

Overcoming Redneck State Stigma



Transcribed by Lisa C. at Rev.com, June 21, 2018.

For those interested, here's how to cite this transcript or episode for academic or professional purposes:

Weber, Eric Thomas, Anthony Cashio, and Larry A. Hickman, "Overcoming Redneck State Stigma," Philosophy Bakes Bread, Episode 42, Breadcrumb 9, Transcribed by Lisa C. at Rev.com, WRFL Lexington 88.1 FM, Lexington, KY, August 28, 2017.



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[Intro Music]

Weber: Welcome, everyone, to a special short edition of Philosophy Bakes Bread, which we call a breadcrumb.

Cashio: Crumble, crumble... Philosophy Bakes Bread is a production of the Society of Philosophers in America, aka SOPHIA. In our breadcrumb episodes, you get a little snippets from past episodes or more substantive responses to our feedback that we have received on Twitter, which is @PhilosophyBB, which always stands for Philosophy Bakes Bread. Get us at Facebook, @PhilosophyBakesBread, or by email at PhilosophyBakesBread@gmail.com.

Weber: That's right. In today's episode, we are very fortunate, again, to be talking with Dr. Larry Hickman, who spoke with us in a full episode, episode 40. We were talking about John Dewey, democracy, and education in America. Well, over time, we've gotten a number of different messages from people. In particular, we got one voicemail from Jason Fultz. This isn't very directly on what Larry was talking about in that episode, but we had him in here. He's from Texas, I've lived in Mississippi, and Anthony's lived in Alabama.

Weber: Jason was asking about states that have negative stigma about them. So, actually, the three of us thought it would be fun to make a little breadcrumb recording responding to Jason's question that he had for us. So, I'm gonna go ahead and play you that, and then I'll ask Larry what he thinks about Jason's questions, and then Anthony, Larry, and I will discuss it a little further and that'll be it. So, thank you for being with us again, Larry.

Hickman: Good to be here.

Cashio: Yeah, welcome back.

Weber: Here's Jason's voicemail:

Jason Fultz: Hi, this is Jason Fultz. I'm a listener to the radio station, and I was listening to your show, Philosophy Bakes Bread, and I have a question that maybe you guys could answer. Kentucky has always been known as a redneck state. A lot of people around the country even still make fun of the state, that they wonder if we have running water, things like that. But with celebrities like George Clooney and Jennifer Lawrence and Johnny Depp, it proves that we have celebrities that come out and even have great success in Hollywood. My question to you guys is, why do we still have that social stigma for what Kentucky is? Thank you, and have a great day.

Weber: Thank you so much for your question, Jason.

Cashio: Thank you, Jason.

Weber: Yeah, what do you think, Larry?

Hickman: Well, I think that across the United States, there are regions that need to look at other regions and say, "Well, we're better than them." Being a native of Texas, I can tell you that that was a problem in Texas for many years, and still is to a certain extent. That a lot of people looked down on Texans as a kind of a stereotypical loud, unvarnished, unpolished. It's a stereotype that's been promoted in the movies.

Hickman: So, how do you get rid of that? Well, I think one of things that Texas has done is to increase its emphasis for many years, although that's in decline right now, increase its emphasis for many years on education, the K-12, and higher education. I mentioned in an earlier episode that the Charter of the University of Texas says that it will be a university of the highest caliber, highest order. So, educational facilities, educational opportunities, that's one thing that people can't deny, first-class education opportunities.

Hickman: But, I think there's an extent to which ... Well, I taught at Texas A&M for almost 20 years, and one of the ways that the Texas Aggies overcame some of that deprecation on the parts of others was through self-reflexive jokes. So, there were entire books, many books, many volumes, of Aggie jokes being sold in the bookstores. So, the bookstores, some of the best ones I ever heard were in the Faculty Senate. So, not taking oneself seriously, and joining in a kind of self-deprecating humor, I think, diffuses a lot of the put-downs that one would find elsewhere.

Hickman: The third thing, I think, is the citizens, the residents, citizens of any state need to be proud of what they can be proud of, and then try to fix what seems to be lacking. There are, of course, efforts in Kentucky to do that, as there are in other states as well. When the people who are voters, the people who are participants in civic life, determine that they want to do that, then it's gonna happen. I live 40 miles, maybe 45 miles, from Paducah, Kentucky, and I know that there's an emphasis there on the arts and the historical district as an art theater, and there's an emphasis on culture. I can say that that's a wonderful spot that people in Kentucky can be proud of.

Weber: Very nice. Very nice. Thank you, Larry. Anthony, do you want to add anything about how to feel better about Alabama?

Cashio: Well, we have a saying in Alabama, thank God for Mississippi.

Hickman: They say ... They're-

Weber: Is that right?

Cashio: Yeah.

Weber: Well, for what it's worth, when I was living in Mississippi, the interesting thing was that this is a surprising ... that these kinds of stereotypes offer moments for surprise, where people don't expect much of you and then turns out, you're really smart, and in fact, that you can be very impressive to people who didn't expect much of you. Right? So, people tend to stand out a lot in places like Washington D.C. There's actually a Mississippi mafia there, where people are sort of all over the place running-

Cashio: A Mississippi mafia?

Weber: ... in Washington D.C. That's what they call it, the Mississippi mafia. You know, these kids are excelling and they're very smart and bright and people don't expect them to be so smart and it turns out, wow, that they are. Right? So, these things can cut both ways. But listen, thank you so much, Larry, for joining us one more time. Thank you, everybody, for your questions.

Hickman: Let me say, Eric, if you've got the time-

Weber: Sure.

Hickman: ... that a part of that ... I mean, I know that you've written about leadership in higher education, leadership in Mississippi, you've got a book on that subject. I think a part of that, also, is the great strides that the University of Mississippi has made over the years in terms of overcoming some of the negative images and, in fact, some of the negative reality that was in effect in decades gone by. That's a really good place to start instilling the benefits of your state.

Weber: That's exactly right.

Cashio: I'm gonna add one thing on myself. Larry said about having pride in your state and then also being willing to fix what needs to be fixed. I think this is great advice, but you have to balance out ... So, for instance, in Alabama, everyone's very proud to be from Alabama. It's a common thing, but sometimes that pride actually gets in the way of fixing things that might-

Hickman: Well, Texas is a good example of that too, believe me.

Cashio: ... need to be fixed.

Weber: Good point.

Cashio: Yeah. I bet it is.

Weber: Good point.

Cashio: I don't know anyone from Texas who's not proud to be from Texas.

Weber: Don't let your pride blind you to those things that need to be improved in your state. I think that's a good final takeaway lesson. Thank you both. And thank you very much to Jason Fultz.

Cashio: Thank you, Jason. All right. Well, I hope everyone has enjoyed this little breadcrumb.

Weber: Indeed. Remember that you can call us and leave a short recorded message with a question or a comment that we may be able to play on the show, as we just did, at 859-257-1849. That's 859-257-1849. You can also reach us on Twitter, Facebook, and by email. For any of that information again, visit PhilosophyBakesBread.com.

Cashio: This has been Anthony Cashio and Eric Weber along with Dr. Larry Hickman. Thank you again for joining us, Larry.

Hickman: Thank you. Great to be here.

Cashio: You've been listening to Philosophy Bakes Bread, food for thought about life and leadership.

[Outro Music]

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