
Articles and Writings re: Carter

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'Hurricane': Film, Lawyer Defended (Los Angeles Times)

Leon Friedman

Myron Beldock

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'Hurricane': Film, Lawyer Defended

Letters

We are the two other principal lawyers in the Rubin "Hurricane" Carter-John Artis case, with Lewis M. Steel. Until now we have not commented publicly about the controversy concerning the truthfulness and accuracy of "The Hurricane." However, the recent Counterpunch article written by the producers (and the director) of the movie, attacking our colleague, Mr. Steel, compels us to speak out.

The Jan. 31 article ("Lawyer's View of 'Hurricane' Was Self-Serving"), by Arnyan Bernstein, Norman Jewison, Rudy Langlais and John Ketcham, attacked Mr. Steel as "disgruntled," "self-serving" and as "seeking self-promotion." This attack responded to an earlier article published Jan. 24, in which Mr. Steel criticized the movie for downplaying the institutional racism that led to the convictions and overemphasizing the contributions made by some Canadians who came to the United States and devoted themselves to freeing Mr. Carter.

We have known Mr. Steel for more than 25 years, and we know him to be a conscientious, sincere, skillful and devoted fighter for justice. As a senior partner in a small firm, he could not lightly make nor easily pursue his commitment to the defense of this complex, high-profile case. He spent over 13 years as a principal member of the Carter-Artis legal team without compensation. His dedication never wavered throughout the long fight to win freedom and secure justice for two defendants he believed were wrongly convicted and victims of racism.

He has had a long record of fighting for civil rights and defending individual liberties in a variety of situations besides the Carter case. He is past president of the New York Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild and is a nationally recognized leader among advocates committed to working for the rights of those who have been poorly served by the criminal justice system. It is a distortion of his character and a misrepresentation of his motives to accuse him of writing critically about the film because he was not portrayed in it.

In addition, some of his criticism of the film has

considerable merit. For example, the racism discussed by Mr. Steel was far more pervasive than depicted in the movie and was not limited to a single police officer. But we do not wish at this time to extend debate on the film's historical accuracy. There is and should be room for different interpretations and perspectives.

It is regrettable that the movie does not acknowledge many of the individuals who committed themselves to the long fight for justice for Rubin Carter and John Artis, including, among others: Mr. Steel; Fred Hogan, the investigator who first uncovered the perjury committed by the state's key witness; and Selwyn Raab, the New York Times reporter who brought the world's attention to the perjury. We understand that the movie makers had limits and made choices. We would like it known that the magic of the original case was that while the campaign was going on, a wide number of individuals worked together, outraged by the unfairness and racism and prosecutorial misconduct that pervaded the case, notably including Lesra Martin and the Canadians. In over-focusing on their actions, the film undervalues the contributions of so many others and the teamwork and team spirit that carried clients, lawyers and supporters through long years of adversity and enabled them to ultimately achieve the habeas corpus victory.

Our own judgment is that, notwithstanding these comments, there is a great deal to admire in this significant and inspiring film. Rubin Carter's blazing spirit was the guiding light in the long fight for justice, and Denzel Washington's portrayal of Rubin was stirring and masterful. The entire story of the Canadians' adoption of Lesra Martin, his reaching out for and adoption of Rubin Carter, Lesra's enlisting of the Canadians in the battle, and their devotion to Rubin is genuine and moving and exceptional. The emotional tone of the movie is very accurate, which is why so many movie audiences have embraced it. And we believe the producers and director should be given credit for exposing how difficult it is to attack injustice in our society. But their misguided personal attacks on Lewis Steel do not do them credit.

LEON FRIEDMAN
MYRON BELDOCK
New York