Weapons labs and city growth: Livermore and Albuquerque, 1945-1975

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Abstract
This thesis traces the transformation of two cities in the American West: Albuquerque, a medium-sized metropolitan area in the generally low-population state of New Mexico, and Livermore, California, a relatively small town on the fringe of the massive San Francisco Bay Area metropolis. The federal government built nuclear weapons labs in both places after World War II, and as a result, they encountered phenomenal growth. This is not surprising, as authors such as Peter Hall and Ann Markusen have argued that federal installations in the postwar years affected the economies of many western cities. However, this thesis asserts that rural areas in the West were impacted as well. Examination of both of these cities showcases how the military-industrial complex in the postwar years affected local identities and economies. In particular, it provides case studies to better understand the issue of federal dependency in the West.

Keywords
Albuquerque; New Mexico; Company towns; Defense contracts; Demographics; Dependency; Economy; Federal government; Livermore; California; Military-industrial complex; Military research; Nuclear industry; Population growth; Slow growth movements; Urban growth; Western United States

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...second nuclear weapons laboratory, the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, in Livermore, Calif., in 1952. For almost the next four decades it was the United States’ chief factory for making thermonuclear weapons. Teller was associate director of Livermore from 1954 to 1958 and from 1960 to 1975, and he was its... Read More. Factors Influencing the Growth of the Nuclear Arsenal. Why did the United States spend so much money amassing an arsenal far larger than even many military and government experts thought necessary? Arbitrary decision making played a significant role. The weapons laboratories at Los Alamos and Livermore also ended up competing against each other in the quest to develop newer and better nuclear weapons, with each coming to view the other as the “enemy.”[15]. Another overlooked factor is that nuclear weapons were considered “free goods” by the military services. A second weapon laboratory established at Livermore, California, in early 1952 soon became the center of a weapon engineering and production network that included the Sandia Laboratory near Albuquerque, New Mexico, as well as new or expanded facilities in Iowa, Texas, Missouri, Ohio, and Colorado.(8). The Commission recognized the need to maintain the vitality of the national labs, and to encourage the university research teams and industry groups whose research on the peaceful uses of atomic energy would provide the technology of the future. The rapid growth in atomic energy activities in the previous decade and changing perspectives in nuclear technology clearly pointed to the need for a substantial reorganization of the Commission's operational and regulatory functions.