

**'Burden' is story of unlikely friendship**

**Pastor's fight against KKK becomes movie that may aid battle**

LAURENS, SC, Feb 4, (AP): Not many years ago in a small, rural South Carolina town stood The Redneck Shop — a racist emporium and Ku Klux Klan museum housed in an old theater, where white supremacist neo-Nazis gave heil-Hitler salutes and flaunted swastikas and Rebel flags.

That building, once the property of the Klan, now belongs to a black preacher and committed foe of racism who fought the group for more than 20 years. The Rev David Kennedy plans to transform it into a shrine of reconciliation.

How Kennedy, whose great-great-uncle was lynched in the community, got ownership of the old Echo Theater building from an ex-Klansman - a man who once contemplated murdering Kennedy - is the subject of a movie that could end up raising funds for that transformation.

"It symbolizes right now in the shape it's in - hatred," Kennedy said. "But we hope we can turn it into a building of love."

A decade ago, the white supremacist store in Laurens was a place where one of the few shirts sold without an overt racial slur said, "If I had known this was going to happen I would have picked my own cotton." The World Famous Ku Klux Klan Museum with its racist meeting place was in the back.

The KKK had put the title in the name of a trusted member, Michael Burden. Burden says other Klan members once suggested that he kill Kennedy, and he considered it. Kennedy didn't know that when he saw Burden, hungry, poor and full of hate, and took him to a buffet to fill his stomach, then to a hotel so his family wouldn't have to sleep on the street.

Burden's girlfriend at the time kept urging him to leave the Klan and in 1997, he did. He also bestowed ownership of the old theater building

upon Kennedy for \$1,000.

But there was a twist. Under the agreement, John Howard, who owned The Redneck Shop, would be allowed to stay and run his store as long as he lived.

**Control**

Howard abandoned the store years ago, ignoring maintenance. Duct work and piping were ripped from the walls. He died in 2017, giving Kennedy complete control over the building.

Kennedy estimates it needs at least \$500,000 in repairs that must be done carefully because of the theater's age and historic location. That seems impossible for the minister whose New Beginning Missionary Baptist Church congregation meets in a converted gun store several miles west of Laurens.

But a movie may provide a Hollywood ending.

The story of the unlikely friendship between Kennedy and Burden has been made into a film called "Burden," scheduled for national release Feb 28. Starring actor Forest Whitaker as Kennedy, it was shown at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival.

101 Studios, which produced it, has promised Kennedy it'll help repair and reopen the theater.

"The South cannot rid itself of its past. But we could rid ourselves of the Redneck Shop," Kennedy said.

The studio is getting companies to donate materials and time and is selling commemorative bricks that can be placed at the theater.

The movie's director, Andrew Heckler, first entered The Redneck Shop in the late 1990s after reading a short article about Kennedy's fight.

He knew it had to be a movie and finished the screenplay in 2001, finally getting the green light from 101 Studios to make the film a few years ago.

"I knew this story would mean something to people. Three people in the middle of nowhere South Carolina did something that would be meaningful to all people," Heckler said. "There is a pathway for fighting hate. It's not easy. It's love, faith and not giving up."

Kennedy knows about not giving up. He protested when a South Carolina county refused to observe the Martin Luther King Jr holiday, and he helped lobby to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse dome. In his church office, he keeps a poster-size photo of a lynched black man swinging at the end of a rope. It is his great uncle, killed more than 100 years ago by a white mob in Laurens County.

Kennedy also has a photo of white people about 15 years ago in the back of the theater, wearing uniforms with a Nazi swastika and raising their arms and hands in a white power salute.

"Racism is a strange kind of organism. It is systemic. And it probably will not go away in our lifetimes," Kennedy said.

Burden and Kennedy remain friends, though not as close as they once were. Burden got married, turned his life around and now drives a truck across the country.

"When I changed my lifestyle I buried that guy," Burden said of his racist past.

Burden cautiously shares his story with those he thinks need to know that change is possible.

The movie named after him is a way to do that on a larger scale.

"I'm willing to go through this again," Burden said. "Am I happy about it? Some days yes, some days no."

Film

Variety



This image released by STX films shows Michelle Dockery, (left), and Matthew McConaughey in a scene from 'The Gentlemen.' (AP)

Film

**Brazil's govt blasts Oscar-nominated docu-maker**

**'Gentlemen,' a star-packed crime thriller**

By Jake Coyle

Guy Ritchie's honor-among-thieves meta-caper "The Gentlemen," with Matthew McConaughey, has all the tailored tweed suits and smoky atmosphere of a handsome scotch commercial. "The Gentlemen" might not be an ad, but Ritchie's film is most assuredly selling something.

It's selling a vision in which "real men" handle their business with a touch of class. There are those who get it (handsomewhite men) and those who don't (over-ambitious minorities, predatory gay men). In "The Gentlemen," any criminal aspirant lacking the proper panache is set straight, until the underworld empire of crime boss Mickey Pearson (McConaughey) has been sufficiently protected.

"If you wish to be the king of the jungle, it's not enough to act like the king. You must be the king," McConaughey's gangster intones in the film's opening. It's a musing that would fit right into one of McConaughey's Lincoln adverts but it reflects the overarching, chest-thumping ethos of "The Gentlemen," a well-heeled, star-packed crime thriller that preaches a retrograde masculinity with the mumbo jumbo to go with it.

For Ritchie, "The Gentlemen" is a return to the scene of the crime. The British director first burst on the scene two decades ago with showily stylistic Cockney crime movies ("Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels," "Snatch") before transitioning into larger and glossier studio projects. He made a pair of "Sherlock Holmes" pictures that glumly swapped the detective's brains for brawn, and last year's live-action "Aladdin."

"The Gentlemen" brings Ritchie back into his element, for better or worse, along with an all-star cast including Charlie Hunnam, Hugh Grant, Colin Farrell, Jeremy Strong and Henry Golding. From the start, there's plenty of winking. Mickey walks into a pub where a bartender draws a pint of the director's own microbrew, Gritchie's English Lore. The scene ends with mysterious bloodshed. After the credits, it shifts to a tale being told by a blackmailing tabloid journalist named Fletcher (Grant) to Mickey's consiglieri, Raymond (Hunnam).

He relates his shakedown in elaborate fashion, fram-

ing the story he's asking \$20 million not to tell as a movie script titled "Bush." (He thinks it should be in 35mm and be like Francis Ford Coppola's "The Conversation" but less boring.) Raymond mostly listens patiently - he grills Fletcher a steak and abides his occasional leering - while Fletcher describes how Mickey attempted to sell his marijuana farm empire for \$400 million but suddenly ran into countless headaches. His would-be buyer is a wealthy Jewish man played by Jeremy Strong of "Succession," and the biggest tell that he's somehow behind the trouble is his character's fey manner, which in the world of "The Gentlemen" signals his duplicity. There is also an up-and-coming Chinese gangster Dry Eye (Golding), and you can guess that he turns out to be the bad sort of criminal unworthy of Mickey's stature.

**Narrative**

It's not that Ritchie's film doesn't have some zip. The many-layered narrative, once it comes alive after lengthy exposition, is smartly plotted. And several of the actors are good, especially Farrell as a protective boxing trainer whose kids inadvertently get involved. And Hunnam's presence, alone, keeps the movie grounded. But the movie time and time again exalts the gallantry of its gentlemen heroes at the expense of those unlike them. It gives this glass of Gritchie's English Lore a bitter taste.

"The Gentlemen," an STX films release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for violence, language throughout, sexual references and drug content. Running time: 115 minutes. Two stars out of four.

**Also:**

**SAO PAULO:** Brazil's government criticized Oscar-nominated filmmaker **Petra Costa** on Monday after she once more labeled far-right President **Jair Bolsonaro** a risk to the country's democracy.

Costa's documentary about the 2016 impeachment of former president **Dilma Rousseff**, "The Edge of Democracy," has been praised by leftists and loathed by conservatives in the politically divided nation.

Ahead of the competition for the best documentary Oscar on Feb 9, Costa spoke on PBS and once more accused Bolsonaro of stimulating "farmers and loggers to

invade indigenous reserves, burn and deforest the Amazon, which is already at a tipping point in which it could become a savanna."

She also repeated her accusation that the Brazilian president has attacked the rights of minorities. Costa made similar statements before she was nominated, but this time Brazil's government chose to answer through an official social media channel.

"Filmmaker Petra Costa played the role of an anti-Brazil activist and tarnished the country's image abroad with a series of fake news in an interview on American television," the communication secretariat for Brazil's presidency said in a string of posts on Twitter, in both English and in Portuguese.

"Without the slightest sense of respect for her homeland and for the Brazilian people, Petra said in an unreasonable script that the Amazon will become a savanna soon and that President Bolsonaro orders the murder of both African-Americans and homosexuals," it added.

Bolsonaro has also criticized the 36-year-old Costa's documentary. As fringe lawmaker, he was a staunch advocate of Rousseff's removal and famously celebrated the man who tortured her during the country's military dictatorship during his vote in favor of her ouster.

Costa did not immediately respond a request for comment from The Associated Press.

In the documentary, the Brazilian director uses her personal story to suggest the abrupt end to 13 years of Workers' Party rule came along with a desire for an autocracy similar to the 1964-1985 dictatorship.

Rousseff was removed for manipulating government finances to conceal a widening deficit, which she argued was not an impeachable offense. Right-wingers insist it was impeachable, and some have also said her administration was wreaking too much havoc on the economy to be allowed to continue.

With Rousseff's removal in 2016, her conservative vice president, **Michel Temer**, took office. Temer remained deeply unpopular until his term ended in 2018, when Bolsonaro defeated the Workers' Party candidate to win the presidency.

The other films nominated for best documentary are "American Factory," "The Cave," "For Sama" and "Honeyland." The winning film will be announced at a ceremony in Los Angeles. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** The documentary about several women who have accused **Russell Simmons** of sexual abuse has found a distributor after **Oprah Winfrey**'s exit from the film left it in the lurch.

HBO Max on Monday said it acquired **Kirby Dick** and **Amy Ziering**'s film, "On the Record," following its premiere last week at the Sundance Film Festival. Along with other stories, "On the Record" tracks the decision of music executive **Drew Dixon** to publicly state that her then-boss Simmons raped her at his New York home in 1995.

Simmons, the co-founder of Def Jam Recordings, has denied all accusations of sexual abuse.

"On the Record" had been set to be released by Apple TV Plus, with Winfrey as an executive producer. But in the weeks ahead of the film's Sundance premiere, Winfrey departed the film because she said she felt that while she believed Dixon, she felt more reporting was needed on her story.

Yet "On the Record" made a strong impression at Sundance, where standing ovations greeted Dixon and other accusers, including **Sil Lai Abrams** and **Sheri Hines**. Critics called the film a powerful documentary that brings issues of race into #MeToo discussions. (AP)

**CAMBRIDGE, Mass.:** Award-winning actor and musician **Ben Platt** was named 2020 Man of the Year by Harvard University's famed Hasty Pudding theater troupe on Monday.

Platt, 26, is the youngest recipient in the 54-year history of the award, handed out annually by the troupe that dates to the late 18th century.

"We're thrilled to honor Ben Platt as our 54th Man of the Year because of the incredible impact he has had on Broadway and in Hollywood at such a young age," Hasty Pudding co-producer **Natalie Needle** said in a statement. "As our youngest Man of the Year, Ben has had a remarkable career as an actor and musician."

Platt will receive his pudding pot at a celebratory roast on Friday. A performance of "Mean Ghouls," Hasty Pudding's second production including women in the cast, will follow.

Platt won a Tony in 2017 for "Dear Evan Hansen," while the cast recording took home the Grammy for best musical theater album, as well as a Daytime Emmy for their performance on "The Today Show."

Platt is also known for his role as Benji Applebaum in the films "Pitch Perfect" and "Pitch Perfect 2."



Winfrey



Platt

He is currently filming the second season of the Netflix series "The Politician," which last season earned him a Golden Globe nomination. (AP)

**NEW YORK:** A key accuser in the New York City rape trial of **Harvey Weinstein** broke down in tears on the witness stand on

Monday during an exhaustive cross-examination over the nature of her relationship with the once-powerful movie mogul.

The drama, which prompted the judge to send the jury home about an hour earlier than usual, came as the defense sought to paint the 34-year-old woman as an opportunistic manipulator who took advantage of Weinstein while

pursuing an acting career, even after he allegedly raped her.

The woman said she tried to make Weinstein "my pseudo father" after a rough upbringing. She said she sent him flattering emails and kept seeing him because "I wanted him to believe I wasn't a threat."

"I was afraid of his unpredictable anger," the woman testified. (AP)

Features

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