

**Journal #2575**

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*In Mali, Art as Real as Life Itself*

*Heritage Emergency National Task Force*

*Northern Nevada Connecting the Good*

*Nine Steps to Living Well Forever*

*Native Americans Give Earth Day an Early Start in Nevada*

**PICKENS' NEVADA WILD HORSE ECO-SANCTUARY PLANS ADVANCE**

*10 Things We've Learned About the Earth Since Last Earth Day*

*Pine Ridge Reservation snippet*

*The Link to Humanity - Gift Economies*

*The ABC's of Diabetes - All your Questions Answered*

### **In Mali, Art as Real as Life Itself**

By **HOLLAND COTTER**

NYT

April 16, 2012

BAMAKO, Mali — Political tumult in the last few weeks — a military coup, [a Tuareg and Islamist takeover](#) in the north — has all but eliminated tourism in this West African nation, which has long been a magnet for Western travelers in search of firsthand encounters with living art traditions.

But in calmer times the usual focus of such a quest is the landscape of cliffs and gorges in central Mali known as Dogon country. The classical tour includes two standard items: a Dogon masked dance performance and a view of a mural-size expanse of rock paintings, reputedly ancient, in the area.

Dances are arranged by appointment. You book one through a local hotel, pay upfront and hire a driver to ferry you out along cratered roads to a village. There, with the help of guides, you make your way up a cliffside to a shelflike clearing.

At a scheduled time two dozen or so young men, some on stilts, all with masks representing spirits and animals, silently emerge from behind high rocks. They circle the clearing at a measured pace, then, one after another, go into short, tightly choreographed solos danced to the driving rhythms of a drum orchestra.

Dust rises. The speed and intricacy of movement increases competitively as the musicians urge on the dancers. Then, in well under an hour, it's over. The performers linger to pose for pictures and vanish as silently as they came.

Canned ethnography? For a Western art critic who tries to resist value-laden paradigms, like high versus low, traditional versus modern, and genuine versus fake, but who is still steeped in binary thinking, it was hard, on a recent visit, not to take the event as an artifact, a slice of globalist consumer art — at least at first. But Africa, once you start asking questions, tends to change how you see.

The dance, it turns out, is a radically condensed version of a funeral masquerade, a communal ritual intended to urge the reluctant dead into the afterlife, where they can assume useful roles as ancestors. A full-scale performance, honoring important elders, can go on for days. The one I saw under a hot winter sun was the CliffsNotes edition. But it was also an example of history in motion, cultural survival in progress.

The Dogon, a farming people said to have come to the region centuries ago to avoid conversion to Islam, have long since been claimed by that religion and by Christianity alike, and by the most seductive of faiths, secular materialism. And as the force of incursions has increased, age-old means of self-support have diminished. Climate shifts and the departure of young men to cities have made agriculture a constant and losing struggle.

In these circumstances tourism has been a godsend. The packaged dances have brought in cash and have given young men a reason to stay home. By packaging and selling their culture, the Dogon have been keeping it viable.

In the West we have a particular definition of authenticity and a mania for it as a standard for art, especially art that we envision as elemental, unmodern, unspoiled. We gauge genuineness in terms of age, rarity, uniqueness, history of use, motives for creation. But in Africa, as often as not, authentic is simply what works, socially and spiritually: for example, the way each Dogon tourist dance keeps a larger dance, and Dogon identity, alive.

Once this idea sank in, Africa blossomed for me, knocked me off balance and kept me that way.

Songho, a Dogon village and the other regulation tour stop, is famous for a cliff face covered with rock paintings that mark the site of a male circumcision camp. Although the village is now Muslim, Dogon initiation still takes place every three years, with boys coming from the surrounding countryside.

The paintings, done in black, white and brick-red pigment, are of floating shapes, some recognizable as humanlike figures, others looking uncannily like cartoon versions of recent communications hardware: televisions or computers or iPhones complete with small screens and keypads.

No one has yet cracked the symbolic codes here.

They may relate to local family histories or to elaborate Dogon oral epics of ethnic origin and destiny. What's striking, though, and initially disconcerting is how vivid, even garish, the images are, despite a vaunted antiquity.

For this there's an explanation. Every three years the wall is selectively repainted. Certain symbols are freshened up, while others are left to fade. And occasionally, it seems, new things are added. Although we tend to think of rock paintings as a time-mellowed medium, a lot of what's here looks as bold as just-bombed graffiti tags.

But as with the masquerade, just because something doesn't look old doesn't mean it's not. And anyway, I found myself thinking, "What's the big deal about old art, of the kind locked up in

Western museums?” Art, like life, is about growing and recharging, keeping on the move. Change is realness. Africa, present-minded and unsentimental, seems to keep saying this.

Or at least I kept hearing it, as I did on a visit to the ironworkers collective, the Coopérative des Forgerons, back in Bamako, Mali’s capital. Embedded deep in the city’s Great Market, the cooperative is an artisan village unto itself, a tangle of dirt lanes and alleys lined with lean-to sheds.

In each, one or two men stand or squat in front of an open forge and heat pieces of castoff metal — car body scraps, plumbing parts, strips of roof sheeting — to an orange glow before hammering them into new things: plows, hoes, cooking bowls, tools and machetes.

In West Africa blacksmiths have always been feared as magicians because of their freakish, godly ability to smelt iron from ore, and turn solid to liquid and liquid to solid again. At the same time, they are revered for their technological prowess. Without them and what they make, crops could not be cultivated, wars waged, homes protected, rituals performed.

In their ovenlike sheds, intent on their hazardous work, paying no mind to tourists angling for shots, they embody the much-told story of Africa as a culture of recycling. And on a continent where art can often be defined as things or actions employed as a means of managing power, they illustrate the force of African agency, of using power — call it art — to create new forms.

A few days later my thoughts turned back to Grand Market as I walked through the permanent textile display at the National Museum of Mali. There’s some fine old material here: fragments, kept under glass, of 12th-century weaving by pre-Dogon Tellem people who used caves, some near the cliff where I’d seen the masquerade, for burials.

But most fabrics in the gallery are of far more recent date, from the 1970s through the 1990s, and of types still for sale in the city today. As if to point up the gallery-to-street connection, lengths of various new cloths hang free in bannerlike rows from the gallery ceiling and are draped over barrel-like metal stands.

For anyone used to the sanctified, conservation-minded environment of Western museums, such casual flair delivers a jolt. I scanned the room, checked some dates, thought confused thoughts about art versus product and was prepared to make my stay short when one item caught my eye.

It was a cotton hand-weave with jazzy, Matisse-ish patterns worked out in gradations of indigo. Fabulous. Date: around 1982. And hadn’t I seen something very like it before? I had. The weave was virtually identical to that in the Tellem pieces nearby, and the indigo pattern closely resembled one I’d admired as it sat, half finished, on a Dogon-country loom.

If the museum’s strategy was to bring past, present and an encompassing concept of preciousness together, it worked. To see it working, and to be entranced by the sight, required for me an on-the-spot shift in perceptual habit.

Taste is habit, a form of learned behavior. And habit is what we rely on to make us feel at home and comfortable in the world. So judgment based primarily on taste, like most art criticism, is inherently conservative, predictable, fixed.

Africa is a habit breaker. It teaches that the ideal of unalterable tradition is an illusion, that change itself *is* a tradition, maybe the great modern one. It teaches that now is as authentic as then, and already is then. If, on an African visit, such thoughts kick in at all, chances are they'll grow larger and realer. As you gradually — confusedly, delightedly — come to realize, the basic experience of being here is learning how much you don't know.

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I wanted to encourage you/ your organization/ project/ network to post in the Northern NevadaConnecting the Good FB group. <http://www.facebook.com/groups/202212706518478/>

Now, with more than 1,200 local members it is an excellent venue to get the word out to:

- ~**Post Your Community Events**
- ~**Promote Your Group/Project** and Let People Know **What Your Needs Are**
- ~**Find Opportunities** to get involved with Northern Nevada/Tahoe/Truckee organizations
- ~**Connect and Collaborate** with other people and groups making a difference
- ~**Build Alignment** around Shared Values and Common Needs
- ~**Share** the activities of your community outreach ministries if you are a faith-based organization
- ~**Inspire** One Another

**Share Your Passions!**

Empowerment of those on the "margins" (homeless, senior, youth...), Strong Local Economy, Clean & Healthy Natural Environment, Community Peace & Safety, Local Food and Water, Neighbor Helping Neighbor, Local Energy, Arts & Culture, Housing, Family and Community Health & Wellness, Education/Mentoring, Spirituality

*You don't need to be a formal representative* of an organization to share. Just share things that you hear about and that you are passionate for. A reminder---we don't share politics, religion, or promote business in the CTG group.

There have been so many wonderful stories of simple connections made in the CTG Group that have helped individuals, organizations, and the whole community get their various needs met. It is such a simple and elegant strategy---concretely connecting the Goodness within us and the Good Works that are already happening in Northern Nevada, into a more effective power for change---building a self-reliant community.

**Let's keep spreading GOOD NEWS and GOOD WORKS.**  
**PLEASE FORWARD THIS EMAIL to YOUR NETWORKS!**  
**QUESTIONS: Richard Flyer (775) 721-3287**

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**Do one simple thing**

Heritage Preservation and other members of the **Heritage Emergency National Task Force** are encouraging libraries, museums, archives, historical societies, and preservation organizations to participate in [MayDay](#), a national effort to prepare for disasters. Severe damage by this year's tornadoes is a reminder that it is essential to have a plan for when emergencies strike. Set aside some time this May to do one simple thing to become more prepared.

### **How to participate**

Any organization can participate in MayDay. Last year, staff at the Newport Restoration Foundation in Newport, Rhode Island, hosted a dialog between 50 cultural heritage and emergency managers that focused on emergency preparedness. In Texas, the Wolf Creek Heritage Museum instructed museum staff and volunteers on how to operate its fire extinguishers. For more ideas and to see what past participants have done, visit the [MayDay Web site](#).

### **Special MayDay webinar**

Join the free webinar, [MayDay!: Create a Game Plan](#), on April 18 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. EDT. Lori Foley, Vice President of Emergency Programs at Heritage Preservation, and LeRae Umfleet, Chief of Collections Management at the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, will share ideas, suggestions, and advice on how to do one thing for emergency preparedness. Registration is not required to participate. Learn more at [Connecting to Collections](#).

### **Take advantage of MayDay offers**

[Submit](#) a summary of your organization's MayDay activity and enter to win free disaster supplies from [Gaylord Brothers](#). Pick up special deals on disaster publications at the Heritage Preservation [bookstore](#) through May 31.

[RescuingRecords.com](#) will also offer a 15% discount on its popular ICS manual and tabletop exercises from now through May 6.

### **Download salvage tips to your iPhone**

Just in time for Mayday, Heritage Preservation's [Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel](#) is now available free of charge on the iPhone, iPod touch, and iPad as the "ERS: Emergency Response and Salvage" app. Long known as the authoritative resource for salvaging artifacts after a disaster, the *Wheel* has been used by museums, libraries, and archives around the world. This new app makes the *Wheel's* invaluable guidance accessible to anyone who is in need of practical advice for saving collections in the first 48 hours after disaster strikes. Apple users can download this free app from the [App Store](#). Simply search for "ERS: Emergency Response and Salvage." The app was created in partnership with the [National Center for Preservation Technology and Training](#).

### **Upcoming Events**

- Now** Bookstore sale open/Prize drawing open/Sale at RescuingRecords
- 4/18** MayDay Webinar
- 4/22** [Preservation Week](#) begins
- 5/31** Sale and drawing close
- 6/4** Winners announced

*Proud sponsor of MayDay 2012*

Heritage Preservation, 1012 14th St. NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 233-0800  
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Delanceyplace.com - today's excerpt - medicine is beginning to turn into an information-based science, in contrast to the hit-and-miss laboratory processes of the past. As that transition continues, success in medical treatments will begin to occur at an increasingly exponential pace:

"Today, the computer in your cell phone is a million times smaller, a million times less expensive, and a thousand times more powerful [than the computer at MIT in 1965]. That's a billionfold increase in price-performance. As powerful and influential as information technology is already, we will experience another billionfold increase in capability for the same cost in the next 25 years (rather than the 40 years or so it took for the most recent billionfold increase) because the rate of exponential growth is itself getting faster.

"The other important point to make is that this remarkable exponential growth is not just limited to computer and communication devices. It is now applicable to our own biology, and that is a very recent change. Consider, for example, the Human Genome Project. It was controversial when announced in 1990 because mainstream skeptics pointed out that with our best experts and most advanced equipment, we had only managed to complete one-ten thousandth of the genome in 1989. The skeptics were still going strong halfway through the 15-year project as they pointed out that with half of the time having gone by, only 1 percent of the genome had been completed!

"But this was right on schedule for an exponential progression. ... If you double one percent seven more times - which is exactly what happened - you get 100 percent, and the project was completed not only on time but ahead of schedule. Similarly, the cost for sequencing a single DNA base pair fell a millionfold over the same period, from \$10 in 1990 to less than one-thousandth of a penny in 2008.

"We have exactly doubled the amount of the genetic data collected each year since 1990, and this pace has continued since the completion of the Human Genome Project in 2003. The cost of sequencing a base pair of DNA - the building blocks of our genes - has dropped by half each year

from \$10 per base pair in 1990 to a small fraction of a penny today. Deciphering the first human genome cost a billion dollars. Today, anyone can have it done for \$350,000. But, in case that's still out of your budget, just be patient for a little while longer. We are now only a few years away from a \$1,000 human genome. Almost every other aspect of our ability to understand biology in information terms is similarly doubling every year.

"Our genes are essentially little software programs, and they evolved when conditions were very different than they are today. Take, for example, the fat insulin receptor gene, which essentially says 'hold on to every calorie because the next hunting season may not work out so well.' That gene made a lot of sense tens of thousands of years ago, at a time when food was almost always in short supply and there were no refrigerators. In those days, famines were common and starvation was a real possibility, so it was a good idea to store as many as possible of the calories you could find in your body's fat cells.

"Today, the fat insulin receptor gene underlies an epidemic of weight problems, with two of three American adults now overweight and one in three obese. What would happen if we suddenly turned off this gene in the fat cells? Scientists actually performed this experiment on mice at the Joslin Diabetes Center. The animals whose fat insulin receptor gene was turned off ate as much as they wanted yet remained slim. And it wasn't an unhealthy slimness. They didn't get diabetes or heart disease, and they lived and remained healthy about 20 percent longer than the control mice, which still had their fat insulin receptor gene working. The experimental mice experienced the health benefits of caloric restriction - the only laboratory-proven method of life extension - while doing just the opposite and eating as much as they wanted. Several pharmaceutical companies are now rushing to bring these concepts to the human market."

Transcend: **Nine Steps to Living Well Forever** Pages: xiii-xvi  
by Ray Kurzweil published by Rodale Books Hardcover ~ Release Date  
2009-04-28

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### **Native Americans Give Earth Day an Early Start in Nevada**

Public News Service-NV

<http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/26023-1>

Join the discussion: [facebook.com/PublicNewsService](https://www.facebook.com/PublicNewsService) Twitter: [@pns\\_news](https://twitter.com/pns_news) [@pns\\_NV](https://twitter.com/pns_NV) Google  
+: [plus.to/publicnewsservice](https://plus.to/publicnewsservice)

(04/20/12) LAS VEGAS - Earth Day activities in Nevada get started today with a local tribe beginning a 50-mile march to the federal courthouse in Las Vegas to protest air pollution.

William Anderson, chairman of the Moapa Band of Paiutes, is calling it a cultural and healing march which begins on tribal land.

On Sunday, the Southwestern tribes are asking all Nevadans to join them at the courthouse for a rally against air pollution from the coal-fired power plant which operates next door to the tribe.

"That's where we're inviting the public to come out to go ahead and march with us, and let our

concerns out; how we want to protect our environment, and protect our land to go ahead and breathe clean air."

NV Energy says the Reid Gardner plant provides electricity for 335,000 Nevada homes. The utility says it has been taking steps to reduce pollution hazards.

The tribe says pollutants from the plant contribute to health problems ranging from asthma to heart disease. At the courthouse rally, tribal representatives are expected to call for the plant to be retired.

In addition to the rally, Earth Day also offers opportunities for family fun this weekend. Jane Feldman, the Sierra Club's Southern Nevada Group conservation chairwoman, says a good place to start is at GREENFest on Saturday at Town Square in Las Vegas.

"They are going to have three stages with continuous entertainment throughout the day. There's going to be a farmer's market. All of the exhibitors are being encouraged to bring kid-friendly games and craft materials."

A Sierra Club Inner City Outing will be held beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas to introduce urban youths to the outdoors.

More information on Earth Day events in Nevada is online at [earthdaylv.com](http://earthdaylv.com).

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**PICKENS' NEVADA WILD HORSE ECO-SANCTUARY PLANS ADVANCE**  
The Bureau of Land Management on Thursday approved launching an environmental assessment of Madeleine Pickens' proposed eco-sanctuary for wild horses in northeastern Nevada, taking the first step toward possible approval of the unique public-private project to protect mustangs.

<http://erj.reviewjournal.com/ct/uz3688753Biz13201348>

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[April 19, 2012](#)

### [10 Things We've Learned About the Earth Since Last Earth Day](#)

A study indicates that global yields of crops such as wheat and corn may already be affected by climate change.

Sunday is the 42nd celebration of Earth Day, which was started in 1970 by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson to help educate people about environmental issues and demonstrate public support for a conservationist agenda. With that in mind, we decided it was the right time to recap the most surprising, awe-inspiring and alarming things that we have learned about the Earth and the environment since last year's holiday:

1. **Undiscovered species are still out there:** Countless discoveries over the past year reminded us that, despite centuries of research, the planet still has plenty of surprise species in store. Among the many finds include [seven new forest mice species](#) in the Philippines, a "psychedelic"



gecko in Vietnam and [a new type of dolphin in Australia](#). [A new analysis released last August](#), billed as the most accurate ever, estimated that a total of 8.7 million different species of life exist on earth.

2. **[Global warming is already driving up food prices](#)**: While many fear that climate change will someday reduce crop yields and cause food prices to rise, a study published last May in *Science* indicates that this troubling trend has already gotten started. The models used suggest that reduced global yields of wheat and corn are related to global warming. Although the effects are relatively small so far, they may cause severe problems in the future, as climate patterns continue to change and food demand increases.

3. **[Natural gas is not so great](#)**: Although advocates of natural gas argue that it contributes less to climate change than other fossil fuels such as coal, a study published last spring revealed that leakage of methane from newer types of shale gas wells and associated pipelines may be a bigger problem than first assumed. As much as 7.9 percent of the methane mined from these increasingly common wells may be escaping into the atmosphere through loose pipeline fittings and during hydraulic fracturing (a.k.a “fracking”). In the short term, the greenhouse effect of methane is 25 times that of carbon dioxide.

Research suggests offshore wind farms may actually increase oceanic biodiversity. Photo by Ad Meskens.

4. **[Offshore wind farms are good for biodiversity](#)**: Last August, wind advocates welcomed the news that offshore turbines apparently have no negative effect on aquatic ecosystems, and might actually provide new habitats for creatures that live in shallow water. Although a few bird species might avoid the wind farms because of the risks of spinning turbines, the net effect of the large scale-wind farm studied by the team of Dutch scientists was positive.

5. **[A fungus causes white-nose syndrome in bats](#)**: First discovered in a New York State cave in 2006, the disease has quickly spread to more than 115 bat colonies across North America and has caused mortality rates as high as 90 percent in affected populations. Finally, last October, researchers pinpointed the cause: the fungus *Geomyces destructans*. The disease forces bats to awaken too frequently from hibernation, leading to starvation, and has already caused several bat species to become endangered. Scientists are tracking movement of the disease and working on developing a cure.

6. **[The oceans are in bigger trouble than we thought](#)**: The annual State of the Ocean report, published in July by an international team of experts, concluded that things are far worse in ocean ecosystems than previously feared. A range of stresses—including rising sea temperatures, overfishing, acidification and pollution—have combined to threaten extinction for many aquatic species, including those that create coral reefs. “We have underestimated the overall risks,” the report noted. “The whole of marine degradation is greater than the sum of its parts.”

7. **[Large wildlife are surviving the conflict in Afghanistan](#)**: Research published in June by the World Conservation Society revealed a tidbit of positive news about the conflict in Afghanistan. A range of large mammals (including black bears, gray wolves, wild goats and rare snow leopards) have been able to survive decades of violence in Afghanistan, despite the attendant

deforestation, habitat degradation and the absence of rule of law. The researchers reaffirmed the need for conservation programs that also provide livelihoods for local people to ensure this trend continues.

8. **Pesticides play a role in bee colony collapses**: A study published last spring in *Science* proved what many have feared—low levels of a common pesticide may confuse honeybees, making it much more difficult for them to find their way home after trips away from the hive. The authors of the study say the results raise questions about the use of the chemical, neonicotinoid, while others note the possible role of other factors, such as increased susceptibility to disease and a reduction in wildflowers because of land development.

9. **Eating meat warms the planet**: A guide released last July by the [Environmental Working Group](#) put firm numbers on what many have argued for some time—namely, that eating meat can contribute as much to climate change as driving a car. According to the report, which took into account every step needed to produce meat (including the pesticides, fertilizers and water used to grow feed, the emissions resulting from processing the meat, the transportation and cooking of it and other factors), if every U.S. citizen gave up meat and cheese one day per week, the effect on greenhouse gas emissions would equal taking about 7.6 million cars off the road.

10. **Millions likely to be trapped by climate change**: A report by the British government, released last October, warned that millions of people around the world will likely end up trapped in places vulnerable to the effects of environmental change over the next century. Although previous studies simply estimated which areas might be flooded by rising sea levels and assumed that all residents would move, the report drew upon more than 70 research papers and recognized that in many cases (such as New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina), the most disadvantaged groups are unable to leave. Experts advocate increased planning to financially support migration, both within and between countries.

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<http://jezebel.com/5887627/the-ten-scariest-places-in-america-to-have-ladyparts>

## **Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota**

South Dakota is the seventh shittiest state on the list for a variety of reasons. First, health services for women are few and far between. There are only two abortion providers in the state which makes worst case scenarios even worse, and its remoteness makes it difficult for many South Dakota women to access emergency medical care. Last year, lawmakers passed a measure that would have imposed a 72 hour waiting period on abortion (the law was eventually struck down for placing an undue burden on women). But on the Pine Ridge reservation, things are so bad for women that it should be a crime.

The infant mortality rate here is five times the national average, and due to high rates of alcoholism and few services available to addicts needing treatment, a larger than average percentage of babies born here suffer from Fetal Alcohol spectrum disorders. [Rape of Native women who reside here is shamefully common](#), and often goes unprosecuted.

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## **The Link to Humanity - Gift Economies**

Beverly Bell, Other Worlds: "All of Coumba Toure's work is aimed at keeping African values alive. As part of this, she is deeply involved in a women-led movement to keep the gift economy thriving. West African gifting is based on the interrelated values that all humanity is linked and that one's well-being is only as strong as that of one's neighbor. Profit and exchange are trumped by a commitment to care for community." [Read the Article](#)

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## **The ABC's of Diabetes - All your Questions Answered**

**Please Join us for this Free Informative Program**

**including Lunch**

[Click Here for Event Flyer](#)

**Reservation are a Must**

### **Contact**

Mylan Hawkins  
Nevada Diabetes Association  
775-856-3839  
[ndaca@diabetesnv.org](mailto:ndaca@diabetesnv.org)

### **When**

Saturday May 5, 2012 from 9:30 AM to 1:30 PM PDT  
[Add to my calendar](#)

### **Where**

Airport Plaza hotel  
1981 Terminal Way  
Reno, NV 89502

