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AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY, INC./KCET/WGBH/WNET

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Rapid Growth, Media Extremism Fuel Political Tensions In Montana in P.O.V.'s "The Fire Next Time" July 12 on PBS

Environmental and Economic Interests Clash, Intensified by Local Talk Radio Station,
In New Documentary by "Not in Our Town" Filmmaking Team

An Independent Television Service (ITVS) Co-presentation

The people of the Flathead Valley in Montana were used to thinking they live in "the last best place in America." Kalispell, the county seat and valley's largest town, means "prairie above the lake." But as revealed by Patrice O'Neill's new film, **The Fire Next Time**, the last best place may become the next worst flashpoint in the country's running battle between the forces of economic development, environmental activism, and anti-government extremism.

Green swastikas were burned to protest environmental laws. A radio talk show host regularly called for the "eradication" of "green slime" while broadcasting the addresses of local environmental activists. Lug nuts were loosened on a car belonging to an anti-hate campaigner's daughter. While loggers and mill workers were facing lost jobs and rising living costs, right-wing extremists plied them with racist and anti-government rhetoric. Most ominously – in news that flashed across the nation and even around the world – a shadowy terror group called Project 7 was discovered with a cache of arms and a hit list of local government officials, police officers and their families.

Patrice O'Neill's **The Fire Next Time** receives its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, July 12, 2005** at 10 p.m., as part of the 18th season of public television's P.O.V. series. P.O.V. continues on Tuesdays at 10 p.m., through September 13 on PBS stations nationwide. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

It was the unmistakably rising tension in the town that led ex-police officer Brenda Kitterman to invite The Working Group to bring its grassroots anti-hate program, "Not in Our Town," to Flathead Valley. Ever since the broadcast of its 1995 film, **Not in Our Town**, about the response of Billings, Montana, to a rash of hate crimes, The Working Group has been helping local communities deal with intolerance and violence by holding film screenings and community discussions. When O'Neill and crew got to Kalispell, however, they realized they had landed in the midst of a conflict too complex to be comprehended, much less soothed, by a few community meetings.

The Working Group ended up staying two years, earning the trust – or at least the willingness to speak candidly on camera – of antagonists on all sides of the Flathead Valley land wars, while documenting the valley's increasingly tense web of conflict, intimidation, and public invective. From

the outset, the filmmakers show they are not “strike a match” documentary makers. Far from heating up the action for dramatic effect, the filmmakers aim for the drama of a community seeking to restore its sense of kinship in the face of mounting stresses from within and without. In **The Fire Next Time**, they appear to have crafted the rare documentary that widens communication – with signal exceptions – between declared enemies.

The tensions roiling the Flathead Valley are not unique to Northwestern Montana. Land-use issues, exacerbated by environmental conflict, global-driven economic change, and festering racial discords, are testing many communities and have, in many ways, turned rural America into today’s political front line. But conflict in the Flathead Valley speaks loudly because it is one of America’s premier wilderness getaway destinations. With beautiful Flathead Lake at its center and Glacier National Park 30 miles to the north, the valley’s 80,000 residents host over two million visitors a year.

In recent years, the valley has attracted wealthy retirees and celebrities, who have driven up land values. New housing subdivisions and the economic infrastructure of tourism are eating up the open spaces they’re meant to enjoy. Meanwhile, the old industrial base of logging, smelting and millwork is eroding, and new environmental laws conflict with the working and recreational habits of many longtime residents.

Throw into this naturally stressful situation two disturbing elements of America’s hyper-antagonistic politics – right-wing talk radio and anti-government militia organizing – and the tension soon becomes volatile. Everyone agrees things took a sharp turn when failed political aspirant John Stokes came to town, bought local radio station KGEZ, and began hosting a daily talk show that was, for some, a breath of fresh air – and for others, a hateful and threatening voice. It’s the unapologetic Stokes who sponsors burnings of green swastikas, and who blandly disavows any hateful intent while broadcasting the home addresses of environmentalists, calling them “the enemy.”

That means that people like sawmill supervisor Scott Daumiller and his friend J.B. Stone, who are in the forefront of the local anti-environmental movement, and Joshua Closs, a young guest music deejay at the station, find Stokes’ provocations compelling. At the same time, people like ex-cop Kitterman, environmentalists Keith Hammer and Mike Raiman, and teacher Randy Hansen, feel themselves suddenly in physical danger. What had been a sharp disagreement between neighbors suddenly emerges as a possibly violent conflict with volatile, extremist forces.

Nothing was more telling – and is more disquieting in **The Fire Next Time** – than the community’s reaction to discovery of Project 7, its cache of guns, and its hit list. The targets, after all, were not distant officials or outsider bureaucrats. They were everyone’s longtime neighbors including popular Police Chief Frank Garner and Sheriff Jim Dupont. And while many citizens, like Brenda Kitterman and newly elected Mayor Pam Kennedy, felt immediately moved to rally in protest, there was a degree of denial about the potential danger. Those accused of being terrorists were also neighbors, who had carved out a place for their views in public meetings and on the radio. For elected officials like Pam Kennedy and Gary Hall, the daily blast of on-air attacks turns public life into a risky proposition, given the real threat from Project 7. The result was also a spreading fear as people began to weigh the costs of speaking out.

With the premise that ordinary people can sometimes, through inaction, allow extremist violence to grow against friends and neighbors, **The Fire Next Time** seeks to find out how the contentiousness in the Flathead Valley could take such a bitter and destructive turn – and once taken, how a community can marshal the will to pull itself back.

“We knew going in that what was disturbing the Flathead Valley involved some of the most critical issues facing the country today,” says director/producer Patrice O’Neill. “What we also discovered was a striking example of modern talk radio polarizing the political atmosphere, and just how high the stakes are – for our whole political system when conflicts like this erupt in growing communities.”

The Fire Next Time is a production of The Working Group in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS). Major production support was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Andrus Family Fund, the Sundance Institute Documentary Fund, The Otto Bremer Foundation and The Greenville Foundation.

About the filmmaker:

PATRICE O'NEILL
Director/Producer

Co-founder of The Working Group in Oakland, Calif., Patrice O'Neill has produced national series on PBS for 15 years. **Not in Our Town**, The Working Group's 1995 story of how Billings, Mont., responded to a rash of hate crimes, which O'Neill co-produced with Rhian Miller, struck a chord nationwide. What began as a half-hour PBS special turned into a ten-year-long national outreach campaign used in over 100 communities across the country. In addition to the follow-up special, **Not in Our Town II**, O'Neill recently completed the first-ever regional special in the series, **Not in Our Town Northern California: When Hate Happens Here**, a co-production with KQED-TV in San Francisco.

As part of The Working Group, O'Neill was executive producer/producer of **Livelihood**, the ten-part PBS series that explored workplace change. She was executive producer for **Test of Courage**, a PBS special on diversifying the Oakland Fire Department, produced by Kyung Sun Yu and Gary Mercer. Her other award-winning documentaries with Rhian Miller for the **We Do the Work** public television series include: **Family Fuel: A Coal Strike Story**, **This Far by Faith** and **Leaving Home**.

Credits:

Executive Producer for ITVS: Sally Jo Fifer
 Director/Producer: Patrice O'Neill
 Co-Producers: Pamela Calvert and Kelly Whalen
 Editor: Linda Peckham
 Director of Photography: Blake McHugh

Running Time: 56:46

Co-Presenters:



Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series Independent Lens on PBS. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have helped revitalize the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. **The Fire Next Time** was produced in association with the Independent Television Service.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 18th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through September, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 220 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V./American Documentary is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television station including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of P.O.V./American Documentary, Inc.



Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. Starbucks has a rich tradition of supporting the arts and independent film and celebrates the fact that numerous points of view can be discussed over a good cup of coffee. Starbucks is committed to offering the highest quality coffee in grocery stores nationwide.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation.



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