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Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Workshop – No Longer on the Fringe: The Wildland Urban Interface as History

Tape #2

[Patricia Limerick – Center of the American West, University of Colorado. *Pressed Back on Each Other: Westerners, Fire and the Hegelian Prediction.*]

PL – ... when shifting paradigms, it is important to remember to put in the clutch. I think that would have to be [indecipherable]. Although, maybe this paradigm, the transmission is not working too good, in some ways. But, that's what we're all here chatting about. I'm really grateful to Steve for this opportunity. And, I've got it in many ways, as the sequence got changed, 'cause now, well, when we get to the point about the responsibility, we now have some content to it from Jack's presentation, so .... An honor in every way to be here and to follow Jack.

I started thinking, in preparing for this, I reached the conclusion, I think it's a [indecipherable] one, that the discourse around wildland / urban fire issues maybe the crabbiest, least edifying, discourse there is in natural resource circles. And I am fortunate to get to commute around to different environments, so sometimes I'm at a water conference, and sometimes it's a wildlife [indecipherable]. But this really might actually be the least edifying, the most likely to go off track and lose itself in blame. And, of all unproductive reckonings with history, that is certainly a prime one.

I got myself into kind of a role of judge, trying to decide which was the nadir moment – the worst, worst moment – of this discourse about fire issues. And I decided I would give the prize ... I'm doing this unilaterally, but I'm asking for your nominations so I can consider a wider pool ... but I thought, when Governor Marc Racicot of Montana, in the 2000 election campaign, when he said that the Clinton Administration had caused the fires, I thought, 'you know, we'll have to give Governor Racicot the prize. I don't think it can get any better than that.' I think that's really the nadir moment ... that he took us to the bottom. In theory, we should only be able to climb up from there. But I'm not sure that's true. Anyway, I'm anxious to get some of your nominations for that, so please don't leave this forum without nominating your nadir moment, so that I can give this more careful consideration. But Governor Racicot, I thought, that is really pretty good.

We ... I ... the Center of the American West that I work with, at the University of Colorado, is bipartisan. We don't fall into any of the usual partisan condemnations. and yet, I do feel that Governor Racicot earn his prize here. The Clinton Administration didn't cause these fires, he was careful to say, but their myopic environmental philosophy led to explosive fires that destroyed everything. So, there is ... the competition is stiff here for ... but we've got him in there, so I ... well, this is really interesting. I'll ... through various conversations with my two excellent new stepchildren, I got into a discussion about *Alice in Wonderland*, which they'd never read. They're 11 and 9 years old, but had never read that. So I was trying to think, well, where do these people – Governor Racicot and his many fellows who take this conversation and take it into such a swamp – where did they learn their techniques. And my stepchildren and I were reading this section in *Alice in Wonderland*, I thought, “well, there's the curricula, there's the training place where these people go to learn how to conduct fire discourse.” The Mock Turtle is describing to Alice that school ... of course, it's a school of fish, but the school he was a part of. He was not able to afford the extra classes, he tells her,

‘I only took the regular course.’

‘What was that?’ inquired Alice.

‘Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with,’ the Mock Turtle replied; ‘and then the different branches of Arithmetic– Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.’

There's where ... Governor Racicot was an alumnus of that school. Now we know where that's taught. So, the question is – how do we reverse such a learning program. Also talking to my stepdaughter, she got the terms ... I was a member of the fuel ... I beg your pardon, Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnership Roundtable, in Colorado, for years and years, we met ... we still meet. And my stepdaughter was trying to memorize that name. She was going ‘Front Range Partnership Treatment....’ No. No. No. We're not treating the partners, we're treating the fuel. And I thought, that's the key. We've been treating the fuel and we haven't been treating the partners. And particularly, we have not been treating the politicians. So while we talk about fuel treatment programs we also have to talk about politician treatment programs. And I'll try to reverse that curriculum, and ‘ambition, distraction, uglification, and derision’ that is so characterized this discourse.

I think this matters, because I think, in lots of ways, this is sort of one-stop worry – that fire connects to so many other natural resource issues – to water, to air quality, to land use, to wildlife, climate change – that if you could improve the public conversation about fire ... it's sort of a one-stop worry sort of thing. If you could get a better [indecipherable] with that, lots of other things fall into place.

And now, a very brief reference to Hegel. [General laughter in room]

Those who panicked when they saw it in the title, breathe deeply again. This going to be very brief. I owe this to Dan Kemmiss, the former mayor of Missoula, and state legislator

of Montana, who, in one of his books, quotes Hegel in a way that I just have found very fruitful. He ... it turns out that Hegel, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, did pay quite a bit of attention to conditions of the united states, and commented, really interestingly, on that. And he felt that we were not a particularly instructive or ... oh, I don't know what ... a serious experiment in governance, as long as we could expand outward. We could turn our backs on each other and expand outward. so Hegel said that the ... let me quote, 'a real republic, an interesting experiment, an instructive experiment in governance, would not happen in America until the immeasurable space – space which that country presents to its inhabitants, shall have been occupied, and the members of the political body shall have begun to be pressed back on each other. The inhabitants, instead of pressing outward to unoccupied the fields, will press inwards upon each other, and so form a compact system of civil society.'

Now, western historians will be thinking, 'well, that's actually ... that's just an anticipation of Turner, in the end of the frontier.' I think it's deeper and more interesting, because Hegel has put a positive cast on that. That we will be a more productive and instructive group of people when that happens. Turner was very sad at the end of the frontier, and considered that to be a calamity for the nation really. But this takes ... this is an excellent way of turning what some might see as bad news into good news. So, my thought, is having looked and looked and looked for that Hegelian prediction to come together and to take effect, it keeps getting postponed. There is more homesteading after 1890 and the end of the country, than there is before. There is a lot of problems with finding that transition, that deadline. But it seems to me that maybe it's that wild / urban interface there, and the issue of fire ... that fire, literally, lights a fire under people's deliberations. It turns up the heat on our considerations. That that might actually be a place where we can take that Hegelian prediction and give it a very grounded notion. if it turns out that Hegel is right, and we do pass into that moment where were pressed back upon each other, forced to deal with each other, forced to find better and more productive ways of resolving our problems, dealing with our pressed state, then maybe this will save us from incidents like Governor Racicot's outbursts. Maybe we could cut back, a little bit, on that overheated rhetoric and find some better ways of approaching that. Okay.

So, what I want to do is take on a little project. We adopted this slogan at [] American West called 'turning hindsight into foresight.' which is, speaking of ambition, I don't think it's got uglification or derision into it, but it certainly has that. And so I would like to sort of experiment with that project. Now, there are two territories that I ... before I get into some particular historical dimensions of this, that I wanted to say I think were so challenging and hopeful in the manner of fire and fire policy. One of the great ways of characterizing the history of the American west over 200 years is that it has been an enormous exercise in drawing lines and jurisdictions. That we have had an extraordinary festival of creating agencies, creating units of governance, and drawing lines around that. So, for 200 years,

that was the project, the support and activity. And now, we are all living with those lines and jurisdictions. And that's one thing.

But then we're also dealing with all sorts of substances that do not respect those lines and jurisdictions. Water. Wildlife. Air. Human migration. All of these substances are crossing all those lines and jurisdictions, and it is a great challenge to us, in our time, to figure out how we coordinate across those lines. That, of course, makes that National Interagency Fire Center here to be an extraordinary historical case study in that sort of coordination.

I have my own little plan for how to get the American public thinking more creatively about these jurisdictions, and maybe to get people in agencies thinking creatively. We have a very active Shakespeare Festival in Boulder, and it occurred to me that's the solution there, because Romeo and Juliet presents us with the basic plot. My thought here is that we work with the Shakespeare people, we create ... well, I guess, take some liberties with the Romeo and Juliet plot. We have Romeo be the son of a forest supervisor, and Juliet is the daughter of a county commissioner. And this is very ill fated – everyone in the room knows how ill fated this is. And it's looking very sad for the couple; they'll probably have to kill themselves because they won't be able to get married. And then, as it gets worse and worse and worse; then everyone comes to their senses; they are pressed back upon each other; the agencies negotiate an interagency memoranda; the two are permitted to marry; they have little half breed children – they're half forest service and half county commission. and [general laughter] there is this [indecipherable] , and that play, preformed around the west. [Laughter continues]

I have a very funny student who's the little ... well, a difficult person to describe, Daniel, but he sits in the front of the room. He's very deadpan. I said this to them a couple of weeks ago, he said that's the goofiest idea I have ever heard. You come up with a better one, Daniel, you come up with a better one. Because I think it's pretty good. It has the potential for that.

But, that is really a big issue of our times. A historically generated issue. Once we created all those jurisdictions, all those units of governance – federal, state, local, tribal – how do we coordinate across those, as these maddening substances continue to cross them.

The second big one is the one that Jack's really given us a great framework for – responsibility. Life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century west was life without a safety net. That was really a kind of suck it up situation. When you had a dilemma that you had either created for yourself, or came down upon you, that was yours to deal with, in ways that are actually quite terrifying to look back at, for the progressive era, on the late 19<sup>th</sup> century workman's compensation, those kinds of things. We've been building a structure that relieves individuals, in many situations, from the solitary burden of their afflictions. And, now I sound maybe a little neo-con, I don't know, but it seems like maybe we went kind of far in that direction. So that that sense of responsibility, where Steven Pyne is quoted in the

paper, speaking on fire risks, says people are active agents, not simply passive victims or whining litigants. Well that's true. And there's the case where I would say if that lesson from fire could move to a broader zone of social issues, then fire has in fact elevated as across the board. That has big relevance.

So that sense of responsibility, and what individuals do or don't do; do individuals sit and wait for your teams to come in and save them? Maybe the worst thing that ever happened to the royal character of Americans was the creation of search and rescue teams. [General chuckles in room] But they're noble people. I admire them madly. They are people I just think the world of. And I'm enraged when one of them gets injured trying to help somebody who was an idiot. [General laughter] [indecipherable] I think was one of the best things Edward Abbey said was, "if you want to go out into the wilderness and hurt yourself, that's your choice as an American, and you'll deal with the consequences on that." And so, to have that 'oh, we'll get ourselves in a pinch and someone will save us from it' ... that probably has reached its limits. That's a Hegelian constraint right there.

So, what one of my proposals for you is, rename ... is to not rename – just add a name – National Interagency Fire Center aka National Repository of Displaced Responsibility. [General chuckles] Okay. And that just stays until people get a better grip on themselves, and then that name moves on. It was just a temporary name; I wouldn't put it on business cards or ... just yet. [General laughter] Okay.

So, now, several items of larger historical context. By the time ... I'm doing this thing that audiences are just a state of joy on. I am taking several sheets of paper and moving them over here and not going to use them, and that ... it's worth copying pages of the phone book and doing that here, just because it makes audiences so [indecipherable]. [General laughter]

So, I only have ... so those ... we have a responsibility; we have agencies and jurisdictions; and now we have the third item here in my historical lessons, which is a very big one, which is – the new west transition, the new ... the transition from the old west of extraction to the new west of amenity / second homes / telecommuters / recreation / tourism / etcetera, which is a ... well, it's speaking of needing to put the clutch in on a paradigm shift. That is a very tough one, because for ... one problem for instance is that extraction will not die. We have obituaries for extraction; we have memorial services; we talk about the interesting values that came from extraction; we pray; we go home; and then the natural gas move starts up western Colorado and Wyoming. You're supposed to be dead! What are you doing back here? [General laughter] So, that has been a very interesting part of the new west transition, is that the obituaries seem to be premature for a lot of forms of extraction.

But something very big has been changing in that rise of amenity / tourism / recreational things. Now, that has huge implications for studying the context of that historical change

for this topic. Sensible land use planning came for many years from the west's difficult terrain and remoteness. It was hard to get to places. That was ... that relieved county commissioners, that relieved state legislators, that relieved all sorts of people of the burden of regulating human settlement. Because it was simply too difficult to get in and out. The proliferation of roads, the building of roads, the extension ... our friends at the [indecipherable] Bill Travis, when he did his *Atlas of the New West*, he has a map of the West just honeycombed with roads. And the title of that map is *A Road Runs Through It*. And there is the change, there is where the burden of land use planning moves so much over to human beings, with the building of those roads.

What we lost, when we lost remoteness and the difficulty of terrain in the west, was huge. And many of our troubles today come from what seemed, and was embraced by so many people, as improvement.

Maybe, staying on this theme of rise of the amenity settlement and the spread of ex-urban housing, maybe, if you could ... this is I know useless hindsight ... but if you could look at the history of the environmental movement, the conservation movement, and you could inflect one thing, go back to the past and change one dimension ... of well there's lots of candidates for that, but my sense is, the most productive one for relieving firefighters, if that's a goal, and for avoiding lots of other connected problems, is to beg Henry David Thoreau, beg John Muir, to really shut up about the beauty of nature, and the way in which a human being is improved by living close to nature. [Growing chuckles] And instead write exhilarated, exuberant, testimonies to urban living. And how great it is. And how wonderful it is. You live with ... you're in an apartment building, and everyone you love is there. You see them in the hallway. Oh, just raises the spirit. Use the same inflated, over the top, rhetoric. But talk about the joy of farmers markets, and so on. [General laughter] The happiness of being concentrated, the sense of community, the joy of being a human and being in the company of humans. what was such a curious misstep, and it's the worst of hind sights speaking here, but, such strange policy was for nature lovers to write about how wonderful it was to live close to nature, dispersed in nature, admiring nature. What a bad move. What a way to destruct wildlife habitat. If there's a better way to get people in circumstances for wildlife takes it on the chin, which is not very vivid image [indecipherable]

But, anyway, what an interesting moment that was, and what a process of recovery. My own feeling is that the one unit of land use planning that would have just been so useful, so consequential – ban picture windows. [indecipherable] [General laughter] just have those little things that [indecipherable]. Oh, what a difference that could have made.

Well, the upshot of all this, for fire in particular, is that we have an enormous weight physiological / economical / cultural / political put on the West looking pretty, as much as the time as we can make it look pretty. That's the whole fascinating ... Tom Power, at the

University of Montana, his fascinating studies of the economic value of unspoiled landscape, the importance for attracting industry of having beautiful hills without mines and clear-cut's and so on. Many positive aspects of that, but, that mandate – that West must be as cute as possible, as much of the time as possible – and that time element is very important. So, as Steven Pyne's reminded us many times, fire is a creative force. Well, it certainly is that. But it's a creative force that presents itself as a destructive, uglyfying, force in the first round. You have to have some sense of time, and some willingness to move through that time, to get to the part where it's a creative, re-beautifying landscape. The uglyfication comes on hard at the beginning.

Those beetles! I'm so glad that somebody talked about beetles, because **that** is the concern of Colorado. What an icky looking thing. And what's just delightful and hilarious is that it's the ickyness that you see driving on I70 that troubles people the most. [General chuckles] That's like people in southern California who fought wind power, because it disrupted the tranquility of their commute. [General laughter] But that ... wonderful friends at Rocky Mountain National Park, a couple of fire experts there, told me a very vivid moment of conveying this message, that for the first year, they say, after a tree is has been afflicted with pine beetle, it's still got a lot of sap. They said, you hold a match to it and its whoosssh. The instant whoosssh thing. A year later, it's not whoosssh, right? A year later it's really going to take you more time and trouble to get that tree started than a tree with a lot more sap in it. So, we are having a ... our debate, our senators have positions, our congressmen have positions, they're all doing a little bit better than Governor Racicot on this so far. But, it's still ... we have to keep the West pretty, is really the mandate they're responding to.

My final point on this New West change, that could have made a very big difference – the rich have forgotten the core meanings and value of conspicuous consumption. A little reading program for the wealthy, in which they go back to read Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, would be so useful, [general chuckles] because what Veblen makes so clear, and it's so important for rich people to get reacquainted with their roots on this, but they ... conspicuous consumption requires showing off to your peers. You have to have your wife ... if you're a male rich person, you have to put pearls on your wife, and then parade your wife around where women without pearls, or with less ... they may have pearls, but the need to have not so rich a set of pearls, that's the whole point – is to have an audience. You parade your possessions in front of an audience that is, in some way or other, your peer group. This business where you go into distant valleys, where nobody ... no rich people come, except for the ones that you invite for the weekend, that's bad practice of conspicuous consumption. [General laughter] It's not as emotionally gratifying. You're just not living up to the mandate. So, we've lost something very important when rich people started wearing jeans on the weekends, started thinking that going out and pretending to be a rancher was a cool thing to do – when nobody could see them doing it.

So, they need to get back to their origins and pay more attention to showing off to their peers. Alright.

Now, just a couple more [indecipherable] time. Okay. Thank you. This is, again, a very good match. I'm really glad I followed Jack, because I really like somebody who really knows what he's talking about that actually had some matching points to that. Okay. [general chuckles]

So we ... my next point is about authority and regulation ... and decision making. [indecipherable] As I say I've been a member of the Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnership Roundtable, which is a very interesting group, that I think represents maybe that happy prospect of the Hegelian moment. Representatives from the Forest Service, the state parks, state forests, insurance companies, Nature Conservancy, Wilderness Society, other environmental groups, Denver Water – because of watershed issues. So, really an interesting consortium of people, all sitting around when those watershed ... well it's not a watershed coalition, because we only have just one watershed ... but one of those collaborative conservation efforts that are happening all over. Very touching. Very mom. Very mom. The facilitation fatigue may do us in before we get productive things. But I don't think that's the case. The Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnership Roundtable really is an existing coalition with a few recommendations that, I believe, everyone in the group signed onto. Well, for me, the moment that was so worthwhile for being a member of that, was the moment when ... well, let me back up and say that Forest Service and the state parks and forests called us into being. So, as a group, whenever we came up with an idea that we wanted to go forward with, the first thing we would do is look at the Forest Service's, state agency people, to see if they were onboard with it, because we knew that we weren't going anywhere. So, we're ... very much in our minds is that these public lands are the key to everything that were talking about.

Then, Greg Aplet, one day, we're a year into this project, he gives a presentation, Greg Aplet for the Wilderness Society, and he shows us his maps of the areas in need of treatment in the wildland / urban interface. And he tells us it's 60% private lands that are at issue and need treatment. And for me that was just such a curious moment and thinking 'well, then why have we been obsessing on the Forest Service and state parks? Why have we been looking at those guys as if they were the ones who carry the burden?' Okay. So that was an illumination; 60% for the front range of the lands needing treatment – private lands. So, then you think, 'uhoh, where is their representative around this table? Who are those private land owners? To whom do they report? From whom do they take their leadership? Now what do we do?' It turns out that 60% of our issue involves people who are independent, resisting ... in many cases, resisting county regulation, resisting strictures on their actions and their conduct and their mitigation. Just as Al Grouske, who's our fire hero, tells us that he's often heard in the midst of fire incidents, in residential areas, he's

heard chainsaws in the middle of the night, while the fire is happening, and people are ‘oh, that mitigation thing, guess I’d better get on it.’ [General chuckles]

So, I had a very ... I’m still having that moment of very intense ... moment of thinking ... wishing I could speak to the private land owners and say ‘take me to your leader’ as we used to say to space aliens. Who will conduct you in a way that will make a productive change for you here? And it’s just ... it’s so ... I can’t believe how fortunate I am to have happened onto [indecipherable] with somebody who is not easy to disagree with, I can say, because Jack on the subject of Norman McLain is not worth listening to, I will say. [Great general laughter] That’s not true. I profited a great deal from hearing his remarks on the humanities and their weaknesses, so .... [General laughter continuing]

So, but, who is the leader of those private owners? I will say, that at a moment like that, the key historical dilemma before us – figuring out how a process, that we’ll just broadly call conservation of resources, which originated in aristocracy and empire, the great practitioners, the model setters, the ones who lead us down this path, were people who could exercise a great deal more authority than anyone can exercise in this society. Thank the Lord! Because cutting the heads off poachers does increase your effectiveness in an implementation plan, but it’s got moral issues that are not good attached to that. So ... where is Dietrich Brandis when you need him? Where is the head of the Forest Service ... the British Forest Service in India, a German, who had considerable authority over conservation in India, who Gifford Pinchot went to study with, when Gifford Pinchot went to Germany. Oh, where is Dietrich Brandis when I need him to speak to those ... not speak to, but push around those private land owners. ‘Imperialist Nostalgia’ is what Renado Resaldo [spelling?] called this thing – where you look back at empire and think ‘oh, those were the days!’ I don’t have many episodes of imperialist nostalgia, but this is the time when I get it, and think ‘oh, to have a colonial governor.’ [General laughter]

Well, in the absence of a colonial governor, it’s back on us to really work as hard as we can on figuring out our customs, our procedures, taking our Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnership Roundtables, our interagency cooperation’s, our Romeo and Juliet reconciliations, and try to work those through.

And that brings me to just two last ... well, actually three ... getting as much clarity as we could get among ourselves, about what restoration means. That’s a ... there are three issues where it seems to me we’ve struggled the most in our ... good spirited cooperation’s. ‘Restoration’ can’t mean turning back the clock. It can’t mean recapturing the past. Climate change alone makes that unviable – where’s the base line in that? So, a really careful, open discussion of what ‘restoration’ could mean, that is the place where historians and scientists have to be in conversations. historians and scientists who think they’re going to go it alone ... historians will just work on that base line issue, and the

scientists will just do that. Those are people setting themselves up for failure. That's the time for the most intense collaboration.

So, the three areas where it seems most crucial for us to be in our interdisciplinary mode, as we are today – restoration, and this one's a little bit harder to say ... getting the right setting on skepticism and cynicism. Calibrating skepticism and cynicism. And that's ... this is my confession, that I have just ended up ... the more I hang out in these circles the more muddled I get, about fuel treatment, and especially commercial dimensions of fuel treatment. I just get ... I move like a pinball around a pinball machine, trying to figure out what I think about that. I understand, when the Sierra Club tells me that conventional logging can heighten fire damage by leaving the slash, by leaving the small trees and the slash, so that logging, unleashed as a supposed remediation and fuel treatment, is actually just going to take the big, commercially valuable trees and leave a worse fire situation. I see that. I don't see that logging has to be practiced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the way it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I'm glad that **Paul Hurtis** [spelling?] is going to instruct me on this before we are through with this day, I know. So, that will be good. But, I cannot assume that someone making money out of a good practice ... taints and contaminates that practice. And in abandoned mines issues, we run into that, where if a mining company wants to clean up an abandoned mine, but also wants to engage in re-mining to pay for that. There's such anger over 'oh, that's just a ... they're just pretending to clean up so that they can do the re-mining.' I may be hanging out in the wrong circles these days? I don't spend as much time in Boulder and treatment programs as I should? But, I accept the concept. Good capitalists get paid for solving problems. I accept that premise.

So, but what that means in practice, is there a smarter form of harvest? Is there a way to find more of a market for small diameter trees? I ... whittling... now, whittling seems like a great idea. [General laughter] A high strung, nervous population, all to harried, all need to calm down. [General laughter] So, think about that. So, small diameter logs ... whittling as a hobby. Wouldn't that be nice to [indecipherable]? We need a guru. We need a real whittling movement – something that galvanizes people. And it's great to know that the Basque people were particularly committed to whittling – sheep herding guys that .... So, here we are. That's so great to be here in Idaho, where the Basques [indecipherable] whittling, but .... And I've looked at web sites on whittling, and they are a happy people, the whittlers. [General laughter] they're so [indecipherable] this is the ... [www. Whittling .com](http://www.Whittling.com), [indecipherable] official home page. "Welcome to the world of whittling, a hobby for some, an obsession for others, joy for all." So, "Whittling is as ancient as mankind itself, and has provided a means for expression both artistic and functional." "Join us in the adventure."

So, anyways, that's maybe the key use of fiber, is to print more reports on fire. Maybe that's the thing, is to just keep using them ... small diameter timber to make paper to print

more reports. But, any case, that's .... So there's that question about – where do we put our skepticism and cynicism when it comes to commercial solutions to some of our dilemmas. Or proposed solutions.

And then my last point is the one about our actual powers, as human beings, to respond to this. And again, it's great to be following after this previous talk. We have been through, in the last 20 / 25 years, after the fire suppression paradigm took such a beating, the last 20 / 25 years of wildfire in the West, has been an extensive treatment program for hubris ... and overconfidence ... and smugness. And that's good, because those are afflictions to the soul, and it's good to be treated for hubris, overconfidence, smugness. But now what? What are our powers? I read Steven Pyne's writings sometimes on this, just as if I were reading the scriptures, trying to figure this out. As he points out, "fire is under human control" ... or ignition ... pardon me he says "ignition is under human control in ways that are totally unlike the start of tornadoes, the start of floods. It is among man's oldest tools. The first product of the natural world we learned to domesticate. Unlike floods, hurricanes, or windstorms, fire can be initiated by man. It can be combated hand to hand, dissipated, buried, herded in ways unthinkable for floods or tornadoes." So there's a wonderful reminder of how different this is to any other circumstance we're in. But, I can't figure out, after the treatment program for hubris and overconfidence and smugness, where is the accurate, the trustworthy, the 'we can steer by this assessment' of what our powers are? What is it that we can do and we can't do? And that's back to our Hegelian question. I think that's the question really pending for us. Where is this setting for the exercise of our powers that is not leading us back to hubris and overconfidence, but also not restricting us or constraining us from positive things we could be doing?

Well, I conclude with a story that applies both to my circumstance and time. I'm sorry to say ... oh, I left out this really, excellent part ... our scholar at ... Tom Lyons, who teaches at University of Colorado, teaches a course on the Bible as Literature. And I walked by his class one day and was eaves dropping, and he was talking about the representation of fire in the Bible. That was really interesting, so .... But, you don't get to hear it, so .... Anyway .... [General laughter] Running out of time. Although a question could be raised about whether or not [indecipherable]. [Great general laughter]

So, my story, my concluding story, addresses my own dilemma with my clock here, but also, is this the Hegelian moment where we are pressed back upon each other, and fire is what heats up the issue that brings us to some kind of next ... reckoning ... next stage. So, there's ... this is a story about a fellow who came into a bar, in a saloon, in an old western town. A cowboy comes riding in. All the townspeople are enjoying an afternoon there and he comes in. And he's very ... he's really disruptive. He's knocking people's hats off. And knocking over their drinks. And just riling everybody up. Insulting people. And the townspeople just don't know what to do. They're just in a state of ... no management strategies or [indecipherable] themselves at all, they have no idea what to do. And just as

they're at the end of their wits on this, they notice that a quiet stranger in the corner of the room has stood up. And he walks over to the cowboy and he says "I'm giving you five minutes to leave town." And, to everyone's astonishment, the cowboy packs up and he's out of there in two minutes. And it's ... peace is restored. It's ... their town is back. And so they go over to the quiet stranger and they say to him "that was incredible! That was so brave! But we're curious. What were you going to do if he hadn't left in five minutes?" And the quiet stranger said "I believe I would have extended the time." [General laughter] Thank you.

Applause

[Indecipherable] some questions.

PL – Okay.

Just a comment, not so much a question. In Atlantic Monthly, the most recent issue, an article talks about the beginning shift to people moving back to urban centers.

PL – Really?

And, it's ... the context it starts with, suburb in southwest ... and I forget which city, and the suburb in ... out by Charlotte, North Carolina, where these big box houses are now being divided up into tenements. And the image is 'the New Tenements.' The most crime calls in urban Charlotte, are in this particular subdivision, where, because of the subprime mortgage crises, because people are too far away and spending too much time commuting back and forth, they are realizing that moving to the fringes is not a good idea.

PL – That's very interesting, and I appreciate that because I take the Atlantic, and I put it in a stack that I'm going to get to soon. And then years pass. This is going to help me a lot with that. But also, I think Denver is a great example of that. And, as you mentioned that, I think one of the things that's really happening in downtown Denver is rich people are buying condos and parading in front of each other, so ....

We have 10,000 units going up in downtown Raleigh.

PL – Well, thank you.

I'm interested about in hearing more about fire in the Bible. [General laughter]

PL – Thank you. but the part that was so fun, is that ... Tom Lyons, I'd invited him to be part of a fire workshop we were doing in 2001, and I didn't tell anybody that he was going to be there. So, he ... well, he was just a man from the English department, that is I ... nobody knew what he was going to do. Excuse me ... I lost my quotations here. So, he sat there and he listened to a bunch of experts in fire, mostly scientists and sociologists. He listened to them speak. And he noted down every time they used biblical language. And, sorry Jack, but, you ... humanities people occasionally get to come out and say 'oh, scientists, what do you know, you're really speaking a language.' And Tom's whole point was that it creeps into everyone's mind; that it's so .... So, his basic point is that even the scientists who thought they were speaking with purest objectivity, were using language that really reflects the Bible. Well, this is what Tom said, and he seems very knowledgeable, trying to verify this myself, he says "There are very rare episodes in the Bible where fire is ... appears with people purposefully warming themselves. It's a curious thing that they ... very inauspiciously, one of the only times where that happens is when Peter is warming himself during the night that he's betraying Christ." So, that's not a great moment, or classic moment for fire right there. [General laughter] But Tom says, and actually, I think it's quite short, I think I might just read it rather than [indecipherable] everyone says he's the expert, "There is nothing natural or spontaneous about fire in the Bible. Fire is a vehicle for judgment and punishment. It responds to human sin, and tests and purifies. It symbolizes God. It's basically this notion that it is always, with the rarest exceptions, purposeful and directed and responds to someone's bad behavior." So when you were talking about how we often speak of the 'well, these people are the dumb jerks who are living in there.' But there's also a kind of 'they sinned; they went into the fire regime area and they are now paying for it.' He says "Fire will be the reward of corrupt leaders, for instance. When the patterns of scripture installed in our minds" Lyons argues "we are very likely to associate fire with some transgression or evil. There must be a reason for fire, and there must be a tie between this reason and guilt." So, I found that just so interesting, because ... why do we do the blame thing? Why are we ... why is that so ...? And I think there is more of that hard wiring in our minds, even those of us who would, probably appropriately, find and

consider ourselves very secular, that just is so much in the air we breathe, really. So, thank you very much for ... [chuckles]

I would suggest that the Biblical version of fire had no credibility starting with the Burning Bush. [General laughter]

PL – But that's ... that would actually support Tom's point – that it's purposeful; that it's intended; that God puts it where ... God wants the bush out of nowhere to burn. God can do that. So, well, there's an interesting, helpful remark for ....

A biblical footnote to that is, in British [indecipherable] in the 1950's, the Russian immigrant [indecipherable] community had a sect that believes that materials that corrupt, and every now and then you cleanse your life by burning you house and your clothes. and this caused a slight concern in winter, as you saw naked families standing around burning houses; little old ladies, naked, with cans of gasoline walking through town [indecipherable] .

PL – That's very interesting.

They now build fire proof churches because of internal politics. [Great general laughter]

PL – That's ... we just spend some time contemplating that. [General laughter]  
[indecipherable]

I'll add a comment to the biblical stuff. That part of the world, the Holy Land, is ... has a climate suitable for fire, but doesn't have the regular ignition sources. So, this is a subject [indecipherable] in which fire is caused by people. Or is related to human behavior. And the same will be true for Europe, except for small parts of the Mediterranean, where there is some natural ignition. So, most of our powerful literature, many of our sciences, our institutions, all came out of very anomalous parts of the world, where there is no natural basis for fire. And, imputed to fire, essentially, human agencies. With cause. The problem is when they take that, in their imperial mode, and try to repeat it elsewhere.

PL – He's not suffering from imperial nostalgia.

No.

PL – No. Okay.

I wish Brandis would come back. Maybe he could meet Hegel.

PL – Well, thank you. Thanks, very much, for this chance.

Appause