

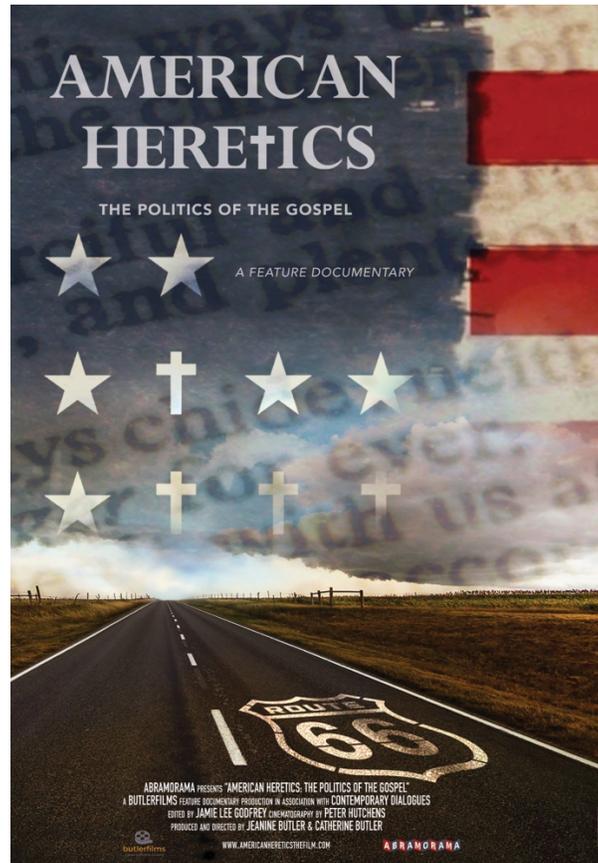
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ABRAMORAMA

PRESENTS

AMERICAN HERETICS

The Politics of the Gospel



In Theaters Nationwide July 12, 2019

Featuring Dr. Reverend Robin Meyers, Reverend Lori Walke, Reverend Bishop Carlton Pearson,
Dr. Bernard Brandon Scott, Oklahoma State Rep Collin R. Walke, Dr. Robert Jones,
Reverend Marlin Lavanhar, and Nehemiah D. Frank

Directed and Produced by Jeanine Isabel Butler and Catherine Lynn Butler

Edited by Jamie Lee Godfrey

Cinematography by Peter Hutchens

RT: 85 minutes

<http://www.americanhereticsthefilm.com>

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LOGLINE

At what other point in our history has the line between church and state become so tangled and polarizing? *American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel* challenges what we think we know about the Christian heartland by offering a rare personal glimpse into the contentious and often misunderstood history of religion, race, and politics in America.

SYNOPSIS

American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel offers a poignant glimpse into the deeply-entwined, polarizing, and often misunderstood history of religion, race and politics as seen through the p.o.v. of a courageous group of Oklahomans working to bridge the divide within their communities. Leading historical, religious and constitutional experts also bring compelling perspective on how the conservative Christian agenda emerged over the last 30 years to become a powerful and divisive force in today's political landscape. Directed and Produced by Emmy Award-winning filmmakers and sisters Jeanine Isabel Butler and Catherine Lynn Butler; Edited by award-winning editor Jamie Lee Godfrey; with cinematography by Peter Hutchens.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When we began this journey, we were familiar with the progressive work of most of our characters, including that of Reverend Robin Meyers from Oklahoma, and his provocative mantra, "*Take back your faith, your flag, and your future.*" Early on, he introduced us to the fact that while *Red State liberals* may sound like unicorns, they're not. In fact, there are many Oklahomans who believe that the conservative fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible fueling today's culture wars have dictated policy on both a state and national level for long enough. It was more surprising to discover that it's a relatively recent phenomenon that Evangelicals seriously engaged in politics at all. So, we wanted to know why and what caused this change. From this starting point we took a deep dive into investigating the roots of America's entangled and often misunderstood history of religion and politics.

We emerged with the idea that perhaps we could capture a small but representative slice of this enormous topic by focusing on America's heartland from a personal narrative p.o.v. – namely from Rev. Meyer's experiences as a liberal Protestant Minister in the conservative Bible belt. We then spent a year filming in Oklahoma – one of the most religious and conservative states in the country – following the lives and work of Rev. Meyers, and other faith leaders, social justice activists, legislators, and self-proclaimed 'border walkers' who are working to bridge deep cultural and racial divides in their communities. We followed them as their congregations voted to join the Sanctuary Movement, as well as work towards the beginnings of a racial reconciliation to help heal and memorialize the little known tragic legacy of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Because their actions today can only be fully understood through the lens of history, we turned to historians and constitutional experts to shed light on the 30-year rise of the conservative right in the political sphere. To really get at the heart of the matter and go back to the source itself, we sought out yet another Oklahoman, Dr. Brandon Scott, who is an internationally renowned Biblical scholar. In his view, conservative politics based on the Bible not only blur the line between church and state and threaten the religious liberties of those who don't agree, but ultimately betray the essence of the Bible itself. Throughout his forty years of teaching, Dr. Scott was confronted by the same questions by each class of students, asking him "*Why the hell didn't anyone ever tell us this before?*"

We too were surprised by the reactions of early screenings with both religious and secular audiences, that it was the millennials and the Gen Z'ers who overwhelmingly responded with excitement, interest, and endless questions about how relevant this history was to their lives today.

By capturing the passion, personal commitment, and courageous actions of our characters at this pivotal moment in our nation's political history, we hope audiences will come away and empowered to engage in new conversations beyond the noise of soundbites, stereotypes, and the Twittersphere. As Rev. Meyers says "*It's not what you believe, it's what you do that matters.*"

ABOUT THE FILM PARTICIPANTS

DR. REVEREND ROBIN MEYERS

Oklahoma Reverend Dr. Robin Meyers has spent three decades building a liberal Christian congregation smack in the middle of a conservative fundamentalist stronghold. Today, and with increasing urgency, Robin's call to action goes beyond speaking truth to power to demand nothing short of a social justice revolution. His mantra, "***the church is dead, long live the church***" is at the core of this film. He believes that the church should be the center of a resistance movement that "***upends the empire***" and challenges conservative Christian orthodoxies that use the Bible to justify nationalism, and threaten civil liberty laws protecting African Americans, women, immigrants and the LGBTQ community.

In 2013 Robin delivered the Lyman Beecher Lectures at the Yale Divinity School based on two of his recent books, *Why the Christian Right is Wrong*; and *Spiritual Defiance: Building a Beloved Community of Resistance*. He is a syndicated columnist, an award-winning commentator for National Public Radio, author of seven books on Progressive Christianity and the Senior Minister of the Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City since 1985. He is presently working on his next book titled *Falling Off the Ceiling: The Death of Michelangelo's God and the Rebirth of Wonder*. Robin has also appeared on Dateline NBC, the PBS NewsHour, and ABC World News, and in the HBO documentary "The Execution of Wanda Jean" (2002).

"Nobody has absolute truth. By the way, the interesting thing about people who say they are certain, then you need no faith..."

REVEREND LORI WALKE

Reverend Lori Walke was born and raised in a small town in Oklahoma. She is from a long line of Southern Baptists and still today, family life revolves around the church. She put herself through school by winning the Miss Oklahoma pageant title, and went on to play college basketball at Oklahoma State. Her teammates introduced her to the LGBTQ community, really for the first time. It was during those years that Lori struggled to understand why her religion excluded those friends that she so dearly loved. And thus, Lori began her journey of questioning the orthodoxy, but not her faith. After law school, she earned her Masters of Divinity from Phillips Theological Seminary and was ordained in the United Church of Christ in 2012. Lori's been firing up the pulpit and the political arena alongside husband, State Representative Collin Walke, with her unique brand of progressive call to action ever since.

"It was not until college that I was completely removed from my environment of origin and experienced some new people and new situations that really pushed me to question the things I had been taught about God and people that are different than I am."

REVEREND BISHOP CARLTON PEARSON

In 2004, at the height of his popularity as a Pentecostal preacher and founder of the 5,000 strong Higher Dimensions Global Ministry associated with Oral Roberts in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Bishop Carlton Pearson was declared a heretic when he publicly questioned the existence of Hell. Retribution was swift and final. He lost his church, the majority of his flock and his entire way of life. In 2018, his story premiered on the big screen in the movie *Come Sunday* starring Chiwetel Ejiofor as Carlton and Martin Sheen as Oral Roberts.

In *American Heretics*, the documentary, we pick up where the feature film left off. In the words of Carlton, this is his "Come Monday" story about his journey into the new thought community.

He has appeared on television programs such as NBC and MSNBC's Dateline, ABC's Nightline, 20/20, Good Morning America, CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, BET Tonight with Tavis Smiley, The Edge with Paula Zahn, Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher, The Monique Show on BET, to name a few.

Most recently, he has authored *The Gospel of Inclusion*, and *God Is Not a Christian, Nor A Jew, Muslim, Hindu...God Dwells With Us, In Us, Around Us, As Us*. He is presently working on his next book titled *You're Not In Trouble, You're In Transition: Making, Managing and Mastering Change*.

"I never thought anybody would ever attribute the word "heresy", "heretic" to me. It was just wasn't in my mind at all. It just means choice or opinion, or to choose differently from others, "heresies" in Hebrew/Greek. So, the whole idea of getting out the trade-ions of the traded down ideologies and ideas, and developing an independent way of thinking, is dangerous".

DR. BERNARD BRANDON SCOTT

Professor Emeritus and acclaimed author, Dr. Bernard Brandon Scott is a leading New Testament expert and one of the foremost Pauline scholars in the world. For thirty years, Brandon taught at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He counts Lori as among his "most impressive and tenacious former students'. As for Lori, Brandon introduced her to the earth-shattering notion that "it's okay to question the bible." In *American Heretic*, Brandon takes us into the early Christian world where 1st - 4th Century authors navigate politically and culturally treacherous landscape. Their writings ultimately end up forming the book that three thousand years later remains at the center of some of today's most polarizing issues --- The Bible.

"This gets to be called the Bible Belt largely because the kind of religion that was in the South was created in the Civil War and came out of the support of slavery. It's a kind of religion that's stark in

many ways and the bible is the center of religion which if you think about it historically is kind of odd because that means Jesus can't have anything to do with it. There wasn't any bible in his day."

OKLAHOMA STATE REPRESENTATIVE COLLIN R. WALKE (D-87)

State Representative for House District 87 in Oklahoma City, Collin is serving his second term as a Democrat. Born and raised in Oklahoma, he's no stranger to navigating political battle lines drawn around a conservative religious agenda. Outnumbered and often outvoted, Collin fights daily for his underrepresented constituents. Collin and Lori met in law school, married shortly after and are now affectionately known as "The Rev and The Rep."

"There's two reasons why I think a lot of these conservative, social spending cut- oriented bills get passed from a religious perspective. The first one is that the individuals who run these bills have a sincere belief that what you believe as far as whether Jesus is your Lord and savior is more important than what you actually do."

DR. ROBERT JONES

Dr. Jones is a leading scholar and commentator on religion, culture, and politics. He is the founding CEO of PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute) a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to conducting independent research at the intersection of religion, culture, and public policy. Dr. Jones is the author of *The End of White Christian America* and writes a column for The Atlantic online on politics and culture and is frequently featured in major national media outlets such as MSNBC, CNN, NPR, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and others.

"Churches have traditionally been places that encourage voters. Young people are increasingly unaffiliated so even though they make up 25 percent of the population, they only represent about 12 percent of the voters. In the 2016 election, white evangelicals represented 26 percent of voters, but made up only 17 percent of the population. So, it means that they are over represented at the ballot box."

REVEREND MARLIN LAVANHAR

A graduate of Harvard Divinity school, Marlin found his way to All Souls Unitarian Church, a predominately white congregation located in a wealthy Tulsa suburb, at the age of 32. A few years later, in 2008, Marlin made a bold move by inviting the outcast Bishop Carlton Pearson and his remaining Pentecostal flock to join All Souls. According to his staff, Marlin was accused at the time of "doing too much racial stuff". In doing so, Marlin and Carlton accomplished something extraordinary ... a truly integrated congregation that includes liberal Christians, progressive Humanists and conservative Pentecostals. Martin Luther King famously said that "Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of Christian America." Not at All Souls.

"We really see this role of being border walkers between cultures and between theologies and religious expressions as something that gives us a role in society that could help us to help lead the community and the country towards its promise."

NEHEMIAH D. FRANK

Nehemiah D. Frank is the founder and executive editor of The Black Wall Street Times. He graduated from Harold Washington College in Chicago, IL, and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Oklahoma State University. A rising voice in America and an emerging leader in the education reform movement, Nehemiah frequently travels for speaking engagements around the country, is a blogger for Education Post, and has been featured on NBC as well as in Blivit and Tulsa People. Nehemiah is also a teacher at Sankofa School of the Performing Arts in Tulsa, OK, a 2017 Terence Crutcher Foundation honoree, a recipient of the 2017 METCares Foundation Community Impact Award, and a 2018 Oluko Fellow. He gave a TED Talk at The University of Tulsa in the spring of 2018.

"The first time I found out about the Tulsa Massacre, I was almost 30 years old. I'm sitting in a church in Chicago and the pastor begins to talk about the excellence of Black Wall Street in the Greenwood district in Tulsa, OK and I'm like 'wait a second, I'm from Tulsa. And he tells the story of how just two generations out of slavery African Americans built this incredible city in the shadows of Jim Crow..."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

JEANINE ISABEL BUTLER

Producer, Writer and Director

Jeanine is an award-winning director, producer and writer. Specializing in documentaries and non-fiction entertainment, her work has been broadcast across multiple platforms, screened at film festivals worldwide and garnered numerous awards, including three National Emmy nominations for Documenting the *Face of America* (PBS), *The Science of HIV/AIDS* (The Discovery Channel), and *Africa* (BBC/Discovery Channel). Butler has produced, written and directed longform documentaries for Explorer, the premier documentary series for National Geographic and crafted strategic storytelling for nonprofits and international NGOs. Currently she has two short films screening at the Newseum in

Washington, DC. and is rolling out *American Heretics: The Politics of the Gospel* with her producing partner and sister Catherine Butler.

CATHERINE LYNN BUTLER

Producer and Co-Writer

Catherine Lynn Butler is an Emmy award-winning documentary writer/producer with global experience developing and delivering impactful long and short form documentaries for television, museums, educational nonprofits and NGOs. Emmy Award winning docs include *Journey of the Universe* (PBS); *The Women of Tibet* (PBS); and a National Emmy nomination for *Documenting the Face of America* (PBS), which she co-produced with her sister and producing partner Jeanine Butler. She also produced the critically acclaimed feature-length investigative documentary *The Future of Food*, which enjoyed widespread theatrical and digital distribution and was a favorite of organic farmers and environmental activists worldwide.

JAMIE LEE GODFREY

Editor & Motion Designer

New York-based Jamie Godfrey is an Emmy-nominated editor and motion designer. She has worked on short- and long-form documentaries, infographic animations, and large-format video installations for companies such as National Geographic, The Newseum, The Smithsonian, Great Big Story, and The World Bank. Her work has been recognized with Telly, New York Festivals, and Cine Golden Eagle awards.

Her large-format video includes creating two multi-screen video installations for the National Geographic museum and two large-scale seamless video installations ((12x1 and 18x1)) for the Newseum in Washington, DC and John Kerry's 2016 ocean initiative.

PETER HUTCHENS

Directory of Photography

Peter Hutchens is an award-winning cinematographer whose clients include HBO, Showtime, PBS, and National Geographic. In 2011, he won the Sundance Cinematography Award for his work on the feature documentary *The Redemption of General Butt Naked*. Peter was a principal DP for Oprah Winfrey's international series *Belief*, and most recently served as Director of Photography on Showtime's critically acclaimed series *The Trade*, which premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival.

ABOUT BUTLERFILMS, LLC – founded in 1986

For over twenty years, sisters Jeanine and Catherine Butler have worked together, and independently, to develop and produce over thirty hours of non-fiction entertainment -- from history and current events to scientific explorations that span the globe. They've produced and directed long and short form documentaries in over 20 countries for a wide array of clients, including PBS and National Geographic, as well as, NGO's and non-profits seeking to globally share their message and mission. As storytellers, they're intimate approach puts a human face to every story and strives to capture the visual poetry within each moment. In doing so, their work has garnered numerous industry awards, including multiple Emmy Awards and a National Emmy Nomination for Best Historical Programming for their acclaimed PBS Documentary "*Documenting the Face of America.*"

ABOUT ABRAMORAMA

Abramorama is the preeminent global theatrical distribution and rights management partner for documentary and music films today and is recognized for the consistent high quality of its work on award winning feature films. An innovator in the focused, personalized form of film distribution and event cinema, Abramorama provides invaluable alternatives to filmmakers and content owners. An industry leader in marketing, promotion, and distribution, Abramorama continues to trail-blaze exciting new pathways for filmmakers to find their audience.

Over the course of nearly 20 years, Abramorama has successfully distributed and marketed hundreds of films, including Ron Howard's Grammy Award®-winning *The Beatles: Eight Days A Week – The Touring Years*; *The Beatles' Yellow Submarine*; Amir Bar-Lev's *Long Strange Trip – The Untold Story of the Grateful Dead*; Tabbert Fiiller's *The Public Image Is Rotten*; Danny Clinch and Pearl Jam's *Let's Play Two*; Corbett Redford and Green Day's *Turn It Around: The Story of East Bay Punk*; John Scheinfeld's *Chasing Trane – The John Coltrane Documentary*; Roberta Grossman and Nancy Spielberg's *Who Will Write Our History*; Brett Bern's *BANG! The Bert Berns Story*; Brett Morgen and National Geographic's seminal *Jane*; Ashley Bell's *Love & Bananas - An Elephant Story*; Charles Ferguson's *Time To Choose*; Asif Kapadia's *Senna*; Neil Young's *Greendale*; Cameron Crowe's *Pearl Jam Twenty*; Sacha Gervasi's *Anvil! The Story of Anvil*; Banksy's Academy Award® nominated *Exit Through the Gift Shop*; the surprise indie hit *Awake: The Life of Yogananda*; Laurie Anderson's astonishing New York Times critics' pick, *Heart of a Dog*; National Board of Review

Winner Listen to Me Marlon; and 2016 Documentary Academy Award®-nominee and IDA Best Documentary Winner The Look of Silence. Abramorama is a founding partner of The Seventh Art Stand program, an act of cinematic solidarity against Islamophobia, that ran in more than 50 theaters across the United States in May of 2017. Abramorama recently launched its music-centric film fund focused on the global release of iconic music documentaries. For more information visit www.abramorama.com

CAST / CREW

Featuring –

Dr. Reverend Robin Meyers

Revered Lori Walke

Reverend Bishop Carlton Pearson

Dr. Bernard Brandon Scott

Oklahoma State Rep Collin R. Walke

Dr. Robert Jones

Reverend Marlin Lavanhar

Nehemiah D. Frank

Executive Producer- Contemporary Dialogues

Director- Jeanine Isabel Butler

Producers- Jeanine Isabel Butler and Catherine Lynn Butler

Editor- Jamie Lee Godfrey

Director of Photography- Peter Hutchens

Writers- Jeanine Isabel Butler with Catherine Lynn Butler

Additional Cinematography- Patrick Sheehan

Assistant Camera- Jonathan Roman

Additional Camera Assistance-

Charles Ellmore

Chad Bennett

Tony Perkins

Audio Recording-

Grant Provence, Provence Sound

Additional Audio Recording-

Royce Sharp

Spencer Smith

Animation Artist -Drew Takahashi, Funjacket Enterprises

Title & Motion Graphics Designer -Jamie Lee Godfrey

Title Animation- Animator Dave

Key-Art Poster Design- Oenone Terrill

Archival Researcher / Rights & Clearances Supervisors-

Tara Farrell-Conlan

Catherine Lynn Butler

Music Design- Jamie Lee Godfrey

Music Design- Marcus Thorne Bagala

Post-Production Services- Post-Op Media

Colorist- Ted Snavelly

Sound Design and Mix- Brian Cunneff

Online Editor- Charles F. MacDonald

Oklahoma City Still Photographer- J. Pat Carter

Oklahoma Historical Research- Mary Logan Wolfe

Locations, Tulsa- Shane Brown

Production Assistants-

Jason Cordis

Cass Meyers

Emily McLean

Production Finance- Catherine Roehl

Production Accounting- Shirley Spencer

Website- Nick Hall

Transcriptions- SS Transcriptions, Susan Siegmann

Travel Arrangements- Ellen Ben-Shalom, Albany Travel