizens (LULAC) appeared in the paper later that February. Although the organization had been founded in Texas in 1929, LULAC was a new presence in Denver in early 1954, having been founded late in the previous year. Over the course of the series, both Robert Perkin and Jack Foster had hailed the group as

¹⁰ "Our Spanish-American Articles," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 7, 1954.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Perkin's recommendations included the establishment of a Spanish-language newspaper, fair employment legislation, stronger truancy laws, "rigorously impartial policework," and most of all, much more rigorous "tabulation of records by ethnic groups." Denver Commission on Community Relations, "Statements Made in Perkins Articles Showing Social and Economic Status of Spanish-Named People" (Denver, CO, 1955), Denver Commission on Community Relations Records, Box 2, ff17, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

¹³ "Objections Voiced to Perkin Articles--News Offers Full Page to Answer Series"; League of United Latin-American Citizens, "An Answer to Perkin--The Spanish-Americans In Denver Area Speak," *Rocky Mountain News*, February 19, 1954.

perhaps the best hope for organization and leadership within Denver's Hispanic communities.

But while such blandishments might enhance LULAC's profile and credibility in Denver, the new chapter neither sought nor welcomed the role of Denver's premier "Spanish-American" community organization. In keeping with the assimilationist ideology of its national parent organization, Denver LULAC strove to differentiate "Mexican-Americans" from Mexican nationals, who were generally poorer and less acculturated.¹⁴ This was particularly important in Denver, which, while not typically considered a borderland city, experienced a dramatic post-war spike in numbers of Mexican nationals due to the combined effects of the Bracero program and intensified recruitment of migrant workers by beet growers and sugar manufacturers.¹⁵

Denver LULAC's response to the "Spanish-American series," while carefully worded, leveled harsh criticism against Perkin's misleading use of statistics, oversimplification of complex social problems, tendency toward sensationalism, and general ignorance of "Spanish-Americans" in general. The organization cited as one

¹⁴ To underscore the distinction between Mexican-Americans and Mexican nationals, LULAC limited its membership to American citizens. David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 75. For more on the history and politics of LULAC in Texas and elsewhere, see Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology & Identity, 1930-1960*, Yale Western Americana Series ; 36 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Benjamin Marquez, *LULAC: The Evolution of a Mexican American Political Organization*, 1st ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993); Francisco Arturo Rosales, *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1997).

¹⁵ The Mountain States Beet Growers Marketing Association of Colorado, "Digest of Reports Submitted to the Sub-committee on Recruitment, Transportation and Placement of the Governor's Commission on Migrant Labor" (Greeley, CO, 1950), Commission on Community Relations Papers, Box 5, ff20, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

example Perkin's occasional characterization of Denver "Spanish-Americans" as culturally and ethnically Mexican. "Even Perkin," Denver LULAC acidly observed, "must be at a loss to explain such application to the vast numbers of Americans of Spanish descent and of Spanish-Indian descent [Hispanos] now living in Denver, whose culture...developed in the American Southwest with little or no impact from the culture of Mexico."¹⁶ Rather than clarifying the complexities of Denver's social relations, LULAC concluded, Perkin and the *Rocky Mountain News* had only compounded the popular misconceptions that surrounded the provenance, cultural heritage and challenges facing Denver Hispanics.

No single aspect of the series raised more alarm for LULAC, however, than Perkin's blithe linkage between "Spanish-Americans" and crime. In one article, for instance, Perkin had claimed that 23% of all Denver crime was committed by "Spanish-Americans," without even citing a time period for the statistic. Unsophisticated readers, LULAC worried, would be "likely to believe that nearly one-fourth of Denver's Spanish Americans are criminals—a wholly unwarranted and unfair conclusion." There was already evidence, the group fumed, that Perkin's articles had "aroused otherwise dormant or non-existent prejudices against Americans with Spanish names in Denver."¹⁷

Denver LULAC's concerns were well-grounded in historical events. The association of certain racial groups with criminal activity, while a timeworn conceit of

¹⁶ This particular critique was predicated on a slightly unfair mischaracterization of Perkin's words. In the article in question, Perkin had written that Denver's Spanish-American population was "predominantly American by birth, [and] its cultural background is Mexican, Spanish, Indian, Spanish colonial." Perkin, "High Infant Death Rate Plagues Denver's Poor"; League of United Latin-American Citizens, "An Answer to Perkin--The Spanish-Americans In Denver Area Speak."

¹⁷ League of United Latin-American Citizens, "An Answer to Perkin--The Spanish-Americans In Denver Area Speak."

American racist ideology, became far more dangerous when trafficked by mainstream news outlets like the *Rocky Mountain News*. Even within the past decade, Hispanics in Denver had been targeted by exactly such reductive logic. During one such instance in March of 1945, at least 65 white men and boys invaded a Hispanic community center and beat those inside with blackjacks and other weapons, ostensibly as payback for insults and acts of aggression by Hispanic youths. None of the Anglo rioters were arrested, perhaps because at least eight of the invaders were reportedly uniformed policemen themselves.¹⁸ Racial violence targeting or involving Hispanics continued to flare sporadically throughout the remainder of the decade and into the 1950s.

The “Spanish American series” faded from the front pages without reaching any formal resolution. But the episode had demonstrated in the starkest terms the political and cultural distance separating Hispanics from Denver’s social and political mainstream. It was also eye-opening for Denver Hispanics themselves, who for perhaps the first time were able to see the results of the power that accrued from an increase in numbers. Thanks to the support of thousands of angry *News* readers, Hispanic leaders in Denver had successfully called into question the ability of one of Denver’s dailies—a powerful shaper of public opinion—to speak authoritatively on their behalf. The nearly instantaneous ignition of community outrage at Perkin’s reporting was also a harbinger of events to come.

¹⁸ Barron B. Beshoar, “Seek to Avert Youth Racial Disturbances,” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 11, 1945.

II. The Rise of “Urban Dualism” in Denver

In the aftermath of World War II, structural racism was in the midst of a profound upswing across the country, and Denver was no exception. Demographically speaking, Denver was overwhelmingly “white,” and its biggest employers, including the federal government, offered few quality jobs to racial minorities, particularly after the end of World War II. Those non-whites who were able to find employment in the early post-war years often worked the dirtiest of jobs, for less pay than similarly skilled whites. Denver’s post-war housing boom was also rigidly segregated. Though the city embarked on a massive home-building binge beginning in the late 1940s, nonwhites were routinely barred from Denver’s newest subdivisions. Segregation in suburban housing enhanced the prosperity of Denver’s white middle class, while imperiling the personal, social, and financial fortunes of non-whites. Like other American cities, by the early 1960s, metropolitan Denver had become a divided landscape composed of two separate, overarching urban entities: a crumbling and increasingly undercapitalized core, and a metastasizing patchwork of unincorporated or loosely governed subdivisions.

The practice of suburban segregation further freighted these contrasting spaces with racial meaning. Census records show that between 1940 and 1960, blacks in particular became increasingly penned inside Denver’s city limits, while black newcomers were almost invariably funneled into these same areas. On the other hand, of the nearly 420,000 whites to move to the Denver metropolitan area between 1940 and 1960, 65 percent took up residence along the city’s suburban fringes.¹⁹ As a result of

¹⁹ Note that it is difficult to isolate the number of “Anglos” from the number of Latinos in Denver at this time, as both were counted as “white” by the U.S. Census. U.S. Census Bureau. *Census 1940, Census 1960*. Social Explorer, Inc., Department of Sociology,

these demographic trends, Denver's suburbs emerged during the 1950s as quintessentially "white space," and self-conscious monuments to privacy, the nuclear family, and self-reliance. Racial exclusivity added to the suburbs' financial and social value, and allowed residents to develop an increasingly critical distance from the racially mixed urban core, even as they continued to benefit from its largesse.

By the 1950s, moreover, Denver's suburbs were adding residents faster than the city itself, and they became the main engine driving the city's housing boom. Denver officials were only too happy to encourage this trend under the mistaken assumption that the Denver's city government would, one way or another, eventually gain control of these new suburban tax revenues. Without demanding incorporation, the city provided new roads, sewers, and most crucially, new water taps for neighborhoods outside its boundaries and beyond its civic control. These investments in Denver's suburbs constituted a de facto investment in the expansion and enhancement of Denver's "white space," further widening the breach between city and suburb.

While historians of Denver have readily acknowledged its racial problems, they have also tended separate the city's post-war racial history from its history of development and growth—a practice which undervalues race as a causative and structural force in the city's post-war urban development.²⁰ It is, in some ways, an entirely

Queens College and Graduate Center, CUNY. Accessed September 11, 2009.
www.socialexplorer.com.

²⁰ Of the leading general histories of Denver, Stephen Leonard and Thomas Noel's *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* perhaps does the best job of emphasizing the experiences of racial minorities as an important part of the history of the whole city. Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1990), 376-377. Yet, like Lyle Dorsett and Michael McCarthy's *Queen City*, Leonard and Noel do not systematically integrate Denver's racial history, including post-war segregation, with Denver's history of rapid urban

understandable omission. Denver's relatively small numbers of racial minorities necessarily limited the potential for truly destabilizing racial unrest. The immense wealth generated by its rapid urban growth also helped to negate challenges to local leadership, and forge a general consensus around growth-oriented economic strategies. As a result, Denver has largely been spared the urban crises that threatened to make certain American cities, including New York and Los Angeles, completely ungovernable between the 1960s and early 1990s.²¹

As in other post-war cities, racial difference in Denver "assumed a spatial definition," to borrow a phrase from urban historian Thomas Sugrue.²² This chapter argues however that racial segregation, though largely invisible to Denver's white majority, strongly shaped the development of their city in the pivotal years between the late 1940s and early 1960s. This chapter integrates Denver's closely linked histories of suburban segregation and rapid urban growth, traces the advance of post-war racial

growth. Lyle Dorsett and Michael McCarthy, *Queen City: A History of Denver*, 2nd Ed. (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1986). Carl Abbott has done much to define and unify the history of "growth politics" in the post-war American West. His lifetime of work on Denver and other Western cities has revealed the logic and inner workings of rapid urban growth. But Abbot's survey-oriented approach also attaches the history of urban Western minorities as a postscript to a larger regional "growth narrative," and assumes the racialization of the post-war West's urban poor without problematizing it. See for example, Carl Abbot, *How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 186-204. More specialized histories of Denver, including Owen Gutfreund's excellent transportation-oriented history, *Twentieth-Century Urban Sprawl*, focus more on policy decision-making than on community formation and racial inequality. Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth Century Urban Sprawl: Highways and the Reshaping of the American Landscape* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²¹ To put a rather fine point on it, see Vincent Cannato's treatment of John Lindsay's tenure as mayor of New York City, *The Ungovernable City*. Vincent Cannato, *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and his Struggle to Save New York* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001).

²² Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-war Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.

segregation through Denver's labor and housing markets, and demonstrates the systematic exclusion of nonwhites from these crucial avenues of capital formation.

Finally, this chapter reconsiders the experiential and lived consequences of Denver's post-war segregation. It also challenges the majoritarian subjectivity of "urban crisis" as a model for understanding the political and racial fragmentation of post-war American cities. Denver does not fit the literature of "urban crisis" because unlike Detroit, Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles—all cities with large African American populations—Denver segregated and ghettoized minorities relatively peacefully. For all of the excellent work that has been done in "urban crisis studies" in the past two decades, the term cannot escape its origins as a measure of minority disruption of the daily functions of entire cities, including the racial majority. As a tool of analysis, the urban crisis model is not scaled to measure cities like post-war Denver, whose numbers of minorities were too small to affect high levels of social or political disruption. Hence, the historical narrative of Denver's early post-war period is one of widespread pro-growth consensus and "businessmen's coalitions," as opposed to the urban crises ostensibly taking place elsewhere.²³

Yet Denver was hardly immune to urban crisis symptoms like segregation and ghettoization, though their deleterious effects were generally limited by the city's lopsided racial demographics. To highlight these dynamics, this chapter will focus on two exemplary central Denver neighborhoods: Five Points and Park Hill. By restoring

²³ Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 249. See also, Robert Fisher, "Urban Sunbelt: Houston in Context," in *The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures: Essays on Sunbelt Cities and Recent Urban America* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press on behalf of the University of Texas at Arlington, 1990), 33-58.

race to the center of the narrative of Denver's post-war development, this chapter offers a corrective to previous work, which has tended to view Denver's style of urban growth as a race-neutral set of policy choices and market imperatives.

Structural inequality was solely responsible for neither Denver's post-war urban and economic growth, nor the political split between Denver and its suburbs. Yet it reinforced and underwrote both of these trends. Denver's segregated and booming labor and housing markets attracted many middle class whites fleeing the urban cores of other cities. Denver's small numbers of minorities posed little threat to suburban property values, and made it easier for white suburbanites to justify the segregation of their neighborhoods as a function of natural market dynamics.²⁴ Public structural investments in Denver's segregated suburbs increased what some race theorists have called the value of "whiteness." Public investment in segregated post-war suburbs further enhanced the value of whiteness as property by subsidizing the creation and expansion of white urban space, and sustaining its value as real property.²⁵

²⁴ In his essay, "Marketing the Free Market," David Freund argues that free market ideology, bolstered by federal housing policies, allowed suburban whites to view suburban segregation and their resulting prosperity as "products of fair competition," rather than predetermined and specifically desired outcomes. This powerful conception of free-market racism accurately captures Denver's post-war racial and growth dynamics. David Freund, "Marketing the Free Market" in *The New Suburban History*, 32.

²⁵ Cheryl I. Harris's essay, "Whiteness as Property," described the ways in which American law and jurisprudence has historically aided in the social construction of 'white' identity as a legally protected form of property. During slavery, "whiteness defined the legal status of a person as slave or free." "Whiteness" later became a form of racialized privilege, protected by law, offering the white working class what W.E.B. Du Bois termed a "public and psychological wage" that non-whites did not receive. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York, NY: The New Press, 1995), 276-291.

This same dynamic was reflected in the changing patterns of land use in the mountain hinterland. As the Denver suburbs turned outwards, coming to consider an increasingly large swathe of the Rocky Mountains as a “playground” or “backyard,” Denver’s urban, poor, and minority-dominated neighborhoods seemed to turn inward, no longer contesting the mountains as Lincoln Hills once had. As the urban residential core become culturally distanced from the mountain hinterland, that hinterland itself ceased to impart the kind of meaning it once had for residents. For the urban core, in other words, the link between city and mountain hinterland was breaking.

III. A Tale of Two Cities: Housing Segregation in the Post-war Metropolis

In December of 1953, the *Denver Star*, a weekly African-American newspaper in Colorado’s capital, published a front-page article titled, “Pointers On Denver’s Real Estate.”²⁶ The article, citing local housing data compiled in a 1953 study by the Denver Urban League, warned Denver’s black homebuyers of the hidden dangers of their city’s real estate market. The article noted the increasing frequency of newspaper home ads bearing such disclaimers as “Attention Colored,” or “No Discrimination,” even for homes on all-white blocks.²⁷ For middle-class blacks searching for alternatives to their old neighborhoods, these homes could be enticing investments. What may initially appear a great opportunity, however, often turned out to be something less. The Urban League

²⁶ “Pointers On Denver Real Estate.” *The Denver Star*. December 12, 1953, 1.

²⁷ Though the *Denver Star* article does not directly address it, these advertisements were an example of “blockbusting,” the immensely profitable real estate practice of introducing blacks to all-white neighborhoods as part of a campaign to scare whites into selling their own homes at below-market prices. Middle-class black homebuyers typically paid far in excess of market value for these homes—a boon for unscrupulous speculators. For an in-depth study of the mechanics of blockbusting, see W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story*. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

reported that most of these homes were old, dilapidated, and intentionally overpriced. Judged in terms of investment potential, they looked even worse. “By the time that many Negroes now purchasing these homes...have finished paying for them[,]” the article observed, “they will have paid \$25,000 in interest and improvements for a \$15,000 home. By this time the place may be sixty years old and surrounded by industrial and business structures.”²⁸ But what were the alternatives? According to the *Denver Star*, the Urban League could not identify a single subdivision built since the war that was open to black or Latino homebuyers. Their choices were limited to either purchasing substandard real estate at inflated prices, or staying where they were. Neither option was particularly palatable or financially rewarding. “This is the penalty,” the article’s unnamed author grimly concluded, “that one has to pay for being a Negro in Denver today.”²⁹

A year and a half later, one of Denver’s two mainstream dailies, the *Denver Post*, published an altogether different kind of “buyer beware” article. This one examined the potential moral effects of Denver’s new suburbs on their invariably white residents. In “point/counterpoint” style, *Post* reporter Ed Olsen first quoted W.N. Greim, director of

²⁸ These informal practices continued in Denver and elsewhere despite the Supreme Court’s 1948 decision in *Shelley vs. Kraemer*, holding that restrictive racial covenants were unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment. See Joe T. Darden, “Black Residential Segregation since the 1948 *Shelley vs. Kraemer* Decision,” *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (July 1995), 680-691.

²⁹ This was the “penalty” for being black in almost every major American city in the early post-war years. In 1965, the University of Chicago’s Population and Research Training Center compiled extensive housing statistics for ten cities in different regions of the country for the years between 1940 and 1950 (Denver was not among them). The data demonstrated that blacks moving into so-called “invasion tracts” (areas that had previously been exclusively white) were usually “of higher educational status and more likely to be homeowners than whites in these tracts.” The pressures and inducements toward suburbanization were as strong for middle-class blacks as whites, but these “invasion tracts” were the closest that most could get in the 1950s. Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1969), 164-165.

recreation for Denver public schools, who viewed Denver's suburbs in an unequivocally positive light, comparing them favorably with the city's older neighborhoods. "In urban areas," Greim explained, "people have depended on municipal and social agencies to supply many needs that should be filled in the home. I'm old-fashioned enough to think we should emphasize and encourage meeting those needs in the home, and I think the family is in a better position to do so in small suburban communities."³⁰ To balance Greim's optimism, Olsen also interviewed Rev. Richard Ryan, president of Denver's Regis College, who offered a more cautious assessment. Suburbanites, Ryan noted, faced longer commutes, and tended to buy and consume more goods. Potentially, the popularity of the suburbs could lead to two working parents, and a corresponding "lessening of parental influence," with all of the ominous consequences that implied.³¹

By the early-to-mid-1950s, middle classes of all racial groups experienced similar pressures and inducements to leave the central city. Post-war housing shortages, declining real estate values, and federal incentives like the FHA and VA loan programs, both pushed and pulled middle-income Americans toward the urban fringe. Yet, as these

³⁰ Ed Olsen, 'Suburbanitis' Seen As Hopeful Trend,' *Denver Post*, May 17, 1955.

³¹ Olsen's article also reflects an increasingly common strain of rhetoric and thought regarding 20th century American cities, which constructed invidious "moralities of place" for city and suburb. Such notions characterized ailing cities as failed communities, and placed faith instead in the relatively new concept of the "nuclear family" to ensure the order and moral hygiene of the suburb, and even identified the movement toward suburbia as a restoration of "pre-urban" values. For more on the intersection of evolving mid-century morality and the growth of suburbia, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). Scholars have since challenged the dichotomy between community and nuclear family, as well as public and private space. "Suburban space was...designed to purify communal spaces," writes historian Lynn Spigel, "to sweep away urban clutter, while at the same time preserving the populist ideal of neighborliness that carried Americans through the Depression." Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Post-war Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 34.

two contrasting articles demonstrate, whites and non-whites in Denver experienced post-war urban growth very differently. While whites generally decamped to the suburbs with ease, phalanxes of realtors, lenders, and homeowners associations—along with the federal government—stood ready to bar non-whites from moving into Denver’s newest subdivisions.³² As in other cities, Denver’s suburbs derived a portion of their appeal and value from the exclusion of non-whites. Thus, while putative experts like Mr. Greim and Rev. Ryan could debate the bourgeois virtues and drawbacks of suburban living, for those excluded by race, the abrupt popularity of the suburbs betokened a devastating loss of wealth and status. Disqualified from this booming market, non-white Denverites forfeited the ability to create or store capital through home equity—a prime generator of post-war middle class wealth.

Denver’s racial minorities had never been numerous enough to command much respect as cohesive constituencies, and segregation had existed in Denver prior to World War II. Nevertheless, Denver’s pre-war segregation had been by city block, rather than by neighborhood. Denver’s racially mixed central neighborhoods, for example, had sustained a small but thriving pre-war black middle class. Post-war suburban growth exacerbated preexisting racial power imbalances by successive phases of geographic isolation: first by race, then by class. As the city grew, blacks became more concentrated

³² Beginning with the passage of the National Housing Act of 1934, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) created “residential security maps,” which “redlined” many minority neighborhoods across the country as ineligible for federal mortgage guarantees. These practices continued in the post-war years. According to historian David Freund, both the FHA and the VA specifically “endorsed” racial exclusion covenants until 1950, and “actively supported” them until well into the 1960s. David M. Freund, “Marketing the Free Market: State Intervention and the Politics of Prosperity in Metropolitan America,” in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 11-32.

in East Denver; Latinos in the industrial neighborhoods along the polluted Platte River, which bisected the city as it wended its way to the northwest. Denver's Japanese population, which had grown during World War II, was penned into "Japantown," just north of Denver's downtown.³³ Segregation made these populations more vulnerable to community disinvestment, reduced home equity, and promoted middle-class out-migration.

This general pattern replayed itself in countless cities across the country in the years following World War II.³⁴ Yet in some ways, Denver's minorities found themselves at an exceptional disadvantage. All of the changes brought about by World War II did little to alter Denver's pre-war racial demographics, which remained heavily skewed toward whites. According to a Denver Human Relations Study commissioned in 1947, "Caucasians" accounted for 89 percent of metropolitan Denver's population, while

³³ In 1942, Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, allowing the Army to designate security zones in which "any and all persons" could be excluded. Almost immediately, the entire Pacific Coast was so designated, and the area's large Japanese population was forced to leave. In an act of considerable political courage, Republican Governor Ralph Carr announced that Colorado would, on principle, accept those Japanese, Italians, and German refugees who had been forced from their homes in California and elsewhere. According to journalist and historian Bill Hosokawa, "perhaps a thousand" Japanese-Americans came to Colorado in the brief period before the Army's Exclusion Order No. 34 required all Americans of Japanese ancestry to report to assembly centers for internment. Bill Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese Americans From 1886 to the Present* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 85-99.

³⁴ In a 1956 report to stakeholders, executive secretary of the Denver Urban League Sebastian C. Owens relayed the findings of a recent Harvard Business Review report which found that of over 9 million units of private housing built across the nation between 1946 and 1954, "less than two percent has been made available to non-white occupancy." Sebastian C. Owens, Executive Secretary, "Executive Report—Urban League Annual Meeting," March 27, 1956, Denver, Colorado. *Urban League of Denver Papers*, MS-ARL36, Box 1, ff2. Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library (Blair-Caldwell), Denver Public Library (DPL).

blacks, Latinos, Japanese, and other groups split the other 11 percent.³⁵ In addition, even within this relatively small population of non-whites, class and racial divisions hindered solidarity, particularly between the late 1940s and the late 1960s. Middle class black Denverites were particularly conservative by national standards, and remained hesitant to ally themselves with working and lower class blacks, while cultural differences limited the opportunities for coalition between the city's black and Latino populations.³⁶ Housing shortages and post-war population growth placed more and more pressure on Denver's poorest areas, but poverty and racial barriers kept residents locked in. Under the unremitting weight of these forces, once-vital neighborhoods turned inexorably into slums.

The political and economic dissolution of the inner city contrasted sharply with the simultaneous racial and political consolidation of Denver's growing suburbs. Fringe growth attracted a significant percentage of Denver's pre-war white population into its segregated suburbs, while the city's growing job market beckoned to middle-class whites from other areas. Denver's post-war employment boom, driven by the expansion of federal bureaucracy and defense-related industries, tapped into a nationwide, pre-

³⁵ Mayor's Interim Survey Committee on Human Relations, *A Report of Minorities in Denver with Recommendations* (Denver, CO: Denver Printing Office, 1947), 33.

³⁶ The travails of the Denver chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) provides an instructive example of how the conservatism of Denver's African American population hindered attempts to challenge Denver's labor and housing color lines. See August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1973), 189-190. For an well-drawn overview on the similar barriers between the blacks and Latinos in post-war Phoenix, see Matthew C. Whitaker, "Great Expectations: African American and Latino Relations in Phoenix since World War II," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 83-97.

segregated population of young and mobile white-collar labor.³⁷ It was these newcomers, even more than the native white population, which fueled the post-war growth of Denver's suburbs.

They soon became a powerful and demanding "growth constituency," who used the avenue of politics to siphon capital and services from the city's core. There simply were not enough minority voters in Denver to create a numerically powerful voting bloc to counter Denver's new suburban constituencies, or to seriously threaten their integration. The result was a geographic, political, cultural, and experiential breach between races that would widen until, for all intents and purposes, urban and suburban Denverites lived in different cities.³⁸

³⁷ For more on the influence of the post-industrial labor market on the creation of the post-war ghetto, see William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁸ Extensive scholarship exists on the hardening of segregation in post-war American cities. See Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), David Mcallister, "Realtors and Racism in Working-Class Philadelphia," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 123-141, Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-war Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). More recent work on race and urban growth emphasizes the role of suburbanization on neighborhood segregation, including, Charles E. Connerly "*The Most Segregated City in America*": *City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005), Arnold Hirsch, "Less than Plessy: The Inner City, Suburbs, and State-Sanctioned Residential Segregation in the Age of Brown," in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 33-56, Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Matthew D. Lassiter, "The New Suburban History II: Political Culture and Metropolitan Space" *Journal of Planning History*, 2005 4: 75-88, Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block*:

Beginning at the close of World War II, the growth of Denver's white suburbs accelerated faster than all other parts of the city. By the late 1950s, the consequences of this growth—both positive and negative—were clearly visible. The housing and employment booms infused the whole city with fresh capital and industry. But they also fractured and polarized city politics, redrew geographic boundaries, and eroded Denver's civic identity. Roads decisively eclipsed rail as a preferred means of urban and regional transportation, bringing the Rockies within reach of the city, while also throwing a blanket of pollution into Denver's once-clear skies. A welter of single-purpose metropolitan districts along Denver's growing fringe made urban planning a nearly impossible proposition, and diluted Denver's authority over its satellites. Most of Denver's once-vibrant mixed neighborhoods became residual cores of racialized, institutionalized poverty—ghetto and barrio islands rising in sorry counterpoint to the sea of shiny new subdivisions.

Though Denver schools were not segregated by law or internal regulation, residential segregation made racial stratification in the city's educational system almost inevitable. In their history of Denver, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, historians Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel recount one episode that seemed to exemplify this passive form of segregation: the 1960 opening of Barrett Elementary School. Barrett's student body was 90 percent black, and seemed to have been built to "drain"

Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), Andrew Wiese, "The House I Live In:" Race, Class, and African American Suburban Dreams in the Post-war United States," in *The New Suburban History*, ed. Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 99-119. On defense of segregation based on conceptions of property rights, see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Post-war Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

black students from nearby Park Hill Elementary. In yet another example of the nearly invisible benefits that accrued through “possession of whiteness,” parents of children in majority white schools had the option to send their children to a school outside their neighborhood if they chose. Yet different rules applied to majority black schools like Barrett. Noel writes, “If a black school exceeded capacity, temporary classrooms were built.”³⁹ Denver’s school segregation set the stage for school desegregation and busing battles in the late 1960s, including the pivotal school desegregation case, *Keyes vs. School District No. 1*, which cleared the way for system-wide desegregation of school districts across the country.⁴⁰

As the Denver metropolitan area grew, the thoroughness with which it winnowed out non-whites from its suburbs did not seem to waver throughout the 1950s. With the force of federal policy behind it, Denver’s real estate market counted the exclusion of minorities from its fringe neighborhoods as a valued-added feature. Realtors, mortgage lenders and homeowner associations patrolled the color line, removing the burden from individual white homeowners. In this way, Denver’s post-war segregation proceeded apace, in plain sight and yet almost unnoticed.

IV. White Labor, White Future

Residential segregation would not have lasted very long without a corresponding color line in Denver’s labor market. If anything however, Denver’s history of labor segregation was even more pronounced than that of housing. For much of the first half of the 20th century, a powerful coalition of local business elites, together with a pliant city

³⁹ Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 376-377.

⁴⁰ *Keyes V. School Dist. No. 1*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

government, had controlled Denver's economic growth, political trajectory, and demographics.⁴¹ Local powerbrokers, including Gerald Hughes, Claude Boettcher, and William Gray Evans, feared that industrialization would dilute their economic and political influence, and would attract a higher percentage of minorities to the overwhelmingly Anglo city.⁴² They also cited Denver's high quality of life, including its many open spaces, low population density, and healthful air as compelling reasons not to court further industrial and population growth. Denver's leading businessmen forged a powerful and long-lived alliance with longtime Denver mayor Benjamin Stapleton to prevent the types of economic growth that might lead to a major population increases. To the chagrin of Denver's Chamber of Commerce, Denver officials threw onerous barriers in front of attempts to locate new factories in the city, while Denver bankers withheld vital loan money from such efforts. The Chamber, however, found it easier to work with banks and the city in expanding one industry upon which all could agree: tourism. Denver's minute black population remained segregated throughout the interwar years, and with the lone exception of a minor riot in 1939, was conspicuous in its conservatism when it came to challenging Denver's color line.

⁴¹ "Anglos" most likely comprised up to 93 percent of metropolitan Denver's population in 1930. Again, please note that it is difficult to isolate the number of "Anglos" from the number of Latinos in Denver at this time, as both were counted as "white" by the U.S. Census. U.S. Census Bureau. *Census 1930*. Social Explorer, Inc., Department of Sociology, Queens College and Graduate Center, CUNY. July 24, 2009. www.socialexplorer.com

⁴² Political racism also served the interests of Denver's most important businessmen. Early in his mayoral career, Ben Stapleton joined the Klan and appointed its members to important city positions. The city had been engaged in a long battle with private interests over the ownership of the Denver Tramway Company. A Klansman city attorney granted full ownership to the private interests, including the Evans, Boettcher and Hughes families, "at a valuation that was double the previous figure." Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 223.

Denver's interwar antigrowth coalition had also held the line on race. In 1940, blacks accounted for a meager 2% of the total metropolitan population. This small number, moreover, remained thoroughly segregated throughout the interwar years, even though it was not codified into law. With the exception of one small neighborhood disturbance in 1939 concerning an instance of police brutality (presaging a more serious problem in the decades to come), Denver's black population did little to challenge the color line. Denver's Latino population hardly fared better. Hoping to capitalize on anti-New Mexican sentiment in Colorado's rural counties, Governor Edward Johnson mobilized the state's National Guard to close its southern border in 1936.⁴³ As in the rest of the state, Denver's Latinos lived on the social and political margins, amidst an undercurrent of racial and class hostility.

Denver did not experience a population explosion after World War II because it was such a beautiful city, or because it exuded a special charm that other cities did not possess. Like other Western cities that grew in similar fashion, Denver's labor market was the driving force behind its population growth. In fact, the so-called "Westward Tilt" that described the movement of Americans toward the booming cities of the Pacific, Southwest and Rocky Mountain regions was preceded by a westward tilt of jobs. Between 1940 and 1950, Denver added 77,839 jobs, reduced unemployment by 17,343, and added 60,496 new workers to its total labor force. The increase in employment drove

⁴³ Sarah Deutsch. *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 165-166. See also, Tanya W. Kulkosky, "Mexican Migrant Workers in Depression-era Colorado" in *La Gente: Hispano History and Life In Colorado*, ed. Vincent C. De Baca (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1998), 129-130, and James F. Wickens. *Colorado In The Great Depression*. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 99-106.

a population increase of 156,064 people during the same period—a gain of roughly 38%.⁴⁴

Due to the vicissitudes of historical timing however, even the sledgehammer effects of World War II could not change Denver in a handful of important respects. Prior to the war, an old guard of local moneyed interests had exerted considerable energy to limit Denver's economic expansion, limiting its appeal to outside industries and itinerant, unskilled labor. In the 1930s, which had been an era of late industrialism in other cities, the majority of working Denverites were employed in the professional, technical, sales or clerical sectors.⁴⁵ Thus, while World War II swept away many of Denver's artificial barriers to job growth, it also ushered in a post-industrial economy in which white collar labor—the same sectors that had dominated Denver's pre-war economy—was ascendant. After the war, at the urging of the Denver Chamber of Commerce, the federal government converted the gigantic Denver Arms Plant on the western side of Denver into the Denver Federal Center.

By 1951, the bureaucracies housed at the Denver Federal Center employed 14,000 workers, and by 1960, that figure exceeded 23,000, in largely white collar, management, and clerical work.⁴⁶ In 1955, the Martin Aerospace Company built a manufacturing plant in the Denver foothills to fabricate the Titan rocket for the U.S. Air Force. By the mid-1960s, the Martin's Denver Titan plant would employ thousands of engineers and

⁴⁴ Denver Planning Office, *Working Denver: An Economic Analysis* (Denver: Denver Planning Office, 1953), 16.

⁴⁵ DPO, *Working Denver*, 25.

⁴⁶ Lyle W. Dorsett and Michael McCarthy, *The Queen City: A History of Denver* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Co, 1976), 260.

scientists.⁴⁷ Led by federal bureaucracy and defense manufacturing, white-collar jobs accounted for nearly three-quarters of Denver's total employment gain between 1940 and 1950. World War II galvanized Denver's job market, but left the city's pre-war occupational and industrial patterns essentially intact.⁴⁸

The consistency of Denver's post-war labor patterns carried over to its racial demographics. As had happened after the end of World War I, World War II touched off a large wave of African-American migration from the South to the industrial cities of the North and West.⁴⁹ Compared with cities like Los Angeles or Chicago, Denver did not rank highly as a destination for migrating Southern blacks, very likely because of the paucity of well-paying manual employment opportunities, and their near-total exclusion from white-collar jobs. This is not to suggest that Denver's populations of blacks, Latinos, and other minorities remained steady during the first two post-war decades. In fact, census figures show that between 1940 and 1960, Denver's black population nearly quadrupled, making it the fastest growing racial cohort in post-war Denver, second only, perhaps, to Latinos.⁵⁰ But because the black demographic had comprised such a small percentage of Denver's pre-war population, its post-war growth would have had to be orders of magnitude greater than that of the white majority to significantly alter Denver's racial demographics. Unlike Chicago or Los Angeles, this did not happen in Denver.

⁴⁷ William B. Harwood, *Raise Heaven and Earth: The Story of Martin Marietta People and Their Pioneering Achievements* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 299-307.

⁴⁸ The Denver Planning Office, *Working Denver: An Economic Analysis*. (Denver: Denver Printing Office, 1953), 22-25.

⁴⁹ For more the second "Great Migration," see James N. Gregory, "The Second Great Migration: A Historical Overview" in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19-38, and Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁵⁰ See footnote 4.

Despite growing twice as fast relative to Denver's white population between 1940 and 1960, by the end of that period, blacks still comprised only 3.6 percent of the total metropolitan populace. Denver's core neighborhoods absorbed these modest numbers as whites moved to the fringes.

Numbers for the Latino population are more difficult to ascertain, both because they were counted as "white" for census purposes, and because a significant proportion of Denver's Latino community spent part of each year working on Colorado's high plains beet farms. Nevertheless, Denver's unofficial system of neighborhood segregation continued to adversely impact Denver Latinos as well. Moreover, the minority growth that did take place during the first two post-war decades remained concentrated in the central, segregated neighborhoods along the polluted Platte River Valley and in East Denver, while white newcomers pushed out into the city's suburbs. Census numbers also bear out the trend toward segregated suburbanization. During the 1940s, the number of people living in central Denver grew by 29 percent, while the population in its unincorporated suburbs grew by 73 percent. Denver's population, fast-growing as it may have been, retained most of its pre-war demographic characteristics.

The exigencies of World War II had integrated African Americans more completely than ever before in Denver's labor market, and many moved up the career ladder to supervisory positions. The year 1946 dealt a cruel blow to those who hoped that such gains might be permanent. Remarkably quickly, blacks and other racial minorities in Denver found themselves at the bottom of the labor market once again. The consequences were both immediate and painful, including higher rates of unemployment,

lower wages, and more physically demanding, “dirty,” jobs than those held by whites.⁵¹ As with housing, employers relied on the “free market” for justification for their racially exclusive hiring practices. “We follow a policy of selective hiring,” reported the personnel director of a “major airline” 1947. “This means that our personnel is almost totally Anglo-American.”⁵² The idea that a “selective” hiring process presupposed racial exclusion epitomized the *de facto* segregation of Denver’s job market in the years following World War II.

In addition to employers themselves, local labor unions added barriers to minority employment, particularly in skilled trades. Denver’s four leading C.I.O. unions had no official policy of discrimination when surveyed in 1947, and A.F.L. unions had recently eliminated exclusionary clauses from their constitutions. Yet two of the four C.I.O. locals had no black or Japanese members, and of 20 A.F.L. locals surveyed, “16 had no Japanese members, nine had no Negroes, five had no Jews, and two had no Spanish-Americans.”⁵³ There were few “closed shops” in Denver, however, and unions enjoyed little community support. The bulk of race discrimination in Denver’s job market, the report insisted, must be laid at the feet of management, not organized labor.

Recognizing the importance of job discrimination among the many barriers to racial equality, Miller Barbour, the first Executive Secretary of the Denver Urban League, hired Sebastian C. Owens as its Industrial Relations Secretary in 1948.⁵⁴ At that

⁵¹ The Mayor’s Interim Survey Committee on Human Relations, *A Report Of Minorities in Denver, with Recommendations* (Denver, CO, 1947), 32.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁴ In addition to his role as the Executive Secretary of the Denver Urban League, Barbour was also a member of the Mayor’s Interim Survey Committee on Human Relations, and contributed data on Denver’s black community for the first report.

point, the Denver chapter of the Urban League was itself only two years old, and still in the process of establishing itself as a local resource. Owens' arrival cemented the Urban League's importance in Denver's black community. In his early twenties, the young graduate of West Virginia State College epitomized the newfound dynamism of the post-war generation of African-American activists. Immediately upon his hiring as an industrial liaison, he also began a Master's program in vocational counseling at the University of Denver. Idealist though he was, Owens labored under no illusions that he could act on the consciences of Denver's business owners, nor was he particularly interested in doing so. His pitch to Denver employers was far more pragmatic: minorities were ready and able to work. "This is strictly business," he told *Denver Post* reporter Bill Hosokawa in the early 1950s. "We're not trying to change an employer's mind about race or moral considerations. That reduces the problem to an emotional level and its bound to arouse resentment...All we're trying to do is sell management the idea of using the same criteria in hiring persons of minority groups as in hiring anyone else."⁵⁵

Setting an example of integration in action, Sebastian Owens helped not only blacks, but also Latinos, Japanese-Americans, and even "Caucasians" get jobs. Yet his approach reflected the ambivalence of many in Denver's black community to directly challenge or criticize the systemic racism of Denver's job and housing markets. The Urban League's many early successes sprang from an ethos of individual responsibility and self-uplift, and a public relations approach that played to the self-interest of employers, and tickled the vanities of philanthropists and charitable organizations.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Bill Hosokawa, "The Teamwork that Works," *Denver Post*, undated, early 1950s.

⁵⁶ Owens worked hard to cultivate relationships with Denver's deepest pockets. In a letter to Lester B. Granger, the Executive Director of the National Urban League, Owens

The underlying power imbalance necessarily limited the Denver Urban League’s capacity to directly challenge the city’s market and structural racism in labor and housing. “Our philosophy and methods reflect the influence and thinking of all citizens,” Owens wrote in 1956, “even those with whom we strongly disagree... It is my belief that the Denver Urban League has proven itself to be capable of making gains for the Negro without endangering the legitimate progress of others.”⁵⁷ In mid-century Denver, faith in the logic and incorruptibility of the free market crossed all boundaries of race and class, narrowing the limits of acceptable criticism of Denver’s emerging post-war racial regime.



Figure 1: Sebastian Owens, Myron Emrich, and Miller Barbour (photo by Phil Slattery, *Denver Post*)

assessed the success of the Denver chapter’s 1956 Annual Meeting, expressing his disappointment that the Denver businessmen who attended were only of the “lower echelon.” But on a brighter note, Owens continued, he had arranged a meeting at the gilt-edged Denver Club with a handful of the “top powers in Denver,” including Charles Gates, president of Gates Rubber, and Aksel Neilsen, president of the Title Guaranty Company, and “host to President Eisenhower when he is vacationing in Denver.” It was, Owens concluded with evident satisfaction, “[a] small but powerful group.” Letter from Sebastian Owens to Lester B. Granger, March 30, 1956, in *Urban League of Denver Papers*, MS-ARL36, Box 1, ff2. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

⁵⁷ Sebastian C. Owens, “Executive Report—Urban League Annual Meeting,” 1956 *Urban League of Denver Papers*, MS-ARL36, Box 1, ff2. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

Nevertheless, Sebastian Owens and the Denver Urban League did help to make tangible gains for Denver's African-American community. Within roughly its first five years, the Denver Urban League reported helping almost 200 people find employment.⁵⁸ In addition, according to a revised report released by the Denver Human Relations Commission in 1954, there were some improvements in the employment outlook for non-whites in Denver, particularly in the public sectors (federal and city employment), since the release of the first Human Relations report in 1947. At Miller Barbour's urging, the Denver Tramway Company changed its employment policies to permit blacks and Latinos to drive busses and streetcars in 1948.⁵⁹ A Fair Employment Practices law, passed by the Colorado State Assembly in 1951, helped to ease barriers to employment, particularly in public agencies. But of the 19,000 jobs catalogued by the Human Relations Commission in private industry, only 5% were occupied by minority employees, representing three times less than the total non-white population of the city in 1954. Minority workers were still clustered toward the lower end of the pay scale, and barred from many jobs in the higher paying professions. Eighty percent of job referrals for blacks and Latinos at the Colorado State Employment Service (CSES) were for

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Even in this victory, however, it was clear that the burden rested on Denver's black community to financially justify their new right of employment. "This venture is only a business play," the African American weekly *Denver Star* reminded its readers. "So, Mr. Negro Motorman, while you have, as being first selected, been greatly honored, yet with that honor carries a great responsibility of supporting those sponsors of yours, [and] upholding the race group you represent..." To the Tramway Company, meanwhile, the *Star* offered its "sincere...hope that, never...shall [there] be any act or conduct on our part or parts, that will cause you to blush in shame or regret that you made this venture of integration... Again and again, we thank you." "Thank [sic] Mr. Tramway Denver Appreciates Your Opportunities Offered, *Denver Star*, October 16, 1948, 2.

unskilled labor, compared to fifty percent of the referrals for whites. Two-thirds of employers seeking applicants from the CSES specified that they wanted whites only.⁶⁰

Progress against job discrimination, while measurable, had been slower than many had hoped. In a segregated and booming labor market such as Denver's in the 1950s, creeping progress on behalf of the excluded was hardly progress at all. Even as Sebastian Owens and others worked diligently to expand opportunity for blacks and other non-white populations in Denver, the explosion of the white labor market became the engine of population growth, and laid the bedrock of the city's post-war civic identity. In mid-century Denver, moreover, local "progress" and racial ideology were inextricably linked in ways that required more than community outreach or personal responsibility to overcome.

V. "What Is Wrong with Five Points?" Dispatches from Denver's Looming Urban Crisis

The literature of "urban crisis," some of which has been cited above, tends to concentrate around post-war cities with significant African-American populations. Racial conflict, and even violence, is generally central to this notion. Given its miniscule African-American population, and the absence of mass incidents of racial violence, as a city, Denver might appear to have escaped the specter of urban crisis almost completely. For Denver's black and Latinos populations, however, "urban crisis" was an ugly fact of life in post-war Denver. Were it possible to show a resident of Five Points in 1940 what her neighborhood would look like twenty years later, the legacy of urban crisis would be instantly visible. It would take only a glimpse at the rows of empty storefronts and weed-

⁶⁰ The Denver Commission on Human Relations, *Inventory of Human Relations* (Denver, CO, 1954), 99-107.

filled lots, or a quick stroll past the corner of 27th and Welton Street where “pimps, con-men, streetwalkers and their customers” conducted their business in plain sight, to confirm that something had gone drastically wrong in the intervening years.⁶¹ These were the symptoms of Denver’s underreported and understudied urban crisis—one that seemed to selectively target Denver’s racial minorities.

The “Five Points” neighborhood was ground zero for Denver’s urban crisis. John Wallace Jr., a reporter for a new African-American weekly newspaper, the *Denver Blade*, traced the neighborhood’s post-war trajectory in a 1961 series of articles titled, “What Is Wrong With Five Points?” Wallace wrote that the early black residents in the East Denver neighborhood of Five Points, who took up residence there after World War I, were “homeowners,” and “pillars of their community.”⁶² They were employed in skilled and professional crafts, participated in civic activities and organizations, and supported their neighborhood’s cultural resources, including the well-known jazz spot, the Rossonian Bar and Lounge. Black businessmen and shopkeepers like Leroy Smith combined the sporting interests of Colorado with the music of Kansas City, New Orleans and Chicago at his busy Five Points store, Rhythm Record and Sporting Goods.⁶³ Five Points had once drawn people in—not just for evenings out on the town—but to stay and live. “So,” Wallace asked rhetorically, “what happened?”⁶⁴

⁶¹ John M. Wallace. “What Is Wrong With Five Points?” *Denver Blade*, September 21, 1961, 3-4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Leroy Smith became the first black member of the Denver Chamber of Commerce in 1949, and one of the first black disk jockeys in Denver, with a show on KIMN radio. He also promoted concerts in Denver by, among others, the Delfonics, Muddy Waters, Count Basie, and Fats Domino. Scrapbook, *Leroy Smith Papers*, MS-ARL69. Box 2, F1, Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 2: LeRoy Smith's Rhythm Record & Sporting Goods shop in Five Points, circa late 1940s (Smith is behind the counter in left foreground) Photo by Burnis McCloud

To recount “what happened” was to expose the anatomy of Denver’s urban crisis. Beginning in the early 1950s, the city began to funnel its growth outward toward the suburbs, prompting white residents in Denver’s older neighborhoods to follow suit. As they vacated, realtors increasingly resold their homes to upwardly mobile blacks and Latinos, who were surprised to be able to afford bigger houses in what had only been all-white neighborhoods. The sudden presence of minorities in historically white neighborhoods offered a pretext for realtors to scare residents about decreasing home values. These blockbusting practices only hastened the flight of the white middle class toward the suburbs. Disinvestment by financial institutions quickly followed. A report compiled in 1954 by the Denver Commission on Human Relations reported that over half the lending agencies they canvassed made no housing mortgage loans in “older portions of the city,” remarking parenthetically that these were the areas in which minorities were concentrated. Soon, even the clubs and bars could no longer escape the effects, and the area lost its status as one of Denver’s premiere entertainment districts. “True,” *Denver*

Blade reporter Wallace allowed, “people still drive through Five Points and stop, but they stop just long enough to pick up a “woman of the evening.”⁶⁵ Five Points was still an entertainment district of sorts, but now its customers were “socially undesirable,” and its black middle class had scattered. Joe Brown, editor and publisher of the *Blade*, put the matter of numbers into stark relief in a 1961 editorial: “Out in East Denver, I have always said, there is nothing wrong that 25,000 more Negroes would not cure. The business is just not thick enough to go around. Food and entertainment businesses go strong, but in a slump East Denver looks like a ghost town.”⁶⁶ But even at the time this editorial was written, East Denver was already headed toward a state of permanent “slump.”

Residents of Five Points and other East Denver neighborhoods recognized readily enough how urban growth along Denver’s fringes was impacting their own neighborhoods. But for most who lacked the means to escape the central city, there were more pressing concerns than what was happening in the suburbs. This was particularly true for minorities. Throughout the 1950s, Denver’s leading minority and civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the Urban League focused providing more opportunities for jobs and housing within Denver’s city limits. Their techniques were generally conciliatory, and often resulted in “tokenism” rather than real change in racial practice among employers, lenders, and realtors.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Joe Brown, “Progress and Sudden Growth!!” *Denver Blade*, October 12, 1961, 1.

⁶⁷ The Denver chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)’s spotty career in Denver demonstrated how difficult it was to make real gains in a city whose black population was itself so conservative and hesitant to challenge the status quo. The Denver CORE chapter began in the first year of the organization’s existence, after a visit by civil rights activist and CORE founder Bayard Rustin. But aside from a few sporadic

This timidity carried a hidden price as well, as it allowed white Denverites to avoid confronting the structural racism of their city. Nowhere was this “blindness” more in evidence than in the early 1960s controversy concerning blacks moving to the central Denver neighborhood of Park Hill. Due to the growth of Denver’s black population, black families over-spilled the boundaries between Denver’s central neighborhoods by necessity. Park Hill was among the recipients of this overflow, and as more blacks moved in, more whites moved out. By 1964, the once-white neighborhood had become one of the few neighborhoods that remained open to black residents. Despite the fact that whites were leaving as a result of the black influx, many of the remaining white residents of Park Hill accused blacks of “re-segregating” the neighborhood, just by moving in.

Amazingly, white Park Hill residents were greatly helped in these efforts by the African-American newspaper the *Denver Blade*, which ran a story about the “Negro ghetto” forming in the neighborhood. In it, *Blade* staff writers reported that they had first learned of the story through a disgruntled white mother who lived in the Park Hill neighborhood. She had apparently requested that the newspaper do a story on the neighborhood to, in the words of the news staff, “show...the Negro citizenry of Park Hill the seriousness of their re-segregation patterns.”⁶⁸ The *Blade* obliged her, and solicited

protests, including one that led to seven arrests outside of a theater, the Denver CORE never gained much support in the African American community, and petered out in 1951. It was re-founded again in 1962 in the wake of the Freedom Rides. But in an action to force the Safeway grocery chain to hire more blacks, the revived Denver CORE found that it still did not have the support of black newspapers or the local NAACP, which still shunned protest as a method of social change. What started as an ambitious effort to get the grocery chain to hire twenty African Americans was whittled down to five jobs “as a token of good faith.” Meier and Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942*, 189-190.

⁶⁸ Blade News Staff, “Negro Ghetto Forming In Park Hill!!!,” *Denver Blade*, February 8, 1964, 1,7

further comments from other white Park Hill residents for use in their article. “We were shocked,” they quoted one white resident, “to see how far this re-segregation had gone. Negroes dominate the entire block behind my house. Why in the Hell doesn’t CORE picket these Negro blocks out here in Park Hill if they are against segregation so much?”⁶⁹

These telling sentiments make visible two of the overarching dynamics of post-war racial politics in Denver: the utter inadmissibility of white responsibility for the formation of Denver’s post-war ghettos, and the tendency of Denver’s conservative black intelligentsia to adopt majoritarian attitudes toward ghetto formation. News stories such as this one, appearing in a “black” newspaper, allowed white Denverites to frame ghettoization as the fault of those hurt most by it. Moreover, the widespread acceptance of “re-segregation” as a term for black influx into previously all-white neighborhoods implies a false history of neighborhood racial comity—one that again absolves white residents, as well as city government, of any blame in the matter. Even those who recognized how widespread segregation in and around Denver drove black homeowners to the Park Hill neighborhood nevertheless seemed to blame blacks for the “re-segregation” of the area. “Naturally I don’t think that Negroes should *re-segregate themselves* [emphasis added] in any area,” allowed David Smith, the African-American owner of Dave Smith Realty. “However, I do understand how and why it happens. Negroes do not have free access to all areas of the city, therefore, when they want to move they naturally move to Park Hill.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

This was, of course, the central and entirely overlooked explanation for the demographic changes taking place in Park Hill. Given the meager alternatives—including a rapidly degenerating Five Points—Park Hill appeared as a haven for black Denverites in the early 1960s. But angry white Park Hill residents were under no obligation to recognize the harsh realities that faced their new neighbors. To them, the “re-segregation” of their neighborhood was a problem for which blacks were solely responsible.

The *Blade* story about Park Hill neatly encapsulates the process by which Denver’s neighborhoods stratified during the early years of the post-war era on the basis of race. Despite the considerable tensions aroused by the arrival of black residents in the Park Hill neighborhood, the discord did not turn violent, as had similar situations in Rust Belt cities like Detroit or Chicago. Unlike these and other American cities, white residents of Park Hill did not turn to violence to defend their neighborhood from black interlopers because the rest of the rapidly growing (and eminently affordable) city lay open to them. Denver offered whites of all classes a level of geographic and social mobility that was not present in economically troubled Rustbelt cities like Detroit.

Moreover, Denver offered whites the immense political advantage of living in an outwardly race-free city—one in which race, as everything else, was ostensibly governed by the just dictates of free market economics. If blacks did indeed live in ghettos, the logic went, then it was their fault. White Denverites did not have to assume responsibility for policing the color line as did whites in other cities. All in all, Denver offered its white residents higher “wages of whiteness” than cities with larger and more

vocal populations of racial minorities.⁷¹ Such attitudes corresponded remarkably well to the racist thought patterns identified by the Denver Human Relations Commission sixteen years earlier.

VI. A New Balance

By the early 1960s, Denver had become a largely segregated city. This chapter has argued that its early post-war growth was predicated to a significant extent on this process of segregation, which added value to the city's new suburbs. The balance of this segregation was born by a relative few minorities, who were excluded from the city's post-war suburbanization, and forced to grapple with the dynamics of urban crisis, including ghettoization. This racial spatialization reshaped civic identities, and destabilized the central city.

But post-war racial separation is only a part of the story. Despite Denver's relatively small numbers, the city's municipal government was far from laissez faire when it came to structural racism and slum formation. The same could be said of Denver's minority communities themselves. As Denver's urban/suburban divide became a racial divide, Denver's minorities increasingly depended on local government to protect their interests, and preserve the social and financial value of their neighborhoods. The next chapter will consider how official Denver reacted to Denver's racial and geographic

⁷¹ "Wages of whiteness" is a term taken from W.E.B. DuBois's treatise, *Black Reconstruction*, which posited that the quality of "whiteness" constituted a "public and psychological wage" that minorities did not receive. This insight has become the cornerstone of the "whiteness" school of racial scholarship, which examines the ways in which the often-invisible advantages of whiteness accrue. W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thompson, 1976). See also David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999), and Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness As Property" in *Critical Race Theory...*, ed. Crenshaw et al., 1995.

dualism in its urban planning, resource management, and human services. It will specifically examine the bureaucracies of Denver's city government, whose approaches to growth mixed ideology, idealism, and organizational inertia. Taken together, the reactions of these local government agencies to segregated urban growth helped to determine the course of the city's growth for the next half century.

Chapter 5: The Dual City, 1945-1962

I. A Well-Intentioned Bureaucracy

Denver's city government has long maintained an active and influential bureaucracy. As Denver historian Carl Abbott has written, "It is Denver's bureaucrats rather than its politicians who have been the more responsive to new public priorities."¹ The context of this quote comes from Abbott's analysis of Denver government during the early 1970s, when Denverites shared a renewed sense of hope in the efficacy of centralized land use planning and community renewal. But he may as well have been writing about any point during Denver's history since the midpoint of the 20th century. In its preference for bureaucratic solutions to citywide problems, Denver differed from cities like Dallas and Houston, which were known more for their "laissez-faire" approaches to rational city planning.² The years between the end of World War II and the late 1950s described a transitional period in Denver politics that swept away pre-war anti-growthism and economic conservatism en route to what urban historian Carl Abbott has called a "businessman's city in its pure form."³

Denver's unique relationship to its hinterland indirectly drove the proliferation of the city's public authorities. Early in the city's history, private interests supplied the city's water—a precious and scarce commodity in an arid climate. Corruption, graft, and

¹ Abbott, *The New Urban America*, 221.

² The city of Houston, write historian Robert Fisher, "did not adopt a more-state oriented strategy to meet urban problems because the city never encountered problems sufficiently great and never experienced a crisis that might have produced comprehensive alternatives initiated by either elites or grassroots insurgents." Robert Fisher, "Urban Sunbelt: Houston in Context," in *The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures: Essays on Sunbelt Cities and Recent Urban America* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press on behalf of The University of Texas at Arlington, 1990), 202.

³ Abbott, *The New Urban America*, 255–256.

monopolistic pricing by Denver's leading private water company led the city to acquire it in 1918, after which it became a public authority known as the Denver Board of Water Commissioners. In acknowledgment of the immense influence that came with the ability to determine water allocation, city leaders in 1918 took pains to remove the Denver Water Board from the political chain of command, and particularly to insulate it from mayoral politics.

The "culture of expertise" in local government truly flowered, however, with the election of neo-progressive mayor James 'Quigg' Newton in 1947. Within months of taking office, Newton revitalized Denver's nearly moribund planning department, renaming it the Denver Planning Office (DPO). He brought in a nationally recognized traffic expert to sort out the snarled streets of Denver's downtown. Shortly after his election in 1947, Mayor Newton created an interim Human Relations Commission to conduct and compile surveys of "race relations" in Denver, the first of which was released in 1948. Using local and federal money, the city embarked on a large public housing program in the late 1940s under the jurisdiction of the Denver Department of Welfare. And as always, the Denver Board of Water Commissioners loomed above all other civic authorities.

Mayor Newton created many of these new bureaucracies in the late 1940s in response to the governing challenges brought about by World War II. Growth in Denver's labor market attracted new residents, quickly overwhelming the city's existing housing stock and infrastructure. The city's streets were hopelessly overcrowded, and municipal services like sanitation stretched beyond their limits. Newton's predecessor in the mayor's office, Benjamin Stapleton, had done little to address these problems, hoping

that Denver's population growth would level off and the city would return to its pre-war industrial patterns. This was not to be, however. Among other things, the federal capital infusion of World War II pried the city's economy from the grip of its old guard financial elites, who had long held the line against rapid urban growth in Denver.⁴ In 1947, average Denverites were desperate for a new politics that would not only acknowledge the city's new needs and challenges, but also strive to meet them. Newton, along with his proposed new bureaucracies, embodied this promise.

By the mid-1950s, the shape of these governing challenges had changed drastically from what they had been less than a decade previously. Denver was no longer in the throes of a serious housing shortage. In fact, city planners openly worried about too much unplanned growth along the city's edges. Sections of the core city, meanwhile, seemed perched on the edge of catastrophic failure, as money, resources, and people streamed fringeward. By the mid-1950s in other words, the city of Denver was contending with the more lasting crises caused by post-war growth: urban sprawl on its fringes, and urban blight and ghettoization in its central neighborhoods. These distinct but closely related dynamics comprised the leading edge of Denver's incipient fracturing into urban and suburban "dual cities."⁵ It fell most directly to Denver's municipal

⁴ See Chapter 2.

⁵ The trope of the "fractured" or "polarized" city finds expression in numerous books and articles about urban development in the post-war era. See Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 272-282, Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race & Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 171-211, Albert M. Camarillo, "Blacks, Latinos, and the New Racial Frontier in American Cities of Color: California's Emerging Minority-Majority Cities," in *African American History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 39-59, John Powell, "Sprawl, Fragmentation, and the Persistence of Racial Inequality: Limiting Civil Rights by Fragmenting Space," in *Urban Sprawl:*

bureaucracies—its planning department and water commission especially—to simultaneously manage Denver’s urban growth and political dissolution.

This chapter focuses on urban planning and water policy not in an attempt to create an exhaustive history of growth politics in 1950s-era Denver, but rather to highlight these strategically important sites in the unfolding of that history. Its findings echo the arguments long advanced by various practitioners of urban political economy, which have tended to separate city politics from urban bureaucracy, and to grant more agency to the latter than the former.⁶ In Denver, as in other cities, bureaucracies such as the Denver Water Board played a considerable role in helping to clear the way for faster urban growth along Denver’s unincorporated fringes. As Denver’s history shows, however, there were real efforts on the parts of urban planners, water bureaucrats, and urban politicians and voters to prevent Denver’s transformation into a “dual city” that was fractured by race and property interests.⁷

Causes, Consequences, & Policy Responses (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 2002), 73-188.

⁶ Political scientist Paul Peterson’s influential “city limits” thesis argues that politicians, obliged as they were to continually seek reelection, were largely powerless to halt 20th century currents of urban growth, and were held in thrall to a combination of market forces and federal policy. Paul E. Peterson, *City Limits* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981). John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch advance a conception of urban political economy that grants more agency to both politicians and bureaucrats, who allied to together to pursue pro-growth policies as part of a “growth machine.” John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, “Political Interests and Urban Economic Growth,” in *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 62-82. Stephen L. Elkin builds on Peterson’s argument with his own conception of urban “regime,” in which “the politics of most city services is dominated by the bureaucracies themselves, acting in concert with groups that are particularly attentive to their workings.” Stephen L. Elkin, “City and Regime,” in *City and Regime in the American Republic* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 85-101.

⁷ For more on how urban bureaucracies, inadvertently or not, contributed to America’s mid-century urban challenges of social inequality, blight, poverty, and sprawl, see Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (New York, NY: Verso, 1993), Thomas J. Sugrue,

Denver city planners worried deeply about this “fracturing” in the early-to-mid 1950s, and hoped to preserve Denver’s integrity as a governing unit. Enlisting the Denver Water Board to help impose limits on Denver’s rapid sprawl, the Denver Planning Office announced plans in the early 1950s to develop and release an urban plan that would address both urban sprawl and urban blight. The DPO struggled to enact their “Comprehensive Plan,” and to simultaneously address the problems of Denver’s core and fringe for most of the 1950s. During the same period, the Denver Board of Water Commissioners enacted a “Blue Line,” beyond which they would not provide new taps. The “Blue Line” corresponded roughly to the contours of the DPO’s “Comprehensive Plan,” and seemed designed to encourage Denver’s “satellite cities” to develop their own water resources. For a relatively brief period, it looked like Denver’s bureaucracies would reprise the control that Denver’s old guard of financial elites had once exercised over the city’s development.

The DPO’s Comprehensive Plan ultimately came to naught, despite the cooperation of the powerful Denver Water Board. This chapter argues that cars, racial suspicion, and the proliferation of “special districts” spelled failure of the urban planning efforts of the DPO in the 1950s. The DPO believed, as did Mayor Newton, that the automobile could serve as an effective planning tool. Under the mistaken assumption that personal mobility could aid in rational urban planning by untethering residents from public transit,

The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-war Detroit (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), Howard Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1993), and Raymond Mohl, “Shifting Patterns of American Urban Policy since 1900), in *Urban Policy in Twentieth Century America*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 1-45.

the DPO built its comprehensive plan around roads and completely jettisoned public transportation as an urban priority. Race also became a major factor in the demise of Denver's mid-century planning. Despite the fact that DPO planning bulletins in the early 1950s drew connections between "blight" and "sprawl," Denver planners studiously avoided any references to Denver's segregation or racial stratification.

Yet by the mid-1950s, sprawl and blight already carried obvious racial connotations, as the city was rapidly spatializing on that basis. Denver already had racially homogenous suburbs, and was rapidly developing equally racially homogenous ghettos. White suburbanites transposed their suspicion of the racial "other" living within Denver's urban confines onto Denver city government and its attempts to impose order on the rapid urban growth of the fringes. The inability to deal with race as a planning issue, helped to doom the efforts of the central city to control urban growth.⁸ Finally, the post-war proliferation of "special districts," which gave subdivisions governmental status and the ability to levy taxes for water and other infrastructure obviated the need for suburbanites to allow themselves to be annexed or incorporated into a larger municipality.

This chapter concludes by recounting the councilmanic election in a single Denver district in 1955. Numerous histories of Denver and other cities document the ways in

⁸ For more on the suburban, racially-informed mistrust of central cities, see Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), Jonathan Barnett, *The Fractured Metropolis: Improving the New City, Restoring the Old City, Reshaping the Region* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1995), Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Post-war Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), Mark Baldassare, *Trouble In Paradise: The Suburban Transformation in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), and Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1992).

which suburbanites resisted association with urban cores, choosing uncontrolled growth over centralized planning. Far less has been written, however, about how urban minorities reacted to suburban growth, or participated in the political discussion surrounding it. This chapter concludes with a councilmanic election in the summer of 1955, in Denver's central and racially mixed District 8. The 1955 election pitted a conservative, up-and-coming black politician named Elvin Caldwell against a fiery neophyte named Rodolpho "Corky" Gonzales, who would later become a leader in the Chicano Movement. Despite the fact that both blacks and Latinos were excluded from the rapid growth that was taking place in Denver's suburbs, the 1955 councilmanic election in District 8 revolved around the issues of suburban growth. The election marked the historical moment at which Black and Latino political leaders began to differentiate the interests of their constituents from those of the city as a whole, and from white suburbanites.

In the end, the narrative of this chapter concurs with countless other histories and studies that show post-war municipal governments and bureaucracies as accelerants, rather than deterrents, to uncontrolled urban growth and further racial stratification. So complete was their failure in these regards that it seems in retrospect as though these authorities *willed* the resulting sprawl and blight. In Denver, however, this was not the case. By examining planning and water policy, along with growth politics in the center city, we can see the efforts that were made to avoid this eventuality, and the cultural, political, and economic assumptions of the period that those efforts implied. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to explain not only what caused Denver's sprawl and stratification, but

also what contemporary experts and urban politicians *thought* would happen. As this chapter will demonstrate, the two were not the same thing.

II. The Intellectual Test of Urban Planning

Planning agencies in post-war Western cities like Denver often play the role of scapegoat for urban historians. Scholars point out with regularity how these bureaucracies failed to accurately understand contemporary urban growth dynamics, how they failed to anticipate future urban development, and finally, how they failed to effectively exert any political or economic control over urban development.⁹ Denver's utter dependence on the automobile is, inarguably, part of the legacy of Mayor Quigg Newton's revitalized DPO. But the centrality of the automobile was only one facet of a much more extensive metropolitan schema that the DPO hoped would become the new state of the art in effective urban planning. This section places the primacy of the automobile into the context of this larger urban plan, which, while ultimately counterproductive, complicates the notion that Denver planners desired peripheral expansion merely as an expedient to over-concentration in the urban core.

By 1947, Denverites were looking for relief from the deleterious effects of rapid population growth. Denver's streets were neither wide nor sturdy enough to handle the city's increased traffic volume. Denver commuters endured hours-long traffic jams with maddening regularity, idling on streets pitted with potholes and stripped pavement. The Denver Water Board had not materially added to its ability to store and supply water since the mid-1930s, and the city had not annexed a square inch of land into the city

⁹ Owen Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 87-95.

proper since just after World War I.¹⁰ A serious post-war housing shortage created cramped conditions in neighborhoods, and overtaxed old apartment buildings and houses that were in need of repair or replacement.¹¹ Denver also needed more social and public health services, and a larger recreation department.¹² In 1946, Denver newspaper publisher and columnist Gene Cervi complained with palpable disgust that after many half-hearted attempts, Denver still had no comprehensive plan to give a sense of the “overall picture.” As a result, the city was “paying now *in confusion* [emphasis in original] the price of failure long years ago to decide where we wanted to go and how we wanted to get there.”¹³

Mayor Newton knew exactly how he wanted Denverites to “get there,” and that was by car. In 1949, Newton hired Harry A. Barnes as the city’s traffic engineer. Barnes introduced one-way streets to downtown Denver, and created more pedestrian-friendly traffic signals to enhance the city’s walkability.¹⁴ Beginning in his first term, Newton tried to address Denver’s downtown parking issues, eventually building three structures to accommodate drive-in commuters. He also replaced the largely defunct Denver Planning Commission with a new Denver Planning Office (DPO) in 1949, and charged it with developing a comprehensive plan for the growing city, predicated on the automobile

¹⁰ Edmund W. Carr. Interview with Donald N. Baldwin. “Annexation in Denver.” Denver, CO, March 20, 1972, Transcript. Denver Public Library Western History Collection, C MSS OH53 Rg17B, Sec2; Sf4, Box 1.

¹¹ Mayor’s Interim Survey Committee on Human Relations, Dean Paul Roberts, Chairman. “A Report of Minorities in Denver, With Recommendations.” (Denver, CO: S.N., 1947), 1-5.

¹² *Denver Post*, May 18, 1947, C2.

¹³ *Cervi News Service*, March 21, 1946, No. 27,1.

¹⁴ His work in Denver won Barnes national recognition. He concluded his career as New York City’s chief traffic engineer. Mark Foster, *Citizen Quigg: A Mayor’s Life of Civic Service* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 142-144.

as the prime mode of transportation. Though a fateful decision in retrospect, Newton's insistence on building Denver's transportation system around cars seemed like good judgment at the time.¹⁵ The prevailing wisdom of post-war urban planning, outlined in a 1954 DPO bulletin, held that urban sprawl was a consequence of over-concentration in urban cores. According to this view, once a "saturation point" was reached, cities spilled in uncontrolled fashion into their fringes, driving a destructive process of "depreciation and decentralization." Once entered, Denver planners warned, the cycle was difficult to break, as the experiences of Chicago and Los Angeles attested. In fact, the DPO bulletin intoned, "[t]his pattern governs urban life like a natural law. The only escape...is extremely objective planning for a stable urban area, executed on a metropolitan scale."¹⁶ In one of history's ironies, Denver planners believed that the automobile could be a powerful weapon in the fight against over-concentration—and thus urban sprawl—by providing more flexibility in where people might live and work.

Denver's number one problem, the DPO believed, was not urban blight or traffic congestion, but rather the proliferation of the "unincorporated suburb." These free-floating subdivisions attracted residents by offering "a temporary vision of 'country life,' supposedly free from urban taxes, regulations, or responsibilities." But without a tax base, these areas often subsisted on "special improvement assessments, insecure and expensive water and sewer arrangements, and local commercial blight."¹⁷ They would ultimately cost more in municipal services per capita than those living in the central city.

¹⁵ Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl*, 87-95.

¹⁶ Denver Planning Office, "Bulletin L-11: A Denver Urban Line" unpublished internal memorandum, October 1954, 2-3.

¹⁷ Denver Planning Office, "Bulletin L-17: Balanced Satellite Towns [vs.] An Ever Expanding Denver" unpublished memorandum, January 1956, 3.

Most importantly, in such a dry climate, unplanned subdivisions placed great strain on the ability of the Denver Water Board to supply the necessary water, or to anticipate future water needs.¹⁸

The Denver Planning Office considered two possible ways to address Denver's metropolitan planning challenges. The first was to follow in the footsteps of Los Angeles, Boston, and other cities, and attempt to annex or otherwise incorporate fringe growth to the central city after the fact. In the short run, this was certainly the easier path. It required no immediate outlay of political capital, and would do nothing to hinder urban growth. It would preserve the ability of developers to connect their subdivisions to the city's water and sewer lines, and allow suburban residents to avoid (at least initially) the burdens and responsibilities of incorporation. It would make Denver more inviting to outside industries by allowing them to locate anywhere they chose. But, the DPO warned, such an approach would also "relieve such industries from their obligation to participate in the financing of community services for their employees... It would require no long-range planning, no conformance with 'regulations.' It would accommodate every interest in quick promotion and quick turnover."¹⁹

Like those other cities, Denver could continue to annex until it had swallowed up its neighboring cities, and covered the surrounding countryside with unregulated growth. But "after fifty years of this," the bulletin concluded, "nobody might appreciate these past

¹⁸ Denver Planning Office, "Bulletin L-14: Urban Sprawl, or Stability? Planning Considerations Toward an Urban Line," unpublished memorandum, September 1955, 5.

¹⁹ Denver Planning Office, "Bulletin L-17: Balanced Satellite Towns, Etc.," 11.

liberties... The lessons taught by Los Angeles and Chicago in 1955 should not be repeated by Denver in 1975.”²⁰

Aside from inefficiency, overcrowding, congestion, and potential depreciation, there were strong financial reasons to oppose reflexive annexation, according to the well known and respected Denver city planner, horticulturist, and consultant to the DPO, S.R. DeBoer. By law, DeBoer noted, Denver operated under a 3 percent debt-to-valuation limit, and in 1953, the city’s total valuation was \$800 million. Legally, Denver could assume no more than \$24 million in debt. Additionally, Denver’s bond rating was double A, on the border of becoming single A. As an “AA” bond risk, the city of Denver paid 8 percent interest on its bonds. If that rating dipped to single A, that interest rate would shoot up to 20 percent, making cost prohibitive the improvements that only bond initiatives could pay for. The challenge, DeBoer argued, was not in determining whether or not Denver should annex, but devising a plan under which annexation would make the most financial and planning sense.²¹

There was, the Denver Planning Office argued, a better choice than mere reliance on annexation. The DPO enumerated its preferred alternative in its *Comprehensive Plan*, which emerged in successive publications and bulletins in the early-to-mid-1950s. The plan was based on a novel conception of a future Denver, which the DPO referred to as a “Balanced Communities in Metropolitan Satellite Pattern.” According to this model, Denver would be situated at the center of a network of evenly spaced satellite cities,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ S.R. DeBoer, “The Fringe Situation and Tentative Annexation Policy, 1953.) *S.R. DeBoer Papers*, DPL, Western History Collection, Series 3, Box 11, ff28.

including Boulder, Broomfield, and Golden.²² The DPO's bulletins included evocative illustrations of Denver's alternative futures: the first an amorphous blob of unplanned, undifferentiated city, and the second a rigorously regulated urban agglomeration resembling a bicycle wheel (see Figure 2). A rigorously enforced urban line would bound each of the cities in the pattern, including Denver, and each city would be separated from its neighbors by large swaths of open or agricultural space called "Estate zones."²³ The Balanced Community model called for the limitation of the city of Denver to 160 square miles, and an "ultimate" total population of 1.2 million by 2000.²⁴ Just as significantly, the plan envisioned that Denver's satellite cities would eventually expand to 225 square miles, and incorporate 1.8 million residents, which was far more than the central city itself. The total population of Denver's three adjoining counties was only 148,000 in 1950, meaning that the DPO expected Denver's suburbs to grow by a factor of twelve before ultimately stabilizing.

²² Rather remarkably, one 1956 map of the Balanced City model projected the future existence of a satellite city called "New Town" near the modern day master-planned community of Highlands Ranch, CO. Highlands Ranch, the epitome of "new town" style planning, did not exist until 1977. Yet it did not envision the growth of Denver's largest suburb, Aurora, which was already taking place as the plan was being written. Denver Planning Office, "Bulletin L-17: Balanced Satellite Towns [vs.] An Ever Expanding Denver," front cover. See also, Mission Viejo Company, *The New Town of Highlands Ranch Planned Community District Development Guide* (Englewood, CO: Mission Viejo, 1979).

²³ Land in the designated "Estate zones" would only be available in lots sizes of one acre or larger, which planners believed would discourage development and land speculation by making it more difficult to subdivide. Denver Planning Office, "Bulletin L-17: Balanced Satellite Towns [vs.] An Ever Expanding Denver," 5-9.

²⁴ In 1955, when this portion of the plan was proposed, Denver's limits encompassed approximately 73 square miles and contained around 500,000 people. *Ibid.*

This seems like more than tacit acceptance that Denver would eventually be a suburban-dominated city, as other historians have pointed out.²⁵ But to the minds of Denver planners, so long as Denver’s metropolitan growth conformed to the dictates of the *Comprehensive Plan*, it would not be “urban sprawl.” Every square inch of land within the entire metropolitan area, including the estate zones, would immediately be annexed or incorporated to the closest responsible city, effectively ending “unincorporated subdivisions.” Additionally, public facilities, though planned in unified fashion, would be provided and administered separately by each satellite city. Taken as a whole, this novel plan for urban growth, if successful, would avoid many of the pitfalls of typical suburban sprawl.

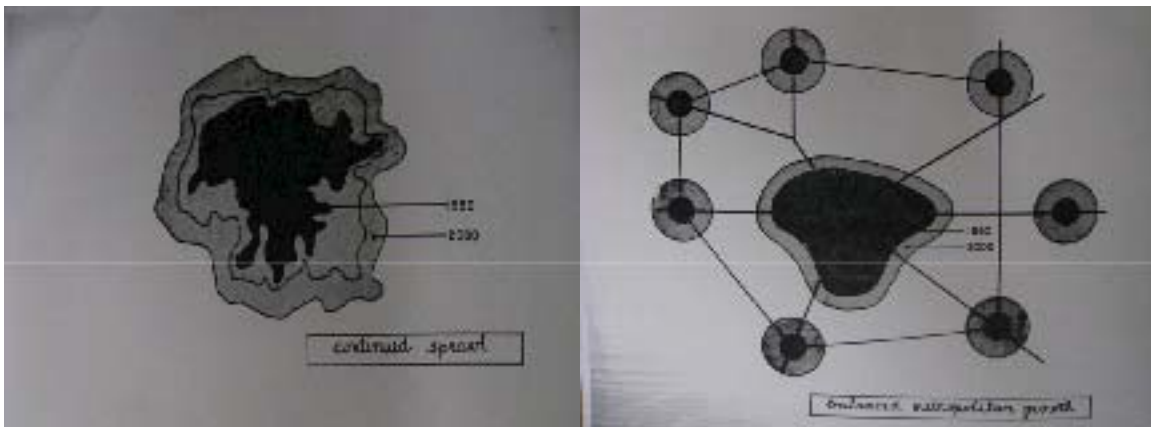


Figure 2: “Continued Sprawl” vs. “Balanced Metropolitan Growth,” Bulletin L-14, DPO

There were two missing elements, however, that would prove crucial to the DPO’s ability to enact its *Comprehensive Plan*. The first was a regional planning authority to coordinate planning between Denver and its satellite neighbors. In the mid-1950s, this was not exactly a new idea. The perceived need for comprehensive planning in and around Denver had inspired four previous iterations of regional government dating

²⁵ Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl*, 93.

back to 1939, and none of them had met with much success. In 1953, Denver planners tried again, creating an Inter-County Regional Planning Association through the machinery of the state legislature. This agency would be responsible for the crucial task of zoning the so-called “Estate zones,” and determining the final size and land use patterns of each satellite city.²⁶

The second unmet need was a method of enforcement. Residents of Denver’s growing fringes were already quite suspicious of the city’s plans. County commissions in the three counties bordering Denver County—Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson—were loath to cede control to an overarching authority concocted by Denver planning officials. The biggest hurdle, however, was the proliferation of special government districts in and around Denver, due in large part to the inability of county governments to adequately respond to the needs of their growing suburban areas. “Home Rule” provisions, codified in Colorado state law, made it exceptionally easy to create metropolitan districts, and by 1962, there were 153 special districts in the Denver metropolitan area, performing functions like sanitation, fire protection, water, and education.²⁷

The formation of a special taxing district, usually financed by high-interest bonds, often proved an extremely inefficient and expensive way to pay for new infrastructure, saddling suburbanites with higher tax rates than Denverites paid, for fewer and often-inferior services.²⁸ Additionally, the debt these districts incurred made the areas they

²⁶ DPO, “L-14: Urban Sprawl or Stability?...” 2.

²⁷ As one knowledgeable observer supposedly remarked at the time, “a man and his wife and one friend could form a water and sanitation district under Colorado law.” James L. Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience* (Boulder, CO: Bureau of Governmental Research and Service, University of Colorado, Boulder, 1967), 17-18.

²⁸ In a study commissioned by the state of Colorado in 1959, Professor E.H. Plank of the University of Denver wrote that special districts, as a governing arrangement, were

served more difficult to annex, because taxpayers within those districts would still be responsible for paying off their district's bonded debt, in addition to paying taxes to the annexing municipality.

With the very best of intentions, the Denver Planning Office invited the decentralization of Denver under the assumption that the process could be controlled, and that its costs and burdens could be shared rationally with other cities in Denver's metropolitan region. Also with the very best of intentions, Mayor Quigg Newton, serving as Denver's mayor during the crucial early post-war years between 1947 and 1954, elected through both policy and politics to, as one DPO publication expressed, "give the automobile maximum freedom of speed and direction."²⁹ It quickly became plain that the automobile was less a tool in the service of the planner than a frank invitation to the very type of sprawling growth the DPO hoped to avoid. Nevertheless, Denver planners were extremely slow to change course, in part because of the political and institutional inertia that earlier decisions had unleashed. New highways and streets became both lifelines and inducements for new fringe development. Flush with cash from both the state and federal governments, the Colorado Department of Transportation, responsible for building most of the state's major roadways, began to develop into a powerful lobby, bringing along road construction companies and suppliers.³⁰

"extremely sketchy," and "not suited to the maintenance of democratic processes in a large urban area..." For those who lived in such a district, "substandard service at an excessive cost is a reasonable expectation." Ellsworth Harvey Plank, *Financing Government in Colorado: A Report* (Denver, CO: Governor's Tax Study Group, 1959).

²⁹ Brown, Giltner, and Nez, *Denver Tomorrow* (Denver, CO: Hirschfeld Press, 1957).

³⁰ Albert G. Melcher, Denver land use activist, interview with author at Mr. Melcher's home, July 24, 2007.

The Denver Planning Office erred, moreover, in its assessment of the costs of associated with urban planning in the 1950s. While city officials may have been quick to see the benefits of planning, they were unsuccessful at convincing Denver’s new suburbanites to shoulder its costs, in addition to the heavy financial burdens of their special districts. Suburban voters, when asked whether or not to either annex or incorporate, were often swayed by fear of potential property tax hikes. Though not directly related to Denver itself, a 1959 vote on the proposed incorporation of a town called “Ridgewood” in suburban Jefferson County provided a typical case-in-point. According to the *Denver Post*, proponents of incorporation argued that it could “stop more special districts from forming,” and begin the long process of debt repayment and eventual consolidation. “Those in opposition,” the *Post* continued, “have based almost their entire argument against incorporation on its potential costs, which they claim will hike the mill levy by as much as 24 mills. Headed mainly by large land dealers, representatives of special districts and old-time Jefferson County residents, the opposition says urban government is not needed now.”³¹ The possibility of annexation to Denver was apparently not considered. For suburban voters, the question of incorporation essentially pitted competing fears against one another—fear of urban sprawl vs. fear of property tax increases. Reduced to these stark terms, it was hardly a fair fight. Voters handily rejected the proposed incorporation of Ridgewood in June of 1959.³²

³¹ *Denver Post*, “Pros and Cons of Incorporation (last of three editorials), May 31, 1959, 2A.

³² The “Ridgewood” area would later be incorporated by the satellite cities of Wheat Ridge and Lakewood. Al Nakkula, “Voters Say: “No to Ridgewood,” *Rocky Mountain News*, June 3, 1959, 1, 8.

The *Comprehensive Plan*, finally, fundamentally mischaracterized the relationship between Denver and its satellites as one of cooperation rather than competition. But according to city engineer technician Edmund W. Carr, by the end of the 1950s, Denver was in a “race” with Aurora, its largest neighbor, for suburban territory and taxpayers. “As one advances a little bit, we have to go just a little bit farther,” he explained. In fact, such aggressive annexation was a novelty in Denver’s history. Between 1914 and 1941, Carr maintained, Denver had not annexed so much as “one inch of ground.” But the emergence of metropolitan rivals would soon make Denver a precipitate and voracious annexer. Beginning in the late 1950s, Carr recalled, “not only did we not know where specific streets were, we weren’t even sure where the boundaries of the City and County of Denver were from day-to-day. They were just losing their minds on annexation.” As Carr’s remembrances make clear, the DPO’s hopeful vision of a cooperative “balanced community” was, in reality, a dead letter at the outset.³³

A mere decade after its introduction, the *Comprehensive Plan* had already become little more than an artifact of a bygone era. It had been a distillation of the widely shared post-war confidence in the power of local government to solve complicated social problems, including those of urban planning. By the early 1960s, those heady days had passed. The proposed Inter-County Regional Planning Association fell somewhat by the wayside until its replacement in the mid-1960s. The alluring vision of regional government had eluded Denver policymakers once again. As for enforcement, the

³³ Edmund W. Carr. Interview with Donald N. Baldwin. “Annexation in Denver.” Denver, CO, March 20, 1972, Transcript, 19. Denver Public Library Western History Collection, C MSS OH53 Rg17B, Sec2; Sf4, Box 1.

business and banking grandees of Denver's pre-war days had long since lost their ability to dictate the terms of Denver's growth.

In the brave new post-war world of splintered governments and fluid political and social boundaries, the only civic authority that seemed remotely capable of imposing an urban plan on the Denver metropolitan region was the Denver Water Board. Responsible for providing water to every development that sprang up along Denver's fringes, the Board could theoretically use the power of selective allocation to control where developers might build. How the Denver Water Board chose to wield that power would strongly influence the shape of the city to come.

III. The Fight of the Century

In later decades, Corky Gonzales would make a national name for himself as a leader in the Chicano Movement, a fierce advocate for social justice, and the author of the galvanizing poem, *I Am Joaquin*. In early June of 1955, however, Gonzales was an ambitious and idealistic 26-year-old, and a first-time candidate in a run-off election for Denver's city council. Trailing in the polls with the election looming, Gonzales' campaign sent volunteers fanning out across the neighborhoods of East Denver to post leaflets on every telephone pole and drop them in every mailbox. "COUNCILMANIC FIGHT OF THE CENTURY," the handbill intoned in large block letters. "Corky has challenged Elvin Caldwell to a debate—*will Elvin SHOW UP?*"³⁴

The pugilistic tone was, in part, a purposeful bit of political showmanship. Corky Gonzales had boxed professionally before entering politics—a fact he wanted to highlight

³⁴ "Councilmanic Fight of the Century," *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 18. Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library (Blair-Caldwell), The Denver Public Library (DPL).

in his campaign literature. But boxing represented more than mere political conceit to the upstart candidate. Gonzales believed that urban growth on Denver's edges was hurting the neighborhoods of District 8, and that the city needed to take extra care to see that the area did not fall further into physical and social disrepair. He thought that Denver's suburban growth ought to largely pay for itself, and resented the fact that established neighborhoods were being asked to subsidize growth by paying higher taxes or service premiums. Finally, Gonzales knew that the many and growing problems of District 8 would take money to solve—money that only the city could provide.

The overriding issue in the campaign between Gonzales and Caldwell was urban growth, and the differences that separated them were less a matter of policy than of style. Gonzales ran against Elvin Caldwell as if the choice between them approximated the choice between heaven and hell. He bluntly characterized his opponent as a “machine” politician, and a pawn of O.L. “Sonny” Lawson, a powerful district captain for Denver's Democratic Party. “If the people of district 8 vote for the Caldwell-Lawson combine,” Gonzales declared, “they are also voting in enough political barnacles to sink the ship.”³⁵ In an effort to compensate for his own inexperience, Gonzales experimented with generational wedge politics, prefiguring the rhetoric of the youth-driven political insurgencies of the 1960s. Gonzales' political platform, for example, concluded with this short, self-authored poem:

Jaundiced old men with one foot in the grave
and one foot in the gravy
Say he's too young, too inexperienced.

³⁵ “Caldwell Accepts Gonzales Challenge To Verbal Bout,” *East Denver Journal*, p. 3. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 19. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

But they don't say it out loud...

They whisper it

Because they know that nothing...

Nothing can beat YOUTH

COURAGE

And HONESTY³⁶

Elvin Caldwell, despite being the more seasoned campaigner, seemed initially caught off-balance by the rhetoric of his younger opponent. He was too canny a politician, however, to respond in kind. He readily agreed to debate Gonzales, and insisted on sharing the venue costs. But he pointedly ignored Gonzales' sharpest barbs. "I will not engage in gutter-type politics," he announced to the readers of the *East Denver Journal*. "Nor will I get into personalities. I have promised a clean campaign—a campaign on the issues—and I intend to keep that promise."³⁷ Like Gonzales, his instincts as a campaigner conformed to the distinct contours of his own personality. Caldwell was natively self-possessed and cautious, and with three elections already under his belt, he was already a skillful politician. Though he did not trade political jobs with the confident abandon of Corky Gonzales, he was well versed in policy and knew how to cultivate advantageous relationships with power.

Yet Caldwell was also a product of East Denver, and was, much more than Gonzales, an inheritor of Denver's conservatism regarding issues of race and the color line. Caldwell's family had been prominent among Denver's pre-war black bourgeoisie,

³⁶ "Stop, Look, and Vote For Corky Gonzales," 1955. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

³⁷ "Caldwell Accepts Gonzales Challenge To Verbal Bout," *East Denver Journal*, p. 3. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 19. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

and the candidate's upbringing had instilled in him a sense of difference that was based more on class than on race. One of eleven children, Caldwell had graduated from Denver's East High School in 1937 and attended the University of Colorado. After college, he earned an MBA degree from the University of Denver. During World War II, he took a job at the Remington Arms Plant in Denver, quickly working his way up to the position of chief statistician. Shortly after the war, Caldwell went to work for Ideal Cement, (one of the Boettcher family's interests) as a divisional accountant. He quit his job with Ideal in 1946 to start a series of local businesses in East Denver, and eventually entered politics by successfully running for state representative in 1949. At the age of 36, he had already compiled an impressive resume in business and politics. Seeking to contrast himself with the younger Gonzales, his campaign literature reminded voters that "nothing equals experience."³⁸ Now he had his sights set on a council seat. If he won, as he seemed quite likely to do, he would become the first African American to serve on a city council west of the Mississippi River.³⁹

Despite their dissimilar personalities, Corky Gonzales and Elvin Caldwell shared important commonalities of trait and circumstance. Both were minority political candidates in a segregated and overwhelmingly Anglo city: Gonzales as a Latino, and Caldwell as an African American.⁴⁰ Both were Democrats, and neither had the benefit of

³⁸ "Just a Reminder..." Caldwell campaign flyer, 1955. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 18. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

³⁹ "Introduction to the Elvin R. Caldwell Papers." Project managed by Ellen Zazzarino, processed and encoded by Merrie Jo Schroeder. 2005. Denver Public Library. Accessed on December 14, 2008.

<http://eadsrv.denverlibrary.org/sdx/pl/toc.xsp?id=ARL1&fmt=text&idtoc=ARL1-pleadetoc&base=fa&ss=true&as=true&ai=Advanced>

⁴⁰ Like most Western cities of the era, Denver's segregation did not have official support, and was policed by a combination of white homeowners' associations and mortgage

incumbency. Neither could count on a preponderance of votes based on race, as District 8 was divided roughly into equal thirds, black, Latino, and white.⁴¹ Both had grown up in the district they hoped to represent, which encapsulated large sections of working-class Denver, including Five Points. The *Denver Post*, in its coverage of the race between Gonzales and Caldwell, described the area as a “sensitive district of minorities—a district featuring slums and poverty on one hand, and good homes and comfort on the other. It is a district where one man’s dessert is the other man’s bread.”⁴² This delicate choice of words reflected a growing awareness that many of the neighborhoods of District 8 were balanced on the knife-edge between viability and hopelessness.

In the early 1950s, Gonzales opened a popular local nightclub called Corky’s Corner. His patrons’ frequent run-ins with police led him to start a bail bond business, which in turn acquainted him with the ubiquity of police brutality in Denver.⁴³ Caldwell also owned a stake in a local tavern, along with a handful of other local businesses in Five Points. Both men had volunteered on behalf of Quigg Newton’s transformative 1947 campaign, and both were genuine in their commitment to the betterment of East Denver.

lenders, who feared that the introduction of minorities would lower property values. Though Denver’s working class neighborhoods were generally integrated, the city’s middle- and upper-class neighborhoods were generally all white.

⁴¹ Nello Cassai. “Elvin Caldwell Has Toughest Job In City’s Legislative Body,” *Denver Post*, June 26, 1955

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “In the bonding business,” Gonzales remembered later, “I went back to the same thing I saw in the streets; people being brutalized; kids with their scalps open...I decided to get out of the bonding business because it wasn’t the kind of a business I wanted to make a living off of.” Vigil, *Crusade For Justice*, p. 8.



Figures 3&4: From left to right, Corky Gonzales and Elvin Caldwell campaign photos, 1955 (Elvin Caldwell Collection)

Gonzales' public baiting of Caldwell, and the crush of surrounding publicity combined to lend their debate the feel of a "main event." The entire city, for the first time in recent memory, found itself in rapt attention to the doings of District 8. On the night of the debate, Phipps Auditorium was packed with constituents, reporters, and curiosity-seekers. The audience, along with the agreed-upon debate moderator, Dr. Byron Johnson of the University of Denver, doubtless expected to witness an entertaining political melee. But the debate's tone remained respectful, with none of the rhetorical fireworks that had characterized much of the campaign. Although Gonzales may have done more to help his cause by continuing his showily oppositional tactics on the stage of Phipps Auditorium, he put aside the theatrics of the campaign to discuss in detail the issues facing District 8. Thus, as rarely happens in politics, the public face-off shed more light than heat. Together, the two candidates expressed what was rapidly becoming a consensus viewpoint in East Denver: that their area's biggest problems, including lack of

resources and public investment, juvenile delinquency and unaffordable housing, were symptomatic of the sudden and rapid development of Denver's urban fringes.⁴⁴

Rather than devolve into trite political spectacle, the debate between Elvin Caldwell and Corky Gonzales became instead an excellent primer for the many concerns that minority Denverites had about growth in their city. Neither Caldwell nor Gonzales seemed interested in evaluating Denver's expansion as either a net positive or negative, and neither spoke of it in terms of acceptance or rejection. Both men seemed to view urban expansion as an unavoidable part of Denver's future, replete with both hazard and opportunity. For both candidates, the hazard came in the form of gradual disinvestment and disinterest in the health and progress of East Denver's working-class and segregated neighborhoods. Urban growth on Denver's fringes was beginning to make demands of the resources and attention that East Denver, despite its status as a poor section of town, had once been able to count on from city government.

In mid-1950s Denver, examples of a shift in resources, along with governing and service priorities, were increasingly easy to spot. One example was very much on the minds of the two candidates on the evening of the debate. As Denver's population growth threatened to overwhelm the city's existing water supplies, Mayor Newton and other civic groups pressured the Denver Water Board to consider metering the water usage of every Denver resident and business, in order to encourage conservation. Both Caldwell and Gonzales viewed the initiative as a thinly disguised attempt to coerce the more central and established neighborhoods of Denver to subsidize urban growth along the city's fringes. During their debate, both candidates came out strongly in opposition to

⁴⁴ *Denver Post*, June 13, 1955, p. 3.

universal water metering, arguing jointly that it would cost more to implement, and would yield fewer results than any number of new water projects then on the drawing board.⁴⁵ Yet despite the fact that the pressure to begin universal metering was coming not from the Denver Water Board itself, but from the Mayor and city council, Caldwell and Gonzales concurred that the Board needed to be restructured to allow more—not less—input, from the city’s elected officials.⁴⁶ They both agreed on the need for a so-called “blue line,” beyond which city water would not be made available. They also jointly articulated their support for an upcoming bond issue on behalf of the Denver Water Board, in order to expand its capacity. It was of utmost importance, Caldwell argued, to assure that Denver had enough water, *before* it continued to grow. “No district in the city,” he observed, “would be more crippled, development wise, than district 8 if we fail to find a solution.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ In the early 1950s, the Denver Water Board commissioned a technical report on possible sources of additional water from the Chicago civil engineering firm of Alvord, Burdick & Howson. Completed and released in March of 1955, the report’s findings bolstered both Caldwell and Gonzales’ arguments against universal metering, though there is no record that either candidate made specific reference to it during their debate. At the time of the report’s publication, only 7% of Denver water users were metered. The report estimated that conservation derived from universal metering would save the city up to 24,000 acre-feet of water (approximately 7.8 billion gallons) per year, at a total cost of around \$15 million—approximately \$623 per acre-foot of water saved. By comparison, building new water projects like the proposed Dillon Reservoir and Montezuma Diversion Tunnel in the mountains west of town would add 120,000 acre-feet per year to the Denver water system, at a cost of around \$395 per square foot. Judged from a purely financial standpoint, universal metering was far less cost effective than new water project construction at meeting Denver’s increasing water needs. Alvord, Burdick & Howson. “Report On Future Water Supply, Denver Municipal Water Works, Denver, Colorado 1955.” Chicago, IL: Alvord, Burdick & Howson, Engineers, 1955, p. 61, 85.

⁴⁶ *Denver Post*, June 13, 1955, p. 3.

⁴⁷ “Caldwell Stresses District 8 Problems,” *East Denver Journal*, undated, p. 1. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 19. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

East Denver's dearth of open space and parks also ranked high on both candidates' list of governing priorities, and both expressed concerns about the linkage between lack of open space and increasing juvenile delinquency during the debate. According to the city's planning department, Denver did indeed lag behind many other major metropolitan areas in the country in terms of its total amounts of open space and parkland per capita. This shortfall was most apparent in Denver's historically minority neighborhoods.⁴⁸ The city's fringe growth had been accompanied by park development, which added real estate value to fringe areas, while taking it away from Denver's comparatively park-poor core.

Lack of adequate housing also continued to plague the neighborhoods of East Denver. Both candidates sought the re-imposition of World War II-era rent controls, which had been repealed in Denver in 1952, and increased public housing stock in the most crowded sections of district 8. As in many other American cities, the preponderance of Denver blacks and Latinos lived in and close to the oldest and most dilapidated sections of the city. Racism in real estate and lending practices continued to impose residential segregation, hemming minorities into established neighborhoods as whites decamped to Denver's new outer boroughs. Whites in Denver, while not nearly as virulently racist as those in the Southern states, remained deeply reluctant to allow black residents to purchase property in all-white neighborhoods.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ S.R. DeBoer. *A Master Plan For Denver's Parks: Study And Plan Of Development*. (Denver, CO: City of Denver Department of Improvements to Parks, 1949), pp. 7-10.

⁴⁹ In 1953, a group of graduates at the University of Denver's School of Social Work wrote a group thesis on an all-white neighborhood into which a black family had recently moved. According to the group's findings, only 11 of 96 people interviewed acknowledged having met the new family of residents, and many expressed concern that the new residents would be the first of many, which would eventually lower property

Both Caldwell and Gonzales also introduced similar programs to deal with the increase in “juvenile delinquency.” East Denver kids were bored because there was little to do, especially in the summers when school was out. Gonzales argued for the creation of a recreational division of city government, whose sole job would be to work with the youngsters of Denver’s poorest populations. It was important, Gonzales insisted, that the city pay a “sufficient wage to enable workers to devote their full time and interests to children.” These city employees would serve as coaches, mentors, and “intermediaries” between East Denver’s young people and Denver police. The city, Gonzales argued, needed to move beyond purely punitive measures for controlling adolescents. Denver’s police needed better training on how to interact on a positive basis with Denver’s youth—particularly those of a different background and environment.⁵⁰ Caldwell’s program to address the issue, while not as extensive as Gonzales, also called for more parks and recreational facilities in the Five Points neighborhood and other vulnerable sections of Denver.

Finally, the two candidates worried about the prospect of increasing urban blight. Gonzales favored razing the defunct office buildings peppering the neighborhood of Five Points, and expressed his concern that “political maneuvering” would “move skid row

values in the area. These attitudes were hardly unique to Denver, and the report’s authors took pains to point out that similar—and worse—conditions existed in almost all regions of the country. However, unlike Detroit, where as historian Thomas Sugrue has shown, deindustrialization led to fierce racial conflict in working class neighborhoods, Denver’s undistinguished industrial past spared it from the worst effects of the post-war “urban crisis.” Denver Commission on Human Relations. *Inventory Of Human Relations*, p. 145. See also Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-war Detroit*.

⁵⁰ Gonzales’ abiding concern with issues of police brutality in Denver would lead, perhaps more than any other single issue, to his transformation from a politician into an activist later in the 1950s. “Gonzales program for curbing juvenile delinquency.” Undated. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 18. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

from 16th and Larimer into our district.”⁵¹ Caldwell agreed, noting that “slums” were a serious and growing problem in the Denver area. “But nowhere,” he also warned, “is the problem more acute than in our district. No council representative from this district could serve without being sensitive to the great needs the problem poses.”⁵² There was reason to be hopeful, however. As a 1953 report on urban blight in Denver pointed out, the city of Denver had developed a “complete kit of tools” to “conserve” older neighborhoods, including a new city plan, a new zoning ordinance, new building and housing codes, and expanded power for redevelopment.⁵³ The political will to expend financial and political capital on the reclamation of older Denver neighborhoods, however, had yet to materialize.

In fact, of all the topics discussed during the comprehensive debate, the only area in which the two candidates disagreed was tax policy. Neither wanted to see the residents of District 8 pay more in taxes, but Corky Gonzales believed that the money to pay for Denver’s outward expansion would have to come from somewhere. Denver’s newest residents, he argued, should pay their “fair share,” by which he meant all of the costs associated with the urban growth that their arrival made necessary. Caldwell believed that such improvements could be paid for through increased efficiency in government, without penalizing any of Denver’s taxpayers.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Gonzales Caldwell Debate Turns Into Cool Talk On The Issues,” *Denver Post*, June 17, 1955. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 19. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

⁵² “Caldwell Stresses District 8 Problems,” *East Denver Journal*, undated, p. 1. *Elvin R. Caldwell Collection*, ARL1. Box 1, Folder 19. Blair-Caldwell, DPL.

⁵³ Denver Planning Office, “Blight In Denver: The Problem, The Location, The Cure.” (Denver, CO: Denver Planning Office, 1953), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁴ Nello Cassai. “Elvin Caldwell Has Toughest Job In City’s Legislative Body,” *Denver Post*, June 26, 1955

With the remove of decades, the 1955 election, of which the debate was an important moment, emerges as a turning point in Denver's history. It is the first instance in the post-war era in which Denver's majority-minority neighborhoods recognized and articulated their interests as opposed to those of the rest of the city, and even the rest of the state. They opposed further annexation to the city except on a near-paying basis, and defended the interests of the city against those of the rest of the majority-rural state. Caldwell even reiterated his provocative suggestion that the city of Denver impose a hiring freeze on those applicants who lived outside the city's limits. "I have witnessed time after time a coalition of votes of all counties against Denver," Caldwell said. "I have seen those counties bordering Denver voting with the rest of the state against the interests of Denver. Because of this selfish and inconsiderate attitude of smaller counties against the city and county of Denver, I am suggesting that in the future hiring for positions in our city government jobs paid for by the tax dollars of Denver's citizens be relegated to those who live within the city."⁵⁵

The election took place on June 21, 1955, and although the fiery upstart had done more than enough to make the campaign interesting, the issue, in all probability, had never truly been in doubt. Caldwell won by a comfortable margin, thus making history as the first African American to serve in a city council in the western half of the country. Gonzales conceded graciously, and because of his strong showing in the district, was made a Democratic district captain for the more Latino-dominated Westside. Less than a year after his loss to Caldwell, Gonzales threw himself into Progressive John Carroll's race for a Colorado Senate seat. Soon afterward, he modulated his approach to politics,

⁵⁵ *Denver Post*, May 13, 1955, p. 3.

becoming a community organizer. The moderate Caldwell easily won the 1955 election, and quickly made a name for himself in city government. Within a year, he became the president of Denver's city council. Unlike Gonzales, Caldwell was a politician by temperament, and would remain so for the duration of his career. But like his young opponent, Caldwell would become more militant in his defense of Eastern, and increasingly, Western central Denver—as metropolitan Denver's sprawling encroachments into its hinterland increasingly resembled a negative image of its abandonment of the central city.

IV. Inward and Outward

In 1955, after eight years as Denver's mayor, Quigg Newton stepped down to pursue an ultimately unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate. By the end of his first term as Denver's new mayor in 1959, Will F. Nicholson had entirely reversed the city's unofficial injunction on annexations. Between 1959 and 1972, Denver added 27 square miles through approximately 150 different annexations.⁵⁶ Denver's newfound willingness to annex land along its edges produced a rather ironic result in the city's suburbs. The very same neighborhoods that rejected the referendum for incorporation as the city of "Ridgewood" in 1959 quickly lost their disdain for the measure in the face of Denver's newly aggressive annexation policy, and particularly its proposed program of intra-city bussing to desegregate the Denver school district. By 1969, these middle-class Jefferson county neighborhoods had enacted defensive incorporation to keep from being annexed to Denver, becoming the two new municipalities of Wheatridge and Lakewood. The city of Denver's physical expansion was stopped permanently by the passage of the

⁵⁶ Edmund Carr interview, March 20th, 1972, 19.

Poundstone Amendment in 1974, which required countywide referendums for every proposed annexation.⁵⁷

After the election of 1955, moreover, voters and politicians in Denver's central neighborhoods addressed the issue of suburban growth, water allocation and metropolitan-wide planning with less frequency. More common political issues increasingly included widespread poverty, police brutality, and public housing—issues that generally ranked as low priorities for white suburban voters. The misconduct of the Denver Police Department grabbed headlines with increasing frequency in the latter half of the 1950s, culminating in a massive burglary scandal that claimed the careers of 53 officers in 1960. The conduct of the Denver Police Department reached a low ebb by the summer of 1962, when an off-duty officer shot and killed an unarmed 19 year old named Edward Larry Romero. Less than two years later, a Denver police officer struck another 19 year old named Alfred Salazar with his nightstick during an arrest, though Salazar's friends protested that he had done nothing wrong. Salazar died in jail that night, and an autopsy showed that the blow from the nightstick had fractured his skull. The two deaths galvanized the Denver Latino community to rally behind a new civil rights organization, organized in 1963. Los Voluntarios was the brainchild of Corky Gonzales, and became the forerunner of the Crusade for Justice, and helped to set the agenda for urban political activism in Denver for at least two decades to come.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America*, 190-191.

⁵⁸ Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice...*, 12-23.

Chapter 6: Conservation in Defense of Autonomy: Water and Growth in Post-war Denver, 1945-1960

If the Denver Water Board acquires the reputation of being difficult to negotiate with, its antagonists will be less anxious to infringe upon Denver's rights.

—Glenn G. Saunders, *Chief Counsel, Denver Board of Water Commissioners, 1929-1989*¹

I. *Praesidentis Ex Machina*

On August 15, 1955, President Dwight Eisenhower received a small delegation of distinguished Denverites at his “Summer White House” at Lowry Field in Aurora, Colorado. His visitors that morning included Denver's mayor, William Nicholson, Denver water department official Harold Roberts, and Aksel Neilsen, a prominent Denver banker and real estate investor, and a close personal friend and golfing companion of Eisenhower's. Today's visit was not a social call, however, but a diplomatic and lobbying mission of vital import to Denver's future. For the better part of a half-century, Denver's municipal water utility, known as the Denver Water Board, had fought for legal rights to the Blue River, a tributary of the Colorado River flowing westward out of the Colorado Rockies.² Denver's traditional opponent in these battles had been the commercial and municipal interests of Colorado's “Western Slope,” which considered Denver an interloper on their side of the Continental Divide, and viewed the Blue River as their own.³

¹ James L. Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience* (Boulder, CO: Bureau of Governmental Research and Service, University of Colorado, 1967), 102.

² Denver Water Department, “Timeline”, 2009, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

³ Geographically, the “Western Slope” refers to the portion of Colorado on the western side of the Continental Divide, a spine-like hydrological boundary bisecting the Colorado

But most recently, the Board's Blue River antagonist was the federal government, in the form of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Justice Department. The Bureau of Reclamation enjoyed "senior rights" to the Blue River, according to existing Colorado water law, and Denver's legal challenge to that right had drawn the Justice Department into the fray.⁴ Though the Denver Water Board had offered to compensate the federal agency for the water it used, the Bureau of Reclamation was not inclined to share.⁵ Nicholson, Roberts and Neilson hoped to convince Eisenhower to contravene his own agencies (both the Bureau of Reclamation and the Justice Department were arms of the federal executive) and throw his considerable weight behind an out-of-court settlement.

For Denver, the stakes could hardly be higher. By the time the Denver emissaries met with Eisenhower in August of 1955, the argument over the Blue River was about to enter its fourth decade. As it stood, the matter seemed destined for the Supreme Court. If that happened, Glenn G. Saunders, the Denver Water Board's chief attorney and one of the nation's top water lawyers, believed that the Denver Water Board would prevail. But

Rockies from north to south. The term is also frequently invoked as a descriptor for that region's economic and political interests, which were frequently opposed to those of Denver and the "East Slope" in matters pertaining to water. West Slope interests could include farming and ranching, towns, businesses, and special government districts. Brian Ellison, "The Denver Water Board: Bureaucratic Power and Autonomy in Local Natural Resource Agencies" (Colorado State University, 1993), 98.

⁴ The Bureau of Reclamation claimed senior rights to the Blue River on the strength of its Green Mountain Dam and Reservoir, which it completed on the Blue River in 1944. Green Mountain Reservoir was part of the Bureau of Reclamation's much larger Colorado Big-Thompson (C-BT) project, constructed between 1938 and 1959 to divert water from the headwaters of the Colorado River to the farmlands of Colorado's northeastern plains. The specific purpose of Green Mountain Reservoir was to set aside water from the Blue River to compensate the Western Slope for the water being taken out of the Colorado by the C-BT project. Denver does not receive any water directly from the C-BT project. Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 72–80.

⁵ Bureau of Reclamation officials accurately maintained that siphoning off a significant amount of water to Denver would reduce the power generating capacity of the Green River dam. *Ibid.*

the Board had a bigger problem: it was running out of time. By the mid-1950s, Denver was already pinioned in a fast-closing vise of post-war population growth and experiencing a lingering, region-wide drought. Unlike its federal opponents, the Denver Water Board could not afford to wait for the Blue River case to wend its way leisurely through the federal appeals process, as Denver could easily run out of water in the interim.⁶ As a practical matter, the meeting with Eisenhower likely represented the Board's appeal of last resort. Only the President had the power to short-circuit the slow legal process by pressing the Justice Department and the Bureau of Reclamation to accept an out-of-court settlement.

As they presented their case to the President, Mayor Nicholson and his associates wisely avoided any mention of the Denver Water Board's institutional stake in the outcome of the Blue River controversy. Instead, they depicted their city as the hapless victim of a federal power grab—a politically canny approach that played to both Eisenhower's fondness for Denver and his distrust of federal bureaucracy. Legally, the Denver men explained, the Blue River conflict was a relatively simple matter of jurisdiction. If state water law controlled in the case, as the Denver Water Board contended, then Denver had a clear and indisputable right to a share of the Blue River—a share for which it had already offered the federal government just compensation. Officials in the Justice and Interior Departments, however, believed that federal law—

⁶ Denver water managers were painfully aware that even if they won in court, it would take a number of additional years to construct the diversion and storage facilities to physically transport Blue River water to Denver. Alvord, Burdick & Howson and Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Report on Future Water Supply, Denver Municipal Water Works* (Chicago, IL: Alvord, Burdick & Howson Engineers, 1955), 13.

and thus federal prerogative—trumped both the statutes and interests of individual states. It was, the Denver men argued, a radical and dangerous new strain of federalism.

Besides, they insisted, the courts were not the proper arbiters of the Blue River conflict anyway. At its core, the fight over the Blue River had always been more about political ideology and power than about the law. Viewed in this light, the stakes were even simpler: Denver wanted to keep and maintain its own water supply as it always had, and federal officials wanted to reduce it to a water protectorate. But there was no reason for it. The Denver Water Board had the financial resources and the expertise to build its own Blue River diversion, and was in fact, prepared to commence construction the moment the matter was settled.⁷ An out-of-court settlement, the Denver men argued, was the quickest and surest way to avoid a water crisis in Denver, which was, of course, also in the larger interest of the federal government.

They wound up their sales pitch by subtly reminding the President of his own authority, and thus his responsibility, for Denver's fate. The city had long thrived through skillful management of its existing water resources, and asked only that it be allowed to continue doing so. But the federal government now thwarted it, and while both water and time dwindled, federal bureaucrats—the President's own *employees*—refused to alter their hardline stance. The Denver officials particularly blamed William Veeder, a Justice Department water lawyer and native of nearby Colorado Springs, whom they described to Eisenhower as “dedicated absolutely to the idea of federal power” and

⁷ Reflecting its confidence that it would ultimately be vindicated in the Blue River matter, the Denver Water Board had successfully passed a \$75 million water bond only the week prior to the meeting with President Eisenhower to pay for the construction of diversion facilities. The amount of the bond was the largest in the Denver Water Board's history. “Water Department Construction Pushed,” *Denver Water News* (Denver, CO, December 1955), 1.

willing to "fight for it to the death."⁸ What, given the circumstances, would the President advise?⁹

Such a frightening scenario made a compelling case for presidential intervention. As long, that is, as Eisenhower accepted two important but unspoken corollaries: first, that the interests of the Denver Water Board and the city of Denver were indivisible; and second, that the Board alone could save metropolitan Denver from parched oblivion. Had they been in attendance, officials at the Bureau of Reclamation and Justice Department would surely have contested both assumptions. But it may not have mattered, in any case. By the time the Denver men finished their impassioned plea, the previously composed President was absolutely irate. He delighted his visitors by harshly castigating the Justice Department's handling of the case, and thunderously condemning the statist ideology that he believed was leading the country "down the road to ruin."¹⁰

Later that same day, he instructed Attorney General Herbert Brownell to personally conduct a "thorough and fair examination of the matter...so that we can bring to a close this long drawn out effort and quarrel to the best interests of all concerned."¹¹ The implication of his order was surely not lost on his top legal hand. Eisenhower wanted Brownell to find a graceful—and quiet—way of accepting an out-of-court settlement.

⁸ Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee, eds., "Dwight David Eisenhower to Herbert Brownell, Jr, August 15, 1955," *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Doc. 1557 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/1557.cfm>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

For their parts, Mayor Will Nicholson, Aksel Neilsen, and Harold Roberts likely left their meeting at the Western White House that morning in a giddy mood. By going above the heads of their adversaries in the Justice and Interior Departments, they had achieved in a single morning what decades of litigation had not. True to his word, Eisenhower reversed the Justice Department's stance on the Blue River Case. The meeting led directly to the Blue River Decree two months later, an out-of-court arrangement granting the Denver Water Board rights to the Blue River in exchange for electricity and monetary reparations to the Bureau of Reclamation.¹²

Signed by all parties on October 4th, 1955, the Blue River Decree was hailed by Denver newspapers as a victory over the Western Slope. Denver's interests had always been at odds with those of the Western Slope, which, while receiving the preponderance of Colorado's yearly snow runoff, had only a fraction of the population of the Eastern Slope, which includes the cities of Denver, Colorado Springs, and Fort Collins. "City Gets 'Blue' Water," cheered one local headline.¹³ "Wedge is Driven Deeper in East, West Water Row," read another.¹⁴ The clash of regional interests was a public narrative that everyone could understand, casting Denver itself in the role of Odyssean hero, and muting the bureaucratic machinations behind the Blue River conflict.

The reality, of course, was more complex. If there were an actual protagonist to the Blue River story, it was the Denver Water Board. While Denver newspapers celebrated the Blue River Decree as deliverance from competing appropriators, federal

¹² Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 77. The details of the Blue River Decree will be further discussed later in this chapter.

¹³ "City Gets 'Blue' Water," *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, October 5, 1955).

¹⁴ "Wedge Is Driven Deeper in East, West Water Row," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO, March 2, 1956), 8.

encroachment and natural scarcity, the Board's managers took a much clearer view of their enemies, and the object of the game they were playing. Since the end of World War II, they had been maneuvering to secure complete control over Denver's water supply for the rest of the 20th century—a claim no other municipal water utility in the arid Intermountain West would be able to make after the 1950s.

It would be easy to credit the Denver Water Board's singular post-war status to the lucky intervention of a president just when the Board, and the city, seemed cornered by circumstance. But the external drama of the Blue River Decree belied the situation's true dynamics, which had been almost entirely purposive and engineered. The Blue River Decree would not have been necessary had the Denver Water Board followed its regional peers in abandoning the old model of integrated municipal control over raw and treated water after World War II. Instead, in the face of the nearly overwhelming challenges of population growth and drought during the late 1940s, the Denver Water Board had dug in, wagering the future of metropolitan Denver on its ability to finagle a Blue River Decree of some kind before it was too late. But what was behind this gamble? What kind of public utility would place its own service area at such risk to begin with?

II. Conserving Water, Cultivating Power

An archetypal water utility like the Denver Water Board has four basic tasks: 1) to capture raw water from natural sources, 2) to store it in reservoirs for periods of drought, 3) to treat and store it again for domestic consumption, and 4) to deliver it either to other agencies or directly to customer taps. Raw water operations, including inflow and storage, are functionally separate from treated water operations of filtration and delivery,

and many municipal utilities have focused on the latter while purchasing raw water from other agencies. But Denver's water managers have historically accepted as axiomatic the notion that local control over water, from source to tap, is a crucial guarantor of a city's political and economic sovereignty from outside interests. So long as the demands on the Board's system never catastrophically exceeded supply, Denver need never turn to an outside source for water, and the Denver Water Board thus need never share its power.¹⁵ The Board's core task was to preserve a semblance of parity between supply and demand—a task made far more difficult in the early post-war years by rapid population growth, regional drought, and lack of capital and building materials. In the early post-war years at least, the Denver Water Board could not increase its supply fast enough to maintain that fragile balance. Equally forceful measures to impose control over demand were also necessary.

Even for cities with accessible and renewable water sources, temperate climates and stable populations, maintaining this balance can be difficult. But for the fast-growing cities of the arid post-war West, keeping water capacity pegged to rising demand was virtually impossible.¹⁶ The fundamental problem was that in the water business, supply and demand moved on separate and completely independent time scales. A municipal

¹⁵ An influential 1922 report commissioned by the Denver Board of Water Commissioners and led by Harry T. Cory, a nationally-known water engineer, urged the Denver Water Board to increase supply as quickly as possible, or face a limited urban future. Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, June 26, 1922), Central Records, Denver Water Department; W. B. Gaumer, *Discussion of the Past, Present and Future Needs of Water for the City of Denver: Its Present Water Supply* (Denver, CO: Private Print, 1925), 11–12.

¹⁶ Prevailing wisdom of the pre-World War II era held that Denver should maintain a two-year reserve of a full supply of the city's water. Gaumer, *Discussion of the Past, Present and Future Needs of Water for the City of Denver: Its Present Water Supply*, 3.

water diversion or storage project to increase supply, for instance, often took decades, while even a single summer of water shortage could jeopardize municipal stability. But the after-effects of World War II enhanced this disconnect dramatically, as the scarcity of funds and construction materials added to the inflexibility of supply, while population growth and drought increased the volatility of demand. City governments also found it difficult to convince local taxpayers to assume bonded indebtedness for new water projects, or to impose meaningful conservation measures in the face of rapid urban growth. Politically vulnerable and hampered by limited supply-side flexibility, the 19th century model of discrete, autonomous, and fully integrated municipal water agencies became largely obsolete in the American West by the early 1950s. In the face of post-war urban hyper-growth and long-term regional drought, cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City found it both cheaper and politically expedient to consolidate raw water operations with nearby agencies, or with the federal government.¹⁷

¹⁷ M. E. Bolding and Erie H. Bolding, *Origin and Growth of the Dallas Water Utilities: Being Composed of Unofficial Collections of Facts, Figures, and Anecdotes from the Files and from Personal Recollections of a Number of Persons Found* (Dallas, TX: M.E. Bolding, 1981); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York, NY: Verso, 1990); Robert Gottlieb, *A Life of Its Own: The Politics and Power of Water* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); Norris Hundley, *Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1975); Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water--A History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Richard Kaufman, "The Anatomy of the Great California Water Debate," *Journal of the West* 34, no. 4 (1995): 77–87; Kupel, *Fuel for Growth: Water and Arizona's Urban Environment*; Logan, *Desert Cities: The Environmental History of Phoenix and Tucson*; Char Miller, *Fluid Arguments: Five Centuries of Western Water Conflict* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2001); Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West*; Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*; William D. Rowley and United States. Bureau of Reclamation, *The Bureau of Reclamation: Origins and Growth to 1945* (Denver, CO: Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 2006); Henry J. Jr. Vaux, "Growth and Water in the South Coast Basin of California," in *Water and Arid Lands of the Western United States*, ed. Mohamed T. El-Ashry and Diana C. Gibbons

Phoenix's experience illustrates the typical trajectory of municipal water utilities in the 20th century West. Founded as a public utility in 1907, the Phoenix water department, emulating the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), quickly fell into a pattern of market imperialism, devouring smaller water distribution companies on the city's fringes without adding commensurately to overall supply.¹⁸ But beginning in 1940, a series of summer water shortages revealed the extent of Phoenix's overreach. Without enough raw water to meet its expanded service obligations, its city government was forced to lease emergency supplies from the Salt River Project (SRP), a nearby agricultural water agency serving central Arizona farms. The outlook worsened again after World War II, as a sustained population boom and regional drought permanently overwhelmed Phoenix's static water supply. From 1945 forward, every dry summer brought a new crisis, leading to fresh accommodations with the SRP, each more lopsided and Faustian than the last. In the mid-1950s, the politically weakened Phoenix water department finally formalized its dependence on the SRP, while looking ahead

(New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 233–279; Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*.

¹⁸ Los Angeles and San Francisco both set the standard for municipal water development during the early 20th century, serving as a model for other cities, as well as the Bureau of Reclamation. See Abraham Hoffman, *Vision or Villainy: Origins of the Owens Valley-Los Angeles Water Controversy*, Environmental History Series, No. 3 (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1981); Hundley, *Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West*; Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water--A History*; William L Kahrl, *Water and Power: The Conflict Over Los Angeles' Water Supply in the Owens Valley* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982); Kaufman, "The Anatomy of the Great California Water Debate"; Kupel, *Fuel for Growth: Water and Arizona's Urban Environment*.

impatiently to the federally-led Central Arizona Project, which would divert even more water from the Colorado River.¹⁹

As in Phoenix, the Denver Water Board was founded along the lines of Los Angeles' public utility.²⁰ But there were at least three crucial differences. First, neither the Phoenix nor the Los Angeles water departments enjoyed the same level of budgetary insulation as the Denver Water Board, making them more vulnerable to pro-growth pressure from other interests within their respective municipal governments.²¹ Second, Denver was both a city and county, which made it easier for the Denver Water Board to draw service distinctions between its core and suburban customers. Finally, the Denver Water Board's historical pedigree was of the same lofty, detached elitism as its local banking structures.²² Denver's water managers did not fear unpopularity, and recognized the political utility of using threats and reprisals to establish and maintain political control. Statutory difference, along with a well-tended fear of water shortage, gave the Denver Water Board far more demand-side flexibility than its Western metropolitan peers.

¹⁹ The Central Arizona Project, constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation and substantially completed in 1994, expanded Phoenix's raw water supply yet again. Jack J. August, Jr., "Water, Politics, and the Arizona Dream: Carl Hayden and the Modern Origins of the Central Arizona Project," *Journal of Arizona History* 40, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 391–414; Kupel, *Fuel for Growth: Water and Arizona's Urban Environment*; Logan, *Desert Cities: The Environmental History of Phoenix and Tucson*; Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*.

²⁰ Marc Reisner has characterized the Denver Water Board as an "understudy of the Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles: a well-oiled, well-funded, suprapolitical machine trying to purloin water from every corner of the state, all in the interest of turning Denver into the Los Angeles of the Rockies—a goal which has been largely achieved." Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, 430.

²¹ Kahrl, *Water and Power*; Kupel, *Fuel for Growth: Water and Arizona's Urban Environment*.

²² For more on Denver banking, see Chapters 1 and 2.

Even before the end of World War II, it was clear to the Denver Water Board that it would have to use that flexibility if it hoped to maintain even rough parity between demand and supply. The Denver Water Board's evolving post-war conservation measures began in March of 1945 when it imposed a three-year ban on new taps outside Denver's city and county limits.²³ After an outright ban proved both practically and politically untenable, the Water Board signed a 1948 agreement with Denver's neighboring counties, known as the General Cooperation Agreement. This agreement rescinded the 1945 ban, but codified revised and very strict terms whereby the Denver Water Board would provide new taps to Denver's suburbs, including more rigorous zoning requirements.²⁴ Finally, in 1951, the Water Board enacted what became known as the "Blue Line," an artificial boundary concentric to the city's territorial limits beyond which it would not supply new water service until the Blue River came online.²⁵ The Blue Line was the most stable iteration of the Water Board's post-war conservation efforts, and it remained in force until 1960.²⁶ Still, it was a radical measure that limited

²³ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners, March 20, 1945" (Denver, CO, March 20, 1945), Central Records, Denver Water Department; Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History* (Denver, CO: Denver Water Department, 1980), 36, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

²⁴ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Exhibit A: General Cooperation Agreement" (Denver, CO, April 5, 1948), 2, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

²⁵ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Rules Governing Distribution of Treated Denver Water Outside the City Limits", August 23, 1951, 7-10, Blue Line General/Correspondence, March 26, 1948-December 7, 1959 Box #179942580, File # 205.008, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

²⁶ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Statement Saying That Commencing at Once The Denver Bd [sic] of Water Commissioners Will Receive Applications from Those Who Desire Water Service Anywhere in the Denver Metropolitan Area" (Denver, CO, January 3, 1960), Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 34, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

the growth of demand at the height of the post-war suburban boom, cutting off major new sources of revenue, and leaving the Water Board vulnerable to new competitors.

It hardly took a water expert to recognize the emerging pattern. The Denver Water Board used its suburban service as a control valve to keep overall system demand in synch with existing supply. Measures like the Blue Line were emphatically not actions that corresponded with those of a traditionally “pro-growth” utility. They were rather a top-down form of conservationism that combined aggressive appropriation (the Blue River) with aggressive demand management (the Blue Line), artificially containing demand pending expanded supply.²⁷ This “Blue Line conservationism” was a risky, all-or-nothing strategy that staked Denver’s viability as a metropolis on the Denver Water Board’s ability to increase its water supply without help or interference. No other utility in the Intermountain West was willing to make the same bet. Yet Denver’s water managers evinced supreme confidence in their chosen path, and did not contemplate the possibility of failure. The Denver Water Board would either succeed completely in securing control of an expanded supply, or it would plunge Denver into a water crisis unlike any other in the nation’s history.

The origins of the Denver Water Board’s “Blue Line conservationism” trace back to a peculiar, deeply ingrained philosophy of resource management in Denver that originated in the 19th century, which held that wealth without resource autonomy was not

²⁷ This is not to suggest that the Denver Water Board made no efforts to encourage its customers to avoid waste and overuse. As early as 1925, the Denver Water Board was advertising in local Denver newspapers, warning against water waste and urging users to adhere to prescribed hours for outdoor irrigation. Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners” (Denver, CO, April 4, 1925), 94, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

true power. This philosophy evolved along with Denver's relationship to its mountain hinterland, whose rich but difficult-to-access resources had fueled the city's rise to dominance in the prior century. Paradoxically, the difficulty and expense of developing Denver's rugged hinterland had historically served as a prophylactic against outside capital, giving local investors an important advantage over monopoly-minded outsiders.²⁸ The Water Board's fiercely territorial stance fit comfortably with the approach to hinterland development taken by Denver's 19th century bankers, politicians, and industrialists, who had also emphasized aggressive local appropriation and development of the mountain hinterland in mining, transportation, and real estate. The Denver Water Board's "Blue Line conservationism" was not an "anti-development" measure, as some contemporary critics charged, but an acknowledgment that where development capital came from mattered almost as much as where it was going. The object of this brand of conservationism was not water itself, but the power that it conferred.

Eisenhower's extraordinary intervention and the resulting 1955 Blue River Decree seemed to uphold the tenets of that philosophy. Though the Denver Water Board had operated as an autonomous agency for nearly thirty years prior to the end of World War II, it won true and lasting institutional independence only in the crucible of this post-war moment. But their approach had costs as well, which were borne by the residents of metropolitan Denver. As in other Western cities, Denver's population grew rapidly after

²⁸ Denver's 19th century industrialists and financiers learned firsthand about the dangers of outside capital when Jay Gould, one of the most rapacious financiers of the 19th century, angled his way into Colorado and quickly either subsumed or demolished their fledgling local railroad companies. Among Gould's victims was Denver investor David Moffat, who would subsequently enter the Denver water business with the painful lessons of the Gould debacle fresh in his mind. Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*, 10–38, 180–183; Hogan, *Class and Community in Frontier Colorado*, 1–16.

the war, as structural changes in housing patterns and federal loan incentives lured new arrivals to the suburbs.²⁹ Measures like the Blue Line did not halt suburban growth, nor were they meant to. But they did prompt new suburban residents to look for alternatives to direct service from the Denver Water Board.

Among these were so-called “special districts:” single-purpose, quasi-municipal governing units authorized by state law to levy taxes and issue public debt. Special water districts around Denver contracted with nearby water agencies, including the Denver Water Board, for service. The suburban water squeeze, created in large part by the Water Board’s Blue Line, spurred the proliferation of these special suburban water districts throughout the 1950s and 1960s, which effectively fragmented any centralized authority over metropolitan water issues, and promoted hydrologically reckless suburban growth.³⁰ The Denver Water Board encouraged this trend, because government agencies were thought to be more reliable at maintaining their own infrastructure than developers or private corporations.³¹ Suburban anger at the Water Board soon gave way to generalized distrust of the central city itself, which would resurface again and again over issues of annexation, zoning, taxation and busing. In Denver, water was the original wedge that divided core from periphery.

²⁹ The numbers confirmed this trend: in 1920, 23% of metropolitan residents lived outside city limits, and by 1940, that figure had only risen to a still-modest 28%. By 1960 however, fully 49% of Denver’s metropolitan population would reside in the suburbs. Ellison, “The Denver Water Board: Bureaucratic Power and Autonomy in Local Natural Resource Agencies,” 91–92. See also Chapter 5 of this dissertation for more on the impact of local and federal housing and transportation policies in Denver, and the rapid post-war growth of its suburbs.

³⁰ There had been only a handful of “special districts” in the Denver metropolitan area following World War II. By 1962, one government census estimated that there were 59 water and sanitation districts in Denver’s suburbs. Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

Beyond institutional and urban history, what can the story of the mid-century Denver Water Board tell us about the larger history of the post-war urban West? First, it demonstrates again why providing urban water in the rugged and arid Intermountain West was such a difficult business. There was good reason for the federal government's heavy footprint on Western water development, because with very few exceptions, only Uncle Sam had deep enough pockets to "make the desert bloom." The Denver Water Board was in some ways the exception that proved the rule. Its actions during this period offer a perfect case study of mid-20th century, Wise Use-style conservationism, which privileged the strategic linkage between resource appropriation and use. Viewed in this light, the Blue River Decree and the Blue Line were not examples of opposing impulses, but complementary strategies with the common goal of aligning supply with demand. The Denver Water Board's commitment to preserving its operational control over and above all other institutional priorities, and its willingness to use "anti-growth" measures like the Blue Line to do so, complicates the familiar narrative casting municipal agencies as willing members of post-war urban "growth bureaucracies."³² As the Water Board demonstrated throughout its history, it called its own tune, and supported pro-growth policies only when they suited its institutional interests.

Second, water offers a direct causal link between many of the changes taking place in Denver and its mountain hinterland. The relationship between Denver and the mountain hinterland changed and deepened as the city grew. Every new dam, road, park, or resort was a form of conservation; a new appropriative claim on mountain resources,

³² Stephen L. Elkin, "Twentieth Century Urban Regimes," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 7, no. 2 (1985): 11–28; John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Molotch, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place."

and a new use of the land itself. Denver's post-war water history particularly undermines the facile but altogether common binary pitting "conservation" against "urban growth." There is nothing intrinsically incompatible about these concepts, and indeed, the Denver Water Board's post-war strategy—particularly its aggressive hinterland claims to the Blue River on Colorado's Western Slope, demonstrates how the former could even facilitate the latter.

Third, this history complicates our understanding of the historical relationship between core and suburb in the cities of the modern urban West. Prevailing wisdom locates the source of tensions between core and suburb in the actions of the federal government after World War II, whose housing, education and transportation policies divided Americans on the basis of race and class.³³ Yet Denver's water history demonstrates that the tensions between Denver's core and fringes long pre-dated World War II. They were fueled as much by perceived inequities of resource allocation as by social disparity. These tensions became even more acute as the Denver Water Board sought to balance its supply shortfall by further limiting its service to the suburbs in the 1950s. Quite apart from the structural divisiveness of federal policies, the actions of the Denver Water Board during the 1940s and 1950s helped to lay the groundwork for a relationship of mutual distrust and enmity between Denver's core and periphery, which would continue to yield bitter fruit in the decades to come. There is no gainsaying the importance of the federal government as a shaper of the modern West, or of World War II as a regionally transformative event. But neither should we underestimate the

³³ See, for example, Arnold Hirsh J., "Less Than Plessy: The Inner City, Suburbs, and State-Sanctioned Residential Segregation," in *The New Suburban History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 33–56.

importance of natural resources, nor the power of provincial institutions like the Denver Water Board to shape metropolitan landscapes and politics.

Finally, Denver's history of post-war water management sheds new light on an old, but endlessly relevant debate about the relationship between water and urban growth.³⁴ From its first days as a public utility in 1918, the Denver Water Board assumed that its control of water could be a powerful urban planning tool.³⁵ From 1945 to 1960, it put these assumptions to the ultimate test in attempting to manage demand, with revealing results. Despite the Denver Water Board's restrictions on extraterritorial service during the 1950s, the number of extraterritorial suburbanites in the Denver metropolitan area jumped by 213,000 between 1950 and 1960, climbing from 38% to 52% of the metropolitan total.³⁶ These statistics make it difficult to claim that the Water Board's policies had much impact on the rate of suburban growth. This history also undermined the factual basis for the historical conceit that the policies promulgated for the benefit of the Water Board would automatically benefit Denver. As its documents show, the managers of the Water Board were not even entirely sure what "Denver" meant, since it served so many suburban customers who could not be classified as

³⁴ See, for instance, Lora A. Lucero and A. Dan Tarlock, "Water Supply and Urban Growth in New Mexico: Same Old, Same Old or a New Era?," *Natural Resources Journal* 43, no. 3 (2003).

³⁵ In 1922, a report on Denver's water supply, commissioned in response to the rejection of the Water Board's first bond issue in 1921, warned that Denver would "ultimately be limited by its water supply." The report's authors further noted that unlike Denver, most large cities of the same age had unlimited nearby water supplies. Given that Denver did not, the authors urged that the city acquire all rights possible at the earliest possible date. Gaumer, *Discussion of the Past, Present and Future Needs of Water for the City of Denver: Its Present Water Supply*, 2-3.

³⁶ Sourced from Denver Regional Council of Government population statistics, in Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Economy and Location--Not Water--Determine Urban Growth," *Denver Water News* (Denver, CO, November 1972), 1-2.

Denverites. Throughout its history, the Denver Water Board, for reasons both historical and statutory, had defined “Denver” as only those areas within the legal limits of the city and county, and regarded areas outside that boundary as extraneous to its core mission. But as the core of its customer base shifted toward the suburbs during the 1950s, this attitude sowed suburban mistrust, contributed to the decentralization and fragmentation of civic authority in fringe areas, and pushed metropolitan Denver further toward a future divided by geography, income, and race. It also laid the groundwork for the coming environmentalist critique of the Water Board.

The regional drought that gripped Denver and most of the West for almost ten years finally broke in 1957. By 1959, with the completion of the Blue River diversion project in sight, the Denver Water Board abandoned the Blue Line for good and began honoring nearly every extraterritorial request for service. The demise of the Blue Line marked the end of the Denver Water Board’s major efforts at demand management. Its water supply now adequate for the foreseeable future, the Water Board swapped its past conservationism for a more pro-growth approach beginning in the early 1960s. But its experiment in conservation clearly demonstrates the deep and abiding continuities that span the turbulent years of the mid-20th century, and that unify Denver’s pre- and post-war history. The consequences of that experiment also continued to reverberate long after the Blue Line had been rescinded in early 1960. Like the Rocky Mountains themselves, conservation is woven through Denver’s past, though its purposes and strategies constantly shifted over time. Conservation is thus a crucial element of Denver’s environmental, political, and social history; nowhere is this more aptly demonstrated than in the arena of water.

III. Seeing Like A Water Utility

Above all else, Denver's water history corresponds to the rough contours of its surrounding environment and landscape. Denver, along with other cities in twelve states and Mexico, depends on water originating in the Colorado Rocky Mountains, which rise precipitously on the city's western flank. As of 1955, the South Platte watershed provided two-thirds of the city's supply, via the South Platte River drainage and its tributaries. Both Denver and the Platte River lie on the eastern side of the Continental Divide, which bisects Colorado (and indeed North America) into Atlantic and Pacific watersheds. Though it comprises only 37% of the state's total area, Colorado's "Western Slope" has historically contained approximately 69% of the state's surface water, which originates from snowfall above 10,000 feet.³⁷ As Denver grew, its water managers were obliged to seek rights to water on the Western Slope, and to engineer methods of "pouring" that water from one watershed into another with tunnels, canals and pumps. Not surprisingly, the Denver Water Board's consistent efforts to increase and perfect its Western Slope water rights angered many on the opposite of the Continental Divide, who resorted to the legal system to fight what they saw as Denver's water imperialism.

In addition, Denver's is a "surface" water supply—both erratic and seasonal in nature. As much as 97 percent of the city's water arrives between May and July, and inflow varies greatly from year to year.³⁸ Reservoirs help to compensate for nature's inconsistency by storing water reserves for periods of shortage, and aid as well in reliably

³⁷ Jack F. Bullock, Loyd R. Eskildson, and John W. Low, "Your City's Life Line: Denver's Water System" (Denver Public Schools in Cooperation with Denver Board of Water Commissioners, 1955), 1–20, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

³⁸ "USGS Colorado - Upper Arkansas River Basin", n.d., http://co.water.usgs.gov/projects/TurqLake/html/homestake_reservoir.htm.

compensating downstream users—a foundational requirement of Western water law.³⁹ But they are expensive to build and maintain, and inflict serious—and obvious—environmental consequences. It is a misnomer that Denver’s water problems stem from aridity. The water originating in the nearby Rocky Mountains has been enough to sustain many of the cities in the southwestern quadrant of the country for well over half a century. Denver’s enduring difficulty has been in successfully negotiating the manifold environmental, hydraulic, legal, and political barriers to its appropriation, transportation, storage, and use of water from its mountain hinterland. Nominally, Denver’s water challenges were no different than those of other Western cities. How Denver met that challenge, particularly during the 20th century, sets it apart.⁴⁰

The very difficulty of developing its water resources helps to explain the unique water culture that developed in Denver over the past century and a half. Other Western metropolises, including Phoenix, Las Vegas, Dallas and Salt Lake City, also encountered barriers to developing distant raw water supplies. Unlike Denver, each of these cities eventually turned to either the federal government or regional water agencies to supply raw water—particularly as their populations skyrocketed after World War II. Dallas, for example, invited the Army Corps of Engineers to build and operate three of the five reservoirs that supply its water system.⁴¹ Salt Lake City came to depend on the

³⁹ Tipton and Kalmbach, Inc. Engineers and Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Report on Comprehensive Studies of the Denver Raw Water System* (Denver, CO: Tipton and Kalmbach, 1957), 5.

⁴⁰ See J. Gordon Milliken, “Water Management Issues in the Denver, Colorado Urban Area,” in *Water and Arid Lands of the Western United States*, ed. Mohamed T. El Ashry and Diana C. Gibbons (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 334.

⁴¹ Bolding and Bolding, *Origin and Growth of the Dallas Water Utilities: Being Composed of Unofficial Collections of Facts, Figures, and Anecdotes from the Files and from Personal Recollections of a Number of Persons Found*.

Bonneville Unit of the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Utah Project for a large percentage of its raw water, while Las Vegas siphons most of its water from the federally built and maintained Lake Mead.⁴² Raw water development, in other words, has been consistently difficult for municipal utilities in the 20th century West. Why, then, was Denver the only major city in the West to retain full control over every aspect of its water development and delivery?

The will toward institutional autonomy is deeply inscribed in the Denver Water Board's founding philosophy, and rooted within the context of its historical relationship to the mountains, along with Progressive-era city politics, and Western water law. Although it was founded as a public utility in 1918, the early Denver Water Board was in reality merely the publicly-owned version of what had previously been the Denver Union Water Company, which had assumed responsibility for Denver's entire municipal water market in 1894.⁴³ Denverites chafed under its monopolistic tendencies, but there was little public officials could do. Together with its fire control, police, and public works, Denver's water was regulated by Colorado's state government, where the Denver Union Water Company enjoyed tremendous influence.

Denver took the first step toward creating a public water utility in 1902, when it finally wrested "home rule" privileges from the state. The passage of the Rush Amendment, enshrined in both the state's constitution and Denver's City Charter, placed

⁴² United States Department of the Interior, Water and Power Resources Service, Upper Colorado Region, *Central Utah Project, Bonneville Unit: Utah: Duchesne, Garfield, Juab, Millard, Piute, Salt Lake, Sanpete, Sevier, Summit, Uintah, Utah, and Wasatch Counties* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980); Hal Rothman and Lincoln Bramwell, *Playing the Odds: Las Vegas and the Modern West* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

⁴³ Denver Water Department, "Timeline," 5.

most civic functions under mayoral, rather than state, control.⁴⁴ The Rush Amendment also reclassified Denver as a consolidated city and county, with the authority to run its own independent school district. Having finally won the fight for home rule, Denver officials and voters soon turned their attention to the incessant political meddling of local utility companies, and the scions of Denver's early wealth which still controlled them. Taken on balance, none had proven more of a public nuisance over the years than had the Denver Union Water Company.

With roots tracing back to Denver's anarchic days as a mining camp, the private utility's checkered and colorful history mirrored the city's own. A year after Denver's founding in 1858, enterprising investors created a number of competing local water companies, each with its own ditch diverting either from Cherry Creek or the nearby South Platte River. Numerous private water companies rose and fell in subsequent years, but by the early 1880s, the city was still served by six different firms.⁴⁵ Denver railroad impresario David Moffat made his move to corner the water market in the early 1890s when he, along with his partner Walter Cheesman, purchased the Citizens Water Company of Denver. After either buying out or bankrupting every other competitor, Citizens' trained its sights on the last holdout: the well-funded American Water Works Company of New Jersey. Hoping to quickly vanquish their opponent with a single masterstroke, Moffat and Cheesman began offering free water as an inducement to new customers in 1892. They nearly drove themselves out of business. But their aggressive gamble paid off in 1894, when Citizens' finally broke the back of its out-of-state rival,

⁴⁴ Ellison, "The Denver Water Board: Bureaucratic Power and Autonomy in Local Natural Resource Agencies," 66.

⁴⁵ Denver Water, "Timeline," (Denver: Denver Water Department) Central Records, Denver Water.

and took over its physical plant and 20-year state franchise (good until 1910) as spoils of war. Renaming themselves the Denver Union Water Company, David Moffat and Walter Cheesman settled in to enjoy the fruits of their hard-won monopoly.⁴⁶

Winning the local service war, however, did not slow the Denver Union Water Company's voracious efforts to acquire new sources of raw water in the hinterland. Moffat and Cheesman knew that their market was only as good as their supply. As it still does, Colorado water law operated on the basis of prior appropriation, in which the first party to use water from any natural source gained legal rights to that water—rights that could then be sold.⁴⁷ Eager to get their hands on as much water as possible, Moffat and Cheesman sent their lawyers and purchasing agents tramping all over the Colorado Rockies to either buy or legally obtain “decrees” (another term for a right of appropriation) from existing users. Their purpose was not just to claim as much water as they could, but also to foreclose any possibility of local competition. Moffat and Cheesman were aided in their quest by a proviso to the Colorado constitution that prioritized the domestic use of water over agriculture and industry.⁴⁸ Very quickly, the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ In the event of drought, priority was determined on the basis of date of appropriation. This framework, known as the “Colorado Doctrine,” was an invention of necessity in the mining districts of the American West. It was codified in Colorado's constitution in 1876, along with the proviso that domestic purposes preceded those of agriculture or industry. Water rights in Colorado were typically adjudicated on the district level, and in accordance with state law. For more on the historical evolution of Western water law, see Hundley, *Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West*.

⁴⁸ Constitution of the State of Colorado, Art. XVI, § 6.

Denver Union Water Company had rights to more water than it had the physical capacity to use.⁴⁹

Back in Denver, the company did little to endear itself to its customers. In addition to price gouging and shoddy service, the private utility colluded with other private utilities, including William Gray Evans' Denver Tramway Company, to rig municipal franchise elections in 1906. Once their political tampering was discovered, an outraged populace clamored for the city to purchase the water company outright. While Denver's powerful mayor, Robert Speer, approved of such sentiments, they were far easier spoken than achieved.⁵⁰ It would take twelve years of litigation, and cost nearly \$14 million in bonds for Denver to finally buy the municipal water business from Cheesman and Moffat in 1918.⁵¹

When the Denver Water Board took over the operations of Denver Union Water Company, they assumed control of an already extensive and complicated system. The \$14 million price tag included rights to additional raw water on the Eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains—no small matter in Colorado's "first in time, first in right" water allocation framework. Early public water managers had to be brought up to speed on the two most basic parts of a fully functioning water utility: a raw water system of catchment and storage, and a treated water system of filtration and delivery. The DWB now controlled two reservoirs on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains to store that water,

⁴⁹ This was particularly true during wet years, when snow runoff exceeded the storage capacity of the Denver Union's two mountain reservoirs, Antero Reservoir and Cheesman Lake. Gaumer, *Discussion of the Past, Present and Future Needs of Water for the City of Denver: Its Present Water Supply*, 10.

⁵⁰ Ellison, "The Denver Water Board: Bureaucratic Power and Autonomy in Local Natural Resource Agencies," 64.

⁵¹ Denver Water Department, "Timeline."

conduits to divert it to the South Platte and into Denver, and operating reservoirs to hold it until it could be filtered. It owned infiltration galleries, English-type slow sand filters, and rapid mechanical filtration plants, as well as “clear-water reservoirs” to store potable water prior to distribution. Finally, the Denver Water Board inherited a network of water mains, pipes, pumps and sewers, to get the filtered water to its customers and back again.

Along with this extensive system, Denver’s city government assumed major new responsibilities and expenditures. It needed to expand its already considerable maintenance, quality control, and engineering divisions to keep up with future urban growth, and add staffing offices to oversee its employees. The Denver Water Board’s charter gave it the authority to generate and sell electricity, creating yet another new business for the city.⁵² It needed billing offices, and a public relations department to keep customers and taxpayers apprised of its activities, and to orchestrate efforts to raise money through public bond issues.⁵³ Finally, because lawsuits were an unavoidable part of the water business, the new agency would also need a strong and capable legal department.

The establishment of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners was meant to be a triumph of the public weal over private lucre. Created by an amendment to the Denver City Charter, the Denver Water Board was unmistakably a creature of the Progressive era. To ensure that the new utility would never cede its core tasks to other agencies, its commissioners were given “complete charge and control” of Denver’s water system, in

⁵² *Charter of the City and County of Denver, 1960 Compilation, Chapter C, Art. IV, 1904, sec. 18.*

⁵³ *Cox, Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience, 100.*

order to supply water for “all uses and purposes” of Denver’s residents.⁵⁴ The commissioners were shielded from political influence by staggered terms, and, most crucially, the Denver Water Board’s budget remained separate from other municipal funds, and accessible only by the Board. Commissioners were paid only a nominal sum, and were usually selected by the mayor from the ranks of Denver’s business community. They were not water experts; there was an executive staff for that. But at their biweekly meetings, the water commissioners exercised the power to set water rates, initiate litigation, sell surplus electricity, and issue bonds as approved by referendum.⁵⁵

Still, the Denver Water Board could never be an entirely new organization. It had inherited an entire water system, and thus retained the vast majority of the Denver Union Water Company’s employees, whose expertise regarding existing infrastructure could not be replaced. The continuities of institutional culture also extended to its executive board of commissioners. Of the five men elected or named to the Board of Water Commissioners at its first meeting in August of 1918, three of them, including Finlay McFarland, Charles Reynolds, and Frank Woodward, were scions of Denver wealth, with personal and business ties to either David Moffat or Walter Cheesman. In fact, McFarland’s job before becoming a water commissioner had been as the last president and general manager of the Denver Union Water Company.⁵⁶ Though none were experts in the fields of water development and service, the majority of the commissioners had some financial stake in local water development, and membership at the exclusive

⁵⁴ *Charter of the City and County of Denver, 1960 Compilation*, sec. 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, sec. 18, 28.

⁵⁶ Wilbur Fiske Stone, *History of Colorado*, vol. 3 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1918), 496–499.

Denver Country Club, where local elites seemed to conduct most of their business.⁵⁷

There was, in short, very little to differentiate these men from those whom they replaced.⁵⁸

The most important continuity, however, was in the realm of guiding philosophy. Within Denver's boundaries, the Denver Water Board was now a public utility, required by its charter to provide guaranteed, price-controlled, water service. Outside the city's limits, however, Denver's early water commissioners seemed to retain the Denver Union Water Company's approach, which had been to treat its service areas as exploitable markets. The Denver Water Board's charter stipulated that it could only "lease" water outside the city, but could not guarantee pricing or availability. The Board's early extraterritorial service contracts rejected all liability for outside water mains connected to its system.⁵⁹ Beyond its city limits, in other words, the Denver Water Board operated just like the Denver Union Water Company once had—as a private monopoly.

From its first days, Denver Water Board was both steeped in and honed by political conflict. In early 1920, the Denver City Council seized upon the Board's

⁵⁷ Glenn G. Saunders, long-serving attorney for the Denver Water Board, recalled that Denver's early Water Commissioners "were the type of people you would find on the directorate of any important utility corporation." They "had their own businesses to attend to, and expected Water Board employees to take leadership in the development of the water system." Glenn G. Saunders, *Reflections on Sixty Years of Water Law Practice* (Boulder, CO: Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law, 1989), 5. Historian of the Denver Water Board James Cox has also observed that the lack of water experience among members of the Denver Water Board was both typical and sustained over much of the Board's history. "By defining the issues involved in questions of water policy," Cox writes, "the administrative personnel [of the Denver Water Board] have exercised a strong, directive influence on the decisions of the board of water commissioners." Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 101.

⁵⁸ Wilbur Fiske Stone, *History of Colorado*, vol. 4 (Chicago, IL: S.J. Clarke, 1918), 31–35, 120–124.

⁵⁹ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 6.

proposed public bond issue for new distribution facilities to pull the utility into a decade-long political turf war.⁶⁰ Hoping to neutralize the standoff, the commissioners invited the city councilmen, including leading Water Board critic D.R. Lucy, to a board meeting in order to make their case. The meeting went poorly, and the Board's critics remained unconvinced.⁶¹ When the Water Board asked voters to approve a \$5 million bond in May of 1921, Lucy stood at the forefront of the opposition, sending the Board's first-ever bond initiative down in defeat. Lucy sustained his vendetta against the Board throughout the 1920s, and with the vehement backing of the *Denver Post*, he convinced Denver voters to reject two more water bond issues in 1925 and 1927.⁶²

Lucy was not satisfied, however, with merely withholding public funds from the Denver Water Board—he wanted to destroy it. Citing its lack of accountability to elected officials, Lucy also staged a series of Charter amendment special elections in 1922, 1927 and 1933 to replace the Denver Water Board with a water manager answerable to the Mayor. Here, however, he was far less successful, losing each time by a greater margin.⁶³ But Lucy and the rest of the Board's local critics were only truly silenced by the city's first serious water shortage in 1933, which forced voters to recognize and acknowledge the risks of an underdeveloped water system.

⁶⁰ In February of 1920, the Council passed a resolution demanding that the Water Board account for its failure to use existing funds for its proposed improvements, as well as why it had not acted upon Council ordinances stipulating the locations of new water mains and fire hydrants. "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, February 17, 1920), Central Records, Denver Water Department.

⁶¹ "Record of Proceedings, Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, April 6, 1920), 2.

⁶² Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Summary, Water Bond Issues", January 1, 1969, 2, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

⁶³ Denver Water Department, "Timeline."

By the mid-1930s, the Denver Water Board emerged from its turbulent adolescence somewhat battered, but politically much wiser. It had learned to entrust no aspect of its operations to any outside entity, and to loudly insist upon its absolute autonomy in both the courts of law and public opinion. Its bond issue defeats in the 1920s demonstrated that charging higher rates to extraterritorial customers was a safer and more reliable way of increasing revenue than bond initiatives.⁶⁴ Lastly, the political boon of Denver's early-1930s water shortage taught the Board never to let a good crisis go to waste. Wielding the specter of water shortage as a political cudgel, the Denver Water Board went on to pass every subsequent bond initiative from 1935 until 1972 with at least 75% of the electorate.⁶⁵ These were lessons learned the hard way, and they soon became deeply etched into the Denver Water Board's institutional DNA.

Finally, it is worth noting once again the context of Colorado water law, which is adjudicated according to the doctrine of prior appropriation. Also known as the "Colorado Doctrine," prior appropriation was a mid-19th century invention, born of necessity in the mining camps of the American West. It quickly became the common legal framework for water allocation in most Western states.⁶⁶ The Doctrine holds that while streams themselves cannot be owned, any person, city, or corporation has the right to use the water in them for beneficial purposes. The first entity to use water in any stream becomes a "senior" appropriator with priority over all later, or "junior"

⁶⁴ Walter R. Eha, *Water for Denver: How Water Helped Build a City, 1944* (Denver, CO: Reprinted by Denver Water in cooperation with the Denver Public Library's Western History & Genealogy Department, 2006), 22–23.

⁶⁵ "Summary, Water Bond Issues," 2.

⁶⁶ J. Gordon Milliken, "Water Management Issues in the Denver, Colorado Urban Area," in *Water and Arid Lands of the Western United States*, ed. Mohamed T. El Ashry and Diana C. Gibbons (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 337.

appropriators—expressed by the adage, “first in time, first in right.” No appropriator can own a water right, and rights must be maintained by continuous use, or they are forfeited.⁶⁷ The nature of prior appropriation doctrine has pushed the Denver Water Board to expand its claims to hinterland water well ahead of Denver’s actual needs, and to preemptively regard other claims to water as threats. It has also historically made the Denver Water Board reticent to drastically reduce water consumption over time, because doing so might result in the loss of unused water rights.⁶⁸ The Colorado Doctrine does not hold any water user responsible for compensating the basin of origin. But it does stipulate that users *downstream* be compensated for any losses from water diverted further up.⁶⁹ In order to gain usable rights on the Western Slope, in other words, the Denver Water Board had to replace what it used through other sources—a major hurdle in the acquisition of usable rights. The “Colorado Doctrine” informed the Denver Water Board’s evolving approach to conservation throughout its history, creating structural incentives for aggressive water appropriation.

This aggressiveness was bound to lead to conflict with other users over water. Making sure that conflict turned out in the Denver Water Board’s favor fell to its legal

⁶⁷ Wells A. Hutchins, *Water Rights Laws in the Nineteen Western States* (Washington, D.C.: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2004), 214–230. Over the years, each state has added several layers of legal definitions and rules governing water apportionment. For more on the historical evolution of Western water law, see Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 33–37; Hundley, *Water and the West: The Colorado River Compact and the Politics of Water in the American West*; Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West.*, 89–91.

⁶⁸ Denver water commissioner A.P. Gumlick made note of this double bind in a letter to Board president Thomas Campbell in arguing for an end to the Blue Line in 1959. Gumlick noted that the Denver Water Board’s failure to make use of the water at its disposal might have an “adverse effect...on our conditional decrees.” August P. Gumlick to Thomas P. Campbell, January 20, 1959, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 20, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

⁶⁹ Milliken, “Water Management Issues in the Denver, Colorado Urban Area,” 343.

department. In 1929, the Board hired a young Denver lawyer named Glenn G. Saunders, who Mayor Benjamin Stapleton considered a protégé, despite their dissimilar temperaments. Where Stapleton was measured in his dealings, Saunders was a natural fire-eater, who thrived on argument and competition. Intelligent and supremely self-confident, he approached water law as blood sport, quickly establishing himself as the Board's political and legal fixer, as well as its designated lightning rod. "Many Denver antagonists regard Saunders as a Machiavellian plotter," wrote Bert Hanna, a staff writer for the *Denver Post* in 1964. "Time after time, he has shattered the opposition in cases before the Colorado Supreme Court. He is tough, devious and dedicated."⁷⁰ Saunders carried his growing infamy with pride. He regarded the politics of comity as a losing strategy when it came to water, and thought it far better for the Denver Water Board to be feared than loved.⁷¹ Denver had been forced to "fight for every drop" of water it had, he reasoned simply, and somebody had to look after its interests.⁷² Saunders did not retire from the Denver Water Board until 1989, fully 60 years after he was first hired by the Board straight out of law school. Some might read his lengthy career, and particularly his breezy apologia for a reputation as a "Machiavellian plotter," as a poetic summation of the Denver Water Board's 20th century history.

⁷⁰ Bert Hanna, *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, January 22, 1964).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; Saunders, *Reflections on Sixty Years of Water Law Practice*, 3–5; Glenn G. Saunders, "Oral History," interview by James Harlan Davis, September 1, 1963, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library, <http://dcbuilder.bcr.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=DPL-OH1-9.tape1.sideA>, <http://dcbuilder.bcr.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=DPL-OH1-9.tape1.sideB>, <http://dcbuilder.bcr.org/streaming/index.cfm?filename=DPL-OH1-9.tape2>.

⁷² Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 102.

IV. Tapping the Rockies: The Struggle For Supply

Prior to the late 1950s, the Denver Water Board's most pressing and difficult challenge had always been expanding its supply of raw water. Exceeding even the complications posed by the mountainous terrain itself, the most serious obstacles to expanding raw water supply were legal in nature. Securing new sources in the Colorado Rockies has historically been difficult primarily because such a large swathe of the American West depends on water originating from there. The Denver Water Board's efforts to expand Denver's supply met with opposition both from local politicians and voters, and from other areas of the state. As America's population shifted westward in the wake of World War II, the Denver Water Board knew that those challenges would only increase.

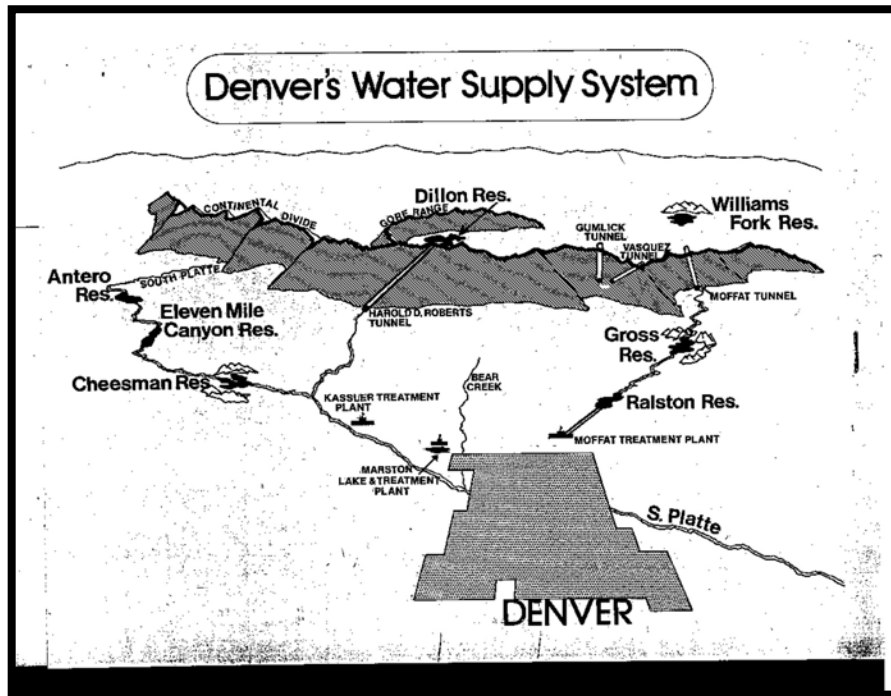


Figure 3: Schematic of Denver Raw Water System facing west, ca. 1970⁷³

⁷³ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water: The Essence of Life* (Denver, CO: Denver Board of Water Commissioners, 1970), 11.

Since its first days as a mining town, Denver has relied on the South Platte watershed. From its headwaters on the eastern side of the Continental Divide, the South Platte flows out of the Rockies and close to Denver before wending its way through Nebraska to join the Missouri. Early residents tapped the river directly, digging diversion ditches to bring its water to Denver. The Denver Union Water Company further developed the South Platte as a water source by gathering additional rights to its watershed, and building reservoirs along the river's course in the Rockies to store surplus supply.⁷⁴ In 1936, the Denver Water Board benefited from federal largesse to complete the city's first transmountain diversion, the Moffat Tunnel, which for the first time brought water from the Western Slope to Denver. The city completed a second transmountain diversion in 1940, known as the Jones Pass Tunnel, and later renamed it after Water Commissioner A.P. Gumlick. As the United States prepared to enter World War II, those sources comprised the entirety of Denver's water supply. The Denver Water Board's managers had long known that they would not be enough to meet the demand, given the city's long-term growth. But the challenges that the city had already faced to expand its raw water supply were nothing compared to what lay ahead.

Since the early 1920s, Denver water managers had known that there were only two practical ways to expand Denver's supply. The first was to increase the city's storage capacity along the South Platte, making fuller use of its rights to that water. The

⁷⁴ Alvord, Burdick & Howson and Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Report on Future Water Supply, Denver Municipal Water Works*, 67. See Ellison, "The Denver Water Board: Bureaucratic Power and Autonomy in Local Natural Resource Agencies," 87–88; Tipton and Kalmbach, Inc. Engineers and Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Report on Comprehensive Studies of the Denver Raw Water System*, 10–11.

second was to divert more water from the Western Slope, the most likely source of which was the Blue River. Beginning in the early 1920s, the Denver Water Board commenced efforts to accomplish both. In 1924, the Board authorized the purchase of a site for a massive reservoir along the South Platte known as “Two Forks,” and began slowly acquiring land in the area for the reservoir’s eventual development.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, on July 4, 1921, the Denver Water Board’s investigative engineer George Bull led a survey team into the drainage areas of the Fraser and Williams Fork Rivers on Colorado’s Western Slope in order to assay Denver’s transmountain diversion rights there. The Denver Water Board then filed with the state of Colorado for rights to the Fraser and Williams Fork rivers using July 4th, 1921 as its date of claim—important within the legal doctrine of prior appropriation.⁷⁶

George Bull’s 1921 survey of Western Slope watersheds also suggested that water from the Fraser River drainage could be diverted across the Continental Divide using the pilot bore of the Moffat railroad tunnel, a 6.2-mile passage then being constructed beneath 13,294-foot James Peak.⁷⁷ It was a bold and creative way to build a

⁷⁵ Author unknown, *Two Forks Reservoir (Sometimes Called Denver Reservoir) and Eagle Rock Reservoir* (Denver, CO: Denver Board of Water Commissioners, December 8, 1952), Two Forks Reservoir Tabulation of Historical Information, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

⁷⁶ Denver was able to defend this date of claim against the states of the lower Colorado River basin (led by Arizona and California) when the states met in 1922 to establish the terms of the Colorado River Compact. Saunders, *Reflections on Sixty Years of Water Law Practice*, 15.

⁷⁷ The railroad portion of the Moffat Tunnel was completed in 1928, creating a direct rail connection between Denver, Salt Lake City, and California. In the construction of large tunnels like the Moffat, engineers routinely used pilot bores to drain groundwater and gas deposits, and to get a better sense of a site’s geology. The Moffat’s pilot bore was cylindrical and 8 feet in diameter. See Robert G. Athearn, *The Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad: Rebel of the Rockies* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1977).

transmountain diversion despite the Denver Water Board's financial limitations. In 1929, over the fierce objections of Western Slope interests, the City and County of Denver began lining the Moffat pilot bore for service as a water conduit.⁷⁸ The city received its first Western Slope water through the new diversion tunnel in 1936. The Moffat Diversion was a marvel of high mountain water engineering, capturing water from the Fraser River drainage area through a series of canals and small diversion dams, before propelling it through the Moffat Tunnel by the sheer force of gravity. Once the water emerged on the Eastern Slope, it was again diverted through existing streambeds to Denver, where it was stored, treated, and distributed. The Denver Water Board increased its intake of Western Slope water yet again in 1940 with the completion of the Williams Fork collection system, which included the Gumlick transmountain diversion tunnel beneath Jones Pass and the Williams Fork Reservoir on the western side of the Divide.⁷⁹

All of this was still not enough, however. As far back as 1927, Denver's water managers had identified a transmountain diversion of the Blue River as the only permanent solution to Denver's raw water needs.⁸⁰ Diverting the Blue River, however, would prove far more difficult, both physically and legally. The Blue River could not be diverted through the Water Board's existing tunnels, necessitating a new diversion tunnel

⁷⁸ The city ran out of money for the project in 1933 due to the Great Depression. The federal Public Works Administration took ownership of the tunnel and leased it back to the city for a thirty-year term. Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 60.

⁷⁹ Note that the water held in Williams Fork Reservoir is not for use in Denver, but for release downstream into the Colorado River to compensate for the water diverted from Fraser and Williams Fork to the Eastern Slope. The Williams Fork collection system was funded by a grant from the PWA. *Ibid.*, 62–63.

⁸⁰ "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, October 18, 1927), Central Records, Denver Water Department.

underneath the Continental Divide, 23.28 miles in length.⁸¹ Moreover, Denver's rights to the Blue River were much less clear than were its rights to the Fraser and Williams Fork. Denver had attempted to argue that George Bull had cemented its priority date on the Blue River on the same day as the Williams Fork and Fraser Rivers—an argument the Colorado Supreme Court rejected, pointing out that George Bull and his team had never actually gone to the Blue River basin during his survey trip.⁸²

Still, the Denver Water Board was unwilling to give up its dream of a megaproject that combined a Blue River diversion with the huge Two Forks reservoir along the South Platte. In the mid-1930s, it appealed to the federal government for funds to help survey and plan such a project, and received \$100,000 from the Public Works Administration in 1936.⁸³ The Denver Water Board hoped that with financial help from the federal government, it could complete the entirety of the envisioned Blue River Diversion, including Two Forks reservoir. To that end, the Water Board entered into a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation on December 31, 1941, to conduct preliminary diamond core drilling, planning, and designing of the proposed Two Forks dam. But precisely who would pay for and own the diversion project and reservoir remained unaddressed until 1945.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Roberts Tunnel...Keystone of Our Water System* (Denver, CO: Denver Board of Water Commissioners, 1959), 1, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

⁸² Saunders, *Reflections on Sixty Years of Water Law Practice*, 15.

⁸³ Richard Wensley, President, Denver Board of Water Commissioners to R.F. Walter, Chief Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation, March 3, 1936, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Stapleton, Mayor of Denver to E.B. Debler, Regional Director, United States Bureau of Reclamation, February 8, 1944, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

Both the Denver Water Board and the Bureau of Reclamation initially left aside the matter of jurisdiction over the proposed Blue River project not because it was inconsequential, but because it was important enough to both sides to strangle the much-desired project in its infancy. But matters came to a head immediately after World War II, when the Water Board began ramping up for a post-war construction push. Some of the land it needed to construct the Two Forks dam and reservoir belonged to the Bureau of the Interior, as part of its Pike National Forest. The Denver Water Board hoped to exchange parcels of private land it had acquired in the area for the necessary National Forest acreage. But when it requested the exchange, the Bureau of Reclamation refused, explaining that it—not the Denver Water Board—would build and control the reservoir. “The City’s plan with respect to the diversion of water from the Blue River and other western slope streams is not as comprehensive as the plans which the Bureau is developing,” the Bureau of Reclamation’s Regional Director E.B. Debler explained in a letter to Glenn Saunders in March of 1945.⁸⁵ The Bureau of Reclamation believed that it was in the federal government’s best interest to make sure that any Blue River project benefited as large an area as possible. For the purposes of any Blue River project, in other words, the Bureau of Reclamation did not consider the Denver Water Board a partner, but rather a mere client. For a municipal utility focused on raw water autonomy, such an arrangement was patently unacceptable.

Debler’s letter marked the end of the cooperative relationship between the Bureau of Reclamation and the Denver Water Board, and the beginning of a period of intense legal conflict. The breakup of the partnership forced the Denver Water Board to scale

⁸⁵ E.B. Debler to Glenn G. Saunders, March 14, 1945, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

back its vision for the Blue River diversion, and to shelve the Two Forks portion of the project. But even as the Board forged ahead with its diversion plans, it encountered another problem. The Bureau of Reclamation maintained its own water project on the Blue River that would be affected by the Water Board's plans. As part of its Colorado-Big Thompson diversion, the Bureau of Reclamation had constructed the Green Mountain dam on the Blue River in 1942 to compensate Western Slope users for water diverted to northeastern Colorado. If Denver used all the water it claimed a right to on the Blue River, it would have to come from the Green Mountain reservoir.⁸⁶ Civic and business interests of the Western Slope resolved not to let Denver snatch the Blue River away as easily as the Fraser and Williams Fork diversions.

Glenn Saunders and the Denver Water Board contended that under Colorado law, domestic water use trumped agricultural use regardless of the date of appropriation, and proceeded to sue the Bureau of Reclamation for rights to the Blue River. Economic interests on the Western Slope quickly lined up behind the Bureau of Reclamation in opposition to Denver's plans, claiming that its rights to the Blue River were secondary to their own, according to appropriation date. Western Slope interests further argued that in addition to their earlier appropriation dates, they needed the water in the Blue River and the Green Mountain Reservoir to develop oil shale resources in the area—a water intensive undertaking.⁸⁷ Finally, they countered that Denver already had sufficient water for its domestic needs, and that the Denver Water Board's true interest in diverting Blue

⁸⁶ Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 73.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

River water was to sell it to farmers on Colorado's eastern plains.⁸⁸ The complex bundle of Blue River lawsuits was consolidated into a single case in 1949.⁸⁹

The local arguments, however, were nominal and tangential compared to the vital issue at the core of the Blue River conflict: whether states or the federal government had jurisdiction over water adjudication. Led by Glenn Saunders, the Denver Water Board argued that Colorado's state law, which granted Blue River rights to Denver under the domestic use exception, controlled not just in the Blue River case, but in all such cases. If not, it meant that that the federal government had more de facto water rights than any other water appropriator, and could theoretically invalidate every adjudicated water claim ever made in a Western state.⁹⁰ The Justice Department's legal team, led by William Veeder, contended that the Denver Water Board had no standing to sue the federal government in state courts. If it did, the federal government would be subject to seventeen different state legal regimes west of the 100th meridian, none of which recognized federal laws or imperatives (national defense, Indian rights, etc.) in their

⁸⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁹ The case was confusingly filed under the title, *United States of America v. Northern Colorado Conservancy District et al.* Although the city of Denver and the Water Board were not named directly in the suit, or even a part of the Northern Colorado Conservancy, they were among the primary plaintiffs. Ibid., 73.

⁹⁰ Glenn Saunders and William Veeder squared off not just in the courtroom, but also as competing witnesses before a Senate subcommittee hearing in 1951 to consider Senate Bill 18, which would strip the federal government of immunity from suit in matters of water adjudication. Veeder and Saunders' statements and exchanges over the merits of the bill provided a close approximation of their arguments in the Blue River adjudication suit—so close, in fact, that William Veeder complained to the subcommittee chair, Utah Senator Arthur Watkins, that the hearing was not the “proper place” to try Denver's title to the Blue River. “You can't go too far to educate the Senate,” Watkins amiably replied. United States Congress Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Adjudication of Water Rights: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-second Congress, First Session, on S. 18, a Bill to Authorize Suits Against the United States to Adjudicate and Administer Water Rights* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1951), 22, 33.

water adjudication procedures. The Denver Water Board, Justice lawyers argued, was essentially claiming that any state judge potentially had the power to “substitute his will for the executive branch of the Government.”⁹¹

Before the Blue River adjudication suits could find their way to the Supreme Court, however, the Denver Water Board had already successfully recruited President Eisenhower in its fight against the Justice Department. Eisenhower’s intervention in the Blue River case was consistent with his regional prejudices as a native Westerner. But it contained a hint of irony as well. After all, his own involvement was driven by his generalized distaste for federal meddling in state affairs, and was itself a perfect illustration of the expansive bureaucratic power vested in the post-New Deal presidency.

More significantly, Eisenhower’s precipitous act disregarded the long and complex history of the Blue River conflict, and failed to contemplate the consequences of his interference in its outcome. While Denver’s precarious water situation was quite real, the Denver Water Board had done more to contribute to it than the President supposed, and would benefit more from his involvement than he likely realized. Eisenhower’s anger did not cloud his political judgment, however. He had personally invested in Denver real estate the year prior, and his broker had been none other than Aksel Neilsen. Even as he instructed his Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, to negotiate an extrajudicial conclusion to the Blue River matter, Eisenhower was careful to distance

⁹¹ Veeder was particularly insistent that any adjudication of the Blue River take into account the existence and substance of Senate Document 80, which had authorized the construction of Green Mountain Reservoir at the outset. *Ibid.*, 14; Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, “C-BT Project Chronology”, n.d., http://www.ncwcd.org/project_features/cbt_chronology.asp.

himself from it, anxious to avoid the appearance of a presidential conflict of interest.⁹² Still, his choice was both clear and determinative. The Denver Water Board would have its water. Negotiations regarding the specifics of the Blue River Decree continued through the fall of 1955, but did not include either of the two former protagonists, Veeder and Saunders.⁹³ In place of Saunders, the Denver Water Board sent Harold Roberts, who had also represented the Denver Water Board at the meeting with Eisenhower, to negotiate the terms of the Blue River Decree with Deputy Attorney General Lee Rankin. Shortly after the Decree was announced publicly in October of 1955, the Denver Water Board named the Blue River diversion tunnel in his honor.⁹⁴

As it happened, the drama regarding the Decree coincided with a much higher-profile battle against the Bureau of Reclamation's plans to build a dam near Dinosaur National Monument in far northwestern Colorado.⁹⁵ While the Echo Park dam

⁹² "I am not personally attempting to determine any of the issues involved," Eisenhower wrote in his instructions to Brownell. "It would be inappropriate for me to do so if for no other reason than my family's modest holdings in the City of Denver." Galambos and Van Ee, "Dwight David Eisenhower to Herbert Brownell, Jr, August 15, 1955." For more on Eisenhower's real estate dealings with Neilsen, see Louis Galambos and Daun Van Ee, eds., "Dwight David Eisenhower to Aksel Nielsen, December 14, 1954," *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, Doc. 1201 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/1201.cfm>.

⁹³ At the time these meetings took place, Saunders was stricken with asthma and confined to an oxygen tent, while Veeder had presumably already been reassigned to other duties within the Justice Department. Despite this setback, Veeder remained a federal attorney for the rest of his career, amassing a legendary record fighting for the water rights of Indian tribes throughout the United States. Saunders, *Reflections on Sixty Years of Water Law Practice*, 34; For more on William Veeder's contributions to Indian water law, see, Norris Hundley, "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Indian Water Rights: Confusion Elevated to Principle," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (October 1978): 455–482.

⁹⁴ "Water Department Construction Pushed," 1.

⁹⁵ For more on the significance of the Echo Park controversy to the larger history of the American wilderness conservation movement, see Mark W. T. Harvey, "Battle for

controversy highlighted the strength of a resurgent national conservationist movement, the Blue River Decree spoke just as eloquently to the continued regional power and influence of local agencies, local government, and local capital. The Blue River Decree exempted the Denver Water Board, along with its supply and service areas, from the emerging system of water federalism in the post-war American West. It allowed the Water Board to preserve its unusual status as a vertically integrated water provider, and it upset federal plans for a massive new federal reclamation project that would primarily have benefited Denver.⁹⁶ Less directly, the Decree greatly extended the scope of Denver's influence over its mountain hinterland, and revalidated the Denver Water Board's institutional culture, rooted in 19th century paradigms of resource exploitation and subjugation of both land and markets.⁹⁷ Finally, the Blue River Decree removed water shortage as a practical and political impediment to the physical expansion of the Denver metropolitan area, and permitted the Denver Water Board to shift to a far more comfortable political role as an agent and cheerleader of that expansion.

Indeed, if there was a signature moment in all of the Denver Water Board's history, perhaps it was the fall of 1955. The passage that August of a \$75 million water bond, followed closely by the meeting with Eisenhower, and the announcement of the

Dinosaur: Echo Park Dam and the Birth of the Modern Wilderness Movement," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 45, no. 1 (1995): 32–45; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 209–219; Hal Rothman, *Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Hal Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century*, The American Ways Series (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 101–107.

⁹⁶ "Backers of Huge Water Plan Blast Denver's Blue Agreement," *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, October 21, 1955).

⁹⁷ Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*; Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*.

Blue River Decree some months later, seemed to justify every risk the Board had taken since World War II. It also signaled the commencement of a new era of furious construction. After 34 years of political and legal wrangling, the Denver Water Board broke ground on the Roberts Tunnel in July of 1956, as crews began boring the 23-mile long dogleg tunnel from both portals. They met each other near the middle of the completed Roberts Tunnel on February 24, 1960.

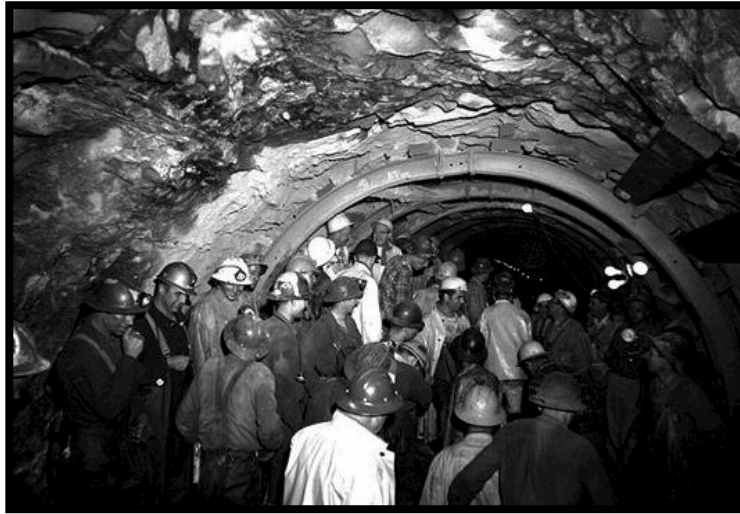


Figure 4: Roberts Tunnel excavation crews celebrate completed bore, February 24, 1960⁹⁸

Between 1956 and 1960, the Water Board also added hydroelectric generation capacity to its Williams Fork Dam, to help compensate the Bureau of Reclamation for water diverted from Green Mountain Dam. It re-lined the Moffat Tunnel and built a much smaller transmountain diversion, the Vasquez Tunnel, to augment the Moffat's flow. Back in Denver, the Water Board also added to its filtration, pumping, and distribution facilities. In 1960, construction began on the Dillon Reservoir, near the west portal of the Roberts Tunnel. Before it could begin, the Denver Water Board moved the

⁹⁸ "Historic Photos", n.d., <http://www.denverwater.org/AboutUs/History/HistoricPhotos/#11>.

entire small mountain town of Dillon.⁹⁹ Lake Dillon, as the complex came to be known, was completed in November of 1963, and the Blue River Diversion came fully online on July 17, 1964, adding another 50% to the Denver Water Board's storage capacity.¹⁰⁰

Predictably, Dwight Eisenhower's intervention in the Blue River conflict failed to establish a lasting peace between the factions, or forge a durable resolution to the underlying issues. Lawsuits regarding the Blue River cropped up again in 1959, when the Denver Water Board requested the use of additional reserves in Green Mountain Reservoir. "It appears," a statement from the Colorado River Water Conservation District bitterly exclaimed, "to be Denver's policy that she is of a right which is created by her might; entitled to take all the water she can physically divert from the Colorado River system for the purpose of providing for her future municipal needs and the development of agriculture in Eastern Colorado."¹⁰¹

Over the course of the first five decades of the Denver Water Board's existence, it fought to increase its raw water supply and reserves against its own customers and local voters, Denver politicians and bureaucrats, property owners and water rights holders in the mountain hinterland, civic and financial interests on the Western Slope, and the federal government. While no victory came easily, the Denver Water Board

⁹⁹ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Development of the Water Plant of the Denver Water Department Since 1956* (Denver, CO: Denver Board of Water Commissioners, August 8, 1975), 13, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *History of Development of the Raw Water and Attendant Treatment Facilities of the City of Denver* (Denver, CO: Denver Water Department, 1975), 19–20, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁰¹ Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 81. The sides reached a slightly more stable compromise in 1964 by agreeing to a stipulation assembled by Assistant Attorney General Ramsey Clark. Ramsey Clark, *United States of American V. Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Et Al.*, 1–7 (United States District Court for the District of Colorado 1964).

systematically vanquished every one of its legal and political foes. These battles, while important, give only a partial picture of Denver's larger history of raw water development. The Denver Water Board could never have fought and won so many raw water wars without support from, and control over, its proverbial home front.

V. Managing Demand and Imposing Hierarchy: Servicing the Metropolis, 1919-1960

From its founding in 1918, the Denver Water Board maintained an ambiguous and often contentious relationship with Denver's extraterritorial suburbs. On one hand, it thrived on the revenue generated by its suburban water service, and used the population growth of its suburban customer base as political justification for new projects to expand its raw water supplies, including the Blue River and Two Forks projects.¹⁰² Yet the Board also fought against accepting the responsibilities of a public utility beyond the comparatively circumscribed boundaries of the City and County of Denver, and left to other entities the tasks of building and maintaining suburban water systems, regardless of whether they were up to the task.¹⁰³

The Denver Water Board's extraterritorial service was initially governed only by the terms of its charter.¹⁰⁴ The charter stipulated that service within the city and county took precedence, and that extraterritorial water service must be conducted on a yearly contractual basis, subject to adequate supply.¹⁰⁵ The Board was otherwise free to improvise and experiment with its outside service arrangements, and it took full

¹⁰² *Two Forks Reservoir (Sometimes Called Denver Reservoir) and Eagle Rock Reservoir*, 1–2.

¹⁰³ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 6; Milliken, "Water Management Issues in the Denver, Colorado Urban Area," 340.

¹⁰⁴ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ *Charter of the City and County of Denver, 1960 Compilation*, para. C4.26–28.

advantage of its considerable latitude. The language of its extraterritorial contracts varied widely and some amounted to little more than verbal agreements, creating what one internal Water Board history later termed a “legal nightmare.”¹⁰⁶ Outside customers had to renew their service contracts each year, and were the lowest service priority in the event of severe drought or shortage.¹⁰⁷ There was nothing to prevent the Denver Water Board from changing extraterritorial rates or terms of service, or to force any codification for how it chose which suburban areas to serve.

The general uncertainty surrounding the core-suburban water relationship allowed the Denver Water Board to treat its suburban customers as a captured market, and a handy relief valve during periods of water shortage and drought.¹⁰⁸ Its harsh treatment and even outright disdain for its suburban customers hearkened back to the 19th century, when Denver’s fiercest competitors for regional dominance had often been its closest neighbors.¹⁰⁹ Unlike most other Western cities of the era, Denver used its suburban water sales to subsidize service in the urban core, rather than the other way around. It was an arrangement that kept prices low and preserved an important measure of demand-side flexibility.

Unsurprisingly, this arrangement generated enormous resentment among residents and businesses in nearby cities like Aurora and Englewood, which depended on Denver’s

¹⁰⁶ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Resolution of the Board of Water Commissioners of the City and County of Denver” (Denver, CO, April 19, 1921), Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁰⁸ Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 110–111.

¹⁰⁹ The town of Golden, for instance, had been early Denver’s main competitor as a regional metropole. Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain & Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change Along the Front Range*; Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*.

water, but chafed at chronically low water pressures, shoddy service, and discriminatory pricing. From 1918 through 1940, the relationship between the Denver Water Board and suburban customers matured under conditions of intense mutual enmity, with constant legal skirmishing over rates, water quality, and the respective contractual responsibilities of the Denver Water Board and its outside clients.¹¹⁰ The outcomes of these contests overwhelmingly favored the Denver Water Board, thanks to the strength of its statutory and legal position, the brutally effective representation of Glenn Saunders and the Board's legal department, and lack of alternative sources of water for Denver's suburbs.

It is difficult, in fact, to overstate the sheer futility of the suburban position vis-à-vis the Denver Water Board in the years leading up to World War II. So unbalanced was the power dynamic that Denver's satellites could not even properly *surrender* to the all-powerful Denver Water Board. In 1940, for example, the city of Aurora—already well on its way to becoming Denver's most populous satellite—asked the Denver Water Board to assume ownership of its entire water system, if only it would extend the same non-contractual, dependable, price-controlled water to Aurorans that Denverites enjoyed.¹¹¹ It was a gesture of abject submission, and an open invitation to annexation. Denver now had the perfect chance to use its control over water to expand its territory and tax base and swallow its closest urban competitor. Few municipal water utilities of the era had the wherewithal to unilaterally decline such a rare opportunity.¹¹² But Aurora

¹¹⁰ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 35.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹² Even the powerful Los Angeles Water Department found that it could not refuse to provide water service to outlying areas that the city council wanted to annex. See Steven P. Erie and Harold David Brackman, *Beyond Chinatown: The Metropolitan Water District, Growth, and the Environment in Southern California* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 29–53.

was already among the Denver Water Board's captive extraterritorial markets, and from the Board's perspective, ownership of another water system promised more liabilities than benefits. Board President August P. Gumlick informed Aurora's mayor that the Board had denied his city's request for various "legal and practical reasons," and the possibility was never broached again.¹¹³ The little-known episode added further anecdotal evidence of the Denver Water Board's extraordinary independence from the rest of the city's government, its imperviousness to suburban threats and blandishments, and its insulation from the generalized pressure toward territorial aggrandizement.

There were some lines, however, that even the Denver Water Board was still wary of crossing. Prior to World War II, the Board remained leery of imposing the kinds of service restrictions that might seriously interfere with urban growth in Denver's fringes. But by the early 1940s, it had begun to rethink this position. A longstanding loophole in the Board's extraterritorial billing structure allowed suburban customers to lease water at a flat rate and resell it at a profit. While Denver's water commissioners had never been thrilled at essentially giving water away to extraterritorial resellers, they had historically tolerated the situation in light of the small numbers of customers lost, and because fixing the loophole would likely provoke another face-off with nearby local governments. But recent population growth outside of Denver threatened to turn what had been a trickle into a flood of lost revenue. In July of 1941, the Denver Water Board reluctantly opted to

¹¹³ Edmund W. Carr, Denver Planning Office, "Annexation in Denver," interview by Donald Baldwin, Transcript, March 20, 1972, C MSS OH53 Rg17B, Sec2; Sf4, Box 1., Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library; Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, April 16, 1940), Central Records, Denver Water Department.

meter all new extraterritorial connections, and to limit contract service to specific properties.

It was too much, too soon. No such restrictions had been proposed for Denver users, and the impact of metering on the economic health of the suburbs remained unknown. The city of Englewood threatened an immediate lawsuit to stop the metering requirement and bring the Denver Water Board back under state control, as its predecessor had been prior to 1904. Uncertain of its legal position, the Board hastily retracted the measure, citing the need for further study.¹¹⁴ Still, veteran observers of the Denver Water Board recognized that it had just crossed a rubicon of sorts, demonstrating willingness to consider suburban service restrictions in order to recover a fractional amount of lost revenue. What, then, would it do to the suburbs when population growth began to outpace its supply, and its autonomy was truly on the line?

The answer was not long in coming. In 1944, the Denver Water Board's year-end report warned that wartime population growth had pushed the Denver water system to its limits, and that rationing of construction materials by the War Production Board continued to stymie additions to capacity. Denver's water commissioners, the report continued, had been forced to "consider the necessity of conserving the use of water by consumers outside the city limits. No definite plans have been inaugurated but under present circumstances some method of conserving water will be obligatory."¹¹⁵ On March 20, 1945, the commissioners approved an indefinite ban on all new connections

¹¹⁴ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 36.

¹¹⁵ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *History of Development of the Raw Water and Attendant Treatment Facilities of the City of Denver*, 4.

“outside the territorial limits of Denver.”¹¹⁶ The die had finally been cast. With the suburbs now cut off, the Denver Water Board had officially committed itself to a strategy of demand management in the face of post-war urban growth.

VI. Drawing the “Blue Line:” 1948-1960

On March 26th, 1948, the commissioners of the Denver Water Board held a special meeting at the utility’s downtown headquarters. As presiding officer, August Gumlick called the meeting to order, and immediately gave the floor to the Board’s chief counsel, Glenn Saunders.¹¹⁷ Saunders announced that after months of tough negotiations, the Denver Water Board had struck a deal with the governments of Denver’s three neighboring counties rescinding the 1945 water ban.¹¹⁸ Its results had been something of a disaster, as desperate suburban dwellers had built their own shoddy water systems and discharged untreated waste into watercourses flowing through the city.¹¹⁹ In exchange for new service, the counties had agreed to accept water metering and comply with

¹¹⁶ “The Board’s ability to properly supply the people of Denver is being endangered,” warned chief engineer D.D. Gross at that day’s meeting. Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners, March 20, 1945.”

¹¹⁷ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners” (Denver, CO, March 26, 1948), 1, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹¹⁸ The new service principles were the hard-fought result of new Denver Mayor James ‘Quigg’ Newton’s high-profile initiative to improve relations between Denver and neighboring communities, known as the “Intercounty Conference.” For the new Mayor, the Intercounty Conference was a first step toward wooing Denver’s increasingly affluent suburbs into annexing themselves to Denver. Mark S. Foster, *Citizen Quigg: A Mayor’s Life of Civic Service* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 133.

¹¹⁹ D.W. Hoagland to Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Recommendations on Future Water Policies to the Denver Board of Water Commissioners from the Denver Planning Board”, October 15, 1959, 28–2, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 28, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

Denver's zoning, building, health, and sewage standards in areas requesting service.¹²⁰ The agreement also hiked suburban water rates by nearly 34%, which was far higher than rates in Denver.¹²¹ Saunders insisted on language emphasizing that the Denver Water Board was not a public utility outside of Denver. Finally, the tentative agreement stipulated that new extraterritorial service would be granted by a uniform distributor's contract, and the Board would only lease water to municipal or "quasi-municipal" (e.g. wholesale) entities.¹²² Saunders had done his job well—the agreement did much to enhance the Denver Water Board's control over extraterritorial customers. The satisfied water commissioners quickly moved, seconded, and unanimously carried its adoption.¹²³

The 1948 General Cooperation Agreement, as it became known, was yet another evolution toward "Blue Line conservationism," and a crucial preparatory step for the imposition of actual Blue Line in 1951. For the first time, all of the Board's extraterritorial customers would sign the same contract, which would require metering—a potentially powerful tool for conserving water. Also for the first time, the Denver Water Board explicitly tied provision of water service to specific planning objectives, by instituting the so-called "500 foot rule."¹²⁴ The new regulation mandated that any area contiguous to Denver that requested water service had to maintain conformance with the

¹²⁰ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 41–45.

¹²¹ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *History of Development of the Raw Water and Attendant Treatment Facilities of the City of Denver*, 6.

¹²² Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 41–45.

¹²³ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners," 2–3.

¹²⁴ The "500 foot rule" required that any suburban tract requesting water service that directly adjoined Denver "be zoned by the County for at least as high a use as the adjoining land in Denver and such zoning shall continue for at least 500 feet or one and one-half blocks in platted territory back from the boundary line between Denver and the County." Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Exhibit A: General Cooperation Agreement," 5.

city's strict zoning standards at least 500 feet on its side of the shared boundary. Most importantly, however, by creating different rate schedules for service inside and outside of Denver, the General Cooperation Agreement sought to establish a legal basis for the Denver Water Board's unequal treatment of its Denver and suburban customers. Just as it had threatened to do in 1941, the city of Englewood quickly filed suit to stop the Board from charging much higher rates in Englewood than in Denver, and to block the metering requirement.¹²⁵ The suit, brought by Englewood City Attorney Mark Shivers, also requested that the state's Public Utilities Commission regulate the Board's suburban service.

It was precisely the move Glenn Saunders had expected, and he urged Denver's water commissioners not to be frightened into a reprise of 1941. The Board was on solid legal ground, he assured them, and in fact, Englewood's suit presented it with a valuable opportunity to legally substantiate its independence from state oversight.¹²⁶ Saunders quickly secured transfer of the case from Arapaho County (in which Englewood was located and the suit was filed) to a friendlier Denver district court.¹²⁷ After the Denver court found in the Board's favor, Englewood appealed to the Colorado Supreme Court, which upheld the initial ruling in 1951.¹²⁸ After the decision, the Denver satellites of Englewood and Aurora, long the most vocal critics of the Denver Water Board's policies,

¹²⁵ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *Water Sales History*, 48.

¹²⁶ Saunders, *Reflections on Sixty Years of Water Law Practice*, 38.

¹²⁷ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, June 2, 1948), Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹²⁸ *City of Englewood v. City and County of Denver et al.*, 123 Colo. 290, 229 P.2D 667 (1951).

elected to create their own water systems.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Saunders' instinct had proven correct. By provoking a conflict with Englewood, the Denver Water Board had won the blessing of the state's highest court to impose prima facie discriminatory standards of pricing and service on its suburban customers.

Given its institutional independence and control over distribution of metropolitan water, the Denver Water Board had always been theoretically capable of limiting demand, and perhaps even planning Denver's growth. But prior to the *Englewood* case, uncertainty regarding its statutory footing had kept the Board from making full use of that power. The 1951 ruling vested it with explicit legal authority to manage demand in ways it had not previously contemplated. Its increased powers did not come a moment too soon. Metropolitan Denver's population growth had accelerated since the end of World War II, and already in 1946, Denver water engineers had been forced to occasionally operate filtration plants beyond their rated capacities.¹³⁰ Moreover, that population growth was increasingly trending toward Denver's outskirts.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 124–125, 130–134.

¹³⁰ D.D. Gross, *Improvements for Both Immediate Needs and Future Developments of the Denver Water Plant* (Denver, CO: Denver Board of Water Commissioners, January 7, 1947), 2, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹³¹ According to one internal report, in 1949, 27 out of every 100 new taps to the Denver water system were outside Denver's corporate limits. In 1953, that figure had risen to 47 out of every 100. The vast majority of these taps, the report continued, were for residential, rather than commercial or industrial use. Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *History of Development of the Raw Water and Attendant Treatment Facilities of the City of Denver*, 8.

County	1940	1950	1960	1970
Adams	22,481	40,234	120,296	185,789
Arapahoe	32,150	52,125	113,426	162,142
Jefferson	30,725	55,687	127,520	233,031
Denver	322,412	415,786	493,887	514,678
Total	407,768	563,832	855,129	1,095,640

Table 1: Denver Metropolitan Population By County, 1940-1970¹³²

The culmination of the Denver Water Board’s trend toward centralized conservationism came in August of 1951, when it further “clarified” the rules governing outside service. Denver, along with most of the interior West, had entered a period of deep, cyclical drought—the same dry period that was concurrently overwhelming municipal supplies in cities like Phoenix. To avoid a similar fate, the Denver Water Board’s new “rules” contained two absolute bombshells. First, the Board announced that it was collaborating with the Denver Planning Office to determine which suburban areas were “suitable” for development, and thus eligible for water service.¹³³ The Planning Office would determine whether or not each area applying for service had fully met Denver’s zoning, building, and sanitation standards. It was a purposely-high hurdle to overcome for unincorporated fringe areas, which generally had weak land use and zoning requirements to begin with.

Second, the August 1951 service revisions stated that the Board would no longer

¹³² *Denver Water News*, Economy and Location--Not Water--Determine Urban Growth, November 1972, 2.

¹³³ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Rules Governing Distribution of Treated Denver Water Outside the City Limits,” 7–10.

serve new suburban areas “not reasonably related to the development of the Denver metropolitan area in an orderly and reasonable way, or which propose boundaries so irregular as not to be easily supervised or understood, or which tend to invite illegal service connections or lead to misrepresentation of the availability of Denver water.”

The latter clause, intended to blanket those suburban areas not already excluded by the former, created the so-called “Blue Line,” beyond which the Board would provide no future service under any circumstances. The area within the Blue Line enclosed approximately 114 square miles, at the center of which were the 56 square miles of Denver itself.¹³⁴ Distributors accused of violating the Blue Line would face hearings before the Water Board, and if convicted, face sanctions including termination of contract, discontinuance of service, and even loss of possession of distribution facilities.¹³⁵ Finally, the revised rules forbade the use of hoses for irrigation or washing sidewalks and required that all water for cooling and refrigeration be recirculated. Denver’s water commissioners added sprinkling restrictions on top of their other conservation measures in the mid-1950s, punishable by up to \$100 fines for each infraction.¹³⁶ The Board also considered, but did not enact, a ban on car washing. The latter restrictions applied both inside and outside Denver.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ E.L. Mosley, “For the Information of the Board--Subject: The ‘Blue Line’”, August 5, 1954, 1–3, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹³⁵ “Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners” (Denver, CO, May 27, 1952), Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹³⁶ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners” (Denver, CO, June 15, 1954), 27, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹³⁷ John Burgess to E.L. Mosley, “Board of Water Commissioners Intra-Office Communication--Councilman Fresques’ Questionnaire”, December 1, 1954, 5, Blue Line

The Blue Line was a blunt instrument of demand control—a random and almost reactionary way of discriminating among potential suburban service areas. But it was not an anti-growth measure. Denver Water Commissioners regarded the Blue Line as a way of creating a “continuing surplus beyond the requirements of the area now within the municipal limits of Denver.”¹³⁸ As the commissioners viewed it, the Blue Line *was* a pro-growth initiative, if not for the suburbs, than at least for municipal Denver. It was also a way for the Board to contain the city’s annexation efforts, over which it had no direct control.

But the logic behind the physical placement of the Blue Line remained something of a mystery. When Denver city councilman James Fresques asked the Water Board to explain the rationale behind its location, he received a cryptic response from Board manager E.L. Mosley. The Blue Line, Mosley wrote, was located “upon a basis of a 22-year average, that the raw water resources of the department, when fully developed, would supply a metropolitan area of 125 square miles using the 1950 population census of density in Denver as a yardstick. You will see...that with our present territory limited to 114 square miles inside the “blue line,” ...we are well within our estimate as originally made and recently confirmed.”¹³⁹ The sheer impenetrability of Mosley’s explanation spoke to the political difficulties that the Blue Line posed for the Water Board. When pressed to rationalize it publicly, the Denver Water Board could only throw up a

Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 6, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹³⁸ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Commissioners” (Denver, CO, August 10, 1954), 56, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹³⁹ E.L. Mosley to James Fresques, Councilman of District 8, City and County of Denver, December 2, 1954, 1–2, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 3, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

smokescreen.

And still it might not be enough. The Denver Water Board's worst case scenario, which it kept well under wraps, assumed that the number of water users would increase between 1950 and 1962 by approximately 330,000 people, that per capita consumption would rise by 1-2% in each of those years, and that Denver's actual raw supply would remain constant over that period at drought-limited 185,300 acre-feet. If these estimates turned out to be correct, the Denver water system would be a catastrophic 105,000 users over system capacity by 1962.¹⁴⁰ Worried Denver water officials secretly debated even more drastic restrictions within the Blue Line during the mid-1950s, although it never imposed them.¹⁴¹

The Denver Water Board and the Denver Planning Office, moreover, made uneasy bedfellows. The Water Board's entire post-war conservation project was aimed at preserving its institutional autonomy and control over water. Denver planners, by contrast, identified the mitigation of unplanned suburban sprawl as their primary task, and believed that high level intergovernmental and interagency cooperation was the only way to accomplish it.¹⁴² But while the two agencies were ultimately at cross-purposes with one another, the short-term benefits of their partnership were undeniable.

Politically, the Denver Water Board's collaboration with the Denver Planning Office

¹⁴⁰ Hudson Moore, Jr., "Analysis of the Blue Line Area (Related Material Attached)", May 3, 1955, 1-2, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 4, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁴¹ Burgess to Mosley, "Board of Water Commissioners Intra-Office Communication-- Councilman Fresques' Questionnaire," 6.

¹⁴² Inter-County Regional Planning Commission, *Metro Growth Plan, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000* (Denver, CO: Inter-County Regional Planning Commission, 1960), 5-6. For more on the Denver Planning Board's approach to regional planning in the 1950s, see chapter 4.

gave it some political cover from the smoldering anger of the suburbs over the Blue Line. After having fought to maintain its relevance and solvency since its creation in 1926, the new arrangement seemed to give the Denver Planning Office some influence over metropolitan water policy—thought at the time to be the planner’s silver bullet.¹⁴³ In fact, as one internal planning bulletin noted, Denver was “fortunate [underline in original] in having a water problem which demands objective solution of the larger problem of urban stability.” Water policy could be the basis for “objective planning for a stable urban area, executed on a metropolitan scale.”¹⁴⁴ However awkward the partnership, it could potentially give Denver’s planners the tools to save the metropolitan area from the ravages of sprawl.

In an additional irony, however, neither agency approved of the Blue Line itself. Denver planning officials quickly soured on it after they realized that it robbed the core city of influence over development beyond the service boundary, artificially inflated land prices inside it, and hindered Denver’s ability to expand through annexation.¹⁴⁵ If

¹⁴³ In 1953, S.R. DeBoer, a well-respected Denver planner, criticized Denver’s past elected officials as unable “to stand up under the pressure of building needs and the pressure of money which the developers could make out of that need.” They had not cared, DeBoer complained, whether new additions to Denver would “fit the city plan, would make the city more attractive and livable, whether the addition itself would be something that the city might be proud of, all of these things were not discussed, first because the men in office hardly knew what the city plan was like; second, because being timid men, afraid of big enterprise, their first works were those of approval.” S.R. DeBoer, “Shall We Limit the Size of Our Cities? (notes, Draft)” (Denver, CO, 1953), DeBoer Papers, Series 2, Box 10, ff 20, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library; Denver Planning Commission, S. R. DeBoer, and Culley & Carhart McCrary, *The Denver Plan, Volume 1* (Denver, CO: The Denver Planning Commission, 1929), 4.

¹⁴⁴ Denver Planning Office, *A Denver Urban Line* (Denver, CO: Denver Planning Office, October 1954), 2, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

¹⁴⁵ Denver Planning Board, “Draft for Committee--Recommendations on Future Water Policies to the Denver Board of Water Commissioners from the Denver Planning Board”,

possible, Denver's water managers disliked the measure even more, as it placed them in an excruciating political and financial bind. They worried intensely throughout the 1950s about the Blue Line's negative impact on Board revenues, and its tendency to encourage the development of rival agencies in areas that otherwise would have remained dependent on Denver water. The city of Aurora, for instance, had recoiled violently at the announcement of the Blue Line in 1951, and had begun planning its own water supply system in the early 1950s, in cooperation with the city of Colorado Springs.¹⁴⁶

The Board also received criticism from Denver water customers, who were increasingly impatient with its restrictions on personal water use. One Denver customer even sued the Board to block its water use restrictions inside Denver, and to prohibit *all* water sales outside the city limits.¹⁴⁷ Water Board officials were particularly frightened of rumors that the city of Grand Junction, on Colorado's Western Slope, was exploring legal avenues of making the Blue Line the permanent boundary of the Denver metropolitan area.¹⁴⁸

June 1959, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 25, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁴⁶ Aurora's joint bid to become water-independent from the Denver Water Board became known as the Homestake Project, a transmountain diversion completed in 1967 with an annual yield of approximately 26,000 acre-feet shared between Aurora, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo. When it became clear that Aurora would follow through on its threat to create an independent raw water system, the Denver Water Board offered to participate with Aurora in the project's development. According to historian James Cox, "relationships [sic] between the central city and Aurora had degenerated to such a degree that Aurora wanted no part of a joint project with Denver." Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 123–127; "USGS Colorado - Upper Arkansas River Basin."

¹⁴⁷ The outcome of the suit is unknown. "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, May 3, 1955), 67.

¹⁴⁸ The Denver Water Board's Secretary-Manager, Robert Millar, shared his fears about the Blue Line becoming a permanent boundary with chief engineer Earl Mosley in a 1957 letter. "I have briefly discussed this phase [the Western Slope Blue Line threat] with Mr.

The most serious consequence of the Blue Line, however, would manifest itself over the course of the coming decades. The Denver Water Board's conservationist actions between the end of World War II and 1960 had sequentially spurred the development of special districts to legally secure water from Denver, and then encouraged those districts to look elsewhere for water in the worst drought years of the early-to-mid 1950s. In addition, the Denver Water Board's high premiums for suburban service made it appear more cost efficient for a number of cities, including Aurora, to develop their own water systems. Thus, by 1964, there were 64 separate entities in the Denver metropolitan area involved in some aspect of water supply.¹⁴⁹ A number of these agencies had been founded in reaction to what many perceived as the Water Board's discriminatory, anti-suburban policies. Due to the Blue Line and similar measures, the Denver Water Board had permanently lost the trust and goodwill of a vast swath of the city's fast-growing suburbs. It would pay a hefty political price for this breach in later decades.

For the moment, however, the Blue Line was surprisingly cost-free for the Denver Water Board. Instead of creating a backlash, the Blue Line actually seemed to bolster the Board's political fortunes, and it scored an impressive series of political victories throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, including two successful bond initiatives, the Blue

Tipton [a private consultant to the Denver Water Board] and he agrees that trouble could well develop over this phase of the situation as long as the Blue Line is kept in place," Millar wrote worriedly. It was an idle threat, in retrospect. But Millar's reaction is a good indication of the uncertainty surrounding water law and Denver's future growth in the mid-1950s. Robert S. Millar to E.L. Mosley, "Two Reasons Supporting Staff Thinking That the 'Blue Line' Should Be Eliminated", September 16, 1957, Blue Line General/Correspondence, March 26, 1948-December 7, 1959 Box #179942580, File # 205.008, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁴⁹ Cox, *Metropolitan Water Supply: The Denver Experience*, 148–155.

River Decree, and the successful completion of its largest raw water project to date. Though universally reviled, the Blue Line was a jarring reminder of what a permanent water shortage would entail. The Board regularly assured its customers that the measure was temporary, and would last only as long as it took to bring new raw water to Denver. Regardless of what they thought about the Denver Water Board itself, few Denverites rooted for its failure in that endeavor. Additionally, as the 1950s progressed, the Denver Water Board became noticeably more adept at combining public fear of water shortage and rationing with more a positive public message of responsible water use and personal conservation. In a comprehensive public relations campaign, the Denver Water Board experimented with cutting edge marketing tactics to enhance its public image as a trustworthy steward of the city's money and water resources.

The new approach, as noted previously, produced remarkable results. On August 9th, 1955, only a week prior to the pivotal meeting between Denver officials and President Dwight Eisenhower, the Denver Water Board asked Denver voters to approve a \$75 million dollar bond initiative—the largest in its history. The money would be used to shore up the Board's existing plant and pay for the Board's Blue River storage and diversion projects. "The proposed bond issue will not increase your taxes one cent, nor will it increase water rates," the Water Board promised in its house organ, the *Denver Water News*. "Denver's continuing growth and expansion naturally raises Water Department income as water use increases." Then the Board threw voters its hardest pitch: "If the city stagnates, you lose. To be decided [on August 9th] is the momentous issue as to whether Denver—and you—can look forward to continued growth and a

better life, or whether our economy shall stagnate for lack of precious water.”¹⁵⁰ In strangely intimate terms, the article melded the themes of urban growth, water conservation, and personal fulfillment together to cast the bond issue as a moral imperative. When the final votes were counted, the tally for the water bond was 37,865 for, and 2,588 against.¹⁵¹ It was the most lopsided political victory in Denver Water Board history.

The Denver Water Board’s evolving electoral strategies mirrored its other advances in public outreach. Over the course of the 1950s, the Board worked to refine its negative image by making conservationism the friendly face of its not so friendly efforts to protect its control over supply. Its public service campaigns to improve water use efficiency focused largely on landscape watering—easily the most wasteful category of domestic water usage. Advertisements with advice on more efficient watering techniques transformed the frugal use of water into an act of profound civic virtue.¹⁵² The Board’s public relations campaigns served the dual purposes of encouraging consumers to use less water, and to repair its own tarnished image as a rapacious and unaccountable public agency.

In 1951, the Board introduced a cartoon character named “Willing Water.” The affable “Willing,” originally a creation of the American Water Works Association (AWWA), dispensed tips and nostrums on water conservation in “Water Wisdom,” a

¹⁵⁰ “The \$75,000,000 Bond Issue...Investing In Our Future,” *Denver Water News* (Denver, CO, July 1955), 4.

¹⁵¹ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, “Chronology of Major Events and Board Action, August 9, 1955-September 1, 1957,” n.d., 1, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁵² For example, the Water Board frequently urged customers to water their lawns less frequently, and to let them grow longer before mowing. “County Agent Warns Against Short Grass,” *Denver Water News* (Denver, June 1954), 4.

recurring feature in *Denver Water News*. In 1953, the Denver

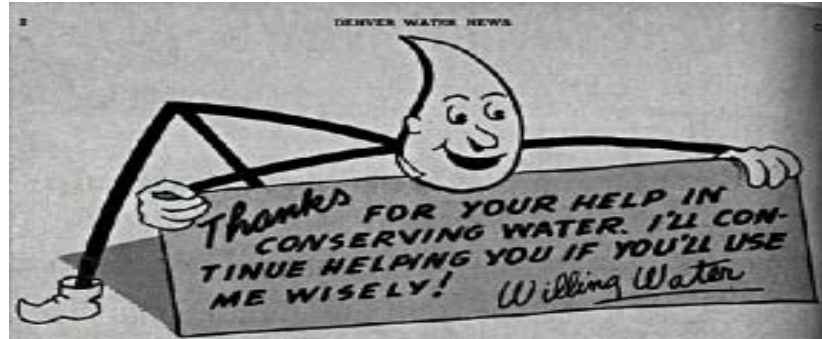


Figure 5. "Willing Water," the Denver Water Board's conservation mascot, debuts in the *Denver Water News*, October 1951¹⁵³

Water Board adopted the cartoon as its institutional mascot, and Willing Water's likeness and epigrams began appearing on billboards, signs, water bills, and the doors of Denver Water Board vehicles.¹⁵⁴ In 1952, Denver's water commissioners considered creating a film for use as a public relations tool.¹⁵⁵ The Denver Water Board's outreach efforts even extended to Denver's elementary students. Together with Denver Public Schools, the Water Board prepared a teaching resource in 1955, to help "children understand the problem and realize their responsibility for conserving water.... It is hoped that the parents will be informed indirectly through the children."¹⁵⁶ Efforts to educate the public on Denver's water history also extended to adults. In 1956, the Denver Water Board commissioned a local public relations specialist, Wayne Welch, to draft informational booklets for local utilities, governmental agencies, and civic leaders, and a shorter one for water users, called "The Story of the Denver Water System."¹⁵⁷ These efforts netted

¹⁵³ "Water Users Cooperate to Help Conserve Our Water Supply," *Denver Water News* (Denver, CO, October 1951), 2.

¹⁵⁴ *Denver Water News* (Denver, CO, November 1953), 4.

¹⁵⁵ "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners," 25.

¹⁵⁶ Bullock, Eskildson, and Low, "Your City's Life Line: Denver's Water System," 2, 5.

¹⁵⁷ "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, June 7, 1955), 84, Central Records, Denver Water Department; "Record of

Welch and the Denver Water Board the Government Public Relations Association's 1956 award for distinguished governmental public relations.¹⁵⁸

As these actions demonstrated, the Denver Water Board began revising its political approach in the early post-war era, and reclassifying public relations as an important component of its core tasks, rather than a distraction from them. The Board's message of water conservation became a useful strategy for addressing the public's economic and political concerns by placing the Board's controversial actions in a more favorable, or at least comprehensible, context.¹⁵⁹ After having struggled mightily with negative public opinion for most of its existence, in 1955, the Denver Water Board saw its political fortunes on the rise, despite the Blue Line. This was due, in no small measure, to its newly refined public relations and marketing strategies.

The news just kept getting better for the Denver Water Board as the 1950s rolled on. The regional drought, which had begun in the late 1940s, finally broke in spectacular fashion in 1957, when a record-breaking winter blanketed the Rockies with deep snow and filled the alpine gullies, rivers, and reservoirs with spring and summer snowmelt. In

Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, November 20, 1956), 84, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁵⁸ The Government Public Relations Association award cited the Board's "outstanding public relations program to interpret the service of and the needs of the Denver water system." "Record of Proceedings, Meeting of the Denver Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, December 4, 1956), 87.

¹⁵⁹ The Denver Water Board's education-oriented approach closely followed the dictums laid out by Edward L. Bernays, who is often credited as the "father of public relations." In his seminal essay, "The Engineering of Consent," Bernays writes, "[I]n certain cases, democratic leaders must play their part in leading the public through the engineering of consent to socially constructive goals and values. This role naturally imposes upon them the obligation to use the educational processes, as well as other available techniques, to bring about as complete an understanding as possible." Edward L. Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 250 (March 1947): 114.

March of that year, the Denver water system's raw water reserves had dwindled to 80,000 acre-feet. By August, that figure had skyrocketed to 257,000 acre-feet—a 220% increase—filling all of the Water Board's reservoirs to capacity for the first time in over a decade.¹⁶⁰ By this time, the Blue River Decree was nearly two years old, and the Denver Water Board remained on target to complete its Blue River diversion and storage project by 1962. Charles Fisk, the Water Board's chief water rights engineer, jubilantly took stock of the utility's drastically revised outlook:

For years, the attention of the Board has been concentrated to a large extent upon obtaining an adequate water supply. Now we have changed overnight, so to speak, from an era of water scarcity to an era of water abundance. Having just been through a severe drought, it is not easy to accept the premise that Denver's fundamental water problem in August 1957 is water utilization, rather than water supply. It is difficult to initiate action which will put excess storage reserves to work at once, helping promote the economic growth of the Denver metropolitan area, helping retire the Board's bonded indebtedness, helping protect Denver's suburban water market by making unnecessary the competitive water developments now being undertaken by people who cannot wait until 1962. In short, it is indeed difficult to realize that the present storage reserves are more than enough to see Denver safely through the interim period until Blue River water arrives.¹⁶¹

Just like that, Denver's supply crisis was over. The Blue Line—so vitally necessary mere months ago—had suddenly become obsolete.

Rescinding the Blue Line, however, was more complicated than simply issuing a press release. The Denver Water Board had pegged the Blue Line's duration to the completion of the Blue River project, and the commissioners wanted to be absolutely certain that its reserves would last until then. If they were to scrap the Blue Line, how much water would be required to meet the additional demand, and where (and to whom) would that water go? Should the Water Board draw a new, more inclusive Blue Line,

¹⁶⁰ Charles Fisk, "For the Information of the Board: Utilization of Denver's Water Resources," August 12, 1957, 1, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 15, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

wondered Thomas Campbell in a letter to fellow water commissioner August Gumlick.¹⁶²

The existing one made it difficult to know, because most of the suburban areas that might otherwise have applied for water service had stopped bothering several years ago.

Nevertheless, in January of 1959, the executive staff of the Denver Water Board (Saunders, Fisk, Millar, Mosley, and other high-ranking water officials) advised the commissioners to immediately accept applications from all prospective water users, and to start granting service case-by-case, based on the availability of raw water and distribution facilities, economic feasibility, and planning considerations.¹⁶³ Do *not* re-impose a new Blue Line, the staff memo warned the commissioners sternly. “No matter how cleverly [such a] line may be placed this year, next year’s examination will indicate the necessity for modifying that line.” Any such boundary on the Denver area, moreover, could potentially endanger the city’s hard won water rights on the Western Slope.¹⁶⁴

Besides, if the Board employed the proper criteria and standards, no Blue Lines would be necessary. Metropolitan “growth” would become “something that occurs on a continuing and expanding basis as necessity constantly improves judgment.”¹⁶⁵ In the spring of 1959, the Board submitted to voters a proposed amendment to its charter that

¹⁶² Thomas P. Campbell to August P. Gumlick, January 22, 1959, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 21, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁶³ The Denver Water Board Executive Staff to The Board of Water Commissioners, “The Values at Stake in the Correct Resolution of Issues Presented by the Lawsuit Against the City of Aurora and the Acquisition of Certain Water Rights in the South Platte River by the Tri-City Trust,” Memorandum, January 23, 1959, 12, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 22, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁶⁴ This was due, of course, to the “use it or lose it” nature of Colorado water law.

¹⁶⁵ The Denver Water Board Executive Staff to The Board of Water Commissioners, “The Values at Stake in the Correct Resolution of Issues Presented by the Lawsuit Against the City of Aurora and the Acquisition of Certain Water Rights in the South Platte River by the Tri-City Trust,” 16.

would, among other changes, allow it to sell water outside city limits on a permanent basis, rather than year-by-year contracts, as its original Charter required. Voters approved the measure in May of 1959.¹⁶⁶

Before dissolving the Blue Line, however, there was also the matter of the alliance with the Denver Planning Board. On August 12, 1959, the Denver Water Board met with Denver planning officials to hammer out the details of a post-Blue Line water planning policy. The two agencies agreed that they shared the objective of promoting Denver's economic and social development, and that the Blue Line should have no successor. But if the Denver Planning Office had entertained hopes that their influence over water service would persist in the post-Blue Line era (or that it had ever been real to begin with), its meeting with the Water Board thoroughly dashed those hopes. The final condition of the revised alliance read: "Every final decision as to whether or not water is to be supplied in any particular place or for any particular purpose remains in the sound discretion of the Board of Water Commissioners for uses outside the City and County of Denver." Although the agreement allowed that the Board would be "strongly inclined to accept the advice of the appropriate planning authorities," it left no doubt that water officials—not planners—would be the true arbiters of Denver's metropolitan water policy.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Denver Board of Water Commissioners, *History of Development of the Raw Water and Attendant Treatment Facilities of the City of Denver*, 16–17.

¹⁶⁷ "Conference - Denver Planning Board and Board of Water Commissioners" (Denver, CO, August 12, 1959), 2–3, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 26, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

The Denver Water Board officially ended the Blue Line on January 3, 1960.¹⁶⁸

With its demise, the Denver Water Board entered a new phase of its post-war evolution, during which it would focus more on effective distribution of its resources and expansion of its operations than on limiting demand. The Board had endured the most trying decade and a half in its history—an era that had forced the comprehensive restructuring of most other urban water systems in the American West. Elsewhere, municipal water service had largely given way to metropolitan and regional cooperation, and the federal government was now ascendant as a raw water supplier. The Denver Water Board had also sustained some damage from the combined population growth and drought of the early post-war years. Its suburban service area had become a patchwork of special districts, and its conservation policies had fostered a deep antagonism toward the core city amongst Denver’s growing suburbs that would not soon subside. Still, the Blue Line had accomplished its primary task. As one decade faded into another, the Denver Water Board was autonomous, well supplied, and more powerful than ever.

VII. The Twilight of Conservation and the Dawn of Conservationism

In December 1960, a young Boulder conservationist named George H. Weber wrote to the manager of the Denver Water Board, Robert S. Millar, explaining the reasoning behind the passage of a “Blue Line” around the city of Boulder, passed by voters that July, beyond which the city of Boulder was prohibited from supplying municipal water. Unlike Denver’s Blue Line, which had recently been abandoned, the purpose of Boulder’s Blue Line was to “preserve and protect” Boulder’s foothills from “imminent

¹⁶⁸ “Release for January 3, 1960,” Press Release (Denver, January 3, 1960), Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 34, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

development,” and to create an undeveloped ring of land around Boulder proper.¹⁶⁹

Weber was concerned that the Denver Water Board might elect to supply water to a federal government lab located outside Boulder’s Blue Line. Many Boulderites, he wrote, hoped that Denver would “stay out of this” until the city had voted again on whether to make an exception to their city’s Blue Line for the laboratory. As the tone of the letter made clear, however, the government laboratory was incidental to Weber’s real demand: that the Denver Water Board not extend service to areas immediately beyond Boulder’s Blue Line.

An annoyed assistant engineer for the Denver Water Board named P.K. Bryant responded to Weber and other concerned Boulderites that the Denver Water Board had not received an application for water service from the laboratory, and had not given the matter any consideration. However, Bryant wrote pointedly, Boulder lay within Denver’s “ever-expanding geographical area of cooperation.”¹⁷⁰ The subtext of Bryant’s response was also clear: the Board did not consider itself at all constrained from extending service toward Boulder, if it so chose.

The unusual exchange demonstrated the intellectual gulf that separated Denver’s Blue Line of 1951 from Boulder’s Blue Line of 1959. Denver’s had served its purpose, and made it possible for the Denver Water Board to fuel the growth of metropolitan Denver. Boulder’s Blue Line, on the other hand, was a permanent measure, designed to

¹⁶⁹ George H. Weber to Robert S. Millar, December 15, 1960, 37–1, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

¹⁷⁰ P.K. Bryant to Mrs. Florence Sibert, January 10, 1961, 38, Blue Line Correspondence, 4-10-1952 Thru 3-24-1961, File 205.018, Box 43714, doc. 39, Central Records, Denver Water Department.

assure the perpetuation of existing open space. Conservation was on course for a bruising collision with conservationism.

Chapter 7: The “Quality of Life” Consensus: Amenity and Reform in Middle Class Denver

Make no little plans; they have no
magic to stir men’s blood and probably
themselves will not be realized.
Aim high in hope and work, remembering
that a noble, logical diagram once
recorded will never die...

—*Daniel Burnham, American architect, (1846-1912)*

I. Factions of Immigrants

September 25, 1964 - It was an early fall morning in the Colorado Rockies. Dawning crisp and blue, the day looked like it might become the season’s crown jewel. Against a backdrop of sharp angles and color, a lone car climbed its careful way up the foothill canyons of Highway 285 just west of Denver. To either side, stands of turning aspen splashed the steep mountainsides in crimson and gold. From their moving vantage point, the car’s two occupants savored nature’s extravagant display. Outwardly devoid of human presence or artifice, the gold-flecked and cragged landscape seemed like some portal into the past, and the wild and unpeopled West of myth and imagination. Both Edward Hilliard, Jr. and his passenger, Roger Hansen, had settled in Colorado to lay their own modest claims to this timeless beauty. Both derived solace in the way it displaced, even if only momentarily, the burdens and cares of their city lives. If they could have seen themselves as from a distance, however, the sight of their car gliding quickly and smoothly across the face of this once-forbidding terrain on an unbroken ribbon of highway, suggested a more protean and volatile reality. Human hands were reshaping

this land every bit as surely as the Pleistocene glaciers once had, and reshaping their own conceptions of what “wilderness” actually meant along with it.¹

Hilliard and Hansen were on their way to the historic mining town of Breckenridge, and the first annual Open Space Conference of the Colorado Mountain Club. The CMC, of which both were members, had been founded as a Denver analogue to San Francisco’s Sierra Club in 1912, and was one of the oldest mountain sports organizations in the country.² The club had a strong social component, and its hikes, climbs, and social activities gave newcomers to Denver ready access to a large and heterogeneous community of outdoor enthusiasts. This was, in fact, precisely how Ed Hilliard had first come to know Roger Hansen. Popular within the CMC community, Hilliard was known as a dedicated conservationist, capable outdoorsman, and successful businessman (he owned and managed a thriving Denver gun sight manufacturer). Hilliard had taken an instant liking to the intense and articulate Hansen after meeting the younger Illinois native on a CMC-sponsored hike earlier that summer. Hansen, meanwhile, quickly came to admire Hilliard’s reverence for nature and his unassuming charisma. Once sealed, their friendship assumed a comfortable dynamic of mentor and protégé, with conservationism at its center.

¹ In his prologue to *Wilderness and the American Mind*, historian Roderick Nash examines the etymology of the word from its roots in the Teutonic and Norse tongues of medieval Europe, and argues that the term describes not only areas of undeveloped and unpopulated land, but places that eroded the civilizing influences of those who entered it. More recent monographs, including David Stradling’s work on the Catskills, have relied on the definition of wilderness as it appears in the 1964 Wilderness Act, in which the term describes “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 1–7; Stradling, *Making Mountains*, 110.

² For more on the rich history of the Colorado Mountain Club, see Hugh E. Kingery and Elinor Eppich Kingery, *The Colorado Mountain Club: The First Seventy-five Years of a Highly Individual Corporation, 1912-1987* (Evergreen, CO: Cordillera Press, 1988).

For Hilliard, Hansen, and other like-minded participants, the CMC's Open Space Conference would offer the first chance for a group debriefing after one of the most important events in the history of American conservationism. Just a month before, President Lyndon B. Johnson had signed the Wilderness Act into law, creating a new statutory mechanism for preserving certain areas of federal land in their "wild" state.³ Johnson's signature culminated an eight-year crusade, led by the Wilderness Society and its executive secretary, Howard Zahniser, to expand the federal land holdings that would receive legal protection from all forms of human development.⁴ Both politically and legally, the Act's passage signaled an important shift in American conservationism. The new law, which categorized land left in its native state as a positive use, gave conservationists a powerful tool for claiming and protecting new areas for preservation. The Act had political effects as well, allowing conservationists to press for specific policy goals, rather than just reacting to the incursions of industry and government on previously protected public land (typified by the fight over Echo Park Dam in the 1950s). Along with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* two years earlier, the Wilderness

³ The Wilderness Act was not the first instance of federal wildlands protection. The Department of Agriculture had selected areas of national forest land as primitive areas beginning in 1924. But this was an administrative, rather than a legal designation. Indeed, much of the fight over the passage of the Wilderness Act concerned which of these "primitive areas" would be included within the language of the Wilderness Act. See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*.

⁴ Zahniser was involved in nearly every aspect of the Wilderness Bill's laborious passage. From drafting the bill's language over its many iterations, to shuttling between Washington and the Western states for hearing after hearing, Zahniser set a new standard for legislative citizen-action. For more on Zahniser and the Wilderness Society's involvement in the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, see Michael Frome, *Battle for the Wilderness* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1974); Mark W. T Harvey, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005); Dyan Zaslowsky, *These American Lands: Parks, Wilderness, and the Public Lands*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994).

Act heralded the arrival of a sophisticated new generation of conservationists; the so-called “second wave” of American environmentalism.⁵

At forty-two, Ed Hilliard had become an acknowledged thinker and leader in the newly resurgent national conservation movement. His life’s trajectory, and his status within conservationism, was very much a function of his adopted identity as a Westerner. Born in 1922, Hilliard was the scion of one of the wealthiest families in Louisville, Kentucky. Quiet and studious in his youth, it was assumed that Hilliard would one day inherit the prestigious brokerage firm founded by his grandfather. But a boyhood summer spent at a youth camp in Montana made a lasting impression on the young man, and ultimately altered the course of his life. Initially, however, Hilliard continued on the path laid out for him, attending Yale and receiving his commission as an infantry officer in 1943. Hilliard fought in the European theater until Germany’s surrender in 1945, after which he reenrolled at Yale for a graduate degree in economics. He finally returned to Louisville in 1947 to join the family business. But though he tried to settle into his new life in Louisville, Hilliard was restless, and childhood memories of Montana kindled in him an overpowering desire to head west. Leaving both Kentucky and his family’s expectations behind him, Hilliard moved to Denver in 1949, seeing it as a neat compromise between rural idyll and growing center of industry.⁶

He wasted little time making a name for himself in his new city. In short order, he bought a controlling stake in Denver’s Redfield Gun Sight Company, and threw

⁵ For more on the periodization of the history of American environmentalism, see Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003).

⁶ “Edward H. Hilliard, Jr. 1922-1970 (obituary)”, undated, Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 4, Box 3, FF34, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

himself into conservation work.⁷ Shortly after joining the wilderness movement in the mid-1950s, his dedication, quiet charisma, and personal connections in Washington brought him to the notice of Howard Zahniser. Recognizing his value, Zahniser gave Hilliard the reins of the Wilderness Society's Colorado chapter in 1961. Hilliard began organizing a grassroots wilderness campaign across the state. Together with friend and associate Hugh Kingery, he arranged public hearings on the proposed federal legislation, established a communications shop to organize mass mailings and press releases, and criss-crossed the state for meetings with local political and industry leaders. Hilliard also lobbied Colorado's congressmen on the bill's behalf—a crucial task given the prominence of Colorado's congressional delegation on the committees most directly concerned with the bill.⁸ In 1962, Hilliard testified before a joint committee of Congress alongside conservation leaders like Zahniser, Olaus Murie, and David Brower.⁹

⁷ Edward Hilliard Jr., "Resume" (Denver, CO, 1962), CONS 119, Series 4, Box 3, FF35, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁸ In both the House and the Senate, the wilderness bill fell under the purview of the Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs, over which Colorado's congressional delegation collectively exerted considerable influence. Wayne Aspinall, an entrenched and powerful representative from Colorado's Western Slope, chaired the House Interior Committee. Rep. Aspinall's position gave him wide latitude to shape committee legislation, and to determine which committee bills would come to the House floor. In the other chamber, Colorado Senator Gordon Allott served on the Senate Interior Committee. If Aspinall was unenthusiastic about the notion of a wilderness bill, Allott was openly hostile, believing it to contravene the accepted "multiple use" standard for federal land. The Senator became one of the measure's leading public critics, and maneuvered behind the scenes to derail or dilute the bill in committee. As the Colorado's Wilderness Committee chairman, Hilliard shouldered the unenviable task of lobbying both men personally. He seemed to give up on Allott, likely considering him a lost cause, and focused his efforts on Aspinall, whom he believed more likely to support a wilderness bill in some form. But the prickly Congressman proved less than entirely accommodating. After one meeting with Aspinall in April of 1962, Hilliard reported to Zahniser that the Congressman's "general tone was cool," and that he in fact "seemed rather irritable, and not inclined to get deeply into conversation... He ended," Hilliard reported, "by saying a Wilderness Bill will go to the floor, but it would be my personal

Yet wilderness was only one facet of Hilliard's conservationism. He was an avid hunter, and after noticing the increasing tension between sportsmen and landowners during the 1950s over issues of access and property rights, he organized "Operation Respect" to broker a peace between the two sides. He founded and led the Conservation Council of Colorado, which attempted to unify the state's disparate conservation organizations behind common objectives. He sat on the directory of the Citizens Committee on Natural Resources, an influential organization based in Washington, D.C. His strong belief in the importance of outdoor education for young people led him to co-found and trustee the nation's first Outward Bound program in Marble, Colorado. On top of this, he found the time to become an accomplished climber and outdoorsman, a husband and father of two.¹⁰ Fifteen fruitful years had passed since Hilliard had first arrived in Denver, and they stood in eloquent testimony to a decision well made.

It had not been Ed Hilliard's design to become an acknowledged leader of a nascent movement. But the untimely deaths of the two most recognizable champions of

interpretation it will be heavily watered down if he can prevail, and that he wouldn't be opposed to seeing it get involved in the last minute rush and thus crowded out." Edward Hilliard, "Ed Hilliard Conversation with Representatives Aspinall and Dominick: Typed Memo" (Denver, CO, April 13, 1962), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 3, Box 2, FF85, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library; Edward Hilliard, Jr., "List of Witnesses and Handwritten Speech Notes" (Denver, CO, February 27, 1961), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 3, Box 2, FF77, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁹ According to his notes, Hilliard asserted before a joint conference committee that preservation of wilderness was vital to the "national interest," and that the argument that wilderness preservation would harm local economies was no more valid than it had been when used against the creation of national parks fifty years earlier. Edward Hilliard, "Handwritten Testimony Speaking Notes" (Washington D. C., February 27, 1961), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 4, Box 3, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹⁰ "E.H. Hilliard Profile for Redfield Gun Sight Co." (Denver, CO, June 7, 1965), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 3, Box 2, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

the Wilderness Bill, Howard Zahniser and Olaus Murie, left a gaping hole in the movement's vanguard.¹¹ Thus, despite being only in his early forties, in the immediate wake of the Wilderness Act, Hilliard found himself thrust into a role similar to that once filled by Zahniser. Hilliard knew he could never truly fill his mentor's shoes. "Zahnie" had been the heart and soul of the national wilderness movement, and had given his life completely to the cause in a way that Hilliard, for all his dedication, knew he never could. Moreover, he prized his relative anonymity, and had no desire to emulate such highly visible leaders as David Brower of the Sierra Club. He much preferred to lead quietly, working in the background and within a democratic and egalitarian organizational structure.

Yet in a way, Hilliard's rise within the conservation apparatus seemed provident. He had a way of effortlessly drawing others to him, uplifting them by his reverence for humanity and the natural world, and inspiring them through his energy, generosity, and focused determination. He attracted dynamic, serious, and competent people, and set a high standard of disinterested dedication to cause over personal advancement. He was, in short, the perfect foundation upon which to build a new type of conservation movement.

His association with Roger Hansen was a good example of this dynamic. The two men had met only a few months earlier on a Colorado Mountain Club-sponsored group hike, and even though Hansen was considerably younger, the two men had bonded easily over their shared affinities and ideals. They quickly discovered other commonalities.

¹¹ Neither Zahniser nor Murie lived to see the passage of the legislation to which they had devoted the last few years of their lives. Zahniser's death, at a relatively young age and only three months short of the bill's passage, lent a particularly bittersweet aspect to the legislative victory. "Wilderness Apostle," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO, May 7, 1964).

Like Hilliard, Hansen had come to Denver by choice, lured by the promise of a mountain lifestyle. Hansen had also been a political organizer, working in public relations for various chambers of commerce before getting a law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.¹² Most importantly, however, Hilliard and Hansen shared a commitment to the ideals and aims of conservationism. Hansen was somewhat newer to organized activism than Hilliard. The older man, having spent years ruminating on the meaning, objectives, and tactics of conservationism, was able to articulate and clarify Hansen's own evolving thoughts on the matter. Both men believed that caring for the land was a fundamentally spiritual responsibility, although Hansen's motivations were more explicitly religious.¹³

Even more remarkably, they both concurred on a question that had divided conservationists since the 19th century: could there be any compromise with traditional nemeses like timber, mining, and water developers? For many on the conservationist side, the very idea was tantamount to heresy, but for both Hilliard and Hansen, the answer was an emphatic yes. In Hilliard's estimation, this reflexive distrust of industry and government had all but crippled the conservationist cause in Colorado. Its champions were accustomed to advocating on the Muirian grounds of morality and aesthetics, but these were intrinsic values that offered no basis for negotiation. A pressure group that could not countenance—let alone actually reach—a middle ground

¹² Estella B. Leopold, interview by Eric T. Busch, at the home of John Wright, Denver, CO, October 26, 2007.

¹³ "I grew up believing that the universe was created by God," he explained to interviewer David McComb in 1975. "I grew up believing that Man had a responsibility to be a steward of the earth. I believe that I had a spiritual or moral obligation to provide stewardship when I had the opportunity." Roger P. Hansen, "Oral History of Colorado Project," interview by David McComb, Transcript, March 5, 1975, 24, Personal Papers of Roger P. Hansen.

with its adversaries had already marginalized itself.¹⁴ Only an ecumenical and inclusive conservationism could contend against the powerful interests ranged against it. Hilliard believed as well that conservationists needed to find a new basis for negotiation—one with an explicitly economic component—in order to extract any enduring concessions from industry and government. The most likely candidate was outdoor recreation (and to a lesser extent, tourism), which was becoming one of the fastest-growing industries in the post-war West.¹⁵

The other chronic impediment to an effective conservation movement in Colorado came in the form of the state's existing conservation organizations themselves. From the Izaak Walton League to the Federation of Garden Clubs, each group had claimed a narrow slice of a larger cause, which they pursued in varying degrees of jealous isolation. The balkanized and dysfunctional structure of conservationism in Colorado may have kept membership rolls and coffers filled, but it failed utterly at achieving meaningful progress on issues that concerned individual conservationists. His work on the wilderness campaign had shown Hilliard the untapped depths of conservationist

¹⁴ By 1964, Hilliard had already been trying to bridge the divide between conservation and industry for several years. Margaret Murie, who along with husband Olaus, had been instrumental in passing the 1964 Wilderness Act, never forgot her first meeting with Hilliard. "He came to the VA Hospital here in Denver in 1959 when my husband, Olaus Murie, had some surgery," Murie recollected many years later. "I remember Ed sitting on the floor with his back against the wall, because there was only one chair in the room, earnestly discussing with Olaus a theory he had of the possibility of business and conservation being friends and partners. He felt that businessmen should see the ultimate benefits of good stewardship of resources, to their business, their lives, their happiness." Her husband, however, seemed unconvinced. "I should like to think there are industrialists who see this far ahead," Margaret Murie remembered him replying. "So far, it always seems we are in opposing camps—they have the money and the power and the influence and want no interference. We have only our ideas and our belief and our stubbornness." Dick Prouty, "Memorial Award Recipient Praises Late Conservationist," *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, February 18, 1974).

¹⁵ Rothman, *Devil's Bargains*.

sentiment in the state. If its leading organizations would consent to sacrifice a small measure of organizational sovereignty in order to cooperate with one another, he had no doubt that Colorado would produce one of the country's most powerful and effective regional movements.

Hilliard also had a very good idea of how difficult it would be. His previous efforts to unite the state's disparate conservation organizations, including the Conservation Council of Colorado and the "Outdoor Roundtable," had failed to generate the enthusiasm that would be required to unite the state's largest outdoor groups.¹⁶ With 36% of the state's total area under federal ownership, the seeming inexhaustibility of Colorado's open space precluded the sense of exigency that usually drove successful conservation efforts. But the Wilderness Act had created a singular, and likely short-lived, moment of opportunity. Fervor and excitement about conservation were running high across the state. Heightened interest in outdoor recreation, particularly in urban areas like Denver, was beginning to visibly change local and regional priorities in land use, setting water and mining powers back on their heels.

In the weeks immediately following the Act's passage, Hilliard had spoken with friends in Denver's conservation community about giving it another try. Those already onboard included Dr. Estella Leopold, a research botanist at the U.S. Geological Survey,

¹⁶ In addition to his efforts to unite conservationists under the banner of the Colorado Conservation Council, Hilliard helped form the "Outdoor Roundtable," a monthly meeting that included representatives from the Federation of Women's Clubs, the Colorado Federation of Garden Clubs, the Metropolitan [Denver] Wildlife Federation, the Denver Field Ornithologists, the Conservation Council of Colorado, the Wilderness Committee, and the Colorado Mountain Club. Such an informal platform lacked the requisite structure and funding to provide a framework for larger, inter-organizational collaborations. "Colorado Conservation Comments," Unpublished newsletter (Denver, CO, ca 1961), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 4, Box 3, FF??, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

and the daughter of prominent conservationist and writer Aldo Leopold, along with Estelle Brown, who chaired the 1964 Open Space Conference for the Colorado Mountain Club.¹⁷ The upcoming conference presented the perfect opportunity to get the ball rolling. Hilliard had satisfied himself that the right person to lead the new effort was sitting next to him. Yes, he decided, it was time to try again. As they approached Breckenridge, Hilliard turned to Roger Hansen. “How would you like to start a new statewide conservation organization at the conference?” he asked his stunned passenger.¹⁸

II. “I Am Man:” George Wallace, the Denver Tech Center, and the Birth of Office Park Culture

Asked about it years later, engineer and real estate developer George Wallace traced the genesis of his Denver Technological Center to an ordinary workday in 1958. He had gotten into his new car that morning, resigned to another punishing commute to his small engineering firm downtown. After the usual hunt for a narrow parking spot and a long day of work, he had returned to his car that evening to find a deep scratch along its side. After subduing his volcanic temper, Wallace began considering the city’s problems in a new light. Every morning, more commuters clogged the streets, cramming themselves into the same handful of central city blocks, in order to perform work that could presumably be done anywhere. There were not enough houses, there was too much air pollution, slums and blight were on the rise, and now it seemed, a man could not even park his car downtown without worrying what might happen to it while he was gone. To Wallace, all of these piecemeal inconveniences took a hefty collective toll on Denver’s

¹⁷ Roger P. Hansen, interview by Eric T. Busch, at the home of Roger Hansen, Aurora, CO, July 11, 2007; Estella B. Leopold, “Curriculum Vitae” (Seattle, WA, September 2005).

¹⁸ Hansen, interview, 8.

quality of life, and it certainly did nothing to improve worker productivity.¹⁹ Worse, it reminded him of Cleveland, the city he and his wife had left for Denver in the early 1950s. Middle class workers themselves seemed to know better, as they were leaving the core city for the suburbs in record numbers.²⁰ Why then should their employers—businessmen like himself—remain slavishly devoted to the prestige of the “downtown office?” Was there a way to build and market a viable alternative to Denver’s downtown?

Long on both risks and rewards, it was the kind of “big idea” that appealed irresistibly to George Wallace’s sense of professional vanity. If it could be done, he reasoned, then he could find the way. He found his site in 1961: forty acres of farmland along a stretch of Interstate 25 south of Denver. Wiping out his family’s savings and mortgaging himself to the hilt, Wallace began construction on the headquarters for his office park’s first tenant: G.M Wallace & Associates.²¹ With the aspirational name of the Denver Technological Center, Wallace began soliciting tenants among the area’s engineering and technology firms.²²

¹⁹ Jim Kirksey, “Tech Center Visionary Wallace Dies,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, June 24, 1996), 1B.

²⁰ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 251.

²¹ Wallace did not easily forgive his detractors. “I take great pleasure in rubbing the DTC’s success in some developers’ faces and they hate me for it,” he told one reporter in 1974. “George Wallace, Denver’s Terrible-Tempered Tycoon,” *Empire Magazine (The Denver Post)* (Denver, CO, January 20, 1974).

²² There is some indeterminacy about whether Wallace had always intended to develop his land into an office park. In his book *Twentieth Century Sprawl*, historian Owen Gutfreund quotes Wallace as saying that he initially “didn’t know what to do with all that land.” But in other interviews, Wallace indicated that he had always planned to build the area into an office complex. “All of a sudden I found myself in the land development business,” he told one journalist in 1974, “with 40 acres, a mortgage and an idea.” *Ibid.*, 11–13; Gutfreund, *20th Century Sprawl*, 97–98.

Although Wallace was never one to underplay his own iconoclasm as a businessman, certainly nobody could question the audacity of the DTC when it began in 1961. Granted, Wallace's bemused critics assured each other, Denver *was* expanding very quickly. But the upstart developer's supposed rival to Denver's downtown was, after all, just an empty field in unincorporated Arapaho County. It had no water or sewer services, and while it was next to a major interstate, there were no nearby exits. With no tax base, weak local governance, and little surrounding infrastructure, even Wallace's allies initially found it difficult to fully share his vision.²³

Moreover, no one in America had done what Wallace was proposing. As its moniker suggested, Wallace intended the Denver Technological Center to become a research park, catering exclusively to leading technology firms. The only comparable developments anywhere in the country at the time were the technology-based industrial parks near Stanford and MIT, which had developed out of academic and industrial research collaborations and with the help of many millions of federal dollars. In fact, at a 1963 industrial conference held at the famed Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs on Colorado's techno-industrial future, Stanford provost Frederick Terman declared that the success of the Stanford Industrial Park owed itself to Stanford's pre-existing "community of technical scholars," who drove innovation, attracted federal funding, and collaborated with private industry. Without such close and well-tended ties to an established, top-tier research institution, Terman assured his listeners, the highest that any industrial park developer could realistically aim for was a "high-grade factory town, not a successful

²³ "George Wallace, Denver's Terrible-Tempered Tycoon," 13.

center of growth industry.”²⁴ The “father of Silicon Valley” preferred to think of his Stanford Industrial Park as triumph of intellect, rather than one of commerce.²⁵

The purpose of Terman’s speech had been to urge state and local policymakers to value universities as engines of economic growth, and to fund them properly. Sitting in the audience, however, George Wallace might have been forgiven for thinking that the address was actually a message of discouragement directed exclusively at him. The DTC was exactly the kind of commercial real estate venture of which Terman was so dismissive. Despite Wallace’s great expectations, neither he nor anyone else involved with the project had any institutional ties to nearby universities (none of which compared to Stanford as research institutions anyway). Yet to all appearances, he seemed entirely unruffled by what he heard. By 1963, Wallace had grown quite accustomed to tuning out his critics and naysayers—even inadvertent ones like Terman. And even though the opinions of the “father of Silicon Valley” carried more weight than most, it is not hard to imagine how a flinty pragmatist like Wallace might have discounted them. Whether or not Terman recognized or acknowledged it, Wallace may have reasoned, real estate economics had been crucial in the creation of the so-called Silicon Valley. He might have dismissed the notion that a “community of scholars” could generate the explosive mid-century development of the Bay Area as so much self-congratulatory academic backslapping. Regardless, the irascible developer was less inclined to credit the Stanford

²⁴ Frederick Terman, *Colorado and the New Technological Revolution: Proceedings of the University-Industry Liaison Conference, 1963*, Conference Proceedings (Denver, CO: Denver Research Institute, 1963).

²⁵ John M Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Michael Ian Luger and Harvey A. Goldstein, *Technology in the Garden: Research Parks and Regional Economic Development* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Industrial Park's dazzling success to Terman's academic/industrial alchemy than to simply being in the right place at the right time.

George Wallace was confident that the DTC was similarly well positioned. But that, by itself, would not be enough. For most premiere businesses and corporations, prestige was also an important element of the locational calculus. There again, Denver's established downtown business district enjoyed an immense advantage. Rather than trying to compete with downtown on its own terms, Wallace employed a clever, asymmetrical marketing tactic, crafting a kind of humanist mythology around his development. The DTC existed, he told prospective tenants, to encourage and exalt human inventiveness, and to bring "man" into harmony with "his environment."²⁶ The DTC's emblem continued the theme, evoking comparison with Galileo's iconic Vitruvian Man. Wallace even wrote a poem titled *I—AM MAN* to express the people-centered vision of creativity and freedom behind his development.²⁷ "These, then, are man's noblest objectives," Wallace added in the poem's postscript, which soon became the DTC's unofficial slogan. "And it is these objectives which [sic] provide the goals to

²⁶ George M. Wallace, "I—AM MAN" (Denver, CO, n.d.), George M. Wallace Papers, OVfol19, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

²⁷ Strictly a one-off (Wallace was no poet), "I—AM MAN" abjured the conventions of meter, rhyme and punctuation, and mixed metaphors with a strangely endearing aplomb. But in connecting such themes as creativity, destiny, freedom and the human environment, it aptly summarized the writer's moral philosophy as a businessman and developer. "How can I achieve? How can I be complete?" Wallace asks rhetorically in one representative set of verses.

"By being free!

Free to let my mind soar as my soul soars.
Free to dream, to love, to think, to question,
To create. To unleash the fires of inspiration
Within myself, and to gain inspiration from my
Environment and my association with my
Fellow man...only then will I truly live.
I—AM MAN." Ibid.

which the DTC aspires...[ellipsis in original] to offer a “complete” environment for the “complete” man. An environment and an atmosphere wherein creative achievement and productive effort may prosper. An environment, and an atmosphere, where man can be free.”²⁸ To lease office space from Wallace was to share his vision of freedom, increased productivity, and ultimately, profit.

In practice, Wallace’s intellectualized conception of “freedom” often blurred into the realms of aesthetics and convenience. In the planning of their structures, DTC’s corporate tenants would be required to “conceal their workers’ cars in covered parking, keep air conditioning equipment off rooftops, maintain no building facades and keep at least 30 percent of their sites green.”²⁹ Parking spaces would be wide enough to easily accommodate the enormously proportioned cars of the era, and the landscaping would be stylized, calm, and restful. And of course, the Rocky Mountains themselves would help to make the sale. “First, picture a typical downtown businessman,” one enthusiastic trade article on the DTC suggested some years later. “He is hassled by traffic, pushed and shoved on the street and dwarfed by huge impersonal buildings. Think next of an entrepreneur in a comfortable business park office suite, making important decisions while soaking in the grandeur of the front range outside his picture window. If that doesn’t move you, then maybe the prospect of free parking, recreational outlets (golf, tennis, jogging) and nearby reasonably priced restaurants will.”³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Alan Snel, “Green Space, High-Tech Mix Once Seemed Science Fiction,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, June 1996), 7C.

³⁰ Untitled article clipping, *Colorado Business Magazine*, July 1980, George M. Wallace Papers, OVfol16, Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

Yet Wallace's unshakeable confidence in the DTC had less to do with marketing, convenience, government, or affordable dining than with the generalized westward drift of both labor and capital after World War II. People were finding their way to Denver, and where workers went, employers would most assuredly follow. Wallace knew that he had placed the DTC—physically, economically and culturally—directly in the path of an advancing American megatrend. His square footage was cheaper because his land was cheaper and his taxes were lower. He would beat downtown Denver on price while rewriting existing standards for the ideal white-collar workplace environment. Denver was intrinsically attractive to many of America's next generation of itinerant and well-educated wage earners. With the DTC, George Wallace would offer them up to high tech employers on a silver platter.

George Wallace brought a new kind of city planning to Denver, which would profoundly alter the city's physical layout, as well as its demographic makeup and culture. It was a "new town," born of reformist impulses—a mechanical engineer's urban idyll. Through smart urban design, it would privilege personal space, convenience, and mobility, while cutting down on air pollution. Workers, relieved of the stress of commuting, would become more productive, and corporate tenants would become more profitable. It would allow Denver to continue to grow without sacrificing Wallace's "quality of life" priorities. But just as Wallace's early critics were unable to see what he saw on the lonely stretch of farmland along I-25, Wallace himself was blind to the ways in which his development might actually compound the problems it was supposed to solve. From Wallace's 1960s vantage point, there was no reason to think that his plans for the Tech Center might not be compatible with comprehensive planning and urban

design. As far as he was concerned, the Tech Center *was* a comprehensive plan: a deliberate “edge city” as a potential panacea.³¹

After a couple of lean early years, the DTC suddenly became a smashing success. By 1965, it boasted such blue chip tenants as Eastman Kodak, Hewlett Packard, and Ball Aerospace. In the 1970s, the DTC would do for the cable industry what Silicon Valley had done for computing, conclusively disproving Frederick Terman’s 1963 prediction that a non-university affiliated office park could never incubate and develop new industries.³² But it hardly took that long for Wallace to say, with justification, that he had been right all along. Denver had been an undetonated cask of commercial and development dynamite in the early 1960s, and he had lit the fuse. By the end of the 1960s, the modern office buildings of the DTC would be well on their way to lining Denver’s southern interstate corridor like pearls on a strand. And Wallace would transform himself from a one-time urban reformer into one of the staunchest defenders of Denver’s new status quo.

III. The Clashing of (Sub)urban Ideals

Despite their considerable differences in temperament and outlook, Edward Hilliard and George Wallace shared much in common. Both were post-war immigrants to Denver, which by the early 1960s placed them in the largest and fastest growing cohort of the city’s population.³³ Neither had moved west for professional advancement, or

³¹ Journalist Joel Garreau popularized the term “edge city” in his 1992 book on the sprawling “edge nodes” on the fringes of large cities, particularly Reston, Virginia. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (New York, NY: Anchor, 1992).

³² Mark Robichaux, *Cable Cowboy: John Malone and the Rise of the Modern Cable Business*, 1st ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2002).

³³ Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 251.

even on the promise of a waiting job. They had instead been drawn west by the appeal of the landscape, and the lifestyle it seemed to offer. Each had come to Denver with his own preconceived and idealized notions of what the experience of Western living should be, and which human values were most intrinsic to the surrounding landscape. Where reality failed to measure up, both were prepared to remake it to conform to their own expectations. Both regarded themselves as self-made, and neither bore any allegiances to Denver's established power structure. Finally, as non-natives, they viewed the voluntary influx of out-of-state workers—not corporations and employers—as the primary shaping force of Denver's future, for good or ill.

And that was the point at which the similarities stopped. Wallace viewed the influx of people into Denver as a largely positive trend—not just for his bottom line, but also for the well being of the city and its residents. He began his career as an engineer in Cleveland before moving to Denver in 1955. For all of its problems, Denver's rapid growth was far more attractive to him than the Cleveland alternative of deindustrialization and urban decline.³⁴ Hilliard, by contrast, worried over the impact of urban growth on Denver's hinterland, and the diminution of open space, water, and other vital natural resources due to the region's increasing population. And while he personally valued the Colorado Rockies for moral and spiritual reasons, he felt that protecting them from indiscriminate industrial and infrastructural development required conservationists to learn to speak in the unfamiliar languages of commercialism and profit, and to redefine wilderness and open space within the context of industrialized recreation.

³⁴ Carol Poh Miller and Robert Anthony Wheeler, *Cleveland: A Concise History, 1796-1996* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 156–166.

In the early to mid-1960s, Ed Hilliard and George Wallace became leaders within two of the most powerful and distinct factions of “quality of life” reformism in Denver. Wallace’s was a technocratic style of reform, which approached the mountain hinterland as one of many compositional elements in a synoptically human-regulated landscape. Hilliard’s conservationist reformism was necessarily more nuanced and internally conflicted. Though a city dweller, he felt an abiding inner connection to the pristine pockets of wilderness that could still be found in the Colorado Rockies. In a departure from many of his compatriots, Hilliard wanted to cooperate with industries and government to see that these areas would be protected, preserved, and enjoyed—but not to the extent that they ceased to be wilderness. It was hard to make such a fine-grained argument to those who simply did not recognize the intrinsic value of undeveloped, open space. It was hard to contend with the counterargument that maintaining existing federal standards of “multiple use” of public land directly benefited more people than wilderness did.³⁵ It was impossible to accomplish anything when the state’s conservation groups were themselves in such disarray. But now that the Wilderness Act had passed, perhaps there was a large enough critical mass in the state to finally make the case for natural, open space as a single, mighty voice.

³⁵ Even the most seasoned conservationists often resorted to casuistry when trying to counter the logic of shared or multiple use. In a 1959 letter to the editor in *The Denver Post*, famed conservationist and writer Arthur Carhart responded to an earlier submission by David Wood of Montrose, CO arguing that the proposed wilderness bill favored the “special interests” of hikers and nature lovers over other prohibited forms of recreation, including “jeep racing.” Carhart facetiously encouraged Wood to join forces with bowling, dog racing and beauty pageant enthusiasts, whose hobbies the bill would also ban from federal wilderness areas. “By the way,” Carhart continued, “about the most exclusive “special interest” use of land we have is a golf course. Shouldn’t we, if following Mr. Wood’s reasoning, open our golf courses to staging rodeos, grazing horses, landing helicopters, tuning up jeeps and meetings of amateur rocket societies?” Arthur H. Carhart, “Romping in the Wildlands,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, May 20, 1959), 19.

If it were not yet obvious that Denver's technocrat and conservation reformers were on a collision course, it would be soon enough.

IV. Conservationism Triumphant: 1964-1972

In the fall of 1964, 175 people attended the first annual Colorado Mountain Club Open Space Conference, titled "What Kind of Colorado Do You Want?"³⁶ On one had, the evocative title spoke to the drastic changes taking place across the state through the post-war influx of people, capital, and industry. It also signaled an increased interest and willingness of conservationists to have their say in the state's growth process, and to shape it into the "kind" of state they envisioned. The conference organizers had invited speakers from across the country, and from various disciplines, to address what were seen as the key questions facing the state's conservationists. The conference had been thematically divided into four sessions—values, issues, action, and issue-specific workshops—which were scheduled for the mornings and afternoons of both days. Participants heard addresses from the governor's administrative assistant, national and regional conservation leaders, government bureaucrats, and local media figures. Topics ranged from zoning to billboard regulations, and wilderness inventories to effective communication through newspapers.³⁷

³⁶ *Conservation Conference at Breckenridge, Colorado--Summary*, Conference Summary (Breckenridge, CO: Colorado Mountain Club, September 26, 1964), Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 8, FF19, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

³⁷ Paul Husted, an assistant manager at *The Denver Post*, spoke at length about how conservation groups could ensure satisfactory coverage by the paper's news desk. He took great pains to assure his audience that the *Post's* news department was not "influenced" by its editorial and advertising departments—a tacit admission of the paper's generally negative stance toward conservationism. *Ibid.*

After being asked by Ed Hilliard to propose the establishment of a new umbrella conservation organization on the way to Breckenridge, Roger Hansen had shelved his intended presentation on land use planning and spent most of the next two nights drafting his pitch. The final product threaded the needle between cajolery and brutal honesty, reminding listeners of the benefits such an organization offered, as well as the consequences of letting this opportunity slip away. It also encapsulated much of Ed Hilliard's thinking about the future of conservationism in Colorado, emphasizing pragmatism over ideological purity, and suggesting immediate measures that conservationists could take that would produce tangible results.

After briefly introducing himself, Hansen gestured to indicate the surroundings.³⁸ "This great land and scenic resource bank," he began, "is the sleeping giant of Colorado's future."³⁹ If they truly wanted to preserve it, conservationists needed to adopt the language of economics—even if that language misrepresented their own understandings of wilderness and open space. Hansen continued,

Those of us here may be able to justify some sort of 'action' program on the basis of esthetics alone, or our physical and spiritual need, alone. We are Emersonians or Izaak Waltons or Audubons or followers of Muir and Thoreau. But this 'Ah, wilderness' attitude alone will NOT help develop a recreation-conservation program for Colorado. We must combine the idealistic with the practical if we are to create the kind of Colorado WE want.⁴⁰

³⁸ There is some uncertainty regarding the number of people who attended Hansen's talk. Although the conference proceedings seem to indicate that it was a plenary session bringing together most of the conferees, Estella Leopold, who was among those present to hear Hansen's proposal, recalled that there were perhaps ten people in the room, each selected by Ed Hilliard. Leopold, interview.

³⁹ Roger P. Hansen, "A Blueprint for Action--Now or Never, Breckenridge Conference, Colorado Mountain Club" (Breckenridge, CO, September 27, 1964), Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 8, FF19, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Squeamish as conservationists might feel about haggling over open space like a fungible commodity, the need for swift action demanded it.

There was no telling how much a more economically oriented approach to conservation might accomplish. Denver's post-war growth, Hansen pointed out, did not conform to the industrial-age model of urban expansion, in which industry dictated the general movement of labor. The dynamic had now reversed itself, and new industries, particularly in the information and technology sectors, were now locating in Denver because of the city's attraction to educated laborers. Tourism, moreover, was now the state's third largest industry by revenues, and it continued to gain on manufacturing and agriculture. These developments were powerful arguments for conservation of the state's wildlands and natural resources. "There is business in beauty, opportunity in open space, economic rewards in recreation [underlines in original]," Hansen reminded his audience.⁴¹

No one, he continued, could deny that conservationism in Colorado lagged behind that in other states. Elsewhere, conservationists had already convinced state governments to establish open space trust funds, and to undertake statewide planning initiatives. These things had not happened in Colorado, Hansen subtly reproached his audience, because conservationists—including those at the conference—were not sufficiently organized to *make* them happen. That could begin to change as early as today, he told them. He then proposed that interested conferees get started right away on establishing a statewide coordinating council. The new organization would advocate for the preservation of the state's scenic resources, coordinate the ideas, manpower, and resources of its members,

⁴¹ Ibid.

establish a concrete “action program” of research, planning and public outreach, and create working ties between conservationists and government. The time for talking was over, Hansen concluded. “We know the values and the issues. The time to act is now—or never.”⁴²

Hansen’s speech hit its mark, and approximately sixty excited conference participants set to work immediately. The afternoon session took on an unmistakable air of historical significance as participants began developing and voting on the rudiments of the new organization. They named the new organization the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council (COSCC), and drew up a detailed purpose statement.⁴³ COSCC was steered by a board of directors composed of delegates from member organizations. In a first for a Colorado conservation group, COSCC had a paid staff, which Ed Hilliard estimated would require an annual budget of roughly \$40,000. The staff served to facilitate the real work of the new organization, which was accomplished by sub-organizational, issue-specific taskforces called “workshops.” The COSCC workshops conducted research and develop COSCC’s positions on a variety of conservation matters.

To decide which conservation issues COSCC’s workshops would focus on, Ed Hilliard conducted a quick straw poll, asking those present to rank their conservation

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Testing the limits of how much a single sentence could convey, COSCC’s purpose statement reflected both the breadth of its ambitions, and the difficulties of satisfying its various constituencies. It read, “Purpose: To provide an effective and continuing coordinating structure in working for the conservation (preservation and wise use) and appreciation of scenic, historic, open space, wilderness and outdoor recreational resources, as related to the total environment, through a program of coordinated action for the cultural, educational, physical, health, spiritual and economic benefit of our citizens and visitors.” “Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc.” (Denver, CO, September 25, 1965), Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 8, FF19, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

priorities in order of importance. The results of the poll were revealing. “Education” easily topped all other concerns; followed consecutively by wilderness, air pollution, zoning and planning, billboard removal, water pollution, parks and wildlife.⁴⁴ As a last act before disbanding, they elected a steering committee to continue what had been started, consisting of Colorado Mountain Club president Dave Abbot, Estelle Brown, Estella Leopold, Ed Hilliard, and Roger Hansen.⁴⁵

The next six months were a blur of activity for the members of the steering committee. Estella Leopold was immediately tasked with researching the federal government’s proposed Frying Pan-Arkansas water diversion project, which diverted water from the westward flowing Colorado River basin into the eastward flowing Arkansas River. Knowing that COSCC would need money to establish itself, Ed Hilliard quietly staked the infant organization with \$10,000 of his own money, requesting only that the money be credited to an “anonymous donor.”⁴⁶ And as COSCC’s unofficial director, Roger Hansen found himself working nearly every spare minute of the day on organization business. He also assumed the task of motivator-in-chief, sending numerous letters to the chairmen of COSCC’s workshops inquiring about progress and encourage

⁴⁴ *Conservation Conference at Breckenridge, Colorado--Summary.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ In truth, there was likely little mystery as to the identity of the “anonymous donor.” Hilliard was central to COSCC’s founding, and one of the very few people capable of underwriting the new organization. Within a few years, all pretense to Hilliard’s anonymity as an “angel investor” had been dropped completely. Roger P. Hansen and Cal Larson, “Board of Directors’ Meeting, Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc.,” Meeting minutes (Boulder, CO, December 11, 1965), 3, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF1, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

more activity.⁴⁷ Some of the organizations invited to join the COSCC umbrella bridled at the prospect of sharing their revenue. In a letter to COSCC's interim president, David Abbott, dated January of 1966, A. Earl Bryson of the Springs Area Beautiful Association, which had been invited to become a participating member of COSCC, urged Abbott and COSCC to reconsider their financial expectations. Though he lauded COSCC's aims, Bryson wrote, "...[O]n the matter of financing... it appears to me that you are aiming pretty high when you talk about a budget of \$30-\$40,000. I don't see where such money is coming from, nor in fact do I quite see why it is necessary... To the extent that you attempt to do all the work yourselves, you, in effect, weaken the component organizations, who, seeing the job being done by others will ease off on their own efforts."⁴⁸

Though the foot-dragging of potential member groups had been predicted at the outset, the lack of responsiveness from the state's conservation groups still tried Hansen's patience. Bryson appeared to be of the opinion that COSCC was, at once, entirely necessary and completely unworkable—precisely the attitude that had doomed earlier attempts to organize the state's various groups. Sentiments like Bryson's irked COSCC's natively impatient young director, and in some instances, Hansen reacted accordingly. Hansen's supporters, which comprised the majority of those closest to the organizations, viewed his willingness to butt heads as a necessary quality. Hansen had, a contemporary

⁴⁷ Hansen struck a gently prodding tone in such letters. "It is the sincere hope," Hansen wrote to his Zoning Workshop chair Stanley Kerr, "that your Workshop will remain an active, vital force in the conservation movement. The challenges are great and, as always, the laborers are few." Roger P. Hansen to Stanley Kerr, March 30, 1965, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 3, FF13, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁴⁸ A. Earl Bryson to David Abbott, January 3, 1966, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 3, FF9, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

later recalled, “some of the feistiness of David Brower, which he had to in order to really do anything.”⁴⁹ His detractors, however, saw him as high-handed and intolerant of other viewpoints. The truth likely lay somewhere in between. Still, there was no gainsaying the weight of expectation that Hansen carried during COSCC’s first few months. Recognizing that the organization’s success or failure depended chiefly on him, Hansen spared no effort to give COSCC its strongest start.⁵⁰

Although most of its early members date the origins of COSCC to the Breckenridge Open Space Conference in 1964, it did not officially come into existence until April 6, 1965, when its provisional board of directors adopted a constitution and by-laws. At the same meeting, “Colorado” was removed from COSCC’s purpose statement to lend a regional dimension to its activities, and Roger Hansen formally became its first executive director, earning an annual salary of \$1500.⁵¹ Already, he was finding his job much more difficult than such a paltry sum might indicate, which was due in no small measure to the strongly democratic structure of the umbrella organization. At the April 6th meeting, he reported having difficulty getting “feedback” from member organizations regarding COSCC’s proposed political platform and issue positions. The Izaak Walton League (perhaps the largest conservation group in the state by the numbers) had earlier given COSCC tepid public support, but had not even bothered to send a delegate to the constitution and by-laws meeting. Meanwhile, requests and inquiries from across the

⁴⁹ William Bradley, interview by Eric T. Busch, Telephone, July 1, 2008.

⁵⁰ Hansen, interview.

⁵¹ Given how much time the position took out of his week, it was “almost a contribution,” he later ruefully admitted Hansen, “Oral History of Colorado Project,” 20.

country were pouring into COSCC's post office box, yet because he was unsure for whom he was actually speaking, Hansen could only equivocate his responses.⁵²

It was a situation at once frustrating and worrisomely familiar. For all of the enthusiasm surrounding its founding months earlier, by the spring of 1965, COSCC now looked as if it might become just another casualty of Colorado's conservationist parochialism. Hansen worried about his ongoing lack of contact with the Workshop chairs, and the general silence from COSCC's member organizations. Discomfort with the new organization's openly commercial approach to open space, and jealousy over the emergence of a new conservationist power clique likely contributed to the early resistance to the new organization. But a series of external events in Colorado and elsewhere gave the foundering young organization a chance to prove its value to a skeptical constituency. They also began to highlight the interconnectedness of conservation issues, and particularly how Denver's growth affected the development and use of its mountain hinterland.

On the evening of June 16, 1965, metropolitan Denverites received a brutal reminder of that interconnectivity. The city and its suburbs clustered along a shallow stretch of the South Platte River, which drained an alpine watershed comprising hundreds of square miles on the eastern slope of the Colorado Rockies. Denver had relied on this water from its earliest days, and by the time the Denver Union Water Company transferred to public ownership in 1918, the city was diverting thousands of acre-feet

⁵² Elaine Appel, "Board of Directors' Meeting, Colorado Open Space Council, Inc." (Denver, CO, April 6, 1965), 1, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF1, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

from the South Platte as it exited the foothills to the city's southwest.⁵³ The diminished river then meandered northward through central Denver on its way to Nebraska and its eventual rendezvous with the Missouri River. Once Denver's center of industry, the flood-prone river valley had since become a massive, unsanctioned waste dump of old cars, appliances, and industrial debris, interspersed with poverty-stricken mobile home parks.⁵⁴ A repository for the castoffs and castaways of a growing postindustrial metropolis, the Platte River Valley looked as if it belonged in the pages of Peter Blake's *God's Own Junkyard*, a polemical photographic essay on the degradation of the American landscape, published in 1964.⁵⁵ Though Denver's politicians and editorialists constantly talked about cleaning up the Platte, and of building a dam to protect Denver and its southern suburbs from flash flooding, nothing had yet been done.

The rains began on June 13th, and intensified for the next three days as a deepening low-pressure system settled over the eastern half of the state. In the afternoon of the 16th, a massive cloudburst emerged from the foothills to the south of the city, dumping 14 inches of rain on already-saturated ground in approximately four hours. Tributary streams quickly overflowed, sending a sudden and massive flood crest barreling northward. It hit Denver at 8 p.m. that evening, sweeping up the river valley's urban detritus before it like a giant battering ram. Plugged with garbage, destroyed

⁵³ See Chapter 5 for more on Denver's post-war water history.

⁵⁴ American Telephone and Telegraph Company; Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company, *Flood, Mud & Misery: The Disaster of the Week of June 14, 1965* (Denver, CO: Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Co. Colorado Plant Dept., 1965).

⁵⁵ Although Blake included photographs from the state of Colorado, the Platte River Valley was not among them. Peter Blake, *God's Own Junkyard; the Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

mobile homes, driftwood and construction debris, the viaducts and bridges crossing the river soon gave way to the raging current. Meanwhile, in the shallow floodplains of the Platte River Valley, water extended beyond the river's banks for a quarter mile on either side, inundating block after block of homes and businesses. Mercifully, the water receded nearly as quickly as it had risen, and by morning, most of the city was dry once again. But the destruction and carnage remained. The Platte River flood claimed several lives and caused several million dollars worth of damage in and around Denver.⁵⁶

Though an act of nature, the South Platte River flood of 1965 was hardly a surprise. Given Denver's history of flooding, and decades of accumulated warnings from experts, the harsh light of hindsight made the catastrophe seem almost foreordained. The clean-up effort took place against a political backdrop of bitter recrimination. Not only had the city failed to address its well-publicized vulnerabilities to flash flooding, but it had also allowed the Platte River Valley to descend into blight and decay, compounding an already dangerous situation.⁵⁷ The vast dimensions of the problem, from the lack of flood control infrastructure to seemingly irretrievable decay of the Platte River Valley, combined to cast the limits of city government in stark relief. But if the South Platte flood made life miserable for city officials, it seemed to present a golden opportunity for a young organization looking to define itself and exert its leadership. Yet in the two months following the flood, journalists and public officials seeking COSCC's input on flood control in Denver generally came away empty-handed. Almost a month and a half

⁵⁶ H.F. Matthai, *Floods of June 1965 in South Platte River Basin, Colorado* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), <http://pubs.usgs.gov/wsp/1850b/report.pdf>.

⁵⁷ A very similar flood had nearly drowned the fledgling city in 1864, even sweeping away the headquarters of the *Rocky Mountain News*. Dorsett, *The Queen City*, 37.

later, the most that COSCC had been able to muster was a weakly worded letter calling on the governor to appoint a flood control study commission.⁵⁸ Despite the obvious conservationist dimensions of the disaster, the ambitious umbrella group seemed to have—almost literally—nothing to say. In part, COSCC’s inability to respond stemmed from the usual problems of message coordination among member groups. But there was another element as well. Considerable epistemological distance separated urban flood control from the traditional conservationist *métiers* of preservation and beautification. Was COSCC prepared to embrace an expanding definition of conservationism? Was it prepared to take on the environmental impacts of the city?

A tense August 1965 COSCC board meeting became a key moment in the organization’s history, and in the history of Colorado conservationism in general. Ten representatives from member groups, along with Roger Hansen, faced each other across a table in a conference room at the Denver Botanic Gardens. Embarrassed at the mounting public confusion over his organization’s stance on flood control, COSCC president Dave Abbott pressed his board for a coherent position. Ruth Newlon, representing the Colorado Federation of Women’s Garden Clubs, immediately dismissed the notion that COSCC could “impose” its own flood control plan on the entire state as an absurd overreach. Besides, she added, COSCC was supposedly a facilitator organization, not a policy shop. Why not instead let member groups address the issue if they were so inclined, and allow the districts and counties most directly affected by the flooding to

⁵⁸ Roger P. Hansen, “Board of Directors’ Minutes, Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc.” (Denver, CO, July 26, 1965), 3, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF1, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

deal with the issue as they saw fit?⁵⁹ Newlon's visceral opposition to COSCC's entrée into the policy realm of urban land use indicated the extent of the disagreement within the organization's leadership not only over the scope of the group's activities, but the definition of conservationism itself. Her specific objections crystallized the concerns of those who believed that flood control, and perhaps the entirety of urban land use planning, fell outside the province of conservationism.

Historically speaking, Newlon was right—there was little precedent in 1965 for conservation-oriented activism in matters of urban policy. But the recent flooding seemed to have implicated COSCC in a new conversation, whether it was prepared to participate or not. The floods, Dave Abbott pointed out, had been a statewide disaster, impacting rural and urban areas alike. A localized and piecemeal approach would be unlikely to address the interconnected roots of the problem. Roger Fuehrer of the Colorado Mountain Club pointed out in the wake of the recent flooding, the Army Corps of Engineers was already considering a flood control dam along the Platte south of Denver. In light of the city's inability to finance such a project, Fuehrer continued, perhaps COSCC should ally with the Denver Chamber of Commerce to back the Corps' proposed "Chatfield Dam and Reservoir."

A tumble of other suggestions followed. One board member suggested that COSCC encourage the state government to reserve flood plains for open space, codified in a new, statewide "master land use plan." Another recommended that Denver apply for

⁵⁹ Roger P. Hansen, "Board of Directors' Minutes, Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc." (Denver, CO, August 30, 1965), 2, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF1, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

federal funding through “urban renewal” programs to clean up the Platte River Valley.⁶⁰ No matter what else eventually came out of the disaster, the board agreed, the public must recognize that “man’s impairment through indiscriminate [sic] development and destruction” of the South Platte’s natural drainage was among the biggest contributing factors to the destructive June floods. “Any approach...must recognize that the need of a population to enjoy beauty...open space...and recreation along unpolluted rivers is just as important as the need of subdividers, shopping centers, industries and other “economic” interests to over-develop the flood plains.”⁶¹ Within the month, COSCC had added a Platte River Workshop, tasked with making recommendations to Denver’s mayor, and cooperate with local businesses to encourage the federal government to build Chatfield Reservoir. The Workshop’s chair was a brash, left-leaning young lawyer named Dick Lamm, who would use the position as a jumping-off point for a long and distinguished political career.⁶²

Lingering doubts about next steps remained, however. Should there be a call for new dams? Proposed alliances with business and industry? Urban renewal? To many conservationists of the era, these ideas seemed, at best, a distraction from the proper aims

⁶⁰Although Jane Jacobs’ scathing indictment of such “urban renewal” projects, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, was first published in 1961, her critiques had yet to enter into mainstream circulation. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 392–404.

⁶¹“Checklist of Recommendations on Colorado Flood Control Compiled from Meeting of August 30, 1965 of COSCC Board of Directors” (Denver, CO, August 30, 1965), Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF1, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁶²“Report on Vail Conference Workshops as Compiled by the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc” (Vail, CO, November 10, 1965), 5, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 3, FF13, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

of conservationism, and at worst, tantamount to heresy.⁶³ Many still viewed the city and hinterland as separate and dichotomous spheres, and believed that conservation ought to remain concerned exclusively with the latter. Besides, conservationists hardly lacked for things to do in Colorado. There were still tremendous challenges to overcome, for example, in ensuring the proper implementation of the Wilderness Act on the state level, where extractive industries were even more powerful than in Washington.

But COSCC was an important first step in redefining conservationism to address a much wider and more interconnected set of political and social concerns. In a 1966 policy statement, COSCC outlined its broader goals. “We in the Colorado conservation movement, represented by approximately 25 major statewide organizations comprising perhaps 50,000 alert and sensitive citizens, are convinced that increasing numbers of people in our state are not so concerned about the time-worn political “issues” of taxes, budgets, aid to education or even war and peace as they are with the QUALITY of the Colorado environment.” Moreover, the statement continued, “[i]t should be obvious that if we destroy the unique quality of Colorado’s environment—which attracts tourists, industries and workers here in the first place—we will suffer the gravest

⁶³ Dams had become even more of a politically radioactive topic for conservationists in the mid-1960s, in the wake of David Brower’s high profile *mea culpa* for his role in the deal between the Sierra Club and the Bureau of Reclamation, which allowed construction on the Glen Canyon Dam to go forward unopposed in exchange for the permanent shelving of similar plans for Echo Park Dam in northwestern Colorado. Brower’s anger at himself and the Bureau of Reclamation led him, in 1963, to write a scathing indictment of all the Bureau’s dam projects, and to call into question the practice of damming rivers in general. Eliot Porter and Sierra Club, *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado*, Rev. ed., Sierra Club Exhibit Format Series 5 (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club, 1966), 7–9.

consequences.”⁶⁴ By linking the preservation of the Colorado mountain hinterland to the economic growth of its capitol and largest city, the “Quality Environment Statement,” as it became known, dissolved the boundary between city and hinterland, placing both into a single, larger unit.

Both the discussion over flood control and the promulgation of the Quality Environment Statement showed that COSCC was expanding its mission at least somewhat organically, driven in part by the organization’s responses to the consequences of Denver’s urban growth. The more COSCC focused on the quality of life for Denverites, the more it dissolved the discursive line that separated the city from the hinterland.

V. Regionalizing the Movement: The Colorado Open Space Council and the Battle for the Grand Canyon

By the time the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council came into existence in 1965, the debate over the Bureau of Reclamation’s proposed dams bracketing the Grand Canyon was well into its second decade. After the stunning engineering success of the Boulder Canyon dam (later renamed Hoover Dam) in the 1930s, the Bureau was eager to press forward with its vision of a series of hydropower-producing dams along the lower Colorado River, as part of a massive system called the Colorado River Storage Project. While legally barred from constructing a dam inside Grand Canyon National Park, the Bureau could still make use of the river’s 1000-foot vertical drop within the park’s boundaries by building a dam on both ends. Located upstream, the proposed

⁶⁴ Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, “Some Comments on a Quality Colorado Environment,” Policy Statement (Denver, CO, August 31, 1966), 1–3, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 2, Box 3, FF19, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

Marble Canyon Dam siphon 90% of the Colorado River's flow into a long underground tunnel and power generator, leaving only a "scenic trickle" to run through Grand Canyon National Park. On the downstream side, the much higher Bridge Canyon/Hualapai Dam would add even more generating capacity. In order not to become "silted up," the Bridge Canyon Dam would in turn require the additional construction of smaller "silt control" dams on the Colorado's nearby tributaries.⁶⁵

The Bureau made no apologies either for the potential harm that the dams might cause to the Grand Canyon, which extended well beyond the boundaries of the national park. Neither did it try to hide the fact that the dams were not needed to meet a local or regional water shortage—indeed, neither reservoir would be nearly as big as either Lake Mead or Lake Powell.⁶⁶ Their purpose, rather, was to generate income from electricity in order to subsidize the Bureau's irrigation projects elsewhere in the West, including five proposed dams within the state of Colorado, which were individually opposed by conservationists in the state.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Glenn Rink and Brad Dimock, "Damming the Grand Canyon," *Boatmen's Quarterly Review*, Spring 1997, 24–25, <http://www.gcr.org/bqr/pdf/10-2.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Indeed, the reservoir created by the Bridge Canyon would create a reservoir with only 16% of the volume capacity of Lake Powell. Rink and Dimock, "Damming the Grand Canyon."

⁶⁷ These projects, all of them in Colorado, and thus, in the upper basin of the Colorado River, included Animas-La Plata, Dolores, San Miguel, Dallas Creek, and West Divide projects. As planned, the projects would only repay 19% of their total cost in water revenues, leaving 81% to be covered by power sales from the Colorado River Storage Project, which included the Grand Canyon dams. Ruth Weiner, "Statement of the Grand Canyon Workshop of the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council and the Colorado Mountain Club to the Subcommittee on Water and Power Resources, Senate Interior Committee on S 861, S 1004, S. 1013, and Related Bills" (Washington D. C., May 1, 1967), 5, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 5, Box 37, FF4, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

The Colorado River Storage Project, for all its ambitions, had not come off as planned. Fearing that the construction of the new dams would reduce its allotment of Colorado River Water, California's congressional delegation kept the project's authorizing legislation tied up in committees for most of the 1950s. In the early 1960s, conservation groups like the Sierra Club began to take a closer look at the Bureau's plans, and to publicize their potential effects on the Grand Canyon.⁶⁸ By early 1965, the Grand Canyon dams were on the verge of becoming a national controversy. Yet for all that the Sierra Club and David Brower had done to publicize the issue, it took a comparably obscure scientist and COSCC member named Richard Bradley to push the issue fully into the public consciousness.⁶⁹

Recognizing both the state and regional significance of the Grand Canyon dam issue, and its potential to garner their new organization increased funding and recognition, COSCC created a new Workshop to oppose the Bureau's plans in late 1965. Estella Leopold, a geologist, became the Grand Canyon Workshop's inaugural chair.⁷⁰ Drawing on her professional contacts, she began to assemble a small group of experts in relevant scientific fields to offer a counterargument to the Bureau, which maintained that its plans represented sound science and the best use of public money. Among them was Dr. Richard Bradley, a physics professor at Colorado College. With Leopold's encouragement, Bradley published an article titled "Ruin for the Grand Canyon" in the

⁶⁸ Marble Canyon Dam, for instance, would have backed river water up nearly 13 miles into the Grand Canyon National Park. James Lawrence Powell, *Dead Pool: Lake Powell, Global Warming, and the Future of Water in the West*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 109.

⁶⁹ Byron Pearson, "Salvation for Grand Canyon: Congress, the Sierra Club, and the Dam Controversy of 1966-1968," *Journal of the Southwest* 36, no. 2 (July 1, 1994): 159-175.

⁷⁰ "Report on Vail Conference Workshops as Compiled by the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc," 1.

Audubon magazine in early 1966, making a strong case against the dams on financial, scientific, and aesthetic grounds.⁷¹ As the Bureau itself readily admitted, Bradley argued, the proposed dams were not needed to provide water. They were “cash register dams,” to be built purely to generate revenue for other Bureau projects so that it could sell water to Western farmers below cost.⁷²

Bradley’s well-written piece caught the attention of the editors of the nation’s largest-circulating magazine, *Reader’s Digest*. Sensing a possible avenue into an untapped market of conservation-minded readers, the popular periodical reprinted Bradley’s article in full, instantly giving the Grand Canyon dam controversy a level of exposure beyond dam opponents’ wildest expectations. To further capitalize on the publicity generated by Bradley’s piece, the magazine also sponsored a “workshop” on the dams on the south rim of the Grand Canyon in March of 1966, bringing together Richard Bradley, David Brower, and Arizona congressman Morris Udall, a dam proponent.⁷³ The obvious tension between Brower and Udall made great political theater, and the event added new dimension and personality to the issue that casual news consumers could easily digest.⁷⁴ And the news kept getting worse for the dam’s backers. In June of 1966, only one day after the Sierra Club ran an anti-dam ad in the *New York Times*, the IRS revoked its tax-exempt status, citing the group’s “substantial” attempts to influence

⁷¹ Pearson, “Salvation for Grand Canyon: Congress, the Sierra Club, and the Dam Controversy of 1966-1968,” 162.

⁷² “Editorials: Grand Canyon ‘Cash Registers,’” *Life Magazine*, May 7, 1965, 4.

⁷³ “With the *Reader’s Digest* press meeting,” Estella Leopold exulted at the April 1966 COSCC board meeting, “the *Digest* is now committed editorially. The problem of the dams has finally entered the public arena.” Elena Slusser, “Board of Directors’ Minutes, Colorado Open Space Council, Inc.” (Denver, CO, April 4, 1966), 2, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF2, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

⁷⁴ Leopold, interview.

legislation.⁷⁵ Widely interpreted as reprisal for the Sierra Club's anti-dam activism, the move was widely denounced by conservationists and civil libertarians alike.

Of course, it would take more than a season of bad press to knock the Bureau off its course. Its commissioner was Floyd Dominy—polymath and one of the most powerful officials in the federal apparatus.⁷⁶ A brash and fearsome political infighter, Dominy did not negotiate so much as run people over. And while he nursed any number of separate grudges, the Bureau Commissioner reserved a special contempt for conservationists, whom he regarded as an undifferentiated mass of “David Brower-types.” In his estimation, conservation activists substituted their own mawkish sentiments for the principles of sound water management, of which they were entirely ignorant.⁷⁷ They had protested the Bureau's various projects for years, compiling, in the main, a record of futility. Even in the face of rising opposition to the Grand Canyon dams, and his Bureau's recent, *Reader's Digest*-administered black eye, Dominy saw no reason to alter existing plans for the Colorado River Storage Project. In fact, the contretemps only strengthened his resolve to see the project through.

As with most Western water battles, the choreography of the fight seemed to unfold in slow motion. Having proved its value as a source of expert testimony and witnesses, COSCC's Grand Canyon Workshop remained intimately involved in the legislative and bureaucratic wrangling in Washington, which continued to provide valuable training to an upcoming generation of conservationist leaders in the art of

⁷⁵ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 230.

⁷⁶ In his book *Cadillac Desert*, journalist and historian Marc Reisner attributes Dominy's influence to his close relationship with then-Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona, who chaired the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee. Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, 247.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 242.

scientific testimony and political lobbying. But by the middle of 1966, the Grand Canyon dam fight had already taught COSCC's leadership a number of important and enduring lessons. It showed that there was an unmet need in the Intermountain West for a regional conservation organization. Just as the Colorado River connected the Western states together through water, the Bureau's plans for one stretch of the river affected, both hydrologically, politically and fiscally, what happened elsewhere along its length.

Just as importantly, it demonstrated that scientific expertise could be a powerful tool for achieving conservationist political objectives. Floyd Dominy's disdain for conservationists was an especially malignant example of a common attitude within the sprawling fields of urban and industrial development. It was unthinking and reflexive reaction, in part because it was predicated upon unspoken and deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, pitting the stereotypical notion of female sublimity against masculine conquest.⁷⁸ The men of mid-1960s conservationism were well aware of this attitude, and some likely shared it themselves.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Dominy's lifetime of troubled relationships with women, as catalogued in Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert*, only seemed to underscore the influence of gender in his critique of conservationists. In her book *Nature's Altars*, historian Susan Schrepfer looks closely at the gender dynamics within the Sierra Club from its founding in 1892 through the 1970s, finding that women were often sidelined in Brower-era Sierra Club, which tended to revolve around Brower and his adjutants. COSCC was much more reflective of founder Ed Hilliard's loose leadership style, which encouraged members to assume responsibilities and claim leadership. In short, it was a far more open environment for women to rise to leadership positions than was the Sierra Club. *Ibid.*, 214–254; Susan R Schrepfer, *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 181–207.

⁷⁹ "There was some of that," former Governor Richard Lamm acknowledged in a 2007 interview with the author. "There was this attitude that "real" men that understand the economy, and understand how complex this is, as opposed to the "distaff" side, we also are concerned for these reasons...It was just a different time, and a different language." Richard Lamm, interview by Eric T. Busch, At Insitute for Public Policy, University of Denver, July 19, 2007.

Yet COSCC's experience with the Grand Canyon dam fight showed that it could leverage the expertise and professional qualifications of its members to blunt such gendered notions, and gain admittance—as private, non-wealthy citizens—to the highest levels of state and federal policymaking. Moreover, COSCC fielded what had to be the most accomplished group of women conservationists in the country during the 1960s, including Dr. Estella Leopold, Estelle Brown, Ruth Newlon, Amy Roosevelt (niece of Franklin Roosevelt), Dr. Ruth Weiner, Dr. Betty Willard, Joy Coombs, Dr. Ruth Wright, Dr. Karen Porter and Thea Phinney. Far from being auxiliary to COSCC's early success, they were among its strongest leaders, and its most powerful weapons.⁸⁰ Even the most cursory inventory of COSCC's core membership revealed an organization heavy with qualifications and degrees. Following up on their success in using hard science as a political weapon, COSCC began sending a stream of lobbyists to Washington D.C.—both women and men—to press federal bureaucrats and elected officials to carefully consider whether the Grand Canyon dams were warranted. Lessons learned from the Grand Canyon fight would allow COSC to successfully alter federal plans to build Interstate 70 over Red Buffalo Pass in Colorado's Gore Wilderness Area in 1968, and would inform its approach to future fights with resource developers like the Denver Water Board.

⁸⁰ The acceptance of women as equals was by no means universal within the conservation/environmental movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, and gendered notions of 'separate spheres' often punctured conservationism's outward patina of gender comity. Ruth Weiner, who held a PhD in chemistry from Johns Hopkins, and who had been active in COSC and other conservation groups along with her husband Eugene Weiner since 1966, recalled experiencing particular problems with local population control advocacy groups like Zero Population Growth (ZPG). As Weiner later recalled, "[t]hey [ZPG] used to yell at me and denigrate me for being the mother of four children, while at the same time they wanted to make my husband the VP of our local chapter. Until I pointed out that those were his children, too." Ruth Weiner, interview with Eric T. Busch, Telephone, March 8, 2008.

More than anything else, however—more than the Platte River flood, and perhaps even than wilderness itself, COSCC’s decision to join the battle over the Grand Canyon transformed it from a teetering new umbrella organization into a region-wide conservationist powerhouse. Its leadership, filled with professionals and academics, seemed to epitomize the twin post-war ascendancies of the white American middle class, and the new urban West itself. COSCCers were young, active, engaged and thoroughly well-educated, comprising an entirely new voice in Colorado’s public affairs arena. They could hold their own across the table from industry and government, and seemed to speak for a large and rapidly growing number of people across the state and the region. Ed Hilliard’s vision of a multifunctional organization that focused on the “total environment” was on its way to becoming a reality.

VI. The Selling of the Selling of Colorado: The End of a Consensus

In 1954, the Denver writer and poet Thomas Hornsdy Ferril took to the pages of *Harper’s Magazine* with a message for his Eastern friends. “Tourists,” he wrote only half in jest, “Stay Away from my Door.” It was folly, Ferril suggested, to continue to “Denvertise” so furiously in order to lure people to Denver, when “[t]he plain truth is that we are overloading a most tenuous water supply with people and industries—in an area that depends fundamentally, and must continue to depend, on agriculture.”⁸¹ But by the early 1960s, such attitudes seemed increasingly passé. The federal government’s furious reclamation activity, and the concomitant growth of Western cities, seemed to disprove the Webbian “Great Plains Thesis,” arguing that the arid West could never sustain the

⁸¹ Thomas Hornsby Ferril, “Tourists, Stay Away from My Door,” *Harper’s Magazine*, May 1954, 77–81.

same level of civilization as the more humid Eastern climes.⁸² Moreover, by the early 1960s, the Denver Water Board had averted the water crisis, at least for the time being, through a furious combination of politicking, legal maneuvering, and construction, allowing growth advocates to dream once again of an unlimited urban future.⁸³

In association with the Denver and Colorado Chambers of Commerce, Colorado Governor John Love undertook the first “Sell Colorado mission” to New York City in June of 1964 to trumpet the state’s advantages for American industry. The *Colorado Development Digest*, published by the state’s chamber, rated the visit as a great success, and noted that a second was planned for the fall.⁸⁴ Love’s addresses to businessmen often made reference to Colorado’s “oil shale reserves,” its “young, stable, productive labor force,” and the pro-business attitude of state government.⁸⁵

It was, perhaps, not unusual for Western governors to undertake such trips. Post-war governors were typically measured more by their records of economic growth than by any other metric. In mid-1960s Denver, however, pro-growthism was hardly the exclusive province of government and industry groups. The same attitude was also prevalent and visible within the state’s resurgent conservation movement. In proposing the establishment of COSCC in 1964, Roger Hansen had suggested that conservationists adopt the language of growth in order to negotiate with industry and government for wilderness preservation. If Governor Love thought that oil shale was the best thing the

⁸² Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

⁸³ See Chapter 5.

⁸⁴ “First Mission Rated--Site of Second Selected,” *Colorado Development Digest*, June 1964.

⁸⁵ Governor John Love, “Governor’s Luncheon Speech--‘Sell Colorado’ Mission to San Francisco” (San Francisco, CA, November 18, 1964), The Governor John Arthur Love Collection, Box 66948, Colorado State Archives.

state had going for it, then it was COSCC's job to convince him how productive Colorado's mountains could be if they were developed for recreational and touristic purposes.

COSCC's message of recreational rather than industrial development of the mountain hinterland dovetailed quite nicely with the interests of Colorado's nascent ski industry, the state's highway department, and mountain landowners, who stood to gain from the increased valuation of their property. Friends and partners Earl Eaton and Pete Seibert had founded Vail ski resort in 1962. Shortly afterward, they hired Bob Parker to serve as the resort's marketing manager. Parker hit upon the idea of explicitly tying the "Vail vision" to conservationism. According to historian William Philpott, Parker's "vision [of] large-scale recreational development would create the incentive to take better care of the high country; economic development and environmental stewardship would go hand in hand."⁸⁶ It was a potent marketing message, as Vail's stunning rise to world-class resort status soon demonstrated.

COSCC and Vail Associates both had much to gain from allying themselves. Vail could parlay COSCC's imprimatur to help fuel its successful environment-based marketing campaign. COSCC, meanwhile could highlight Vail's financial success as proof for its economic argument for conservationism, and point to its alliance with the company as evidence of its willingness to cooperate with industry. The nexus between Vail Associates and COSCC was tight enough to convince the umbrella organization to hold its second annual conference (the CMC Breckenridge Conference was generally

⁸⁶ William Philpott, "Stand by Your Brand: Vail, Colorado, and the Consumer Roots of Popular Environmentalism," in *Cities and Nature in the American West*, ed. Char Miller (Las Vegas, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 230.

counted as the first) in the brand new “village” of Vail. Parker himself addressed the gathering, (which included two future governors of the state, Dick Lamm and Roy Romer) and “urged conservationists to better assess the “dollar value” of conservation interests,” and that the “economic argument (rather than the scientific or aesthetic argument) is the one which will win the battle for conservationists in the long run.” As a quid pro quo, Parker promised that Vail Associates would do what it could to support COSCC’s objectives in the surrounding Gore Range area.⁸⁷ It was an extremely profitable partnership for both sides. Vail burnished its conservationist bona fides, while COSCC established itself as the go-to organization for industries interested in opening communication with conservationists, and a member-in-good-standing of Colorado’s pro-growth consensus.

Though written over two decades ago, Samuel P. Hays’ *Beauty, Health, and Permanence* still stands as one of the most perceptive overviews of the post-war American transition from conservationism to environmentalism. Hays interprets the change as a function of the country’s post-war shift from a production-based economy to one driven by consumption, amenities, and the “search for a higher quality of life.” Hays’ insight is fundamental to understanding not only the rise of the conservation movement in Colorado, but also the motivation behind such city-altering developments as George Wallace’s Denver Technological Center. Both placed the idea of amenities and “quality environments” at the rhetorical center of their respective efforts to reform their city. Both were fundamentally imperialist, making cultural and economic claims to land beyond Denver’s historic cultural and economic boundaries. Both were driven by the

⁸⁷ “Report on Vail Conference Workshops as Compiled by the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc,” 10.

continuous process of road building in Colorado, which has been ably documented in other histories.⁸⁸ Finally, both were predicated on the continued growth and political ascendancy of metropolitan Denver's white, suburban middle class.

Colorado's pro-growth constituency had shown remarkable durability, persisting largely intact from the end of World War II through the mid-1960s. But as Colorado and the rest of the country entered the turbulent latter half of the 1960s, conservationists would increasingly question the assumption that economic and population growth was either good or benign. What did "environmental quality" mean, in practical terms? For many, it began to mean, simply, "less people." This shift would tear Colorado's pro-growth consensus asunder in remarkable fashion, and set up some of its most vicious, and consequential battles over the future of city, state, and region.

⁸⁸ Gutfreund, *20th Century Sprawl*.

Chapter 8: Conservation at the Pinnacle, 1968-1974

I. The Conservationist Vision for Government

The founding of the Colorado Open Space Council (COSC) in 1964 ushered in a new era of conservationism and environmental awareness in Colorado. At first, it was by degrees, and then the pace accelerated. Its founding goal was to “provide an effective coordinating structure” within which the state’s existing conservation groups (which would have membership in the umbrella organization) could coordinate action, share expertise, and pool resources to improve the “total environment.”⁸⁹ It had been the brainchild of Edward Hilliard, Jr., a Denver industrialist and conservation leader in Colorado. The organization’s first executive director, Roger Hansen, was one of Hilliard’s philosophical protégés.

While campaigning in Colorado for the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, Ed Hilliard decided that the main obstacles to effective conservationism in Colorado were largely self-imposed. For years, conservationists in the state had resisted efforts to foster inter-organization, and made few efforts to collaborate or communicate with their antagonists in industry and government.⁹⁰ In the resulting silence, polarization and dogmatism reigned unchallenged. But political impotence coupled with dogmatism only

⁸⁹ “Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc.”

⁹⁰ Hansen shared this opinion, and placed much of the blame for the failure on conservationists themselves. As COSCC’s first executive director stated in a 1976 interview, “I think the pattern is that it’s mainly that environmental leaders are anti-business. They have a high socio-economic profile. They are well educated. They have money. They live in \$100,000 houses..., and their fathers made their money as stripminers. But I find a paucity of understanding of the business community among the so-called environmental leadership throughout the country.” Hansen, “Oral History of Colorado Project,” 32.

produced further impotence. Hilliard's views were not widely shared among conservationists of the early 1960s. But then, Hilliard was not a garden-variety conservation activist. In addition to his environmental activism, Hilliard was a managing partner and majority stakeholder of Denver's Redfield Gun Sight Company. With feet planted firmly in both the business and conservation communities, Hilliard had a better vantage point than most of the opportunities sacrificed when there is ideological rigidity on both sides. Before they could hope to become a political force, conservationists needed to accept that they—not industry or government—bore the greater burden of proof. Beneath that lay an even more uncomfortable truth: if conservationists ever wanted to become more than a shoestring budget operation, they would need to court industry, not just as political partners, but as sources of funding.⁹¹ In selecting Hansen to serve as COSC's first executive director, Hilliard knew he was choosing a person whose views on the matter tracked closely with his own.⁹²

Yet reforming the epistemology and internal structure of Colorado's parochial conservation community was easier said than done. COSC's formation stoked predictable fears among existing conservation groups of "takeover," worry about organization "autonomy," [and] disagreement over who could "speak" for whom," as Roger Hansen remembered later. Some within COSC resented the fact that in his capacity as COSC's executive director, Hansen was paid for "doing what they were doing

⁹¹ The constant inability to self-fund was, and arguably still remains, among the key challenges to American environmentalism. It has proven difficult for grassroots environmentalists to avoid the appearance, if not the fact, of cooptation by government and industry. Samuel P Hays, *Explorations in Environmental History: Essays* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 383.

⁹² Hansen, "A Blueprint for Action--Now or Never, Breckenridge Conference, Colorado Mountain Club."

as volunteers.” The new organization also earned the derision of Colorado’s business community, who dismissed it as just another “front for Eastern city dwellers with a guilt complex.”⁹³ COSC’s goal of serving as a bridge between conservation and industry was inevitably going to generate controversy, and as its most visible leader, Hansen occasionally found himself a target for criticism from both sides.⁹⁴ But while launching the new organization sometimes felt like a lonely and thankless task, Hansen was candid about the satisfaction he derived from his role as COSC’s spokesperson. “I am public spirited, I do care about what happens to people and to communities, [but] I don’t think those are the only motivations with me,” he explained to an interviewer in 1976. “I like the spotlight and recognition. I love making speeches. I love doing television shows.... You do those things in part because you’re motivated by the need for attention or recognition.”⁹⁵

One of the most obvious ways for COSC to generate positive attention was to align itself with the surging mountain recreation industry. The Colorado high country offered countless year-round activities for tourists and local pleasure-seekers alike. Popular summer activities included sport fishing, hunting, hiking, and horseback riding,

⁹³ Roger P. Hansen, “History of COSCC (COSC)”, January 1968, CONS 137, Series 1, Box 2, FF39 - 1966-1969 - Policy: position papers, releases, testimony, Western History & Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.

⁹⁴ On the other hand, Hansen’s strong personality and vestigial chauvinism occasionally created unnecessary tension as well. Ruth Weiner, who holds a PhD in chemistry from Johns Hopkins, recalled the puritanical Executive Director’s dismay at her mode of dress. “The fashion of the day was miniskirts and colored tights,” Weiner remembered. “Roger objected pretty violently to the fact that I wore miniskirts. And he was absolutely sure that the head of Public Service Company of Colorado would object to meeting with someone who wore miniskirts. I was elected as the treasurer of COSC [in 1967] and Roger wanted me to resign, because he didn’t think that business people, the business community, would want to deal with a woman, let alone an educated and outspoken woman like me.” Weiner, interview.

⁹⁵ Hansen, “Oral History of Colorado Project,” 54.

while mountain resorts drew visitors from around the world to ski the state's famous powder in the winter months.⁹⁶ In its early strategic alliances with Vail Associates, Colorado Ski Country USA, and other winter sport industries in the state, COSC conformed to what environmental Samuel P. Hays characterizes as the consumption-based roots of modern environmentalism.⁹⁷

But recreation was not the only perceived avenue to respectability for Colorado conservationists in the mid-1960s. COSCC leaders like Hilliard and Hansen believed that the conservation movement could prove quite valuable to the state's leading industries—especially those entities with which conservationists were traditionally at odds. While conservationism had always catered to a certain income class and educational level, COSC seemed to stockpile environmental and scientific expertise the way a baseball team might collect relief pitchers. Nearly two-thirds of its founding membership held advanced degrees in law and the sciences, and many held doctorates in geology, stratigraphy, biology, and other highly relevant fields.⁹⁸ COSC was able to demonstrate the political utility of its collective expertise during the national fight over the Bureau of Reclamation's proposed dams near the Grand Canyon in 1965, when it had sent multiple member-experts (including Drs. Richard Bradley, Estella Leopold, and Ruth Weiner, as well as Ed Hilliard and the future Colorado Governor Richard Lamm) to testify before Congress in opposition to the Bureau's plans. Why not channel that same

⁹⁶ See Chapter 6.

⁹⁷ Hays, *Explorations in Environmental History*, 341–342.

⁹⁸ Not only did we have considerable technical expertise, but we could express it quite well," Weiner said later. "Almost all of the adults [in COSCC] had graduate degrees. Almost all of the men had PhDs. And a few of the women, like me. And at that time, if you were well educated, you also wrote very well. It was required. That, by the way, is no longer true." Weiner, interview.

expertise to help interested companies design more ecologically sensitive industrial sites, or help cities design better land use policies? Why not, in short, market COSCC's expertise in the service of industry, rather than exclusively in opposition to it?

There was a certain amount of moral hazard to such an approach, and indeed, many within the conservationist community regarded COSC's efforts to work in tandem with land developers and industrialists a form of "biostitution," by which they gave a stamp of environmental approval to projects that ought to have been opposed.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, COSC's decentralized and urban-centered approach—which combined grassroots voluntarism with proto-professional research and argument—placed it at the cutting edge of conservationist thought and activism in the latter half of the 1960s.

COSC members became leaders in nearly every major conservation issue in the state, and extended the organization's influence across the country by helping to establish duplicate organizations in a number of states.¹⁰⁰

The years between 1967 and 1970 marked a unique period of consensus, hopefulness and experimentation within Colorado conservationism, before the complications and disappointments of modern environmentalism reduced the movement back into its component strands once again. It was a type of activism rooted, and held together, by a common and specific love of place—in this case the Colorado high country.¹⁰¹ These years were, perhaps, among the swan songs of the "Silent Generation"

⁹⁹ The term refers most specifically to scientists who accepted payment from corporations in exchange for science whose outcome was determined by money rather than data. Leopold, interview.

¹⁰⁰ Hansen, interview.

¹⁰¹ This place-based identification and the activism that sprang from it corresponds roughly to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of "topophilia." Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A*

who, even at the height of their accomplishments, were unknowingly preparing to hand the environmentalist torch to the much more militant and polarized Baby Boomers. So many and varied were their activities during these years that it is impossible to catalog them all. Certain of their actions stand out, however, as important fulcrums of historical change. While large organizations like the Sierra Club dominated national headlines, COSC quietly revolutionized the aims and tactics of conservationism, producing a number of important social, legal, and regulatory precedents. COSC was a crucial link in the transition from conservationism to modern environmentalism, and helped to pioneer many of the techniques and arguments that environmentalists would rely on for decades to come.

II. A Strange Alliance

When it first began in 1966, corporate lawyer H. Stanley Dempsey secured a spot on the so-called COSC-CACI committee mainly out of curiosity. CACI stood for the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, of which Dempsey was a member. It was essentially a state-level chamber of commerce, heavily subsidized by Dempsey's employer; the massive AMAX mining firm.¹⁰² Though he worked for an open-pit mining company, Dempsey considered himself to be generally sympathetic to the aims of Colorado's nascent conservation movement. He was an avid climber, and had heard a lot about the Colorado Open Space Council, the new conservation umbrella group that had formed in Denver the year before.

Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values (Columbia University Press, 1990).

¹⁰² Stanley Dempsey, interview by Eric T. Busch, At Denver offices of Royal Gold, Inc., Denver, CO, July 11, 2007.

The COSC-CACI committee was a joint effort by the two organizations to open a dialogue between industry and conservationism. Though it seemed a nominal step in retrospect, nothing like it had happened in Colorado (or likely anywhere in America) before now. The first committee meeting took place in October of 1966, where Dempsey was introduced to conservation leaders Roger Hansen, Ed Hilliard, Dr. Betty Willard, William Mounsey and Robert Venuti, all members of COSC.¹⁰³ Representing the “industry” side along with him were Ralph Sargent of the Public Service Company (suppliers of Denver’s electricity and natural gas), and Frank Morrison of Denver’s prestigious Holland and Hart law firm.¹⁰⁴ Although the two sides were cordial to one another, nothing miraculous happened at first. Uncertain of each others’ motives, the two sides held somewhat aloof.¹⁰⁵

Not long after the first meeting however, Dempsey learned that his firm was planning to build a massive new molybdenum mine in the mountains west of Denver, called the Henderson Project.¹⁰⁶ Dempsey saw an opportunity to make concrete use of

¹⁰³ Hansen, “Oral History of Colorado Project,” 30.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ After sustained meetings over three months, COSCC and CACI had managed to tentatively agree to a debate, to be televised on Denver’s public television station, about the Sierra Club’s documentary film *The Redwoods*. COSCC enlisted the help of the famed Berkeley natural resource geographer Daniel Luten to argue the conservationist viewpoint. Elena Slusser, “Board of Directors Meeting--Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, Inc.,” Minutes (Denver, CO, February 6, 1967), Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF3, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library; Elena Slusser, “Board of Directors Meeting---Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, In.,” Minutes (Denver, CO, April 3, 1967), Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF3, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹⁰⁶ AMAX already operated the world’s largest molybdenum mine, the Climax, near the town of Leadville, CO. Stephen M. Voynick, *Climax: The History of Colorado’s Climax Molybdenum Mine--Mountain Press Pub Co.*, First Printing. (Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1996).

the COSC-CACI committee. Why not enlist the COSC people to help plan the new mine, and develop environmental mitigation strategies? space “I could see that the environmental community was becoming stronger and better organized,” Dempsey recalled later. “I finally thought to myself, if we have to assemble a major land package on the west side of the Continental Divide up there, that close to Denver, we can expect some trouble. And I went to my boss, who grew up in Leadville, who was a wonderful lawyer and a man of great judgment. And my analysis was that a lot of their [conservationists’] frustration was because they couldn’t get any information. Nobody would tell you the truth about anything. I said, if a corporation were willing to tell the truth, the bad and the good, and really *mean* it... my judgment is that these are people who would respond well to that kind of treatment. I also judged that probably the industry still had more power than the public...we had enough power to push our way through if we had to, but why not open up?”¹⁰⁷

Due to the sensitive nature of Dempsey’s proposal, the decision ultimately landed on the desk of AMAX’s chairman and CEO, Ian MacGregor, who gave the project the go-ahead. Dempsey invited Roger Hansen out for a drink, and broached the possibility of teaming up with COSC to help plan the Henderson Mine. Hansen was suspicious at first. He had no interest in allowing COSC to be used as a marketing gimmick. And even if the AMAX offer was entirely genuine, it was not a particularly easy one to accept.

¹⁰⁷ The quote is remarkable not only for its elucidation of Dempsey’s thought processes, but for its tacit admission that for AMAX at least, misleading the public regarding the environmental effects of its mining operations was a common practice. Dempsey, interview with author, July 11, 2007.

“There’s nothing more dangerous for a conservationist than to appear to be crawling into bed with industry,” Hansen later explained.¹⁰⁸

To be seen as “crawling into bed” with molybdenum mining could be particularly damaging. Molybdenum is used as a hardening agent in steelmaking, and mining it is a messy and waste-intensive business. To extract the metal, the ore is crushed to a fine powder and subjected to a chemical leaching process. One thousand pounds of ore typically yields only four to five pounds of molybdenum. Disposing of the remaining 99.9 percent of the pulverized ore constitutes one of the biggest environmental challenges for the molybdenum industry. AMAX’s earlier mines in Colorado and Arizona had been far from exemplary in this regard, burying entire valleys under millions of tons of ground-up rock.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, Hansen agreed to think about it. His fellow COSC members on the COSC-CACI committee shared his initial hesitation, but decided to accept Dempsey and AMAX’s invitation on a provisional basis. “All of us had strong doubts at first,” remembered Robert Venuti of COSC. After giving their joint project the tepid-sounding name, “Experiment in Ecology,” both sides settled back to see what would come of it. Neither, it seemed, held out much hope that their “experiment” would yield tangible results.

In early 1968, ecologist Betty Willard, chemistry professor Dr. Eugene Robert Weiner, and planning consultants Robert Venuti and Roger Hansen began making regular trips to the Henderson mine site, as well as AMAX’s reclamation projects in Colorado

¹⁰⁸ Philip B Osborne, *The War That Business Must Win* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 93–94.

¹⁰⁹ Voynick, *Climax*.

and Arizona.¹¹⁰ They were often accompanied by officials from Public Service Company, which would supply the Henderson Mine with electricity. “Of course,” Stan Dempsey chuckled, “the company wanted to put everything in the best possible light. So we shepherded our visitors to this beautiful valley, delivered this long spiel about how it would have been cheaper to put our facilities there rather than somewhere else, but that we decided to preserve this lovely area. Bob Weiner just looked at me and said: ‘Fine. Now that we have seen the area you have miraculously saved, let’s go see the area you’re going to screw up.’”¹¹¹

The COSC committee members offered detailed studies outlining the Henderson mine’s potential impact on the surrounding ecosystem, scenery, and natural resources, and did their best to offer reasonable and practical suggestions to minimize the mine’s environmental footprint. It was not realistic, of course, to completely neutralize the effects of a major mining operation on the surrounding landscape. But within the realm of the possible, Dempsey and the AMAX representatives also remained true to their word. They faithfully attended monthly meetings of the COSC Board of Directors, and gave presentations detailing the company’s track record of reclaiming earlier mine sites, as well as the details of the Henderson Project, to often skeptical audiences.¹¹² And once the Henderson project was underway, AMAX and Public Service Company managed to translate many of COSC’s suggestions into reality.

¹¹⁰ Elena Slusser, “Board of Directors Meeting---Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, In.,” Minutes (Denver, CO, June 3, 1968), 2, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Series 1, Box 1, FF4, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹¹¹ Osborne, *The War That Business Must Win*, 95.

¹¹² Slusser, “Board of Directors Meeting---Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, In.,” 1.

Instead of clear-cutting the trees beneath the powerlines, Public Service Company removed and replanted many of them using horses (to avoid building roads). The trees that had to be cut down were reused in fencing, or as firewood at nearby campgrounds. Rather than the typical drab, corrugated metal buildings that it typically erected at mining sites, AMAX painted Henderson's structures and power poles to blend into colors of the landscape. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the mine's design and operation was its tailing disposal and storage system. Rather than pouring the powdered rock into nearby valleys or hastily constructed tailing ponds, the firm bored a 9.3-mile long tunnel beneath the Continental Divide, and hauled the tailings by a specialized electric railroad to a remote disposal facility, specially designed to contain run-off.¹¹³

As Roger Hansen had expected, the AMAX corporation flogged the Experiment in Ecology for advertising and public relations purposes, publishing glossy, bound booklets filled with self-congratulation. But in Hansen's estimation, the corporation had held up its end, and was entitled to brag a little about it. Modern ecologists, moreover, would surely fault the measures enacted by the Experiment in Ecology as insufficient, or as being more concerned with scenery and aesthetics than with the mine's ecological impact. At the time of its conception, however, the Experiment represented the state of the art in ecological science and reclamation.

The Henderson mine still operates occasionally when molybdenum prices rise. Yet four decades after its opening, both the mine and the Experiment in Ecology seem largely forgotten—hidden in plain sight due to their success in avoiding the catastrophic destruction of the surrounding landscape. Thus, the lasting impact of the Experiment in

¹¹³ Osborne, *The War That Business Must Win*, 96.

Ecology is perhaps best understood from the standpoints of science and law. The reports drawn up by COSC's planners and scientists prefigured the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that would be mandated by the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).¹¹⁴ It was far from a perfect solution to the ecological problems created by molybdenum mining. Yet it demonstrated what could come of collaborations between conservationists and industry given the proper outlook, political climate, and tools for communication. The Experiment in Ecology achieved, moreover, a quantum leap beyond the mining mitigation strategies and technologies of the past. That it happened naturally, without the force of law to compel it, symbolizes a unique and remarkable period in America's history of conservationism.

III. Ecology—What's That?

In 1958, Beatrice Willard, *née* Scott-Williams, approached Park Service officials at Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park about conducting a study detailing the cumulative effect of thousands of annual tourists on the park's fragile alpine tundra. In fact, tourists took a heavy toll, as park officials well knew. Large swathes of alpine meadow had been trampled into gravel in the well-loved national park, but administrators were unsure of what could be done. Scott-Williams requested the sectioning off of two "exclosures" in the heavily trodden tundra along the park's famous Trail Ridge Road. The park service approved, and she spent much of the next four years, in snow and sleet, rain and sunshine, studying and comparing tundra specimens. When she was finished, the "Tundra Queen" (as Park Service officials affectionately called her) submitted copies

¹¹⁴ Gordon Morris Bakken, *The Mining Law of 1872: Past, Politics, and Prospects* (University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 122.

of her findings to the Park Service and her dissertation committee in the biology department and the University of Colorado Boulder. Based on her recommendations, the park's superintendent instituted the beginnings of a trail system on the sensitive alpine tundra, allowing it to begin a slow process of recovery.¹¹⁵

Betty Willard received her doctorate from CU Boulder in 1963. But her four-year sojourn in the alpine meadows of Rocky Mountain National Park was just the beginning of a four-decade commitment to studying the area, documenting its ecology, and marking its gradual restoration. Moreover, they had given her an opportunity to simultaneously spread the gospel of ecology to park visitors made curious by the sight of a woman in a floppy bush hat and round-rimmed glasses, peering intently at the ground on her hands and knees.¹¹⁶ Willard had spent nearly as much time holding impromptu symposia on alpine ecology as she had collecting her data. Far from being indifferent, it seemed that people could not learn enough about the alpine ecosystem, or ecology in general. When she explained how tourist foot traffic disrupted the local ecology, park visitors asked how they could help protect it.

The experience had remained in her memory for a long time afterward. If a single afternoon in an alpine meadow could open the eyes of the lay public to the lessons of ecology—and even to move them toward a deeper understanding and consideration of their own impact on the natural world—then why could it not do the same for the nation's leaders and opinion-shapers? Willard became determined to create a program that would bring top businesspeople, academics, writers, artists and elected officials into contact

¹¹⁵ Marice Doll, “‘Tundra Queen’ Rules Lichen, Moss,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, July 25, 1975), 1B.

¹¹⁶ Doll, “‘Tundra Queen’ Rules Lichen, Moss.”

with the outdoors, where they could learn about ecology and the web of interconnectedness within which people lived without realizing it. Properly educated, they could apply the lessons they learned in their own fields, and could do much to mitigate the deleterious impacts of industrial and infrastructural development on America's remaining wildlands.

Willard's project was in some ways very much in keeping with the traditional *modus operandi* of American conservationism, which had historically relied on the money and influence of American elites to accomplish its objectives.¹¹⁷ It was, nevertheless, a particularly ambitious undertaking for a newly graduated adjunct biology professor, who was still something of a newcomer within her field, and a complete unknown outside of it. Those who knew Willard, however, had no doubts that she would make her vision a reality. The daughter of a teacher and a landscape photographer, Willard had grown up roaming California's deserts and mountains, learning the rudiments of ecology through her own exploration and observations. After graduating from the Yosemite Field School in 1948, Willard convinced the Park Service to hire her as a naturalist, in spite of its unofficial policy of hiring men exclusively.¹¹⁸ Enterprising, fearless, and a gifted educator, Betty Willard built up a successful nature guiding

¹¹⁷ In his book *Wilderness Warrior*, historian Douglas Brinkley chronicles the parade of national monuments to emerge from the Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. Additionally, in its detailed cataloguing of Roosevelt's written exchanges with wealthy philanthropists regarding the conservation of wilderness and wildlife, Brinkley demonstrates the nexus of power and money behind many of the triumphs of early American conservationism. Douglas Brinkley, *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America*, 1st ed. (Harper, 2009).

¹¹⁸ Polly Welts Kaufman, *National Parks and the Woman's Voice: A History*, Updated ed. (University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 72.

business by the time she was 18, taking locals and tourists alike on guided hikes in the mountains near Mammoth Lakes.¹¹⁹

Moreover, Willard had far more resources to create such a program than it appeared. After graduating from CU, Willard had taken a job as a staff scientist at the Thorne Ecological Institute in Boulder. The Thorne Institute, founded in 1954 by a then-first year biology graduate student named Oakleigh Thorne, had been among the first non-profit ecological education centers in the country. By the late 1950s, it had gained a national reputation for its innovative approaches to both education and conservationism.¹²⁰ With his slender frame and sparkling eyes, “Oak” Thorne bore a passing resemblance to John Muir himself. Thorne’s personal history, much like Willard’s own, had been shaped by his love of the outdoors, and by the friends and contacts he had made as a student and conservationist. Before coming to Colorado, Thorne had studied under Dr. Paul B. Sears at Yale’s new graduate program in conservation. While at Yale, he had learned how to set up a tax-exempt organization, and how to mount an effective preservation campaign by saving what would eventually become the Fire Island Sea Shore from residential development.¹²¹ Under the aegis of

¹¹⁹ “Obituaries: Dr. Beatrice Willard,” *University of Colorado Boulder Obituaries*, February 6, 2003, <https://www.cu.edu/sg/messages/1597.html>.

¹²⁰ Oakleigh II Thorne, interview by Eric T. Busch, Telephone, February 9, 2009.

¹²¹ Yale’s conservation program required its master’s students to preserve an area of “wilderness” threatened by development. Oak Thorne was encouraged by *New York Times* editorialist John B. Oakes to consider preserving the Sunken Forests of New York’s Fire Island from condominium development, Thorne solicited funds to purchase the property under the tax-exempt status of his friend Richard Pough’s new conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy. Thorne succeeded in purchasing the property out from under the developers. It was later transferred to the ownership of the National Park Service, and is known today as the Fire Island National Seashore. Coincidentally, Thorne’s classmates at Yale included another future Colorado conservationist, Estella Leopold. Ibid.

the Thorne Institute, Willard began seeking out potential participants for the inaugural Seminar in Environmental Arts and Sciences (SEAS).

The SEAS took place in Aspen, which went on to host all of the subsequent SEAS events until they petered out in the mid-1980s. Originally, however, the conferences were to have been held in the small but growing planned community of Vail, which was owned and developed by Vail Associates. When COSC came into existence in early 1965, it had not taken long for Vail's marketing manager, Bob Parker, to catch wind of the new developments taking place in Denver. Parker went out of his way to develop contacts with the new organization, and upon hearing of Willard's plan for an ecological seminar, had urged her to consider holding the event at his company's mountain resort. Theoretically at least, Willard's SEAS plans combined the fashionable intellectual trend of ecology with the prospect of famous guests. It was a script right out of Aspen's marketing playbook, and Parker was thrilled at the chance to eat the rival resort's proverbial lunch.

Parker's excitement was to be short-lived, however. Upon hearing of Vail Associates' plans for SEAS, Elizabeth Paepke, wife of Walter Paepke (founder of the Aspen Ski Company and the Aspen Institute) made Willard an offer of her own. As the grande dame of Aspen's contrived but bustling intellectual scene, as well as the largest landowner in town, Paepke offered to donate sizeable chunk of Aspen real estate to SEAS, and money to construct an ecological center and home space for the seminar. Willard did not need to be asked twice.

To plan the event, Willard turned to her friends and contacts within Colorado's deepening and expanding conservation community. Her team of organizers included

Roger Hansen, Estella Leopold, and Con Tolman, all of whom were members of COSC. In choosing the venue, Willard looked to the newly revitalized mountain village of Aspen. Along with his wife Elizabeth, Chicago industrialist Walter Paepke had rediscovered the nearly abandoned silver mining town in 1945, and had turned it into a thriving center of both recreation and culture, founding both the Aspen Skiing Company and the Aspen Institute in the early 1950s. Though Walter died in 1960, Elizabeth continued their cultural work. Willard's idea for an ecological seminar focused on thinkers and policy-makers fit perfectly with Aspen's humanist flavor.¹²² Though the Thorne Ecological Foundation was the main sponsor of SEAS, with Roger Hansen's assistance, Willard added such additional underwriters as the National Wildlife Federation, the Pinchot Institute, the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, Sports Illustrated, and of course, the Colorado Open Space Foundation.¹²³

She envisioned SEAS as a collegial but intellectually rigorous training workshop, combining "fieldwork" in the mountains and valleys near Aspen with discussion and panel sessions; which applied the insights of ecology to pressing social problems like poverty, racism and pollution. Willard made no bones about the ideological purpose of the seminar:

1. To develop an appreciation of the knowledge, principles, and applications of the science of ecology as an 'umbrella' for environmental arts and sciences
2. To examine the relationship of an environmental ethic to various basic scientific and cultural disciplines

¹²² For more on the cultural and recreational roots of modern Aspen, see James Sloan Allen, *The Romance of Commerce and Culture: Capitalism, Modernism, and the Chicago-Aspen Crusade for Cultural Reform* (University Press of Colorado, 2002).

¹²³ "Seminar on Environmental Arts and Sciences," Program (Boulder, CO, July 23, 1967), Richard G. Beidleman Papers, 1950-1990, Ms. 0272, Box 2, fd.1, Tutt Library (Colorado College) Special Collections.

3. To offer an intensive exploration of ecological principles for leaders in business, industry, government, politics, education, religion, the professions, the arts, and the communications field.
4. To enhance the quality of citizen leadership on environmental concerns, oriented to the *broad view* [italics in original] in ecology and conservation.¹²⁴

Though Willard looked forward to reprising the role of ecological docent that she had played on the alpine slopes of Rocky Mountain National Park, she knew that she needed help to guide SEAS participants through the varied ecosystems in and around Aspen. Turning to friends and colleagues in ecology and biology departments around the country, Willard recruited noted biologists Richard Beidelman of Colorado College, W. Dwight Billings of Duke University, Frank Golley of the University of Georgia, and Stanley Cain of the University of Michigan.¹²⁵

Culminating a furious year of organizing, the inaugural SEAS conference took place in Aspen in late July of 1967. The program of events spanned an entire week, and represented a considerable investment of time and energy for all involved. SEAS participants were out in the “field” by 8 AM each day for lessons in field ecology from the expert teaching staff of science professors. Afternoons were filled with panel discussions on topics ranging from population growth to “environmental design ethics.” Although the first SEAS conference was primarily an intra-Colorado affair, it drew guests and participants from widely varied disciplines and fields.¹²⁶ Although of course there was always room for improvement, Willard was satisfied that SEAS had achieved its objectives.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ The month after the conference, Willard’s friend and ecology guide Richard Beidleman wrote to compliment her on a “successful and provocative seminar...Out of

The next year, Willard moved SEAS to a date in late August. To measure how successful its first year had been, and how much had changed within conservationism in the state of Colorado in 13 short months, one needed only to look at the list of sponsors for the 1968 event. Not only did it include all of the sponsors from the year before, but the list now contained the likes of the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry (CACI), the AMAX company, and the Oil Shale Development Corporation.¹²⁸ Where the 1967 list of attendees had been confined primarily to within the state, the 1968 SEAS conference included the names of such luminaries as Robert McNamara, David Brower, Margaret Mead, George Romney, Laurance Rockefeller, and George Meany.¹²⁹ Willard's original plan of gathering opinion-shapers and policy-makers had, it seemed, born itself out. As ecology came of age at the dawn of the 1970s, Willard along with her COSCC associates could take at least some credit for bringing it to the world's attention, and bringing the world to Aspen.¹³⁰

IV. Women, Science, and the Politics of Place

my contacts with the Bureau of Reclamation, I think that I will make overtures to set up some ecological surveys and permanent photographic points for the new reservoir going in at Pueblo [Colorado], perhaps working some students into a continuing field research project there." Richard Beidleman to Betty Willard, August 4, 1967, Richard G. Beidleman Papers, 1950-1990, Ms. 0272, Box 2, fd.1, Tutt Library (Colorado College) Special Collections.

¹²⁸ "Seminar on Environmental Arts and Sciences," Program (Snowmass-at-Aspen, August 25, 1968), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 3, Box 2, FF48, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ The list of famous personalities on the 1967 SEAS program is nothing short of remarkable in its eclecticism: I.M. Pei, Margaret Meade, Robert McNamara, Sen. John Saylor, Mich. Gov. George Romney, Sen. Lee Metcalf, William White, Ansel Adams, David Brower, Laurance Rockefeller, Stewart Udall, and Walter Reuther each gave addresses and participated in various workshops during the five day gathering.

Willard turned to the many experts in the Colorado movement, including Estella Leopold and Ruth Weiner, for help in organizing and running the event. Although the SEAS seminars were meant for laypeople, its themes, presentations, and discussion topics were intellectually rigorous and advanced by even today's academic standards. SEAS workshops discussed everything related to the environment, covering hard science, aesthetics, psychology, spirituality, and engineering. One workshop, moderated by Margaret Meade, had a title that could easily have come from the program of next year's Environmental History Conference: "The Cultural Dimensions of Environmentalism." Between workshops, participants were encouraged to go on field ecology trips, which were guided by Betty Willard and other local experts, in order to develop a sense of the ecology of mountain ecosystems. The first SEAS program was comprehensive, provocative, and well executed, gaining the attention of industry and government heads, who continued to attend until the program's eventual demise in 1976. It was a textbook example of the "Colorado" approach; educating, rather than chastising the powerful.

The personal histories of prominent women conservationists in Colorado reveal perhaps better than anything else the discrepancies between the Colorado conservation movement and the Sierra Club in the decades following World War II. Far from fading into the background, the 1960s saw women surge into positions of power and authority within the Colorado movement. Some of the top women leaders had advanced degrees in science, and were able to leverage their expertise in exchange for acceptance, however grudging, from both their male counterparts within the conservation movement and their male adversaries in industry and government. As the conservation movement in Colorado rapidly grew in stature and influence, the institutional power within the

movement began to translate into unofficial “community power” of a distinctly political dimension. The mere presence of women in the movement ensured a more open gender regime within Colorado’s conservation movement—one that contrasted starkly with that of opposing industry and government groups, which in some cases remained inhospitable to women until well into the 1980s.

Two caveats are in order, however. First, there is nothing to indicate that sexism was naturally any less prevalent within the movement than it was outside of it, or that the conservationists’ looser gender formation was the result of anything other than expediency. Second, women conservation leaders in the 1960s were not feminists in the modern sense of the term. Although they pushed back hard against sexual marginalization, their primary loyalty was to the cause of conservationism. Their emotional and intellectual investment in it made it difficult for them to do the work that would have been required to mount a sustained feminist critique of their movement. Still, the disparities in the gender regimes of conservationism and those of industry and government were real. And although it went largely unremarked at the time, the conservationist approach of “activism by consultancy” offered women a point of entry into the centers of political power in Colorado that at the time did not exist anywhere else in Colorado.

Estella Leopold’s experience in the conservation movement highlights the instant credibility that accrued to women who had a Ph.D. in the hard sciences. As the youngest daughter of the revered conservation writer Aldo Leopold, her conservationist bona fides were inbuilt. After graduating from Yale in 1955 with a doctoral degree in botany, she found her first job at the Denver-based Paleontology and Stratigraphy Branch of the U.S.

Geological Survey, as a research botanist. Despite her conservationist pedigree, Leopold did not feel immediately compelled to involve herself in conservationism, and remained aloof from it for her first eight years in Colorado. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, followed two years later by the passage of the landmark Wilderness Act, along with the public announcement by the Department of the Interior that it planned to build two dams bracketing the Grand Canyon as part of the massive Central Arizona Project, moved her to take action. Angered particularly by the proposed dams, Leopold joined the fledgling Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council to help stop them. Under their aegis, she began what became known as the Grand Canyon workshop in 1965. But because Leopold worked for a branch of the Interior Department, she had to be circumspect in her activism. Letting others, like friends and fellow COSCC members Ruth Weiner and Amy Roosevelt (niece of FDR) press their case in public, Leopold focused on the science of the dams. In her spare time, and with the help of friends in the Colorado's scientific community, Leopold assembled a stratigraphic and economic argument against the dams. Her work would play a key role in their eventual demise.¹³¹ She went on to serve briefly as president of COSCC in 1969.¹³²

Ruth Weiner and her husband Robert moved to Colorado in 1964, after they graduated from Johns Hopkins with doctorates in chemistry. With four children and a mountain of school debt, cheap family entertainment was the order of the day, and the Colorado Mountain Club fit the bill. Through it, she met Estella Leopold and others who were already active in the conservation movement, and along with her husband, she

¹³¹ Estella Leopold, interview with author, Denver, CO, October 26 2007.

¹³² Estella Leopold. 2008. Environmental Movement History--focus on Colorado: personal notes given to author by the subject.

joined COSCC shortly afterward. Although her interests in conservationism were not as focused as were Leopold's, Weiner approached environmental issues with the same intense commitment that had propelled her through graduate school, despite the extreme sexism that was then endemic to most academic sciences. The biggest problem she encountered among her peers, she would later recall, had nothing to do with her professional merits: "Being married put you one step below women who were not... I was supposed to be wifey and mother first." Shrugging off such criticism, Weiner became an acknowledged thought leader within COSCC after only a few months' membership. In 1967, at the height of the legislative battle over the Central Arizona Project, COSCC sent her to Washington, D.C. for three months to lobby and offer scientific testimony before Congress in opposition to the Grand Canyon dams. She often testified together with well-known Sierra Club leader David Brower. Her "mildly exotic" status as a woman helped to draw attention to her cause.¹³³

But their experiences in Washington diverged sharply beyond the steps of the capitol. Brower was able to call upon the immense resources of the Sierra Club for his accommodations and meals, and found easy entrance into the social structure of Washington's most powerful. "His [Brower's] trip," Weiner later recalled, "must have cost the Sierra Club about twenty times what my trip cost (COSCC), because I stayed with friends. If somebody took me out for a meal, I would eat everything in sight." The class implications are unmistakable here, and highlight the considerable striations within the national environmental movement. Still, the collective effort paid off, as the dams were stricken from the Central Arizona Project a year later.

¹³³ Ruth Weiner, Interview with author via telephone, Albuquerque, N.M., March 8, 2008

This list barely scratches the surface of these particular women's experiences and activities as part of the Colorado conservation movement. And there were many others. Amy Roosevelt, mentioned previously, became the chair of COSCC's Outdoor Education workshop, tasked with finding ways to education Colorado's children, particularly those in Denver's underprivileged areas, about the outdoors and conservation.¹³⁴ Vim Wright filed suit against the development of the Florissant Fossil Beds in 1969, and held off a developer's bulldozer by lying in front of it as she waited for an injunction to be delivered from the district federal court in Denver.¹³⁵ The site became a national monument soon afterward.

Although Leopold, Weiner, and Willard came to conservationism by way of the Colorado Mountain Club, there were other points of entry for women interested in environmentalism. The conservation movement in Colorado overlapped considerably in personnel and in scope with historic preservation organizations, and the prominent Colorado Federation of Women's Garden Clubs, which was active in highway beautification and anti-billboard advocacy. It was not hard to see the institutional strength of Colorado's powerful League of Women Voters chapter behind each these efforts. Estelle Brown and Ruth Newlon, two other notable conservation leaders, came to the movement by way of these more civic-oriented organizations. Both had been active in anti-billboard and highway beautification efforts in Colorado since the late 1950s.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Amy Roosevelt. 1967. Activity Highlights 1965-66: Future Goals. Colorado Environmental Council collection. Denver: Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

¹³⁵ Estella Leopold, interview with author, Denver, CO, October 26 2007.

¹³⁶ Dick Lamm, who would become the state's governor in 1974, was still a young and unknown lawyer, Estelle Brown hired him on behalf of the Colorado Federation of Women's Garden Clubs to lobby the Colorado statehouse against billboards. It was his

There may have been some resentment on the part of women conservationists who did not have doctorates for their more accredited peers. Because the Colorado conservation movement so privileged science, and fetishized the “expert,” women with advanced degrees almost certainly enjoyed higher status within the movement, and more name recognition outside of it. Ruth Weiner certainly noticed: “There were a lot of women in the environmental movement [who] weren’t working and didn’t have advanced degrees. And it became their lives. For a professional person, it wasn’t. They may have felt a little left behind.”¹³⁷

first foray into politics. (Governor Richard Lamm, interview with author, Institute for Public Policy Sciences at the University of Denver, July 18 2006.)

¹³⁷ Ruth Weiner, Interview with author via telephone, Albuquerque, N.M., March 8, 2008

Epilogue

For the whole earth is the Sepulchre of famous men;
and their story is not graven only in a stone over their native earth,
but lives on far away, without visible symbol,
woven into the stuff of other men's lives.

--*Oration of Pericles, 430 BC*

I. Full Circle

The saga of the 1976 Winter Olympics, and its ultimate defeat at the hands of Colorado voters in the spring of 1972, has been hashed and rehashed in the Colorado press and, increasingly, in the work of historians. Some saw it as a powerful rebuke of Denver's business elite, whom historian Paul Whiteside described as "prominent, well-heeled, and widely respected business and political leaders for whom growth and economic development were gospel." It has been seen as a referendum on the desirability of economic growth itself for Denver and its mountain hinterland, and a coming-of-age moment for electoral environmentalism and proto-libertarianism.¹³⁸

Part of the reason the Denver Olympics story continues to attract such attention is that it simply does not fit the historical arc of either city or state. Politically, economically, and in any number of other ways, the anti-Olympics coalition of the early 1970s is a freak. It unified groups of voters that otherwise had very little in common, and handed Denver's longtime power brokers a thoroughly public, and unprecedentedly

¹³⁸ See Michael Wayne Childers, "Fire on the Mountain: Growth and Conflict in Colorado Ski Country" (Ph.D., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2010), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/pqdtft/docview/741159522/abstract/139ACA0816236E23771/1?accountid=7118>; Laura Lee Katz Olson, "Power, Public Policy and the Environment: The Defeat of the 1976 Winter Olympics in Colorado" (Ph.D., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1974), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/pqdtft/docview/302726819/citation/139ACA0816236E23771/2?accountid=7118>.

humiliating defeat. It signaled the political arrival of environmentalism as a political force, cemented its ties with Great Society liberalism, and helped earn it the enduring enmity of the similarly rising “New Right.”

The Olympics defeat was also a moment of unusual historical confluence. Few political issues brought so many different voices into the public square, and few were more tied to the real and imagined relationship between a city and its hinterland.

II. In Rest, No Peace

On March 3, 1972, Colorado Governor John Love gave a speech before the Colorado State Assembly, recounting his February trip to the accept the symbolic Olympic torch at the Olympic Winter Games, held that year in Sapporo, Japan. It had not been a pleasant journey for the Governor. Displeased by the Denver Olympic Committee’s continuing indecisiveness regarding siting for downhill ski racing and other events, and surprised by an impromptu teach-in staged by anti-Olympics activists, IOC president Avery Brundage had appeared poised to scrap the Winter Olympics entirely.¹³⁹ Without a swiftly marshaled resolution of support from the U.S. Congress and statement of support from President Nixon, Love might easily have returned to Colorado torchless.

As matters stood however, the Games were still Denver’s to host, and on this day, Love found himself in the surprising position of urging continued support for hosting the Games to Colorado lawmakers. When he told them, for instance, that he was certain that “those who were intimately involved in the effort [to win the Olympic Games] had no

¹³⁹ Brundage was openly skeptical of the Winter Olympic Games in general, given the expense of the facilities and the narrowness of its appeal. John M. Lee, “DENVER SUFFERS SAPPORO ORDEAL: After 15 Hectic Hours, City Gains ’76 Affirmation,” *New York Times* (New York, N.Y., United States, February 2, 1972), sec. SPORTS.

thought but that the citizens of Colorado would join with them in their elation and pride in the outcome,” he was, in all likelihood, describing himself.¹⁴⁰ He assured the Assembly, to the extent that he could, that the cost of the Games to the state would remain within the realm of \$5 million dollars, and dismissed the concerns of environmentalists and budget hawks. “It is unthinkable to me,” Love concluded, “that at this time and place in the history of the Olympic Games ...Coloradoans would stand up and say—“We have neither the will nor the unity.”¹⁴¹ It was, in retrospect, a speech laced with unintentional irony. There was no lack of unity or will in Colorado that year. If anything, there was comity perhaps than at any time in recent memory, but it was concentrated on the side of an opposition that Love could not recognize or accept as real.

This was true even as Citizens for Colorado’s Future (CCF), the umbrella activist group coordinating the anti-Olympics electoral effort, prepared to submit a petition with over 77,000 voter signatures in support of placing the matter on the November ballot.¹⁴² For Love, as well as the organizers and chief supporters of the Denver’s 1976 Winter Olympic Games, the idea that Coloradoans would reject the Games—indeed that they would even have the means to do so—was beyond imagining. The ethos of “selling

¹⁴⁰ Love had in fact been one of the Colorado delegates to the International Olympic Committee during the bidding process some years earlier. Governor John Love, “Address of John A. Love, Governor of Colorado, March 3, 1972,” Speech transcript (Denver, CO, March 3, 1972), Speeches and Messages, Statement Before the I.O.C., Sapporo, Japan--Tuesday, Feb 1, 1972, Colorado State Archives.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Charlie Meyers, “Here Is How A City Lost The Olympics,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, November 12, 1972).

Colorado” was one that they believed most citizens of the state and capital city continued to endorse.¹⁴³

Moreover, in the history of the modern Olympic Games both before and since, no other country or province has won the right to host and then rescinded the offer. Since the beginning of the modern Olympic movement in the late 19th century, organizers had successfully cloaked the event in the mythic ideals of international peace and brotherhood, making the quadrennial event into a kind of “secular ritual.”¹⁴⁴ In a reflection of the effectiveness of this form of marketing, selection to host an Olympiad was considered among the highest honors accorded any first world city, carrying with it the obligation to do so with the consummate panache, polish and cosmopolitanism. To reject the honor of hosting an Olympic Games was to reject the ideals for which they supposedly stood—a fantastically misanthropic statement.

Shortly after Governor Love addressed the Colorado Assembly, the CCF turned in its petitions, guaranteeing the Olympics referendum a spot on the ballot. In response, the DOC would clean house, firing several of its most visible and vocal leaders, and

¹⁴³ Governor Love himself participated in the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry’s explicitly branded “Sell Colorado” missions in the mid-1960s, traveling to various American cities to urge businesses there to invest and expand into the Denver area. “Let me again reassure that we are not suggesting the departure of industry from San Francisco,” he told one audience at a 1964 luncheon put on by CACI in San Francisco. “We recognize, first the futility of such a suggestion, and, second, its impropriety; but we do hope that, as economic forces dictate the necessity of new branch plants for more competitive market penetration or as you have need for a new raw material for your product expansion or as you find need for an alternate labor source or for a research facility removed from your present production facility to provide new vision or for any other reason which may suggest expansion into another region, we do hope you will consider Colorado in your expansion planning.” Love, “Governor’s Luncheon Speech-- ‘Sell Colorado’ Mission to San Francisco.”

¹⁴⁴ For more on public sports as secular ritual, see Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, *Secular Ritual* (Uitgeverij Van Gorcum, 1977).

reorganize as the Denver Olympic Organizing Committee (DOOC). The new leadership hoped to leave behind the original DOC's political and managerial missteps, and to make clear to Colorado voters that a new era of openness and accountability in planning for the Games had now arrived. But DOOC could not gain the political distance from the original DOC that its committee members hoped, which was a consequence of its continuing failure to understand the nature of the Olympics opposition. It was not the individuals on the original DOC to which the CCF objected, but rather the interests they were seen to represent.

Even if the DOOC had adopted an entirely new outlook and approach to organizing the 1976 Winter Games, it is doubtful that the new committee could have escaped the fatal consequences of its predecessor's mistakes. In June 1972 for example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced a reduction to its Model Cities funding for proposed low-income housing projects in Denver, which the original DOC had counted on for housing members of the press during the Games.¹⁴⁵ The reduction in funds forced a re-reckoning of state and city-borne costs, driving up the projections. As a number of other cost-cutting measures taken by the DOC turned out to be similarly unrealistic, the DOOC had to continually revise upward its estimate of the costs associated with hosting the Games. It was becoming increasingly clear, moreover, that Denver would not be prepared to host the Games by 1976, blunting the argument that

¹⁴⁵ Once it became clear that a referendum on prohibiting state and municipal funding for the Olympics would appear on the November 1972 ballot, it became clear that the DOC's ill-considered move to tie Model City federal grant funding for urban renewal to press housing for the Olympics ultimately threatened both objectives. If the referendum passed, the city would be unable to legally contribute its share of expected funding for the redevelopment projects. Bob Jain, "Council OKs Olympic Housing," *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, October 25, 1972).

the city would embarrass itself by rejecting them. Problems with site selection continued to plague planning efforts, leading to, among other things, a bizarre arrangement to hold the bobsled and luge events at Lake Placid, NY.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, by 1972, it looked as if Denver would probably embarrass itself either way.

By the time the referendum on the Olympics was placed on the ballot, its outcome was nearly guaranteed. The Denver organizers, so focused on “selling Colorado” to the IOC, had failed to sell actual Coloradoans on the idea of hosting the Games. Despite the somewhat deceptive wording of the referendum itself, the Olympics were rejected by nearly two-thirds of the state’s voters in November of 1972. Their defeat was even more pronounced in Denver itself.

On November 8, 1972—the day after the referendum—*Denver Post* Ski Editor Charlie Meyers groped for an appropriate analogy for what had just transpired. He settled on the funereal: “The Denver Olympics. Born May 12, 1970 [the announcement of Denver’s winning bid.] Died Nov. 7, 1972. Even in rest, it has no peace.”¹⁴⁷ While the anti-Olympics camp celebrated, pro-Olympics supporters immediately began their bitter autopsy. They blamed misinformed voters: “Three of five people who voted against the Olympics did not realize the deep and far-reaching implications of what they did and the damage to the state and nation,” declared one member of the Denver Olympic Organizing Committee (DOOC). They blamed the mismanagement and poor leadership

¹⁴⁶ AP, “IOC Leaders Air ’76 Winter Games Problems--Denver Reassured,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (Washington, D.C., August 20, 1972).

¹⁴⁷ Charlie Meyers, “Denver Olympics: In Rest No Peace,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, November 8, 1972).

of the Denver Olympic Committee: “What was done in two years couldn’t be undone in just two months.”¹⁴⁸

Yet there was something else going on as well—something that Olympics backers were loath to identify. The opposition to the Olympics was among the most unusual amalgamations of political interests that the state had ever seen. In the February 1972 issue of *The New Republic*, Sam Brown, one of the leaders of Citizens for Colorado’s Future (CCF), the umbrella group directing the anti-Olympics electoral effort, described the two sides of the debate:

Both U.S. Senators, all Colorado Congressmen, the Governor and his 1970 opponent, the Mayor of Denver and his 1971 opponent, the state’s leading businessmen (particularly those with real estate interests), the two large newspapers in the state and a majority of both houses of the legislature favor the Olympics. On the other side have been only blacks, Chicanos, environmentalists, a large number of students, a growing number of low- and middle-income taxpayers, a small number of state legislators and residents of areas near the proposed sites.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, among the first to publicly oppose the Games was the Ad Hoc Citizens Committee for an Equitable Olympics, representing neighborhood and minority groups from central Denver neighborhoods.¹⁵⁰ The Committee protested the lack of urban and minority representation on the DOC, and Denver mayor Bill McNichol’s “obtuse,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Sam W. Jr. Brown, “Snow Job in Colorado,” *The New Republic*, January 29, 1972.

¹⁵⁰ George Lane, “Group Requests Talks on Olympic Planning,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, December 18, 1970).

unresponsive and self-interested” leadership on the issue.¹⁵¹ Olympics planners called for press housing to be built as federally funded low-income housing projects, chosen more for their proximity to the proposed event sites than their suitability for urban renewal.¹⁵² As had become its standard operating procedure, the DOC kept the site selection process secret.

It is precisely the emergence of this improbable anti-Olympics coalition that continues to fascinate Colorado historians. The anti-Olympics movement cut against the prevailing political trend pitting urban core against suburb, and at the time, seemed to even presage a permanent political realignment in the state of Colorado. Even as the Supreme Court deliberated the bitterly contested, Denver-based, *Keyes* busing case, which pitted minority urban core against Anglo suburb over the issue of de facto segregation in Denver’s public schools, the anti-Olympics coalition united much of the Front Range in opposition to an event with a stainless reputation. Never before had such disparate interests been able to line up and fight so effectively under a single banner. The defeat of the Olympics seemed to presage a permanent political shift within the state, in which environmentalism might allow the political interests of Anglos and minorities to fuse with one another. In other words, for the first time in its entire history, it appeared that Colorado might be developing a New Deal-type coalition. But it was not to be.

III. Footnote to Tragedy

¹⁵¹ Clarke R. Watson, “Reasons Why Citizens Group Objects to Mayor’s Appointments to Olympic Committee,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, December 22, 1970).

¹⁵² The two projects were expected to evict 600 families and 84 businesses from the proposed areas. Fred Gillies, “DURA Preparing Bid for ’76 Press Housing,” *Denver Post* (Denver, CO, April 14, 1972).

Edward Hilliard died in a climbing accident on August 15, 1970. Together with their friends Rodney Aller, Jr. and Rodney Aller, Sr., Hilliard and Ann Fowler had set out to climb North Maroon Peak, part of the Maroon Bells massif in the heart of Colorado's Elk Mountains. Their steep slopes, difficult route finding, and rotten, loose rock had earned these mountains the nickname, "The Deadly Bells." Though he was an expert climber, Ed Hilliard had led his party up the wrong route, ascending a steep gully on the east face of the mountain. Roped and helmeted, Hilliard led the party most of the way up the slope. The younger Aller took the lead near the top of the couloir, his father ascending immediately behind him. As they prepared to belay Hilliard and Fowler from above, Aller Sr. accidentally dislodged a large rock with his foot, and yelled a warning as it bounced over the ledge. "There was no cry or other sound heard from below," the sheriff's report recorded. "There was no pull on the rope. Looking down from the top of the couloir, there was no sign of Ed or Ann."¹⁵³

The Allers quickly descended the couloir and found Hilliard's ice ax still lodged in the rock where he had been standing. They found Ann Fowler's body about 200 yards down slope. Covering her with a parka and gathering her pack, they continued downward through a sudden snow squall before finding Hilliard, lying in a rock field another 300 yards below. Collecting his pack as well, the Allers continued down the

¹⁵³ Rodney Aller Sr. and Rodney Aller Jr., "Report to Sheriff Whitmire and Coroner Charles Williams Regarding Accident on North Maroon Mountain, on August 15, 1970, Resulting in the Death of Ann Noyes Fowler and Edward H. Hilliard, Jr." (Aspen, CO, August 16, 1970), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 4, Box 3, FF35, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

mountain, returning to their campsite by 5 PM. The bodies of Hilliard and Fowler were recovered by helicopter the following day.¹⁵⁴ Ed Hilliard was 48 years old.

Hilliard's death hit the conservation movement in Colorado with the force of a hammer blow. Though his name was not the most widely-known within the state's conservation movement, Hilliard had supplied the sustaining vision, the will to persist despite setbacks, and patience to seek a dialogue with antagonists. All that had happened to conservationism in Colorado over the past decade, from the founding of the Colorado Open Space Council to the Rocky Mountain Center on the Environment, and from Outward Bound School to the Seminar on the Environmental Arts and Sciences—all of it had been animated by his altruism and hopefulness for a movement that could harmonize the relationship between people and their environment. "I am convinced," Roger Hansen said at his friend's memorial service, "that Ed was just beginning to mature his life's main thrust." With sadness, he described his friend:

He was stepping over a wider threshold, about to apply a mathematical square to the dimensions of his service to his fellow man....Ed Hilliard was a total environmentalist. His concern and involvement was universal, cosmic. He had the vision—as so few have—to quickly grasp and articulate the inextricable relationships between the great social revolutions of our time—poverty, race, peace, environment. Ed Hilliard loved his world, the whole world, and all the people in it, and more important, he never ceased his efforts to make it better.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Roger Hansen, "Edward Hilliard Memorial" (Denver, CO, 1970), Edward Hilliard, Jr. Papers, CONS 119, Series 4, Box 3, FF34, Conservation Collection, The Denver Public Library.

Hilliard's loss would be deeply felt in the years after his death. His presence had somehow dulled the sharp edges of ego and personality that could shatter even the most unified movements. In his absence, personality conflicts, differences of ideology, and expedient politics began to slowly tear at the fabric that had held Denver's remarkable conservation movement together for the past five years.

IV. Separate Ways

Questions of growth were not as amenable to compromise, and in the 1970s, matters came to a head. A significant faction of Denver's conservationists deeply opposed the city's rapid urban growth. As their political clout had increased during the 1960s, they began to oppose some of the Denver Water Board's most important projects. These included a proposed diversion from the Eagle-Piney Wilderness, a giant proposed Foothills water project which contemplated a Lake Powell-sized reservoir in the foothills just to the southwest of the town, a water tunnel underneath the low mountains, and a large treatment plant. Conservationists believed that if constructed, both the Eagle-Piney diversion and the Foothills Project would substantially damage the scenic, wildlife, historical and recreational values of the proposed site, and that their existence would encourage more water waste and more indiscriminate urban growth. They believed that better water conservation measures could increase Denver's water supply far more cheaply, and without courting further population growth and urban sprawl.¹⁵⁶

The Denver Water Board insisted that the project was absolutely necessary in order to meet the water needs of Denver's projected population growth, for which the

¹⁵⁶ COSC Board of Directors, 1977, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Denver, Denver Public Library Conservation Collection, CONS 137, Box 2, FF40.

Board was bound by city charter to provide.¹⁵⁷ While respectful of conservationists (or more accurately, the public support at their command), the Water Board, led by the irascible James Ogilvie, vehemently rejected the notion that water might be used to dictate where people could live.¹⁵⁸ In the fight over Eagle-Piney, Ogilvie tried to take a conciliatory tone, insisting that the Water Board would be ecologically conscientious in its development of the wilderness area. The Wilderness Act, Ogilvie pointed out, contained explicit exceptions for states to be able to develop water resources on wilderness land. Portals would be designed to blend with the terrain, and objections would be dealt with “at the local level.”¹⁵⁹ Conservationists were not satisfied, however, and they successfully opposed a massive bond measure for the Water Board in 1972.

The following year, the Water Board turned to George Wallace for political help in passing another bond issue. Giving vent to his inner-demagogue, Wallace took confidently to the airwaves and newspapers, warning darkly that Denver would run out of water in ten years, and that without Foothills and Eagle-Piney, water rates for Denver users would increase anywhere between 40 percent to 80 percent per home. He insisted that the objections to Foothills—and to the bond issue in particular—came from “non-residents of Denver, whose basic interests are not those of Denverites.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Heidi Burgess, “Environmental Mediation (The Foothills Case)” in *Resolving Environmental Regulatory Disputes*, eds. Lawrence Susskind, Lawrence Bellow, and Michael Wheeler. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1983, 156-221.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 160

¹⁵⁹ Statement of Denver Board of Water Commissioners by James L. Ogilvie, 1970, Colorado Environmental Coalition Records, Denver, Denver Public Library Conservation Collection, CONS 137, Box 35, FF 20.

¹⁶⁰ Jack Frank, 1974, George M. Wallace Papers, Denver Denver Public Library, OV Box 5, WH 1006, FF41. (add period)

Privately, both Ogilvie and Wallace were livid with conservationists. They both believed that Denver conservationists were threatening the city's economy and long-term viability, purely for selfish reasons of aesthetics. Ogilvie accused his antagonists of wanting to "pull the ladder up" after themselves, closing off Colorado to further affluence or expansion.¹⁶¹ Much of the discussion was far too technical to offer easy accessibility to the casual observer, but the stakes of the argument were readily visible to all. Denver could either use water supplies to try to limit growth and potentially risk its affluence, or it could do nothing, and risk the myriad ill effects of uncontrolled growth. With Wallace's help, the Denver Water Board's 1973 bond passed by a narrow margin.

Nonetheless, at roughly the same time, a hastily organized group of opponents began to coalesce, composed of conservationists, libertarians, and numerous unaligned neighborhood organizations. This *ad hoc* coalition worried about the impact that the 1976 Olympic Games, if held in Denver, would have on their neighborhoods.¹⁶² Tapping into pre-stoked fears of population expansion, they mobilized successfully for a state referendum on whether or not Colorado tax money would be used to fund the Games. The Denver Olympic Committee, responsible for bringing the Games to Denver and planning the two-week event, rallied its allies in a desperate public campaign to defeat the referendum, but again, Colorado voters overwhelmingly rejected the Olympics on the 1972 ballot initiative. Two years later, they would elect conservationist and anti-Olympics leader Richard Lamm as their governor.

¹⁶¹ U.S. Senator Gary Hart, interview by the author, at the University of Colorado at Denver, August 23, 2007.

¹⁶² Laura Lee Katz Olson. *Power, Public Policy and the Environment: The Defeat of the 1976 Winter Olympics in Colorado*. (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1974).

But Lamm's election in 1974 proved to be the high water mark, at least politically, for Denver's conservation movement. In the late 1970s, COSC and other leading groups began to lose their former cohesion and leadership as founders burned out and moved on.¹⁶³ From the dizzying heights of the early 1970s, including the defeat of the Olympics and the obstruction of the once-omnipotent Denver Water Board, to the election of Gary Hart as a Senator and Richard Lamm as Colorado's governor, it was not difficult to imagine a constant upward movement toward smart, limited growth, careful protection of the environment and, with the end of the Vietnam War, a return to the social priorities that had informed the legislation of Great Society. But even as environmentalists rose to halls of state and federal power, their moment in history was quickly passing, as a new, peculiarly Western style of conservatism caught on, eventually finding national expression in the figure and presidency of Ronald Reagan.

Once in office, Reagan nominated James Watt as his Secretary of the Interior, who quickly set about finding ways to divest the federal government of its massive Western landholdings, and loosening the regulations regarding private mining and ranching on public lands. An avowed "part of the Sagebrush Rebellion," Watt viewed the federal government's land ownership in the West as an intrusion on the rights of the states. The Sagebrush Rebellion has variously been interpreted as a closely-knit collection of rural Western resentments against the federal government, and particularly environmentalists for preventing the extractive industrial development of public land. While Watt failed to remake the Department of the Interior in his image, his tenure

¹⁶³ Hansen Interview, July 2, 2007.

marked a definitive end to the era of federally-backed environmentalism when it came to conservation and land management in the American West.

As this and other works of Western history have shown, anger against the federal government was nothing new in the American West, extending back at least as far as the Grange and Free Silver movements of the late 19th century. But the resentment against environmentalists in particular (frequently referred to in Sagebrush invective as “toadstool worshippers,” “tree-huggers,” etc.), added a new element to a familiar mixture. The Sagebrush Rebellion’s hostility to the objectives of political environmentalism was in part a reaction to nearly a decade of successful hinterland claims by conservationists—claims that were quintessentially urban and consumer-oriented in nature in nature.¹⁶⁴ The Sagebrush Rebellion was an expression of the anger of rural and production-oriented interests, and instigated a momentous fight over the meaning of public property, litigated in the political sphere.

While the high point of the conservation era forms the endpoint of the narrative within this dissertation, there was no declension to the story it tries to tell. The relationship between city and landscape continued to shape both, as it does today. To think about Denver is to think about its mountains. Denver and its mountains have always been one place. And so will they continue to be.

¹⁶⁴ For more on the Sagebrush Rebellion, see Philip L. Fradkin, *Sagebrush Country: Land and the American West*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1989); Jacqueline Vaughn, *Green Backlash: The History and Politics of Environmental Opposition in the U.s* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner, 1997); Karen R. Merrill, *Public Lands and Political Meaning : Ranchers, the Government, and the Property Between Them* (University of California Press, 2002).

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