

LOST NATION PICTURES, LTD PRESENTS

www.reckoninginboston.com
Documentary, 83 minutes
Directed by James Rutenbeck

A RECKONING IN BOSTON

“AN ABSOLUTE MUST-SEE”

- The Boston Globe

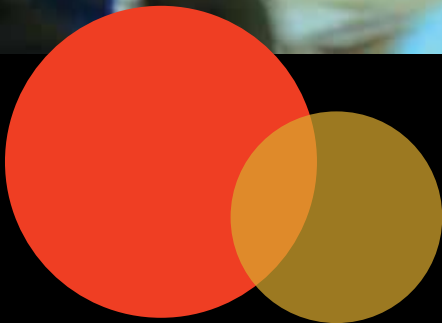
**“HEARTBREAKING AND
MUCKRAKING”**

- Arts Fuse



A WHITE FILMMAKER COMES INTO A BLACK COMMUNITY LOOKING FOR TRANSFORMATION IN THE LIVES OF LOW-INCOME ADULTS ENROLLED IN A NIGHT COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES.

AS HE SPENDS MORE TIME WITH THE STUDENTS, HE'S AWAKENED TO THE VIOLENCE, RACISM AND GENTRIFICATION THAT THREATEN THEIR VERY PLACE IN THE CITY.



“Don’t miss this powerful film that lays bare the transformative force of the humanities in our lives in these turbulent and troubling times!”

*Cornel West
Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy
Harvard University*

“It is only through the life experiences of Carl and I that James has become aware of his blind spots.”

- Kafi Dixon, Producer

**Median household
wealth in
greater Boston:**

**White people:
\$247,000.**

**Black
people:
\$8.**

IT'S A TREE

**Nationwide, 2.7 million
grandparents are raising
grandchildren, and about
one-fifth of those have
incomes that fall below
the poverty line.**

**Wait list for affordable
housing in Boston:
40,000 applicants.**

I can remember as a young person reading about the Civil War, and it said that Indians didn't do much. And Black people were basically relegated to digging ditches. Why would I want to contribute to something that really wasn't respectful of me or my family?

- Carl Chandler



Sometimes I feel afraid for myself. Like this could be a space for a million, million, million dollar housing development, and I'm squatting on it and occupying on it and planting food. And I'm in somebody's way.

- Kafi Dixon

A RECKONING IN BOSTON SYNOPSIS

In fall 2014, Kafi Dixon and Carl Chandler enrolled in a rigorous night course in the humanities at a community center in their Boston neighborhood of Dorchester.

Kafi, 44, sharp, witty and restless, dropped out of school at 15. She had her first baby a year later and two more soon after. Carl, 65, who lives on a small pension and disability payment in one of Boston's most dangerous neighborhoods, began the class with a keen interest in learning but little faith in educational institutions.

White suburban filmmaker James Rutenbeck came to Dorchester to document the students' engagement with the Clemente Course in the Humanities. The Clemente Course is taught in 34 sites across the U.S.--to those who have experienced homelessness, transitioned out of incarceration or faced barriers to a college education. The Clemente mission is to foster critical thinking through deep engagement with history, literature, philosophy and art history. Clemente students, its proponents assert, become fuller and freer citizens.

But over time James is forced to come to terms with a flawed film premise and his own complicity in racist structures. As he spends time with Carl and Kafi, he's awakened to the violence, racism and gentrification that threaten their very place in the city.

Troubled by his failure to bring the film together, he spends more time listening than filming and eventually enlists Kafi and Carl as collaborators/producers with a share in the film revenues. Five years on, despite many obstacles, Kafi and Carl arrive at surprising new places in their lives, and following their lead, James does too.



A RECKONING IN BOSTON BIOS



**James Rutenbeck –
Producer/Director/
Writer/Editor**

James Rutenbeck's nonfiction films have screened at various forums including Cinema du Reel, Museum of Modern Art, National

Gallery and the Flaherty Film Seminar. James is a two-time recipient of the Alfred I. du Pont Columbia Journalism Award for his work as producer of the PBS series **Unnatural Causes**, about health disparities in the U.S. and *Class of '27*, which he executive produced, directed and edited. *Class of '27*, about the lives of young children in rural America, is streaming as an Editor's Pick at *The Atlantic*. His film *Scenes from a Parish* aired on the PBS series *Independent Lens* in 2009. James has been awarded grants from Sundance Documentary Fund, LEF Moving Image Fund, Southern Humanities Media Fund and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. His broadcast editing credits include *Zoot Suit Riots*, *Jimmy Carter* and *Roberto Clemente* for the PBS series **American Experience**. James studied filmmaking with Richard Leacock at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



**Carl Chandler –
Producer**

Carl is a baby boomer, a product of the Sixties. He was born in Boston, as was his grandmother, father, two daughters, and a grandson. His ancestry is Black, Indigenous American and western European.

Because he felt that his people were not respected or embraced by America, Carl made the calculation early in life to opt out of chasing the material excesses of the so-called "American Dream." Throughout his life he has given lectures and presentations on indigenous culture in southern New England as his small contribution to the education of young people. Poor, but not impoverished, he feels his own education has been incomplete.

When his youngest daughter went away to college, he struggled with what to do next. A year later he found the Clemente Course in the Humanities. There, he received a first-rate education and a new direction in his life. He was elected class graduation speaker, and this honor confirmed to him that he should speak to the positive impact Clemente has on a person's life. He has spoken in videos, public forums, and small classes. This is his first film.

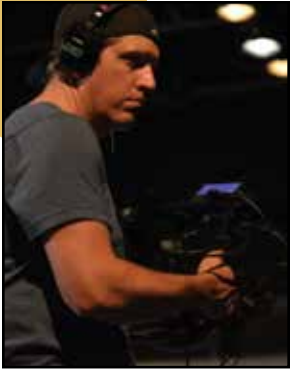


**Kafi Dixon –
Producer**

A Black Woman, an Urban & Rural Farmer and a Generational New Englander, in 2017 Kafi Dixon founded Boston's 1st

Cooperative for Women and its 1st Worker / Owner Urban Farm Food Coop. Initially named the Women of Color Co-op, in embracing women of all races, class and culture the co-op was renamed Common Good Co-op. In response to the socioeconomic experiences of lower resourced and impoverished communities, and the intimacy of community violence women in Boston experience, as producer of *A Reckoning Boston* Kafi shares her experiences, hopes, and perspective as she asks us to bear witness to the systemic violence and interrogate resolutions.





P.H. O'Brien – Cinematographer

P.H. O'Brien has a long career of shooting and producing documentary films and TV shows. Among P.H.'s many director-of-photography/producer credits are collaborations with Steve (Hoop Dreams) James: Reel Paradise, Head Games and The War Tapes (best documentary, Tribeca 2006).

He shot and produced *Bad Voodoo's War* for **Frontline** on PBS, the MTV show *How's Your News?* and *Earth Made of Glass* for HBO, which was nominated for a Producers Guild Award and winner of a 2012 Peabody Award. His documentary *Six Days to Air... The Making of South Park* was nominated for an Emmy.



Allie Humenuk – Cinematographer

Allie Humenuk is an award-winning filmmaker whose films have been broadcast internationally. After a successful festival run, *The Guys Next Door* (2016) aired nationally on PBS. Allie's previous feature documentary, *Shadow of the House* was heralded as "one of the best films ever made about an artist and

the artistic process" by Bo Smith, former film curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Allie was nominated for an Emmy for cinematography on the PBS series **Design Squad**. Other cinematography credits include programs for HBO, BBC, PBS, National Geographic, MTV and ESPN.





Heather Merrill – Coordinating Producer

Heather Merrill has worked in documentary production for more than 10 years. Her associate producer and research credits include work on numerous independent films and projects for Discovery, Showtime and the WORLD Channel, as well as work for the PBS series **American Experience**, **American Masters** and **NOVA**.

Her favorite topics have included women wrestlers, the roots of the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict and disaster studies.



Nate May – Composer

Nate is a composer and performer whose interest in human ecosystems has driven explorations into sounds and interactions. Raised in West Virginia, much of his work stems from a deep engagement with the art and culture of Appalachia. This includes his oratorio *State*, a setting of interviews Nate conducted with Appalachian migrants while on a fellowship from the Berea Sound Archives. Nate is an accomplished keyboardist and improviser as well as an electronic musician and producer. He has collaborated with Paris-based

choreographer Wanjiru Kamuyu on the world-touring work *Spiral*. While in South Africa on a Reese Miller scholarship from the Telluride Association, he worked with the indigenous experimental trio Khoi Khonnexion on their debut album *Kalahari Waits*. His work has been performed by world-renowned ensembles, including International Contemporary Ensemble and Ensemble Dal Niente. He is a teaching artist with the American Composers Orchestra and is on faculty at Montclair State University. He is also on faculty at the Walden School where he was awarded the 2018 Arno and Ruth Drucker Faculty Chair.



Llewellyn Smith – Executive Producer

For thirty years, Llewellyn Smith’s award-winning documentaries have explored a range of social justice topics, including race relations and racial identity, American slavery, Reconstruction, health inequities, civil rights,

community organizing and childhood trauma in impoverished neighborhoods. For the PBS series NOVA Llew produced and directed *Poisoned Water* (2017), an investigation of the Flint water crisis, which was awarded the Kavli Foundation Science Journalism Award. He directed the film *Herskovits At The Heart Of Blackness* (2010) and was an executive producer for the PBS series **Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?** (2008). Honors include the George Foster Peabody Award, the Alfred I. DuPont Columbia Journalism Award and multiple Writer’s Guild and Emmy nominations.



Anne Marie Stein – Executive Producer

Anne Marie Stein has worked with independent media artists for over 30 years. She is currently VP (of most stuff) at Winikur Productions. From 2005 - 2019 she was Dean of Professional

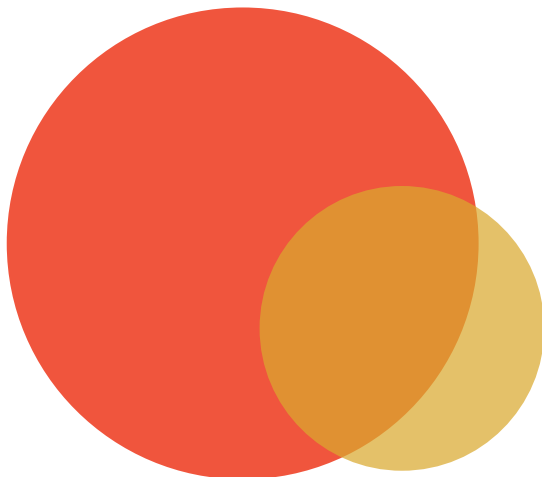
and Continuing Education at The Massachusetts College of Art. Previously she was Director of Development for Northern Light Productions, where she managed business development and co-produced and co-directed the feature documentary *The Dhamma Brothers*. Anne Marie was Executive Director of the Boston Film/Video Foundation from 1987 to 2001, where she expanded support and recognition for moving image artists. She served on the Executive Committee of the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture, was a co-founder of the Boston International Festival of Women’s Cinema and co-director of the New England Film and Video Festival.



Co-Producer – Diana Fischer

Diana Fischer has 30 years of experience producing and writing for film and other media. At WGBH in Boston, she worked on projects including Emmy award-winning

segments on Japan for **NewsHour**, profiles of Tip O’Neill and Vladimir Posner and art programming with John Sayles. She also wrote scripts for the Emmy Award-winning children’s series **Peep and the Big Wide World** and produced short history and science films with the WGBH Interactive Projects department. As consultant to Sundance Multimedia, Diana worked on environmentalis web sites and museum installations. At web magazine **iCast**, she wrote and produced streaming video interviews with notables including author Tom Perrotta, musician/film composer Mark Mothersbaugh and Paris food writer Patricia Wells. Diana also wrote book and film review columns for the web site **Offsprung**. At Lost Nation Pictures, she served as Story Editor of the Alfred I. du Pont Columbia Journalism Award winning film *Class of ’27*.



A RECKONING IN BOSTON DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Last fall I drove to Maine with Kafi Dixon and Carl Chandler for meetings with industry professionals at the Camden International Film Festival. We met with Noland Walker, Vice President of Content at ITVS, who had viewed some excerpts. Noland spoke candidly about the film's shortcomings. He told me unless I made myself as vulnerable as Kafi and Carl had for me, the film would be "like every other film of its kind."

I had first imagined "Reckoning" as an observational film. I conceived it as a year in the lives of students in the Clemente Course, a rigorous tuition-free night class in the humanities. I vowed to keep my distance and let the students tell their own stories. But long before we met with Noland, I'd been struggling with the film. My editing attempts, however focused, seemed to be leading nowhere. Despite several workshop screenings, I was at a loss.

On the ride back from Camden, Kafi asked me if I was afraid to enter into the film and make myself

truly vulnerable. Her words first chilled and then lit a fire under me.

Kafi formed a working group to help me develop my character voice. I collected my thoughts and started processing the consequential events I had witnessed over four years of filmmaking. There was the time Kafi had been evicted and invited me to Housing Court where dozens of poor people face eviction every week, most with no legal support. I accompanied her to an agency that had for weeks threatened to cut off her housing subsidy. But when we both showed up, two nervous white men took us to a conference room and told us the issue had been resolved in Kafi's favor.

At another point, Carl's landlord told him he would have to move out any day, as she was putting his space on the market as a condo. As a month-to-month tenant he had no recourse and as the primary caregiver for his young grandson, the prospect of an abrupt move was devastating.

Although I had planned to anchor the film in the personal transformations of the Clemente students, I came to realize ever-present structural racism was something I could no longer ignore. I'd been oblivious to the dark underside of beautiful, cosmopolitan Boston's development boom and had failed to validate the lived experience of people I had grown to know as friends. I hadn't really understood the lives of low-income people of color and had failed to recognize my own complicity in the structures that were holding them back.

Processing all this and entering into the film with my own character voice required patience, time and support from a team of people of color who had my back: Kafi, Carl, Noland, Llewellyn Smith and two friends of Kafi, Tolga Shields and Fernando Ona. Stepping back, there's some irony in a white suburban filmmaker being encouraged to find and value his voice by people whose stories he had set out to mediate. I hope that is evident to viewers of "A Reckoning in Boston."



A RECKONING IN BOSTON

A FILM BY JAMES RUTENBECK



"AN ABSOLUTE MUST-SEE"
The Boston Globe



LOST NATION PICTURES, LTD. & INDEPENDENT LENS PRESENTS A RECKONING IN BOSTON

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS LLEWELLYN SMITH ANNE MARIE STEIN & LOIS VOSSEN EXEC PRODUCED BY CONRAT AT 1019 NOLAND WALKER

PRODUCED BY CARL CHANDLER KAFI DIXON & JAMES RUTENBECK EXEC PRODUCED BY DIANA FISCHER COORDINATING PRODUCER HEATHER MERRILL

CASTING DIRECTOR ALLIE HUMENUK & P.H. O'BRIEN MUSIC BY NATE MAY EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY CHAD SMITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY GREG McCLEARY

DIRECTED, WRITTEN & EDITED BY JAMES RUTENBECK

**Airing on the PBS series
Independent Lens in 2021**

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