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PLACE MAKING, HAZARDOUS WASTE, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOOELE COUNTY, UTAH*

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ABSTRACT. Declining populations, aging inhabitants and infrastructure, limited economic opportunities, and under- or unappreciated natural environments characterize a number of rural communities in the western United States. Faced with the challenges of providing for their residents, some of these communities have chosen to permit undesirable land-use activities, including the disposal of hazardous or nuclear waste. Central to the development of such sites is how a place is perceived and portrayed. Our purpose in this article is to examine how a dominant perception and portrayal of one such place—Tooele County, Utah—was created and used to facilitate the development of hazardous-waste-disposal sites. We use the geographical concept of “place” to illustrate how meanings and values are attached to a region in order to justify its becoming what it is and how such views persist. *Keywords:* hazardous waste, NIMBY, perception, place, Tooele County, Utah.

Except for localized boom-and-bust cycles of mineral exploitation, many rural areas in the intermontane U.S. West have always been economically marginal. Because of the typically arid climatic conditions at the lower elevations, which limited agricultural development without irrigation, and the difficulty of settlement at higher elevations, the rural parts of this region have two overriding traits that set it apart from other regions in the United States: sparse and widely scattered rural settlement patterns and federal government ownership of large swaths of land. These two factors, along with the general aridity of the region, provide the context within which ongoing globalization has and is creating new rural geographies.

Globalization has accelerated competition for the products that the rural West produces, making many traditional activities economically marginal (Galston and Baehler 1995; Beyers and Lindahl 1996; Power 1996; McGranahan 1999, Deller and others 2001; Shumway and Otterstrom 2001; Stauber 2001; Walker 2003; Green, Deller, and Marcouiller 2005). This has led to economic restructuring and the creation of new spatial patterns of rural development, which can be classified

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