

Reformers of the Technoshock City: Denver, 1960-1970

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Denver the “Technoshock” City?

The “shock cities” of the 19th century were not typically places of beauty. They were sites of tremendous industrial productivity, held in thrall to the imperatives and logic of the factory. They were disfigured by life-threatening levels of pollution, and grew so fast as to test social cohesion and civic authority beyond their breaking points. Shock cities stood out as trend-setting human agglomerations. In the developed world at least, these industrial-style shock cities are now largely extinct. Scholars have since debated over possible postindustrial descendents of the shock city. If we steer by Asa Briggs’ classic dictum that shock cities represent, by their nature, trend-setting and even world historical shifts in urban form, then Los Angeles, and “postsuburban” Orange County specifically, would seem to occupy the pole position, at least for the American West.¹ Yet while Orange County became, in multiple respects, the first urban agglomeration of its kind, its distinction quickly lost its difference as cities across the West underwent similar processes of explosive urbanization in the second half of the 20th century. Regardless whether or not the “OC” is a true shock city in the classic sense, it has a much more legitimate claim to the mantle than Denver does. In terms of rapid urbanization, Denver was not the first, the worst, or the biggest. But does it have to be? After all, historical “shocks” are generally subject to cultural perception, and for many thousands of Denverites who witnessed the astonishing refashioning of their city and

¹ Asa Briggs. *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1963), 56. For Orange County as a potential shock city, see, for example, Rob Kling, Spencer Olin, Mark Poster, ed. *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County Since World War II*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

surrounding landscape in the years following World War II, “shock city” may well have been an apt description, indeed.

Sooner or later, those who study postwar Denver must come to grips with an oftentimes-frustrating realization: its rugged surrounds notwithstanding, Denver is not an easy city for which to claim any sort of metropolitan exceptionalism. 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. It was not a one-industry town like Houston, or drenched in self-perpetuated myth like Dallas. 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. To find Denver’s exceptionalism in fact, one is almost compelled to reach back before World War II, to the city’s days as a self-sustaining fiefdom for its hereditary financial and business elites. For much of the early 20th century, and particularly during the interwar years, this small and exclusive club controlled Denver’s economy and politics. For a variety of reasons (some selfish and shortsighted, and some quite prescient), they were wary of rapid, uncontrolled urban growth and industrialization, seeing in it a threat to their hard-won prerogatives. Over time, Denver’s finance and business aristocracy had achieved a copasetic stasis: a city big enough to exert market control over its hinterland and ensure their wealth, but small enough to defend from rapacious Eastern capital and manipulate via political machines and coordinated banking practices.² So while other cities grew, Denver merely maintained, in precisely the manner that its most powerful citizens preferred.

² For an excellent environmental history of the region and sharp analysis of Denver’s gradual mastery over its hinterland, see Kathleen Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain and Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change along the Front Range*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

In the late 1940s however, the leadership of Denver's entrenched financial interests began to face unaccustomed challenges from a restive business class, eager to join in the derby of urbanization taking place in other Western cities. By then, it had fallen far behind cities like Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Dallas in the urban growth race, and the local business and political atmosphere was one of desperate ambition. Thanks in part to new political leadership and a revitalized banking sector, the growth that Denver's boosters hoped for was not long in coming. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of people in the Denver metro area doubled in size, from 600,000 to over 1.2 million, with four suburban counties accounting for 83% of the increase. Denver suddenly began experiencing many of the characteristic afflictions of rapid growth, including air pollution, sprawl, neighborhood stratification, class and racial tension, dwindling natural resources (water in particular) and the strong sensation among many residents of overcrowding.³

Postwar Denver does not fit perfectly into the quintessentially industrial "shock city" model. Its rate and magnitude of expansion, even during its fastest-growing years, are not comparable to those of Manchester, Chicago, or even Los Angeles. Denver's pollution problems, while acute, did not pose the same existential threat to public health and order that it had in earlier shock cities. Moreover, they were rooted in patterns of consumption rather than production. Denver's "Brown Cloud," for instance, came primarily from exhaust pipes, not smokestacks. It was and remains a "tech" city, and its economic growth was driven by the "Information Age" industries like defense and communications. Unlike the polyglot working classes that peopled the cities of the

³ Denver Regional Council of Governments. *Population: Current Estimates and Projections, Denver SMSA*. (Denver: The Council, 1969).

industrial revolution, postwar Denver tapped into a relatively homogenous labor flow of affluent, educated whites, thus avoiding much of the class and ethnic tension of earlier shock cities.⁴ Megatrends like automobility and suburbanization allowed Denver and other postwar cities to deposit their expanding populations over larger areas, instead of packing people into cramped urban cores, as earlier shock cities had.

In his recent book on Manchester and Chicago however, Harold Platt expands the notion of shock cities to encompass the lived experiences of their inhabitants—communities that endured the trauma of rapid environmental and social change, and responded with urban and social reform. Industrial shock cities became the seedbeds of Progressivism, a transatlantic reform movement that sought to mitigate by various means the worst effects of what Platt calls “industrial ecologies.”⁵ Denver is a *subjective* “shock city” in the sense that its postwar history fits neatly into this cycle of urban trauma and reform. The “shock” came as a perceived diminution of Denver’s variously defined “quality of life,” and dismay over the massive physical changes to a beloved landscape. Denver was marked by a particularly potent strain of what geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has called “topophilia,” and urban growth was damaging the qualities that many Denverites valued most about their city.⁶ Denver’s growth-associated trauma was heightened by the daunting certainty of continued, and even accelerated growth yet to come. In the early 1960s, census experts predicted that the Denver metro area would continue to expand by

4 Denver Regional Council of Governments. *Total Population and Minority Group Population, Estimates and Projections, Denver SMSA : A Technical Report*. (Denver: The Council, 1969).

5 Platt, Harold L. *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 15-18

6 Yi-fu Tuan. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).

50% each decade until the year 2000.⁷ The neologism “technoshock city,” while provisional at best, attempts to capture the unique cultural, economic, and social dynamics of an exploding, postindustrial metropolis, as experienced by those who lived through it.⁸

Protecting Denver’s “quality of life” and preserving its pristine surroundings were two separate impulses, and they gave rise to two separate, and often divergent types of reform in Denver during the early 1960s. The first was what Joel Garreau calls the “edge city.”⁹ This type of urban development has become synonymous in urban literature with a lack of comprehensive planning, and is often seen as a reflexive and almost over-determined response to automobile culture and/or late capitalism. It certainly does not enjoy a place of honor in the annals of urban reform, nor, probably, should it. Yet one of its originators, Denver businessman George Wallace, conceived his version of the edge city in the late 1950s as a potential cure-all for the ills of rapid growth in the core city of Denver, that would restore the luxuries and freedom of a navigable city without sacrificing the wealth that rapid urban growth generated for the area. His development, the Denver Technological Center, amounted to a declaration of secession from Denver proper, and an ambitious attempt to alleviate the ills of the dynamic city through a technical, ground-up redesign.

The second was what might be called the “controlled growth” movement, which sprang back to life in the mid-1960s, after having been dormant since the displacement of Denver’s conservative, old-guard elite in the early 1950s. There was no “controlled

7 Denver Regional Council of Governments. *Population: Current Estimates and Projections, Denver SMSA*. (Denver: The Council, 1969).

8 “Technoshock” is meant to play off of Robert Fishman’s term, “technoburb.” For an in-depth treatment of the interchange between industry, technology, transportation and suburbanization, see Fishman’s book, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 182.

9 Joel Garreau. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. (New York: Random House, 1991).

growth” orthodoxy, however: some believed in limited urban growth in and around the Front Range, some believed that all growth should be steered to other parts of the state, and some believed that no further growth should be permitted as a matter of course. The impulse and cultural force behind “controlled growth” sprang from a particularly vibrant and active Denver-based conservation movement.¹⁰ “Controlled growthers,” regardless which solutions they subscribed to, uniformly believed that Denver’s fragile landscape, and its lack of fresh water, simply did not allow the city to pursue rapid growth in an environmentally responsible manner. It opposed water projects, new highways, and even the 1976 Winter Olympics, under the belief that these measures would needlessly bring more growth to an area of the state that was already overcrowded. In the minds of most conservationists, the answer was not, as George Wallace believed, to make more room for urban expansion, but rather to limit it, and direct it to less populated parts of the state.¹¹

The original shock cities of Manchester and Chicago inspired the emergence of the Progressive Movement in its many different guises. In a similar fashion, “technoshock” cities like Denver provided the context for new groups of reformers, each with different answers to the riddle of rapid urban growth. One sought to mitigate its effects through design, the other to prevent as much of it as possible. This paper offers a brief historical contextualization of both, and considers the role of their interplay on the postwar history of the city of Denver.

¹⁰ Conservationism is a troublesome term in the 1960s, because it was during this period that “conservationism” which was primarily concerned with matters of wilderness preservation, branched out into “environmentalism” which concerned itself with a much wider array of environmental issues. My dissertation considers how COSC and other conservation movements gradually became true environmental movements during the 1960s, but for the purposes of this paper, I will refer to COSC and its affiliates in Colorado as “conservationists,” as they referred to themselves that way.

¹¹ Governor Richard Lamm, interview with author, University of Denver, July 18 2006.

The Edge Node

When he was asked about it years later, Denver developer George Wallace traced the genesis of his most important development project to an ordinary workday in 1958. He had gotten into his car that morning, resigned to another punishing commute from his suburb to the downtown engineering firm where he worked. Returning to his car that night, Wallace found it gashed on the driver's side from hood to trunk. After subduing with difficulty his natively volcanic temper, he found himself considering Denver's many and growing problems in an unaccustomed light. The city was adding people faster than it could accommodate them. Every morning it seemed, there were more commuters clogging Denver's streets, all trying to get to the same place to do work that seemingly could be done anywhere. There were not enough houses, too much air pollution, growing pockets of slums and urban blight, and constant water shortages. Now, it seemed, you could not even go to work downtown without worrying about the safety of your car. Something had obviously gone wrong, and Wallace became determined to do something about it. In 1961, he invested everything he had (and borrowed a good deal more) to buy a large piece of farmland next to an interstate well south of Denver's city limits. Middle class whites were already fleeing the core city for the suburbs in droves; why should their employers stay behind? He would start a new city from scratch that would be carefully designed to avoid the mistakes of the collapsing core. Wallace believed that the first step was establishing a viable new business district. Hoping to attract electronic and

engineering firms, Wallace named his this project the Denver Technological Center, and began building office space before locking in a single tenant.¹²

The Denver Technological Center thus became one of the nation's first large office parks. George Wallace did not "invent" the concept, but he was quite probably the first developer to build one as a pure real estate venture, without any institutional ties to a university.¹³ If it worked, the Tech Center would represent a considerable advance in this respect alone, but for Wallace, it was just the first step of a thirty-year development strategy. By the year 2000, Wallace envisioned a self-contained community of 100,000 people, living in close proximity to work, home, shops and communal spaces. Denver South (as Wallace and his employees tentatively referred to it) would have the most modern infrastructure, and no urban blight. With everything so close by, traffic (and air pollution) would be minimal. Everything would be logically separated and organized by single-use zoning, and connected by tree-lined and winding boulevards (and eventually, a monorail).¹⁴ There would be ample green space, and acres of covered and hidden parking lots. On paper at least, the Denver Tech Center 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

12 Author Unknown. "Every Other Thursday." *Office Park Life*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 1983, 9-11.

13 "Colorado and the New Technological Revolution: Proceedings of the University-Industry Liaison Conference, 1963." Denver Research Institute: Denver, CO. 1963 43-54. In these proceedings, Stanford provost Frederick Terman discusses the genesis of Silicon Valley, emphasizing that office parks do not work as real estate ventures without connection to preexisting research institutions. George Wallace attended the conference. His reaction is not known.

14 George Wallace, Denver's Terrible Tempered Tycoon, in *Empire Magazine (Denver Post)*, Secondary. 1974: Denver. p. 10-13.

grow without sacrificing Wallace's "quality of life" priorities. 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.

The Denver Tech Center became an overnight success, drawing blue chip companies like Kodak, Hewlett Packard, and Ball Aerospace. In the 1980s, it would even become one of the so-called "birthplaces" of the cable industry. Denver was like an undetonated cask of commercial and development dynamite in the early 1960s, and Wallace's DTC became the lit fuse. In less than two decades, hundreds of business developments, built in the same manner and predicated on the same social principles as the DTC, would line Denver's interstate corridors in all directions like pearls on a strand.

Controlled Growth

Although there were active conservation groups throughout the state in the early 1960s, conservationism experienced something of a rebirth at the annual meeting of the Colorado Mountain Club in Breckenridge, in the fall of 1964. Open to all, the Mountain Club was a hybrid social and sporting association, (with occasional forays into conservationist politics) and it had existed in some form since 1912.¹⁵ Edward Hilliard was a Denver businessman and a leading conservationist in the state. His experience campaigning in Colorado for the landmark Wilderness Act of 1964 had shown him the breadth of potential support for conservationism in Colorado, from third generation

¹⁵ Hugh E. Kingery assisted by Elinor Eppich. *The Colorado Mountain Club: The First Seventy-Five Years of a Highly Individual Corporation, 1912-1987*. 1st ed. Evergreen, Colorado: Cordillera Press, 1988, 2-5.

ranchers on the Western Slope to California transplants in Denver's urban fringes. The state was ready, he felt, to support a vigorous wilderness preservation organization with their votes and checkbooks. As yet though, no such organization existed.

In the weeks leading up to the 1964 CMC meeting, Hilliard discussed the possibility of starting such a group with Roger Hansen, a recently arrived young lawyer from North Carolina. Hilliard and Hansen had first met on a Mountain Club hike some months before. Hansen had been planning to give a presentation on land use control at the 1964 Mountain Club gathering, but Hilliard suggested that Hansen propose their new idea instead. Roger Hansen scrapped his planned talk, and on the second day of the weeklong gathering, he presented the blueprint for an innovative new conservation organization.¹⁶ The idea met with such enthusiasm that the remaining days of the conference were given entirely over to writing the bylaws for the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council (soon shortened to COSC). Many of those present agreed to sit on COSC's first steering committee. Ed Hilliard volunteered to finance the first year of operations, including a part-time secretary, out of his own pocket. As Hilliard had hoped, the members of the new organization unanimously selected Roger Hansen as COSC's first executive director.¹⁷

COSC quickly took shape in the following months. The new organization took pains not to impose ideological orthodoxies on its members or affiliated organizations, to reject environmental radicalism, and to make its membership as inclusive as possible. It operated under a single executive committee, which was responsible for administration

¹⁶ Roger Hansen, interview with author, at Roger Hansen's home, July 3, 2007.

¹⁷ 1965-1972 - Activity highlights: lists, *Colorado Open Space Coalition Records*, Denver, Denver Public Library Box 2,

CONS 137, FF41

and fundraising. The actual environmental work of the organization was done by “workshops,” or subgroups focusing on specific environmental issues. These groups met on a weekly basis in tightly organized meetings to hammer out strategy, compare notes, and delegate tasks and responsibilities. By the middle of 1965, COSC had workshops dedicated to fighting proposed dams near the Grand Canyon, local air and water pollution, public land law, roads, wilderness, and wildlife.

COSC’s strength, however, was as much intellectual as organizational. Determined to counter the persistent public image of environmental activists as overemotional and under-informed, early COSC’ers pursued a pointedly professional, precise, and detached style of activism. As Roger Hansen later explained the council’s approach:

“Our viewpoints, our arguments, even our philosophy must be researched, documented and organized with near-faultless logic... Facts, knowledge and persuasion will win the day, not nasty, emotional letters to the editor, or parading baby carriages in front of bulldozers.”¹⁸

In concert with the council’s larger emphasis on expertise and professionalism, COSC communicated with corporations, government agencies, and even “unfriendly” business organizations such as the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, which represented mining and logging interests.¹⁹ COSC tried to offer compromises that would

¹⁸ Roger Hansen, 1967, *Colorado Environmental Coalition Records*, Denver, Denver Public Library, Box 2, CONS 137, FF39.

¹⁹ Ibid.

allow for new infrastructure and industry while causing as little harm to Colorado's environment as possible.

Looking to capitalize on the success of their more conciliatory approach to environmental activism, Hilliard, Hansen, and other founding members of COSC used a grant from the Ford Foundation to start yet another new organization in 1967. Unlike COSC however, their next project would be regional in scope, and would emphasize environmental consultation over opposition. The organization, known as the Rocky Mountain Center for the Environment (ROMCOE) became an "environmental service center," collecting the knowledge resources of Denver's conservation movement and offering them, for free, to corporations interested in making their operations more environmentally friendly.²⁰ ROMCOE also became one of the nation's first dedicated environmental arbitration specialists, working in multiple states to settle disputes between environmental and corporate interests.²¹

But questions of growth were not as amenable to compromise, and in the late 1960s, matters came to a head. A significant faction of Denver's conservationists deeply opposed Denver's rapid urban growth, and as they had grown in political clout over the course of the previous decade, they began to oppose some of the Denver Water Board's most important projects. These included a proposed diversion from the Eagle-Piney Wilderness, and 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

²⁰ Estella Leopold, (2007). "Environmental Movement History—Focus on Colorado" unpublished manuscript in the author's possession.

²¹ Hansen interview, July 2, 2007.

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.²²

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 Board was bound by city charter to provide.²³ 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.²⁴ 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."²⁵ Conservationists, however, were not satisfied, and 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 their bond issue. Giving vent to his inner-demagogue, Wallace took

22 COSC Board of Directors, 1977, *Colorado Environmental Coalition Records*, Denver, Denver Public Library Conservation Collection, CONS 137, Box 2, FF40.

23 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.

24 Ibid, 160.

25 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.

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% to 80% 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.”²⁶ Privately, both Ogilvie 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.²⁷ 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.

At roughly the same time, a hastily organized group of opponents began to coalesce, composed of conservationists, libertarians, and numerous unaligned neighborhood organizations worried about the impact of the Olympic Games on their neighborhoods.²⁸ 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

26 Jack Frank, 1974, *George M. Wallace Papers*, Denver Denver Public Library, OV Box 5, WH 1006, FF41

27 Gary Hart, interview with author, at the University of Colorado at Denver, August 23, 2007.

28 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. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text database. (Publication No. AAT 7513457).

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. 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.²⁹

An Imperfect Ending

In their respective reactions to Denver's days as a shock city, neither reform movement carried the day quite in the way each had hoped. George Wallace's development had a profound and lasting impact on Denver, and succeeded in bringing a larger portion of the high tech industry to the city. Although it never officially became "Denver South," the southern sections of the Denver area accounted for most of the city's population growth between 1970 and 2000. By the early 1970s, three Denver-area counties, including the one that contained the Tech Center, were on the list of 25 fastest-growing counties in the country.³⁰ But for all its influence and financial success, the Tech Center has yet to become the model cityscape that George Wallace envisioned in the 1960s. In a twist that falls somewhere short of irony, Wallace's imperfectly conceived utopia has thus far been closer to the opposite. It caught on so quickly that it drew workers from all parts of Denver, which greatly increased the city's traffic problems and air pollution, and added weight to the arguments of limited growth conservationists. In a

²⁹ Hansen Interview, July 2, 2007.

³⁰ Development Research, Associates, McHarg Roberts Wallace, Todd, and District Regional Transportation. *A Public Transportation Plan for Colorado's Regional Transportation District. Summary Report*. Los Angeles, 1973.

city growing as quickly as Denver, a 30-year plan seemed to be about 25 years too long. It became a linchpin for the intense growth of south Denver, for which, thirty years later, there is not much nice to say. The area has become a sprawling and visually unpleasant mass of unaffiliated and developments and townships which remain segregated by race and class, and continue to exacerbate Denver's environmental and resource problems.

Conservationism in Denver reached its high water mark in the early years of the 1970s, and began to decline as a unified political force after the election of Dick Lamm in 1974. Ultimately, the calculus that led them to oppose growth-enabling projects like Foothills proved faulty. These victories seemed to do little to slow the juggernaut of population growth or urban sprawl. As with most grassroots reform movements, the energy that sustained COSC and other leading conservation groups began to wane in the face of unremitting growth. They were increasingly riven by factional conflict, as some became impatient with the incrementalist approach set forth by Roger Hansen and ROMCOE. Conservationists were also demoralized by "zombie" projects, which could be "killed" in a political sense, but never completely excised from the federal budget. The collective hopes of the Denver Water Board became a notable exception in this regard. Conservationists, allied with political and economic interest on Colorado's Western Slope, succeeded in preventing the Eagle-Piney diversion, and drastically scaling back the Foothills project. The conservationists' success in thwarting the proposals of the Denver Water Board in the early 1970s set the trend lines for water development in Colorado for the next two decades.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to remake the term “shock city” into a historical tool for evaluating the lived experiences as well as the cultural and political reactions of Denverites to rapid urban growth. During the 1960s, many Denver residents still remembered what their city had been like before it began growing in exponential fashion. From the standpoint of lived experience, Denver’s sleepy recent past and dynamic and immediate future might as well have existed in different universes. The “shock city” allows for a description of how a city that was intrinsically ambivalent about growth met not just the physical, but also the cultural and intellectual challenges posed by rapid urban expansion. It also takes us back to a time when an American environmental ethic was, in some ways at least, more widely shared than it is today, and freer from the entanglements of political ideology. We can trace the gradual maturation of conservationism into a recognizably modern environmental movement as its leaders discovered, through both the emergence of ecological studies and their own fights over resources and infrastructure, that what happened to the hinterland depended in large measure on what happened in the city. We can study the hopes and methods, and the often-surprising successes of “conciliatory environmentalists” in the years before it became clear how much it would cost corporations and governments to become environmentally responsible.

In a larger sense however, the story of “technoshock” reform is still being written in Denver, and in other Western cities. Both Portland and Seattle gave rise to similarly powerful conservation movements as a result of urban growth, each of which have been able to sustain their political influence over a longer period than Denver’s did. But the

impulse toward conservation and environmental protection remains vibrant in Denver and the Front Range, and may still match or exceed its former vitality. And while most (although by no means all) urbanists would still consider the Denver Tech Center to be more of a failure than a success, it may yet be possible as south Denver matures that Wallace's original long-term vision will eventually come to pass in some form. Possible futures notwithstanding, it is worth considering both of these important historical developments within the context of shock, cultural perception, and reform because doing so helps to complicate the easy dichotomy between pro- and anti-growth that still dominates our literature on the postwar cities of the American West.