

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BOOM GROWTH IN WYOMING

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The history of power production – synonymous with “boom development” – in Wyoming is a dismal record of human ecosystem wastage. Frontier expansion without adequate planning has left cities crippled by shameful environments which cause human casualties.

The Chancrevilles have disappeared, those tent towns set up to provide saloon and feminine social entertainment for the early day frontiersman, but the grim statistics of spiritual depression, divorce, drunkenness, dissention and death indicate that the “Old West” – not the idealized movie and TV kind, but the real world of drought, dirt, elemental danger and a dismal battle for existence – are not even 100 years in the past for Wyoming.

Growth of our society has been punctuated by a variety of confrontations: nobleman versus serf, farmer versus rancher, and now in Wyoming, rural energy rich producer versus industrial energy user. The question is not whether to change, but rather in which direction the change will occur.

Depending upon the conditions, change may enhance the quality of living or lead, as in the past, to increased cost in human casualties as a result of less civilized living conditions.

Population expansion has been a world problem. Conditions of crowding in large cities and the mobility of the population are likely to cause behavioral changes (Kaplan, 1972). The danger of traffic accidents, air and water pollution, overcrowding and long distances traveled between residential and work areas not only affect physical functioning, but also lead to psychological effects such as fear and anxiety (Spiegelberg, 1973). The results of overcrowding are such a serious nature that by the year 2,000 there will be two groups of people left on the earth: the sick and those who care for them (Christoph, 1973).

Behavioral scientists are increasingly asked what effect crowding has on human development and behavior. Some recent studies on crowding have produced a variety of findings. One study failed to find any significant effects of density (Freeman, Klevansky, and Erlich, 1971). This study, however, examined only adults' task performances and not their social behavior.

Ross, et al., (1973) employing similar methodology to that of Freeman, et al., found that males rated themselves and others more positively in the un-crowded conditions while females evaluated them selves and others more favorably in the crowded condition.

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Hutt and Vaizey (1966) found significant effects of density on children's behavior. Four and five-year old children became significantly more aggressive and less social in a high social-density condition. In a similar study, Chalsa M. Leo (1972) found significantly less social interaction and less aggression in a high spatial density condition. Children played in solitude, which raises the question of whether continuous crowding might retard a child's social development.

Leo believes that the contradictory results are due to the degree of structure imposed by the experimenter. Typically, research on crowding of adults examines highly structured activities and settings provided with furniture; e.g., wooden chairs with desk-type arms. Studies with children have been in unstructured situations. There was no furniture and the toys were portable. Furthermore, her experiment involved spatial density, while the earlier research involved social density. The former compared the behavior of the same number of people in different-sized spaces while the latter compares behavior of different numbers of people in the same space. The latter condition is more typical of boom town conditions.

It has been difficult for the social scientist living in a boom situation to do the type of controlled research possible in a planned environment. Boom town expansions are not planned as an experiment in which data can be gathered. The social scientist is so inundated by "data" that it, like the mud is too deep to wade, hardly deep enough to swim. He is there to take care of the casualties, not to prevent them. The expansion, whether due to a military base, precious mineral rush, or energy production has repeatedly occurred as a crash, unplanned program. Consequently, the social psychologist living under such conditions has more clinical impressions than actual facts at his disposal. He too works a sixteen hour day, seven days a week, inundated by the consequences of drunkenness, anomie, martial discord, suicide attempts and teenage rebellion. Even the most stable citizens become concerned as the consequences seem to touch their doorsteps.

Almost every community in Wyoming is experiencing boom, e.g., Newcastle, Cheyenne, Laramie, Hanna, Salt Creek, Casper, Gillette, and now Rock Springs and Rawlins. There has been little change in the social consequences over the past one hundred years.

Kliever (1970) has chronicled a "boom" town in the late 1800's. Usually the first act of the new arrival is to take from his pocket a dirty plat of the town and hunt for his lot. If this lot were satisfactory, lumber was hauled to the location, and in less than a week a new building was ready for occupancy.

Soon the first rush was past and civic-minded individuals began to see that improvements must be made if the town was to continue to prosper. Shortage of water prevented watering dust from streets. Jails, water systems, and sanitation were necessary. The mud was almost too deep to wade and hardly deep enough to swim.

During the construction period, a certain amount of "riff-raff" drifted into town, but this was temporary. Another group furnished entertainment, e.g. saloons and dance halls. Saloons took care of recreation during the boom, but as the town became more permanent, other recreation was needed, e.g. baseball games, horse races, fireworks, and grand halls. Later, it became evident that more schools were needed.

Compare this description of Billings in 1881 due to the railroad with the author's experience in an energy production boomtown (Kohrs, 1973). A housewife, after fighting mud, wind, inaccurate water and disposal systems, a crowded mobile home and muddy children all day, snaps at her husband as he returns from a 16-hour shift. He responds by heading downtown and spending the night at a bar drinking and trading stories with men from similar circumstances. This typical occurrence came to be called the "Gillette Syndrome".

Divorce, tensions on children, emotional damage and alcoholism were the result. Children went to school in double shifts; hotels turned over linens in triple-shifts. Jails became crowded and police departments experienced frequent changes in personnel in the tradition of frontier justice. Out of frustration with the quality of living, it appeared that mayors shuttled in and out of office regardless of party like bobbins in a loom. Depression was rampant with suicide attempts at a rate of one per 250 people. Suicide attempts were rarely fatal but they became the tool to regulate the lack of human concern. It was the ultimate method to express that something was wrong and needed changing.

When neglect went beyond tolerable limits, divorce was the natural consequence. Fatigued men working long shifts and driving long distances to work came home to equally fatigued wives coping with a mud spattered world.

Trailer courts offered only a mud patty for children's play as they raced between trailer houses and trailer court traffic. Even schools were in trailers similar to those in which the children lived. Nothing seemed permanent. Difficulty in coping with transient living, angry school personnel teaching under less than adequate conditions, and parental conflicts led to poor school adjustment and achievement, then truancy, then delinquency and finally a residential environment.

Like 100 years ago in Wyoming, many came looking for employment. Wide open spaces and unlimited employment attracted workers from Florida to California. Although these transients were not the frontier-day Europeans seeking a new life, they were from all over the United States hoping to find a home where fast living was available and social norms for behavior were blurred. People worked hard and drank hard. There was little time for release through recreation.

Jails often became a protection of wives from beatings by drunken spouses, rather than detention for real crime. Psychiatric and alcoholic withdrawal problems were maintained in the jail because of overworked medical personnel and inadequate medical facilities. The hospital was a firstaid station to maintain life until transported to a hospital in Casper, Billings, or Denver.

The pattern of depression, delinquency and divorce was so well documented that the consequences were predictable. Citizens forsook the pursuit of higher needs in order to cope with the need for adequate water, sanitation, and social survival. An attitude soon developed, "Let it happen; we'll meet the crisis again." Booms are not new in Wyoming, but the social consequences are becoming increasingly clear.

The present study is based on Campbell County although statistics from other boom situations will be included. Campbell County geographically is the size of the state of Connecticut and contains one town – Gillette. From 1960 to 1970, it grew 121 percent. The peak of the most recent boom occurred in 1970.

Table I

<u>Year</u>	<u>City Population</u>	<u>County Population</u>	<u>Public School Enrollment</u>
1950	2,190	4,889	694
1960	3,580	8,861	986
1968	8,000		2,456
1969-70			2,575
1970-72	7,194	12,957	3,261
1971-72	7,200		2,968
1972-73	8,000		3,146
1973-74	9,000		3,068

While Campbell County increased in population, the ratio of city to county population did not change from 1960 to 1970. This suggests that cities cannot take the burden for planning but rather must work cooperatively with the county. The ratio of school children to the total population changed from one in seven to one in four. The statistic reflects the younger population coming with a boom growth.

Campbell County can be compared to other Wyoming counties with roughly the same 1970 census population figures. Carbon County grew at a rate of zero percent and Goshen County at a rate of minus 6.7 percent from 1960 to 1970. Campbell County had a high energy boom. Carbon County had significant changes due to the coal expansion in Hanna and uranium at Shirley Basin. Goshen County has continued to be a stable ranch and farming community.

Table II

<u>1970 Statistics</u>							
<u>County</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>Births</u>	<u>Marriages</u>	<u>Divorces</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	
Campbell	12,957	3,696	317	130	72	1.8	
Carbon	13,354	3,514	237	148	54	2.7	
Goshen	10,885	3,178	172	129	39	3.3	

While the number of marriages is equivalent in the three counties, the ratio of divorces to marriages ranges from 1.8 in Campbell County to 2.7 in Carbon and 3.3 in Goshen. Notable differences can be seen in the criminal statistics of the counties in 1970 and 1972.

Table III

<u>1970</u>							
<u>County</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Arrests</u>	<u>Charges</u>	<u>Guilty</u>	<u>Public Drunkenness</u>	<u>DWI</u>	<u>Criminal Budget</u>
Campbell	12,957	1,025	Not Available	Not Available	134	98	\$1,118,597
Carbon	13,354	614	Not Available	Not Available	36	20	551,567
Sheridan	10,885	337	Not Available	Not Available	47	20	419,580
<u>1972</u>							
Campbell		852	505	305	39	75	\$1,329,081
Carbon		412	338	205	9	34	999,019
Goshen		505	459	306	63	75	521,030

Total arrests as well as public drunkenness charges in boomtowns were twice that of the other two counties. The original justice budget in boomtown almost doubled from \$750,688 in 1968 to \$1,330,951 in 1971. Boomtown budget was also more than double that of the other two counties with comparable population in 1972. The trend has continued through the 1972 report, which as the last report published by the Governor’s Council on Criminal Administration.

A question frequently raised in this type of study is the effect of transients during the year which may not be reflected in the census figure. The following is a comparison of Boomtown to Sweetwater and Sheridan Counties – both counties had a 1970 census population of approximately one-third more than Campbell County.

1970					
<u>County</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Arrests</u>	<u>Public Drunkenness</u>	<u>DWI</u>	<u>Criminal Budget</u>
Campbell	12,957	1,025	134	98	\$1,118,597
Sweetwater	18,391	674	135	63	953,461
Sheridan	17,852	616	164	26	555,437

Total arrests, DWUI, and criminal budgets for Campbell County in 1970 far exceed the other two counties even though the others have one-third more population.

Which employment and wealth of local conditions does not necessarily mean fewer school casualties, or less welfare involvement.

	School Drop-Outs					
	Drop-Outs			Rate		
	1969-70	1970-1971	1971-1972	1969-70	1970-1971	1971-1972
Campbell	70	58	80	5.0	5.2	6.3
Carbon	52	81	68	3.4	5.2	4.0
Goshen	31	33	50	2.3	2.5	3.8
Wyoming				3.4	3.4	3.8

The dropout rate of 5.0 to 6.3 percent in Campbell County far exceeds Carbon, Goshen, and the State of Wyoming as a whole. The move from a stable school environment to one plagued with rapid growth and administrators unfamiliar with such conditions resulted in frequent school personnel-student confrontations. Because of high employment opportunities, many students opted for work rather than continued education unrelated to employment trends.

At a time when industry was already planning additional boom expansion, bond issues were designed to meet only part of the contingencies. Consequently, new school facilities were already overcrowded. High school attendance is discouraged during assemblies because the auditorium cannot hold everyone despite less than one year occupancy.

The increasing dropout rate in Carbon County may be reflecting some of the changes occurring because of community expansion in that County.

A boom community has high “total general relief” and “individual welfare,” when compared to counties of similar populations.

Table VI

	Total General Relief		Individual Welfare		Transients	
	1970	1971	1970	1971	1970	1971
Campbell	230	168	85	93	16	59
Carbon	349	123	56	15	149	48
Goshen	38	47	15	19	2	1

High employment does not mean less relief or individual welfare. There is no explanation for the high number of transients in 1970 for Carbon County although it is a well known fact that the prison population may result in some abnormalities.

There is also an increase in the number of probationers.

Table VII

1968-69 Wyoming Probations

County	Male Adults	Male Juveniles	Female Adults	Female Juveniles
Capbell	26	22	1	2
Carbon	11	12	1	0
Goshen	2	4	1	0
1970-72 Wyoming Probations				
Campbell	30	15	3	1
Carbon	15	15	2	0
Goshen	6	9	0	1

The number of probationers in Campbell County for 1968-69 and 1970-72 is almost twice that of Carbon County and considerably in excess of Goshen County.

It is difficult to obtain statistics representing the medical consequences of “boom”. Citizens find it difficult to obtain a family physician and resort to the use of the hospital emergency room for routine treatment. It is not uncommon to find individuals lined up for a three-hour wait in the emergency room to obtain medical assistance. The following statistics are from Rock Springs, the newest boom town in Wyoming.

Table VIII

Emergency Room Admissions -- Rock Springs

Before Jim Bridger	300 Per Month
Fall 1973	1300 Per Month

While the population of Rock Springs increased about a third, the rate of energy room assistance increased over 400 percent.

An analysis of total dollar liquor sales for the three counties from 1968 to 1973 provide for some interesting hypothesis when compared to criminal statistic.

Table IX

Dollar Sales of Liquor

County	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
Cambell	\$382,345	\$466,827	\$502,633	\$403,277	\$453,056	\$453,401
Carbon	592,079	603,396	627,799	678,432	743,112	790,719
Goshen	237,873	251,936	249,019	253,775	279,423	301,566

The contrast between Campbell and Goshen are obvious. An explanation for Carbon is more difficult. One possible hypothesis is that a minority population in Campbell was consuming proportionately more alcoholic beverages and getting into trouble. This would fit the author's clinical experience in dealing with police crises. In Carbon County, either more people were drinking moderately or law enforcement was more tolerant. Rawlins is a big truckstop overnight drinking spa year around. In summer, it is halfway across the state and a good overnight stop for tourists with lots of motel bars with "old west" atmosphere for tourist trapping.

The implication for community services was carefully studied by Lee Nellis (1973), a research assistant at the University of Wyoming.

Table X

**Community Services Evaluations of Oldtimers and Newcomers
30 Or Under -- Those Checking Necessary**

	Newcomers	Oldtimers
Retail Shopping	85.2%	66.7%
Good Streets and Roads	73.9%	81.2%
Good Schools	94.7%	87.5%
Sanitary Facilities	91.7%	75.0%
Youth Organizations	73.6%	50.0%
Civic-Service Groups	34.2%	12.5%
Continued Learning	50.0%	50.0%
Recreational Facilities	76.9%	56.2%
Participation in Local Government	42.1%	56.2%

His study of Hanna revealed some important implications for community services as demanded by newcomers and oldtimers. While the priorities are about the same, he noted intensity differences. "Oldtimers place less value on civic-service, organizations and continued learning. They also place more value on participation in local government but the newcomers are more likely to favorably mention the mayor or council when asked about civic action possibilities." The newcomer demands more community services of all types, but particularly shopping, sanitary facilities, youth organizations, civic groups and recreation.

The implications for Wyoming are: (1) Community planning that considers individual territorial boundaries in the designing of permanent and trailer park residential centers. Architecture and engineering can and must allow for the deeds of personal territorial boundaries. There is no trailer park in Wyoming planned for psychological well-being. The excuse is no longer adequate that

oldtimers “don’t know better.” The problem with frontierism is, “If it was good enough for us its good enough for them.” Bridal therapy was invented in Wyoming by those who went into the thules and yelled “God darn”whoever until they’ve vented the spleen. They would not believe that this works for everybody or that having a “few snorts” would not cure the ills that beset them. It is also part of the rugged individualist that “no real man” would ask for help. They would rather see their wife in Evanston with a “nervous breakdown” or their kid in Rawlins then have the neighbors know they are “sick in the head”. (2) Increased recreational facilities for all ages designed to help individuals cope with the problems of crowding. The arts, from basket-weaving to flutophone playing (not just the high-brow stuff, but the kind people know are essential to spiritual well being) are excluded by this frontier spirit. People are hungry to live music but there is not a stage in the state adequate for even so modest a company as the Ballet West Company. There is no facility in the state acoustically adequate for either the Denver or the Utah Symphony. Facilities are limited to whistling “Get along little doggie” or your horse is a “sissy.” There are inadequate opportunities for the young to look at careers in fields which have no “frontier” value, i.e. drilling, engineering, ranching, mining, or even teaching as a woman’s work.

The aged are treated much worse then eskimos. The frontier society has no use for those who are not productive in their narrow definition and this implies full vigor and health.

(3) Planning for the different needs of males and females in crowding conditions. The primitives knew about communication and provided for women to wash together at the riverbank. The Wyoming trailer court does not provide this although the saloon does for men. For eight hours women wither in isolation while the kids are in school. Then there is the bedlam before and after school and when the “old man” gets home from work. (4) Planning communities for psychological well being rather than allowing pathological crises lending to immature and psychopathic behavior. A society so close to frontierism needs training in the use of social services. The oldtimer grew up with ideas about sanity such as “never draw to an inside strait,” “turn the motor off in a drift – freezing is better than monoxide,” and “you can always trust the bartender.” The newtimer needs training in “no man is an island,” “It’s okay to cry,” and “even ball players do fub.”

The issue of boomtown is not politics, economics or engineering, but rather human survival at a level above existence, getting along, or even, as good as we have it now.

Since the first oil was found at Salt Creek, power production in Wyoming has wreaked a toll of human suffering, developed communities that flared in the boom blaze and died, or flared and continued wildfire growth without care or planning, leaving wakes as devoid of quality life support as a prairie grass burn area.

The goal must be community that supports psychological well being for all not merely a few who can escape the human crises of boom because of their wealth. The motto should be, “Wyoming is gonna supply the power, let’s first plan for peace of mind.”

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