

25. Ibid, p. 87.
26. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970).
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28. The authors are indebted to students at the University of Wyoming who made many of the following suggestions in class exercises.

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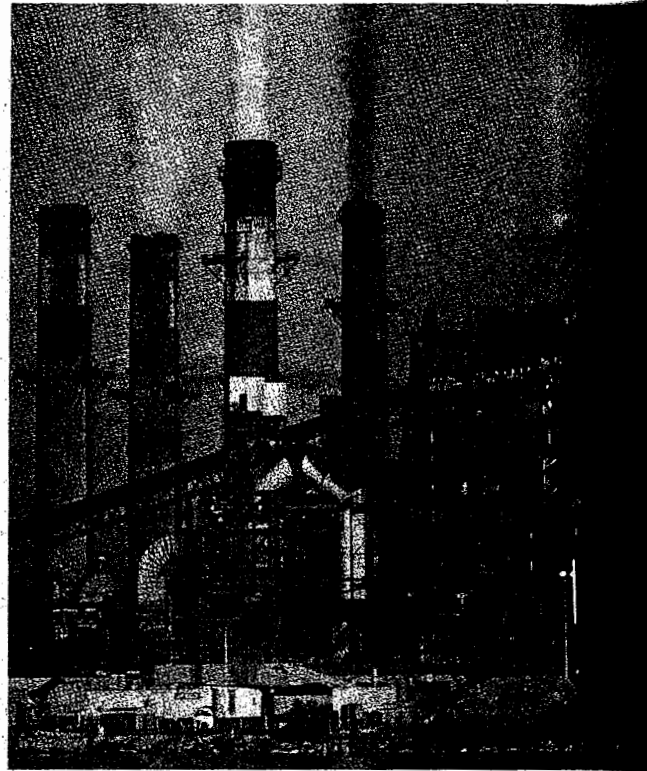
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# Boomtown women

Dede Feldman



*The Four Corners Power Plant is one of the energy projects that has lured thousands to the Farmington, N.M. vicinity. The Boomtown atmosphere has affected the lives of many women, among them Betty Holland.*



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It's Saturday morning in Farmington, N.M., and pickups are streaming into town. At the "Wash and Clean," women who've been at home all week while the men work in the power plants and the coal fields are doing the laundry and getting ready to run errands. It's been a long week, and the talk revolves around problems—of getting around (a car is a necessity), of finding a job and of coping with the violence that is often directed against women and their children in this, one of the many boomtowns of the new Southwest.

"This place is getting too crowded," says Betty Holland, a Navajo who lives in Fruitland, just outside Farmington.

These are fast and furious times for Farmington, located at the intersection of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. There are an estimated six billion tons of strippable low sulfur coal and over seven trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the San Juan Basin surrounding Farmington—not to mention a fortune in uranium deposits. Much of the coal stripped from these arid mesas fuels two coal-fired generating plants—the Four Corners Power Plant and the San Juan Generating Station. Within 20 miles of Farmington, the two plants transmit electricity as far away as California. That makes Farmington and three of its outlying towns—Aztec, Bloomfield and Shiprock—the power generating capital of the Southwest.

Farmington itself is a busy commercial center for ranchers, Indians and others spread sparsely across the high desert. On weekends and paydays, the town's normal population of about 39,000 can swell to over 50,000. It is a town where men wear T shirts saying "I'm oil field trash and goddamn proud of it." It is a town, too, plagued by tensions between local Navajos and whites, many of them migrants to the energy rich area.

Local boosters in Farmington and many Western boomtowns point to the jobs and prosperity that energy related development brings. For women and minorities, though, it has often brought personal crisis and economic inequality.

"There is good reason to believe that minorities and women are not receiving an equitable share of the benefits and in

some areas are being adversely affected by the West's energy boom," says the preface to a U.S. Commission on Civil Rights study, *Energy Resource Development*. The report goes on to document the strain on the families of both energy migrants and on old time residents who must now cope with the problems of boomtown life—spiraling crime rates, housing shortages, inadequate health care and social services, local inflation and startling increases in child abuse and domestic violence.

The Farmington area has been vulnerable to economic ups and downs for as long as many of its residents can remember. Large energy companies began flocking here in the 50s when oil and gas production spurred the county's first boom. The population increased from 18,300 to 53,300 in just 10 years. But the other side of boom is bust, and things began to slow down around 1967. Then the Arab oil embargo in the early 70s revived the oil and gas industry. By 1977 coal mining and construction activities related to the area's two power plants had helped boost county population to 68,700.

Today, Exxon is negotiating with the Navajos for one of the largest uranium leases in the country, and Consolidated Coal Co. plans to open another coal operation at Burnham on the reservation southwest of Farmington.

There's talk of synfuels development too. While the on again, off again plans for a huge coal gasification complex are now off, Utah International and Texas Eastern Synfuels are studying the feasibility of building a \$3 billion synfuels plant in the area. Even without taking these projects into account, population estimates for the area now range as high as 110,000 by 1990.

The giant new energy operations are indeed providing jobs and prosperity to local residents and newcomers in Farmington. But federal and state statistics show that high wages benefit construction workers, power plant operators and miners. Women and Navajos, meanwhile, are often left out of the economic bonanza.

One Navajo woman from Crownpoint, a reservation town outside Farmington, says she looked for six months for a secretarial position, and even when she found one she had to drive an hour to get to town. "Energy growth doesn't al-

ways bring jobs to all of us," she adds, "and now there's pollution and high prices."

Women have had a hard time because mining and construction are traditionally male fields, with few union apprenticeship programs and little affirmative action. In Farmington, there are only a few counseling services or vocational training programs, and women are discouraged by the lack of day care facilities and transportation services.

Although many of the energy resources that created Farmington's boom lie beneath Navajo land, Indian unemployment rates hover around 40 percent, and one recent federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) report on the San Juan Basin area puts the figure for Indian males closer to 65 percent. Not surprisingly, per capita income in San Juan County is among the lowest in the country.

Racial tensions between Navajos and whites exploded here in 1974, when the bodies of three Navajo men who had been beaten and mutilated by white youths were discovered outside of town. That summer Farmington was the scene of civil rights demonstrations, culminating in a probe by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission which found Farmington guilty of police brutality and discrimination against Navajos.

Since 1974 the city has adopted an affirmative action plan, hired a full time minority recruitment officer and funded an Indian Community Center. City officials say that racial tensions have ebbed.

Indian leaders, however, say that while there has been some improvement there is still a gap between Indians and whites, aggravated by a lack of Indian participation in economic and political affairs of the city and county.

Eleanor Kelly, nurse at the Farmington high school, and others feel that the city has acted to encourage energy growth but not social change—a discrepancy that is hardest on women and minorities.

In recent months the city of Farmington and San Juan County have been hit by three civil rights suits involving Navajos and other minorities. In one of the suits the Justice Department charges the city and county with employment and promotion practices that discriminate against Navajos, Hispanics and women.

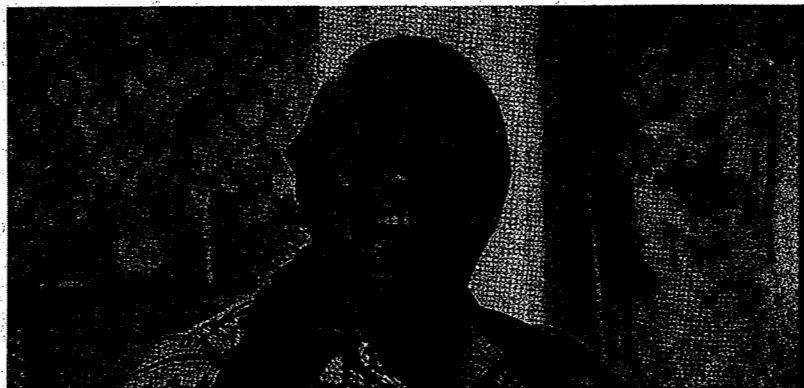
Kelly says there is a tendency among the city's fathers, many of them Mormons, to ignore the problems of women

Dede Feldman is a New Mexico freelance writer whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *High Country News*, *Inquiry* and local publications.

and minorities. "Mormons tend to bury their problems," she says. "Farmington really is an ostrich community."

It's swing shift in Farmington, and the bars are filling up as quickly as glasses of cold beer. For many women who must cope with tired and irritable husbands who often work double shift, it is the worst part of the day.

Tom Stuart-Bush, director of Farmington's Family Crisis Center, says child abuse, rape, and spouse beating especially, are reaching epidemic proportions in Farmington, a problem he partially at-



Sadie Garcia is afraid boomtown rents and inflation will force many of her neighbors out of Rawlins, Wyo.

## It takes more than money

While studies and proposals focusing on the needs of Western energy boomtowns now abound, few deal with the plight of women and minorities.

The most commonly offered solution is to throw millions of dollars in impact assistance from either the federal or state government at the entire boomtown problem and hope it disappears. Last year, for example, Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.) introduced a bill that would have provided up to \$1 billion in loans and guarantees over the next 10 years. These would be used to help defray the costs of needed public programs and facilities in areas where new energy development has doubled or tripled the local population. (The bill has yet to emerge from Congress.) Severance taxes levied on energy industries who take resources out of state are already used by many Western states to meet immediate needs.

There are problems with this kind of bandaid approach. Many of the federal dollars go into desperately needed community services—sewer systems, new schools or roads. But day care centers, mental health clinics and funds for training programs—all of which would benefit women directly—are low on the list. And federal funds are vulnerable to cutbacks and bureaucratic delays that make the difficult job of planning in a boomtown even harder.

Local and state taxes cannot usually solve the problem because resources in the West are located on federal land

and are therefore exempt from state severance taxes. In some states, the taxes by law must be put into a permanent fund, and only a portion of the earned interest can be used for impact assistance. In almost all cases, state funds are inadequate to cover needed services. Several years ago New Mexico, for example, estimated \$250 million in aid was needed by the hard pressed cities of Farmington, Gallup and Grants; so far the state legislature has appropriated only about \$10 million.

Meanwhile, the energy corporations, who bear the major responsibility for the crisis, welcome federal impact assistance because it reduces their responsibility to local residents. When it comes to state imposed severance taxes, though, it's another story. In one state companies have taken the tax to court, and throughout the West, energy corporations threaten to increase energy costs to consumers to make up for the taxes.

Either way consumers or taxpayers, and not the companies, will be footing the bill for boomtown aid.

One way to shift this burden is through legislation to force the companies to provide basic services or subsidies to existing services, including child care, transportation and family counseling.

Providing jobs in local industry and government, of course, would help both women and minorities. Often, this means vigorous affirmative action programs.

Hester McNulty, natural resources coordinator for the League of Women Voters, reported in 1978 that there had been little affirmative action in West-

ern states. The Justice Department is bringing suit against the city of Farmington to insure that it hires a proportional number of women and minorities. More pressure of this type must be brought to bear on unions to open the way for women in nontraditional jobs through training and apprenticeship programs. And private industry must also be pressured to recruit more women.

Perhaps the greatest hope for women and minorities now living in boomtown areas is in organizing and communicating with each other. A hotline, a battered women's shelter, a newspaper or coffeehouse that is controlled by local women are all giant steps toward reducing alienation and isolation. The projects are costly in terms of time and emotional commitment, but for now they seem to represent the only way out of what, for many, is a desperate situation.

Even more fundamental than equal employment and impact aid is the whole issue of where energy facilities should be located in the first place.

William Freudenburg of Washington State University says power plants—the worst boomtown generators—should be located in the areas where the power will be used, not in the sparsely populated areas where the fuel is produced. The cost of transporting the fuel would rise, but that would be offset by a reduction in the loss of electricity in long transmission lines. And if energy facilities were built in the regions where the energy were to be used, the social and environmental costs as well as the benefits of the plants would be borne by the energy users. —D.F.

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Linda Roddy, a volunteer with the Family Crisis Center, says alcohol contributes to the violence in Farmington.

tributes to a macho ethic among oil field workers and miners.

"The only thing I can compare it to is the attitude of the conquering GI," says Stuart-Bush. "They are here to rape and pillage—it's their right. They wear T-shirts that say, 'If you ain't an oil worker, you ain't worth shit,' and 'Boilermakers do it better.' For them, being drunk is absolutely normal."

"Miners, and particularly the Anglo miners, are regarded by members of the community as hard workers, heavy drinkers, free spenders and somewhat hedonistically oriented, traits that promote domestic conflicts that often lead to violence," says University of Arizona professor Lay Gibson in *Town of Strangers*, a study of the so called miner subculture prepared by the BIA in 1978.

Statistics bear out the study. With 10 percent of the state's population in 1975, San Juan and neighboring McKinley County (another boomtown area)

were third in the number of murders, second in the number of rapes and first in the number of aggravated assaults among all regions of the state except the metropolitan areas. In addition, alcohol abuse was five times the national average, and the accident rate was four times the national norm.

"Farmington is a real violent community," says Linda Roddy, a volunteer with the Family Crisis Center whose husband works at the San Juan generating station. "Nine out of 10 family crisis cases that we see are related to alcohol."

While the exact number of violent crimes against women is hard to pin down, the Center Against Sexual Assault (CASA), a federally funded project of the San Juan Mental Health Clinic, reported 90 rape cases in 1979, and Tom Stuart-Bush says the Family Crisis Center worked with about 70 women from September 1979 through January 1980. Because rape and wife beating are diffi-

cult for many women to talk about, few cases are reported to the local police. But even so, in Bloomfield, a trailer town of about 3,000, police reported 53 family disturbances in 1977, and in Aztec, another outlying town of about 6,000, police say they receive five to seven family related calls a week.

Adelle Richards, former coordinator at CASA and a lifelong resident of Farmington, says many of the rapes and batterings are related to the long hours and the pressure many of the men face in the oil and coal fields. "A lot of relationships are going to pot here because of shift work," says Richards. "Couples just don't see one another anymore because of the long hours—and a lot of women end up stranded, divorced or in very painful positions."

Richards, who now works with an alcoholic rehabilitation project in Farmington, says that men who work in the energy industries near Farmington have support and camaraderie at their jobs, but women often find themselves isolated and abused.

Marge Atkinson, chair of Farmington's Family Crisis Center, recounted one recent painful case. "The man would regularly beat his child after work," she says, "and when the woman finally did complain—and this took a long time to do—he threw her against the wall too."

Compounding the problem for women in the area is the lack of support from families, neighbors or community agencies. "There's no sense of community here," says Diane Paolazzi, director of Farmington's Family Planning Council.

Boomtowns are populated largely by transient workers and their families who move to where the jobs are and leave when the well runs dry. Farmington is no exception. On weekdays, local motels are full of men who work in the mines and at the plants, and the San Juan County planning department estimates that about one-third of all Anglo and black workers enter and leave the county each year. For the longtime residents of the area the result is often a cultural clash; for the families of miners who often move into trailer parks, or "aluminum ghettos," there is the sudden loss of old friends and family and the difficulties of adjustment.

"Transients are takers from the community," says Eleanor Kelly. "They do not really know anybody, they often live

in neighborhoods of trailers where the turnover is high and there's a lack of social caring."

According to Kelly, education is one area where the effects of transience are particularly telling. "There's a whole layer of kids at Farmington high school that don't seem to have any home," she says. "A lot of them are girls 15 to 17 who live with guys that work in the oil fields. A lot of them are unknown to anyone—they have no families or neighborhoods."

Even among married women "there are no cohesive social groups or communications networks," says Paolazzi, "so women don't even know they are not alone." Often women don't know what services are available, and even if they did a sense of fear and depression keeps them at home.

Worst of all, Paolazzi says, is the lack of public transportation. "There is no means for a lot of women to escape battering or get out of a bad situation," she says. Many rapes occur in the parking lots of bars, prime outlets for miners and others after work. In addition, Navajo women forced to hitchhike along a dangerous 20 mile stretch of highway that's the main link between Farmington and the power plants are frequent rape victims.

In Rawlins, Wyo., another coal town where many of the old time residents are Chicano, Sadie Garcia and others who live on the Mexican side of the tracks fear that the high rents and local inflation brought by the boom will eventually drive them out. "I don't think the majority of people here realize it yet," says Garcia, "but this big crowd and big money coming in is going to push us out. They're going to find excuses to move the Spanish people out, tear down our houses and put up trailer courts."

Pauline Gonzaleas, another Chicano resident of Rawlins' south side, says she is frustrated more people in her community are not active. "Anglos have always been organized to do all kinds of things," she says, "but when minorities do it it's a threat. Somehow we become militants. We have a lot of work to do if we're going to get through this development and survive."

Craig, Colo., a coal boomtown of about 14,000, also has its problems. "Preliminary evidence suggests that these burdens fall heavily on the women and



Many rapes in the New Mexico boomtown take place in parking lots outside bars.

children," the Denver Research Institute reports. Statistics from 1973 to 1976 indicate that the number of complaints and actual incidents of family disturbances in the town is up 352 percent, while child abuse and neglect is up 130 percent and crimes against persons are up a whopping 900 percent.

Margaret Brabeck, editor of a local newspaper, says there are as many as 20 men to every woman in the town. The boom, says Brabeck, is especially difficult for divorced women, some of whom migrated to the area from the eastern slope of the Rockies to seek high paying jobs. Brabeck and others are now publishing a women's newspaper, *She*, for northwestern Colorado, but other than that, women in Craig are "not really getting together to face their problems."

In the short run at least, though, that may be one of the most effective things women and minorities can do to lessen the impact of the boomtown syndrome on their personal lives (see box).

In Farmington, a network of women who work in social service agencies has set up a hotline for crisis victims, and in the past several months volunteers have been providing shelter to raped and battered women in a number of "safe homes." The women recently obtained and are now renovating a permanent shelter for battered women.

And a dozen or so women are planning a Women's Center to be run out of the Farmington Family Planning Clinic. There are plans to develop the center into a coffeeshop, but in recent weeks planning for the facilities has slowed down.

One of the women involved in the Farmington projects, Barbara Bush-Stuart, summed up the current difficulties for both social workers and the wives of energy migrants. "There are tremendous problems for women here, but there could be lots of opportunities too. If women organize there can be a future," she says, "but then, that's the antithesis of transience."



# ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL EMPLOYMENT<sup>1</sup>

Ronald L. Little and Stephen B. Lovejoy

A shriveling population and a decaying economic base has plagued rural America since the 1920's.<sup>2</sup> The rural picture, at least until recently, has been a mirror image of the urban scene.<sup>3</sup> Conventional wisdom, both scientific and lay, has counseled industrial development as a panacea for rural unemployment and underemployment, as well as a means for stemming the flow of rural migration to the metropolis. Governmental decision-makers and their scientific advisors have long recognized the twin evils of rural poverty and urban growth. Alleviation of these problems has been attempted through a variety of government programs, with the Rural Development Act of 1972 the most recent attempt.<sup>4</sup> The intent of such government actions has been to encourage the locations of industries in rural areas thus lessening rural poverty, while simultaneously, and often unintentionally, reducing urban growth.

Rural industrialization has been further spurred by the rush to develop America's energy reserves that are located primarily in the rural West.<sup>5</sup> Between government programs and private energy exploration and development, rural industrialization in the West is currently moving more quickly than the most optimistic predictions of just a decade ago. Thus, employment opportunities are rapidly increasing in rural regions and some dwellers will undoubtedly begin participating more equitably in the nation's economic structure.

The extent to which economic benefits from rural industrial developments accrue to local residents can be estimated only imprecisely, and non-economic costs, i.e., social costs, are all-too-frequently ignored. Even when considered, social costs fair poorly in standard cost-benefit calculus.<sup>6</sup> Though the process whereby local communities accumulate economic and social benefits is imperfectly understood, the standard assumption is that with rural industrial development, economic benefits at least will be forthcoming.

Lending temporary support to the above assumption are the many studies which have demonstrated that community as well as mean personal incomes have increased as a result of industrialization.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, upon reflection it becomes evident that summary and aggregate measures of income beg the more important question of "Who benefits?" Many scholars<sup>8</sup> have noted that not all social categories prosper equally. The aged, women and minorities appear to suffer relative declines in prosperity as a consequence of industrial projects. Furthermore, incomes generated by rural projects do not remain entirely in the local community. They frequently "leak" out, benefiting other communities or regions, contributing considerably less than would be expected to the development of the local service sector.<sup>9</sup>