

THE REAL SILENT MAJORITY: DENVER
AND THE REALIGNMENT OF AMERICAN POLITICS AFTER THE SIXTIES

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Sixties

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For Bonnie and Nathan

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ABSTRACT

THE REAL SILENT MAJORITY: DENVER AND THE REALIGNMENT OF AMERICAN POLITICS AFTER THE SIXTIES

Rachel Guberman

Thomas J. Sugrue

“The Real Silent Majority: Denver and the Realignment of American Politics after the Sixties” traces the emergence of a new political culture at the metropolitan grassroots from the 1960s onwards. Whereas most studies of the late-twentieth century have emphasized the death of liberalism and the rise of the New Right, I argue that the era is better understood as a period of transition to a newly market-oriented politics and policy across the political spectrum. Focusing on the Greater Denver area, I show how rapid metropolitan growth, the defining feature of American life and landscape in the late-twentieth century, led to a reshuffling of the political status quo at the state and local levels, creating a contested terrain in which citizens vied for increasingly scarce public resources and white suburbanites often set the terms of debate. Out of this crucible emerged a newly pragmatic and only weakly partisan political culture that eschewed conventional notions of liberal or conservative ideology. Instead, it embraced a moderate, consumerist language of “quality of life” and “common sense” that appealed to a growing majority of white

metropolitan voters disaffected from the party system and anxious about their economic futures.

Through local case studies of issues, including school desegregation, gay rights, taxes, the environment, and even the scope and scale of government, I illuminate changes in how Americans regarded basic questions about citizenship and rights. Blending metropolitan history's close attention to nuanced local experience and the grassroots with political history's interest in national transformations, I show how this new political culture reverberated upwards throughout the Republican and, especially, Democratic Parties over a 30-year period. Archival documents and government records, journalistic sources, ephemera, and geographic information systems built from demographic and electoral data capture both the new ways in which citizens began to articulate their political identities and demands in this period and the ways in which reform-minded politicians responded. By 1992, when Bill Clinton took office as the "first New Democrat president," the politics of markets, individualism, and consumer choice had firmly taken hold.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT	IV
ABSTRACT	VIII
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	XI
INTRODUCTION: WHERE HAVE ALL THE VOTERS GONE?.....	1
CHAPTER 1: "PRESERVING OUR WAY OF LIFE": ANNEXATION, POLITICAL POWER, AND THE COLOR LINE IN GREATER DENVER, 1962–1974.....	18
CHAPTER 2: “DON’T CALIFORNICATE COLORADO!”: QUALITY OF LIFE POLITICS & THE 1976 WINTER OLYMPICS	53
CHAPTER 3: “SOMEONE WHO CAN WIN!”: REFORM DEMOCRATS AND THE REMAKING OF THE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM	99
CHAPTER 4: “HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF?”: THE TAX REVOLT IN COLORADO, 1966–1992.....	157
CHAPTER 5: “NO DISCRIMINATION & NO SPECIAL RIGHTS”: THE POLITICS OF MODERATION AND THE 1992 ELECTION	190
CONCLUSION	230
BIBLIOGRAPHY	236

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Figure 1.</i> Flyer: “What’s all this noise about annexation?”	19
<i>Figure 2.</i> Flyer: “Invasion by Intersection!”	20
<i>Figure 3.</i> Population Growth in Colorado, 1960–1970	25
<i>Figure 4.</i> Population of Districts, 1960 Census.....	31
<i>Figure 5.</i> Colorado Senate apportionment: 1962 and 1964	31
<i>Figure 6.</i> Colorado General Assembly apportionment: 1962 and 1964	32
<i>Figure 7.</i> CANS Poundstone Amendment cartoon	49
<i>Figure 8.</i> Proposition 8 By County.....	92
<i>Figure 9.</i> Equality Protection Coalition Campaign Ads, 1987	196
<i>Figure 10.</i> “Don’t Legalize Discrimination,” EPOC advertisement, 1991	199
<i>Figure 11.</i> EPOC “Vote NO on 2” flyer	212
<i>Figure 12.</i> “A Job is Not a Special Right,” EPOC advertisement, 1992	221
<i>Figure 13.</i> CFV flyer, “Yes On 2 the ‘Stop Special Rights’ Amendment”	222

Introduction:

Where Have All the Voters Gone?

When President Richard Nixon coined the term "Silent Majority" in 1969, he did so to describe what he claimed was a majority of "good, law-abiding" and, he argued, fundamentally conservative Americans. These citizens, he suggested, had been abandoned by their government in its rush to attend to the clamoring demands of minorities, the poor, and other special interests. The Silent Majority, Nixon empathized, were "good people with good judgment who stand ready to do what they believe to be right" and who should not be made to feel guilty for enjoying the fruits of their labor in comfort and security.

Although Nixon hoped to capture these voters for the GOP, that outcome was far from assured. The early 1970s marked a moment of rupture in American society, as economic crises rocked the foundation of the nation's middle class prosperity, calling into question the tenets of Keynesian economics that underlay postwar policy, and a series of political shocks—beginning with Watergate and Vietnam but certainly not ending there—shook citizens' faith in governing institutions and officials. The result was a period of profound unease when, as left-wing political activist Michael Harrington wryly observed, Americans were "moving vigorously right, left, and center all at once."¹ By 1972, many academic observers, journalists,

¹ Michael Harrington, *New York Times*, May 14, 1972.

and political analysts predicted an end to the two party system and the emergence of a multiparty system in its stead. And, although the Democrats and Republicans endured, fear for their future remained. As pollster Everett C. Ladd warned in a series of articles for *Fortune Magazine* and, later, a book entitled *Where Have All the Voters Gone?*, Americans were “unhappy with the performance of the principle institutions of their society” and, in the case of the Democratic and Republican parties, had “come to question the responsiveness of the parties to popular interests and expectations.”²

“The Real Silent Majority: Denver and the Realignment of American Politics after the Sixties,” traces the emergence of a new political culture at the metropolitan grassroots from the 1960s onwards. Whereas most studies of the late-twentieth century have emphasized the death of liberalism and the rise of the New Right, it argues that the era is better understood as a period of transition to a newly market-oriented politics and policy across the political spectrum. Focusing on the Greater Denver area, it shows how rapid metropolitan growth, the defining feature of American life and landscape in the late-twentieth century, led to a reshuffling of the political status quo at the state and local levels, creating a contested terrain in which citizens vied for increasingly scarce public resources and white suburbanites often set the terms of debate. Out of this crucible emerged a newly pragmatic and only weakly partisan political culture that eschewed conventional notions of liberal

² Everett C. Ladd, Jr., *Where Have All the Voters Gone? The Fracturing of America's Political Parties*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), xiv, xxiii. Academic and journalistic concern over the fate of the two-party system during the 1970s was common. For two very different examples see Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on Campaign Trail '72*, (New York: Fawcett Popular Library, 1973) and Douglas Price, “Critical Elections’ & Party History: A Critical View,” *Polity*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter, 1971), pp.236–242.

or conservative ideology. Instead, it embraced a moderate, consumerist language of “quality of life” and “common sense” that appealed to a growing majority of white metropolitan voters disaffected from the party system and anxious about their economic futures.

Through local case studies of issues including school desegregation, gay rights, taxes, the environment, and even the scope and scale of government, I illuminate changes in how Americans regarded basic questions about citizenship and rights. Blending metropolitan history’s close attention to nuanced local experience and the grassroots with political history’s interest in national transformations, I show how this new political culture reverberated upwards throughout the Republican and, especially, Democratic Parties over a thirty-year period. “The Real Silent Majority” reveals the new ways in which citizens began to articulate their political identities and demands in this period and the ways in which reform-minded politicians responded. By 1992, when Bill Clinton took office as the “first New Democrat president,” the politics of markets, individualism, and consumer choice had firmly taken hold.

Many studies of twentieth century political and urban history have persuasively demonstrated the collapse of the New Deal Order and the rise of a powerful conservative movement in the postwar United States, both within the major political parties and at the grassroots in the nation’s rapidly expanding metropolitan areas. Recent scholarship has substantially debunked the notion of a postwar liberal consensus, at least at the grassroots, and of racial backlash driving the post- sixties rightward shift. By focusing almost exclusively on a burgeoning

conservatism, however, these works create a teleological view of recent political history, culminating in Ronald Reagan's 1980 election, that overemphasizes the role of conservatives in fomenting political change. In so doing, they have failed to adequately account for the complexity of American politics in the late twentieth century, especially but not exclusively at the grassroots in the rapidly expanding metropolises that became home to a majority of the population in this period.³ "The Real Silent Majority" complicates this narrative. Surveying the broad range of Denverites' political attitudes and behavior from the 1960s onwards, it shows how a diverse array of grassroots actors deployed their identities as homeowners, parents, taxpayers, and consumers towards an eclectic range of political and policy objectives, forging a language of individual freedom and market logic that defied partisan bounds.

The new political culture that is the subject of this dissertation was the product of a significant transformation in metropolitan political economy in the decades after World War II. During the 1950s and sixties, government at every level from federal to local pursued an agenda that scholars have termed "growth

³ This trend marks a notable historiographical shift over the past twenty years. In his 1994 essay, "The Problem of American Conservatism," Alan Brinkley lamented the lack of attention to conservatism in scholarship on the postwar U.S. Since then, conservatism has become the near-exclusive focus of political historians, who have produced a rich and vast literature both challenging the idea of liberalism as monolithic or hegemonic in the postwar era and detailing the rise of conservatism as a dominant force in American political life. Yet, as Matthew Lassiter notes in a 2011 essay reflecting on this trend, "the recent pendulum swing has overstated the case for a rightward shift in American politics...inadvertently replicating some of the blind spots of the liberal consensus school that it supplanted, especially through a linear declension ascension narrative that has conflated the fate of the New Deal with the political triumph of the New Right." See Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review*, 99:2 (1994), 409–429 and Matthew D. Lassiter, "Political History beyond the Red-Blue Divide," *Journal of American History*, 98:3 (2011), 760–764.

liberalism.” It comprised a wide array of spending initiatives, from social welfare policies like social security and mortgage underwriting, to infrastructure projects like the construction of the interstate highway system, and a dramatic increase in government subsidies for defense-based research and development. These policies reflected their advocates' belief in the ability of state power, correctly applied, to create, subsidize, and stabilize private markets, creating economic prosperity while at the same time alleviating inequality. Growth liberalism had the direct effect of encouraging metropolitan growth everywhere, but especially in the Sunbelt South and West where most federal defense spending was concentrated and where “business friendly” tax and labor policies encouraged capital investment. Within this context, local governments across the country vied for industry, government spending, and population, using metropolitan growth in both number of residents and spatial footprint as a benchmark of success.⁴

It is not surprising, then, that significant changes in the structure of American life during the postwar period and late twentieth century might have resulted in a major political reorientation too. Other scholars have highlighted the role that structural inequalities built into the landscapes of America's metropolises have played in shaping grassroots and national politics. Kenneth Jackson's pioneering research in *Crabgrass Frontier* demonstrated for the first time the role of government policy in building America's white suburbs and, concomitantly, its urban ghettos. In *Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Thomas Sugrue took Jackson's insights a

⁴ Andrew Needham, “Sunbelt Imperialism: Boosters, Navajos, and Energy Development in the Metropolitan Southwest,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region*, Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

step further, uncovering the centrality of homeownership and the racial coding of urban neighborhoods to the political consciousness of urban whites in the postwar era. More recently, scholars have moved this analysis beyond the city limits, exploring the ways in which place, ownership, and the very structures of the modern American metropolis have been central to the political struggles and realignments of the late twentieth century. Their work indicates the importance of individuals' and communities' attachments to particular parts of metropolitan geography and their ideas about which people and places are “deserving” in shaping American politics.⁵

At the same time, these scholars have showcased the nexus between metropolitan space and political economy and its potency as a driving political force.⁶ In Colorado, the kinds of places people inhabited, whether the unincorporated communities of the affluent in the foothills of the Rockies, North Denver's Chicano barrios and black ghettos, or the miles of expanding suburban subdivisions that ring the city, influenced how Denverites understood the Games and whether or not

⁵ Only a handful of scholars have explored non-conservative politics after the 1960s. In his book, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), Matthew Lassiter argues against the idea that conservatism was or became the dominant political ideology at the grassroots in the 1970s and suggests instead a bipartisan ethos of “suburban populism” originating in the Sunbelt South and spreading to metropolitan areas across the country. Peter Siskind looks at the relationship between growth liberalism and grassroots politics in the Northeast Corridor during the same period. See Peter T. Siskind, “Growth and Its Discontents: Localism, Protest, and the Politics of Development on the Postwar Northeast Corridor,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002). Lily Geismer's “Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals in Massachusetts, 1960-1990” (Ph.D. diss, University of Michigan, 2010) deals with liberalism in suburban Boston. By contrast, the literature on the rise of the New Right is vast. Notable recent examples include Lisa McGirr's, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶ This speaks to another aspect of Self's typology of space: space as property. Property, in Self's view, is money fixed in space. The political conflicts that play out within metropolitan space, then, reflect the jockeying of various groups for position as actors in a competitive metropolitan market for industry, tax base, and government resources a central place in our thinking is among his most important contributions.

they supported them. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, concerns about the use of space, as well as about the allocation of resources such as energy, water, and tax dollars to different constituencies and different locales, shaped both Coloradans' grassroots commitments and their choices on election day. These transformations in metropolitan geography and political economy were the impetus for these dramatic grassroots political shift after the 1960s, which scholars have until now only partially examined. By giving attention to what Robert Self has termed “space as political scale,” we see clearly the battles that extended from individual homes, to neighborhoods, to government at every level over the allocation of resources and decision making power across metropolitan areas and between metropolises and their hinterlands.⁷ Space as political scale puts these grassroots activists on a single continuum leading ultimately to the federal government. In so doing, it highlights the specific mechanisms available at each scale for influencing certain dimensions of public life.

Most of the literature on America's post-1960s realignment focuses either on national elites or on communities in the Northeast, South, and California. By combining analyses of both grassroots activism and the responses of political elites and institutions, my dissertation bridges the usual gap between top-down and bottom-up narratives. Furthermore, its focus on greater Denver sheds light on the nation's political transformation from the vantage point of an important but

⁷ Self, introduction. Andrew Needham has written extensively about the relationship between metropolis and hinterland in his study of Phoenix, Az and its relationship with the outlying Navaho Reservation. See Todd Andrew Needham, “Power Lines: Urban Space, Energy Development, and the Making of the Modern Southwest,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2006).

understudied region. Although largely ignored by political historians, in the last fifty years, the West has emerged as the fastest growing region of the country, with most growth concentrated in metropolitan areas. As such it has been both typical and prototypical of larger demographic, economic, and political trends sweeping the United States including massive Latino migration, the supplanting of older agriculture and industry with a robust service sector, and the dramatic rise of sprawling metropolises as political, social, cultural, and economic powerhouses. Metropolitan Denver and the Front Range of which it is the center have been at the forefront of these developments.⁸ Most notably, it was both a focal point for the emergence of the centrist “New Democrats” in the 1990s and, at the same time, became a major center for a newly politicized evangelical Christian right. Since the year 2000, the area has been heralded by pundits and political observers as ground zero for a supposedly new kind of centrist or populist Democratic politics that, in fact, reaches back to the political transformations of the late-twentieth century.

“The Real Silent Majority” argues that Coloradans’ political attitudes and behavior were symptomatic of a broad, national political realignment, not away from Democrats and towards Republicans, as it is often described, but rather away from the party system and conventional notions of liberal or conservative ideology

⁸ There is a significant literature on Western history. The most well known to scholars outside the field deals with the nineteenth century expansion of the United States and the encounters between white Americans, native peoples, and other Europeans. On the twentieth century, there is a significant body of well-known scholarship about California that has been incorporated into more general understandings of key issues like immigration, grassroots politics, race, etc. Other Western states, however, and especially the Mountain West, are almost entirely absent from the literature that has shaped our understanding of major twentieth century historical developments. One notable exception is Carl Abbott’s *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West*, (University of Arizona Press, 1993), which won the Urban History Associations prize for best book in North American urban history.

altogether. It examines not only the transformations in political culture and grassroots activism in Denver and its suburbs, but also the ways in which those changes reverberated upwards over a thirty year period to influence the politics and policy of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Exploring the overlapping arenas of race, growth and development, sex, the family, the environment, and taxes, I recast the conventional narrative of liberal decline and the rise of the New Right as one of neoliberal realignment and show how political struggles in metropolitan areas like Denver helped reshape politics at both the local and national levels.

In explaining the transformation of American politics after the sixties, scholars have tended to focus either on the connections among social and economic factors like race, inequality, and metropolitan expansion or on “culture war” issues such as sex and the family. By bringing these histories together, “The Real Silent Majority” argues that they are fundamentally intertwined. It shows how the upheavals of metropolitan expansion—which threw into question how resources should be allocated across a rapidly changing political-economic, demographic, and spatial landscape; who should have the power to make those decisions; and ultimately who should be included within the bounds of these newly-drawn communities—framed citizens’ engagement with a host of local and national issues.

As my dissertation reveals, this was especially true on questions pertaining to what many voters and party strategists dubbed “quality of life”: issues such as environmental protection, taxes, education, and whether or not to extend access to previously disfranchised groups like minorities and gays. As Matthew Lassiter

points out, this colorblind and class-driven political discourse, popularized in the spaces of the metropolitan Sunbelt, resonated nationally among self-identified liberals and conservatives alike, offering what he describes as “a bipartisan political language of private property values, individual taxpayer rights, children’s educational privileges, family residential security, and white racial innocence.”⁹ Liberalism and conservatism, then, were not stable or coherent categories, but rather, as Nathan Connolly puts it, ideologies of convenience strategically employed by political actors at different times and to different degrees. Quality of life politics, as I dub this new political culture, crossed traditional ideological boundaries. Although it was an amorphous category, that very indeterminacy was, in part, what gave “quality of life” politics its power, since anyone could adopt the rhetoric and wrap themselves in its mantle.

The trans-partisan political ethos of individualism and quality of life that emerged in metropolitan Denver was part of a seismic shift in American, and indeed global, politics away from the Keynesianism of the immediate postwar years and towards a new paradigm. Scholars in a variety of fields are increasingly using the concept of neoliberalism to describe this political and economic orientation, which preferences individualist, market-based solutions to a wide range of social and economic problems and that views government’s proper role as one of supporting market activity. Historical sociologists like Stephanie Mudge have persuasively demonstrated the shift towards neoliberal policies within all Western democracies in the last forty years. Most striking is that, while neoliberalism is typically understood

⁹ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 304.

to be a product of the right, the greatest movement has in fact been within center-left parties including the Democrats in the U.S. But while such studies provide concrete, quantitative evidence that neoliberalization is taking place across the political spectrum in America and elsewhere, they cannot explain why or how. My dissertation does just that. While Mudge's work identifies three faces of neoliberalism—intellectual, political, and bureaucratic—it is a central contention of this dissertation that neoliberalism has a forth, equally important cultural face. Through a bottom up, community study approach, “The Real Silent Majority” shows how a majority of metropolitan residents—Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated voters alike—came to view themselves and their relationship to society and government in individualist, market terms. The embrace of quality of life politics provided the necessary cultural foundation for political and economic neoliberalism to take hold.¹⁰

* * *

The dissertation is organized in two parts. Part I, “Sell Colorado,” begins by describing the material development of metropolitan Denver. It then examines a series of intensely local struggles that emerged out of this context, including battles over regional governance and municipal annexation, busing for school desegregation,

¹⁰ Stephanie Mudge writes about the shift towards neoliberalism in Western democracies, especially Anglo-liberal democracies, in two articles: Stephanie Lee Mudge, “What’s Left of Leftism?: Neoliberal Politics in Western Party Systems, 1945-2004,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (2011), 337–380 and Stephanie Lee Mudge, “What is Neoliberalism?” *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2008), 703-731. For more on the “culture of neoliberalism,” see Andrew J. Diamond, “The Long March toward Neoliberalism: Race and Housing in the Postwar Metropolis,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 20, No. 10 (2010), 1–7 and *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908–1969*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

and whether Denver should host the 1976 Winter Olympics. Through these case studies, it traces the emergence of a new, grassroots “quality of life” politics that was, in the late-1960s and early-1970s, almost entirely off the radar of the major political parties. It culminates in 1974 with the election of a cadre of reform candidates, mostly Democrats, showing how the new political ethos that had been percolating at the grassroots ultimately both shaped and was transformed by formal politics at the state and national levels. At the same time, it shows how black and Hispanic Coloradans engaged with this increasingly dominant political discourse.

In the 1960s and seventies, amidst dramatic growth and a major reshuffling of political power within Colorado, residents of metropolitan Denver engaged in a protracted debate over the future of their metropolis. Chapter one examines the range of ways in which Denverites sought to make sense of their rapidly changing landscape. Municipal annexation and school desegregation were two crucial, interlinked arenas in which these struggles played out. On both issues, residents of the Front Range debated the boundaries of their communities and their mutual responsibility along lines of race and class as much as geography. Urban arguments in favor of annexation often held a none-too-subtle suggestion that the suburbs “owed” Denver for making possible their racial exclusivity. It was, meanwhile, the Supreme Court’s 1973 ruling in Denver’s school desegregation case that ultimately persuaded a majority of suburbanites to vote for an end to future Denver annexations, effectively sealing themselves off from the possibility of having to bus their children. Black and Hispanic residents, meanwhile, mostly urban, asserted their own claims both to the landscape and to a share of public goods. Throughout, a

rhetoric of taxpayer rights, entitlement to certain public resources, and the fairness (or not) of the tax structure permeated the debate. Ultimately, the triumph of a particular, racialized, suburban vision for the metropolitan future contributed to a larger project of naturalizing political boundaries such as school districts and city lines in Greater Denver. In the process, it enabled white Coloradans from diverse ideological perspectives to coalesce around an individualist, consumerist, and ostensibly race-neutral political language while forcing blacks and Hispanics to adopt a similar vocabulary in pressing their own agendas.

Chapter two follows the story of the 1976 Winter Olympics and Denver's ill-fated bid to host the Games. In 1972, Denver became the only city in history to win a bid to host the Olympics and then reject hosting the Games when citizens passed, by overwhelming margins, a constitutional amendment banning public funding. This episode marked the powerful emergence of a nascent grassroots political culture in Colorado, especially metropolitan Denver, around the concepts of quality of life, citizen participation, and government transparency. The anti-Olympics coalition that emerged joined urban and suburban, white, black, and Hispanic, affluent and working-class voters in an effort to block the Games. The success of this movement, I argue, signaled the growing importance of this new political sensibility, creating the conditions for the dramatic success of candidates who adopted it in the 1974 elections. At the same time, the fragility of the coalition and its inability to substantively address citizens' concerns across racial and class lines highlights the centrality of a color-blind mythos to this emerging politics.

The 1974 election in Colorado brought a raft of politicians, mostly Democrats, into power on the strength of their espousal of the new quality of life politics so visible at the grassroots during the anti-Olympics fight. Tracing the rising prominence of this rhetoric within both major parties nationally, with particular attention to the Democratic politicians who swept Colorado in 1974, is the work of chapter three. Most notably, these reform politicians included Governor Richard Lamm, Congressman (and later Senator) Tim Wirth, and Senator Gary Hart who came to office fresh from defeat on the campaign trail as manager of George McGovern's unsuccessful 1972 presidential bid. Following these politicians forward into the 1980s, I show how the politics of quality of life and government accountability were, in the hands of ostensibly liberal politicians, readily transformed into a pro-market politics that appealed to Colorado's majority of moderate voters while, simultaneously, undercutting traditional liberal policy concerns for economic and racial equality. Placing these Colorado politicians in national context, I further show how Colorado's political realignment was both part of and a driver for a broad, national transformation.

In Part II, "The Real Silent Majority" turns to a series of issues that are generally viewed as unambiguous parts of America's conservative turn. Instead, it shows how the new politics inflected these debates in complex and surprising ways. In 1992, Coloradans' support of both the Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) and the anti-gay Amendment 2 led many observers to view Colorado as part of a conservative vanguard. Yet, that same year, Coloradans decisively rejected George Bush and the GOP's unabashedly conservative "family values" platform, making Bill

Clinton their first Democratic pick for president in nearly thirty years. Part II explores the deep history of TABOR and Amendment 2. In doing so, it reveals the predominance of market-oriented and quality of life ideas—not a burgeoning cultural conservatism—in shaping public responses to both issues. This insight has important implications, calling into question the pervasive understanding of Newt Gingrich’s 1994 “Republican Revolution” as a popular rebuke to the Democrats and a culturally conservative mandate for Republicans. Indeed, far from representing opposing impulses in American politics, I argue, Clinton’s election and the Contract with America two years later together marked the fullest expression of the new market-oriented paradigm in American politics.

Chapter four focuses on Colorado's long and halting history of anti-tax politics. The tax revolt that began in the late 1970s is generally understood as a conservative popular movement, proof of the nation’s rightward shift in these decades and of the triumph of conservative economic orthodoxy. Yet the long and slow progress of anti-tax politics in Colorado reveals a more complex history. Over a twenty-five year period beginning in 1966, a variety of anti-tax groups succeeded in putting a total of eight proposed constitutional amendments on the state ballot. Each went down in defeat, rejected by voters, until the eventual passage of the Tax Payers Bill of Rights (TABOR) in 1992. This chapter chronicles the broad skepticism of most Coloradans towards tax limits throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It further examines the combination of changing political sensibilities and economic circumstances that contributed to TABOR’s eventual success. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of catalyzing events (most notably widespread public

frustration over the use of tax money to build a new baseball stadium and airport in Denver), rather than a dramatic increase in ideological conservatism, in precipitating TABOR's passage. Ultimately, it argues that this popular frustration, combined with a widespread shift in economic thinking towards an individualist and market-based approach, was the key to the amendment's success.

Even as Coloradans contemplated TABOR, two other issues dominated the 1992 election cycle. The three-way presidential contest between Republican incumbent George Bush, Democratic newcomer Bill Clinton, and independent insurgent Ross Perot was, of course, paramount. Almost as important in Colorado, however, was Amendment 2, a proposed change to the state constitution that would ban any form of legal protection for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the Rocky Mountain State. Both Amendment 2 and Clinton won. While most commentators have understood this as paradoxical, I argue that, in fact, both the election of a self-styled New Democrat and passage of the anti-gay amendment were extensions of the new political culture that had been percolating among the electorate since the late 1960s. At the ostensible height of family values fervor in the United States, family values arguments were remarkably unsuccessful at attracting voters. Instead, the amendment's success relied on a series of racialized arguments about privilege and economic access. Moreover, both the Republican and Democratic parties were aware of this shift in political sensibilities and their efforts to engage what they saw as a new breed of voter. Chapter five chronicles the history of gay rights politics in Colorado and the central role of quality of life politics, not rising conservatism, in the

passage of Amendment 2 and in shaping American politics more broadly during this period.

Although Richard Nixon coined the term “silent majority” in an effort to claim the mass of white, middle-class and lower-middle-class voters for the GOP—a population that came to be seen as a bulwark of a growing conservative, Republican majority— my dissertation demonstrates that adherents of this new, trans-partisan quality of life politics formed the real silent majority of late-twentieth century America. Their emphasis on quality of life issues and its concomitant, local citizen control, are central to understanding the trajectory of American democracy and political democracy in the last third of the twentieth century. By placing these Americans and their concerns at the center, my dissertation offers an important corrective to the conventional narrative of conservative ascendance and liberal decline that has dominated both popular and scholarly conceptions of the period.

Chapter 1:
**"Preserving Our Way of Life": Annexation, Political Power, and the
Color Line in Greater Denver, 1962–1974**

In 1966, residents of Greenbelt, a small community bordering Denver to the east, held a special election to decide whether to become part of the neighboring town of Greenwood. To outsiders, the stakes may have seemed small, but for Greenbelt residents, the future of their community and their very way of life hung in the balance. A flyer produced by the pro-annexation Greenbelt Steering Committee presented the question in stark terms: below a drawing of a white man cowering behind a large eight ball, the text warned, “In the near future, we’ll HAVE to annex either to Denver or to Greenwood. We CANNOT afford to stay as we are.” Another flyer featured a white woman holding her head in confusion and asking, “What’s All This Noise About Annexation?” In response, the Committee explained, “IT’S NOT NOISE, MA’AM! IT’S VITAL TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN” to vote for annexation to Greenwood in order to keep the Greenbelt way of life and “our orderly growth.” The flyer continued, suggesting that Greenbelt and Greenwood should put aside their previous differences and join forces to confront a common enemy: Denver.¹¹ The flyer ended in bold print and capital letters, “Protect our schools...Protect our tax base...Join the New Greenwood.”

¹¹ Greenbelt Steering Committee, “What’s All This Noise About Annexation?” (c. Nov, 1966), Tom Currigan Papers, Box 16, Folder 32, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.



Figure 1. Flyer: "What's all this noise about annexation?"

Other materials from the same campaign were even more alarmist: A third flyer, this one titled "INVASION BY INTERSECTION!," used angry red and black illustrations and an explosive font to warn that, "Denver IS invading us down the

highway!” and that, unless Greenbelt became part of Greenwood, it would lose its tax base, its schools, and, again, its “way of life.”¹²



Figure 2. Flyer: “Invasion by Intersection!”

¹² Greenbelt Steering Committee, “INVASION BY INTERSECTION,” (c. Nov, 1966), Tom Currigan Papers, Box 16, Folder 32, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

The “way of life” to which the Greenbelt Steering Committee referred was a suburban one of quiet streets, good schools, high property values, and prosperous young families. In short, the postwar American dream. And, although they rarely articulated it in such explicit terms, it was, without exception, a white one, predicated on racial exclusivity and the invisible yet tightly drawn, vigilantly patrolled lines that separated suburban Denverites from their urban neighbors. As in other metropolitan areas across the rapidly urbanizing Sunbelt South and West, federal housing policy and capital investment in industry and military installations, combined with the political efforts of local boosters, created metropolitan Denver’s explosive growth. They did so in ways that intentionally extended and strengthened racial and socioeconomic divisions that already marked the region’s landscape.

The Greenbelt annexation vote was on the leading edge of a thorough-going renegotiation of the political, economic, and racial status quo across metropolitan Denver during the 1960s and 1970s. It sat at the intersection of several tectonic shifts underway throughout the Front Range and, indeed, the state. As the Greater Denver area grew exponentially, citizens and their leaders debated the appropriate relationship between the city and its new suburbs on matters ranging from cultural amenities, to essential public services and infrastructure, to education and social provision.

Although many issues played into these fights over annexation, school desegregation became the battlefield on which they were most fiercely fought. At the time of the Greenbelt annexation vote, Denver had just begun to discuss the possibility of a school desegregation plan. By 1974, when Coloradans finally passed a

constitutional amendment that effectively ended Denver's ability to annex suburban territory, the city was under order from the United States Supreme Court to use busing to correct the extreme racial imbalance within its public schools. The violent, militaristic language with which the Greenbelt Steering Committee discussed annexation and the threat that Denver, particularly its public schools, posed to suburban children highlights the intensity of feeling that citizens brought to the debate and their understanding of the link between the demarcation of political boundaries and the (also linked) economic and cultural security of their communities.

During the decade and a half of their duration, the "Annexation Wars," as they were dubbed by Denver's two major local newspapers, the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post*, provided a focal point for a far-reaching debate among citizens of metropolitan Denver—residents of both the city and the suburbs—about the future of their metropolis: Did Denverites imagine their metropolis as some sort of cohesive whole—a community spanning municipal boundaries, united by a shared pool of natural resources, economic engines, cultural institutions, and social obligations? Or did they view the region as a patchwork of politically, economically, and socially autonomous communities, defined by clearly marked and closely guarded municipal boundaries? These were questions whose importance stretched far beyond the immediate issue of whether to allow Denver to incorporate outlying suburban territory into the city limits; they were also the unspoken questions underlying debates about access to water, the location of industrial and nuclear

facilities, construction of affordable housing, school desegregation, and many more issues that gripped the region over the ensuing decades.

* * *

A visitor to Denver at the start of the 1960s would have found a city that, in many ways, still felt like a small town. Nestled on the high plains just east of the Rockies, with a population of not quite 500,000, the Mile High City still served primarily as a clearinghouse for the products of miners and ranchers on the far side of the mountains. Great expanses of prairie extended to the north, south, and east, while a smattering of mountain towns dotted the foothills to the west. But signs of change were all around. Arriving at Stapleton International Airport, this visitor would have landed at one of the nation's first jet-ready facilities, where a rapidly expanding roster of flights connected travelers to New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and London. The drive towards downtown would have passed by the city's growing network of parks, skyscrapers under construction, major slum clearance and urban renewal projects underway, and a vibrant cultural scene including museums, a zoo, and even a ballet. Perhaps the visitor came for meetings at one of the new corporate headquarters beginning to populate the city's business district or treatment at Denver's world-renowned National Jewish Health, a premier center for treatment and research of respiratory disease and allergies. Then again, the visit might have been prompted by the allure of the mountains and the area's famously clean air, blue skies, and alpine beauty.

Driving out of town, our visitor would have encountered yet more signs of change. While Denver itself was bustling with new economic activity, it was the suburbs that experienced the most dramatic growth. In 1940, nearly three-quarters of the metropolitan area's population lived within the Denver city limits (indeed, to call the vast and almost entirely undeveloped area surrounding Denver “metropolitan” might have raised eyebrows among the city’s old guard). Over the next decade, however, the suburbs boomed. Denver’s own impressive population growth of thirty percent—twice the national average—paled in comparison to the remarkable 73.5 percent increase in neighboring Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson Counties. And the disparity only grew. During the 1950s, the rate of suburban growth doubled as corporate executives, government employees, scientists and engineers, and military personnel flocked to new housing developments on the urban fringe in search of economic opportunity and Colorado’s much-touted quality of life. By 1960, Greater Denver was home to almost a million people, more than half of whom lived in the suburbs.¹³

All this development and bustle marked a dramatic shift. Prior to World War II, Denver was a sleepy cattletown with a small business elite servicing the state’s dominant mining and ranching industries.¹⁴ By 1960, however, the rapid influx of newcomers to the metro area had made the Rocky Mountain State one of the ten fastest growing states in the nation. Over eighty percent of Coloradans lived in the increasingly urbanized Front Range corridor that extended from Ft. Collins in the

¹³ Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, (Denver: University of Colorado Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Ibid.

north to Colorado Springs in the south with Denver at its center. These newcomers were drawn by new economic opportunities in Colorado's burgeoning corporate, government, and tourism sectors. At the same time, rural counties that depended on the state's dwindling extractive industries lost population, creating a new imbalance between metropolitan Denver and the rest of the state (Figure 3).¹⁵

Population Growth in Colorado 1960 - 1970

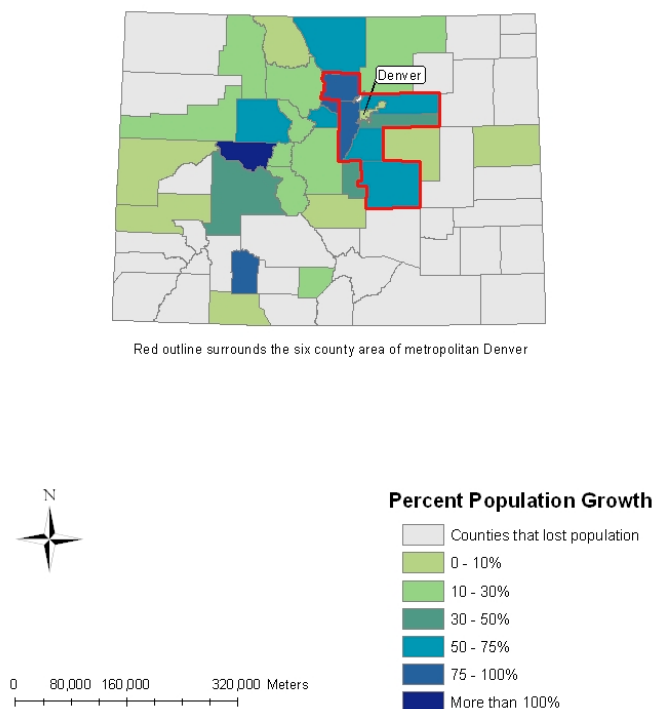


Figure 3. Population Growth in Colorado, 1960–1970.

¹⁵ “Annexation: Key to Our Future, First of a Series,” *Rocky Mountain News*, (1966).

Our visitor no doubt would have been impressed by all this construction and new infrastructure, the product of Denver's rapid transformation from small town to modern city, from prairie to expansive subdivisions and highways lined with new businesses. But the landscape was also marked, if less visibly, by the intense political contests that brought the new metropolis into being. Growth was not accidental nor was it uncontested. Rather, as in so many Sunbelt cities, it was the product of an intentional business strategy designed by Denver boosters and the chamber of commerce, in concert with local, state, and federal policies. During the 1950s and '60s, government at every level, from federal to local, pursued an agenda that scholars have termed "growth liberalism." It comprised a wide array of spending initiatives, from social welfare policies like social security and mortgage underwriting, to infrastructure projects like the construction of the interstate highway system, and a dramatic increase in government subsidies for defense-based research and development. These policies reflected their advocates' belief in the ability of state power, correctly applied, to create, subsidize, and stabilize private markets, creating economic prosperity while at the same time alleviating inequality. Growth liberalism had the direct effect of encouraging metropolitan growth everywhere but especially in the Sunbelt South and West where most federal defense spending was concentrated and where "business friendly" tax and labor policies encouraged capital investment. Within this context, local governments across the country vied for industry, government spending, and population, using

metropolitan growth in both number of residents and spatial footprint as a benchmark of success.¹⁶

While growth liberalism spurred development and shaped local policy imperatives across the country, it had its greatest impact in the Sunbelt. Federal policies moved capital and resources to the south and west, encouraging businesses and people to follow. In addition to building the highways and funding the water and energy development projects that made possible the region's explosive economic and metropolitan growth, many federal agencies established major offices in Colorado, and military bases built during wartime continued to serve as important training and research facilities. Veterans returning from Europe and Asia in 1945 recalled with fondness their training in Colorado and settled there after the war. They were joined by a steady stream of military personnel, scientists, and engineers working at Lowery Air Force Base in Denver, Buckley Air Force Base in suburban Aurora, and the chemical weapons manufacturing center at Rocky Mountain Arsenal. Indeed, in the postwar years, Greater Denver became a major military and federal government hub, drawing thousands of workers to the area.¹⁷

Denver boosters, like their counterparts in Phoenix, Charlotte, and Atlanta, sought not only to take advantage of favorable government programs but to actively shape policy to their interests. Economic growth was, boosters argued, inherently competitive, and it was the role of the state to use taxation, land use policy, and labor law as recruitment tools to attract capital that would otherwise flow to

¹⁶ Needham, "Sunbelt Imperialism."

¹⁷ Leonard and Noel, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*.

metropolises with more favorable business climates. Just as proponents of growth liberalism measured national progress in terms of increases in gross domestic product, so boosters measured success locally by Denver's ability to attract new companies and residents and by the physical expansion of the metropolis.¹⁸ As then-governor John Love explained to an interviewer a decade later, "We wanted industrial parks, factories—all the economic growth we could get."¹⁹ To "Keep Colorado growing!," Love launched a "Sell Colorado" campaign in 1966, sending local businessmen on "missions" across the country and around the world, with the objective of convincing major corporations to relocate to or open regional headquarters in Colorado. Local business associations like the Colorado Ski Information Center, big businesses including major airlines with Western hubs in Denver, and ranchers looking to cash in on an emerging land boom all joined the effort. Meanwhile, with winter sports becoming a national obsession, Colorado businessmen were quick to dub their home state "Ski Country USA." Traditional Colorado industries like mining and ranching gave way to tourism, recreation, and finance. Overall, boosters and their supporters in state government evoked a heavily corporate and pro-growth vision for the state's future with an expanding metropolitan Denver as the economic driver.²⁰

* * *

¹⁸ Needham, "Sunbelt Imperialism."

¹⁹ Laura Lee Katz Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment: The Defeat of the 1976 Winter Olympics in Colorado," (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 1974), 30.

²⁰ On growth liberalism see Needham, *Power Lines*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

The fundamental political-economic challenge of the postwar era was negotiating access to resources and the distribution of the tax burden that supported them. In metro Denver, this took many forms, from struggles over access to basic services like sewerage, fire, police, and schools, to battles for control of vital natural resources such as water. These challenges animated politics not just within the metropolis between Denver and its suburbs and among the suburbs themselves but also between the metropolitan Front Range as a whole—symbolized by Denver—and the rest of the state. This was most clearly illustrated in the case of water. As the state’s largest (indeed, only) major population center, metro Denver used close to eighty percent of Colorado’s water resources, almost all pumped in from reservoirs across the mountains, far the west. In this context, voting against Denver in a host of seemingly unrelated state-wide ballot initiatives became a vehicle for “out state” Coloradans to express their displeasure with Denver’s control of resources drawn from within their communities and with what they perceived as the city’s growing political supremacy. Within the metropolis, meanwhile, suburban counties accused Denver of wielding access to water as a cudgel, charging suburbanites higher rates than Denver residents paid in an effort to extort money from the more affluent suburbs and, ultimately, to coerce them into petitioning for annexation to the city, where they would bolster the dwindling urban tax base and thus help support an array of programs for the benefit of poor and minority Denverites. In response, the Denver Water Board argued that differential water rates were a fair recognition of the fact that Denver residents paid for the construction, maintenance, and operation of the water system through their taxes, while suburbanites did not.

In 1962, at the height of the boom, a revision of Colorado's municipal annexation laws made the process of adding new territory into the Denver city limits markedly easier, with the result that annexation petitions soared and large swaths of formerly suburban territory were incorporated into the city itself. Tensions between Denver and the surrounding counties ran high, as city and suburbs battled for control. That same year, the Supreme Court's ruling in *Baker v. Carr* brought Colorado's long-simmering malapportionment crisis to a head. Activists in metro Denver, led by the League of Women Voters, had long argued that the existing system of legislative apportionment in Colorado was outdated and undemocratic, concentrating political power in the sparsely populated western counties while the growing majority of voters in the Front Range surrounding Denver lacked sufficient representation (See Figures 4 through 6). Now, with the Court's blessing, they filed suit in federal district court, demanding reapportionment of the state legislature and Colorado's congressional districts.

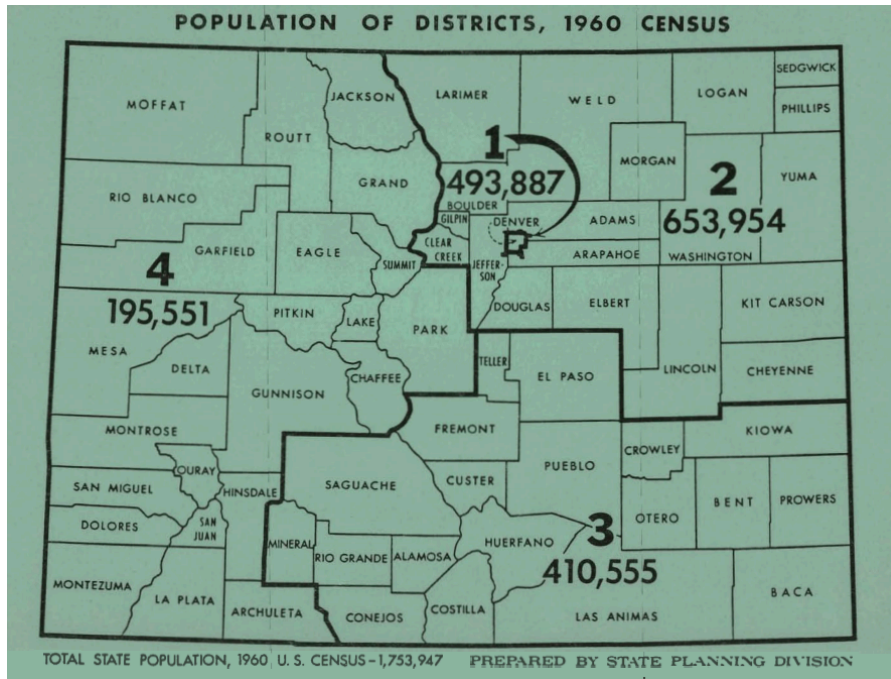


Figure 4. Population of Districts, 1960 Census.

County	Senators -- 35 Total Seats		
	No. in 1962	No. in 1964	Change
Denver	8	9	1
El Paso	2	3	1
Jefferson	1	3	2
Pueblo	2	2	0
Adams	1	2.5	1.5
Arapahoe	1	2.5	1.5
Boulder	1	1.5	.5
Weld	2	1.5	(.5)
Larimer	1	1	0
Mesa	1	1	0
	<u>20</u>	<u>27*</u>	<u>7</u>

Figure 5. Colorado Senate apportionment: 1962 and 1964.

<u>County</u>	<u>Representatives -- 65 Total Seats</u>		
	<u>No. in 1962</u>	<u>No. in 1964</u>	<u>Change</u>
Denver	17	18	1
El Paso	3	5	2
Jefferson	2	4	2
Pueblo	4	4	0
Adams	2	4	2
Arapahoe	2	4	2
Boulder	2	3	1
Weld	3	3	0
Larimer	2	2	0
Mesa	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
	39	49	10

Figure 6. Colorado General Assembly apportionment: 1962 and 1964.

The legislative reapportionment case, *Lucas v. Forty-Fourth Colorado General Assembly*, eventually made its way to the Supreme Court and, in 1964, as part of a series of high-profile “one man, one vote” rulings, the justices found that all state legislatures must be based on population.²¹ Suddenly, the balance of political power in Colorado shifted dramatically. Control over decision making and the allocation of public resources was wrested from the hands of the cattlemen and mine operators who had wielded power since the state’s founding and was turned over to the great mass of the population living within the six counties of metropolitan Denver. These Coloradans were often newcomers to the state, well-educated white-collar workers who came as part of the postwar boom. Others were part of Denver’s longstanding black, Hispanic, and Japanese communities. All had competing

²¹ *Lucas v. Forty-Fourth Colorado General Assembly*, 377 U.S. 713 (1964).

interests, and the promise of new-found political power in the reapportioned state legislature intensified contests among these groups.²²

* * *

Since statehood, annexations in Colorado have only been possible when initiated by residents or landowners in the areas to be annexed. Until 1962, Colorado law made this process extremely difficult. That year, however, the state government took a variety of steps to reform the annexation laws, annexation easier. Annexation petitions soared, bringing thousands of additional acres of new residential, commercial, and industrial land into the city limits by the late 1960s. But as the city grew, so did opposition to continued annexation, led by county commissioners and school officials in neighboring Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson counties. A group called FAIR (For Annexation Inequality Repeal) formed and tried twice without success—first in 1962 and then again in 1964—to put an initiative on the Colorado ballot to amend the state constitution to effectively prevent Denver from any future annexations. They never collected enough signatures to get the initiative on the ballot, though, highlighting the intense disagreement among even suburban voters on this issue. Given the virulent anti-annexation sentiment expressed by many suburban residents and officials by the early 1970s and the ultimate passage of an anti-Denver annexation constitutional amendment, it is important to note that the property owners in suburban areas—whether that meant

²² J. Douglas Smith, *On Democracy's Doorstep: The Inside Story of How the Supreme Court Brought "One Person, One Vote" to the United States*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2014).

land developers or residents—had to petition the city for annexation. Denver could not legally initiate annexation proceedings.

Throughout the mid-1960s, both urban and suburban officials pushed for a resolution to these “Annexation Wars.” The conflict spawned a governor’s commission to explore the issue, along with calls from various groups either for a moratorium on Denver annexations, reorganization of the metropolitan area under a unified regional government, or more rarely both. This led eventually to another major overhaul of state annexation laws in 1966. By decade’s end, annexation had become the overwhelming political issue in metropolitan Denver, fueled by the city’s initiation of a school desegregation plan, which had the potential to involve any area annexed by Denver in busing for integration.

The conflict between Denver and its suburbs continued until 1974, when Colorado voters, by a sizable majority, passed the Poundstone Amendment, ending Denver annexation. The text was essentially unchanged from the earlier FAIR amendments. What had changed, however, were the circumstances: The 1974 election came close on the heels of two crucial Supreme Court rulings. The first in 1973, *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, effectively ended the fight to stop school desegregation in Denver, finding that the school system there was, in fact, segregated and that busing should be used to remedy the situation.²³ The second case, *Milliken v. Bradley*, from Detroit, held by a 5–4 vote, that suburban school systems could not be forced to participate in busing or other remedies designed to

²³ *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

alleviate segregation in the core-city schools.²⁴ Coming just before the vote on the Poundstone Amendment, *Milliken v. Bradley* was critical to the amendment's success. By exempting suburbs from school desegregation mandates, the Supreme Court gave sudden urgency to white, suburban parents' desires to remain outside the bounds of both the city of Denver and its school system. In this highly charged context, the Poundstone Amendment sailed to victory.²⁵

* * *

The official Denver position on annexation was, essentially, a booster vision. From the editorial boards of the otherwise-politically opposed *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* to mayors Tom Currigan and Bill McNichols, who governed the city throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, city leaders forcefully argued for Denver's central and expansive role within the region, the state as a whole, and, indeed, throughout the Mountain West. In a statement on annexation circulated in August 1973, Mayor McNichols made the case: "Denver is the heart of the front range region of our state." Denver held not only classic urban resources, like "the libraries, the zoo, the Art Museum... the convention centers, and the sports arena;" it was also responsible for funding the construction of many of the Front Range's most beloved attractions outside the city limits, including the Red Rocks Amphitheater just west

²⁴ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

²⁵ The Poundstone Amendment, officially titled "An act to amend Articles XIV and XX of the Constitution of the State of Colorado, concerning the annexation of property by a County or City," passed 58 percent–42 percent. Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/>

of Denver and the Mountain Park system, which together attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors from throughout Colorado and around the country each year.²⁶

Mayor McNichols reminded suburbanites that the water system Denver paid for made the very existence of their communities possible, while the public transit system constructed through a property bond on Denver homes extended far out into the suburbs, making the core city and its amenities more accessible. Finally, he argued,

it is Denver as the “little Washington” of our nation, which acts not only as a magnet to attract tourists who then proceed to visit all portions of Colorado but also makes it possible and feasible for federal installations to be located in the counties adjacent to us.

The international airport built and operated through Denver taxes was the “focal point of the entire Rocky Mountain region and one of the prime reasons the metropolitan area and the State of Colorado enjoy a viable economy.”²⁷ Boosters and city officials made the case for mutual dependence between Denver and its suburbs on broad terms. Their arguments reflected a vision for the metropolitan future that was regional in scope. Denver and its suburbs, in this view, were symbiotic, naturally operating not as a series of separate and fragmented entities but as a unified whole with the city as the political, economic, and cultural center.

As the pro-annexation rhetoric of Denver’s mayors and boosters made clear, the city’s boosters had an expansive vision for the future of their region. Significantly, this vision was predicated on an understanding of the entire

²⁶ William McNichols statement re: Annexation, Aug 22, 1973, William McNichols Papers, Box 46, Folder 9, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

²⁷ Ibid.

metropolitan area as a unified whole. As the *Rocky Mountain News* put it in a four-part 1966 series titled “Annexation: Key to Our Future,” “There’s a close interdependence between the core city and its suburbs.”²⁸ A mid-sixties study of annexation produced by the City Club of Denver described the city’s cultural pull throughout the metropolitan area, noting that suburbanites traveling outside Colorado would typically identify themselves as being from Denver when asked. “In the larger sense,” the City Club argued, “the suburbs are but a part of Denver” and “Government policy, laws and proposals for change which fail to recognize the fact of interdependency and which aim at a goal other than the greater good of the metropolitan area can only lead to the wrong solution of a given metro area problem.”²⁹

City officials like McNichols as well as boosters made the case for mutual dependence between Denver and its suburbs on broad terms. After describing Denver as the economic engine and cultural center of the Front Range and, indeed, all of Colorado, McNichols went on to chastise the suburbs for their thankless attitude towards the city, which he claimed they threatened with “dismemberment.” He then denounced calls from suburban lawmakers for a special session of the legislature to address annexation as an effort with the “sole purpose of destroying Denver and its future.” As “Mayor of this great city,” he pledged to “do all in my power to thwart those who intend to harm Denver or its citizens.”³⁰

²⁸“Annexation: Key to Our Future, Part Two of Four,” *Rocky Mountain News*, (1966).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Nowhere was this interdependence more important than on matters of race and poverty. In a story instantly familiar from metropolitan areas across the country, the bulk of Denver's growth from the 1950s onwards took place on the city's suburban periphery. A combination of white flight and the migration of white families from out of state directly to the Denver suburbs meant that, by the 1970 census, the majority of greater Denver's population resided outside the core city. And yet the vast majority of the metro area's poor and minority residents—roughly eighty percent, according to a 1972 study by the Denver Regional Council of Governments lived in Denver itself. In his 1973 statement on annexation, Mayor McNichols ran through a litany of the suburban counties, highlighting their share of the total population and comparing it to their share of affordable housing units: to the north and east, 200,000 residents in Adams, with 1,870 affordable housing units and 200,000 residents in Arapahoe County with only 387 units; in the west, nearly 250,000 residents in Jefferson County, and only 495 total units of affordable housing. By contrast, Denver's population in 1972 was 525,000—less than 50% of the metro area's 1.2 million total—but the city provided 77% of all affordable housing units in the region.³¹

McNichols was not the first Denver mayor to highlight this disparity in the distribution of minority and poor residents and the city's outsized role in providing them with housing and basic services. Both Tom Currigan and Ben Stapleton, McNichols' predecessors in office, made the same case. That all three of Denver's postwar mayors connected the issue of providing for low-income citizens of

³¹ McNichols, statement re: Annexation, Aug 22, 1973.

metropolitan Denver (who were often assumed to be either Black or Hispanic) to the question of annexation goes far towards illuminating their general understanding of how the metropolitan area functioned: that is, as a single organism. Rather than describe the poor and minority populations of each county, for example, McNichols was careful to discuss the poor and minority populations of the metropolitan area as a whole and each county's "share" of that total. To a significant degree, his argument in favor of regional government or, failing that, annexation, was that Denver was doing more than its fair share of providing these types of services—just as it provided more than its fair share of parks, museums, hospitals, water, and other amenities—and that the other counties of the metro area needed to contribute in an equitable way.

This cohesive, regional vision is strikingly different from the typical ways in which politicians and citizens frequently approach the question of amenities and service provision within metropolitan areas, particularly on questions of race and poverty. Where the tendency is often to naturalize political boundaries, viewing them as insurmountable features of the landscape that then justify policies of class and racial containment by making each distinct county or municipality's population strictly its own affair, Denver boosters and politicians argued precisely the opposite. Given their organic and interconnected understanding of the metropolis, it is unsurprising that both the Currigan and McNichols administrations actively advocated for the creation of a unified metropolitan government. Both saw annexation as only a "stop-gap measure" for bringing regional issues like water provision, fire protection, zoning, and resource allocation more generally under a

central authority. Regional government, they both argued, would ultimately be necessary in order to resolve what Currigan described as the “chaos of multiple and often overlapping jurisdictions gripping the metropolitan area.”³²

The alternative, boosters argued, was grim. The *Rocky Mountain News* listed other Sunbelt cities with which Denver perceived itself to be in competition—Houston, Phoenix, Wichita, Oklahoma City—and warned that all of them were outpacing the Mile High City in terms of acres annexed.³³ The *Denver Post*’s editorial board predicted gloomily that, without continued annexation, the city would become “completely closed in by incorporated communities, sealing its own fate.” It went on to caution that continued suburban expansion without growth in Denver itself would put “an ever-increasing burden on the core city’s streets, parks and other public facilities,” hastening Denver’s decline and producing “ever-increasing urban renewal problems and a declining tax base.” Suburban communities would also suffer, forced to provide essential services for themselves for the first time at what the *Post* presumed would be far greater cost than they currently paid to Denver for the same services.³⁴

Denver residents and boosters who supported annexation were not necessarily liberals or even Democrats. Though their core arguments stemmed from

³² There are many examples of such statements from both mayors. See for example Tom Currigan as quoted in the *Rocky Mountain News*, “Currigan Follows Annexation Policy,” (Sep 19, 1963) and “Annexation: Key to Our Future, part x of Four,” (1966). For Bill McNichols on annexation and regional governance, see, for example, William McNichols memo to State Legislature, c. Feb 1969, William McNichols Papers, Box 46, Folder 5, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division. See also William McNichols statement re: Annexation, Aug 22, 1973, William McNichols Papers, Box 46, Folder 9, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

³³ “Annexation Key to Our Future, part X of Four,” *Rocky Mountain News*, (1966).

³⁴ “Sometimes ‘Trouble’ Stands for ‘Progress,’” *Denver Post*, July 27, 1962.

a conviction that Denver and its region could function only as a cohesive whole, many also feared, like long-time conservative city councilman Ted Hackworth, that unless new suburban developments were incorporated into the city, Denver would be overrun by minorities and the poor. At the same time, there were Denver citizens who resisted the booster vision altogether. These Denverites argued, as Mrs. Betty Morris did in a July 1963 letter to Mayor Currigan, that Denver schools were already over-crowded and that adding new students from annexed areas would only worsen the problem. Others, like Mrs. W. A. Callagan, wrote to complain that annexations create “more expense on Denver tax payers for improvements, schools, and everything else it includes” in the newly annexed areas.³⁵ On the whole, though, support for annexation was high among Denverites, as evidenced by their resounding vote to defeat the anti-annexation Poundstone Amendment in 1974.

Conversely, some percentage of suburbanites supported a more expansive view of Denver’s role in the growth of the metro region, actively seeking their own annexation. As both Mayors Currigan and McNichols were at pains to point out, Denver never initiated annexation proceedings. Only suburban residents and landowners themselves could initiate a petition for annexation to Denver,³⁶ and the extensive annexations during the 1960s—thousands of acres annually—testified to the desire of some suburbanites to become part of the city. These residents usually cited access to lower water rates and lower taxes as benefits of becoming part of

³⁵ Betty Morris to Mayor Tom Currigan, Aug 13, 1963 and Mrs. W.A. Callagan to Mayor Tom Currigan, July 31, 1963, Tom Currigan Papers, Box 16, Folder 14, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

³⁶ “Annexation: Key to Our Future, part X of Four,” *Rocky Mountain News*, (1966) and McNichols Statement re: Annexation, Aug 22, 1973, William McNichols Papers, Box X, Folder X, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

Denver. Some, for example many residents of the Sheridan development in suburban Adams County who sought annexation in 1963, were frustrated with what they perceived as a chaotic and inadequate suburban school system.³⁷ In 1966, when a commission to study possible revisions of the annexation laws threatened to restrict Denver's ability to annex, the city was inundated by a glut of annexation petitions from suburban areas, all clamoring to be incorporated into Denver ahead of any change.³⁸

* * *

Despite some suburban support for Denver annexation, the metropolitan vision articulated by suburban county and school officials—and the one that came to be espoused by homeowner associations and other civic groups as well as, ultimately, the majority who voted in favor of the Poundstone Amendment—was distinctly different. While Denver officials and boosters viewed the city and its suburbs as a unified whole, anti-annexation suburbanites argued strongly for the distinct character of suburban communities and their political, economic, and above all social and cultural separation from the core city. In this view, Denver annexation threatened the suburban “way of life” and “quality of life,” along with the all-important suburban property values. Op-eds in suburban newspapers, statements by suburban officials, “fact sheets” and flyers produced by suburban county commissioners and homeowners’ associations all depicted Denver as a stagnant and

³⁷ “Sheridan Residents Circulate Annex-to-Denver Petitions,” (*Denver Post*, June 27, 1962, Zone 2 p. 3)

³⁸ “Annex Pleas Swamp Denver, Planners Say,” (*Denver Post*, June 27, 1962, Zone 2 p. 3)

chaotic city—a “bully” conspiring to “black jack” suburbanites into paying exorbitant taxes and forfeiting their right to a lifestyle of their choosing.

Anti-annexation advocates generally declined to be explicit about what they meant by suburban “quality of life,” but the implication was clear. Essentially, their complaint amounted to “not Denver” and, although they rarely expressed it in so many words, not Hispanic or black. The specter of a menacingly “chaotic” and “disorderly” Denver requires imagining Denver’s suburbs as an orderly and harmonious alternative, which they were not. Colorado had, and still has, some of the most lax land use regulations of any state in the country, and suburban development in the 1960s and ‘70s was, essentially, a free-for-all. This fixation on Denver’s supposed “chaos,” then, was less a response to a real urban threat than an evocation of long-standing tropes about the unsavory, disorderly, and even unhealthy nature of cities tied directly to their minority and immigrant populations.³⁹

Against this background, the campaign to keep Denver from annexing Greenbelt and Greenwood Village by uniting the two suburban communities shows that, as early as the mid-1960s, when Denver first began to address the problem of school segregation, residents of the suburbs sought to draw bright lines between themselves and the core city. While suburbanites rarely acknowledged the racial

³⁹ Examples of this argument are too numerous to mention here. For specific language depicting Denver as “conspiring” against the suburbs, see Ed Scott to Tom Currigan, Oct 1, 1964, Tom Currigan Papers, Box 16, Folder 18, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division. See also Arapahoe County Planning Office, “Greenwood Village Information,” (Nov. 21, 1966), Tom Currigan Papers, Box 16, Folder 28, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

content of their concerns for their “way of life,” these fears lay only barely below the surface. One pamphlet titled, “What the Greenwood Village Annexation Means to Us and Our Way of Life” came closest. The cover depicted a white man holding his child on his shoulders, the child covering the father’s eyes. On the next page, the pamphlet warned that “they”—meaning Denver—“are coming at us by way of the Valley Highway—with a bankrupt (bare bones) city budget, split-session schools, a long bus ride away, large problems of crime in the streets and extra sales tax.” The pamphlet went so far as to compare Denver to an invading Nazi army, warning that, “If we keep our heads in the sand and keep thinking nothing will change, they will out-flank us just like Hitler outflanked France’s Maginot Line.” Mixing metaphors somewhat, it concludes by predicting that, if this is allowed to happen, “Denver just won’t go away. Instead Denver will come our way...pick our ostrich plumes...take our schools, our tax base and our way of life.”⁴⁰ In this context, as in the other pro-Greenwood materials, “protecting our way of life” was but a thinly veiled suggestion that Denver posed an existential threat to white families—especially children.

As these flyers from Greenbelt reveal, protecting the suburban “way of life” was, to a very large extent, about keeping white, suburban children out of the Denver schools. The same pamphlet that compared Denver to Hitler’s invading Nazi army went on to proclaim, “There is no disagreement that the residents of this area would like to keep intact the [suburban] School District, of which we are so proud.” The only alternative, it warned, was becoming part of the Denver schools, which

⁴⁰ Greenbelt Steering Committee, “What the Greenwood Village Annexation Means to Us and Our Way of Life,” (c. Nov, 1966), Tom Currigan Papers, Box 16, Folder 32, Denver Public Library, Western History & Genealogy Division.

were “already over-crowded, looking for more capital funds, running split sessions, and in many cases bussing children—they could be your own children—to far-distant schools for a variety of questionable reasons.”⁴¹ Of course the “questionable reasons” for busing had to do with school desegregation, with which the Denver School Board had just begun to grapple that year. The reference to busing here is particularly noteworthy because in 1966, when the pamphlet was written, busing had not yet begun and was still in an early planning stage. Nevertheless, the specter of mandatory integration was sufficient to scare a majority of Greenbelt residents into voting to avoid being annexed to Denver.

Where others hedged, Cherry Creek Schools Superintendent Otis Dickey was unusually blunt. In an interview with the *Denver Post*, he argued that the desire to remain outside the Denver school system had already motivated white suburban parents, many recently arrived scientists and engineers employed in Denver’s new “think” industries, to vote against many annexation proposals. Drawing a direct link between racial exclusivity and economic growth, Dickey asserted that maintaining the color line was vital to the continued prosperity of the metropolitan region as a whole. Well-educated newcomers, he explained, “do not want their children exposed to the minority and slum problems of core city schools,” but rather demand small suburban districts that can “concentrate on excellence.” He contended that conditions in the Denver schools had already cost the region, as some industries chose to bypass Denver in favor of other cities with more “favorable” conditions.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Annexations Close In: Two School Districts Threatened,” *Denver Post*, January 10, 1965.

Putting the “Annexation Wars” in the context of Denver’s school desegregation struggle brings the racial nature of the annexation controversy—and, indeed, the entire debate over the future of the metropolis—into stark relief. School integration in Denver did not become a matter of discussion until the mid-1960s. Before that time, schools hardly factored in anti-annexation rhetoric at all. In 1962 and again in 1964, the anti-annexation group FAIR could not muster enough signatures even to get their anti-annexation amendment on the state ballot—never mind to get it added to Colorado’s constitution. But 1964 was also the year in which civil rights activists in Denver began pushing to integrate the city’s schools. By 1966, when the Greenwood/Greenbelt annexation issue came to a vote, pressure for reform from both African Americans and Hispanics had reached high intensity and busing seemed imminent.

In 1968, at the urging of Denver’s first black school board member, Rachel Noel, the board passed Resolution 1490, mandating the desegregation of the Denver schools through busing among other means. A lengthy, headline-grabbing controversy ensued, punctuated by the implementation (and then cessation) of a busing plan and, ultimately, a Supreme Court ruling in 1973 mandating busing for desegregation within the Denver schools. The next year, the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Detroit busing case, *Milliken v. Bradley*, held it unconstitutional to forcibly involve suburban areas in solutions to urban school segregation—effectively siding with those like the suburban Denver anti-annexation activists who viewed metropolitan regions not as unified wholes but rather as a patchwork of autonomous political entities without obligations beyond their own city lines. As the Detroit case

made its nationally publicized way to the Supreme Court, Greenwood Republican activist and future Greenwood Village mayor Freda Poundstone resurrected the old FAIR amendment to make future Denver annexations essentially impossible and the initiative, now dubbed the Poundstone Amendment, won decisively.

While anti-annexation activists insisted that race and class were unrelated to their desire to restrict Denver's growth and, consequently, its power within the metropolitan region and the state, Denver boosters sought whenever possible to bring this unsightly feature of anti-annexation sentiment into view. In August 1973, for example, just after the Supreme Court's ruling in the Denver busing case, a suburban newspaper, the *Lakewood Sentinel*, quoted an anonymous Denver official as saying, "The plain fact is some people in the suburbs just don't want their kids going to school with minority races." Alan Canter, director of the Denver planning office, made much the same point, responding dismissively to suburban claims that taxes and municipal services were the true issues: "You don't really think that's the main problem," he chided, "The real trouble is the school problem, and the white flight to the suburbs only exacerbates the problem."⁴³

Of course, school busing was also controversial within Denver itself. And supporters of Denver annexation and of Denver school integration were not alone in observing the covert racial character of the "Annexation Wars." Members of the Denver anti-busing group CANS—Citizens Association for Neighborhood Schools—were quick to point out the hypocrisy of white suburbanites who denounced the working-class, white Denver anti-busing activists from the safety of their suburban

⁴³ "Suburban Counties Fear Denver Blitz," (*Lakewood Sentinel*, Aug 9, 1973)

homes. A December 1974, CANS cartoon commenting on the passage of the Poundstone Amendment depicted two Denver children, both white, looking on sadly as white men wearing shirts labeled “Arapahoe” and “Englewood”—one a suburban county, the other a town—built a brick wall to keep them out. On the wall, a sign proclaimed “Achtung! You are entering Das Arapahoe Zone. Only authentic White Flight allowed.” The cartoon’s caption, written from the perspective of the wall-builders, read, “We certainly don’t want any of those little Denver bigots going to school with our kids.”⁴⁴ Much like the Berlin Wall that it invoked, the cartoon suggested that suburbanites had, with the Poundstone Amendment, built a durable boundary between themselves and Denver. Despite the best efforts of suburban anti-annexation activists to appear race neutral, the racial content of their campaign was abundantly clear.

⁴⁴ “We certainly don’t want any of those little Denver bigots going to school with our kids...,” cartoon in CANS info pamphlet, (1974), Keyes v. School District No. 1 Papers, Accession 1, Box 1, Folder 1, University of Colorado-Boulder Archives/

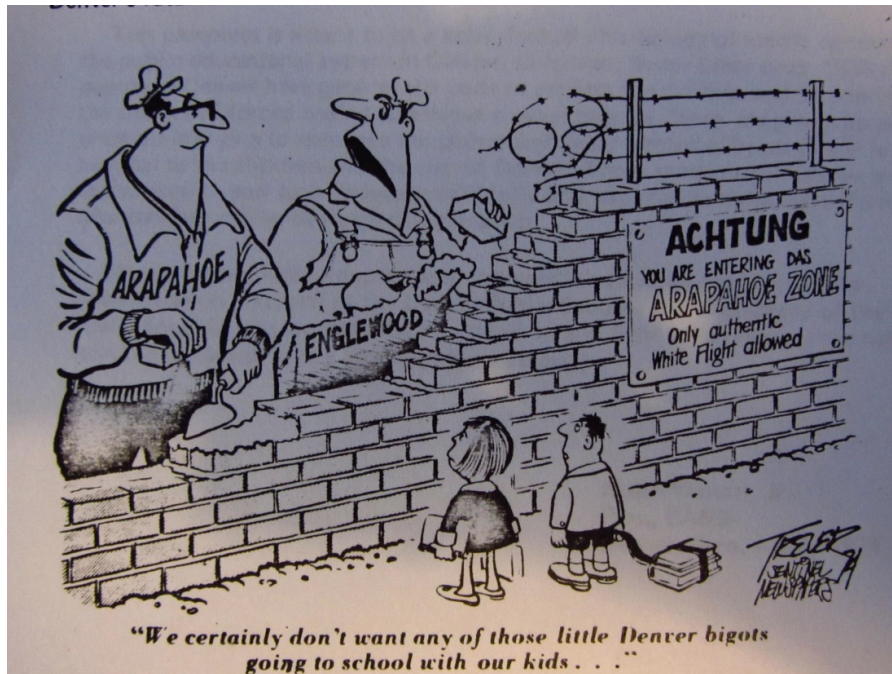


Figure 7. CANS Poundstone Amendment cartoon.

* * *

In 1976, two years after the Poundstone vote, members of League of Women Voters chapters throughout metropolitan Denver met in small groups to discuss their feelings about a variety of challenges facing the region. The ultimate question before them: was metropolitan governance desirable and, if so, how could it be achieved? While nearly all the League groups agreed that a comprehensive, regional government was the way forward on matters of environment, economy, infrastructure, and even inequality, ultimately, they believed regional governance was doomed to failure. Reporting back to the state LWV headquarters, one board member from Adams County noted, “Most members agreed that education is the one thing the region could never get together on.” Similar reports emanated from across

the region. In Arapahoe, “there was strong opposition to the creation of a single school district; busing played a major role in maintaining that fear.” Leaguers in Aurora, the large suburban municipality to Denver’s east, were nearly unanimously of the opinion that a single regional school district was “totally undesirable,” citing busing as “the main reason people would never accept a regional system.” Even in Denver itself, few Leaguers held out hope that the problem would ever be resolved. Noting that any meaningful solution to the city’s racial problems would necessarily be metropolitan in scope and encompass economic integration too, they noted that, “busing, of course, was the real issue.” Most Denver members doubted whether their suburban neighbors would agree to set aside the boundaries they had so meticulously constructed and reinforced.

In Greater Denver, as in numerous metropolitan areas nationally, matters of race, growth, regional balance of power, and quality of life were inextricably linked. Suburban racial exclusivity was understood as central to the metropolis’s ability to attract new industries and the young, educated families they brought with them, thus underwriting the Front Range economic boom. Willingly or not, Denver was also conscripted into this project. By containing and providing for the region’s poor and minority residents, the core city made possible the reality of suburban exclusivity and, with it, the illusion of suburban racial innocence.

The submerged racial content of conflicts like the Denver Annexation Wars becomes visible when considered in terms of broader questions about why certain boundaries and consolidations of political power and resources are deemed acceptable while others are not. Suburbanites resisted being brought into Denver,

ostensibly on the grounds of retaining local control over their “way of life,” yet, at the same time, many of these unincorporated subdivisions lobbied to consolidate in their own, new, suburban municipality so as to “protect” themselves from any future Denver annexation attempt. The desire to retain the most local possible level of control was not, then, their vital concern. Instead, the unspoken issue was a specific not to be forced to grapple with the challenges of serving its large low-income and minority populations. In many ways, then, annexation encapsulated what Robert Self has identified as the fundamental political-economic problem of the postwar era: reconciling the demand for public services with the distribution of tax burdens.⁴⁵ The debate over fragmentation versus regional cooperation made visible in the landscape of the Front Range the often-unseen tension inherent between a patchwork of local autonomy and the obligations of mutual care.

The end of annexation in Denver had important, tangible repercussions. With the exception of the hard-won deal to annex territory for a new airport in the mid-1980s, Denver’s geographic boundaries have remained unchanged since 1974. But the true significance of the annexation debates and of the ultimately successful effort to limit Denver’s growth lay in the institutionalization of a perspective that naturalized metropolitan fragmentation. It put the subject of where to draw political boundaries and when it might be appropriate to cross them to achieve policy objectives, such as integration, beyond legitimate political debate. As a result, suburban voters in particular were empowered, regardless of where they fell on the political spectrum, to view questions about taxation, zoning, school funding, and the

⁴⁵ Self, “Prelude to the Tax Revolt,” in *The New Suburban History*,”

like as fundamentally market-based questions driven by property values and “quality of life” concerns over the safety or physical beauty of their neighborhoods rather than as questions about the equitable distribution of resources to all of their metropolitan region’s residents.

The annexation controversy has broader implications for thinking about race and policy, demonstrating how the language of racial neutrality could often be used to legitimate racially differential outcomes. When viewed in the context of other simultaneous controversies like school desegregation, it becomes easier to tease out the racial and class dimensions of what might otherwise appear to be race-neutral issues like water rates, zoning, or taxes. Naturalizing political boundaries—as though they were immovable features of the landscape like the Rocky Mountain—allowed residents of metropolitan Denver to write off the core city and its citizens as beyond the scope of their responsibility. This insistence on the neutrality of political boundaries accounts for the broad consensus on these issues from people at otherwise distinct ends of the ideological spectrum.

Chapter 2:
**“Don’t Californicate Colorado!”: Quality of Life Politics & the 1976
Winter Olympics**

In 1972, Denver became the first city in history to give up the right to host the Olympics after having been awarded the 1976 Winter Games. An intense campaign had pitted environmentalists, minorities, and anti-growth quality-of-life activists against local boosters and business elites in a protracted battle over state funding for the games. Ultimately, many of the same Coloradans who had initially expressed great excitement at the coming of the games opposed public funding by overwhelming margins in a statewide ballot initiative. Growing fears about tax hikes, pollution, and a potential stampede of newcomers to the Rocky Mountain State fueled anti-Olympic sentiment, overwhelming the state’s dominant pro-growth and pro-business political ethos. At a time of tremendous racial tension in metropolitan Denver, residents from across the political and demographic spectrum forged an unlikely alliance to beat back booster ambitions. The controversy over Denver’s Olympics bid also provided a powerful springboard for local Democrats, while at the same time revealing the generally pragmatic, non-partisan, and yet still hotly contested nature of Colorado politics.

The controversy over the 1976 Olympics reveals previously invisible fissures in Colorado’s political culture. It also provides a new window into important questions about the relationship among place, the built and natural environments, the interactions of various demographic groups within metropolitan areas, and

political engagement in late-twentieth century America. The success of the anti-Olympics movement, which had far-reaching implications for Colorado, reflected the emergence by the 1970s of a new kind of politics in metropolitan Denver and other metropolises across the United States. This new, pragmatic, self-interested, and non-ideological ethos became a prominent, perhaps predominant, political orientation for many Americans.

That the anti-Olympics side ultimately won marked a significant shift in local political culture away from the rubber stamp the booster agenda had previously enjoyed. It also suggests that, even as a pro-growth dynamic has often dominated recent American politics, citizens have often disagreed about exactly what form growth should take and what growth should look like at the local level. Significantly, to the extent that current scholarship has recognized the importance to political engagement of changes in metropolitan space, it has tended to see such spatial differentiation as a boon to Republicans, who successfully capitalized on grassroots suburban politics to attract suburban voters to their fold. The Colorado Olympics case, however, suggests that the politics of place are more complex, and that, far from being inevitable, the rise of the GOP after the 1960s was the product of a series of contests played out in the spaces of metropolitan America. Moreover, a focus on metropolitan Denver uncovers the ways in which the new metropolitan realities influenced both identity and political engagement for Americans of all stripes, not just suburban whites.⁴⁶ Recent American political history cannot be

⁴⁶ Although metropolitan history has thus far focused overwhelmingly on white suburbanites, other scholars such as Robert Self have also begun to look comprehensively at metropolitan areas and their diverse populations.

understood outside the context of the major structural changes in metropolitan geography and political economy that transformed American life at that time. The evidence from Denver points to a far more nuanced, less partisan politics than has yet been realized.

* * *

The Denver Olympics controversy pitted a broad coalition of local residents against Colorado's newly-ascendant corporate elite. These boosters, who largely controlled state government, emerged rapidly in the aftermath of World War II, transforming Denver from a small, staid city into one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. They espoused a key corollary of growth liberalism, "metropolitan growth politics," which understood economic development as inherently competitive and argued that the state should use taxation, land use policy, and labor laws as recruitment tools to attract capital. Where growth liberalism used measures such as GNP and GDP to track growth at the national level, proponents of metropolitan growth politics measured local success both by a metropolis's ability to attract new companies and residents and by the physical expansion of the metro area.⁴⁷ In this view, a successful bid for the 1976 Winter Olympics would give metropolitan Denver competitive advantages by attracting a huge influx of new businesses and residents.

In the immediate postwar years, Denver had a reputation as a sleepy, self-satisfied city.⁴⁸ By the early 1960s, however, a new energy suffused the city and

⁴⁷ Needham, "Sunbelt Imperialism."

⁴⁸ Leonard and Noel, *Mining Camp to Metropolis*.

state. Winter sports were becoming a national obsession, and Colorado businessmen were quick to dub their home state “Ski Country USA.”⁴⁹ Traditional Colorado industries like mining and ranching gave way to tourism, recreation, and finance. As Governor John Love explained to an interviewer a decade later, “We wanted industrial parks, factories—all the economic growth we could get.”⁵⁰ In order to “Keep Colorado growing!” the governor launched a “Sell Colorado” campaign in 1966, sending local businessmen on “missions” across the country and around the world. The objective was to convince major corporations to relocate to or open regional headquarters in Colorado. Local business associations—including the Colorado Ski Information Center, ranchers looking to cash in on an emerging land boom, and major Denver-based corporations such as Samsonite—all joined the effort.

“Sell Colorado” worked, and between 1960 and 1970, despite shrinking populations in rural counties that depended on the old mining and ranching economy, the state’s overall population increased by twenty-six percent making Colorado one of the five fastest growing states in the country. The overwhelming majority of this growth took place in the six Front Range counties of metropolitan Denver, fueled by a rush of corporate executives, government workers, and others out to cash in on the boom and enjoy the area’s much-touted quality of life. The six counties surrounding Denver—including Jefferson County, where many Olympic events were slated to be held—grew by fifty percent or more and attracted by far the

⁴⁹ Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment,” 30.

most newcomers in absolute terms.⁵¹ Most of these newcomers were business people and professionals in tourism, technology, airlines, and other industries that established western headquarters in Denver. As a result, the state's political center of gravity shifted towards corporations and affluent, white-collar, suburban workers, and away from the traditional influence of agricultural and extractive industries like mining, forestry, aquaculture, and energy development. This transformation in Colorado reflected broader trends throughout the Mountain West, where the percentage of citizens who made their living directly from the land dropped from twenty-eight percent at the end of World War II to just six percent by 1980.⁵²

Plans to host the 1976 Winter Olympics, although not officially connected to Sell Colorado, were part and parcel of this booster strategy. The same Chamber of Commerce members who championed the governor's promotional campaign were instrumental in lobbying for his support of Denver's Olympic bid and then in running the Denver Olympic Committee (DOC).⁵³ Efforts to bring the Olympics to Denver first began in 1956, when a group of executives from the then-small recreational ski industry launched a bid for the 1960 Winter Games. This first attempt, which was entirely privately funded and received neither state support nor

⁵¹ "CensusCD Neighborhood Change Database: 1970–2000 Tract Data Selected Variables for US Census Tracts 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 and Mapping Tools," (Brunswick, NJ: Geolytics, 2003).

⁵² Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 30–1. Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), xv.

⁵³ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 97.

publicity, failed.⁵⁴ The 1976 bid, by contrast, drew on both public and private resources and enjoyed the full backing of both the city of Denver and state of Colorado. Once Denver became the official United States candidate city, the federal government also got involved, pledging millions in Olympic support. Although the mayor and governor were officially members of the DOC, the 1976 bid was still overwhelmingly a booster effort. Throughout the process of becoming the designated city and then developing and implementing Olympic plans, Governor Love and Mayor Bill McNichols remained marginal figures, attending only a few meetings and generally signing off on whatever the executive committee members proposed. Executive committee members, for their part, were primarily senior executives in major local corporations who had been granted extended leaves of absence from their respective companies in order to facilitate their work on the Games.⁵⁵

The interweaving of business interests with local, state, and federal politics evident in the Olympic planning highlights the prominent role that business has played in shaping policy and setting political agendas throughout the Sunbelt and West. As in many states where the chamber of commerce effectively became a shadow government, in the 1950s Colorado business associations became the largest campaign contributors to both parties. State legislators themselves were heavily involved in land development and many new economy industries, as were the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41–2.

⁵⁵ This characterization recurs in the several works that touch upon the 1976 Winter Olympics. See Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment,” 41–3. See also Matthew Burbank, Gregory Andranovich, and Charles H. Heying, *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-Events on Local Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001). Rothman and Leonard and Noel also write on this issue.

Denver mayor and members of Colorado's Congressional delegation.⁵⁶ The boosters' metropolitan growth agenda thus informed and was re-enforced by the official policy agenda of the state.⁵⁷

In addition to the core group of Denver businessmen who led the Olympics effort and convinced both the governor and state General Assembly to support it, businesses and business associations were the Olympics' most enthusiastic advocates. Chambers of Commerce in Denver and surrounding counties wrote to congratulate the DOC on winning their bid, saying that the Olympics would be a "community inspiration" and a "boon to tourism and job creation." The Colorado Association of Real Estate Boards, Colorado Motel Association, Consulting Engineers of Colorado, Sales and Marketing Executives of Denver, and Advertising Club of Denver all offered their endorsements. So did the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, the mayor of Aurora (a Denver suburb), and Bill Chavez, a Republican candidate for Congress in Colorado Springs.⁵⁸ These politicians clearly positioned themselves as allies to the business community and adopted their priorities.

Local politicians' early enthusiasm for the Olympics reflected Colorado's broader pro- growth business and political climate. The state had extremely lax, locally controlled land use and zoning regulations, making it difficult to block what

⁵⁶ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 39.

⁵⁷ See Needham, "*Power Lines*," Matthew Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, and Carl Abbott, *The Metropolitan Frontier* for more on the role of corporate boosters in shaping politics and government policy throughout the Sunbelt South and West.

⁵⁸ File containing Olympics endorsements from various cities and organizations, FF1 McNichols, William, William McNichols Papers, Denver Public Library Western History & Genealogy Division.

opponents called “strip” and “spot” zoning, resulting in rapid and unplanned land development throughout Denver’s surrounding suburban counties. The array of Olympic supporters spread across the multi-county Front Range also highlighted Denver’s economic and political pull throughout the region, strengthening the notion of the Front Range as a single, connected metropolitan entity.

Business priorities permeated the promotional materials produced for Denver’s Olympic bid. Promoters of the Games presented their state to the world as a booming and vital center for industry and culture, with the excitement of both the Old West and of cutting edge innovation at its core. Themes of Western exceptionalism dominated the pro-Olympics discourse. A 1969 brochure titled “The Denver Story” boldly proclaimed 1976 “Denver’s Year to Host the World.” Denver, as the DOC described it, embodied the contrasts that made the West distinctive and exhilarating: “Skyscrapers and spaces, youth and traditions, sunsets over the majestic Rocky Mountains, Old West and New West, sunshine and people. That’s Denver Colorado.”⁵⁹

In the official Denver bid book submitted to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1970, these contrasts were heightened through both text and images. The bid emphasized themes of Western hospitality, innovation and entrepreneurship, and the energetic Denver lifestyle. Colorado’s history, promoters suggested, was ever-present in the Mile High City, a cultural heritage that drove the city’s boundless growth and enthusiasm. Denver, the bid explained, was the very

⁵⁹ “The Denver Story,” FF6 McNichols, William, William McNichols Papers, Denver Public Library Western History & Genealogy Division.

heart of the frontier, “the Old West where great buffalo wandered, followed by the Indians, the trappers, the frontiersmen, the homesteaders.” In Denver, the ambition and the “western spirit and fervor” of the pioneers “helped Denver grow from a gangly, rambunctious town into a sophisticated metropolitan area—a city that likes to make things happen.” Boosters proclaimed that this entrepreneurial spirit was Denver’s economic engine and its cultural heritage, “the common thread that binds the people of Denver together.”

High quality color images on every page of the bid book reinforced these themes. Photographs of families, all white, enjoying winter sports, rodeos, the ballet, fine dining, and modern architecture were juxtaposed with full-page reproductions of famous paintings depicting scenes of the Old West. The book opened with an image of a visionary Mayor McNichols, staring purposefully into the distance. On the facing page, an aerial view of metropolitan Denver extended outwards from downtown to meet the far-off mountains on the horizon. This image of the infinitely expanding metropolis as a sign of vitality and fulfillment encapsulated the boosters’ expansionist vision for the future of Denver and the Front Range and their understanding of success and the good life with economic growth at its core.⁶⁰

Growing the metropolis was among the Olympics promoters’ explicit goals. Portions of the bid book and other promotional material read like real estate brochures for Denver. “Denver attracts people from all walks of life and from all parts of the nation,” DOC chair Robert Pringle explained, “because it ranks as one of

⁶⁰ Denver Olympic Organizing Committee (DOC), “Denver: United States Candidate for the XII Winter Olympic Games, 1976,” in the Auraria Library, Denver Colorado.

the most desirable places in America to live.”⁶¹ According to the bid book, while the first Denver residents chose the area for its accessibility and natural beauty, modern Denverites chose the Mile High City “because it is a well-balanced city with the most extensive public park system in the world, deep blue skies, abundant sunshine and many- colored sunsets that silhouette the magnificent Rocky Mountains which tower west of the city.” Just as the mountains once attracted trappers and miners, “now the mountains beckon to winter sports enthusiasts, campers, fishermen, and hunters.” Metropolitan Denver, the DOC hastened to point out, was among the five fastest growing metro areas in the nation, a fact they attributed to the area’s natural beauty, “the pleasant living factor and year around sports activities, coupled with the enthusiasm of the Denver citizens, which was attractive to new residents.” The DOC trumpeted the city’s modern jet-ready airport, its culture, its climate, and its beauty in the hopes of drawing more residents and more business to the Area.⁶² Growth was good for business and therefore, the boosters presumed, good for the people of Colorado.

Indeed, just as business priorities became state priorities in Colorado, so were business preferences projected onto the public at large by the business community and government officials. “Denverites,” the DOC proclaimed, “feel the XII Winter Games will give them a chance to let the rest of the world know what they have known for many years—that Denver is a beautiful and friendly city and that the Rocky Mountains are unexcelled as a winter sports center.” Organizers

⁶¹ Robert Pringle speech to IOC, October, 1970, FF11 McNichols, William, William McNichols Papers, Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy.

⁶² DOC, “Denver: United States Candidate.”

argued that the Games would “give Denver a chance to acquaint people from throughout the world with true Western hospitality.” They proclaimed local enthusiasm for the Games to be universal, a natural outgrowth of the Denver lifestyle. Since “most of the 1.2 million people in Denver are not only avid sports fans but also participate in sports themselves,” they reasoned, it was “easy to see why these people desire to stage the Winter Games in 1976 so strongly.”⁶³ Not only did the DOC cast Denverites as enthusiastic supporters of the booster vision, they made clear that that vision was a metropolitan one. Denver itself had only about a half million residents in 1970—the 1.2 million referenced in the bid book made up the population of the entire seven county metro area.

Although boosters touted the enthusiastic support of metropolitan residents, their vision for Denver’s future and the central role of the Olympics in bringing it about was, in fact, sharply contested. As early as 1966, residents of Aspen, just over 200 miles from Denver, objected to the use of their town as a site for alpine skiing events. This forced the DOC to look elsewhere, despite having been specifically offered the location by Aspen’s mayor and the local ski industry—an early foreshadowing of the differences between residents and business leaders that soon would dominate the Olympics debate.⁶⁴ Closer to Denver, residents of the Front Range communities in the Rocky Mountain foothills were also among the earliest objectors, citing fears of growth and the degradation of the natural environment that had been among the area’s greatest draws for them and their neighbors. Minority rights advocates in Denver itself objected to their lack of representation Olympic

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Burbank et al., *Olympic Dreams*, 49.

planning, while the Colorado Labor Council demanded without success that the DOC adopt fair labor practices.

Paramount among all these objectors' complaints was the lack of transparency in DOC decision-making. DOC meetings were not open to the public, citizen input was not solicited, and accurate information about Olympic plans was often hard to come by. Moreover, when they chose to address Coloradans at all, which was rarely, the DOC tended either to dismiss outright or simply ignore citizen concerns about the environment, urban renewal, labor, and taxes. Instead, DOC members emphasized the economic benefits they claimed the Games would bring to the state as a whole, despite serious skepticism from area residents. Their attitude demonstrated Olympic boosters' confidence in both the rightness of their cause and the strength of their position *vis a vis* both the public and the government officials and institutions whose support the effort required.⁶⁵ As late as the winter of 1972, just months before these disparate groups would coalesce behind the effort to place anti-Olympics initiatives on state and city ballots, representatives of all three constituencies stressed to both the DOC and IOC that they did not object to Colorado hosting the Olympics per se but rather to the particular sites under consideration and the secretive manner in which decisions were being made. Unable to win any meaningful concessions from the DOC, these activists would ultimately launch and win a campaign to remove the Olympics from Colorado altogether.

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⁶⁵ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 49.

Residents of the Front Range mountain communities outside Denver were among the earliest Olympic objectors. The DOC had planned many Olympic events in or immediately adjacent to these areas throughout the Front Range. Residents, catching wind of the plans, worried that the pristine landscape of their mountain enclaves, already under threat from rampant growth and unregulated real estate development, would be destroyed by the construction of luge and bobsled runs, the deluge of spectators and press, and the hordes of newcomers they felt sure would flock to Colorado and take up residence after seeing the state's natural beauty. In the years leading up to the 1970 Amsterdam meeting at which Denver was designated the host city, Front Range residents grew increasingly vocal about these concerns.

Opposition to the Olympics came from a wide array of Front Range groups. Local conservationists, like the Evergreen Naturalists, the Wilderness Society, the Sierra Club, and the Hill and Dale Society, were natural allies. The Colorado State Grange, an agricultural association with local chapters, joined in opposition. Representing the greatest number of Coloradans were homeowner associations, which opposed the Games for a variety of reasons, ranging from concerns about water rights, traffic congestion, and public safety to more general fears about how environmental damage caused by Olympic construction and spectators would affect homeowners' property values and quality of life.

The Buffalo Park Improvement Association was typical, citing not only the usual worries about environmental degradation and safety but also more generalized concerns about the inability of local public services from police and fire to water and sewerage to handle either a mega-event or the hordes of newcomers that they imagined would flock to the area and take up residence thanks to Olympics publicity. Their misgivings also reflected concerns about long-term threats to community stability. Members wondered who would pay for the upkeep of Olympic facilities after the Games left town and whether the areas around the sites—formerly hunting and park lands that added to the area's residential desirability—would become havens for motorcycles and trailers.⁶⁶

The threat of sharply increased taxes to pay for an event that appeared to have serious costs and few local benefits emerged time and again in homeowners' newsletters, polls, and entreaties to both Olympic and elected officials.⁶⁷ A survey taken by one local newspaper in early 1971 revealed that more than sixty percent of the residents of Evergreen, an unincorporated Front Range community in Jefferson County slated to host several Olympic events, opposed the games. At the same time, hundreds of area residents sent cards to Governor Love and to the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners demanding that the Games be removed from the area. This opposition coalesced into an organization called Protect Our Mountain Environment

⁶⁶ Buffalo Park Improvement Association to members, 4/2/1971, Colorado Environmental Coalition Papers (CEC), Box 19, Folder 17, Western History and Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Catherine Dittman to Governor John Love, 1/13/1971, POME Papers, Colorado Historical Society.

(POME), signaling the importance of the mountain lifestyle to local homeowners. Founded in the wake of Denver's selection by the IOC, it grew largely out of local conservationist organizations, which had deep roots in the area and substantial support, but the grievances it articulated addressed the concerns of the area's varied Olympic critics.⁶⁸

One anti-Olympics resolution passed by the Sierra Club's Rocky Mountain chapter captured locals' most frequently expressed fears. The resolution denounced "a lack of realistic state land-use planning which will encourage land speculation with disastrous environmental results" as well as the DOC's failure to develop any sort of regional transit plan to prevent damage to the environment and private property through the extension of highways, use of meadows for parking, and increased traffic. In an oft-heard refrain, they worried about the "considerable investment of state tax funds" in the Games, "which could be spent in areas of more immediate social concern" and regarded the DOC's reluctance to meet with citizen groups with suspicion.⁶⁹ POME also raised the specter of rampant rezoning for "liquor outlets, restaurants, service stations wherever the Olympians want them," massive deforestation to make way for new power and telephone lines, and litter. Public safety, they argued, was also under threat, both from increased crime as a result of the expected influx of spectators and from dangerous Olympic events

⁶⁸ "POME Bulletin #9," POME Papers, Box 3, Folder 40 and POME et al to International Ski, Biathlon, Luge, and Bobsled Federations, POME Papers, Box 2, Folder 16, Colorado State Historical Society. See also Olson, 126.

⁶⁹ Citizens for Colorado's Future (CCF) Papers, Western History and Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

themselves. Residents particularly worried that the biathlon, in which competitors on skis shoot at moving targets, was slated to pass through heavily residential areas.⁷⁰

For many who opposed the Games, the biggest objection of all, stressed over and over in letters to the IOC and international sports federations, was simply that the Front Range was a lousy place for winter sports, with warm winters, minimal snowfall, and insufficient water to create and then refrigerate manufactured powder. “Denver is not ski country,” POME leaders warned. “This area is entirely inappropriate for any sort of winter athletic events, particularly of the great scope and importance of the International Olympics.” They exposed the DOC for having painted snow onto the pictures of several proposed sites in order to trick the IOC into accepting the bid.⁷¹

For most suburban Denverites on the Front Range, environmental concerns were part of a larger set of issues directly tied to their status as homeowners. Homeowners’ fears were perhaps best summed up in the popular bumper sticker: “NO OLYMPIC TAXES! Save Your Money Save Your Mountains STOP THE OLYMPICS.”⁷² All these concerns, including environmental ones, ultimately came

⁷⁰ POME Bulletin, 11/18/1971, POME Papers, Colorado Historical Society.

⁷¹ Dittmans et al. to Sion Olympic Committee, 10/18/1971, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, History Colorado. POME to International Bobsled Federation, 9/15/1971, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 3 and POME to Comité International Olympique, 4/24/1971, POME Papers, Colorado Historical Society. Jean Gravell to Marc Hodler, 11/11/1971, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Colorado State Historical Society.

⁷² Citizens for Colorado's Future (CCF) Papers, Folder 4, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

back to a single underlying issue: suburbanites' fear that the Olympics would diminish the quality of life for which they had chosen their communities in the first place. The subject was especially fraught, as it highlighted some of the inconsistencies, and potential incompatibilities, among the various issues that fell under the quality-of-life rubric. For example, homeowners on the metropolitan fringe often objected to raising taxes, yet the land use protections and environmentally sensitive policies they championed often required tax hikes. Similarly, these residents typically made their demands in the name of citizen participation and local control, yet the slow-growth policies they advocated frequently required the expansion of the state's regulatory power at the local level.

Coloradans were not alone in their ambivalence towards metropolitan growth. The objections of suburban Denverites to the Games not only reflected changes in Colorado and the West, but also broad national shifts in Americans' relationship to changing metropolitan geography and political economy. With those changes came a transformation in citizens' political consciousness in the early 1970s. As America became increasingly suburban, a new culture of suburban populism developed. It was a bipartisan ethos that emphasized, among other things, the sanctity of private property, the rights of individuals as taxpayers and parents, residential security, and consumer free choice.⁷³ At the heart of this new political

⁷³ Matthew Lassiter has argued extensively about the new suburban populism that developed during the 1970s. See, for example, his "Suburban Strategies: The Volatile Center in Postwar American Politics," in *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History*, ed. Meg Jacobs, William J. Novak, and Julian E. Zelizer, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 327-349.

consciousness lay a paradox: It depended upon the suburbanization that growth liberalism produced but, at the same time, necessarily resisted further metropolitan development as a threat to the quality of life that current residents enjoyed. Indeed, by the early 1970s, quality of life had become a rallying point for Americans who were increasingly rejecting growth.⁷⁴

Environmentalism was a key part of that effort, emerging first as a radical alternative to the dominant growth ethos and ultimately being incorporated in its less radical manifestations into the suburban quality of life political agenda.⁷⁵ By the early 1970s, millions of white, middle-class Americans who had followed the postwar promises of prosperity and homeownership to new suburban communities were beginning to question the wisdom of the very growth liberalism that had made their own lifestyles possible. Instead of assuming the value of continued expansion, the Urban Land Institute reported that, “The ethic of growth...is increasingly being challenged; no longer is it accepted unquestionably as a premise of progress.” A 1973 Rockefeller Brothers Fund report on metropolitan growth and land use concurred, concluding that,

[T]oday, the repeated questioning of what was once generally unquestioned—that growth is good, that growth is inevitable—is so widespread that it seems to us to signal a remarkable change in attitudes in this nation.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Peter Siskind, “Suburban Growth,” in *The New Suburban History*, edited by Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), and “Growth and Its Discontents.”

⁷⁵ Rothman, *Greening of a Nation*, xi.

⁷⁶ Siskind, “Suburban Growth.”

Residents of metropolitan Denver shared in this growing skepticism. Denver was nationally known as a quality-of-life destination city, with white-collar professionals drawn to the area because of its combination of lucrative corporate job opportunities, laid back style, and natural beauty. Yet the very metropolitan growth agenda that made these things possible also threatened to destroy them through overcrowding and uncontrolled development. Olympic boosters who prescribed growth, growth, and more growth for the Mile High City failed to recognize this inherent tension.

The Olympics was not the only issue to attract suburban Denverites' attention for their potential impact on growth and quality of life. POME and other conservation groups also took action on zoning, pollution, roads, and water.⁷⁷ They persuaded the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners to make it more expensive for developers to begin new subdivisions and to undertake an "ecologically based land use study" to develop a systematic plan for the area's future development.⁷⁸ They warned that metro Denver and the surrounding Front Range counties were fast on their way to becoming a "future megalopolis" that would be among the "largest in the land" and urged for state-level planning and controls to ensure that growth would not outpace local services and deplete natural resources.⁷⁹ The Olympics, in their view, were merely a catalyst to a dangerous process of growth and development already underway throughout the region.

⁷⁷ POME to members, n.d., POME Papers, Box 2, Folder 21, Colorado Historical Society.

⁷⁸ "Subdividers to pay more to file plats," Canyon Currier, 12/23/1971 and POME campaign postcard, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Colorado Historical Society.

⁷⁹ Fran Kithil to Jefferson County Board of Commissioners, c. 1971–1972, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 11, Colorado Historical Society.

Suburban Denverites concerned about growth were themselves part of the dramatic demographic shift that was remaking the metropolis. By 1972, the peak of the anti-Olympics movement, over 1,000 land development corporations were in the process of subdividing upwards of two million acres, mostly in the expanding metropolitan corridor along the Front Range between Ft. Collins and Colorado Springs.⁸⁰ Although theoretically controlled at the county level, in practice, this explosive growth went virtually unregulated. By the early 1970s, residents were already beginning to see the adverse consequences of rapid growth. Once known for its crystalline mountain air, metropolitan Denver ranked as the sixth smoggiest city in the nation, thanks in large part to increased traffic. Experts warned that haphazard land development and pollution would be particularly detrimental to the Front Range's fragile mountain ecosystems.⁸¹

To combat what they saw as threats to their mountain way of life, Denverites, especially in the suburbs, founded several environmental organizations in the 1960s, most notably the Rocky Mountain Center on the Environment and the Colorado Open Space Council. By 1970, in response to pressure from environmentalists, the Colorado General Assembly created a state Land Use Commission, Environmental Commission, and Coordinator of Environmental Policy. These new agencies lacked enforcement power and funding, however, rendering them largely ineffective. Efforts to introduce tough new statewide land-use and zoning legislation also foundered as

⁸⁰ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 32.

⁸¹ Ibid., 33–4.

the General Assembly, Republicans and Democrats alike, prioritized booster concerns over environmental ones.⁸² Many suburban anti-Olympics activists were part of this larger environmental awakening in metro Denver. As such, they saw the Olympics as part of a general disregard that quality of life and the rights of homeowners suffered in favor of a short-sighted booster agenda.

Such fears of growth reflected a central paradox of metropolitan America and the West in particular. Ever in search of a private retreat removed from the chaos of urban life, suburbanites moved to the farthest edges of metropolitan development, only to find that they had brought with them the very crowding and chaos they hoped to avoid. In the West, this tension has been heightened by cycles of boom and bust, booster expansion versus the ethos of rugged individualism and unfettered open space. Denver had not been a booster-oriented place until after World War II, such that those Denverites who insisted that the metropolis move away from booster policies did not in fact demand a radical new direction in local policy but rather a return to the status quo ante.

The greatest irony arose from the fact that the residents in the vanguard of anti-growth crusades were often themselves newcomers to the area, participants in the very expansionist trends they later fought. Thus, while anti-Olympics sentiment in Front Range communities was an expression of genuine concerns about good governance and the environment, it also stemmed from Coloradans' complex

⁸² Ibid., 33–4.

relationship to the expanding metropolis. As Peter Siskind has noted, a precipitating event was often necessary to make suburbanites in a given community recognize the threats that growth and environmental degradation might present to their quality of life.⁸³ For suburban Denverites, the bid for the 1976 Winter Olympics was that event. While conservation groups had been active in the state for decades and some committed activists had begun agitating for better land-use controls in the 1960s, environmental concerns were only beginning to capture widespread grassroots support before the Olympics controversy jolted area residents into action. The ultimate success of the anti-Olympics movement signaled the importance of environmental concerns to state officials, and they remained a central part of Colorado's political debate long after.

Until 1972, when voters soundly defeated the Olympics, both Olympic planners and elected officials at every level largely ignored citizens' environmental and anti-growth concerns. DOC policy was not to disclose any specific information about Olympic costs or site selection unless an organization specifically asked to see it. Moreover, in October 1970, the planning committee disbanded its speakers bureau, leaving citizens with virtually no access to information about the Games.⁸⁴ Despite numerous attempts by POME and other citizens' groups to meet with the DOC, officials refused, insisting that until all the site selections had been finalized,

⁸³ Siskind, "Suburban Growth," 165.

⁸⁴ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 105, 132.

“a meaningful discussion...would not be productive.”⁸⁵ POME was able to meet with Governor Love to discuss site selection for the Olympics in early 1971, but the group’s concerns fell on deaf ears. At the same time, POME petitioned the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners to oppose Front Range sites. To placate concerned residents, the board, made up largely of local chamber of commerce members, agreed to an investigation but ultimately did little.⁸⁶

Throughout the Olympic planning process, as opposition grew, DOC and government officials continued to emphasize what they claimed would be the Games’ economic benefits to the exclusion of all other interests. As one DOC member later acknowledged, “No thought was given at all to the environment by the committee. The word, in fact, did not even exist for us.”⁸⁷ Although the DOC did little to address the concerns expressed by suburban Denverites, they were certainly aware of the opposition. As early as 1968, then DOC chair Richard Olson advised committee members “not to get involved with controversies such as the Indian Hills situation,” in which residents of the unincorporated Indian Hills development in the Rocky Mountain foothills mobilized very loudly against Olympic events slated to be held in their community.⁸⁸ In an interview not long after the Olympics controversy ended, another DOC member admitted that planners had misjudged the reasons for residents’ skepticism, and then hostility, about the Games. For while citizens

⁸⁵ Donald Magarell to Vance Dittman, 10/16/1970, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Colorado Historical Society.

⁸⁶ Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment,” 134.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 112.

worried about long-term changes to their communities, the DOC viewed their objections as “fear of hot dog stands, large crowds, and so forth.”⁸⁹

This miscalculation ultimately proved fatal to boosters’ efforts. As the planning process wore on and citizen objections from POME and others grew louder, the IOC began to recognize the extent of the problem facing the Games if they remained in Denver. By the end of 1971, when Colorado state representative Dick Lamm, a key champion of the anti-Olympics cause, wrote to IOC president Avery Brundage in opposition, Brundage was forced to acknowledge that the deluge of anti-Olympics mail inundating the Olympics’ governing body “revealed an alarming situation.”⁹⁰ Only a frantic last minute trip by Denver boosters to the IOC’s early 1972 meeting in Sapporo, Japan stopped the international committee from stripping Denver of its host city designation.

* * *

Suburbanites were not alone in their concerns about the Games: most Coloradans ultimately rejected the Olympics. Organized support for the anti-Olympics cause, however, came primarily from minority rights and labor activists. Their objections differed substantially, both from each other and from the environmental and anti-growth suburban activists who dominated the movement and spearheaded the eventual campaign to put public funding for the Games to a popular vote. Together, these groups formed an uneasy alliance of convenience, brought together by a mutual interest in keeping the Games out of Colorado rather

⁸⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁰ Avery Brundage to Dick Lamm, 11/29/1971, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, Colorado Historical Society.

than any broader, shared political agenda. Organized labor, for example, had little interest in the environment or the threat of sprawl. Indeed, the Olympics would have brought a substantial number of construction and other blue-collar jobs to the state. But growing frustration over the DOC's refusal to adopt fair labor practices, meet with labor leaders, or involve labor in decision making over land-use and construction ultimately soured the Colorado Labor Council and AFL-CIO on the Games.⁹¹

For their part, minority activists' objections to the Olympics were not initially about the Games per se, but rather about housing, spending priorities, and the lack of minority representation in metropolitan decision-making. In particular, community activists worried about DOC plans to build housing for the press corps using funds from Denver's Model Cities, a federal program explicitly intended to promote community-driven development within poor communities. The plan would also have required razing a significant number of existing housing units in minority and low-income neighborhoods. According to DOC, the press housing constituted an acceptable use of Model City funds because it could later be repurposed as low-income housing. Residents, however, objected that such units, concentrated in two press "villages," would effectively increase ghettoization in Denver rather than promote the dispersed affordable housing options that community activists preferred.⁹²

⁹¹ Colorado Labor Council Olympics resolution, 4/6/1972, CEC Papers, Box 19, Folder 17, Western History and Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

⁹² Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 172.

Denver was also a national center of Chicano activism, and members of that community objected to the Olympics as part of their sweeping critique of what they viewed as American capitalist and imperialist policy, of which they saw themselves as victims. Reclaiming spaces within Chicano neighborhoods for the Chicano community was an important part of this political project. Throughout the late-1960s and 1970s, Chicano activists vied with city officials over the naming of local community centers, policing of neighborhood parks, employment opportunities in neighborhood public facilities, and control of curricula and discipline in schools with heavily Chicano student populations. Opposition to the Olympics emerged out of such struggles, as several major event sites would have required the demolition of Chicano schools or residential neighborhoods. The expense of the Olympics, which was to be paid for substantially through local taxes, was also a specific source of anger to Chicanos and other minority residents. When, in 1972, Denver Chicanos drafted a platform for the Colorado branch of the nationalist Raza Unida political party, it included an anti-Olympics plank, declaring that, “We fail to see any resulting benefits for Chicanos and the poor, and therefore we oppose the diversion of badly needed financial resources from education and other crucial human issues.”⁹³

DOC did little to address these concerns, appointing several black and Chicano members to a largely symbolic planning committee while leaving the decision-making executive committee entirely white and booster-oriented. In

⁹³ “Partido de la Raza Unida 1972 Colorado State Platform,” *El Gallo*, Vol. IV, No. 7, (Oct, 1972). Volumes III and IV of *El Gallo* contain numerous articles detailing struggles over a variety of neighborhood facilities, parks, schools, etc.

response, Black and Chicano residents formed the United Residents Planning Committee (URPC) and Citizens Interested in an Equitable Olympics (CIEO) to protest Olympic decision making. Existing advocacy organizations like the Denver Westside Coalition joined in pressuring the DOC but with little effect.⁹⁴

Despite their differences, all those arrayed against the Olympics had one thing in common: a strong belief that citizen participation in local and state decision-making was an essential component of American democracy and, indeed, a fundamental right of all Americans. Whatever their specific concerns—metropolitan growth, property damage, union hiring, urban renewal, taxes—opponents saw the DOC’s unwillingness to meet publicly or to incorporate residents’ desires as a violation of their right as citizens to control the decision-making process on matters that affected their communities. As they understood it, hosting the Olympics reflected the desire of corporate boosters, abetted by state and local government, to set the public agenda without regard to the needs and preferences of local communities. POME representative Catherine Dittman wrote to Governor Love in early 1971, denouncing the “so-called leaders of Denver” who “brought [the Olympics] upon us through secrecy and misrepresentation.”⁹⁵ POME activists argued to the international sports federations that Denver’s entire Olympics bid was illegitimate because “citizens were *never* consulted regarding the use of their property” (emphasis in original), while homeowners’ associations passed resolutions

⁹⁴ Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment,” 134-141, 168-172.

⁹⁵ Catherine Dittman to Governor John Love, 1/13/1971, POME Papers, Colorado Historical Society.

opposing the Olympics on the grounds that “democratic principles” demanded it.⁹⁶ In Denver itself, minority activists insisted that they, not Olympics planners or state legislators, should have control over development projects in low-income neighborhoods. These objections stemmed from forceful convictions about the primacy of engaged citizens and local communities in governance. Throughout metropolitan Denver, residents chanted the familiar refrain of local control.

The alliance between white and minority Denverites over the Olympics issue indicates the complex and shifting nature of grassroots politics during this period. Even as black and Chicano leaders came together with whites to criticize and, ultimately, oppose hosting the Winter Games, they were divided over other major issues. Denver proper was intensely segregated throughout the postwar decades, as was the largely white surrounding metro area.⁹⁷ Rapid growth in Denver throughout the 1960s had already led to a significant shortage of affordable housing. In 1971, the League of Women Voters reported that sixty-seven percent of families statewide could not afford even the cheapest of new housing being built. The shortage was particularly acute in metropolitan Denver, where the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) estimated that at least 19,000 additional units were needed, even as urban renewal projects demolished existing homes without providing adequate resources to relocate displaced families.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Jean Gravell to Marc Hodler and FIS, 11/11/1971, POME Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Colorado Historical Society.

⁹⁷ National Neighborhood Change Database.

⁹⁸ Olson, “Power, Public Policy, and the Environment,” 34–5.

Denverites in both the city and its suburbs fought over ending residential segregation, while a local school desegregation case made its way to the Supreme Court. In 1973, just one year after the Olympics battle ended, the Court ordered the Denver schools to desegregate, making the Mile High City the first outside the South to fall under such a mandate and the first anywhere to involve not just blacks and whites but other racial groups as well.⁹⁹ In response, as discussed in chapter one, voters passed the Poundstone Amendment the following year, which ended Denver's annexations of adjacent suburban territory, thus insulating new suburban developments from the threat of integrated schools. This had the predictable result of speeding middle-class and affluent whites' exodus from the city, further heightening the spatial isolation of different racial and ethnic groups in the Denver area.¹⁰⁰

Although minority and white Denverites could work together to stop the Olympics, at the same time, the controversies over residential and school desegregation reflected and intensified bitter racial divisions within the city and throughout the metropolitan area. On each of these issues, different groups within metro-Denver mobilized politically to enact their own particular visions for the future of the metropolis. In the case of segregation, whites, blacks, and Chicanos fought to protect or challenge the existing balance of power. Because access to resources and decision-making power were localized within particular race- and class-coded parts of the metropolis, the resulting conflicts took on a clear spatial

⁹⁹ *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

¹⁰⁰ Tom I. Romero, Jr., "Of Race and Rights: Legal Culture, Social Change, and the Making of a Multicultural Metropolis, Denver, 1940-1975," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2004).

dimension: Residents of the ghetto and inner-city barrios clashed with working-class whites within Denver, and whites themselves divided along class lines that often followed the city limits.¹⁰¹

Given the sharp racial and class tensions in Denver at the time, the alliance among these groups against the Olympics and their success in appealing to a majority of Coloradans is striking. It points to a far more pragmatic, less ideological political ethos than is generally imagined to have existed at the grassroots in this period. Where scholars have tended to see a dramatic rightward shift taking hold in the 1970s, both at the level of national party strategy and the grassroots, Denver's experience with the simultaneous school desegregation and Olympics battles suggests a less straight forward political trajectory. Whites and minorities, Republicans and Democrats, the vast ranks of Colorado's independent or "unaffiliated" voters—all these groups fell in and out of political alliances according to the specifics of each case. The Olympics provided a very narrow common ground on which these otherwise divided groups could unite. Leading opponents were able to put aside their differences to forge a functional coalition and, in turn, to articulate an anti-Olympics rhetoric that appealed to both liberal and conservative Coloradans as well as to those without strong ideological convictions.

¹⁰¹ Many scholars have traced the ways in which racial and class differences are encoded in metropolitan geography, with business practices and government policy creating affluent white suburbs, poor black ghettos, and everything in between in a way that is simultaneously invisible and self-reinforcing. Key works in this area include Thomas Sugrue's *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), Robert Self's *American Babylon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), and David Freund's *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Leaders of the anti-Olympics effort acknowledged these tensions and worked assiduously to maintain their fragile coalition. Shortly after the Sapporo meeting in early 1972, a group of white Denver progressives launched a campaign to put prohibitions against public funding for the Olympics into the Colorado state constitution and Denver city charter. With the help of Democratic State Representative Dick Lamm, they founded Citizens for Colorado's Future (CCF) to spearhead the effort. Although the organization's young, white leaders were themselves primarily concerned with limiting growth and protecting the environment, they recognized the need for a broader base of support if they hoped to get enough signatures to put the initiative on the 1972 ballot and to win a statewide election. To that end, CCF consciously drew in minority and labor activists, working with them to raise awareness about the Games and gather signatures in those communities.

They succeeded by focusing very narrowly on removing the Winter Games from Colorado and divorcing that campaign as much as possible from any of the larger concerns that motivated the coalition's various members. To appease minority rights activists, for example, CCF wrote to members of Colorado's Congressional delegation, seeking federal appropriations for low and moderate income housing in Denver, but they specifically requested that the money not be contingent in any way on the Olympics. The Colorado Labor Council, meanwhile, made clear that it would support CCF's ballot initiative but did not want to be associated with any broader environmental or anti-growth agenda. Conversely, POME worked actively to collect signatures but refused to be involved in any of the

issues that drew organized labor and minority opposition to the Games, limiting themselves instead to the immediate concerns of the Front Range.¹⁰² CCF leadership understood that their supporters were, on issues other than the Olympics, often diametrically opposed, and they made strenuous efforts to avoid any action that might fracture the tentative coalition.¹⁰³

* * *

Having thus wrangled their own coalition, CCF set out to convince Coloradans at large. Going door-to-door for the cause in a manner that was then unusual but is now standard operating procedure for such campaigns, by July they had gathered close to 9,000 signatures for the Denver-only initiative and over 77,000 signatures for the statewide constitutional amendment—far more than the legally required number.¹⁰⁴ Yet despite CCF's success at putting both initiatives on the ballot, as late as September 1972, only 45% of Coloradans reported they would vote to stop funding for the Games.¹⁰⁵ In a survey conducted that month, a majority of the state's residents said that, while they believed that the Games would bring significant economic benefits to the state, they also worried about cost and growth. Coloradans were also evenly split over allegations of DOC mismanagement of the planning process and environmental concerns.¹⁰⁶ With voters thus divided, CCF crafted a rhetoric that would appeal to a broad swath of the electorate, framing the Olympics as both a tax issue and as a question of basic democratic principles: the

¹⁰² Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 187.

¹⁰³ Ron Worl, "Yes, We have no Olympics," *Straight Creek Journal*, November 21, 1972, 3.

¹⁰⁴ John Parr Papers and CCF Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

¹⁰⁵ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 270.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 258–60.

right of citizens to have a say in decisions that would have a major impact on them and their communities.

CCF argued that all recent Olympic Games had cost far more than anticipated, with taxpayers stuck footing the bill. At a rally in front of the Colorado state house, Lamm told the crowd that citizens' support for the ballot initiative "represent[s] a majority of both the old values and the new values," both demanding that tax money be spent frugally and proclaiming that "we're too proud of Colorado to sell it; we'd rather conserve it."¹⁰⁷ In speeches and campaign literature, CCF stressed the themes of misplaced spending priorities, mismanagement at the DOC, and lack of public accountability as reasons to oppose the Games. These themes were then picked up by the local press, whose editorials called for an end to the "pie in the sky" approach to the Olympics and the [DOC's] plea of 'just give us the go ahead and leave all the details to us.'"¹⁰⁸ These tropes resonated across the political spectrum, appealing to committed liberals and conservatives along with the substantial numbers of unaffiliated voters who were in fact the plurality in many Colorado counties.¹⁰⁹

Lamm himself, the anti-Olympics movement's leading spokesman, captured the highly charged political language of the controversy in a widely circulated open letter to the people of Colorado. Noting that 1976 was both the country's bicentennial and the state's centennial year, Lamm proclaimed that, with regards to the Olympics, Colorado was experiencing a "quiet revolution" similar to the

¹⁰⁷ Robert A. Burns, "Anti-Olympic petitions are delivered," *Rocky Mountain News*, July 7, 1976.

¹⁰⁸ "Denver and the Olympics," *Rocky Mountain News*, March 23, 1972, Opinion Section.

¹⁰⁹ Voter registration and party affiliation data by county for Sept and Nov 1972, (Denver: Colorado Secretary of State).

American Revolution two hundred years before. “The people themselves,” he wrote, “are changing the goals and policies of a Colorado government which itself refuses to change those goals and policies.” The anti-Olympics movement, then, was a “recommitment of our people to the principles of democracy upon which our nation was founded.” Many Coloradans, Lamm noted, found their state’s government unresponsive to the new realities of explosive growth and the crushing financial burdens it exacerbated. Rather than address these problems, government seemed to move “in the opposite direction,” traveling around the country to “sell Colorado” instead of selling the legislature on sound land use policies and improved quality of life. “Rather than make ‘Olympic’ efforts to come to grips with our problems and our limited tax base,” Lamm lamented, “Colorado’s leaders are attempting to spend limited tax dollars hosting an Olympics which promises both to be a large drain on state funds and counterproductive to the serious growth problems Colorado is already experiencing.” He compared the current Colorado leadership to the British General Burgoyne, who clung so blindly to the status quo that he marched into battle during the Revolutionary War toting silver tea service and chests of china.¹¹⁰

If Lamm’s rhetoric seemed overblown, it was in fact a direct response to the arguments being made by Olympic boosters throughout 1972. As public opposition to the Games grew, the governor and DOC stepped up their efforts to sell the event, but in a characteristically tone-deaf manner. Governor Love formed the Spirit of ‘76 Committee to lead an expensive ad campaign in support of the Olympics.

Unsurprisingly, this committee did not take seriously the reasons for citizen

¹¹⁰ Richard Lamm in *The Colorado Destiny*, a publication of CCF, September 2, 1972, CCF Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

opposition. Instead, committee members saw their task primarily as assuaging any doubts that the IOC might have about Denver's ability to host the Games as a result of the local turmoil. Their rhetoric emphasized patriotism as a central theme, suggesting that those who supported the anti-Olympics constitutional amendment brought international shame upon their state and their nation. In one characteristic speech, former Denver mayor Thomas Currigan likened hosting the Olympics to settling the western frontier or putting a man on the moon. He derided Coloradans for passing up a "golden opportunity...to show the world the true pioneering spirit that is the heart and soul of our people" and lamented that, "if our forefathers had adopted this type of attitude," there might not be a Denver at all. He further accused those who opposed hosting the Games of believing that the United States was somehow inferior to other countries like Japan that had recently played host. "Where is our Yankee pride and ingenuity?" he exhorted. "We, as a nation, rebuilt Japan and Germany after World War II. We certainly have the capability and the capacity, financial and otherwise, to host an Olympic celebration that will be second to none."¹¹¹ To the extent that they addressed any of the opposition's substantive concerns, boosters like Currigan argued that growth was, in fact, a boon to the state, that environmental damage would be minimal and the economic benefits widespread.

By mid-October, voters were beginning to lose patience with what they saw as the DOC's arrogance. Although some Coloradans shared the boosters' view, most flatly rejected their arguments and bristled at the slights to their patriotism.

¹¹¹ Thomas Currigan, speech, 1972, FF12 McNichols, William McNichols Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

Emerging evidence of mismanagement at the DOC and conflicts of interest among its executive committee members fueled voter outrage and an incipient tax revolt. “I am unchangeably and intensely opposed to the use of even one penny of taxpayer money to produce any athletic event, regardless of its purported beneficence,” wrote one citizen to Mayor McNichols.¹¹² In a letter to both McNichols and Governor Love, Denverite Marian van de Griendt suggested that opposition to the Games was indicative of a broader “taxpayer revolt” and the DOC’s lack of credibility with the public. “Unfortunately for you,” she wrote, “citizens are more concerned about their pocketbooks and the quality of their lives than saving your faces.”¹¹³ Grace Merz, another Denver resident, demanded to know “What kind of a *democracy* do you call this?” (emphasis in original) and went on to berate the mayor for what she and many others saw as their selfish motives.¹¹⁴

Denverite Leonard Davis agreed, warning Governor Love that, “you are just trying to sell this deal to the people for reasons other than the good of the state and its people. You are getting a lot of free rides out of this thing, and the people know this.”¹¹⁵ Scorning DOC suggestions that failure to host the Olympics was unpatriotic and “welshing” on a deal, Mrs. Ray Scavezze thundered, “LET ME REMIND YOU—The People of Colorado had made no promises to the I.O.C. or anyone...so please don’t place the blame on the citizens of Colorado for humiliating you.” She continued, “We the PEOPLE never broke a promise to anyone because—

¹¹² Stephen F. King to William McNichols, August 24, 1972, FF3 McNichols, William McNichols Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

¹¹³ Marian P. van de Griendt to John Love and William McNichols, n.d., FF9 McNichols, William McNichols Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

¹¹⁴ Grace Merz to William McNichols, September 29, 1972, FF3 McNichols, William McNichols Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

¹¹⁵ Leonard Davis to John Love, August 25, 1972, FF3 McNichols, William McNichols Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

REMEMBER WE HAD NEVER COMMITTED OURSELVES TO BE HOST TO SUCH AN EVENT” (emphasis in original).¹¹⁶ Whatever else divided them, Coloradans at large and residents of metropolitan Denver in particular were united in their assessment that the DOC, mayor, and governor had violated the trust of the electorate and the rights of their constituents.

These residents were far from alone in their skepticism of taxes and invocation of fundamental American values. In the 1970s, the “rights revolution,” touched off by the New Deal and intensified by the success of civil rights activists in the previous decade, became a dominant political force at the grassroots and a potent rhetorical device for politicians and party strategists of all stripes. The spate of tax revolts that swept the country often drew on this rights rhetoric, arguing against existing tax policy on the basis of claims of “fairness” and the primacy of community control over spending priorities.¹¹⁷ Scholars and pundits have tended to associate the connection between anti-tax activism and rights discourse only with the rise of the New Right. While these did form the core of New Right doctrine, anti-tax attitudes were not the exclusive province of conservatives. Indeed, anti-growth liberalism was particularly amenable to such arguments, as residents who opposed growth resisted paying additional taxes to subsidize metropolitan expansion.¹¹⁸ Among opponents of the 1976 Winter Olympics, both liberal and conservative reasons for opposing new taxes held tremendous sway. Among whites, the tax issue

¹¹⁶ Mrs. Ray Scavezze to John Love and William McNichols, n.d., FF9 McNichols, William McNichols Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

¹¹⁷ Robert Self writes about the reasons for conservatives' engagement in anti-tax activism in “Prelude to the Tax Revolt,” in *The New Suburban History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 144–60.

¹¹⁸ Siskind, “Suburban Growth,” 166.

cut across lines of class, political affiliation, and urban versus suburban residence. Recognizing the salience of taxation with such a broad swath of the electorate, CCF emphasized both the tax issue and the concerns about the DOC's subversion of Coloradans' rights as democratic citizens.¹¹⁹

By election day in November, a majority of Coloradans, nearly sixty percent statewide, had become convinced that Denver should not host the 1976 Winter Games.¹²⁰ CCF's rhetoric, combined with the DOC's poor handling of the controversy, appear to have made a significant impression on voters. An analysis shortly after the election by a political scientist at the University of Colorado found cost to taxpayers and concerns about growth and the environment—the very issues CCF had pushed most strongly—to be the primary factors motivating Coloradans to vote against the Games.¹²¹ Indeed, the two appeared to be equally critical to the initiative's success. Neither, the study concluded, was strong enough to carry the election alone, but together they swayed a decisive majority.¹²² Only seven of the state's sixty counties, mostly in rural western Colorado, voted to retain public funding for the Olympics. Another nine counties, including those in the Front Range immediately surrounding Denver, passed Proposition 8 by fifty-seven percent or less. Everywhere else, the margin was even greater, with voters rejecting by more than sixty percent in most counties and, in some, more even more (Figure 8).¹²³

¹¹⁹ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 272.

¹²⁰ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council,
<http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/>

¹²¹ Olson, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment," 263.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 265.

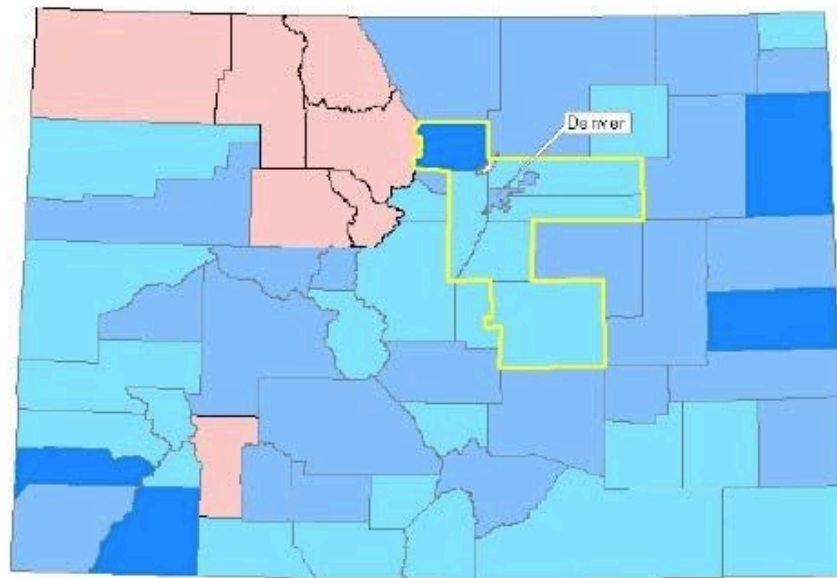
¹²³ *Ibid.*, 272.

It seems likely that the vote was so evenly split in the Front Range because residents in these areas, which were slated to host many Olympic events, had the most to lose in terms of quality of life but also, potentially, the most to gain economically. These closer—although still decisive—results suggest that questions about quality of life, the desirability of either business or residential growth, environmental degradation, taxation, and good governance were being fiercely contested in metropolitan Denver and that they crossed party lines. Indeed, Republicans outnumbered Democrats in all but one of the six metro-Denver counties, and unaffiliated voters surpassed members of either party throughout the region, with each group splitting over the Olympics question.¹²⁴ Yet Proposition 8, which has often been understood as a case of liberal environmentalists against corporate conservatives, ultimately passed in all six suburban counties and Denver itself.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Voter registration and party affiliation data from Sept and Nov 1972, (Denver: Colorado Secretary of State).

¹²⁵ Numerous newspaper and magazine articles at the time characterized the Olympics battle in this way. Subsequent scholarship on the subject has been thin and similarly two-dimensional.

Proposition 8 Vote by County



Yellow outline surrounds the six county area of metropolitan Denver



Source: Laura Disch, "Power, Public Policy, and the Environment"
Rachel M Guberman 5/6/200

Figure 8. Proposition 8 By County.

The controversy over the 1976 Winter Olympics had an immediate impact on Colorado politics. Dick Lamm, a Democrat, rode the wave of anti-growth sentiment from the state legislature to the governor's mansion, which he occupied from 1975 to 1987. Many state and federal legislative districts also changed hands,

as voters expressed their displeasure with the way their representatives had handled the Olympics question. Yet the Games' effect on any broader electoral trajectory remains unclear. On the eve of the vote in 1972, more Coloradans were Republicans than Democrats, and substantially more were registered unaffiliated than were members of either party.¹²⁶ This trend continued over the next several decades, so that even as issues like the environment and growth, typically associated with Democrats, became increasingly important in Colorado politics, Democrats did not see an attendant jump in their share of voter registration.

And yet, upon closer scrutiny, the characterization of Colorado as a solidly Republican and conservative state, fails. Focusing on national electoral cycles, most political histories of the 1970s and beyond have argued that this period was wholly defined by the decline of postwar liberalism, the birth of modern conservatism, and the rise of the New Right. In Colorado and other Sunbelt states across the South and West, this assessment has been bolstered by presidential election returns. For example, in the twelve presidential elections since 1964, Coloradans chose the Republican all but three times. Scholars and pundits have pointed to this nearly unbroken string of Republican presidential picks as evidence of the state's abiding conservatism.¹²⁷ But, as in so many states with similar presidential histories,

¹²⁶ Colorado Secretary of State's Office.

¹²⁷ This utterly ahistorical presentation of Colorado and Mountain West electoral history is an ongoing problem. As recently as Nov. 2, 2009, a National Public Radio report by Jeff Brady, "In Colorado, All Eyes on Unaffiliated Voters,"

<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=114331884>> propagated this inaccurate narrative. More broadly, such stories point to too heavy an emphasis on national electoral cycles among reporters and scholars alike. Some scholars have begun to push back against this tendency. In particular see the introduction to Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* and Julian E. Zelizer, "Beyond the Presidential Synthesis: Reordering Political Time," in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, edited by Jean-

Colorado politics at the local level have always been more mixed. In the nearly half century since Colorado went for LBJ, three of the state's six governors and seven of its twelve senators have been Democrats.¹²⁸ The state legislature has been similarly divided.

The paradigm of liberal decline and conservative ascendance that has defined the literature thus far cannot explain either this electoral history or the form that local politics took in the twentieth century's closing decades. Most problematically, it ignores the pragmatic and less partisan politics that in fact predominated, both in the Rocky Mountain State and elsewhere. In so doing, it fails to adequately account for the complexity of American politics in the final third of the twentieth century, especially but not exclusively at the grassroots in the rapidly expanding metropolises that became home to a majority of the population in this period.¹²⁹

The outcome of the two Olympics ballot initiatives and Colorado's divided electoral history strengthen the emerging picture of Colorado as a state in political flux, where partisanship was of limited importance and where the center was continuously contested. As Matthew Lassiter has suggested, voters' populist identification as homeowners and taxpayers often took on greater salience than

Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenszweig, (Wiley- Blackwell, 2006), 345–370.

¹²⁸ Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (1993–2005) switched his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican part way through his first term. I have counted him here as a Democrat because he was a member of that party when first elected. The overwhelming power of incumbency was most likely a significantly more important factor than his changed party affiliation when he was reelected. For a list of Colorado governors, including party affiliation, see the Colorado State Archives website <<http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives/office/gov.html>>

¹²⁹ By 1970, 69% of Americans lived in metropolitan areas, with more than half of metropolitan residents in the suburbs. By 2000, 80% of all Americans lived in a metropolis; fully 50% of the population of the United States lived in suburbs. Statistics come from the U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census of population, 1910–2000.

partisan affiliation.¹³⁰ For the first time, fears about the environment and growth took on major political importance and became a force to be reckoned with, even if only as lip service. Going forward, Colorado politicians of all persuasions would tread carefully around environmental and anti-growth concerns, with several high-profile examples like Governor Love's successor in the governor's mansion, Republican John Vanderhoof, belatedly adopting anti-growth rhetoric in an unsuccessful attempt to pacify voters as the 1974 election drew near.¹³¹ For many Coloradans, the anti-Olympics movement, with its emphasis on good governance, the rights of property owners, and the importance of quality of life, provided a potent new language for describing their place within the modern metropolis and for pressing an articulate policy agenda. The Olympics controversy became a lightning rod for the myriad tensions within growth liberalism among corporate boosters, suburban populists, urban minorities, and other constituencies. Party affiliation proved an exceptionally poor indicator of voting behavior.

* * *

The Olympics battle encapsulated the tensions inherent within growth liberalism between booster expansionism and populist quality of life politics. It reflected a moment in American politics and policy in which boosters, government officials and institutions, and citizens of all demographic and political backgrounds encountered a new metropolitan geography and political economy and vied to ensure favorable positions within the new order. From the brochures touting Colorado's

¹³⁰ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 7.

¹³¹ John Love stepped down as Colorado's governor in 1973 to become the first Director of the Office of Energy Policy under Richard Nixon.

“Western hospitality” and “booster spirit,” to bumper stickers urging Coloradans to vote down the Olympics so as not to “Californicate” their state, to dozens of pamphlets and editorials warning about the dangers of unfettered metropolitan growth, contests over space and its uses drove the Olympics debate.

Denver’s bid for the 1976 Winter Olympics and the ultimate success of anti-Olympics activists in barring the Games from their state opens a window into the messy, contested world of metropolitan politics in the early 1970s. Rather than adhere to strictly partisan or reflexively ideological positions, residents of metropolitan Denver mobilized to defend intensely local ideas about how their communities should be developed. Whether in the affluent, white enclaves in the Rocky Mountain Foothills or the black and Chicano neighborhoods of inner-city Denver, residents demanded their right to control over decision making and public policy and rejected the corporate-led vision of metropolitan growth and expansion. Although the Games themselves ultimately came to a vote in the context of a single-issue ballot initiative, the debate over whether or not to host them created a shift in the political discourse of Colorado writ large. “Environment” and “growth” became buzz words for politicians of all stripes. With growing proportions of residents registered as unaffiliated and both the governor’s mansion and Congressional delegation changing parties on a regular basis, Coloradans made it clear that politicians ignored constituent concerns at their peril.

The Olympics controversy and its fallout point to many of the ways in which late- twentieth-century American politics have been more pragmatic and more attuned to local concerns and quality of life issues than is generally realized. It also

highlights the existence of seemingly unlikely coalitions among diverse demographic groups. Scholars have tended to view the politics of race as inextricably linked to the geography of neighborhoods and municipal boundaries within the metropolis. Yet the Denver story reveals a more complex history. For even as whites, blacks, and Chicanos struggled—sometimes violently—over the geography of school districts and busing, they joined in an uneasy alliance in opposition to the Olympics, another issue deeply rooted in individuals' identification with the physical spaces their communities inhabited. Indeed, Denverites' relationships with each other across the bounds of race, class, and geography shifted pragmatically in response to each specific political issue that emerged. Rather than partisan fealty, ideological purity, or even racial animosity, the underlying principle that directed these citizens' political engagements was that of community participation and local control. Under this rubric, quality of life became the ultimate right.

While the Olympics controversy was confined to Colorado, the political forces at work existed throughout the United States. Denver may have been among the fastest growing metropolitan areas nationwide, but the transformations it experienced from the 1950s onwards were also underway in numerous other places. National-level studies conducted at the time indicate the broad reach of a political ethos centered on quality of life and community involvement. This is a history without the neat inevitability of rising conservatism that most tellings have imposed on this recent period in America's past. Instead, it suggests the state of flux in which boosters, activists, and government officials at every level found themselves as they struggled to adapt to the new realities of metropolitan geography and political

economy in late twentieth century America. It points towards a new political history with the interplay among changing metropolitan structures, every day life, and political action at the center.

Chapter 3:

“Someone Who Can Win!”: Reform Democrats and the Remaking of the Political Mainstream

For many Coloradans, the anti-Olympics movement, with its emphasis on good governance, the rights of property owners, and the importance of quality of life, provided a potent new language for describing their place within the modern metropolis and for pressing an articulate policy agenda. While the anti-Olympics movement was an important catalyst for developing this new political sensibility, the Olympics were far from the only issue in which it took shape. At the same time that Coloradans debated and resisted hosting the Games, they also were embroiled in the Annexation Wars. On that issue, too, many Coloradans expressed displeasure with the business community's perceived role, this time in spurring Denver annexations and attempting to play municipalities off of each other for their own best advantage in zoning, taxes, and other concessions at the expense of what residents sought to protect as their “way of life.” Indeed, a host of concerns, ranging from busing for school desegregation to nuclear testing and Denver's plans to develop new water resources across the Rockies, led many Coloradans to question the roles of government and corporate interests in shaping the future of their state.

By the mid-1970s, Coloradans, like many Americans, were pushing back against the notion that what was good for big business was always best for the citizens of their state. They had grown skeptical of the ethos of continuous growth that lay at the heart of postwar political culture and policy-making both locally and

nationally. Outrage over the secrecy and expense of the Olympics bid—its lack of concern for citizen input and its chauvinistic insistence that the boosters spoke for all Coloradans—caused many citizens to lose faith in business and the Chamber of Commerce as representatives of the public interest. That loss of faith carried over into electoral politics, too. In 1972, the same year that the anti-Olympics amendment was on the ballot, Colorado voters also passed a “sunshine law” requiring politicians to disclose all of their corporate ties. Two years later, in 1974, Coloradans cleaned house, ousting elected officials who had supported the Games and electing a raft of self-styled “reform” candidates, mostly Democrats, in their place.

Colorado was at the leading edge of a national trend. Citizens’ faith in governing institutions and officials was shaken by a series of political shocks—beginning with Vietnam and Watergate, but certainly not ending there—at the same time that economic crises rocked the foundation of the nation’s middle class, calling into question the tenets of Keynesian economics that underlay postwar policy. The result was a moment of profound unease when, as left-wing political activist Michael Harrington wryly observed, Americans were “moving vigorously right, left, and center all at once.”¹³² By 1972, many academic observers, journalists, and political analysts predicted an end to the two-party system and the emergence of a multiparty system in its stead. And although the Democrats and Republicans endured, fear for their future remained. As pollster Everett C. Ladd warned in a 1978 series of articles for *Fortune Magazine* and *Where Have All the Voters Gone?*:

¹³² Michael Harrington, *New York Times*, May 14, 1972.

The Fracturing of America's Political Parties, Americans were “unhappy with the performance of the principle institutions of their society [and] questioned the responsiveness of the parties to popular interests and expectations.”¹³³ Both parties scrambled to respond to these shifting political currents.

While GOP strategist Kevin Phillips predicted an emerging Republican majority in the political tealeaves, others were not so sure. In the pages of scholarly journals, in political magazines like the *New Republic*, and in the Nixon White House, experts worried about what they perceived as a marked increase in voter disaffection and a resultant weakening of the American party system. In *The Real Majority*, which came out in 1970 and was widely seen as a rebuke to Phillips, political scientists Ben Scammon and Richard Wattenberg used data from the 1968 presidential election, along with various polls, to argue that Americans were, fundamentally, centrist in their views. They contended that the party that was most successful in attracting this large and growing group of moderates would emerge victorious. Although they were Democrats, Scammon and Wattenberg's work found a hearing across the political spectrum, even becoming fodder for intense strategy debate within the Nixon administration.¹³⁴ While some within the GOP advocated embracing Phillips's call to tack sharply right, other influential party insiders, like pollster and senior strategist Robert Teeter, urged the adoption of a more centrist

¹³³ Ladd, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?*, xiv, xxiii. Academic and journalistic concern over the fate of the two-party system during the 1970s was common. For two very different examples see Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on Campaign Trail '72* and Price, “Critical Elections' & Party History,” 236–42.

¹³⁴ Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, c. 1971); Dov W. Grohsgal, “Southern Strategies: The Politics of School Desegregation and the Nixon White House,” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2012); Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 240–1.

platform in order to compete successfully with Democrats, particularly at the state and local levels where Republicans struggled to attract votes.¹³⁵

Among Democrats, meanwhile, the transformation was especially profound. Reflecting in 1973 on McGovern's crushing defeat at the hands of Richard Nixon, McGovern campaign manager Gary Hart offered a scathing assessment of the Democratic Party's failure. The party was, he declared, woefully out of touch, beholden to special interests and an outmoded, ideologically driven policy agenda. "The traditional sources of invigorating, inspiring, and creative ideas were dissipated," he wrote in *Right from the Start*, his postmortem of the campaign.¹³⁶ Although McGovern had succeeded in drawing forth a new generation of energetic party activists, he had failed, Hart argued, to inspire new ideas and, "by 1972, American liberalism was near bankruptcy." Already gearing up for his own 1974 Senate bid, Hart spoke of new ideas and the need for an activist but less intrusive government.¹³⁷

The Democratic politicians who succeeded in 1974, like Hart, were those who most successfully tapped into the new popular mood, translating a nascent political culture oriented towards quality of life into a flourishing national politics. A combination of local concerns, national crisis, and what many perceived as the institutional failures of the Democratic Party spurred reformers. Many were

¹³⁵ This is the general thrust of most of Teeter's voter analysis and strategic recommendations from 1972-2000. See for example, "Reslicing the American Pie 1-2," February 1973, Robert Teeter Papers, Box 6, Ford Presidential Library. Boxes 50-77 are also particularly dense with statements on this theme.

¹³⁶ Gary Warren Hart, *Right from the Start: A Chronicle of the McGovern Campaign*, (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 3.

¹³⁷ E. J. Dionne, Jr., "Gary Hart the Elusive Front Runner," *New York Times*, May 3, 1987.

young—almost all were male—and they shared an approachable, friendly personal style along with a commitment (at the very least rhetorical and, often, actual) to making government more transparent and standing up for “the people” against “the interests.” Often dismissed as the “Watergate Babies” of 1974, who rode a wave of anti-Nixon sentiment into office, in fact these young reformers offered a distinct political vision that was centrist and fiscally conservative, that embraced free trade, and that elevated private enterprise and markets, rather than government programs, as the solution to social problems. When, on the eve of his election to the Senate in 1974, Gary Hart stood on the steps of the Colorado capitol and announced the “end of the New Deal,” it was a sentiment shared by many in this group. What had begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the New Politics quickly evolved into a full-fledged reform movement within the Democratic Party. Known variously as progressive, neopopulist, and later Atari Democrats, by 1980, the reformers were dubbed neoliberals.¹³⁸ Over the ensuing decade, they remade the Democrats from the party of postwar liberalism into a “third way” party of New Democrats.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Other terms reform Democrats used to describe themselves during the 1970s included “compassionate realism” (Paul Tsongas), “democratic pluralism” (Bill Bradley), “Prairie Populist Jeffersonian Democracy” (Gary Hart), neopopulism (Al Gore), neocapitalism, and structuralism. The term “Atari Democrats” was coined in 1982 by an assistant to House Speaker Tip O’Neill during an informal brunch where it was picked up by a member of Gary Hart’s Senate staff, written into a speech delivered by the Senator, and reported in the *New Yorker* by staff writer Elizabeth Drew. See Randall Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals: Creating the New American Politics*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 22, 68, 79.

¹³⁹ Norman Miller, “The Transformation of Gary Hart,” *Wall Street Journal*, Oct 28, 1974. Numerous newspaper and magazine articles between 1974 and 1992 discussed the emergence of reformist, “neoliberal” Democrats. See for example Robert Shogan, “Democrat Again Testing Waters: Hart Tries to Recast Party,” Nov 14, 1985, *Los Angeles Times*; E. J. Dionne, “Washington Talk; Greening of Democrats: An 80’s Mix of Idealism And Shrewd Politics,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1989; George E. Condon, Jr., “California - Here they come! Democrats must test their vision in Reagan territory,” *San Diego Union*, May 20, 1984; Special election issue, *Newsweek*, Nov/Dec 1992, 8–9. This reformist, centrist, and market-

Neoliberals were a varied group, hailing from every region of the country. Colorado's reform Democrats were central players in the national movement. Along with Missouri's Dick Gephardt, Tim Wirth, who had served as deputy assistant secretary for education in the first Nixon administration and who went on to represent Colorado's second district, led the effort of Congressional Democrats to develop a new statement of party principles along pragmatic, centrist lines. In "Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity," they urged federal investment to promote economic growth via high technology, entrepreneurship, and job training, along with cuts in spending for social welfare. In both houses of Congress, Wirth and Hart were joined by a host of like-minded colleagues, including Paul Tsongas, Norman Mineta, Leon Panetta, and Al Gore. Together with Dick Lamm, young Democratic governors like Massachusetts's Michael Dukakis, Arkansas's Bill Clinton, Arizona's Bruce Babbitt, and others articulated new visions for their states along similar lines. All presented themselves, to use future Vice President Al Gore's words, as "raging moderates," bent on promoting equality and social justice through business and markets. Rather than court constituencies, the traditional interest groups that made up the Democrats' New Deal coalition, they invested their energy in issues, appealing to a younger, more educated, and more suburban voting demographic.

oriented sensibility is also on display in the speeches and writings of various "Atari" or "New Democrat" candidates from the mid-1970s onwards. See for example Gary Hart, *A New Democracy: A Democratic Vision for the 80s and Beyond*, (New York: Quill, 1983); Stephen A. Smith, *Preface to the Presidency: Selected Speeches of Bill Clinton, 1974-1992* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996); Bill Clinton and Al Gore, *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America* (New York: Times Books, 1992); Jimmy Carter, "Our Nation's Past and Future" and "A Message on Justice," (speech delivered on "Law Day," University of Georgia, May 4, 1974), Documents and Photographs from the Jimmy Carter Library Collections, Jimmy Carter Library <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/law.pdf> and "Campaign Strategy Paper," 1974, 1976 Campaign Strategy Paper, Nov 28, 1978, Textual Records from the President (1977-1981: Carter), Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Health Issues, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA.

Across the United States, this young generation of new Democratic leaders embraced the grassroots rhetoric of government transparency and quality of life. Capitalizing on growing popular skepticism, both towards government and civic and political institutions, they came increasingly to dominate their party and shape its direction.¹⁴⁰

It may seem counterintuitive to describe a group of Democrats as neoliberal. The term is most often associated with a politics of the right that emphasized the tenets of classical nineteenth-century liberalism: limited government, individual liberty, and laissez faire economics. In this account, neoliberalism began to gain traction in the United States and elsewhere in response to the supposed failure of existing Keynesian economic policy to manage the soaring inflation of the 1970s and the fallout of the OPEC oil crisis. Margaret Thatcher's 1979 election as British prime minister and Ronald Reagan's landslide victory in the 1980 U.S. presidential election marked neoliberalism's political arrival.

Yet the term had another, highly prominent use in American politics during the seventies and eighties as the name for a reformist movement among Democrats. Like Hart, many of these young reformers came from Republican families but were drawn by John Kennedy to the Democratic Party and his brand of mid-twentieth century American liberalism. By 1974, when many of them were first elected, they had begun to feel that the New Deal liberalism that dominated Democratic policymaking was outdated. Originally a response to the problems of industrialization, these reformers argued, liberalism no longer offered an effective

¹⁴⁰ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 22–4, 162–3, 222–3.

response to the challenges of an emerging information age. Rather, it had become a vehicle for serving special interests within the Democratic coalition, notably, labor unions, blacks, working-class Catholics, and Jews. Instead, Democratic neoliberals urged a recommitment to the national interest; they saw themselves as pragmatists, applying new solutions to old problems of injustice. As Charles Peters, editor of the *Washington Monthly*, a political magazine that came to be closely associated with this neoliberal movement, put it: “Neoliberalism recognizes that there were a lot of things wrong with a lot of the Big Government solutions we tried, but there was never anything wrong with the ends we were seeking—justice, fair play, and liberal ideals.”¹⁴¹ In this context, what made neoliberalism new was its divergence from the “old” liberalism of the postwar years.

One corollary of the move away from New Deal interest group politics was the neoliberals’ reassertion of economic growth at the top of the Democratic agenda. Indeed, a crucial distinction between the new liberalism and the old was the neoliberals’ almost exclusive policy focus on economics. “The key,” explained New Jersey senator Bill Bradley, “is how to get the economy moving again, not how to get new government delivery systems.”¹⁴² Or, as neoliberal chronicler Randall Rothenberg put it, “John F. Kennedy’s maxim ‘A rising tide lifts all boats’ has been modified by the neoliberals: ‘You can’t slice a shrinking pie.’”¹⁴³ This emphasis on economics enabled neoliberals to overlook sometimes significant differences on social issues that would once have been divisive. For example, Dick Gephardt, a key

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴² Ibid., 46.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 45.

neoliberal leader and collaborator with Tim Wirth on budget issues, was a vocal opponent of both busing and abortion. By contrast, Wirth supported abortion rights, and Lamm, when he was in the Colorado state legislature in 1967, specifically touted his credentials as sponsor of the nation's first liberalized abortion law.¹⁴⁴

Three key themes animated neoliberal policymaking and brought otherwise disparate neoliberals together: investment, appropriate technology, and cooperation. To promote economic growth, neoliberals emphasized investment in so-called human capital as well as in small business and entrepreneurship. Appropriate technology was closely linked and encompassed not just the interest in the burgeoning high tech sector that in the early 1980s would earn neoliberals the moniker "Atari Democrats," but also a devotion to what they referred to as appropriate political technologies. As elaborated by Charles Peters in his 1983 "Neoliberal Manifesto," these included programmatic flexibility, decentralization, microeconomics in place of macro, and reliance on market forces rather than government action to effect economic and social change. (Indeed, a telling mark of the growing schism between neoliberals and New Dealers was neoliberals' rejection of the aggregate indicators such as Gross National Product and Gross Domestic Product that were so central to postwar growth liberalism.¹⁴⁵) Cooperation was the final theme. Rejecting what they viewed as liberalism's outmoded understanding of competition among antagonistic interest groups, neoliberals instead called for concerted action among nations, economic

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 85; Phil Gailey, "Democrats' Search for 1988 Identity," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 18, 1986; Dick Lamm, "Abortion Position Paper," John Par Papers, Box 1, "State Rep Richard Lamm—Literature, Mass Correspondence, Election Information," Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

¹⁴⁵ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 75.

sectors, and even between management and labor within the workplace as the most effective means of achieving growth and equity.¹⁴⁶

Observers on both the right and left watched the neoliberals with interest and trepidation. Conservatives claimed that neoliberals were unserious. As Michael Scully, editor of the American Enterprise Institute's magazine *Public Opinion*, derisively commented, "If neoconservatives are liberals who got mugged by reality, then neoliberals are liberals who got mugged by reality but refused to press charges."¹⁴⁷ Old-school Democrats, meanwhile, dismissed the reformers, sniffing, "I read the neo-liberal manifesto by [*Washington Monthly* editor] Charlie Peters and there was no there there."¹⁴⁸ In the wake of Reagan's 1980 presidential victory, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., self-appointed last stalwart of the old liberalism, opined in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Playboy*, and elsewhere that neoliberals were "fellow travelers in the Reagan revolution" who had "joined the clamor against 'big government,' found great merit in the unregulated market place, [and] opposed structural change in the economy."¹⁴⁹ Despite the reservations of the Washington establishment, however, by the end of the eighties, neoliberal Democrats had

¹⁴⁶ Charles Peters, "A Neoliberal's Manifesto," *Washington Monthly*, (May, 1983) reprinted in Charles Peters and Philip Keisling, eds., *A New Road for America: The Neoliberal Movement*, (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1984),

¹⁴⁷ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Rep. George Miller (D-California) quoted in "Strains Appear as 'New Breed' Democrats Move to Control Party in the House," *National Journal*, (June 25, 1983)

¹⁴⁹ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 19, 177.

effectively captured the heart of their party and installed their market-oriented agenda as the Democratic agenda for the 1990s.¹⁵⁰

Coloradans like Lamm, Hart, and Wirth were central to this transformation. This chapter follows several of Colorado's winning reformers, examining the ways in which their political rhetoric and policy priorities shaped the new grassroots political ethos of the era. It then turns to the national stage, demonstrating that Colorado's new politics were, in fact, part of a national phenomenon. By examining similar reform candidates across the country, internal party strategy documents, and scholarly and popular debates as well as the key role of Colorado politicians like Tim Wirth and Gary Hart in shaping national political discourse, this chapter reveals the pervasiveness of the new politics and its impact across the political spectrum. It further demonstrates the significance of neoliberalism among Democrats in particular as a historical phenomenon (since Republicans already embraced a dominant market orientation before the 1970s, they had less ideological and political ground to travel). Moreover, it argues that Democrats were, in fact, uniquely well-positioned to sell the neoliberal political agenda to a wary public because of their history of skepticism toward business and their greater cultural capital as plainspoken and trustworthy in the aftermath of both local controversies such as the Olympics and the national trauma of Watergate. Following these politicians forward into the 1980s, I show how the politics of quality of life and government accountability were, in the hands of ostensibly liberal actors, readily

¹⁵⁰ Numerous books and articles about the Democratic "neoliberals" appeared throughout the 1980s. See for example "Strains Appear as 'New Breed' Democrats Move to Control Party in the House," *National Journal*, (June 25, 1983), Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, and Peters and Keisling, *A New Road for America*.

transformed into a pro-market politics that appealed to Colorado's majority of moderate voters while simultaneously undercutting traditional liberal policy concerns for economic and racial equality. Placing these Colorado politicians in national context, I further show how Colorado's political realignment was both part of and a driver for a broad, national transformation towards neoliberalism.

* * *

In 1972, Dick Lamm was a state legislator from a blue-collar neighborhood in central Denver. That year, he became the main spokesman for the anti-Olympics cause, helping activists establish Citizens for Colorado's future, the non-profit that coordinated the anti-Olympics campaign and draft the successful constitutional amendment that banned public funding for the Games. He was also among the primary champions of the "sunshine law," also on the ballot that year, which required state officials to disclose all of their business ties and funding sources. Lamm's politics were iconoclastic, combining an array of what would become central elements of the new political culture. In particular, his aggressive focus on quality of life, his silence about racial inequality, and his approachable personal style marked him as a transitional figure between the old politics and the new.

Originally from Madison, Wisconsin, Lamm came to the Rocky Mountain State in 1961. Crossing over the border from Kansas, he remembered stopping by the side of the road to watch a flock of geese and thinking, "This is the place."¹⁵¹ He made Denver his home and quickly became active in local politics, where he worked

¹⁵¹ "Lamm: A compass in his head," *TIME*, November 11, 1974, 14.

to protect the natural environment that had drawn him to his new home. Lamm's Colorado story was reflective of the times. Between 1960 and 1970, Colorado's population grew by twenty-five percent.¹⁵² Like Lamm, many of the newcomers were drawn by the state's natural beauty and, once there, dedicated themselves to preserving it.

Lamm laid the groundwork for his 1974 gubernatorial campaign in the anti-Olympics fight. He chastised Governor John Vanderhoof, a pro-Olympics booster who imagined Colorado as the future "energy capital of the world" and the state legislature for ignoring the problems of explosive growth, rising financial burdens, and deteriorating quality of life in Colorado.¹⁵³ "Rather than make 'Olympic' efforts to come to grips with our problems and our limited tax base," Lamm chastised, "Colorado leaders are attempting to spend limited tax dollars hosting an Olympics which promises both to be a large drain on state funds and counterproductive to the serious growth problems Colorado is already experiencing." Colorado, he announced, was experiencing a "quiet revolution." "The people themselves," he claimed, "are changing the goals and policies of a Colorado government, which itself refuses to change those goals and policies." The anti-Olympics movement was thus "a recommitment of our people to the principles of democracy upon which our nation was founded." Government—in the pocket of the Chamber of Commerce—was the problem, Lamm argued. Instead, he proclaimed, government should work in the interest of the people of Colorado to improve their quality of life by listening and responding to their needs and desires.

¹⁵² U.S. census, 1960 and 1970.

¹⁵³ "Lamm: A compass in his head," *TIME*, November 11, 1974, 14.

Lamm made listening to Coloradans and representing the public interest the centerpiece of his gubernatorial campaign. With the slogan, “I’m Dick Lamm, and I’m *walking* for governor,” he undertook several treks across the state, walking eight hundred miles in all. It was, ostensibly, a “listening tour” in which the candidate sought to hear from citizens—sometimes in planned stops, often simply by the side of the road—seeking to find out what they were most concerned about and what their policy priorities were. In a radio spot that aired repeatedly across Colorado, Lamm explained the reasons for his walk: “A wise politician once said, ‘I thought I heard the voice of the people, but it was just three of my friends talking among themselves.’” Politicians, he remarked, often became “remote, removed, strangers to the very people they represent,” leading to such breaches of public trust as Watergate and the Olympics. Because of his walking tour, he promised, “If I’m elected governor, I’ll then be ready to lead—in the direction the people want us to go.”¹⁵⁴ For Lamm, and for the voters with whom he spoke, the breach of public trust represented by Watergate and Vietnam and, in a more diffuse sense, the economic crises of the early 1970s, was matched by local breaches of public trust by government officials and by corporate elites. Together, these generated a sense that something had to change.

Lamm encapsulated that something in a set of policy priorities that he shared with other successful reform candidates in 1974. Care for the elderly, lower food prices, funding for education, support for agriculture, and property and sales tax reform were all part of Lamm’s appeal. These went hand-in-hand with a series of

¹⁵⁴ Dick Lamm, “Walking and Listening Spot,” 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL,” Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Division.

initiatives to move political power in Colorado away from corporations and towards individual citizens and to make sure that citizens—not business—were the primary beneficiaries of state resources. Dolores Williams, a self-described housewife and registered Republican who nonetheless supported Lamm, captured the essence of the candidate's appeal, aptly summarizing the larger New Politics ethos in the process:

Dick Lamm seems to me to be a representative of all people, citizens, not necessarily private interests, but a champion of the people who have no other lobby, taxpayers, people over 64 who need tax relief, citizens who need to have their property protected by adequate land use provisions, citizens who would like people to have thought ahead enough to have provided parks for their children...He could walk right down the middle line, keeping his sights on the people who elected him....avoiding special interests left and right.¹⁵⁵

In practice, this meant lower taxes individuals, higher taxes and more regulation for oil companies and oil shale development, campaign finance reform, and better controls on growth to direct new development out of the overcrowded, overtaxed metropolitan Front Range and into rural areas that needed and wanted it.

Lamm's politics retained many elements of a traditional Democratic platform, such as advocating government intervention to protect citizens from corporate excess and proposing a more progressive system of taxation. But it also marked a notable departure from classic, New Deal politics. Labor was entirely absent from his rhetoric and policy prescriptions, replaced instead with appeals to consumerist and individualist approaches to citizenship and political belonging. This was of a piece with the kind of messages emanating from Democratic reformers

¹⁵⁵ Voter Testimonial Transcripts, 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 1, "Issues—DL," Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

across the country, who tended to view unions as a special interest that detracted from the “national interest” by demanding preferences and privileges for some while ignoring the needs of other citizens and the nation as a whole.¹⁵⁶ Lamm’s was a populist politics, the watchwords of which were “transparency,” “public interest,” and “quality of life.” All other issues—from property taxes and parks to inflation and the oil crisis, from the Olympics and growth to Watergate and Vietnam—were ultimately subsumed within this rubric.

In keeping with the broader neoliberal interest in entrepreneurship over big business and in protecting what they understood as the interests of individual citizens over those of organized constituencies, Lamm trumpeted a consumerist and anti-corporate message. Thus, for example, when Lamm campaigned on the problems of growth and environmental degradation in greater Denver, he explicitly linked these issues to the ruling Republicans’ ties to corporate interests: “The traffic, the congestion, the noise, the air pollution get worse every day,” he bemoaned in one television advertisement, “And while some profit from excessive growth, most of us pay for it through increased taxes and more competition for jobs and housing.”¹⁵⁷ On the subject of Colorado oil shale development, a hotly debated issue in the midst of the 1973 oil crisis, Lamm again drew a direct link between the state’s favorable corporate tax climate, particularly for energy development, and the myriad ways in which citizens suffered under what he argued was an unfair tax burden. To great popular approval, he advocated an increase in corporate taxation and a

¹⁵⁶ For an extensive discussion of neoliberals on labor and special versus national interest, see Rothenberg, *Neoliberals* and Peters, “Neoliberal Manifesto.”

¹⁵⁷ “Land Use Spot,” John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

corresponding decrease in property taxes for private homes along with the elimination of the sales tax on groceries, insisting that “Colorado citizens pay proportionally too much of our tax burden—and corporations pay too little” and that “every industry must pay its own way, and that everyone in Colorado has a right to benefit from the presence of natural resources in this state.”¹⁵⁸

Far from being “liberal” or “left wing” issues, these concerns about the fate of Coloradans in the face of rampant growth, unregulated energy development, environmental degradation, corporate lobbying, and government secrecy animated a majority of voters. Although there was, of course, a diversity of opinion across the ideological spectrum, these were ultimately homeowner issues, parent issues, and above all taxpayer issues, emerging repeatedly in statewide polls atop lists of pressing concerns for the 1974 election. And they were part of a general critique of the reigning corporate-government alliance that Dick Lamm successfully mobilized his run for governor.

This advocacy of the public interest was tied to a concern with what had come by the 1970s to be known as “quality of life.” Much as quality of life was a rallying cry in the anti-Olympics movement, mobilizing millions of Coloradans against the corporate-backed Games, so Lamm argued forcefully that the quality of life in Colorado would deteriorate dramatically without a true champion of the people in the governor’s mansion. Many voters agreed. One considered that, “the thing that attracts me to Dick is concern about the quality of life in Colorado, his concern

¹⁵⁸ “Lamm Charges Oil Companies with Blackmail,” c. 1974, John Par Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL” and radio ads, John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Press Releases,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

about...land use issues, consumer protection, some of these kinds of things.”¹⁵⁹ Bob Andreason, a “life-long Republican” from Cascade and avid Lamm supporter, explained, “I’m tired of the philosophy that growth is good, rip-off is right, and quarrying is quality environment...I still consider myself a political conservative, but...I support Dick Lamm because he is interested in people and in Colorado—in that order.”¹⁶⁰

Beyond the substance of his platform, Lamm also had huge stylistic appeal. In the aftermath of Watergate and the secrecy surrounding Denver’s Olympic bid, appearing to be forthright mattered. The very language Lamm used signaled to voters that he was a regular guy. Thus, campaign newsletters about Lamm’s walk described his conversations with Colorado citizens but also detailed his meals on the trail and his taste in hiking boots.¹⁶¹ Campaign speeches and advertisements were conversational and laced with phrases intended to help voters relate to Lamm personally, like a trusted friend. In television advertisements and brochures, Lamm emphasized his interest in ordinary Coloradans, highlighting, for example, what he had learned from residents of the state’s less-populous western and southern regions and acknowledging that Denver-based politicians had a reputation for ignoring their out-state constituents. He pledged to be a true representative for rural voters,

¹⁵⁹ Voter Testimonial Transcripts, 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

¹⁶⁰ Constituent Testimonials, 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

¹⁶¹ “Dick Lamm: Democrat for Governor,” 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 5, “Dick Lamm Materials,” Denver Public Library Western History & Genealogy Division.

promising that, “As governor...I’m going to keep coming back, and keep listening.”¹⁶² In a characteristic radio spot, Lamm argued, “It’s all right not to have all the answers as long as you’re asking the right questions.”¹⁶³ When discussing the issues of the day, Lamm readily acknowledged areas in which his opinions were evolving or about which he still had more to learn.

Coloradans warmed to Lamm’s candor. “Dick,” one voter opined, “is one of those rare politicians that is absolutely honest, absolutely forthright.” Paulette Kapp, a student from Greeley, explained that she was supporting Lamm because, “He accepts us as people not as votes, and it’s a good feeling. Dick Lamm is a friend, not just a Gubernatorial candidate.” Another attested that Lamm’s openness helped him maintain the respect of all voters—not just those who planned to vote for him. Moreover, the campaign’s theme, “If you care for Colorado...,” promoted the idea that government was not just the responsibility of elected officials, but of citizens too. As Lamm’s campaign strategy documents put it, “caring for Colorado means caring for our water resources...our core cities...our elderly...our land; and, finally, caring for Colorado means making Dick Lamm its governor.”¹⁶⁴ The intent was to draw voters into a partnership with the candidate, positioning them as active participants in the process of making Colorado a better place to live.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Dick Lamm, “Arkansas Valley—Local Problems,” “Arkansas Valley—Alienation,” and “Arkansas Valley—Growth,” 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 5, “Dick Lamm Materials,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

¹⁶³ Dick Lamm, hand written copy for radio ads, John Parr Papers, Box 5, “Dick Lamm Materials,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

¹⁶⁴ “Themes, Slogans, and Logo,” 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 5, “Dick Lamm Materials,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

¹⁶⁵ Voter Testimonial Transcripts, 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

Lamm and other reformers in the New Politics mold argued that the electorate, in fact, yearned to be engaged; they rejected conventional wisdom that voters were apathetic. The walking tour itself was predicated on the idea that Coloradans knew best what their local communities needed. Voters agreed, noting that, “He isn’t the typical politician who goes out and meets people and tells them what they want to hear. He’s honest in the way he deals with questions, he’s interested in what people think, and he listens to them. And uses their suggestions.”¹⁶⁶ Speaking directly with constituents and then signaling that he took their concerns seriously by announcing a policy agenda that specifically addressed what he’d heard on the road was a hallmark of Lamm’s winning approach to politics. And although he was, perhaps, the most aggressive of all the Colorado reformers in perpetuating this self-image, it was a strategy adopted in one form or another by all the winning candidates in 1974.

* * *

Like Lamm, other Colorado politicians also sought to ally themselves with the public interest by adopting a more laid-back, populist style and advocating policies that could appeal to a broad swath of voters, regardless of party affiliations. Tim Wirth, for example, won election to Congress from Colorado’s second district, comprising suburban Jefferson County, Boulder, and West Denver. A vignette from his reelection campaign two years later (also successful) is particularly illustrative of the new political mode. A campaign brochure, titled “The day Tim Wirth made the

¹⁶⁶ Voter Testimonial Transcripts, 1974, John Parr Papers, Box 1, “Issues—DL,” Denver Public Library, Western History and Genealogy Division.

lobbyists stand up,” began in a casual, colloquial tone, “Tim tells the story...” and went on to describe a particularly packed congressional committee hearing on a bill affecting the Bell Telephone System. Noticing that all the people in the crowded room looked “suspiciously alike,” Wirth asked the president of Bell to have all those connected to the company stand up, and the entire audience stood: they were all company lobbyists. For Tim (all his campaign materials referred to him by first name), the moral was clear:

The big boys have plenty of high-priced lobbyists in Washington and they make sure that their point of view gets across to the Congress. We don’t have to call them. They call us. It’s the other people I worry about—the consumer, the senior citizen, the average middle-class American. I represent them, and I take that part of my job very seriously.

The brochure went on to detail Wirth’s proposals on campaign finance reform, lobbying reform, and enhancing the powers of the Federal Elections Commission. “All of this,” Wirth explained, “will help to bring government out in the open...where it should have been all along.”¹⁶⁷

A businessman-turned-politician, Wirth made a name for himself in Congress on energy policy, environmental and consumer protection, and budget reform. In six terms in the House and another in the Senate, he garnered a reputation as an exceptionally accessible representative who was responsive to constituents, open to alternate viewpoints, concerned about quality of life for people in his district, resistant to special interests, and willing to stand up to members of his own party—

¹⁶⁷ “The day Tim Wirth made the lobbyists stand up,” *Wirth Washington Letter*, 1975, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1975, 1976, 1978–79, University of Colorado Libraries Archives Division.

including the president—when he felt it was warranted. Despite having been branded by national right-wing political groups as a “dangerous liberal,” the broad range of endorsements Wirth garnered in each of his campaigns reveals the remarkable extent of his bipartisan support. Both the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Denver Post*, Colorado’s two ideologically opposed major newspapers, supported Wirth’s candidacy time and again. So did the editorial boards of local papers across Colorado’s second district, from progressive Boulder to traditionally Republican Lakewood, Broomfield, Golden, and Longmont in Denver’s northern and western suburbs.¹⁶⁸ During his 1986 Senate race, *Colorado Business*, a local business magazine, lauded him as a forward thinker, able to “cut through the gibberish and petrified platforms of the political scene” while others hailed his firm grasp of economics and his ability to earn the respect of even the most ardent political opponent.¹⁶⁹ In crafting his political persona, Wirth intentionally cultivated these depictions of himself as eminently rational and beyond partisanship, working with only the interests of the people in mind.

Like Lamm and other reformers, Wirth tapped into an inchoate sense of dissatisfaction at the grassroots and turned it to electoral advantage. He was particularly adept at transposing the new grassroots political orientation that was already so visible in contests like those over annexation and the Olympics into formal politics, embracing a quality of life message that grounded citizens’ political claims in their roles as consumers. In a series of full-page advertisements during his

¹⁶⁸ “The Record Speaks for itself,” c. 1980, Tim Wirth Papers, FF3 Publicity, History Colorado.

¹⁶⁹ “About Tim Wirth,” c. 1986, Tim Wirth Papers, FF1 Personal Info, History Colorado.

1974 Congressional campaign, Wirth appealed directly to the citizen-consumer, encouraging constituents to vote their pocketbooks. Most significantly, he made a direct connection between the failure of existing government policies and consumer issues like exorbitant prices for basic necessities. Under the headline “We need to do something about prices. About taxes. About honesty in government. Now,” a full-page advertisement from the campaign displayed the image of a gas pump. The surrounding text promised that Wirth would “work to make government spend within our means” and vowed that he would help to ease the crushing economic burden imposed on individuals and families by stagflation by using a common sense approach to budgeting and challenging special interests “when they ignore their responsibility to keep prices down.” Wirth promised, if elected, to work for tax reform to help “people who really need [it]. People like you.” In his view, governmental transparency, advocating campaign finance reform, and tighter limits on lobbying were essential to protecting citizens in their consumer and taxpayer roles.¹⁷⁰

For Wirth and others among the new, young cohort of Democrats in Congress and in statehouses across the nation, the ultimate question for the new political era was this: “Can our large and diverse country be governed by a broad bipartisan consensus in the interest of the general public? Or is it going to be fragmented by special interest groups which operate solely on the basis of their own narrow

¹⁷⁰ “We need to do something about prices. About taxes. About honesty in government. Now,” Tim Wirth Papers, FF3 Publicity, History Colorado. See also additional publicity materials in the same location, including “We’ve waited long enough for some real representation.”

concerns?”¹⁷¹ While Wirth and others aggressively criticized the Republican Party, particularly during the Reagan administration, they simultaneously put great stock in appearing to rise above the partisan fray. Wirth’s 1976 reelection campaign touted his “old-fashioned common-sense approach” to making necessary changes in government, particularly with regard to taxes and the budget. Wirth described his bipartisan efforts to bring inflation and the deficit under control, triumphantly projecting a balanced budget by 1979. Independence, Wirth proclaimed, was also central to his common-sense philosophy. “He doesn’t believe in the old labels—like ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative,’” one brochure explained, “because each problem requires an individual solution...Tim Wirth takes each issue at [sic] it comes up, looks at all sides, and then makes up his mind.” If this moderate, non-partisan approach seemed unusual in Washington, that was unsurprising: “Not many Congressmen operate that way—but then many Congressmen like the old labels. Tim Wirth just likes to be labeled with common sense.”¹⁷²

Yet even as Wirth invoked his “common sense approach,” the very definition of common sense was changing rapidly. According to Wirth, common sense meant engaging in bipartisan efforts to curb inflation and reduce or, better still, eliminate the deficit. And although he preferred to target what he viewed as excessive and unwise defense spending, Wirth warned constituents that social programs and many government agencies would also be forced to make cuts. This agenda was

¹⁷¹ “The Federal Budget: Will it be balanced in 1981?” *Tim Wirth Newsletter*, April 1980, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1975, 1976, 1978-79, University of Colorado Libraries Archives Division.

¹⁷² “Congressman Tim Wirth. Common sense makes sense,” c. 1976, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1975, 1976, 1978-79, University of Colorado Libraries Archives Division.

dramatically different from the previous Keynesian common sense that had governed Democratic politics and, for the most part, the nation in the early postwar decades. By defining deficit reduction and inflation as government's primary responsibilities, Wirth promoted a new understanding of political and economic common sense that was on the cusp of becoming hegemonic.

The neoliberals' new, market-based approach took center stage in the Democrats' signature 1982 economic policy document. Authored by Tim Wirth and fellow Democratic reformer Dick Gephardt, the document, titled "Rebuilding the Road to Opportunity (RRO)," laid out House Democrats' economic and social agenda for the decade. RRO was, Wirth explained, an attempt to address a fundamental shift from an "industrial economy to one that is increasingly technology- and information-based" and from an economy that was largely domestic to one that was increasingly international. Although RRO identified growth and fairness as the "cornerstones of the Democratic vision," in fact the document dealt with growth almost exclusively. Section headings such as "Increasing Investment in Our Economy," "Investing in Our People," "Investing in Public Infrastructure," and "An Environment for Investment" signaled the neoliberals' move away from New Deal liberalism's redistributive politics and towards, in Wirth's words, "the economics of growth and opportunity." In practice, this meant getting away from what neoliberals saw as the Democrats' pattern of setting policy by appeasing interest groups in order to maintain the party's coalition—what Wirth called "ad-hockery"—in favor of what they dubbed a more "realistic" approach centered on entrepreneurship and market investment.

Traditional liberals lambasted the Wirth-Gephardt roadmap. In an editorial titled “Skirting the Fairness Issue,” the *Washington Post* dryly noted the absence of fairness from the “growth and fairness” vision. “What is truly striking about the document,” the editors remarked, “is how far the pendulum has apparently swung.” Social issues such as health care, welfare, private pensions, and fair access to employment that had once been Democratic priorities were now relegated to the sidelines, “gathered up in a box and labeled ‘women’s issues.’” No longer matters of general concern or questions of civil rights, the *Post* complained, neoliberal House Democrats, now with the power to set their party’s agenda, seemed to believe that the major problems of equality had been solved and “need only some fixing up to make sure that women get their fair share of the benefits.” Indeed, despite their claims to pragmatism over partisanship, this marginalization of social issues was part of a political strategy to recapture the votes of so-called Reagan Democrats in the upcoming 1984 elections. RRO became the template for the House Democratic Caucus’s campaign strategy document that year.¹⁷³

In 1984, as he prepared to run for reelection, Wirth wrote to his constituents about the future of Colorado and the nation. Three years into the Reagan administration, with the country still recovering from the 1981–1982 recession, Wirth grimly enumerated the problems of the day, laying them at the feet of President Reagan and the Republican Senate, which he called “the most conservative Administration and Senate in memory.” As Democrats, he vowed, “We must continue to stand up for a very different vision of America.” From there,

¹⁷³ Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 160–3.

however, he launched into what, to all appearances, looked very much like a Republican policy manifesto, promising to “chop the massive federal deficits,” lower interest rates, reform the tax code, and invest in high technology. The crucial difference, which continued to be a major dividing line between Democrats and Republicans, was the balance Wirth struck between defense and domestic spending. Where Senate Republicans and the President proposed massive increases to defense spending while slashing domestic programs, Wirth and other New Democrats argued that a strong and sensible national defense was possible at much lower cost and that, “We must avoid placing the burdens of reduced federal spending on the backs of low income persons. We must ensure a dignified and decent quality of life for our nation's Senior Citizens.”¹⁷⁴

In conjunction with such austerity measures, Wirth also promoted high technology and private enterprise as solutions to America’s economic and social problems. Indeed, for Wirth the two were intimately linked. If, as reform Democrats claimed, America’s economic crisis was the product of a faltering manufacturing sector and the inability of Keynesian government interventions to solve the problem, then promoting business investment in new sectors was crucial. Wirth and his cohorts argued that America’s “prosperity and competitiveness abroad depends

¹⁷⁴ Tim Wirth campaign letter to “Fellow Democrats,” May 7, 1984, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1980-1982, University of Colorado Libraries Archives Division.

increasingly on high technology products and sophisticated services,” and they promoted these as the keys to the nation’s future economic strength.¹⁷⁵

Wirth’s career is illustrative of the ways in which the reform spirit in American politics, especially within the Democratic Party, persisted and evolved throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Colorado Democrats liked to say that Wirth “began running for president the day he was inaugurated into the House,” and this ambition was reflected in his embrace of the free market at a time when public faith in New Deal and Great Society programs was waning.¹⁷⁶ Wirth was a key player in the transformation of the Democratic Party from New Deal liberalism to neoliberalism, from government solutions to market-based solutions for a wide range of social, economic, and environmental problems. Writing to constituents in 1980, Wirth declared, “Federal spending must be cut back...Every federal agency and program must be thoroughly examined. There can be no sacred cows.” His policy prescriptions included means testing of social benefits such as food stamps and energy assistance and narrower targeting for entitlements.¹⁷⁷

Ever a deficit hawk, Wirth warned, “We cannot expect the federal government to provide a fiscal solution to every problem. The government already does too much—and too little well.” He called for cuts in government spending and

¹⁷⁵ Tim Wirth to Fellow Democrats, May 7, 1984, in Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1983-1984, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, University of Colorado Libraries, Archives Division.

¹⁷⁶ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 161.

¹⁷⁷ “Wirth’s Committee Votes Balanced Budget” and “Wirth’s Budget Principles,” *Tim Wirth Newsletter*, (April, 1980), Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, University of Colorado Libraries, Archives Division.

for efforts to rein in inflation.¹⁷⁸ In addition to co-authoring RRO with Dick Gephardt and serving as economics subcommittee co-chair for the House Democratic Caucus Committee, Wirth was part of the so-called gang of four along with Dick Gephardt, Norman Minetta, and Leon Panetta, that drafted the 1981 budget compromise between President Reagan and House Democratic leadership. He also served, along with Gephardt, on an economic task force for the Democratic National Committee, where he was instrumental in incorporating neoliberal economic ideas and policy priorities into the party's platform.¹⁷⁹

During the Reagan years, Wirth embraced the term "Atari Democrat" to describe himself and colleagues who advocated a moderate, pro-growth, pro-business agenda for the Democratic Party. As the *New York Times* described them, Atari Democrats were committed to "free markets and investment" and saw "investment and high technology as the contemporary answer to the New Deal."¹⁸⁰ A founding member of the House Democratic Caucus Committee on Party Effectiveness, an early institutional manifestation of changes in the Democratic Party widely viewed as a forerunner to the New Democrats, Wirth would go on to become a key player in the early years of the Democratic Leadership Council, the flagship organization of the neoliberal New Democrat movement that, with the election of Bill Clinton in

¹⁷⁸ "The Federal Budget: Will it be balanced in 1981?" *Tim Wirth Newsletter*, April 1980, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1975, 1976, 1978-79, University of Colorado Libraries Archives Division.

¹⁷⁹ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 160–1.

¹⁸⁰ E. J. Dionne, "Washington Talk; Greening of Democrats: An 80's Mix of Idealism And Shrewd Politics," *New York Times*, June 14, 1989, accessed June 6, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/14/us/washington-talk-greening-democrats-80-s-mix-idealism-shrewd-politics.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

1992, ultimately took control of the Democratic Party as a whole. (Indeed, Wirth was national co-chair of the Clinton-Gore campaign.)

Wirth's language mirrored similar rhetoric from fellow Coloradans Dick Lamm and Gary Hart about fair-mindedness and post-partisanship in the name of the public interest. It also became a hallmark of the reform Democrat persona in the 1980s and, ultimately, of the New Democrats. Wirth's early rhetoric of independence, which he continued to employ throughout his career, was of a piece with, for example, the rhetoric of Bill Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign. In their book *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America*, Clinton and his running mate Al Gore promised voters, "Our policies are neither liberal nor conservative, neither Democratic nor Republican. They are new. They are different. We are confident they will work."¹⁸¹ This language reflected a revised (or still revising) American political center, which Clinton and Gore hoped to capture. In conjunction with their market- and consumer-oriented policy platforms, their approach constituted a clear recognition that the old political consensus had collapsed and was rapidly being replaced—both as a result of grassroots pressure and through such framing.

* * *

Of all the reform candidates to come to office in 1974, Gary Hart was, perhaps, the most self-conscious about the transformation he saw in American politics and his sense of himself as its avatar. A native of Kansas, Hart was born

¹⁸¹ Bill Clinton and Al Gore, *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America*, (New York: Times Books, c. 1992), viii.

into a conservatively religious Republican family. After graduating from small Methodist college in Oklahoma in 1958, he enrolled in Yale Divinity School.¹⁸² But John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign was a turning point for Hart. After hearing the candidate speak, he was so won over that he registered as a Democrat and went to work for the campaign, eventually leaving the divinity school and transferring to Yale Law School instead. With the zeal of the convert, Hart set out to transform his new party. He believed that Democrats were too beholden to the New Deal (what he called the "Eleanor Roosevelt wing of the party") and should leave it behind in favor of a new "pragmatic liberalism." Kennedy, Hart felt, was poised to bring the Democrats into the future and would have succeeded were it not for his assassination.¹⁸³

Upon graduating from Yale Law School, Hart returned west, opening a law practice in Denver. It was there that he emerged onto the national political scene in 1970, when McGovern met him on a campaign stop in Denver and invited him to become the manager of his 1972 presidential campaign. McGovern lost, but two years later Coloradans sent Hart to Washington, ousting long-time Republican senator Pete Dominick by a wide margin. In the Senate, Hart made a name for himself on the Armed Services Committee as an advocate of military reform and, along with Texas congressman Martin Frost, began organizing weekly breakfasts where like-minded colleagues gathered to discuss policy and the future of the

¹⁸² Richard L. Madden, "Hart Taking His Campaign Back to Its Yale Roots," *New York Times*, March 22, 1984,

¹⁸³ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 128.

Democratic Party. By 1980, Washington insiders were beginning to identify Hart as the leader of the new, reformist, neoliberal movement among Democrats.¹⁸⁴

Hart's 1974 campaign resonated with the rhetoric of other successful reformers that year. Like them, Hart saw himself as part of a broad movement in American politics that sought to "break the deadlock of old systems and old doctrines."¹⁸⁵ He trumpeted his success as evidence of "the restoration of honesty in government" and a first step towards beginning Colorado's long march into the future. Hart appealed to the state's rapidly expanding, increasingly educated and affluent electorate with the slogan, "They Had Their Turn. Now It's Our Turn."¹⁸⁶ Symbolizing his move away from traditional Democratic constituencies and policies, he rejected the term "liberal" to describe the new generation of Democrats, of which he saw himself as a leader, preferring instead to be called "progressive," a label he argued should apply equally to moderate Republicans interested in pragmatic approaches to policymaking in a rapidly changing world.

Standing on the steps of the Colorado statehouse in Denver immediately after his Senate election in 1974, Hart solemnly intoned, "We now face a stark choice, between national renewal or national decline." Leveling his attack at Republicans and Democrats alike, he warned that, "Our problems worsen while some retreat to an unfair past and others debate old remedies and contend over shopworn policies." He concluded with a theme that would resurface time and again

¹⁸⁴ Hart, *Right from the Start*, 128-130.

¹⁸⁵ Howard Raines, "Hart Enters Presidential Race, Stressing New Ideas," *New York Times*, February 18, 1983.

¹⁸⁶ "Gary Hart, Democrat for Senate," Colorado Elections State & Federal, Box 5, Folder 10, University of Colorado Archives.

in his subsequent campaigns: “We must preserve our enduring ideals by replacing tired assumptions with new and fresh ideas.”¹⁸⁷ Indeed, Hart was among the first politicians to understand that the nation was, in 1974, in the early stages of a profound economic and political change. Hart later identified the 1970s and 1980s as a moment of rupture in American politics, one marked by shrinking voter turnout and party identification, increasing factionalism, and one term presidencies. The rupture, he argued, was “the product of the fundamental failure of our system to deal with change.”¹⁸⁸ In this case, that change was the failure of Keynesian-style economic management to provide effective solutions in the face of a rapidly changing economy that was increasingly post-industrial, service- and financial-sector oriented, and global in scope.¹⁸⁹

Throughout his political career, Hart, more than almost any other Democrat, went out of his way to reject the New Deal and the old political coalition that had been the bedrock of Democratic politics since the 1930s. He first sounded this theme in his 1974 race for Senate, but it surfaced again in his 1980 reelection campaign and in his 1984 run for president, making him one of the first, even among a group of young, like-minded Democrats, to so explicitly and forcefully renounce the old liberalism. Addressing an audience at the University of Denver in 1974, Hart explained that, “This country is in trouble” because of the New Deal habit of creating a new government agency every time a problem emerged. He denounced “the

¹⁸⁷ Howard Raines, “Hart Enters Presidential Race, Stressing New Ideas,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1983.

¹⁸⁸ Hart, *A New Democracy*, Introduction.

¹⁸⁹ Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

proliferation of agencies,” which he argued often created more problems than they solved, concluding, “It is time to replace the New Deal, or at least the conventional thinking which is its grandchild.”¹⁹⁰ Hart identified inflation, energy, the environment, and congressional reform—the very issues that had animated Colorado voters—as the issues of the day and proclaimed that, “they are not left-right issues...and they will not yield to ‘New Deal thinking.’”¹⁹¹

Like other reform Democrats, Hart’s policy prescriptions were an eclectic hodgepodge of more clearly market-oriented ideas and ones that harkened back to an older Keynesian liberalism. In one of his first speeches on the Senate floor, Hart denounced government bureaucracy, admonishing: “The pragmatism of the New Deal has become doctrine—if there is a problem, create an agency and throw money at the problem. We have lost that sense of pragmatism over the years, and what were once viewed only as experiments have now become articles of faith.”¹⁹² Such pronouncements earned Hart comparisons to a young Barry Goldwater and won him accolades from leading conservatives including *National Review*’s William F. Buckley and Paul Weyrich, director of the influential conservative think tank Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress.

Despite these small government pronouncements, however, Hart was no friend to big business. Indeed, he attacked corporations with equal fervor, championing instead the small businesses and entrepreneurs that were the favorites

¹⁹⁰ Norman Miller, “The Transformation of Gary Hart,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 28, 1974.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 131.

of neoliberals. The result was a typically neoliberal policy agenda. Hart demanded an end to what he saw as failing public housing programs and promoted instead a system of government incentives to stimulate a market for privately built and owned affordable housing for low-income families. He attacked wasteful military spending that, he argued, produced massive federal budget deficits while failing to actually increase national security, proposing rather that the Pentagon behave like a business, relying on competitive bidding to improve costs and efficacy. Throughout, his proposals had a distinctly market-oriented bent that, while clearly not Republican, nevertheless set them apart from conventional Democratic prescriptions.¹⁹³

This program of pragmatic, market-based approaches to the problems of ordinary Coloradans and the nation, along with Hart's rhetoric of transparency and innovation, had clear bipartisan appeal. Hart won his first election in a landslide, outpolling Republican incumbent Pete Dominick across the state. Even in heavily Republican precincts, CBS and NBC exit polls indicated that Hart received an impressive forty-eight percent of the vote. Moderate voters of both parties and the middle class were Hart's strongest supporters, with fifty-six percent of self-described moderate Republicans, sixty-five percent of moderate Democrats, and sixty-one percent of middle-income voters choosing Hart.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Norman Miller, "The Transformation of Gary Hart," *Wall Street Journal*, October 28, 1974.

¹⁹⁴ Daryl Lembke, "Ex-McGovern Aide Hart Easily Beats Sen. Dominick in Colorado," *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1974.

Hart's victory among a broad swath of the electorate came as no surprise to many influential Washington observers. While Watergate was, of course, a crucial factor in the election, his appeal, like that of other reformers, reached far beyond simple anti-incumbent sentiment. The distinctly moderate or, as Tim Wirth put it, "common sense" solutions proposed by reform Democrats in 1974 were crucial to their success. Observers such as the political statistician Richard Scammon, co-author with Ben Wattenberg of the influential 1970 book about the changing American electorate, *The Real Majority*, argued earlier in 1974 that, as the *New York Times* put it, Hart "made himself a front-runner partly by trimming his liberal sails—plumping for free enterprise and damning gun controls."¹⁹⁵ Hart himself sounded a similar theme. When pressed to explain how the election of so many ostensible "liberals" could be reconciled with new Gallup Polls showing that public opinion was growing increasingly conservative, he explained that liberalism and conservatism were old terms unsuited to a new political era. "We're locked into these '60s definitions of liberal-conservative which don't work anymore," he explained. "The issues of the '70s are not liberal or conservative." The movements that polarized the nation along liberal conservative lines in the 1960s, civil rights and the Vietnam War, were no longer relevant.¹⁹⁶

Hart's insistence that the old, ideological terms no longer applied points to a crucial and little-understood aspect of the 1974 "Watergate Babies" election, which brought scores of young Democrats into office. While the Democratic victories that

¹⁹⁵ Christopher Lydon, "Democrats Await a Flood of Votes...Exceptions to the Rule Strong," *New York Times*, October 13, 1974.

¹⁹⁶ Daryl Lembke, "Colorado's Hart: McGovern Liberal Moves into '70s as a 'Progressive,'" *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1974.

year are often explained away as merely a strong tide of anti-incumbent sentiment in the wake of the Watergate revelations, in fact they were the product of a far-reaching political shift within the electorate. By distancing himself from McGovern's more leftwing stances while continuing to court his constituency of young people and suburbanites by extending the quality of life and transparency themes, Hart won election without having to appeal to the Democrats' traditional coalition of minorities, ethnic voters, and organized labor.

Although often dismissed as hopelessly liberal, McGovern's own candidacy pointed the way towards what would emerge as the neoliberal orientation among Democrats. In fact, McGovern's New Politics coalition provided the kernel for a new, core Democratic constituency and a new generation of leaders. Young and affluent, this new generation was moderate, pragmatic, and hostile to the old coalitions and alliances that had long governed the Democratic Party.¹⁹⁷ When McGovern wrote in a 1970 letter announcing his candidacy, "I seek the presidency because I believe deeply in the American promise and can no longer accept the diminishing of that promise...Thoughtful Americans understand that the highest patriotism is not a blind acceptance of official policy, but a love of one's country deep enough to call her to a higher standard," these young voters responded enthusiastically.

Pronouncements like this, along with promises to run a campaign built on "candor and reason," free from manipulation and fear and rooted in a "national dialogue on mutual respect and common hope" resonated with disillusioned young voters and pointed the way towards a politics that eschewed special interests in favor of an

¹⁹⁷ Penn Kemble, "The New Politics & the Democrats," *Commentary*, December 1972.

imagined national interest.¹⁹⁸ These, in turn, became hallmarks of the neoliberal political philosophy.

Indeed, the characterization of the New Politics of 1968–74 as a far-left movement from which the New Democrats of the 1980s and ‘90s offered a dramatic departure is false. Rather, the very same people were involved at each stage of the Democratic Party’s post-sixties reform. Along with campaign manager Hart, Bill and Hillary Clinton were devoted McGovernites and campaign workers, as were many who would become active in neoliberal and New Democrat circles. While Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern certainly offered a leftwing political vision, the seeds of the reform movement that their acolytes would eventually popularize were already present in their emphases on consumerist and quality-of-life issues like the environment, growth, and consumer prices. By the same token, the young, educated, frequently suburban voters that both McCarthy and McGovern courted would prove crucial to Democratic successes under Bill Clinton, shifting the focus away from the party’s historical coalition of minorities, labor, and the poor toward the swing voters and “soccer moms” who dominated 1990s debate. It was not only their vehement opposition to the Vietnam War but also this move towards a new Democratic constituency that set them apart from establishment candidates, and it was this strategic innovation that subsequent Democratic reformers would embrace to great effect. Contemporary observers, who characterized so-called Atari Democrats like Hart and Wirth as a departure from the “ultra-liberal” New Politics, failed to recognize these important continuities. New Politics, Atari, neoliberal, and New

¹⁹⁸ Hart, *Right from the Start*, 44.

Democrat were simply different stages in the evolution and refinement of a new Democratic political form. By the time he first ran for president in 1984, Hart had become thoroughly associated with the reform movement of market-oriented, high tech Democrats who appealed to the new constituency of issues voters under these various guises.

But how did a political culture of public interest that was anti-bigness and anti-corporate contribute to the emergence of a pro-business, market-oriented politics, all the while maintaining a populist appeal? The grassroots “quality-of-life politics” espoused by a growing number of Americans reveals the kernel of what would, in the hands of politicians like Hart, Wirth, and Lamm, become the core of a new neoliberal political consensus in America. Fundamentally, quality-of-life politics were about property ownership and the right to control where and how one lived, whether that meant clean air and access to beautiful mountain parks; being empowered to keep mental institutions, affordable housing, landfills, and other “undesirable” land uses out of one’s neighborhood; or sending one’s children to a neighborhood school. The ways in which reform Democrats framed the problems facing Americans—and their proposed solutions—are revealing of their underlying ideology. Consumer citizenship has a long history in the United States, but what distinguished the neoliberals’ brand of consumer-oriented politics was its fiscal conservatism. Earlier generations of consumer-citizens had marched and boycotted to achieve greater regulation of food industries, price controls, and other government

interventions.¹⁹⁹ By contrast, seventies-era consumer politics, as re-articulated by politicians like Hart and Wirth, advocated stricter targeting of entitlement programs, cuts in federal spending, a slow down in federal construction projects, revenue sharing, and the devolution of power from the federal government to the states and localities.²⁰⁰

Quality of life was a consumerist ethos that simultaneously offered a political rallying cry for citizens, while also effectively stripping issues of their racial and class elements. So, for example, the “quality of life” environmental argument emphasized the unpleasantness of smog and the despoiling of the pristine mountain landscapes, for which, reform politicians like Lamm, Wirth, and Hart suggested, most residents had moved to Colorado in the first place. At the same time, such politics typically downplayed or ignored the racial and class elements inherent in environmental concerns. Even as the environmental justice movement made impressive strides nationally to increase awareness of the environment as a matter of serious, structural inequality, both in terms of access to green space and exposure to pollution and its effects, mainstream politicians addressed it almost exclusively on the terrain of consumer choice and protection. Lamm and Wirth, both recognized as leaders on the environment and conservation, rarely if ever acknowledged the negative health impacts of smog or the disproportionate impact of pollution on lower

¹⁹⁹ For more on consumer and economic politics, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Knopf, 2003) and Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁰⁰ There are numerous examples of Wirth as a deficit hawk. For one representative example, see Tim Wirth newsletter, “The Federal Budget: Will it be balanced in 1981?” April 1980, Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, Wirth, Tim E. Rep 2nd District 1980, 1982, University of Colorado Libraries Archives Division. On the neoliberal shift among Democrats from Keynesianism toward austerity, see Mudge, “What’s Left of Leftism?”

income and minority communities. Instead, they framed environmentalism in terms of helping Coloradans to “protect their own homes and yards” or “protecting our neighborhoods from accidents involving the transportation of hazardous materials.” Wirth was also adept at framing other issues in consumerist, quality-of-life terms. Deficit reduction, for example, was vital because, “Unless the deficits are reduced now, young families will have to continue to wait to buy their first home.” This kind of politics, which elevated citizens’ identities as taxpayers and consumers as central to political identity and participation, lent itself to the neoliberal message of autonomy, individualism, and markets.²⁰¹

On other issues too, quality-of-life politics ignored the structural inequalities under which communities of color were forced to operate. Education was a crucial arena in which reformers proposed solutions focused on developing the capacity of individual students without addressing systemic obstacles to minority access and success. In the 1974 election that brought so many neoliberals to office, for example, education was a central issue, with school desegregation and busing at the center of the debate. Yet race was conspicuously absent from campaign rhetoric and policy prescriptions offered by candidates like Wirth, Lamm, and Hart. Wirth, for example, campaigned hard on education, but although his early education proposals contained many traditionally liberal elements such as support for teacher collective bargaining, his overall framing of the challenges that education policy must address was distinctly neoliberal. Diversity, Wirth argued, should be encouraged, but not on

²⁰¹ “Cutting the Federal Deficit,” *Rep. Tim Wirth Reports*, (Jan, 1983), in Folder “Wirth, Tim E., Rep 2nd District” and “A Fighter for Colorado: Tim Wirth,” in Folder “Sen. Tim Wirth—Sen 2nd District,” Colorado Elected Representatives—Newsletters & Reports, University of Colorado Libraries, Archives Division.

the basis of race or class. Rather, diversity in educational style and goals was to be the goal. “[O]ur philosophy,” he explained, “should be aimed at allowing every child and adult the opportunity for the best education he or she can handle. Diversity must be encouraged, because different individuals learn in different ways, and a single, lockstep system is not best for all.”²⁰² Dick Lamm’s education platform in his 1974 gubernatorial race was similar, also avoiding any explicit mention of race. Lamm’s running mate George Brown, who became the first African American to win statewide office in Colorado when he was elected lieutenant governor that year, also called for improvements in educational equality but was careful to list universal goals such as special education and improved literacy—not school desegregation or equalized funding for minority schools—as specific policy objectives.²⁰³

While, at least in Brown’s case, the choice to distance himself from the issue of race may have been strategic, by and large the reformers’ characterization of education as an economic question of investment in the nation’s human capital, not as a matter of social justice, was a deeply held neoliberal tenet that distinguished it from traditional liberalism. “What is striking about the reemergence of education and training [in Democratic policy making and thinking],” noted one contemporary observer, “is that their new economic context represents a departure from contemporary liberal theory, which has stressed not the market advantages, but the non-market benefits of education and training.”²⁰⁴ In language that would soon become familiar in school reform debates from the 1990s onwards, neoliberals in the

²⁰² “Wirth on Education,” c. 1974, Tim Wirth Papers, FF4 Attitudes On, History Colorado.

²⁰³ George Brown campaign materials, Colorado Elections—State and Federal, Box 5, Folder 5-1, University of Colorado Libraries Archive Division.

²⁰⁴ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 87.

late 1970s and 1980s argued that, far from being instruments of social progress, urban public schools “have in fact become the principal instrument of class oppression in America” and that incompetent teachers were largely to blame.²⁰⁵ They therefore attacked teachers unions and tenure. Where liberals advocated programs like busing as tools for increasing social and political equality, neoliberals called instead for job training programs, merit pay for teachers, and magnet schools. In keeping with their general emphasis on cooperation, public-private partnership was one of the most consistent themes in neoliberal education policy. Vouchers, which would replace investment in public schools with subsidies to allow lower income students to attend private school, were a centerpiece of their education proposals.

In nearly every instance, neoliberals put forward these ideas in language that did not reference race.²⁰⁶ By contrast, the candidates who lost to neoliberals, both Democrats and Republicans, addressed questions of race head on. In his first election to Congress, Tim Wirth defeated incumbent Don Brotzman, a conservative Republican, and a left-liberal Democratic challenger backed by the Colorado Federation of Labor, both of whom discussed busing openly throughout the campaign. Similarly, Gary Hart’s Republican opponent, Pete Dominick, was a vocal opponent of busing, as was Governor John Vanderhoof, whom Dick Lamm unseated. The absence of race from neoliberal rhetoric and policy programs in the 1970s and ‘80s was one manifestation of an influential “color-blind” politics in this period that systematically obscured the structural and racialized underpinnings of inequality in

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 188.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 88, 188–94

America, particularly with regard to residential geography and schools.²⁰⁷ Color-blind politics had the effect of absolving white citizens of any perceived racial bias while, simultaneously, producing racial- and class-differentiated outcomes. Such politics operated by focusing exclusively on individual choices in supposedly free markets (e.g., for suburban housing) while ignoring the vastly unequal resources and power that white and non-white, poor and non-poor actors brought to the field and the structural forces that both created and perpetuated these differences. This color-blind politics lent itself readily to the neoliberal project. Indeed, it was integral to it, elevating market principles and market-based solutions as the only either legitimate or effective means for addressing racial inequality. It thereby bolstered the notion of the market as a sort of super institution, beyond politics, that was inherently neutral and fair.²⁰⁸

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In 1984, eight candidates ran in the Democratic primaries for the chance to challenge Ronald Reagan. That contest, which ultimately came down to a two-man race between Gary Hart and the eventual nominee Walter Mondale, dramatized the divide between the old liberalism of the New Deal and the new style of pragmatic, market-oriented politics espoused by young, centrist Democrats. In Mondale's words, the election was for "the soul of the Democratic Party," offering voters a choice

²⁰⁷ See Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and David M. Freund, *Colored Property*.

²⁰⁸ N.D.B. Connolly, "Property Rights and the Black Political Imagination," (paper presented at Fractures: Defining and Redefining the Twentieth-Century United States, a Trans-Atlantic Conference, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, May 7, 2012).

between New Deal liberalism and what he called the “uncaring attitudes of a whole generation of younger Democrats.” Running as a self consciously old-style liberal, Mondale derided Hart for abandoning what he saw as the party’s longstanding concerns for equality and justice. On civil rights, Mondale recounted his movement credentials, while noting, “My opponent wrote a book about America’s future. Never mentioned civil rights in 180 pages.”²⁰⁹ As the election drew nearer, Mondale continued to court the party’s traditional constituencies aggressively: organized labor, Jews, and blacks. By contrast, Hart trumpeted the need for “new ideas” in American politics and the need for a new generation of leaders to move beyond what he called “a government bound by old alliances, old promises, and failed institutions.”²¹⁰ He talked passionately about American economic influence throughout the globe, lauding the United States as a catalyst for increasing democracy and opening markets, two things he saw going hand-in-hand.²¹¹ And, while he continued to seek the support of organized labor, he simultaneously rejected their legislative agenda as a threat to free trade, which he deemed to be of paramount importance.²¹² While talking in general terms about equality, he focused his attention on young voters, suburbanites, and women. Although Mondale won the Democratic nomination, he did so by the smallest of margins. Hart won almost as much of the popular vote and only one fewer states—twenty-four to Mondale’s twenty-five. In addition to Ohio, Indiana, and all of New England, which he carried

²⁰⁹ “Mondale Champions Party’s Old Values,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 1984.

²¹⁰ Gary Hart television campaign advertisements, 1984, http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=1EX9k7OC0w4.

²¹¹ Gary Hart presidential campaign brochure, 1988, University of Colorado Archives.

²¹² Howard Raines, “Hart Enters Presidential Race, Stressing New Ideas,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1983.

handily, Hart also swept every state in the West with the exceptions of Kansas and Texas.

Hart's narrow defeat in the primaries and Mondale's crushing loss to Reagan in the general election point to the sea change underway both within the Democratic Party and the electorate at large during the 1970s and '80s. Traditional liberalism was losing traction and neoliberal ideas had growing appeal. As the 1988 election came into view, pundits noted that virtually all the Democratic candidates had adopted what were, four years earlier, some of Hart's most surprising new ideas on issues like military reform, education, free trade and, as the *New York Times* put it, "above all, a sense that it is possible for Government to attend to social needs without producing copies of New Deal and Great Society programs."²¹³ Hart was widely viewed as the front-runner and someone uniquely positioned to craft a new identity for the party going forward. Even professional Republicans such as Republican National Committee chair Frank Fahrenkopf, Jr. opined, "at least he has tried to distance himself from the old New Deal liberalism" and predicted that Hart would have an edge among voters.²¹⁴

Neoliberal ideas gained traction among party leaders too. In 1985, a group of Sunbelt Democrats founded the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) to promote neoliberal ideas within the party. The next year, when the Democratic National Committee met in Atlanta to develop the party's platform for the upcoming election, DLC members took leading roles, even earning the grudging endorsement of party

²¹³ E. J. Dionne, Jr., "Gary Hart the Elusive Front Runner," *New York Times*, May 3, 1987.

²¹⁴ Shogan, "Hart Tries to Recast Party," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 14, 1985.

chairman Paul Kirk, Jr., a long-time reform skeptic and confidant of Ted Kennedy. In language that echoed familiar neoliberal tropes, Kirk proclaimed that, “The larger interests and broader agenda of the Democratic Party and the nation have superseded the singular agenda of elite groups.”²¹⁵ The neoliberal call to elevate issues over constituencies, the national interest over special interests, now had institutional support.

Whereas in the 1970s, reform candidates like Hart often seemed to be awkwardly straddling the old and new politics, by 1988, after eight years of the Reagan administration, Democrats had come into a fuller embrace of the neoliberal policy agenda. Indeed Hart, once considered something of a party heretic, now found himself running to the left of DLC stalwarts like Dick Gephardt and Bruce Babbitt, whom he described as “Reagan in Franklin Roosevelt’s clothing.” Going forward, it would be Hart’s and his peers’ young, female, and suburban constituencies who would be not just the centerpiece of future Democratic victories but the most hotly contested and aggressively targeted voting groups for both parties. Although Hart’s early front-runner candidacy eventually collapsed amidst scandal, leaving the Democrats scrambling for a viable nominee, his themes would resurface triumphantly in 1992 in the hands of fellow ex-McGovernites-turned-New Democrats, Bill Clinton and Al Gore.

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²¹⁵ Phil Gailey, “Democrats Search for 1988 Identity,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 18, 1986.

Indeed, Bill Clinton was himself a product of this neoliberal transformation. Journalistic accounts often portray Clinton as the savior of the Democratic Party, a reformer who emerged out of whole cloth after decades of Democratic foundering and gave the party new life and political relevance as centrist New Democrats. Yet Clinton's 1992 presidential victory is best understood as the apotheosis of a broad realignment of American and Democratic Party politics since 1968. As with so many other neoliberal reformers, Clinton's story in fact begins in the upheavals of the early 1970s. In 1972, he and future wife Hillary Rodham went to Texas to work for the McGovern campaign. Two years later, Clinton ran for Congress in his home district, Arkansas's third. At just twenty-eight years old, Clinton, like Lamm, traveled his state to learn first-hand what mattered to citizens (although, unlike Lamm, he preferred a beat up AMC Chevy Gremlin to hiking boots). His campaign ads sought to make him relatable, showing him meeting with constituents across the state while the voiceover intoned in a folksy, banjo-accompanied singsong, "Bill Clinton's ready, he's fed up too! He's a lot like me, he's a lot like you. Bill Clinton wants to get things done, so we're gonna send him to Washington." The theme, as with so many that candidates year, was change.²¹⁶

In his early days, Clinton's politics were mixed with a heavy dose of old-style Arkansas populism: excess profits tax on the oil industry, trust busting, national health insurance, a fairer tax system, better funding for education, public funding of presidential elections, and a general skepticism towards the government in Washington. "The American people," he sympathized, "have a general feeling of

²¹⁶ Bill Clinton, 1974 Congressional campaign TV advertisements, http://youtu.be/1__eIb9wYu8

helplessness about the federal bureaucracy, which is unyielding, distant, and not responsible.” He promised that, as congressman, he would work to reduce inflation, lower food prices, make the tax code more fair to middle class families, and curb government spending.²¹⁷ Clinton also advocated austerity, proclaiming himself a candidate “who’s not afraid to say no to the unnecessary government spending that has hurt the economy of the country.”²¹⁸ Although he lost the election, Clinton came closer than any Democrat in several generations and made a name for himself as a rising star in Arkansas politics. Two years later, he was elected attorney general and, in 1978, governor.²¹⁹

As governor, Clinton’s Democratically inflected brand of neoliberalism developed further. Education was his passion, and he focused tremendous energy and resources on improving his state’s public schools, which were among the worst in the nation. While public education has long been a Democratic priority, Clinton’s approach to improving the schools was a departure from liberal expectations. Like Wirth and Hart, he coupled increased funding with new requirements for teacher and student accountability. In 1980, Clinton implemented Arkansas’s first statewide standardized-testing program. Reducing welfare dependency was another preoccupation and, in Clinton’s proposals for Arkansas in the 1980s, the seeds of what would eventually become his national welfare reform program were already evident. Indeed, the signature formulation of Clinton’s 1996 welfare reform drive—that Americans “want a hand up, not a hand out”—first surfaced in a speech he

²¹⁷ 1974 brochure, Clinton House Museum

²¹⁸ 1974 congressional race, Clintons Timeline, Clinton House Museum.

²¹⁹ "Clinton, Democrat for Congress" brochure, 1974, Clinton House Museum digital collection and Clintons Timeline, Clinton House Museum digital collection.

made to the Arkansas state Democratic convention in 1974, and a variety of policies requiring work and education for all welfare recipients became hallmarks of his policy as governor.²²⁰

If in the popular imagination Clinton's success has come to symbolize the transformation and revitalization of the Democratic Party, Jimmy Carter's beleaguered presidency is often posed as the nadir of the party's post-1968 slump. In this view, Carter was the last liberal president, his failures proof of liberalism's dysfunction and waning relevance after its postwar golden era. But this misses the tectonic shifts within the party during this period. Carter was hardly a liberal. Rather, like other successful Democrats of the 1970s, he presented himself as a reformer. As a candidate, he adopted themes consonant with the new style in Democratic politics. As president, he promoted cuts to federal spending, deregulation of major industries, and a slew of other policies more in keeping with the emerging neoliberal sensibility within his party than with the receding liberal tide.

Carter is best understood as a transitional figure bridging the divide between the New Deal and the New Democrats. In accepting the Democratic nomination at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1976, Carter explicitly invoked the Democratic legacy of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson and hailed the party as the proud champion of America's diverse people: immigrants, workers, and religious and racial minorities. At the same time, he embraced many of the stylistic

²²⁰ Bill Clinton, "The Fight for Fairness and Justice," speech to the Democratic State Convention, Hot Springs Arkansas, September 13, 1974 in Smith, *Preface to the Presidency*.

and thematic elements of the emerging neoliberal politics, proclaiming, “There is a new mood in America. We have been shaken by a tragic war abroad and by scandals and broken promises at home. Our people are searching for new voices and new ideas and new leaders.”²²¹ Responding to voters’ demands for transparent and responsive government, Carter promised “a government as good as its people.” He seemed to offer national unification after a period of intense generational, class, and ideological schisms.²²²

Carter adopted a folksy, approachable style. Both as governor and presidential candidate, he quoted theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and folksinger Bob Dylan and called for political power to be returned to the hands of the people.²²³ Like Colorado’s Lamm during his bid for governor, Carter opened his presidential campaign with a “learning posture”: an admission that he did not have all the answers and a pledge to travel the country listening to and learning from citizens.²²⁴ In television advertisements, Carter addressed voters directly, a departure from the more formal campaign ad conventions of the time, telling them that he would work for a federal “sunshine law” to expose legislators’ ties to industry and vowing to

²²¹ Jimmy Carter, “Our Nation’s Past and Future,” (speech delivered at the Democratic National Convention, New York, July 15, 1976), Selected Speeches of Jimmy Carter, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/speeches/acceptance_speech.pdf

²²² Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 34–5.

²²³ Carter, “Our Nation’s Past and Future” and Jimmy Carter, “A Message on Justice,” (speech delivered on “Law Day,” University of Georgia, May 4, 1974), Documents and Photograph from the Jimmy Carter Library Collections, Jimmy Carter Library.

<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/law.pdf>.

²²⁴ “1976 Campaign Strategy Paper,” 1974, 1976 Campaign Strategy Paper, 11/28/1978 - 11/28/1978 ARC Identifier 145866 Textual Records from the President (1977-1981: Carter). Office of the Special Assistant to the President for Health Issues. (1977 - 1981), Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA. Item from Collection JC-1032: Records of the Office of Peter Bourne, Special Assistant to the President for Health Issues, 1976–1979.

make government work for the people. While images of the candidate glad-handing eager crowds filled the screen, a voiceover proclaimed that voters were beginning to recognize him as “a man who will change the way this country is run, a competent man who can make our government open and efficient.” In the aftermath of Watergate and President Ford’s subsequent pardoning of Nixon, Carter’s winning slogan was “A leader, for a change.”²²⁵

From the vantage point of the mid-1980s, neoliberals still claimed Carter as one of their own. Rather than a last gasp of liberalism, Randall Rothenberg proposed, “it can be argued that the Jimmy Carter elected in 1976 represented the first halting steps towards a post-New Deal liberalism, and that his defeat of Gerald Ford that year was occasioned by the electorate’s innate awareness and approval of this shift.”²²⁶ James Fallows, a Carter speech writer and journalist closely associated with neoliberalism and Charles Peters’ *Washington Monthly*, concurred. Looking back on Carter’s presidency and his legacy in 1979, Fallows reflected on the 1976 campaign. Using language strikingly reminiscent of the way Tim Wirth or Gary Hart might have described themselves at the time, Fallows recalled:

I felt that [Carter], alone among the candidates, might look past the tired formulas of left and right and offer something new....I was led on myself by the hope that Carter might make sense of the swirl of liberal and conservative sentiment then muddying the political orthodoxy....I told my friends that summer that Carter had at least the same potential as Franklin Roosevelt to leave the government forever changed by his presence.²²⁷

²²⁵ Jimmy Carter television campaign commercials, 1976, viewed at The Livingroom Candidate, Museum of the Moving Image.

<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1976>

²²⁶ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 34.

²²⁷ James Fallows, “The Passionless Presidency: The trouble with Jimmy Carter’s Administration, *The Atlantic Monthly* (May, 1979).

Carter's failure, then, was not that he embraced liberalism too strongly but rather that he failed to live up to his promise of unity, progress, and transparency.

Many neoliberals attributed Carter's political demise to the unwillingness of the Democratic Party to embrace the new, reformist direction that they believed Carter espoused. Reflecting back on Carter's presidency in 1982, Bruce Babbitt, Arizona's neoliberal Democratic governor, hailed Carter as a man ahead of his times who "recognized, as a candidate, out on the horizon, many of the issues we're talking about." Carter's problem, Babbitt suggested, was being "a little too early" and finding himself at the mercy of a party leadership unprepared to hear his message of reform. This, then, a cautionary tale to Democrats about the perils of ignoring the popular mood and neoliberalism's growing appeal.²²⁸

By the mid-1980s, Democrats had adopted a fuller embrace of the kind of neoliberal politics that the party had once resisted. To see the rhetorical and ideological distance that the Democratic Party had traveled, one need only look at Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns. Often dubbed the New Democrats' "main nemesis," he was branded by reporters as a "classic liberal in the tradition of the New Deal and Great Society" and "a repository for the philosophies of America's old-fashioned liberal-left." Jackson's rhetoric and platform stood in stark contrast to the new mainstream of Democratic politics.²²⁹ Whereas politicians in the new style talked in soaring terms of "equality" and "justice" even as they avoided any mention of race, Jackson was more direct. Others focused their foreign

²²⁸ Rothenberg, *The Neoliberals*, 34–8.

²²⁹ Joyce Pumick and Michael Oreskes, "Jesse Jackson Aims for the Mainstream," *New York Times*, November 29, 1987.

policy discussion on military spending, developments in Central America, and nuclear disarmament. While Jackson's platform included policy prescriptions for these issues and more, his overall assessment was a more fundamental critique. Campaigning for president in Philadelphia in January 1984, he exhorted the crowd: "When you buy Honda and Toyota, that's foreign policy. Russian Vodka, that's foreign policy. Mercedes Benz, that's foreign policy," and, to his largely black audience, he concluded, "Matter of fact, we came here on a foreign policy!"²³⁰ Capitalism, Jackson argued, was America's foreign policy, perhaps especially so in the emerging new age of market orthodoxy. Juxtaposed with Hart's and other neoliberals' lofty pronouncements about equality of opportunity for all, Jackson's old-style civil rights rhetoric and tone, his explicit evocations of blacks' historical exclusion from economic and political participation, and his matter-of-fact focus on discrimination and equality of outcomes rather than of opportunity, were jarring.

Jackson also offered a trenchant diagnosis of the demographic, economic, and political transitions transforming the United States that differed markedly from the increasingly neoliberal perspectives of his Democratic contemporaries. "You must never forget," he warned, "that about the time we [African Americans] began to take over the cities, Nixon shifted the power to the suburbs. Now Reagan has shifted it to the states. So you have mayors who have more and more responsibility and less and less power. We got more and more votes and fewer and fewer services."²³¹ Jackson focused attention squarely on the structural and institutional underpinnings of

²³⁰ Jesse Jackson, "David and Goliath" speech, (Delivered at Tendley Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA, January 16, 1984), accessed June 19, 2013 <http://lybio.net/jesse-jackson-tendley-baptist/speeches/>

²³¹ Ibid.

racial and class disfranchisement in the United States, emphasizing the cruel irony of rising black political power within cities at precisely the moment when cities began losing power to rapidly growing, often heavily segregated suburbs. This emphasis on structural forces, which then demanded structural (i.e. political and governmental) solutions, ran counter to the mainstream individualist, race-neutral political discourse of the era. Indeed, Jackson was alone among the candidates in his framing of the issues. Jackson's campaigns, with their unabashed embrace of traditional liberal programs and direct appeals to minorities and the poor offered a stark counterpoint to the new neoliberal commonsense that had taken hold within the Democratic Party.

Jackson's emphasis on structural inequalities, while increasingly alienated from Democratic rhetoric and policymaking, resonated with other critiques of neoliberalism on the left. Speaking at a conference on neoliberalism convened in 1983 by Charles Peters, Victor Navasky, editor of *The Nation*, observed that unions always topped neoliberals' list of special interests and that their much-vaunted "realism" seemed to rely on the erosion of labor strength. Rather than achieve the neoliberals' lofty goal of rising above special interests in the name of pragmatic public policy, Navasky argued that the effect of neoliberalism in practice was simply to elevate the interests of the non-minority and non-poor by coding these citizens (essentially, wealthy and middle-class whites) as part of the national interest while dismissing all others in their claims for political representation.²³²

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²³² Peters, "A Neoliberal's Manifesto," 179–80.

The early 1970s was a moment of rupture in America, providing an entry point for a new political-economic and cultural common sense to take hold. The 1973 OPEC embargo, which quintupled the price of oil in the United States, leading to dramatic increases in the price of consumer goods, and the emergence of a new, service- and finance-oriented global economic regime confounded conventional Keynesian theories of economic management, demanding a systematic reevaluation of old assumptions about the role and responsibilities of government. At the same time, significant breaches of the public's faith in governing institutions and officials created an opening for a reevaluation of the relationship between government and citizens, leading to the emergence of a new popular political culture. In this, the Watergate scandal was the most far-reaching—but hardly the only—precipitating event.²³³

Yet the evidence from Colorado and metropolitan Denver makes clear that a more thoroughgoing rupture was underway and that the seeds of discontent came not just from major national upheavals but from the experience of politics at the state and local levels too. Local battles were the breeding ground for this cultural and political transformation. The standard narrative of late twentieth-century liberal decline showcases George McGovern's 1972 defeat in the presidential election as a watershed moment for the breakdown of the Democratic Party, presenting it as part of a binary in which liberalism and its institutional embodiment in the Democrats must give way entirely in order for the New Right to rise. At the same

²³³ Stein, *Pivotal Decade*; Mudge, "What's Left of Leftism?" and "What is Neoliberalism?"

time, discussions of public alienation and their growing distrust of government tend to focus on the national level, emphasizing Watergate and the Vietnam War.

Moreover, the politicians who proposed solutions to those challenges—who sought to overcome the rupture in the American political system and to rebuild the public's faith in politics as an enterprise that could represent their interests—drew many of their ideas, their tactics, and their rhetoric from local struggles. In Denver, as the preceding chapters have shown, contests within the rapidly expanding metropolis over the allocation of scarce resources like water, parks, roads, and schools and over who should be empowered to make those decisions dominated the political landscape. Leaders like Lamm and Wirth especially, but also Hart, were themselves shaped by these conflicts as much as were their constituents. They were then able to capitalize upon them to win elective office and begin the process of reforming existing political and bureaucratic institutions along new lines. It was in this crucible that the newly neoliberal quality-of-life political culture was formed.

Indeed, it was this cultural transformation that enabled the neoliberal political project to take hold across the political spectrum. Popular demands for government transparency and accountability, the populist insistence on approachable and responsive elected representatives (and the elevation of this characteristic above almost all programmatic considerations in making electoral choices), a growing evocation of consumerist and individualized quality of life as a primary right all constituted a new cultural orientation towards society, government, and citizenship that provided fertile soil for the new politics, particularly (and, perhaps, ironically) within the Democratic Party. Where their

Republican opponents often sounded condescending or elitist, tone deaf to the public demand for populist rhetoric, reform Democrats like Dick Lamm, Tim Wirth, and Gary Hart eagerly embraced the new ethos. Indeed, they owed their electoral success largely to their ability to frame the new market-oriented politics as being in the interest of ordinary Americans—Tim Wirth’s “people like you.” By contrast, the Republicans, despite Richard Nixon’s winning “silent majority” formulation of several years earlier, struggled in the 1970s to overcome their longstanding reputation as the party of business and elites.

Neoliberalism took various forms and was constantly contested, even or perhaps especially by those who were among its chief promulgators. Political neoliberalism could have many expressions. Certainly, the rhetoric and programs of Democrats like Lamm, Wirth, and Hart differed markedly from those of Ronald Reagan, who is often viewed as the quintessential American neoliberal. Yet what anchored these various articulations across the political spectrum was a shared belief in the market as an autonomous, pre-political force that was both efficient and fair in the task of allocating resources across society. Effectively, the fundamental question for governance in this period shifted from a Keynesian “how much state?” to the new “how much market?,” and it became increasingly difficult to articulate alternatives to the rising market logic while still maintaining mainstream political legitimacy.²³⁴

²³⁴ Mudge, “What is Neo-Liberalism?”

Chapter 4: “How Do You Spell Relief?”: The Tax Revolt in Colorado, 1966–1992

The rising influence of neoliberal reform Democrats and their success with the electorate was one marker of the shift in public attitudes towards government from the 1970s onwards. Another was the emergence of a widespread anti-tax politics across the country. Taking root in places as disparate as California, Michigan, Florida, Massachusetts, and Colorado, it was another potent manifestation of the public’s growing frustration with how government operated and their ability, as citizens, to influence it. In the fall of 1978, Coloradans joined millions of Americans across ten states who went to the polls to consider adding tax and spending limitations to their state constitutions. Earlier that year, Californians had garnered dramatic attention with their passage of Proposition 13, a constitutional amendment that rolled back property tax rates to just one percent of the assessed property value and severely curtailed the ability of local governments to raise them. Throughout the country, people, pundits, and politicians alike spoke of a tax revolt. The amendment on Colorado’s ballot that year, known colloquially as Burch-Orr after State Treasurer Palmer Burch and co-author Jack Orr, a local rancher, took a somewhat different approach, demanding a hard limit on government spending rather than a tax cap. But unlike voters in California, the Coloradans who voted on November 7 defeated Burch-Orr by a resounding 59% to 41%.²³⁵

²³⁵ “Ballot History,” Colorado Legislative Council, accessed May 12, 2015

This was not the start of Coloradans' uneasy relationship with the tax revolt, nor would it be the end. Over a twenty-five year period, beginning in 1966, a variety of anti-tax groups succeeded in putting on the state ballot a total of eight proposed constitutional amendments designed to limit taxing, spending, or both. Each went down in defeat, until the final attempt in 1992, when the Tax Payer Bill of Rights (TABOR) passed with just over fifty percent of the vote.

The nation-wide tax revolt that began in the late 1970s is generally understood as a rightwing popular movement, proof of the nation's rightward shift, and of the triumph of conservative ideology. In this mode, the 1992 passage of TABOR, then the most restrictive state limit on taxation and spending anywhere in the United States, is often presented as evidence of Colorado's abiding conservatism. And indeed, conservative activists were instrumental to its passage. Douglas Bruce, the Colorado Springs real estate investor who devised the amendment and was its chief advocate, was active in the Colorado Republican Party and national conservative politics. Before coming to Colorado in 1986, Bruce worked as a prosecutor and real estate investor in Los Angeles, where he became interested in anti-tax initiatives through Proposition 13. The Colorado Union of Taxpayers (CUT), sponsor of the earlier Colorado amendments and vocal supporter of TABOR, was the local subsidiary of the National Union of Taxpayers, where now-legendary anti-tax

crusader and conservative political activist Grover Norquist got his start as executive director.²³⁶

Yet it would be a mistake to characterize TABOR, and anti-tax politics more broadly, as evidence of a rising popular conservatism or the increasing dominance of small government ideology. Indeed, throughout the 1970s and '80s and into the 1990s, Americans consistently supported a wide array of tax-supported government programs and services, even calling for the expansion of some. Rather, the history of tax- and spending-limiting constitutional amendments in places like Colorado reveals that this was yet another manifestation of the emerging politics of quality of life and government transparency at work. What changed over the quarter century between the first attempt to pass an anti-tax initiative in Colorado in 1966 and the eventual passage of TABOR in 1992 was not Coloradans' fundamental political outlook or their beliefs about government's proper role but rather their feelings of frustration and sense that government had become both unfair and unaccountable.

The "tax revolt" of 1978 was not a conservative groundswell but rather an outpouring of frustration with how government was operating in particular local places at the time, which conservatives and Republicans turned to their advantage. Where anti-tax measures passed, it was because citizens felt that the tax system was unfair and that government had become unresponsive to their needs. Where the measures failed, as in Colorado, voters either did not share that sense or were

²³⁶ "About Grover," Americans for Tax Reform, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.atr.org/about-grover>.

unpersuaded that the anti-tax amendments on their ballots would provide meaningful improvement.

The situations in Colorado and California in 1978 were markedly different, which accounts for the differing outcomes of their anti-tax measures that year. The slogan “Don’t Californicate Colorado,” coined during the Denver Olympics controversy to connote the Los Angeles pollution, sprawl, and gridlock that Coloradans hoped to avoid, might equally have applied to taxation and state finance. In the late 1970s, California was notorious for its soaring property tax rates, spurred by inflation, which rose by as much as four or five percent annually, often resulting in as much as a tripling of an individual homeowner’s bill from year to year. On the eve of Proposition 13’s passage, Californians paid property taxes fifty-one percent above the national average. At the same time, the state came to rely increasingly on income taxes as a source of revenue. A combination of rising tax rates and inflation produced nearly twenty percent annual increases in per capita state income tax collections, even as Californians experienced a decline in their real wages, as measured in constant dollars adjusted for inflation. As citizens struggled to meet the demands of this heavily unbalanced tax system, the California state government amassed a five billion dollar surplus, none of which the legislature chose to return to the people or otherwise use for tax relief. For all of these reasons, Californians were

understandably distraught and, by 1978, increasingly pessimistic about the willingness of their elected representatives to offer any sort of relief.²³⁷

Although Colorado's property tax rates were quite high during much of the 1960s and '70s, accounting for nearly a third of total state revenue, Coloradans' overall tax burden remained at or below the national average. Both the state and local governments' heavy reliance on property taxes led many to argue that Colorado's tax structure was regressive and that it tended to replicate socioeconomic inequality across the metropolitan landscape, as lower-income communities generated lower tax revenue and, consequently, had substantially less money to direct towards public services like education. This situation was exacerbated during the 1960s and early 1970s by inflation in property assessments, which both increased annual local property tax revenues and triggered a provision in state law to lower state aid for education correspondingly. Decreasing reliance on state funds for education resulted in a substantial budget surplus, but rather than keep the excess, as California lawmakers at done, Colorado's legislature took steps to correct the imbalance, passing bills in 1973 and again in 1978 that drastically reduced property taxes. As a result, by the time the Burch-Orr tax limiting amendment came to a vote in November 1978, Colorado ranked twenty-third nationally in property taxes (California, by contrast, ranked fourth).

These were not the only ways in which Colorado lawmakers took action to address what state residents considered to be significant inequities in the tax

²³⁷ Daniel A. Smith, *Tax Crusaders and the Politics of Direct Democracy*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 58-63; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon*, 316-27; and Robert O. Self, "Prelude to the Tax Revolt: The Politics of the 'Tax Dollar' in Postwar California," 144-60.

structure. In addition to these property tax reforms, in 1977 the Colorado legislature imposed a five-year, across-the-board cap, limiting the annual increase on all state spending to seven percent. This was an extension of an earlier spending cap, which itself had been an expansion of a previous, more narrowly focused spending limit. Moreover, in the face of rapid inflation that artificially catapulted taxpayers nationwide into higher tax brackets, Colorado lawmakers were national pioneers in indexing the state income tax to inflation, thereby stabilizing rates for most state residents. As a result, Coloradans were not plagued by the threat of losing their homes or being forced into higher tax brackets when inflation artificially made their incomes appear larger. In short, Coloradans did not share the experience of Californians and voters in the other twelve states that adopted tax or spending limitations in 1978, who faced rising taxes and unresponsive state legislatures. Rather, they could point to effective and well-publicized efforts on the part of state government to take citizen concerns about inflation and taxation seriously and to implement appropriately corrective policy.²³⁸

Colorado's 1978 tax-limitation measure, Burch-Orr, failed despite a decade of very active debate about taxation and attempts to pass tax-limiting constitutional amendments in the state. A closer look at this history helps to illuminate the danger of classifying anti-tax politics as necessarily conservative. From the mid-1960s through the late-1970s, the Colorado conversation about taxes spanned the political spectrum. For their part, miners and ranchers in Western Colorado wanted lower

²³⁸ D. Smith, *Tax Crusaders*, 132–3. In the lead-up to the 1978 election, numerous articles in both the *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* catalogued the state's tax reform efforts across the preceding decade. For a good encapsulation of Colorado tax policy to that date, see "The Post's Opinion: Colorado and the Tax Revolt," *Denver Post*, June 13, 1978.

taxes on business property. This was reflected in a 1966 ballot initiative written by the Colorado Association of Commerce & Industry—formerly the Colorado Chamber of Commerce—in conjunction with the Cattlemen’s Association of Colorado, the Cattle Feeder’s Association, and the Colorado Woolgrowers. This first attempt at constitutional tax limitation would have severely restricted tax rates on both personal and business property and would have exempted all personal property and business from taxation. The measure failed at the polls by a wide margin, 68% to 32%, losing decisively in the metropolitan Front Range, where a majority of Coloradans lived.²³⁹

Also in 1966, the non-partisan, but generally progressive, League of Women Voters of Colorado embarked on a study titled “Are Property Taxes Obsolete?” Recognizing that property taxes had become crucial to the provision of public services at the local level, the League planned to focus on them as a mechanism for funding schools.²⁴⁰ Over the next five years, the League’s volunteer researchers came to see Colorado’s existing tax structure as severely regressive, relying too heavily on local sales and property taxes for the majority of school funding. At a time when the League was deeply involved in efforts to combat municipal fragmentation across metropolitan Denver, this growing reliance of local school districts on property taxes only served to compound the deleterious effects of residential segregation and class stratification throughout the region. The League’s 1971 platform addressed both the

²³⁹ “Ballot History,” Colorado Legislative Council, accessed May 12, 2015 <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/>; “issues,” in *Colorado (Woman) Voter* (June 1966), League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, Box 12, Folder 22, University of Colorado Archives.

²⁴⁰ “Are Property Taxes Obsolete?” in *Colorado (Woman) Voter*, March 1966, League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, Box 12, Folder 22, University of Colorado Archives.

problems of excessive property tax and school inequality, demanding “a state finance system that would provide sufficient funds for public schools to equalize educational opportunity and to relieve property taxes...[and] measures to make taxes and services throughout the state more nearly equal.”²⁴¹ Responding to these same concerns, the progressive citizen advocacy group Common Cause proposed an initiative for the 1972 ballot that would have written severe limits on local property tax rates into the state constitution, with the intent of forcing Colorado to shift public school funding back to the state in an effort to equalize per-pupil funding across all school districts.

Despite their shared concerns about the way that reliance on property taxes to fund schools exacerbated the effects of residential segregation and perpetuated inequality, the League nevertheless came out against both the Common Cause amendment and another tax-limiting amendment would have capped property taxes at 1.5 percent of assessed value. This, too, was in keeping with the League’s action program for the seventies, which rejected efforts to correct inequities in the tax code by imposing constitutional restrictions. In a policy statement issued shortly before election day in 1972, the League advised, “We support a state finance system that would provide sufficient funds for public schools, to equalize educational opportunity and relieve the property tax, but we are convinced that neither of these two amendments provide the appropriate vehicle for change.” Instead, they argued, the constitution should be left flexible and unburdened by “unnecessarily restrictive

²⁴¹ “State Program 1971–1973,” in *Colorado (Woman) Voter*, League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, Box 12, Folder 26, University of Colorado Archives.

language” to allow state lawmakers to respond quickly to changing circumstances and emergencies.²⁴²

Coloradans rejected the Common Cause proposition by a margin of 79% to 21%, and the proposed 1.5% cap by a margin of 76% to 24%.²⁴³ Most Coloradans apparently either were satisfied with their elected representatives’ ongoing efforts to limit the tax burden or were persuaded that, whatever inequities and inefficiencies persisted in the tax code, these amendments did not offer effective solutions. For residents of metropolitan Denver, the ongoing and increasingly tense controversies over municipal annexation and school desegregation also may have played a role, making suburbanites, in particular, less receptive to calls for equity as they sought to police the boundaries of their communities and regional responsibilities. In 1976, yet another tax-limiting amendment, which would have required voter approval of all new or increased taxes, met a similar fate, rejected by voters 75% to 25%.²⁴⁴

Even as Coloradans repeatedly rejected the imposition of tax limits in their state constitution, the issue of taxation remained politically potent. In addition to the property tax reform passed by state lawmakers in 1973, successful candidates

²⁴² “State Program 1971–1973,” in *Colorado (Woman) Voter*, League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, Box 12, Folder 26. “League of Women Voters of Colorado Opposes Property Tax Amendments No. 7 (Dean) and 12 (Common Cause),” September 1972 and Ruth Wells to Local League Presidents and Fiscal Education Chairmen, “Coalition to oppose amendments #7 and 12,” League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, Box 20, Folder 3.

²⁴³ “Ballot History,” Colorado Legislative Council, accessed May 12, 2015

Common Cause amendment:

<http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/26c510a890dc50d587256ffd006a4948?OpenDocument>

1.5% cap:

<http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/a4afccc7b151ae7687256ffd006a4943?OpenDocument>

²⁴⁴ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council, accessed April 8, 2015,

<http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/>

for office made promises for tax reform central to their campaigns. Republicans and conservatives were not the only ones focusing on taxes. As shown in chapter three, this included the array of reform Democrats who won election in 1974. Dick Lamm and Tim Wirth, in particular, were masters at capturing the public mood with their denunciation of current tax policy and promises of reform. Unlike their conservative counterparts, however, Democrats like Lamm and Wirth couched their promises in the language of populism rather than that of liberty and freedom from government tyranny. One full-page Wirth campaign advertisement that appeared in local newspapers during the 1974 campaign asked voters, “Do you think your taxes are fair? Tim Wirth doesn’t. And he’s ready to start doing something about them.” Aiming squarely for the middle class, the ad continued, “He proposes real tax reform...The kind that won’t allow millionaires to pay no tax at all, while the rest of us pay more than our share. It’s time for tax breaks—for the people who really need them. People like you.”²⁴⁵

In these Colorado Democrats’ populist framing, three issues received particular attention: taxes on natural resources, corporate taxes, and the sales tax on food. Lamm hammered these themes throughout his 1974 campaign for governor, arguing that Colorado’s existing tax structure unfairly favored business at the expense of citizens. In position papers, radio ads, and on the stump, Lamm fumed, “Colorado citizens pay proportionally too much of our tax burden—and corporations pay too little. While retired people in my district are selling their homes because they can’t afford to pay their taxes, the chamber of commerce is bragging about our

²⁴⁵ “We need to do something about prices. About taxes. And about honesty in government now,” Box 1, Folder 3, Tim Wirth Records, History Colorado.

favorable tax climate.” If elected, he promised to work for legislation to correct what he dubbed an unjust tax structure. He further called for closing loopholes that protected extractive industries, such as mining, timber, and oil shale, from taxation, even as these businesses placed increasingly heavy demands on state resources and taxpayer-funded services. Along with Wirth and other Democratic candidates, Lamm vowed to end the three percent sales tax on food, a regressive tax seen by many as particularly egregious.²⁴⁶

Yet even with the popularity of these calls for tax fairness and reform—and the success of candidates who championed them—Coloradans themselves proved the ultimate obstacle to reform. Just as he had promised during the 1974 campaign, two years later Lamm pushed for a voter referendum on legislation to eliminate the sales tax on food, raise corporate income taxes, and impose severance taxes on natural resource extraction just as he had promised during the campaign. Voters rejected it by a twenty-two point margin, 61% to 39%.²⁴⁷

In addition to reform Democrats and Colorado’s traditional mining and ranching interests, conservative movement activists joined the tax-limiting fray. The Colorado Union of Taxpayers (they cleverly inverted the name of the national organization to produce the acronym CUT) was founded in 1976. Although affiliated with the National Taxpayers Union, based in Washington, D.C., and taking many of its cues from the parent organization, the Colorado affiliate was also, in important

²⁴⁶ “Tax Reform Position Paper,” Box 1, Folder State Rep Richard Lamm—Literature, Mass Correspondence, Election Information and Taxation radio ad scripts, Box 1, Folder Issues—DL, John Parr Papers, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

²⁴⁷ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council, accessed April 9, 2015, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/>

respects, a genuinely grassroots organization. Headquartered in the conservative Denver suburb of Lakewood, CUT was fueled by the work of a small band of dedicated members throughout the Front Range.²⁴⁸

By 1978, the spirit of the tax revolt was in the air across the nation. Wary elected officials scrambled to respond. At the National Governor's Association meeting that year in Boston, the main topic of conversation was the ten state ballots sporting "tax relief" measures and twenty-four additional states where activists or officials were working to introduce legislation or circulate petitions. Colorado's Governor Lamm, who had campaigned on a platform of government transparency and a promise to reform the state's tax code, attributed the tax-limiting atmosphere to citizens' desire to gain more direct control over government. When asked about the proposed Burch-Orr amendment on Colorado's ballot, he predicted, "If the constitutional amendment passes, it will not be because of a well-organized campaign supporting the amendment, but rather because of the mood of the public." Maine's Independent Governor James Longley concurred, opining that, "The tax revolt is very serious and is going to continue until government is responsive to the will of the people to limit spending and taxation."²⁴⁹

Yet for all the talk of tax revolt, the movement (if it could truly be called that) enjoyed surprisingly limited popular support. Despite this pervasive sense that voters were anti-tax and, increasingly, anti-government, voters in general weren't conservative ideologues and, indeed, conservative ideological affiliation was not on

²⁴⁸ Al Sampson to Hellen Rogers, February 21, 1977, League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, Box 29, Folder 1.

²⁴⁹ "Survey shows tax revolt has touched most states," *Associated Press*, August 27, 1978.

the rise during this period. Polling indicates that citizens continued to support a wide array of government services and programs. They also supported taxes in general to pay for these services but chafed when they believed that they were being asked to pay more than their fair share, that others were getting off too easy, or that government was being profligate with tax money.²⁵⁰

Those, like Palmer Burch and CUT, who were conservative anti-tax ideologues, understood the fine line they would have to walk to garner public support for their amendment. Throughout the 1978 campaign, co-sponsor Jack Orr insisted that the amendment was a moderate one, designed simply “to bring growth in spending within an acceptable range without disrupting the necessary functions of government.”²⁵¹ Appealing to the same themes that worked for winning reform Democrats in the 1974 elections, CUT secretary Lillian Bickel argued that existing statutory limits on government spending were not working and that, if passed, Amendment 2 would free Colorado government from the excessive power of special interests.²⁵² Burch, meanwhile, took pains to distance himself and the amendment from the comparison to California’s Proposition 13. “The sponsors of Amendment No. 2 are not anti-education, or anti-government,” he hurried to reassure voters, “We are not like Jarvis who said ‘them dirty bureaucrats,’ you haven’t heard us say a thing

²⁵⁰ Arthur B. Sanders, *Victory: How a Progressive Democratic Party Can Win and Govern*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 60-67.

²⁵¹ Louise Cook, “Tax Revolt Talk Turns to Action,” *Associated Press*, July 11, 1978.

²⁵² “Debate over spending limits heats,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 17, 1978.

like that. I believe in representative government, I spent 28 years of my life [in state government]. I am not anti-government.”²⁵³

Throughout the campaign, appeals to ideological conservatism including references to the threat to liberty or the importance of small government were conspicuously absent. Indeed, during this period, even clearly conservative anti-tax organizations like CUT sought to portray themselves in a more neutral light, downplaying their ideological allegiances and their connection to national conservative activists and, instead, presented themselves as middle-of-the-road protectors of the public against the encroachment of special interests. “It is emphasized that we are neither an extremist nor a right wing group,” CUT assured voters in a membership recruitment letter widely distributed in advance of the election. “Instead we are individuals who believe that government can be made more efficient and more effective if given a proper push by concerned citizens.”²⁵⁴ This rhetorical gambit, while sharply at odds with the group’s privately expressed anti-government attitudes, had obvious appeal in a state that had just elected an array of reform Democrats precisely on their anti-special interest merits.

The failure of the Burch-Orr amendment in Colorado and the simultaneous success of similar tax and spending limits in other states in 1978 was, then, not ideological but rather circumstantial. Over the ensuing decade, Americans generally, Coloradans among them, continued to espouse broadly liberal attitudes towards

²⁵³ Chicano Education Project, “Un Nuevo Dia para un nuevo día en la educacion: a closer look at Amendment 2,” Fall 1978 (special edition), Box 29, Folder 3, League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, University of Colorado Archives.

²⁵⁴ “Dear Taxpayer” letter from the Colorado Union of Taxpayers, c. 1978, Box 29, Folder 1, League of Women Voters of Colorado Records, University of Colorado Archives.

government programs and services. Even at the height of Ronald Reagan's popularity, when he won reelection in 1984 by a landslide over former Democratic Vice President Walter Mondale, the majority of Americans continued to profess economic views that were explicitly at odds with the conservative Republicans' political economic philosophy and policy prescriptions.²⁵⁵

If, in fact, the story of anti-tax politics were one of steadily increasing conservatism among the electorate, we would expect to see the issue persist on the public's political agenda and for anti-tax measures to receive increasing levels of support over time. In Colorado, this is not what happened. For almost a decade after the Burch-Orr amendment's failure in 1978, tax limitation remained off the agenda in the Rocky Mountain State. The next attempted ballot initiative—Amendment 4—came in 1986. The brainchild of John and Diane Cox, western slope farmers concerned with rising property taxes and the falling property value of their farm, Amendment 4 was largely supported by other western Colorado farmers in similar circumstances. To promote the initiative, the Coxes formed an organization called the Association of Colorado Taxpayers, which worked throughout the state to garner support.

It comes as no great surprise that Western Slope farmers led the anti-tax charge in the mid-1980s. Once the dominant economic and political interest in the state, by 1986 farmers, ranchers, miners, and others who made their living from the land were no longer Colorado's primary economic engine and had become

²⁵⁵ Sanders, Victory; Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

marginalized in state politics, supplanted by metro Denver, with its concentration of corporate headquarters, finance, and tourism. Although Colorado did experience an economic downturn during the 1980s, it still performed well ahead of the national average, with most of the economic deceleration concentrated in oil and agriculture.²⁵⁶ Front Range voters, less hard hit than their counterparts across the Continental Divide, were disinclined to alter their constitution, persuaded by opponents of the amendment who argued that it would make it more difficult for government to respond quickly to emergencies or changing circumstances. Despite its grassroots origins, therefore, popular interest in Amendment 4 was extremely limited and the measure was defeated 62% to 38%.²⁵⁷

For the next six years, anti-tax efforts in Colorado limped along, bolstered by the single-minded determination of activist Douglas Bruce. While the 1986 campaign, albeit limited, had been a genuine grassroots effort, Bruce's campaign for tax- and government-limiting amendments had more the quality of a personal crusade. Freshly arrived from California, Bruce threw himself into the Amendment 4 campaign, becoming the measure's Colorado Springs spokesman. As he tells it, when activists met after the election to discuss next steps, a schism emerged between those who wanted a stiff property tax cap similar to California's Proposition 13 and those, like Bruce, who preferred a broader tax relief measure. Ultimately,

²⁵⁶ Karen Lyons and Nicholas Johnson, "Education and Investment, not TABOR, Fueled Colorado's Economic Growth in the 1990s," (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2006) and Wilson D. Kendall, "A Brief Economic History of Colorado," (Denver: Center for Business and Economic Forecasting, 2002).

²⁵⁷ "Ballot History," Colorado Legislative Council, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/ce9ccd939097d9a487256ffd006a4974?OpenDocument>.

Bruce decided to forge ahead with his own tax- and spending-limit initiative in the 1988 election cycle.²⁵⁸

Bruce's 1988 measure, supported by his newly formed Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) Committee, was one of four anti-tax initiatives proposed for the Colorado ballot that year. All came from people who had been active in the 1986 campaign but who disagreed about the best path forward. One competing initiative came from the Coxes and their Association for Colorado Taxpayers. Another was proposed by a group of Freemont County residents on the western slope who championed a property tax cap similar to California's Proposition 13. Along similar lines, mine operator and oilman Joseph Dodge formed Citizens that Love Colorado and proposed another Proposition 13-like amendment. Although the existence of four initiatives in 1988 may seem to be an indication of the growing importance of anti-tax politics in Colorado, in fact, they were more a product of in-fighting among the small but dedicated group of activists who had been involved with the Coxes' 1986 Amendment 4 campaign.

Ultimately, only Bruce's TABOR initiative gathered enough signatures to appear on the November 1988 ballot, as Amendment 6. TABOR differed significantly from previous tax-limiting efforts in Colorado. Although TABOR included both a spending limit and tax cap, it went considerably further. Under TABOR, all new or increased taxes would require direct voter approval, except in narrowly defined cases of emergency; state income and property taxes would be significantly reduced; and total government spending would be tied to a ratio of inflation and population

²⁵⁸ D. Smith, *Tax Crusaders*, 139.

change. Although Bruce tried to present himself as moderate and TABOR as a modest change to current state policy, he frequently slipped into more radical rhetoric, denouncing Colorado taxes as “out of control” and proclaiming that TABOR was “leading a crusade for traditional American values—home ownership and the authority to decide how much government we are willing to pay for.”²⁵⁹

Opposition to Bruce’s initiative came from many quarters. Citizens for Representative Government, the political action committee formed by a combination of business associations, education groups, and government interests to oppose the Cox’s 1986 measure, redoubled their efforts in the fight against TABOR, challenging the validity of many of the signatures Bruce had gathered to get TABOR on the ballot. Unsurprisingly, Roy Romer, the Rocky Mountain State’s Democratic governor, also came out against the amendment, campaigning across the state for its defeat. Labor groups donated heavily to the anti-Amendment 6 campaign as did the Colorado Municipal Bond Dealers’ Association. Meanwhile, the non-partisan Colorado Public Expenditure Council, a publicly funded entity charged with studying various economic issues in Colorado and the potential economic impact of prospective legislation, opined that, “adoption of a far-reaching constitutional amendment, whose effects are unknown and subject to years of litigation, will not serve the best interests of Colorado as it works toward economic recovery.”²⁶⁰

Among the measure’s more surprising opponents were the Colorado Association of Commerce and Industry, the state’s leading business association,

²⁵⁹ D. Smith, *Tax Crusaders*, 140.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

which dubbed TABOR “a draconian disaster”; Republican state senate president and long-time anti-tax advocate Ted Strickland; Bill Armstrong, Colorado’s famously conservative U.S. senator; and three former Colorado governors. Even Joseph Dodge, author of one of the other 1988 tax limitation initiatives, came out against TABOR. Despite Bruce’s confident assurances that his measure would sail easily to victory, sending a clear message to Colorado’s governor and state legislature that “the voice of the people...cannot be ignored,” voters rejected it by a margin of : 58% to 42%.²⁶¹

Declaring that special interests had “stolen” the 1988 election, Bruce immediately began work on a new version of TABOR for the 1990 ballot. This version, known as Amendment 1, was even more convoluted. Once again, a laundry list of Colorado lawmakers, Democrats and Republicans alike, lined up to oppose the amendment, even going to far as to discuss putting forward their own alternative amendment in order to draw attention away from Bruce. Governor Romer, now in a battle for reelection, again toured the state urging voters to reject TABOR once and for all. Described by one political observer as a “toned-down and polished-up successor to Amendment 6,” at 1,875 words, Amendment 1 was still remarkably lengthy and complex, prompting *Denver Post* columnist Fred Brown to lament, “For sheer complexity, [TABOR] deserves a prize.” For his part, Bruce insisted publicly

²⁶¹ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/345ed57dc206494587256ffd006a497a?OpenDocument>. D. Smith, *Tax Crusaders*, 142-3.

that TABOR was merely a “moderate, responsible curb on the tax-and-spend politics of the recent past.”²⁶²

Once again, the amendment failed, although this time by a much narrower margin. Indeed, as election night came to a close, Amendment 1 was still too close to call. Ultimately, it lost by just 20,000 votes, 51% to 49%.²⁶³ Growing popular frustration with lawmakers, both locally and nationally, while helping to close the gap, was still insufficient to get the measure passed.

In both 1988 and 1990, proponents of TABOR accused their foes of using political chicanery to keep the amendment from passing. In 1988 Citizens for Representative Government petitioned to have many of the signatures gathered in support of the initiative invalidated, prompting Colorado Secretary of State Natalie Meyer, a Republican, to throw out nearly a third of them. TABOR’s proponents cried foul, insisting that the signatures were all legitimate and that this had been an illegal political maneuver on the part of Democrats and others to block the amendment. In 1990, Meyer again was in the public eye for attempting to keep that year’s incarnation of TABOR off the ballot. Her effort, while unsuccessful, publicized Bruce’s cause, casting him and his amendment in a sympathetic light as victims of government run amok. Rather than fighting Meyer by gathering new signatures, as they had done previously, supporters of the amendment took her to court and won.²⁶⁴

²⁶² Fred Brown, “The Grace of a Simple Idea,” *Denver Post*, October 3, 1990; D. Smith, *Tax Crusaders*, 143.

²⁶³ “Ballot History,” Colorado Legislative Council, accessed May 12, 2015 [http://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_Voter_Approval_for_Revenue_Increases_Initiative_1_\(1990\)](http://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_Voter_Approval_for_Revenue_Increases_Initiative_1_(1990)).

²⁶⁴ Al Knight, “Tax limitation: The hot topic of 1990,” *Denver Post*, October 21, 1990.

Although Bruce tried again in 1990 to present himself as moderate and his amendment as a reasonable, middle of the road solution to high taxes, he continually returned to an amped-up, ideological rightwing language of small government and freedom that did not sit well with voters. “Every year, government gets bigger,” Bruce told the *Denver Post* after TABOR qualified for the ballot, “It frankly corrodes the human spirit to have people think government will take care of everything. I’m opposed to the trend toward state socialism.”²⁶⁵ TABOR also suffered from the support of the Republican candidate for governor against incumbent Roy Romer, John Andrews.. While Romer successfully presented himself as a moderate, centrist Democrat working to bring economic prosperity to Colorado, the Republican challenger campaigned as a staunch conservative. Andrews made support for TABOR a centerpiece of his campaign, warning that, if the measure failed, Colorado would become “Taxarado,” and women would be forced out of the home and into jobs because of high taxes, derisively dubbing Romer “Governor Tax.”²⁶⁶ He also accused Romer of being beholden to “radical feminists” and “militant homosexuals.”²⁶⁷ Such views were far to the right of most Coloradans and did nothing to help TABOR at the polls. Indeed, Andrews’ conservatism was sufficiently controversial that many Colorado Republicans gave money to Romer in an effort to keep the GOP candidate out of the governor’s mansion. Many of these Republican donors, both individuals

²⁶⁵ Jennifer Gavin, “Forces set to battle tax limitations—Constitutional Amendment 1 will be on the November ballot,” *Denver Post*, June 4, 1990.

²⁶⁶ Romer says Andrews’ remark insults women. “Challenger: High taxes forcing mothers to work and Andrews: High taxes force women to work—Romer rips opponent’s statement,” *The Gazette (Colorado Springs, CO)*, September 14, 1990

²⁶⁷ “Don’t label me, Romer responds to foe Andrews,” *The Gazette (Colorado Springs, CO)*, September 16, 1990

and businesses, specifically cited Anderson's support for TABOR as the primary reason for their displeasure.²⁶⁸

By 1992, things had changed. While in 1978 and again in 1986 and 1988, Coloradans paid relatively low taxes and could be fairly confident in their elected officials' willingness and ability to correct inequities in the tax structure, by 1992, that was no longer the case. Even so, it would be a mistake to view TABOR as proof of either a tax revolt or some groundswell of popular conservatism. Rather, a combination of factors conspired to facilitate TABOR's passage. A series of high-profile incidents led to widespread popular frustration with elected officials around the question of taxes, while several years of economic slowdown led many Coloradans to worry about their financial futures (although, ironically, at the time of the election the economy was on the cusp of a major boom). But these were far from the deciding factors. In fact, in the years preceding TABOR's passage, Coloradans approved tax increases to fund an array of major public projects, indicating not a rise in anti-tax sentiment but, rather, their continued willingness to use taxation as a tool for achieving specific public goods. Where TABOR and taxes had dominated the 1988 and 1990 elections, ensuring that voters were generally well-informed about the substance of the proposed amendments, in 1992 other issues, namely a proposed sales tax increase to fund public schools, the anti-gay constitutional amendment also on the ballot that year, and the presidential election, took center stage, distracting the attention of both traditional opponents of anti-tax measures and the public at large. Amidst this state of popular frustration and general

²⁶⁸ Jennifer Gavin, "GOP contributors treating Romer as one of their own," *The Denver Post*, September 23, 1990.

preoccupation with other issues, TABOR's dogged author and chief advocate Douglas Bruce was able to dominate that year's conversation about taxes and government limitation in ways that had not previously been possible. On election night, TABOR passed with nearly 54% of the vote.²⁶⁹

What accounted for TABOR's eventual success? In the years leading up to TABOR's passage in 1992, Colorado politics was dominated, particularly in the Front Range, by a series of tax proposals. The success of measures to raise funds for local schools and libraries, a new convention center, airport, and baseball stadium all demonstrate the continued willingness of voters to support taxation when they deemed it beneficial. As Floyd Ciruli, Colorado's leading public opinion pollster, put it, voters "still pick and choose" among individual tax proposals, "They haven't reached a point where they say no to everything yet."²⁷⁰ Rather than an outright rebellion against rising taxes or an embrace of small government conservatism, Coloradans, particularly in the populous metropolitan Front Range, evinced a strong embrace of taxation as a valuable tool for accomplishing desired public ends.

Plans to build a new airport and to attract a new major league baseball team to Denver developed more or less simultaneously. Both projects required popular approval of new taxes across the six-county Denver metropolitan area to fund construction. The challenge, then, was not simply to persuade Coloradans that these initiatives were worthy of their tax dollars but also to achieve a high level of inter-county cooperation across a fragmented and often contentious metropolitan region.

²⁶⁹ Jeffery A. Roberts, "Tax limit hailed and decried," *Denver Post*, November 5, 1992

²⁷⁰ Fred Brown, "DPS bond issue seems likely to pass - Pollster: Voters haven't hit saturation point for taxes," *The Denver Post*, April 15, 1990.

In 1990 and 1991, voters approved both projects, and the attendant new taxes. Support for the projects was widespread, cutting across partisan lines. Indeed, Douglas and Arapahoe counties, generally regarded as conservative, passed the ballpark initiative with over 60% approval. It also passed decisively in Jefferson County.

The airport measure, meanwhile, won approval 63% to 37% across metropolitan Denver, with Front Range residents eager to take advantage of the influx of new jobs, business, and tourism that the project promised. Upon receiving the election results from across the six-county stadium district, Denver Mayor Federico Peña proclaimed, “We are in a time that is unparalleled in the history of our city.” Pointing not only to the stadium vote but also to recent voter approval of the airport and a new convention center, along with bond initiatives to improve city schools, streets, and libraries, Peña asserted, “People realize we need to make investments in our city, even in difficult economic times.”²⁷¹

Although the airport and stadium initiatives passed overwhelmingly across the metro area, the stadium tax actually was rejected in both Denver and Adams Counties. Just as the success of these initiatives evidences the pragmatic approach that most residents of metro Denver took to taxation, the stadium issue’s failure in these two of the six metropolitan counties demonstrates the importance of particularist local concerns, not ideology, in determining voters attitudes towards particular tax proposals. Adams County’s rejection of the stadium tax was, above all,

²⁷¹ Paul Hutchinson, “Vote on baseball stadium: ‘Safe!’—Conditional sales tax wins narrow approval,” *Denver Post*, August 15, 1990.

the product of years of animosity between the suburban county and the core city. Simmering resentments towards Denver fueled the opposition, much of it rooted in old tensions stemming from what many Adams County residents saw as a land grab by Denver of land needed to connect the city to the airport. Many in Adams County feared Denver's annexation of a narrow connecting corridor would open the county to the threat of possible future Denver annexations. Adams County voters ultimately came around and supported the annexation by a significant margin, but only after extensive campaigning on the part of Governor Romer and numerous Front Range business leaders.

Despite the county's eventual support for the airport initiative, tensions remained. In an article published immediately following the stadium vote, tellingly titled "Adams Co. still touchy about Denver," the *Denver Post* sighed, "Tuesday's vote shows they managed to fuel the lingering resentment toward Denver that exists among a fair number of Adams County folks who still think the big city gets all the goodies at their expense. Like the new airport that may bring jobs to Adams County, but still is located in Denver." Denver naysayers in Adams, the *Post* suggested, never passed up an opportunity to "drive a new wedge between Denver and its suburban neighbor," a view that seemed born out by former Adams County Chairman Hal Shroyer. Upon learning that Adams residents had voted down the stadium initiative, he crowed that the negative stadium vote proved that, were the airport election held again, it would fail. Far from a rejection of taxes at large or an

ideological commitment to limited government, Adams residents' rejection of the stadium appears to have been driven primarily by inter-county rivalry.²⁷²

Within Denver itself, opposition to the stadium was also widespread—almost two-to-one—even as Denverites supported a host of other spending proposals, including three billion dollars for transportation and ninety million dollars for library improvements. Political observers agreed that the key to passing new taxes was persuading voters that the funds were directly linked to a tangible benefit. Moreover, frustrations with local government did not necessarily translate into anti-tax attitudes. As pollster Paul Talmey, who conducted pre-election surveys for the *Denver Post* and News 4 just ahead of the city bond election, explained it, the thinking among Denverites went something like this: “I may not trust city council, but if I earmark the money for an improvement on my street, I don’t have to worry about city council messing it up. I may not think much of the school board, but I still believe in education, and I want the school in my neighborhood to be fixed up.” Pollster Floyd Ceruli concurred: “There is no taxpayers’ revolt at this point...While it may be tightening up, you can still see people willing to make these investments.”²⁷³

Two referenda on school bonds, one in ostensibly conservative Jefferson County and the other in heavily Democratic Denver, further indicated Coloradans’ willingness to selectively embrace taxes when they saw a clear benefit. Jefferson, located to the west of Denver and home to the state’s largest school district, had long been known as one of the more conservative suburban counties within the metro

²⁷² Carl Miller, “Adams Co. still touchy about Denver,” *Denver Post*, August 18, 1990.

²⁷³ Fred Brown, “DPS bond issue seems likely to pass,” *Denver Post*, April 15, 1990.

area. Indeed, it was home to many of CUT's executive board members and the organization itself was headquartered there. What is more, the preceding decades had provided residents with numerous reasons to resist taxation: fear of annexation into Denver, opposition to school desegregation and "forced busing," resentment over the proposed use of local land and tax dollars for Olympic events, and more. For both ideological and circumstantial reasons, then, Jefferson County seemed fertile soil for anti-tax sentiment. Yet, following extensive public debate, residents rejected the ideological anti-tax argument decisively in a special election with heavy turn out in October 1992, passing a bond initiative to give \$325 million to the county's public school system in the upcoming fiscal year for use in building maintenance, new school construction, and other infrastructure needs.²⁷⁴

Rather than embrace arguments about the importance of small government or taxes as a threat to liberty, instead, the majority of Jefferson County residents expressed views in keeping with the pragmatic quality-of-life politics that had long-since become the norm. As parents, their children's education was of paramount importance, and many expressed the view that higher taxes were acceptable—even desirable—in the name of better schools. One parent who voted for the bond initiative explained, "We have school-age children who deserve a good education." Echoing this sentiment, another told reporters outside a polling place in southern Jefferson County, where school enrollments were rising particularly fast, "It's just

²⁷⁴ Berny Morson, "JeffCo Approves one Bond, Rejects Second \$325 million issue wins in heavy turnout, reversing 7 years of defeats, but extra \$117 million loses," *Rocky Mountain News*, October 7, 1992.

really important for kids.”²⁷⁵ When Ray Walton, Jefferson County resident and CUT leader addressed a public meeting, suggesting that cutting taxes would actually increase the funds available for public education—essentially a “trickle down” argument—he drew hisses from the crowd of over 200 assembled parents. Voters were equally unpersuaded by the arguments of Colorado Christian Coalition president and CUT activist Katherine Anderson’s argument that taxes are a “moral issue” because higher taxes force mothers into the workforce and cause families to reduce their donations to churches. Denverites themselves displayed similarly selective attitudes towards taxation, approving a substantial school bond initiative even as they resisted the stadium tax.

These attitudes were very much in keeping with prevailing popular political sentiments. In the 1992 presidential election, a decisive majority of Coloradans supported either Perot or Clinton over George Bush, drawn to the candidates’ centrist social values and seemingly pragmatic, rather than ideological, approach to taxes. Residents of heavily Republican Jefferson County were representative, supporting Bush and Clinton in almost equal measure, with the combined Clinton and Perot vote outpacing Bush almost two to one.²⁷⁶ In short, voter responses to the array of proposed tax increases across metropolitan Denver indicate that quality of life politics, not rising anti-tax, small-government conservatism, dominated local politics and voter attitudes at the time of TABOR’s passage.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ “Abstract of Votes Cast 1992,” Colorado Secretary of State, (copy on file with the office).

In addition to the major tax initiatives in 1990 and 1991 for the airport and the stadium, what ultimately tipped the scales in TABOR's favor in 1992 may simply have been distraction. In previous election years, TABOR dominated the campaign and was the subject of intense debate among candidates, substantial activity among Colorado political organizations, and news coverage in both of the state's major daily papers. Consequently, voters arrived at the polls comparatively well versed in the details of the initiative. Bruce, as the measure's sponsor and chief advocate, also drew considerable attention, much of it negative. By contrast, in 1992, TABOR received little attention and this, ironically, seems to have contributed to its success.

Several factors contributed to TABOR's comparatively low profile. Most obviously, the 1992 presidential election dominated the public's attention. The three-way contest between Republican incumbent George H. W. Bush, Democratic newcomer Bill Clinton, and independent Ross Perot was among the most dramatic races in recent memory, and Colorado was a key battleground state. Additionally, while in past years TABOR and other tax-limiting initiatives had occupied spots on relatively uncrowded ballots, where they were often the most high profile items and, thus, the most intensively discussed and dissected, in 1992, TABOR was one of thirteen ballot initiatives. And two of the others took the limelight. Most significant was Amendment 2, a proposed constitutional amendment, discussed at length in Chapter 5, which was a first-in-the-nation attempt to add provisions regarding sexual orientation to a state constitution. Amendment 2 dominated the campaign, bringing intense national scrutiny to the Rocky Mountain State and drawing the

lion's share of local news coverage as well as the political attention, energy, and financial resources of citizen groups, activists, and politicians who, in previous years, had dedicated themselves to defeating TABOR.

The other measure on the ballot in 1992 to garner considerable attention was Amendment 6, an education proposal that, among other things, would have raised the state sales tax by one percent to increase funds for public schools. It was unpopular among voters, garnering just 46% percent of the vote.²⁷⁷ Arguments against the initiative ranged from fears that higher sales tax would deter Colorado tourism to concerns that the package of education reforms coupled to the tax hike was insufficiently robust. There was also the suggestion that the projected \$300 million school budget shortfall that had prompted the initiative had already been cut in half by a stronger-than-expected local economy, making the additional tax unnecessarily high.²⁷⁸

Governor Romer, who in past years had been among TABOR's most vocal opponents, focused most of his energy in 1992 on the campaigns for Amendment 6 and against Amendment 2. TABOR became something of an afterthought. Bruce himself recognized the importance of these distractions and the general lack of attention directed at his amendment, commenting wryly, "The boring old tax limitation which usually loses isn't getting the attention it usually does," going on to gloat that the governor's focus on other issues was a boon for his effort. "He's

²⁷⁷ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/84ae53d838f1799f87256ffd006a498a?OpenDocument>

²⁷⁸ "Vote 'No' on Amendment 6," *Rocky Mountain News*, October 16, 1992.

basically just given me the election,” Bruce crowed, “I’m thinking about calling a press conference and appointing him my honorary chairman.”²⁷⁹

To the extent that TABOR did garner press coverage, the coverage tended to focus not on the substance of the proposal—which, at close to 1,800 words, remained complex, with consequences that were difficult to predict—but rather on an ongoing standoff between Bruce’s TABOR Committee and Secretary of State Natalie Meyer, who once again sought to keep the amendment off the ballot by invalidating signatures. Rather than use the mandated correction period to gather more signatures, as they had done in the past, in 1992 TABOR and its ally CUT took Meyer to court. This kept the story in the news while simultaneously casting TABOR sympathetically as an underdog fighting against allegedly corrupt officials.

TABOR’s very complexity, which in past years had often been used against it, may also have contributed to its passage in 1992. With attention elsewhere, details of the proposal, which opponents described as “too lengthy and ambiguous,” full of “ponderous complexities,” with “kind of a devilish, counterproductive side to it,” received little scrutiny. Rather than send Bruce’s intended message that government tyranny in Colorado must end, it seems that many who voted for TABOR did so as a way of re-enforcing the very different message to lawmakers so clearly evidenced by their selective support for any number of tax increases over the preceding years: Coloradans *liked* having a direct say on individual tax proposals. The language that appeared on the ballot seemed aligned with this message:

²⁷⁹ John Racine, “From Bears to Bonds, Colorado Voters’ Ballot Likely to Have it All,” *The Bond Buyer*, August 3, 1992, and John Racine, “Colo Lawmakers Pay Schools Bill; Governor Urges Sales Tax Rise for Future,” *The Bond Buyer*, March 4, 1992.

Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado Constitution to require voter approval for certain state and local government tax revenue increases and debt; to restrict property, income, and other taxes; to limit the rate of increase in state and local government spending; to allow additional initiative and referendum elections; and to provide for the mailing of information to registered voters?²⁸⁰

Only the full text of the amendment, which a voter would have had to make a special effort to locate, read, and understand, suggested the far more radical nature of Bruce's project.

In all events, Coloradans awoke on November 4, 1992 to discover with surprise that TABOR had passed by a clear, if slim, margin. On the morning of the vote, Bruce himself had predicted the amendment's failure.²⁸¹ In the days after the election, political observers, journalists, and Coloradans all seemed startled to discover that TABOR had, in fact, passed. Governor Romer offered the opinion that the state's struggling economy had caused Coloradans to tighten their belts, although he predicted that it was "inevitable" that the pendulum would swing back once people got a taste of living under TABOR and the incessant special elections he predicted it would require.²⁸² Others suggested that Coloradans had simply become fed up with "endless" new taxes, although one pollster pointed out that that was unlikely, citing recent voter approval for large projects such as the stadium and airport. Observers across the political spectrum, Democrats and Republicans alike, school superintendents and county commissioners, along with representatives of the

²⁸⁰ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/256803c2c1a0c85c87256ffd006a4985?OpenDocument>

²⁸¹ Rich Laden, "Voters say yes to tax limits Amendment 1 curbs spending," *The Colorado Springs Gazette*, November 4, 1992.

²⁸² Ibid.

state's major unions and business associations, agreed that the consequences for Colorado would be dire.

Chapter 5:

“No Discrimination & No Special Rights”: The Politics of Moderation and the 1992 Election

Even as Coloradans contemplated TABOR, two other issues dominated the 1992 election cycle. Paramount, of course, was the three-way presidential contest between Republican incumbent George Bush, Democratic newcomer Bill Clinton, and independent insurgent Ross Perot. Almost as important in Colorado, however, was Amendment 2. Officially titled “Colorado No Protected Status for Sexual Orientation Amendment,” Amendment 2 garnered massive media and activist attention, both within Colorado and beyond, as the nation’s first constitutional amendment dealing with homosexuality. Approved by voters by a margin of 53% TO 47%, the amendment made it illegal for any government entity in Colorado—city, county, or state—to offer protections from discrimination to gays and lesbians.²⁸³ In the wake of its passage, activists launched a nationwide boycott of the Rocky Mountain State, dubbing Colorado “The Hate State.” Gay rights advocates in Denver filed suit in federal district court and the amendment was immediately enjoined, pending a full appeals process. The case, *Romer v. Evans*, went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where it ultimately became the basis of the court’s first

²⁸³ Ballot History, Colorado Legislative Council,
<http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/f92307749e2caea387256ffd006a4986?OpenDocument>

pro-gay rights ruling, holding that Amendment 2 denied gays and lesbians the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment .²⁸⁴

The 1992 election is often identified as a watershed moment in the Christian right's rise to political power. At the same time that Coloradans passed Amendment 2, the GOP made social conservatism the centerpiece of its campaign strategy. Standing before the crowds gathered in Houston's Astrodome for the 1992 Republican National Convention, conservative-Christian presidential candidate Pat Buchanan proclaimed to a prime time audience that, "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America." The crowd went wild. The new GOP platform sounded the same theme, emphasizing "family values" as central to the Republican agenda for the nineties.

But the issues surrounding both the 1992 presidential election and Amendment 2 were far murkier than simply the triumph of cultural conservatism, as was the very notion of the culture war itself. Even as Coloradans voted to enact both TABOR and Amendment 2, leading many observers to view Colorado as part of a conservative vanguard, voters in the Rocky Mountain State decisively rejected George Bush and the GOP's unabashedly conservative "family values" platform. Bill Clinton became the first Democrat to carry Colorado since Johnson won the state in 1964. Voters in the Rocky Mountain State decisively rejected George Bush and the GOP's conservative family values platform. With 39% of the vote, Bill Clinton became the first Democrat to carry Colorado since Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Clinton

²⁸⁴ *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620 (1996).

got 39% of the vote. Ross Perot got another 23%, for a total of 62% to Bush's 35%.²⁸⁵ Significantly, Perot was socially moderate. For example in his campaign book *United We Stand: How We Can Take Back Our Country*, he wrote about his pro-choice stance on abortion and other issues that put him at odds with the GOP.²⁸⁶ Clinton, meanwhile, campaigned on an explicitly moderate and "pragmatic" fiscal platform that, in fact, had much in common with Perot's, suggesting that the nearly two-thirds of voters who supported them had more in common with each other than either group had with Bush voters.²⁸⁷ While most commentators have understood the election of a self-styled New Democrat and passage of an anti-gay constitutional amendment in the same election as paradoxical, they were, in fact, both extensions of the new political culture that had been percolating among the electorate since the late 1960s.

An in-depth examination of Amendment 2, and the history of gay rights politics in Colorado more broadly, raises several questions: What can be learned from the make up of the coalitions for and against Amendment 2? How prevalent were conservative, Christian Right ideas among the voting public, and were voters responsive to these arguments? What does the fight over Amendment 2 reveal about broader debates—within Colorado and the nation—over questions of political power, local control, individual freedom, and government transparency? Ultimately, the Amendment 2 saga reveals the failure of arguments explicitly against homosexuality to move voters. At the ostensible height of family values fervor in the United States,

²⁸⁵ 1992 Abstract Book, Colorado Secretary of State, (copy on file with author).

²⁸⁶ Ross Perot, *United We Stand: How We Can Take Back Our Country* (Hyperion 1992), pp. 93–94.

²⁸⁷ Clinton and Gore, *Putting People First*.

family values arguments in Colorado were remarkably unsuccessful at attracting votes. Instead, the amendment's success relied on a series of racialized arguments about privilege and economic access. The answers to these questions reveal the predominance of market-oriented and quality of life ideas—not a burgeoning cultural conservatism—in shaping public responses to both these constitutional amendments and the presidential race.

* * *

Amendment 2 was the culmination of a decades-long debate within Colorado over the standing of gays and lesbians: were they, in fact, a minority and, as such, deserving of laws protecting them from discrimination or were they merely a “special interest group” seeking “special privileges”? Was the whole matter of sexual orientation an appropriate arena for state action of any kind?

In 1973, the Boulder city council passed Colorado's first local ordinance banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The measure was written at the behest of local gay advocacy groups by Penfield Tate, Boulder's first black city council member who, shortly thereafter, was elected mayor. The ordinance was a broad anti-discrimination measure that included sexual orientation in a list of protected categories. The backlash was immediate, sparking an effort to persuade Boulder's city council to remove the new sexual orientation provision from the civil rights ordinance. Two weeks before the council vote, four hundred people crowded the Boulder municipal building for a public hearing on the issue, filling every available inch of floor space in the council chambers and spilling over into the lobby,

where they watched the three-hour proceedings via closed circuit television. The forty-four speakers for and against reflected a range of opinion. Some, like Hilma Skinner, a leader of the repeal effort, opposed the inclusion of sexual orientation on religious and moral grounds. By keeping sexual orientation in the ordinance, she warned, Boulder would be transformed into a “sex deviate mecca that will become as corrupt and vile as Sodom and Gomorrah and Pompeii.” The city’s new name, she predicted, would be “Lesbian Homoville.” Others quoted the Bible and pledged to go to jail before they would compromise their faith by hiring gays or lesbians.²⁸⁸

Moral and religious arguments, however, were in the distinct minority. Instead, most of the arguments revolved around the needs of local business and the status of homosexuals. Foreshadowing what would become central themes in the pro-Amendment 2 campaign two decades later, the Boulder Chamber of Commerce issued a statement in advance of the hearing distancing themselves from religious arguments but nevertheless stating their opposition to the ordinance. “[W]e do not wish to become involved in a discussion of the moral aspects of the issue,” the Chamber’s board of directors protested, “and we base our opposition solely on the infringement of the rights of any employer to select those who work for him according to his own standards and judgments.” They went on to add, “We believe that any employer has the right to hire a homosexual if he is willing to do so, but we do not feel that he should be denied the right not to hire such a person.”²⁸⁹ During the hearing, opposition leader and local businessman Frank Cernich sounded much

²⁸⁸ Barry Koltnow, “Show-Like Aura Pervades Sexual Preference Hearings,” *Daily Camera*, (Feb 20, 1974).

²⁸⁹ Barry Koltnow, “Sexual Preference Bill Sparks Controversy: The Opponents’ Position,” *Daily Camera*, (n.d. 1974).

the same note, insisting that the ordinance threatened the free association rights of employers. Taking a different tack that would also become familiar in the later campaign, other opponents argued that homosexuals did not meet the criteria of a real minority but, rather, were more analogous to people suffering from alcohol or drug problems.²⁹⁰

When the vote came on March 5, 1974, a majority of Boulder council members refused to remove sexual orientation from the civil rights ordinance. In response, opponents took the matter to the citizens of Boulder, who voted decisively to repeal the protections for gays and lesbians. That fall, they demanded a recall election and succeeded in removing both Councilman Tim Fuller, a supporter of the ordinance who was himself gay, and Tate.

Although the battle in Boulder ended in defeat both for the non-discrimination measure and its advocates, it was nevertheless on the leading edge of a national legal movement for gay rights. In 1972, just one year before Boulder city council initially passed its non-discrimination ordinance, East Lansing, Michigan, became the first city in the nation to enact civil rights protections for gays and lesbians, followed quickly by Ann Arbor and San Francisco. When debate over the Boulder ordinance began, the American Psychiatric Association had not yet removed homosexuality as a disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). That groundbreaking decision came even as Boulderites were preparing to vote on the repeal. In the years immediately following the showdown in Boulder, only one

²⁹⁰ Barry Koltnow, "Show-Like Aura Pervades Sexual Preference Hearings," *Daily Camera*, (Feb 20, 1974).

other Colorado municipality took up the question of gay rights. In 1977, as Anita Bryant waged her Save Our Children campaign to repeal Dade County, Florida's non-discrimination law, citizens of Aspen quietly enacted an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public services and public accommodation on the basis of, among other things, sexual orientation.²⁹¹

The Aspen ordinance, which passed by a decisive majority, was among the most far-reaching in the nation. For the next decade, it remained the only gay rights ordinance in Colorado. But then, in the late 1980s, gay rights activists launched a new round of efforts to pass local anti-discrimination ordinances. First Boulder voters passed a law in 1987 adding sexual orientation back into the city's civil rights ordinance. By the time of that campaign, the terms of debate, along with the political climate, had shifted. Against the backdrop of the emerging AIDS crisis, the prominence of homosexuality as a topic of conversation—and the sense of urgency that permeated those discussions—had grown. Over and over, Boulder gay rights activists hammered home the importance of nondiscrimination laws in the fight against the disease. Under the headline “Discrimination Spreads A.I.D.S.,” the Equality Protection Coalition, which spearheaded the initiative campaign, argued that those at risk for AIDS would be unlikely to get tested or to participate in prevention programs if they feared that coming forward would expose them to

²⁹¹ Robert O. Self, *All the in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 243. “No protected status based on sexual orientation, review and comment,” Colorado Legislative Council and the Office of Legislative Legal Services, August 9, 1991, Box 5, Folder “Legislative Process—1992,” Evans v. Romer Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library. “Not in Colorado!”, EPOColorado, Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. “If you want to help stamp out A.I.D.S. and prevent the spread of this killer disease,” the advertisement suggested, “You must ensure lesbian/gay rights.” A vote for the ordinance, they argued, was a vote for life.²⁹²

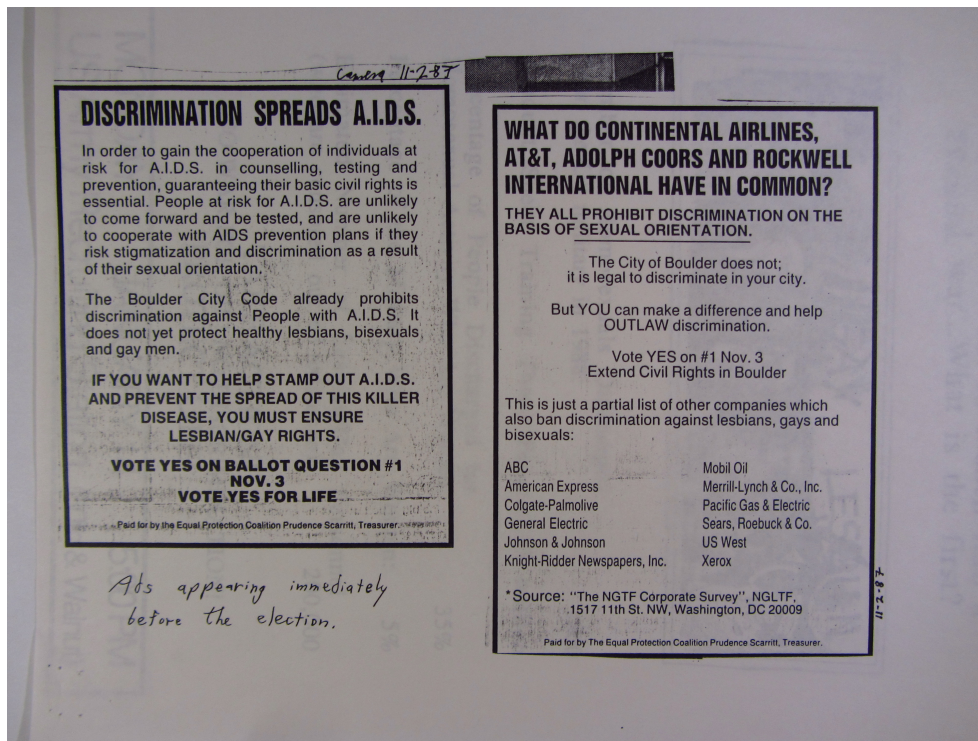


Figure 9. Equality Protection Coalition Campaign Ads, 1987.

Other differences between the 1987 Boulder campaign and earlier conflicts pointed towards a cultural shift on the issue of homosexuality. Where the 1974 campaign had prominently featured local small businessmen and the Chamber of Commerce arguing against protections for gays and lesbians, by 1987 the business community had switched sides. Proponents of expanding the anti-discrimination law

²⁹² “Discrimination spreads AIDS,” Equal Protection Coalition, November 2, 1987, Box 6, Folder 20, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

could argue that banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was essential for the future of Boulder's economy and for continuing to attract businesses to the area, highlighting the fact that many large corporations had personnel policies banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. "What do Continental Airlines, AT&T, Adolph Coors and Rockwell International have in common?" one newspaper advertisement asked. The answer, "They all prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation." Such policies were, they argued, good for business. As Boulder's Equal Protection Coalition explained

Employees who don't have to waste time hiding their personal lives from their employers have more energy to put into doing their jobs. That helps everyone. If Boulder wants to maintain and attract businesses on the cutting edge, those that are leaders in the field of ideas, Boulder must accept all people. Ending discrimination is good for Boulder business.²⁹³

Where the earlier campaign portrayed Boulder as a leader in pioneering anti-discrimination, by 1987 proponents of the new ordinance could warn that over fifty U.S. cities already had such laws on the books and that, unless the ordinance passed, Boulder would soon fall behind.

Three years later, in 1990 and 1991, similar arguments emerged in the battle over Denver's non-discrimination ordinance. With the support of over two dozen community organizations including church groups, professional associations, major corporations, black and Hispanic community organizations, civic associations, and the Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce, the Equal Protection Ordinance Coalition (EPOC) quietly worked to persuade Denver officials that a new, stronger

²⁹³ "On Nov. 3 Vote 'YES' on #1," Equal Protection Coalition, Box 6, Folder 20, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

civil rights law that included protections for gays and lesbians was needed. These efforts bore fruit when, in 1990, the Denver city council adopted a measure known as the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, which added several new categories, including sexual orientation, to the city's list of protected classes.²⁹⁴ As had happened before in Boulder and elsewhere, opponents, themselves mostly not Denver residents, launched an effort to remove sexual orientation from the new law by bringing the matter to a popular vote in a city-wide referendum, known as Initiative #1. Citizens for Sensible Rights (CSR), as they called themselves, argued that the public should decide such an important change to the city's civil rights. Ultimately, however, CSR failed to persuade a majority of Denver voters that protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination in housing and employment constituted a credible threat to Denver citizens, losing 55% to 45%.²⁹⁵

Although Initiative #1 failed by a wide margin, the campaign surrounding it is worth examining as a prelude to the Amendment 2 battle the following year. For both opponents and supporters of the anti-discrimination ordinance, the rhetoric and strategies used, along with the organizational structure of their campaigns, bore important similarities to the subsequent campaign. In the wake of the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Ordinance's passage, conservative activists from across the Front Range converged on Denver to push for repeal. Although CSR described itself as a "grassroots coalition of Denver residents" that had "risen up to oppose this law," the truth was somewhat different. In fact, as EPOC and their allies

²⁹⁴ "Shall an Ordinance of the City and County of Denver be Adopted to Permit Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation—Could this really happen???" Box 6, Folder 26, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

²⁹⁵ Steve Lipsher, "Election loss won't end battle over gay rights," *Denver Post*, May 23, 1991.

were quick to point out, CSR was a local subsidiary of the Traditional Values Coalition, an organization founded by Orange County, California fundamentalist and national family values crusader Lou Sheldon to lobby nationwide for what it called traditional Christian values. Moreover, because many of the “local” activists working for repeal were not residents of Denver, they were themselves ineligible to vote in the popular referendum for which they worked.²⁹⁶ EPOC described the CSR operatives as carpetbaggers who had “singled out the gay and lesbian community as being unworthy of equal rights.” They characterized Initiative #1 as part of a national “Hate Campaign,” pushed by people that “don’t care about Denver or Colorado” but, rather, “seek to create a climate of fear where none exist.”²⁹⁷

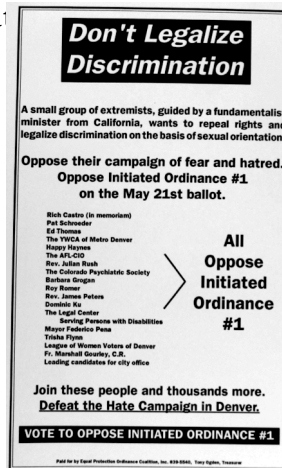


Figure 10. “Don’t Legalize Discrimination,” EPOC advertisement, 1991.

As they had in Boulder, Denver gay rights advocates argued that including sexual orientation among the city’s protected classes, in addition to being fair and

²⁹⁶ Citizens for Sensible Rights, “Action Alert,” Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

²⁹⁷ “Shall an Ordinance of the City and County of Denver be Adopted to Permit Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation—Could this really happen???” and EPOC letter to supporters, March 21, 1991, Box 6, Folder 26, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

right, also was good for business. In a letter to supporters on behalf of EPOC, Patricia Schroeder, Denver's Democratic Congresswoman and honorary EPOC co-chair, brought the two themes together. Highlighting the importance of non-discrimination to Denver's business climate, Schroeder exhorted voters to keep sexual orientation as part of the city's ordinance. "Denver's anti-discrimination ordinance is comprehensive for a reason," she argued, "Discrimination based on any of the characteristics listed in the ordinance is not only wrong, it is counter to a safe, productive, non-violent community and healthy business environment." Schroeder went on to underscore the threat that repeal posed to Denver's home rule and local control, noting that outsiders, namely suburbanites aided by Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition, led the Initiative #1 charge. Calling opponents of the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Ordinance "arch-conservatives," she warned, "They have money, and they have time."²⁹⁸

Indeed, Sheldon himself—who was often referred to as "Son of Falwell" in a nod to Christian Right political icon Jerry Falwell—participated directly, flying to Denver to host campaign meetings and strategy sessions. The centerpiece of his proposed strategy, which CSR adopted, was two pronged: attacking homosexuals as a special interest group rather than a "true minority" and warning of the threat that gays and lesbians posed both to families and public health. As CSR frequently put it in leaflets, advertisements, and other materials distributed throughout the campaign, "The U.S. Supreme Court has stated that homosexuality is a behavior, not a minority. Therefore, homosexuality is not deserving of special recognition and

²⁹⁸ Patricia Schroeder to Concerned Friends, April 15, 1991, Box 6, Folder 26, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

privileges. Homosexual behavior does not equate minority status.” The group’s tagline, “Equal rights for all, special rights for none,” neatly encapsulated this message.²⁹⁹

Sheldon and CSR made frequent direct appeals to Hispanic and, especially, black Denverites in an effort to “divide and conquer.” One EPOC activist who attended Sheldon’s pro-Initiative #1 strategy session reported that he recommended reaching out directly to these and other racial or ethnic minority groups in Denver. “You do everything within your power to show them what is happening to the hard-earned minority status that blacks and asians and hispanics have sought to have and rightly have,” [sic] the observer quoted Sheldon as saying, and tell them, “Now comes the aggressors (gays) who are trying to snatch and piggyback that civil right.”³⁰⁰ CSR took Sheldon’s message to heart, blanketing minority neighborhoods across Denver with leaflets. “All Americans are already guaranteed equal protection, human rights, under the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights,” CSR argued. Civil rights laws, then, were special, “powerful laws which are reserved for only oppressed groups who have suffered real discrimination because of racial or ethnic traits they CANNOT change.” By contrast, the leaflet argued, gays were not a true minority and “have NEVER known the discrimination of sharecropping, slavery, separate schools and ghettos which true minorities have endured, for which Civil Rights were made!” Rather, homosexuals were a powerful special interest group that had succeeded in duping Denver into providing legal protections to which they were not

²⁹⁹ Citizens for Sensible Rights, “Action Alert,” Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³⁰⁰ EPOC letter to committee members, April 27, 1991, Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

entitled.³⁰¹ The same leaflet warned, “Homosexual ‘Equal Protection’ really means ‘economic protection’ which divides, defiles, and destroys affirmative action opportunities and set asides for blacks, hispanics and other truly underprivileged minorities” [sic]. Warning that “Homosexuals demand abnormal sex should have the same privileges as skin color,” CSR predicted that including sexual orientation in the city’s anti-discrimination ordinance would have a direct, detrimental impact on black and Hispanic Denverites.³⁰²

But while much of the CSR literature employed these more secular-seeming formulations against including sexual orientation in the Denver ordinance, the group’s distaste for and moral objections to homosexuality, as well as the religious underpinnings of their stance, were also very much on display. In addition to emphasizing the difference between homosexuality and such “genuine bases of minority status” as race and gender, which they argued were “God given and unchangeable,” CSR warned that including gays and lesbians in the anti-discrimination ordinance was part of a far-reaching “homosexual agenda” that posed a dire threat to children, families, and public health.³⁰³ In pamphlets and advertisements, CSR consistently claimed that the equal rights ordinance was part of a broad effort by gays as an elite special interest group to “force their abnormal lifestyle on us” through manipulation and lies. The Comprehensive Anti-

³⁰¹ Citizens for Sensible Rights, “Return Sensible Rights to Denver, May 21,” Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³⁰² Citizens for Sensible Rights, “Return Sensible Rights to Denver, May 21,” Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³⁰³ Jim Lucero to Rev. Earl K. Hanna, May 2, 1991, Citizens for Sensible Rights, Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

Discrimination Ordinance itself was, as CSR described it, “a sex law giving special recognition and privileges to homosexuals” and was the product of years of secret negotiation between Denver City Council and the powerful homosexual lobby.

While most of CSR’s rhetoric emphasized secular arguments against providing legal protections for homosexuality, other CSR arguments in support of Initiative 1 made CSR’s ties to the Christian Right abundantly clear. Under the headline “Restore Sensible Rights to Denver,” for example, accompanied by the image of a bald eagle flying across the American flag, a CSR flyer exhorted citizens to “Make a stand for traditional family values, civil rights, and religious freedom.” After warning that the Denver anti-discrimination ordinance was a gateway to further licentiousness and the normalization of aberrant sexual behavior, CSR’s proposed solution began, “Pray God’s witness will be seen in the Church’s stand against sexual perversion.”³⁰⁴

The religious caste of CSR’s campaign materials and their alarmist, conspiratorial tone did not play well with Denver voters. On election day, Denverites defeated Initiative #1 by ten percentage points.³⁰⁵ By the following year’s Amendment 2 campaign, CSR had learned its lesson, eliminating almost all discussion of homosexuality itself as dangerous or morally objectionable and employing more measured tones in presenting the civil rights and economic arguments that formed the bulk of the proponents’ campaign.

³⁰⁴ Citizens for Sensible Rights, “Return Sensible Rights to Denver, May 21,” Box 6, Folder 24, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³⁰⁵ Steve Lipsher, “Election loss won’t end battle over gay rights,” *Denver Post*, May 23, 1991.

At around the same time that gay rights advocates succeeded in passing and then defending the Denver anti-discrimination ordinance, activists in Ft. Collins and Colorado Springs proposed local anti-discrimination ordinances, both of which failed.³⁰⁶ It was in this context of increasing discussion of homosexuality and the relationship between sexual orientation and citizenship that Amendment 2 emerged as a direct response to the Denver, Ft. Collins, and Colorado Springs ordinance campaigns. Until shortly before the election in November 1992, polls indicated that Amendment 2 would fail, yet voters ultimately passed it by nearly seven percentage points, 53.4% to 46.6%.³⁰⁷

* * *

Amendment 2 was the product of a Colorado Springs-based organization, Colorado for Family Values (CFV), that was offshoot of Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition. Additional support came from a host of national Christian Right organizations, many of them headquartered in Colorado Springs and represented on CFV's board. Over the preceding two years, Colorado Springs had become a magnet for Evangelical religious and political groups, earning the moniker "Evangelical Vatican" because of the density of Christian Right ministries and organizations headquartered there. Although the Springs, as the city was called, had always been fiscally conservative, social views in the sleepy town at the southern end of the

³⁰⁶ Colorado Legislative Council, "An Analysis of 1992 Ballot Proposals," (Denver, Colo. September 3, 1992), p. 10, accessed May 14, 2014

<http://cospl.coalliance.org/fedora/repository/co:2548/ga49369internet.pdf>

³⁰⁷ Colorado Legislative Council, "Ballot History," accessed May 14, 2015

<http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/835d2ada8de735e787256ffe0074333d/f92307749e2caea387256ffd006a4986?OpenDocument>

metropolitan Front Range were historically varied, what many long-time residents described as “live and let live.” During the 1980s, for example, Springs residents backed both arch-conservative Republican U.S. Senator Bill Armstrong and iconoclastic, pro-abortion rights Democratic Governor Dick Lamm.

By the early 1990s, however, reeling from a crash in the local real estate market, city fathers were eager to attract new business to the area. Adopting a “clean growth” strategy intended to align with the city’s reputation as a good place to do business and enjoy the outdoors, Springs business leaders, organized through the Economic Development Corporation, sought to lure national non-profits by offering a variety of incentives. A four-million dollar grant drew But in August 1991, just ahead of the Amendment 2 campaign, Focus on the Family, one of the leading national parachurch organizations involved in promoting the Christian Right’s political agenda, moved its national headquarters, and 400 employees, to the Springs.³⁰⁸ Other like-minded groups quickly followed.

CFV also drew support from a network of Christian Right groups around the country. In drafting Amendment 2, for example, CFV worked closely with the National Legal Foundation, of Virginia Beach, Virginia, an organization whose mission was “to prayerfully create and implement innovative strategies that, through decisive action, will cause America’s public policy and legal system to

³⁰⁸ Focus on the Family, “Historical Timeline,” “A look at the first 30 years of Focus on the Family,” accessed May 14, 2015.
http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/news_room/history.aspx

support and facilitate God's purpose for her."³⁰⁹ In short, the push for Amendment 2 not only drew support from, but was also a product of, an organized strategy on the part of national right-wing religious groups to shape local law and policy across the United States.³¹⁰

CFV and its allies were not the only ones to make Amendment 2 a national issue. Even as opponents attacked the pro-2 forces as out-of-towners bent on undermining local control, anti-2 activists were, themselves, enmeshed in a national network of gay rights organizations. Opponents drew legal help from what was then called the National Gay Task Force, later renamed the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and from Lambda Legal, another gay advocacy group, as well as from the ACLU. And the whole country, in a very real sense, was watching. Journalists from every major network, newspaper, and newsmagazine covered both the Amendment 2 campaign and the aftermath of the initiative's passage. As the first national effort to constitutionally limit gay rights (or, for that matter, to deal with sexual orientation in any way), Amendment 2 was among the most talked about issues of the 1992 election cycle. In the wake of the amendment's passage, gay rights activists launched a national boycott of Colorado, the impact of which was keenly felt throughout the Rocky Mountain State in terms of lost revenue from tourism, conferences, and more. While the Amendment 2 fight was, in one sense, an intensely local and particular political struggle, in another, it was a proxy war in a much

³⁰⁹ Mission Statement, National Legal Foundation, accessed on April 29, 2015, <http://www.nlf.net/About/mission.html>.

³¹⁰ Steve Campbell, "Clash of Values: Evangelist newcomers challenge Colorado Springs' live-and-let-live tradition," *Rocky Mountain News*, September 26, 1993.

larger, national struggle over the status of gay men and women and, more broadly, over the role of religion in American political life.

* * *

The coalition that emerged against the Amendment 2 is very revealing and suggests some new directions for thinking about the politics of homosexuality in the United States. In particular the role of the business community in backing the anti-amendment cause and the interracial, interethnic nature of the gay rights coalition merit further attention.

In contemporary discussion of homosexuality and gay rights politics, especially marriage equality, it seems to be taken as a given that African Americans and Latinos are disproportionately culturally disposed to oppose any expansion of rights or legal protections for gays and lesbians.³¹¹ For example, higher than average black turnout in the 2008 election is often cited as the reason for the success of California's Proposition 8, which banned same sex marriage in that state.³¹² Indeed, while Proposition 8 carried with 52% of the vote, exit polling showed that 70% of

³¹¹ See, for example, Jesse McKinley, "Same-Sex Marriage Is Tied to Obama Factor," *New York Times*, September 20, 2008, and Charles M. Blow, "Gay Marriage and a Moral Minority," *New York Times*, November 29, 2008.

³¹² See, for example, "Blacks, Hispanics nixed gay marriage," *Washington Times*, November 8, 2008 accessed on May 14, 2015

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/nov/08/blacks-hispanics-nixed-gay-marriage/?page=all>

Associated Press, "Black and Latino voters backed California marriage ban," *New York Daily News*, November 5, 2008 accessed on May 14, 2015

<http://www.nydailynews.com/latino/black-latino-voters-backed-california-marriage-ban-article-1.336361>

African Americans supported the measure.³¹³ And while 74% of Latino voters voted for Barack Obama, 53% supported Proposition 8.³¹⁴ By the same token, beginning in the 1960s, “organized labor, and the working class more generally, came to be associated with a conservative defense of the status quo and white male privilege.”³¹⁵ But the evidence from Colorado suggests a far more nuanced and rich history of collaboration, mutual support, and intersectionality.

Blacks, Hispanics, and organized labor were crucial allies for gays and lesbians in all of Colorado’s gay rights battles, beginning with Mayor Penfield Tate’s support of Boulder’s gay rights ordinance. Indeed, Tate’s support of the gay and lesbian community was directly responsible for his recall. During both the Denver ordinance campaign and the campaign to stop Amendment 2, Denver’s black and Hispanic leaders also overwhelmingly gave their support to the gay rights side, rejecting CFV’s argument that legal recognition of gay rights undermined the cause of equality for racial and ethnic minorities. The vote on the Denver ordinance was held on the same day as the first round of the Denver mayoral election, in which the top two candidates were black. That election became, in part, a contest over which of

³¹³ Randal C. Archibald and Abby Goodnough, “California Voters Ban Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2008. Chris Cillizza and Sean Sullivan, “How Proposition 8 passed in California—and why it wouldn’t today,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2013.

³¹⁴ Chris Cillizza and Sean Sullivan, “How Proposition 8 passed in California—and why it wouldn’t today,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2013.

³¹⁵ See Marion Crain and Ken Matheny, “Labor’s Identity Crisis,” 89 *Cal. L. Rev.* 1767, 1781–83 (footnotes omitted) (noting that, as “the scope of collective action covered by the [National Labor Relations Act] contracted,” and “Congress responded to ‘identity politics’ movements that emerged from the Left by enacting a panoply of antidiscrimination statutes that made individual action, rather than collective action, the weapon of choice to fight discrimination,” “[m]ovements dedicated to issues of social justice, including the civil rights movement, the gay and lesbian movement, and the movement for rights for the disabled, displaced labor unions as the relevant mobilization bases for the Left,” and “[s]ocial justice movements and organized labor became estranged from one another”).

them—District Attorney Norm Early or City Auditor Wellington Webb—was the greater and longer-term supporter of gay rights. Members of the Colorado Civil Rights Commission came out against Amendment 2, as did both the local and national NAACP. Jesse Jackson came to march in Denver against the amendment, telling voters, “Some people say unless we discriminate against gay and lesbian people, somehow our rights as African Americans or Latino Americans are lessened. That’s not true. It is immoral. Discrimination is wrong. Amendment #2 is wrong.” Coretta Scott King lent her endorsement and that of the King Center to the gay rights cause.

The leadership of Denver’s large Hispanic community was similarly to be found overwhelmingly on the pro-gay side. Under the banner “Libertad y justicia para todos—sin excepción” (Liberty and justice for all — without exception), a full-page advertisement against the amendment signed by every major Hispanic organization and political figure in Colorado urged citizens to vote no on two. “If the civil rights, privacy, privileges and protections of citizens can be restricted because of sexual orientation,” the Colorado Hispanic League asked, “what protects Hispanics from similar initiatives based on equally arbitrary reasons?”³¹⁶ Prominent Colorado Hispanic leaders were actively involved in EPOC, serving on the board and as co-chairs of the campaign. These included, among others, nationally prominent Democrat Polly Baca, sitting Denver Mayor Federico Pena, and, until his death

³¹⁶ “Amendment #2—Enmienda #2—is not about special rights. It’s about discrimination,” Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

shortly before the election, legendary Colorado civil rights activist Rick Castro.³¹⁷

For their part, too, Colorado unions also rallied to the gay rights cause, signing on to the EPOC campaign and proclaiming forcefully to their own rank and file, “Nobody should be fired just because they’re black or white or brown or gray...Or gay.”³¹⁸

These alliances, which were so important to the Denver ordinance and Amendment 2 fights, were the product of years of collaborative organizing on the parts of blacks, gays, and Hispanics as well as organized labor. Since the mid-seventies, they had been united in a local and national boycott of the Golden, Colorado-based Coors Brewing Company in an effort to force the brewery, known for its support of conservative political causes, to put an end to a long history of discrimination and unfair labor practices. By the early 1990s, Coors had long-since adopted company-wide practices banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in an effort to separate gays and lesbians from their minority allies. But the Coors family’s continued support for anti-gay political causes prompted many in the gay community to continue shunning the brewer. The boycott experience helped to solidify relationships among gays, blacks, Hispanics, and organized labor that proved vital to the campaign against Amendment 2, as local and national unions, minority rights organizations and leaders lent their support to the gay rights cause

³¹⁷ Polly Baca, Statement to Colorado Institute for Hispanic Education and Economic Development, April 14, 1992, Box 7, Folder 6, Equality Colorado Records; “There’s no place for bigotry in Denver,” Box 7, Folder 13, Equality Colorado Records; “Don’t Legalize Discrimination” and “Racism. Anti-Semitism. Homophobia,” Box 7, Folder 16, Equality Colorado Records;

“Amendment #2—Enmienda #2—is not about special rights. It’s about discrimination,” Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³¹⁸ “Nobody should be fired just because they’re black or white or brown or gray...Or gay,” published in *Colorado Labor Advocate*, Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

and were, in fact, among the most active participants in anti-Amendment 2 activism.³¹⁹ This history of intersectional alliances among gays and lesbians, blacks, Hispanics, and labor defies conventional understandings of the relationships among these groups, revealing them, at least in some important cases, to have been valuable political partners rather than competitors or antagonists.

Yet even as such alliances suggested the possibility of a more radical, intersectional gay and lesbian politics, the business community's embrace of gay rights pulled in other directions. Just as in the 1987 Boulder ordinance drive and the subsequent Denver struggle, many of the state's most influential businesses and business groups made the strategic choice to array themselves on the pro-gay side.

CFV routinely portrayed Amendment 2 as an asset to Colorado businesses, targeting them directly throughout the campaign. Their fundamental argument was that, for business owners already overburdened by state rules and regulations, "gay rights' adds another substantial layer of liability and responsibility in favor of a group that already enjoys substantial income and professional privileges!" Among the "burdens" CFV warned that business owners would face if gay rights were codified in Colorado were being forced to build separate bathrooms for gay and lesbian employees, losing the ability to pursue harassment claims against them, and

³¹⁹ "Colorado could wake up one day and be *surprised*," Box 7, Folder 1; "Voting No on Constitutional Amendment #2," Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

being forced to hire applicants on the basis of their professed sexual orientation without being able to prove whether the individual in question were truly gay.³²⁰

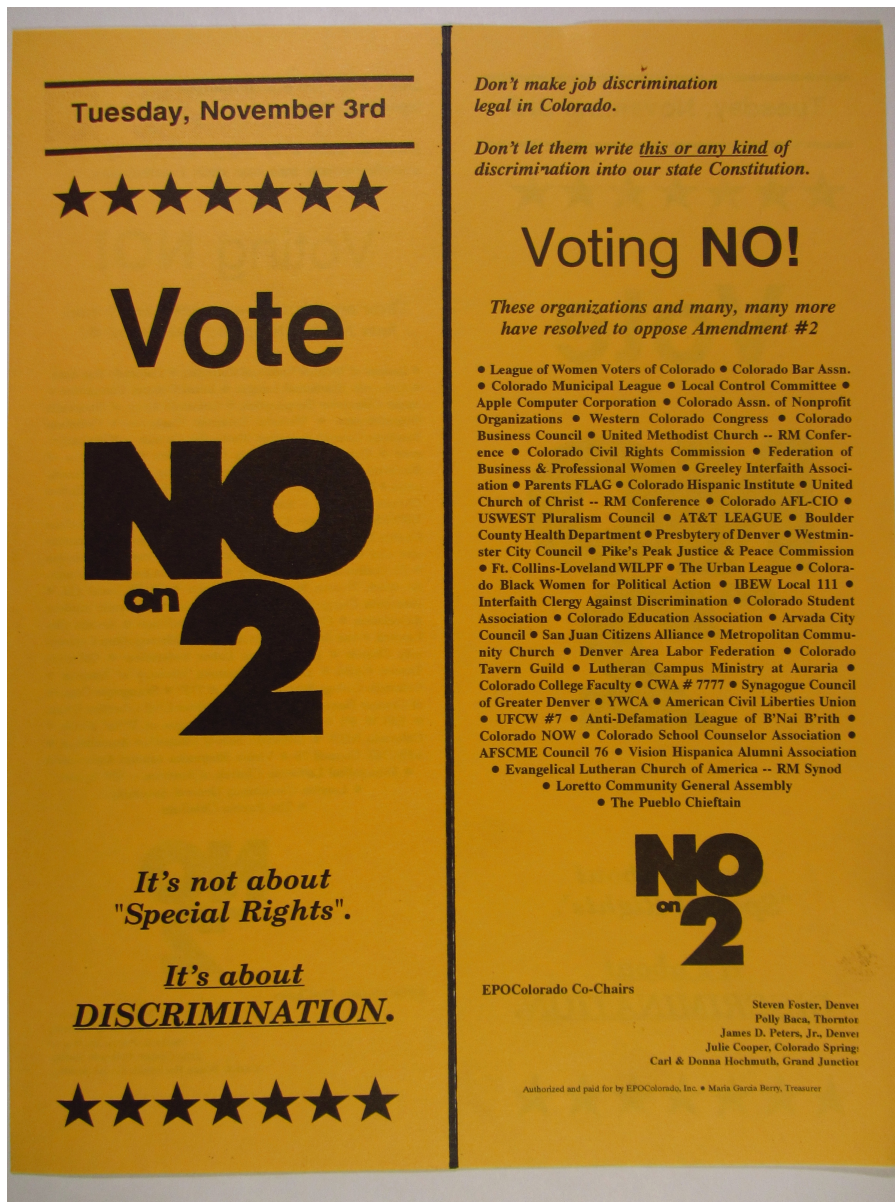


Figure 11. EPOC "Vote NO on 2" flyer.

³²⁰ Colorado for Family Values, "Equal Rights—Not Special Rights. STOP special class status for homosexuality," Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

Colorado business leaders were unpersuaded. In a full-page advertisement in the *Denver Post* published just before the election, some seventy-five local businesses announced their opposition to Amendment 2 (see Figure 11).³²¹ Major national corporations with offices in Colorado also joined the anti-amendment chorus. Apple Computers, for example, took out an advertisement in local papers announcing the company's view that, "Employment discrimination wastes vitally needed talent," and urging Coloradans to vote no.³²²

After Amendment 2 passed, with gay rights activists successfully orchestrating a massive national boycott against "The Hate State," Colorado business leaders were at pains to distance themselves from the measure. The Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce quickly reiterated its opposition, recalling the group's active participation in the fight against the amendment and, before that, in the campaign supporting Denver's anti-discrimination ordinance. As a further show of support, the Chamber acknowledged that it was in the process of developing an anti-discrimination pledge for local corporations to sign, announced plans to dedicate staff and volunteer resources to legal efforts to overturn the amendment, and touted its involvement in a statewide coalition of business, religious, and community organizations dedicated to the amendment's repeal. In explaining why the business community chose to defy the apparent will of Colorado voters, the

³²¹ "Discrimination is bad business, and it's bad for business," Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³²² "Employment discrimination wastes vitally needed talent," Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.⁵

Chamber argued that “Colorado voters were duped” by a “cleverly developed ‘stealth’ media campaign” orchestrated by far-right religious groups.³²³

In a telling move that indicated the extent to which support for gay rights was, by 1992, already becoming mainstream, even the largely conservative and Republican Colorado Springs business community worked actively against Amendment 2. Following the amendment’s passage, prominent Springs attorney Greg Walta, himself an Evangelical and long-time resident, went so far as to draft an alternative measure, which he and other local business leaders hoped might win enough votes to replace Amendment 2. They positioned their initiative, titled “No Special Rights or Discrimination in Employment, Housing and Public Accommodations Based on Sexual Orientation,” as a compromise that would guarantee statewide protections from discrimination for gays and lesbians while simultaneously banning them from any preferred legal status, affirmative action, or quotas. The measure had the backing of Colorado Springs’ most influential business leaders, notably including Bill Hybl who, as CEO of the El Pomar Foundation, had orchestrated the four million dollar grant that drew Focus on the Family to the area in the first place. Backers, concerned by the boycott of Colorado and the growing national association between the Springs and the religious right, sought to distance

³²³ “Greater Denver Chamber of Commerce approved responses regarding inquiries about Amendment #2,” Box 109, Folder 31, Denver Chamber of Commerce Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

themselves both from Amendment 2 specifically and from the religious right more generally.³²⁴

* * *

In the wake of Amendment 2's passage, observers across the country were quick to point to Colorado, either in triumph or despair, as a vanguard in a national battle over morality, "family values," and the role of religion in politics and governance. One letter to the editor of the *Rocky Mountain News*, written by a despairing former Colorado resident just days after the election, summed up the dominant understanding of the Amendment 2 victory: "I can't believe that the majority of Colorado people I lived and worked around actually voted to discriminate against a minority of fellow Coloradans," Wes Simmons lamented from his new home in Massachusetts, "I never realized how strong a hold the right-wing Christian Fundamentalists have on the state. Colorado has now become a place of hatred and bigotry instead of natural beauty and friendly people. Viewed from a distance, it looks like Colorado stands right in line behind Idaho and the Aryan Nations."³²⁵ But on the ground the reality was notably different. Whether or not the Chamber of Commerce was right in saying that Colorado voters had been duped into voting for Amendment 2, the pro-amendment rhetoric from CFV and its allies, at least insofar as it was directed at

³²⁴ Bruce Loeffler to Concerned Lesbian and Gay Groups re: Proposed "Compromise" Amendment to Replace Amendment 2, January 31, 1993 and "Walta's 'Amendment 2 Compromise' Much Worse Than a Repeal," Box 5, Folder "Repeal Amendment 2," Evans v. Romer Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³²⁵ Wes Simmons to Rocky Mountain News, Nov 8, 1992, Box 1, Folder 6, Amendment 2 Collection, History Colorado.

the general public, was not overtly anti-gay. Nevertheless, the Colorado minority, labor, and business communities sought to distance themselves from Amendment 2 and seemed to regard the growing presence of the religious right in Colorado as a costly embarrassment.

As Colorado business leaders had been quick to realize, arguments rooted in “family values” did not win elections. National public opinion polling revealed that, in the run up to the 1992 election, voters were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the economy: 43% listed it as their number one concern. “Family values,” the rubric under which issues like homosexuality and Amendment 2 fell, came in a distant fourth, with just 15% of voters listing it as their top priority. Indeed, in their postmortems following the election, many observers both inside and outside the GOP, pointed to what they argued was an excessive focus on family values, both at the Republican National Convention that year and throughout the campaign, as the primary reason for Bush’s defeat in the presidential race.

In Colorado, the same held true. Focus groups conducted in the weeks leading up to the November 3 election revealed that sizable majorities believed that discrimination against gays and lesbians in employment and housing should be illegal. Sixty-eight percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “No population group should be singled out for discrimination as this amendment does.” Even voters who said they had moral or religious objections to homosexuality said they supported basic rights for gays, believed gays and lesbians to be the subjects of discrimination, and dubbed CFV and their supporters extremists. Among those who said they would oppose legalized same-sex marriage or adoption by same-sex

couples, a majority saw these issues as unrelated to the amendment, making any efforts by CFV to portray Amendment 2 as a bulwark against these possibilities unfruitful.³²⁶

A second Colorado-based public opinion firm reached similar findings. In a report issued shortly before the election, Talmey-Drake concluded, “Supporters of the Colorado for Family Values anti-gay rights initiative have assumed they were speaking of a ‘silent majority’ who believe homosexuality is morally wrong. The assumption is shaky” [sic]. The report went on to note that, were the election held at the time of the poll, the Family Values initiative would lose by a 52% to 38% margin. Even more significantly, their polling suggested that the amendment would lose almost as badly among voters who expressed strong moral opposition to homosexuality as among the electorate as a whole. Trying to make sense of these results, researchers surmised that voters’ resistance to morality-based arguments for the amendment stemmed from a growing general belief that consenting adults had a right to privacy in their sexual conduct without interference from government, business, or their fellow citizens.³²⁷ The failure of efforts to repeal Denver’s Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Ordinance the previous year suggested much the same conclusion. After all, Citizens for Sensible Rights, which had peppered its campaign materials with references to homosexuality as immoral, a “perversion,” and a “deviant sex practice,” lost decisively.

³²⁶ Miller Research Group, Pre-election focus groups, Box 5, Folder “Correspondence, Memos Pre-Dating Case,” Evans v. Romer, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³²⁷ Talmey-Drake Report, Box 7, Folder “Election Press,” Evans v. Romer, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

Recognizing, or at least fearing, that family values arguments were remarkably unsuccessful at attracting a majority of voters, the proponents of Amendment 2 generally avoided moral arguments against homosexuality in making their case. CFV insisted that “Amendment 2 doesn’t hinge on religion or morality. And it *certainly* isn’t about hatred. It’s about fairness.”³²⁸ Or, as a CFV television advertisement in support of Amendment 2 put it, “OK, I think I’ve got it. Homosexuals have equal rights; they want special rights. That’s not fair. I’m voting yes on Amendment 2.”³²⁹ The purpose of Amendment 2, CFV argued, was to prevent an already privileged group from taking advantage of hard working, well-meaning Coloradans. This framing was fundamental to the entire Amendment 2 enterprise. Indeed, the very wording of the amendment reflected this careful rhetorical strategy. In a letter to CFV offering feedback on proposed language for the amendment, Brian McCormick, a staff attorney at the conservative Virginia Beach National Legal Foundation, argued against a possible draft that referred to gay marriage, reasoning that, while the public was inhospitable to “special privileges” for homosexuals, it was receptive to pleas “to be ‘treated just like everyone else’”:

While homosexuals do not get far by asking the electorate for special privileges, they do get a good deal of sympathy by asking to be “treated just like everyone else.” The presupposition here is that if two people love each other they ought to be able to marry, and if two men or two women ‘love’ each other they ought to be able to marry. Since same sex marriages are not recognized in Colorado at present, I feel

³²⁸ Colorado for Family Values, “Equal Rights—Not Special Rights. STOP special class status for homosexuality,” Box 7, Folder 1, Equality Colorado Records, Western History & Genealogy Division, Denver Public Library.

³²⁹ Floyd Ceruli, “Ten Years after Amendment 2: Colorado Voter Attitudes on Gay Rights, 1992-2002,” powerpoint slide #15, presentation to the American Association of Public Opinion Research, Phoenix, Arizona, May 2004.

that the clause regarding their legal recognition hurts the initiative without really adding anything to it.³³⁰

CFV took McCormick's advice. Amendment 2's final version did not mention of same-sex marriage nor did it argue directly against homosexuality per se. This choice allowed CFV to argue that the proposed amendment did not "remove any basic civil rights granted to homosexual individuals under the U.S. Constitution," but rather "only prohibits homosexual desires or practices...from being a basis for legal protected class status in the State of Colorado."³³¹The final text read:

Shall there be an amendment to Article II of the Colorado Constitution to prohibit the state of Colorado and any of its political subdivisions from adopting or enforcing any law or policy which provides that homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual orientation, conduct, or relationships constitutes or entitles a person to claim any minority or protected status, quota preferences, or discrimination.

By framing the question as one of protected minority status and quotas, CFV distanced the initiative from controversial questions about morality, relying instead on a series of radicalized arguments about privilege and economic access.

Indeed Colorado for Family Values primarily relied on economic arguments in selling Amendment 2 to voters. In a climate of shrinking job opportunities and rising unemployment, CFV co-director Kevin Tebedo held up the specter of affirmative action, suggesting that, without Amendment 2, "employers soon will be required to hire homosexuals by quota," with the result that, someday in the not too distant future, white men would have to "lie and say they are homosexual just to get

³³⁰ Brian M. McCormick to Tony Marco, re: Analysis of Language in Amendment Initiative, June 13, 1991, Box 1, Folder 16, Colorado for Family Values Records, History Colorado.

³³¹ "Vote 'YES!' On 2!," Colorado for Family Values, Box 1, Folder 16, History Colorado.

a job.”³³² This affirmative action argument proved especially potent for CFV, as it both spoke particularly to white male voters concerned about their own employment insecurity and also provided a familiar language for dismissing charges that support for Amendment 2 was motivated by anti-gay bias. Just as it became possible to say, “I’m not racist—I just don’t see why they should get a leg up when I’ve worked hard for everything I’ve got,” so, too, it became possible to say “I don’t have a problem with gays. I just don’t think they should have any extra advantages.” In fact, none of the anti-discrimination ordinances passed or proposed in Colorado had ever suggested any sort of gay affirmative action, yet CFV was extraordinarily effective at persuading voters that gay rights posed a serious threat to their own economic security and that “A ‘yes’ vote on Amendment 2 is a vote **against special rights** for **GAY SPECIAL INTERESTS**.”³³³ The reference to quotas in the text of the Amendment was specifically intended to conjure these old, usually racialized, economic fears among white, and especially white male, voters.

³³² Karen L. Vigil, “Springs man argues against homosexuals’ effort,” *Pueblo Chieftan*.

³³³ “Vote ‘YES!’ On 2!,” Colorado for Family Values, Box 1, Folder 16, History Colorado.

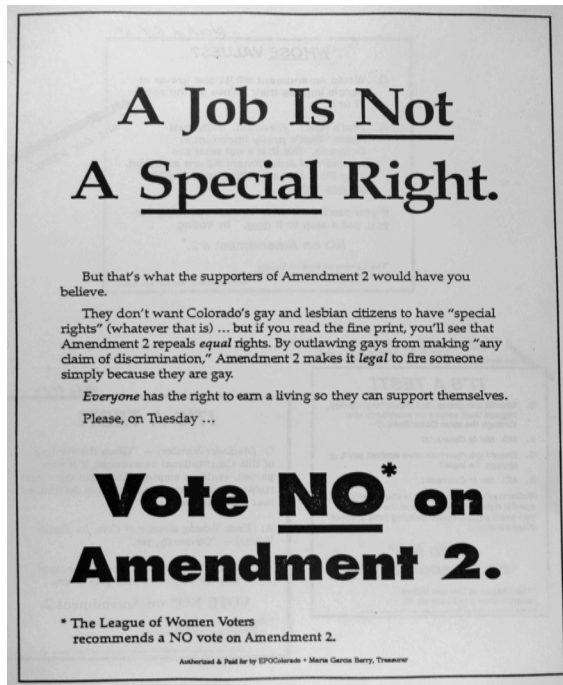


Figure 12. “A Job is Not a Special Right,” EPOC advertisement, 1992.

* * *

The racial undercurrents in the language surrounding Amendment 2 highlight the ways in both sides in the Amendment 2 campaign used race in making their cases about sexual orientation. The language of rights, equality, fairness, and color blindness that grew up over decades of civil rights struggle was repurposed and deployed in the early 1990s in debates over gay rights generally and Amendment 2 in particular. It was an uneasy but, nevertheless, effective appropriation that operated in several ways.

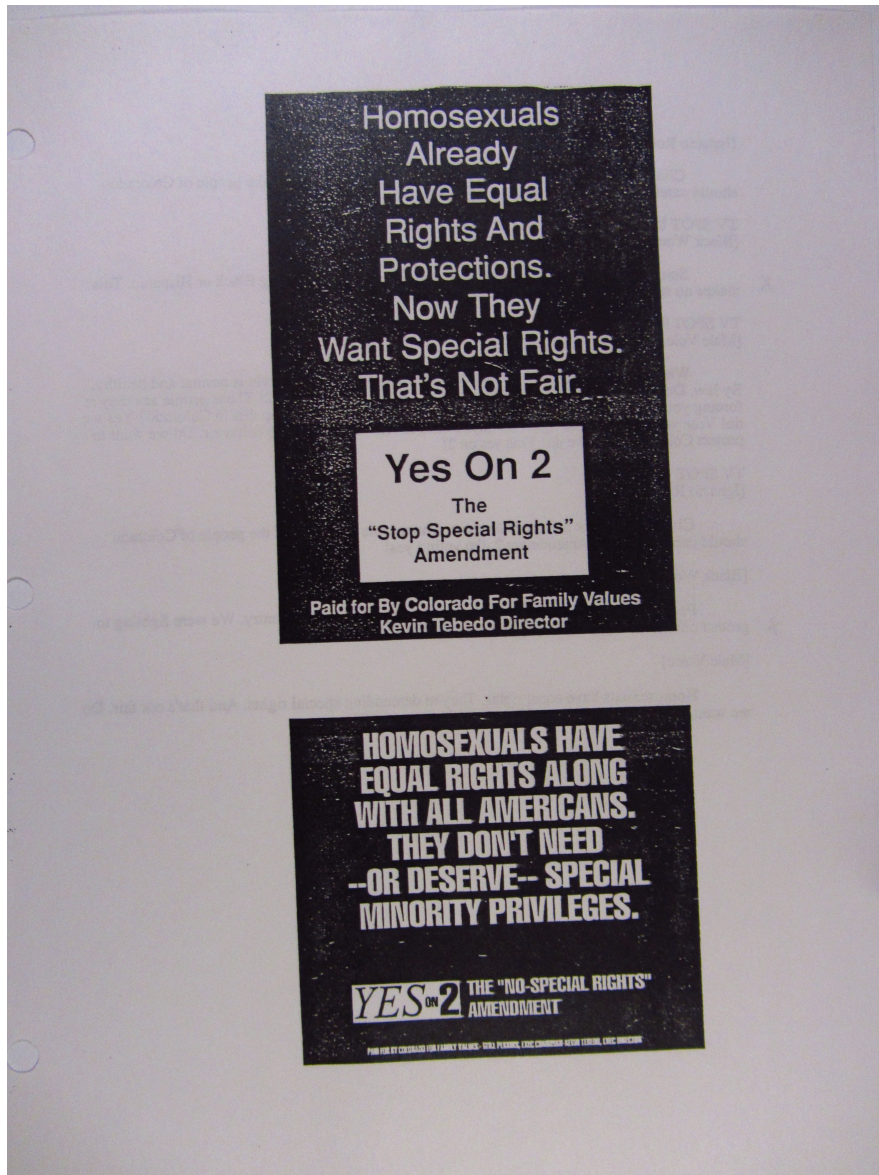


Figure 13. CFV flyer, “Yes On 2 the ‘Stop Special Rights’ Amendment.”

On the one hand, by arguing that any law protecting gays from discrimination was tantamount to affirmative action, CFV and its allies sought to appear as sympathetic champions of the rights of “genuine” minorities. They did this overtly, as we have seen, in general press releases and media appearances as well as in campaign materials specifically targeted at black and Hispanic Coloradans (see

Figure 12). The explicit message was that “real” minorities like blacks, Hispanics, or the disabled were entitled to the kinds of protections and benefits they received and that, by demanding similar protections for a group that *wasn’t a real minority*, gay rights advocates were harming genuine minority groups. As one black pastor and CFV supporter put it, “The freedom bus that went to Selma was never meant to go on to Sodom.”³³⁴ By repeatedly describing gays as affluent and white, CFV and their allies sought to divide gays from the groups that they termed genuine minorities.

In one particularly stark example of this strategy, CFV blanketed both white and African American communities across the state with leaflets purporting to reveal the dangers of allowing gay rights laws. One of the most potent anti-Amendment 2 arguments in the campaign had been that, by constitutionally banning any government entity in Colorado from passing future gay rights laws, the measure effectively ran an end-run around the principles of home rule and local control. In response, CFV told a cautionary tale: “Remember the detestable ‘Jim Crow’ laws that used to oppress African Americans decades ago in the Deep South?” the leaflet asked. Those, CFV explained, were home rule laws, “designed to keep people of color ‘in their place.’” Fortunately, as a result of activism and legislation during the 1960s, civil rights were no longer subject to local whims but, rather, were decided at the state and national level. By insisting on the right of local communities to pass gay rights ordinances, CFV argued, “militant homosexuals....have pushed their agenda for years exactly the way the old racists did: through friendly city councils, the least democratic, least responsive of all governing bodies.” Amendment

³³⁴ “What’s wrong with special gay rights? YOU be the judge!”

2, then, was a safeguard for civil rights, helping “all Colorado citizens make sure civil rights are never ‘Jim-Crow-ised’ again.” Finally, the leaflet suggested, “the next time a militant gay tries to tell you Amendment 2 destroys ‘home rule,’ ask them: Should Colorado towns be able to vote in ‘Jim Crow’ laws again? NO WAY! VOTE ‘YES!’ ON AMENDMENT 2.”³³⁵ In this formulation, gay rights activists were tantamount to segregationists and voting to block future gay rights measures like the anti-discrimination ordinances in Aspen, Boulder, and Denver was a means for African Americans to protect themselves. At the same time, the leaflet suggested, any white voter who rejected Amendment 2 was, effectively, supporting a return to legalized racism.

This sort of rhetoric, which ostensibly demonstrated CFV’s commitment to minority rights, also contained an implicit, far less politically correct message for white voters. Affirmative action had long been among the most reviled and least understood manifestations of the civil rights movement’s legal and policy successes (indeed, even many self-professed liberals objected to it). By linking gay rights to affirmative action and quotas, however erroneously, CFV sought to create an association between racial minorities and gays, thereby planting the suggestion for white voters that gays were yet another minority group demanding special benefits while middle-class whites were forced to struggle.

The pro-gay rights side, meanwhile, was doing a similar dance. On the one hand, it actively sought—and found—solidarity with minority communities.

³³⁵ “‘Jim Crow’ Laws and the Truth about ‘Home Rule,’” Box 1, Folder 16, Colorado for Family Values Records, History Colorado.

Supporters of gay rights explicitly positioned their cause as the latest chapter in a thirty-year history of civil rights struggle and progress in the United States and Colorado. On the other hand, leaders of the Equality Protection Ordinance Coalition and, later, Equality Colorado felt pressure to distance themselves from the tensions and animosities surrounding unpopular programs like affirmative action, which required them, in turn, to make arguments that distinguished sexual orientation from race.

* * *

Ultimately, CFV's efforts to frame gay rights as a threat both to the civil rights of (supposedly) genuine minorities and, simultaneously, to white Americans overwhelmed by minority rights claims proved effective. On election day, fifty-three percent of voters pulled the lever for the Family Values initiative, making Colorado the first state in the nation to put the fraught matter of sexual orientation and its legal and social standing into its constitution. Post election polls confirmed the success of CFV's strategy. As one voter who supported Amendment 2 explained in a letter to the *Rocky Mountain News*, "It should be reasonably clear that the passage of Amendment 2 is a message from the tax paying majority saying, 'we are tired of special interest groups and their woes.'" Indeed, after decades of mounting frustration with what many saw as the growing influence of special interests in state politics and the pressures of a struggling economy, for many Coloradans Amendment 2 offered an opportunity to make their feelings of disfranchisement heard.

But observers outside Colorado, unfamiliar with the context and background to the referendum campaign, took Amendment 2's passage as an indication of Coloradans' negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Certainly, homophobia was a factor. In 1992, when Amendment 2 passed, homosexuality was the subject of intense debate. Bill Clinton's apparent support for gay rights was a major issue in the presidential election that year, AIDS was a pressing national crisis, and citizens across the country were engaged at both the national and local levels in debates and electoral struggles over anti-gay discrimination, gay and lesbian teachers, homosexuality in school curricula, gays in the military, and more. Both in the run-up to the election and in its aftermath, the Amendment—and Colorado—were in the national spotlight. Many viewed Amendment 2, the subsequent boycott of Colorado, and the eventual Supreme Court case as among the opening salvos of the “culture wars” that have become the iconic representation of American politics in the nineties.

But what happened in Colorado and, indeed, nationally was more interesting and subtle than homophobia alone. The ways in which Colorado for Family Values, an unabashedly rightwing Christian organization with clear ties to the national Christian Right, sought to sanitize its campaign and to make affirmative action or quotas the issue, rather than homosexuality, speaks to what was, at the time, a widely understood truth among religious conservatives: family values didn't win elections. Outside of an admittedly sizable cadre of true believers for whom family values were the number one political issue, most voters simply did not rank it as a major factor in choosing whom to vote for. Moreover, many voters were turned off by

what they perceived as the Religious Right's moralizing tone. The forty-three percent of voters nationally who pulled the lever for Clinton/Gore overwhelmingly reported moderate or even center-left social views and said that the economy and jobs were their number one concern. Similarly, among the nineteen percent of voters who supported independent Ross Perot for president that year—whose candidacy was often blamed for “throwing” the election to Clinton by attracting voters who would otherwise have gone Republican—an overwhelming majority articulated views that were fiscally conservative but socially well to the left of the GOP's 1992 family values platform.

Colorado, despite the passage of Amendment 2 and the severely tax-limiting Taxpayers Bill of Rights, more-or-less mirrored the nation. While Bill Clinton did slightly worse in Colorado, with thirty-nine percent of the vote, and Ross Perot slightly better, with twenty-three percent, Clinton did carry the state and their combined Colorado total of 62% equaled their combined national total. These results fit with the general trend of voters in Colorado—since the 1970s—towards self-described “moderate” or “centrist” view points and a demand for greater accountability and transparency in government. Moreover, it fits with national trends, as during the 1970s, eighties, and nineties—in fact, up until 2010—more Americans identified as “moderate” than as either liberal or conservative.

In this political climate, it is no accident that a constitutional amendment billed as preventing affirmative action and “special rights,” an amendment requiring voter approval of any new tax revenues in Colorado, and a presidential nominee who campaigned on redefining the Democratic Party as a party of moderation and

centrism, preaching “opportunity, responsibility, community,” could all succeed. The story of Colorado’s Amendment 2, then, is a national story in more ways than has been realized. Exploring the Amendment 2 campaign and putting it both in a broader national context and in a much deeper context of political change in Colorado itself begins to illuminate the contours of a political realignment in the late twentieth century that challenges the simple notion of conservative ascendance and liberal decline. What emerges instead is a far more nuanced and contested politics of the center with which both parties had to grapple in their quest for continued relevance and electoral success. Moreover, it calls into question the pervasive understanding of Newt Gingrich’s 1994 “Republican Revolution” as a popular rebuke to Democrats and a culturally conservative mandate for the GOP. Indeed, far from representing opposing impulses in American politics, Clinton’s election and the Contract with America two years later together marked the fullest expression of the new market-oriented paradigm in American politics.

Conclusion

Two years after Bill Clinton's narrow victory in the 1992 presidential election, Americans ushered in the first Republican House majority in forty years. The GOP immediately trumpeted their success as a triumph for conservatism, framing their victory as proof that the nation was conservative and that the new Congress had a popular mandate to advance its ideologically conservative agenda. Leaders of the Religious Right were quick to embrace this narrative, portraying the Republicans' success as proof of widespread popular support for the conservative social program they called "family values." Standing shoulder to shoulder with House Speaker Newt Gingrich and members of the Republican Congress several months after the midterm elections, Ralph Reed, executive director of the rightwing Christian Coalition, announced, "As religious conservatives, we have finally gained what we have always sought—a place at the table, a sense of legitimacy and a voice in the conversation."³³⁶

The reality, however, was quite different. When, as House minority leader, Gingrich set about devising an electoral strategy for the 1994 midterms, he did so not by targeting conservatives but, rather, by explicitly courting those voters who had supported Ross Perot in 1992. Gingrich modeled his Contract with America, signed by close to four hundred Republican Congressmen and Congressional hopefuls, on Perot's "Checklist for All Federal Candidates"; he convened focus groups

³³⁶ Thomas W. Waldron, "Christian Coalition unveils social 'Contract with the American Family,'" *Baltimore Sun*, May 18, 1995.

of Perot voters to identify the combination of issues and language most likely to win their votes. Arguing that a winning message was more important than ideological purity, Gingrich declared that, “There will be no social issues,” and sought to distance the GOP Congressional campaign from the 1992 platform’s emphasis on family values, which many observers and party strategists blamed for George Bush’s defeat. As Joe Gaylord, together with Gingrich one of the Contract’s chief architects, explained, the very term “contract” was chosen because these focus groups revealed that Perot supporters, who prized reform and accountability above all, understood a contract as more binding than a platform. Similarly, to signal a departure from partisanship, the word Republican did not appear in the title, or indeed, the document as a whole.³³⁷

In short, the Republicans’ strategy was designed to appeal precisely to the moderate, quality of life voters who had emerged over the preceding decades of metropolitan politics and come to dominate the electorate. Just as Clinton and Gore, in their book *Putting People First*, pledged to move beyond partisanship, promising, “Our policies are neither liberal nor conservative, neither Democratic nor Republican. They are new. They are different. We are confident they will work,” so Gingrich sought to present the GOP as the party of moderate, pragmatic solutions that would restore transparency to Washington and put government in the hands of the people.³³⁸ In the end, Scammon and Wattenberg’s 1970 prediction that the winning party would be the one that “can hold the center ground on an attitudinal

³³⁷ Ronald B. Rapoport and Walter J. Stone, *Three’s a Crowd: The Dynamic of Third Parties, Ross Perot, & Republican Resurgence*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 151.

³³⁸ Clinton and Gore, *Putting People First*, vii-viii.

battlefield,” proved accurate.³³⁹ For while Americans may have been “moving vigorously right, left, and center all at once,” it was the center that seemed, ultimately, to prevail.

Instead, the pragmatic, individualist, market-oriented politics that emerged at the metropolitan grassroots from the 1970s onwards had, by the early nineties, come to dominate American political culture, leaving both Democrats and Republicans scrambling to remake themselves in its image. For Republicans, this meant distancing themselves in general elections from the language of both economic and social conservatism. In Colorado, this strategic framing made possible the eventual passage of TABOR, a radically anti-government initiative that backers, themselves unabashedly conservative, succeeded in portraying to the public as a moderate effort to make government more popularly accountable. Similarly, proponents of the successful anti-gay rights Amendment 2 presented it as a moderate attempt to prevent gays and lesbians from gaining "special rights" above and beyond the equal rights they ostensibly already enjoyed. Democrats, meanwhile, embarked on a project of wholesale reinvention. Sensing that the old New Deal, Keynesian prescriptions that had held their winning coalition together were no longer effective, they gradually embraced a neoliberal rhetoric and policy agenda more in line with the public mood. When Al Gore described himself as a "raging moderate" and Bill Clinton promised to "put the power of the presidency to work for the American people," they were but the latest in a succession of neoliberal Democrats prominently including Coloradans Tim Wirth, Gary Hart, and Dick

³³⁹ Scammon and Wattenberg, *The Real Majority*, 80–1.

Lamm, to articulate the new Democratic agenda as one of transparency, accountability, and common sense that transcended traditional ideological or partisan bounds.³⁴⁰

Underlying this political shift was an equally seismic transformation in the political, economic, and demographic circumstances of most Americans, rooted in the emergence of metropolitan areas as the primary locus of postwar American life. The rapid expansion of metropolitan areas in this period across the United States threw into question a previously established political order, creating new opportunities for a range of constituencies to compete for control of metropolitan resources, spaces, and decision-making. Moreover, through engagement with these intensely local conflicts, residents of Greater Denver and other similar places began to articulate a new political ethos that took hold at the grassroots and ultimately came to redefine politics and policy at the highest levels within both the major political parties.

Conventional narratives have tended to view the final third of the twentieth century in ideological terms: the post-New Deal liberal consensus giving way to the New Right and the rising dominance of the GOP. Recent scholarship has substantially debunked the notion of a postwar liberal consensus, at least at the grassroots, and of racial backlash driving the post-sixties rightward shift. Scholars have, however, with few exceptions, continued to focus on both the emergence of grassroots movement conservatism and conservatism's rise within the newly ascendant GOP. In so doing, they have failed to adequately account for the

³⁴⁰ Richard Stengel, Steven Holmes, and Strobe Talbott, "Profiles in Caution: The several faces of Al Gore are all carefully thought out," *TIME*, March 21, 1988. Clinton and Gore, *Putting People First*, viii.

complexity of American politics in the late twentieth century, especially but not exclusively at the grassroots in the rapidly expanding metropolises that became home to a decisive majority of the population from the 1970s onwards.³⁴¹

To the extent that current scholarship has recognized the importance to political engagement of changes in metropolitan space, it has tended to see such spatial differentiation as a boon to Republicans, who successfully capitalized on grassroots suburban politics to attract a majority of suburban voters to their fold. Yet in Colorado, the politics of race and place were more complex, demonstrating the ways in which the new metropolitan realities influenced both identity and political engagement for citizens of all political stripes. The same debates that dominated political debate in Denver played out in metropolitan areas across the nation, from other booming Sunbelt cities embroiled in their own annexation conflicts, to cities and towns up and down the Northeast Corridor, to places like Portland and Seattle in the Pacific Northwest or the Twin Cities in Minnesota, which pioneered anti-sprawl policies in this period. Recent American political history cannot be understood outside the context of the major structural changes in metropolitan geography and political economy that transformed American life at that time.

The evidence from Denver points to a far more nuanced, less partisan politics than has yet been realized. This history lacks the neat inevitability of rising

³⁴¹ Only a handful of scholars have explored non-conservative politics after the 1960s. See for example Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern American Liberalism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). In *The Silent Majority*, Lassiter argues against the idea that conservatism became the dominant political ideology at the grassroots in the 1970s and suggests instead a bipartisan ethos of “suburban populism” originating in the Sunbelt South and spreading to metropolitan areas across the country. See also Siskind, “Growth and Its Discontents” and Geismer, *Don’t Blame Us*.

conservatism that most tellings have imposed on this recent period in America's past. Instead, it suggests the state of flux in which boosters, activists, and government officials at every level found themselves as they struggled to adapt to the new realities of metropolitan geography and political economy in late twentieth century America. Understanding this perspective is key to explaining the emergence of the individualist, market-based political culture that lies at the heart of the transformation in American politics, at the grassroots and within both the Democratic and Republican parties.³⁴²

³⁴² On "color blind" politics, see Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* and Freund, *Colored Property*.

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