

A CRIME ON THE BAYOU

***** A film by Nancy Buirski *****



Written & Directed by **Nancy Buirski** (*Loving Story, The Rape of Recy Taylor*)

Executively Produced by **John Legend, Brenda Robinson** (President of IDA)

Produced by **Nancy Buirski, Susan Margolin, Claire L. Chandler**

Co-Producer: **Vanessa Martino**

Featuring: **Gary Duncan, Richard Sobol, Leander Perez, Lolis Eric Elie, Armand Derfner**

RT: 89 Minutes



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SYNOPSIS

You must also study and learn the lessons of history because humanity has been involved in this soul-wrenching, existential struggle for a very long time.

- John Lewis

It's 1966 in Plaquemines Parish, a swampy strip of land south of New Orleans. A young Black fisherman, Gary Duncan, tries to break up a fight between white and Black teenagers outside a newly integrated school. He gently lays his hand on a white boy's arm and the boy recoils like a snake. That night, police arrest 19-year-old Gary Duncan for assault on a minor.

After months of clashes, the public schools have been integrated by court order. But we are in the land of the white separatist despot, Leander Perez, who rules Plaquemines like his fiefdom, making sure that segregation sticks regardless of federal laws desegregating schools and mandating voting rights. Arresting men like Duncan keeps Black people in their place. With the help of a young Jewish attorney, Richard Sobol, Duncan bravely stands up to Perez. Systemic racism and pervasive anti-Semitism meet their match in decisive courtroom battles, including the U.S. Supreme Court; hate is vanquished by a powerful friendship that will last a lifetime. With the rise of white nationalism in the U.S. and abroad, there is no more important story to tell today. The roots and the mechanics of hate groups are in full display in this dramatic story of a crime on the bayou.

Our nation is beginning to confront our past in order to understand our present, engaging in the slow process of 'tearing' down historical commemorations of oppressors; our film is a part of the replacement, the more truthful re-telling of our past. In it we see monuments dismantled, from the "pretend laws" of Jim Crow to anthemic music symbolically transformed. We see children water hosed then voting for the first time. We see Gary Duncan getting justice in the U.S. Supreme Court.

But as we witness protests in today's streets, we are reminded there is much that remains to be done, even if our story suggests there is hope in Gary's story and in the allyship it represents. For every Gary Duncan there are thousands of Black men incarcerated for touching a white boy's arm.

A Crime on the Bayou is the third film in director Nancy Buirski's trilogy profiling brave individuals who fought for justice in and around the Civil Rights era, following **The Loving Story** and **The Rape of Recy Taylor**. Together this trilogy demonstrates that regular people standing up for their values are the root of progress. Mildred Loving, Recy Taylor and Gary Duncan did not set out to change history. But they remind us that anyone can. Important films have been made about racism – our film helps us to understand how the mechanics of white supremacy maintain racist institutions. We are inspired by those passionate individuals who work to defeat it and destroy the pervasive hate at its core.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Our film is about institutional racism. It is also about allyship, the coming together of Black and white activists who worked throughout history to demolish it. It is a complicated notion, one receiving new scrutiny in the current climate.

Racist structures were put in place at the founding of this country by white settlers and maintained by white society. It's been incumbent on whites to participate – but not own – the dismantling of those structures, pulling down its figurative and literal monuments. This must be done on all fronts, including educational and cultural.

As a filmmaker I've been engaged in exploring racist assumptions and dismantling them through storytelling. It's been my privilege to do so; a responsibility I take seriously as a white filmmaker complicit with these acts. It is not just the acceptance of a racist legacy but a recognition of the small and big ways whites reenact aggressions today, unconsciously and otherwise.

There's an important debate around allyship in the midst of the BLM movement. I've looked back over my last three films in this space and hope that they've helped culturally. Should they have been made by a white filmmaker – that is an open and lingering question. Do white filmmakers bring worthwhile perspectives in spite of not living the experience of BIPOC or do they simply occupy space and funding that should go to Black filmmakers? Are we allies in a change movement or obstacles?

Angela Davis said in 2017, "I have an ambivalent relationship to the term allies, because when it comes to challenging racism, I think white people should know that they have as much at stake as the people who are the immediate targets."

A Crime on the Bayou examines all of this, as both an intimate story of two men, Black and white, coming together to get justice and retaining a profound relationship throughout their lives. It also looks at allyship on a wider scale as white lawyers played crucial roles defending Black people during the Civil Rights struggle. Black lawyers were not "heard" by white racist judges unless white lawyers were present. That was then. Today, it is not just about getting a seat at the table and opening up opportunities for Black artists and others. It is opening up a collective consciousness, one that recognizes that all people, regardless of race or class, are worthy of the presumption of total humanity.

This is all evolving and I am grateful to this movement for expanding my own consciousness and inspiring me to examine my motives for making a trilogy on racial injustice: *The Loving Story*, *The Rape of Recy Taylor* and now *A Crime on the Bayou*. The latter deals most directly with the question of allyship, but I wonder if that's what I've been examining all along.

As a member of the filmmaking community, I am committed to amplifying the voices and works of BIPOC filmmakers. As I do, I hope that these films will be seen as part of cultural change and not an impediment to it. We won't know for a while, but that is what we must discuss. I hope *A Crime on the Bayou* will spark discussion about these complexities. I hope it will create dialogue about the possibilities of genuine and honest allyship - what that actually means.

- Nancy Buirski

BIOGRAPHIES

GARY DUNCAN

"We had no rights." - Gary Duncan

Gary Duncan, the Black protagonist of *A Crime on the Bayou* was a fisherman living and working in Plaquemines Parish Louisiana. He and his 7 brothers and sisters eked out a living on the Mississippi River, trawling for shrimps. Before that, enslaved ancestors worked the cane fields of French, Spanish, and English plantations. Duncan is one of many unsung heroes that stood up for what was right during the Civil Rights Movement. He did not set out to change history, but his actions remind us that anyone can. At 19 years old, he tried to break up a fight as he witnessed two Black boys being bullied by white boys outside a newly integrated school. He diffused the fight – not unlike Jacob Blake - but was arrested that night and re-arrested numerous times before his case went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has said we need to know the real people behind their groundbreaking cases. Gary Duncan is one of them.

RICHARD SOBOL

"We felt we were in the trenches." - Richard Sobol

To ensure that desegregation and other federal civil rights laws are implemented, a group of mostly white attorneys, many of them Jewish, came to Louisiana to aid in the struggle. Among them was Richard Sobol, a 29-year-old from the East Coast, employed by Abe Fortas' elite white-collar law firm in Washington, D.C. His work in Louisiana under the mentorship of the most radical Black law firm in the state, Collins, Douglas and Elie, would change his life and history. Because Gary Duncan was not tried before a jury of his peers, Richard Sobol appealed Duncan's guilty verdict in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. In that groundbreaking ruling, Trial by Jury became the law of the land. Sobol is an unsung hero of the legal civil rights struggle.

LEANDER PEREZ

"I know negroes, we have a number of negroes in our community and I know that basically fundamentally they are immoral, they're unmoral." - Leander Perez

Plaquemines Parrish is the land of the white separatist despot, Leander Perez, who ruled it like his fiefdom, enforcing segregation regardless of federal integration laws. Not for the kingpin - arresting men like Gary Duncan keeps Black people in their place! He was referred to as The Judge but he was not elected, he took that position. He was considered a hero to some - having syphoned millions of oil money to the parish, enriching his cronies and himself – and a pariah to others. Originally from the Canary Islands, his family made a living hunting muskrat along the Louisiana Bayous. But all this changed when oil was discovered there. In his day, he was as well-known as George Wallace and Huey Long for his racist and anti-Semitic views. Through his character, we witness the way white supremacy actually works, how he manipulated the parish government and its courts to maintain systemic racism and Jim Crown.

When Richard Sobol wins Gary Duncan's appeal in the Supreme Court, Leander Perez is enraged by this intrusion into a justice system he controls, and he arrests Sobol for practicing law without a license. To Perez, Sobol is not just an outsider, he's one of an organized group of Jewish lawyers who are in his state to fight oppression. He blames the enterprise on "those Jews who were supposed to be cremated at Buchenwald and Dachau but weren't."

JOHN LEGEND, Get Lifted Film Co. | Executive Producer

Based in Los Angeles, **Get Lifted Film Co.** is an entertainment production company that was launched by Emmy and Tony Award-winning producer **Mike Jackson**, Oscar® and Grammy® award-winning recording artist **John Legend**, and **Ty Stiklorius**, the founder and CEO of the entertainment management and social-impact company Friends At Work. **Austyn Biggers** joined the team in 2019 as the Head of Unscripted Television.

Having recently signed a three-year overall deal with ABC, Get Lifted has developed television projects with major networks including ABC, NBC, FOX, HBO, Showtime, Netflix and MTV. The company executive produced Damien Chazelle's Oscar®-winning musical "**La La Land**," starring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone. Its NBC special "**Jesus Christ Superstar Live in Concert**" won both a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Variety Special Live as well as a Broadcast Critics Choice Award. Its documentary "**United Skates**" on HBO was Emmy nominated, and its acclaimed comedy series "**Sherman's Showcase**" has been picked up for a second season on IFC. Get Lifted also executive produced Richard Tanne's Obama romance, "**Southside With You**," WGN America's critically acclaimed drama, "**Underground**," Pop Network's docu-series "**Sing it On**," HBO's documentary "**Southern Rites**" and "**Can You Dig This**," which won the LA Film Festival's Jury Award that same year. Get Lifted produced Netflix's first music competition show "**Rhythm + Flow**," in 2019, which has been picked up for a second season. Their acclaimed Broadway productions include "**Jitney**," the 2017 Tony Award-winning revival of August Wilson's play. The company's HBO Documentary, "**Atlanta's Missing And Murdered: The Lost Children**" in association with RocNation, is a five-part HBO documentary series offering an unprecedented look at the abduction and murder of at least 30 African-American children and young adults in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981.

Upcoming projects include the Entertainment Studios feature film "**All Rise**," which originally premiered in the Dramatic Competition at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival is releasing Winter of 2019, the holiday film "**Jingle Jangle**" for Netflix launching in 2020 and 1980s dramedy series inspired by Sandra Bullock's college years for Amazon alongside Bullock and Akiva Goldsman. "**40 Years a Prisoner**," a film by filmmaker and TV producer Tommy Oliver will make its TV debut Dec. 3 on HBO after premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival. Most recently, Netflix has secured the right to "**Giving Voice**," the James D. Stern and Fernando Villena-directed documentary which earned the Festival Favorite Award at this year's Sundance Film Festival with Executive Producers Viola Davis and Julius Tennon.

Get Lifted is represented by WME and attorney Nina Shaw.

BRENDA ROBINSON, President of IDA | Executive Producer

Brenda Robinson is an entertainment attorney and partner in Gamechanger Films, an equity fund that finances feature films and television series by women and diverse storytellers. As a dedicated philanthropist in the arts and entertainment community, Brenda currently serves on the boards of Film Independent, The Representation Project, Chicken & Egg Pictures and the International Documentary Association (IDA) where she was appointed the first Black President. She is active in the Sundance

Institute as a member of the Women at Sundance Leadership Council and serves as an advisor to The Redford Center. She is also a board member of Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival and currently serves as legal counsel to the festival. Brenda was most recently a financier and Executive Producer of the breakout Sundance film *Passing*, directed by Rebecca Hall and starring Ruth Negga and Tessa Thompson. She was a financier of the Academy Award-winning documentary *Icarus* as well as *Won't You Be My Neighbor* and *Step*. She is an executive producer on numerous projects including *United Skates*, alongside executive producer John Legend; *The Great American Lie* by director Jennifer Siebel Newsom; *Jump Shot: The Kenny Sailors Story*, alongside executive producer Steph Curry and *Marian Anderson: The Whole World In Her Hands* for PBS' *American Masters* series.

END CREDITS

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Nancy Buirski

PRODUCED BY

Nancy Buirski
Susan Margolin
Claire L. Chandler

CONSULTING PRODUCERS

Daniel J. Chalfen
Laurens L. Grant
Sam Pollard

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

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Geraldyn Dreyfous
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Michael Jackson
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ARCHIVAL PRODUCER

Hannah Shepard

Inspired By

DEEP DELTA JUSTICE

By

Matthew Van Meter

FEATURING

Gary Duncan
Richard Sobol
Lolis Eric Elie
Robert A. Collins, Ph. D
Armand Derfner

WITH

Shea Boatswain - voice of Bert Grant
Julian Bones - voice of Bernard St. Ann
Camari Brown - voice of Lolis Elie
Isaac Conner - voice of Richard Sobol
Tom Gibbs - voice of Mr. John Dowling
Quentin Hudspeth - voice of Mr. Darryl Bubrig
Skeeta Jenkins - voice of Gary Duncan
Ken Petrie - voice of Sidney Provensal
Kasim Rana - voice of Herman M. Landry
Alexander Walk - voice of Wayne Scarabin