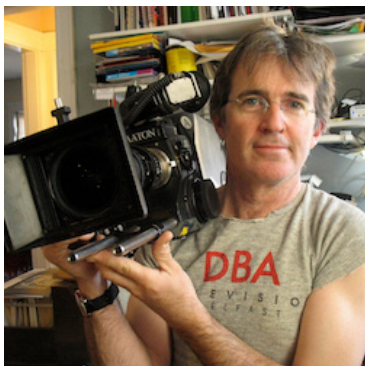


# A RECKONING IN BOSTON

## MEET THE MAKERS



### **STEPHEN MCCARTHY, CINEMATOGRAPHER:**

While following Kafi Dixon around the vacant lot on Mission Hill - truly a “mission” for Kafi - I couldn’t stop thinking of my late friend John Carroll. John was a neighbor of in nearby Jamaica Plain - an African-American

Vietnam vet with a wondrous green thumb. Our many years of friendship began through early morning encounters in a former horse stable which I helped him cultivate with flowers, herbs and small plots of vegetables. Like Kafi, John had a quiet mission to spread positivity through agriculture in a dense urban setting. In John’s case, the endeavor resulted in a permanent community garden that now serves as the hub of a thriving (and desirable) neighborhood. There is a monument to John at the garden’s entrance. The less inspiring side of this story is that John’s work likely helped price him out of the very neighborhood in which he had become a true fixture.

Media: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHnOZnQ\\_A-o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHnOZnQ_A-o)

**Stephen McCarthy** is a director of photography whose thirty-five year career has spanned the width and breadth of non-fiction filmmaking. His work appears regularly in prime time documentary series including PBS’s American Experience, American Masters, Frontline, Nova and P.O.V. as well as HBO, Netflix and Apple TV.

### **AARON BOUCHARD, SOUND RECORDIST:**

I first worked with James on the doc back in April of 2014 when it was just it was just him, a cameraman, and I rolling through south Boston in my beat up PT Cruiser. I worked with James on many more shoot days until the film was finished in 2020. Over the years I developed a sentimental investment in the lives of Kafi & Carl so seeing the film for the first time was very moving. It is a rare experience to work on a project like A Reckoning in Boston and it is one I am very proud to have been a part of.



**Aaron Bouchard** has been working in New England as a sound mixer for the last ten years. His work includes everything from sports & live events to TV & feature films. Aaron also enjoys traditional New England activities such as shoveling snow and complaining about humidity.

## **NATE MAY, COMPOSER**

The first music I wrote for the film is the tune that plays when the credits arrive at the end. I wrote it on a little upright piano in the mountains of New Hampshire after seeing clips from the film. In particular I was thinking about Thompson's Island and Kafi's relationship to it. In the spaces between the phrases I felt some memory of childhood --a soft sense of the waves crashing on the shore.

**Nate May** 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.

## **LISSA DEONARAIN, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER**

In the summer of 2018, I had just graduated college and was working as an intern on *A Reckoning* in Boston. After spending time assisting in the editing room, I first



met Kafi in person on a visit to the urban farm while students from Tuskegee were visiting for the summer. On one of the visits, Kafi pulled me aside with the young women

from the Tuskegee group and we stood in a circle. Kafi talked about the different types of pain people hold. In that moment, I felt seen in a way I never expected. For her to go out of her way to bring me, the only woman of color on crew, together with other women of color was a moment of vulnerability, honesty and love that I cherish to this day. Her motherly caring combined with her playful spirit made me feel at home in a place I had never been. Wherever Kafi is, you can feel her energy, which is one of strength, resilience, determination, authenticity and love.

**Lissa Deonarain** is a Guyanese-American documentary filmmaker, producer and activist from Omaha, Nebraska. She received her B.A. from Emerson College in Media Arts Production with a concentration in Documentary



Film Making & Producing, and a minor in Global & Postcolonial Studies. Her films explore social justice issues and themes such as identity, belonging, community and memory, largely inspired by her own experiences as a disabled, multiracial woman and daughter of an immigrant.

## **MOLLY SCHWARTZ, ANIMATOR**

Before animating, we listened to Kafi and Carl's readings, over and over, learning the flow of their spoken rhythms and the soundtrack. We wanted the typography animation to reflect their presentation of each word and sentence. James selected beautiful footage as a backplate for the animated text, a mix of seeing Kafi and Carl move through their day cut with abstract footage, capturing the light and motion of the city. We experimented with the movement and drift of the words, how they mixed with the audio and the motion in the background footage, letting each sequence guide the composition. Using delicate typography let the the words be airy and light as the sounds passing. As an animator, you get to know the characters in the film as they were for a brief moment in time-- we see them live these small moments repeatedly. We learn so much as Kafi and Carl thoughtfully tell their own stories.



**Molly Schwartz** is the founder and director of PHLEA TV studio, creating art, animation, design, and code for installations and documentary film. Her work on *Watchers of the Sky* won a Sundance Special Jury Award for Animation. Film credits include: *Above & Beyond: NASA's Journey to Tomorrow*, *Worlds of Ursula K LeGuin*, *Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, *Cancer: Emperor of All Maladies*, *Nothing Left Unsaid: Gloria Vanderbilt & Anderson Cooper*, *Rancher Farmer Fisherman*, *CODE: Debugging the Gender Gap*, *Rachel Carson*, *Words from A Bear*, *Hemingway*, and *My Name is Pauli Murray*. [phlea.tv](http://phlea.tv)

## **HEATHER MERRILL, COORDINATING PRODUCER:**

James brought me on to this film six years ago. Although the story was still unfolding, even early on, he had a strong poetic vision for the film. It was my challenge and my pleasure to understand and support that vision,



through conversations, questions, research, and handling logistics. In the end, James, Kafi and Carl produced a beautiful and powerful film, and I'm so proud to have worked on it. Viewers sometimes ask about what gets left out of the final version of a film. We did a lot of research about displacement, and working to understand the housing situation in Boston, and studying development and gentrification. It's heartbreaking to have learned in detail that many other cities are struggling with these issues as well, but in the end we focused on our city and what was unique about how this is all playing out here.

**Heather Merrill** has worked in archival research for more than 10 years. Her production credits include work on the PBS series *American Experience*, *American Masters*, and *NOVA*, programs on Discovery, Showtime, and the WORLD Channel, and numerous independent documentary films. She has also conducted research for publications, recently for books on Theodore Roosevelt and immigration laws of the 1920s. Some of her favorite topics have included women wrestlers, the roots of the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and disaster studies.

#### **LLEW SMITH, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:**



James had fears about bringing himself into this story, as any sensitive, sensible documentarian would. The film was not supposed to be about him. And yet how can

you tell a story about race in a city like Boston, without interrogating how racism deftly insinuates itself into housing policy, economic development, land use and so many well-meaning white lives? So many of the city's white residents have never acknowledged or thought to challenge the economic violence and oppressive governmental actions committed in their name against others who are poor, who are people of color. Is it because it's always been that way, racism masquerading as the unavoidable collateral of urban progress? Why is the pattern of who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged undeniably predictable? Is that the city's DNA speaking? James makes a brave journey in *A Reckoning* in Boston— from “objective observer” who doesn't believe he's part of the stories Kafi and Carl reveal about the city and their lives in it, to someone who wakes up to the truth that we are all connected and all responsible. To paraphrase Edmund Burke, all it takes for evil to triumph is for well-meaning people to see nothing, to insist that nothing is wrong, it is what it is, not your concern, move on.

As a filmmaker **Llewellyn Smith** continues to explore history and science stories that illuminate social inequality and possibilities for change. He is the recipient of Peabody and duPont awards, and other honors. Groundbreaking projects Llew has produced or contributed to include *Eyes On The Prize*, *Race: The Power Of An Illusion*, *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War*, *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, *Africans In America*, *American Denial*, *Wounded Places: Confronting PTSD In America's Shell-Shocked Cities*, and *American Denial*. As the first Story Editor for PBS's *American Experience*, Llew was central in origination, development and acquisition of more than 70 programs for the acclaimed series. He currently in production on a 3-part documentary series *Future of Work*. His next film for NOVA, *Inside the Black Box: Justice, Prejudice and AI* (w.t) investigates the disturbing role of Artificial Intelligence in our criminal justice system. Llew is Executive Producer for *A Reckoning* in Boston.

#### **ANNE MARIE STEIN, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:**

I met James over thirty years ago through the Mass Council on the Arts and Humanities where I was a program coordinator for works in progress by Massachusetts artists



and then through the Boston Film/Video Foundation where I became Executive Director. I am a huge fan of James' work and have always stayed in touch with him and what he is doing. I think of James' films as journeys into corners of the world that are too often invisible to too many-- from the film on the farm crisis to the pentecostal preachers to the parish in Lowell and now to the Clemente Project and the participants. What I particularly love about the pieces is that James' seeks seekers of sorts and takes the time for you to really get to know his subjects with a kind of humble curiosity that is unique.

My role was to help raise some funding for the film and also providing notes for different cuts as a work in progress. I think I saw three or four versions. When I saw the work in progress in the beginning I offered to help him raise some money and also saw a number of different cuts and gave feedback.

**Anne Marie Stein** is an arts and education administrator and manager and has worked with independent media artists for over 30 years. She is currently VP of Most Stuff at Winikur Productions, a company specializing in media for museums and visitor centers. Previous positions include Dean of Professional and Continuing Education at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Development Director for Northern Light Productions, Executive Director of the Boston Film/Video Foundation, Program Coordinator for the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities and Director of the Center for Media Art at the American Center in Paris. She also co-produced and co-directed *The Dhamma Brothers*, a film about a meditation program in a maximum security prison in Alabama and has been a consulting producer on other independent films, and was Co-Director of the New England Film and Video Festival for a number of years and a co-founder of the Boston Independent Festival of Womens Cinema.

## **ALLIE HUMENUK, CINEMATOGRAPHER**

One of the many moments that sticks with me from filming *A Reckoning in Boston* is Carl's graduation. Usually when I am filming, the camera is a buffer and I don't fully process my emotions until I put the camera down. But, during this scene, nothing blocked my feelings. While I was shooting Carl's speech and the reactions of his family, classmates,



and teachers, I felt the impact of his momentous achievement. My tears blurred my vision and made it a little hard to keep the footage in focus.

**Allie Humenuk** is an award-winning filmmaker and Emmy-nominated cinematographer whose films have been broadcast nationally and internationally. Her most recent film, *The Guys Next Door* (co-director, co-producer, and cinematographer), had long and successful festival runs and aired on PBS. Her previous feature documentary, *Shadow of the House* (director, producer, and cinematographer), about the photographer Abelardo Morell, was heralded as “one of the best films ever made about an artist and the artistic process” by Bo Smith, former curator of the film program at the MFA Boston. Her first film, *Love Knots*, was shot on 16mm film and was nominated for a student Academy Award. Allie was nominated for an Emmy for her camera work on the PBS series *Design Squad*. Her other cinematography and camera credits include programs for HBO, BBC, PBS, National Geographic, MTV, and ESPN. She has taught film and video production at Harvard University, Massachusetts College of Art and the Maine Media Workshops. Currently, Allie freelances as a director and cinematographer.

## **DIANA FISCHER, CO-PRODUCER**

I have two particular interests in documentary filmmaking: introducing viewers to people and circumstances they know little about, and providing the underserved a voice. When I first read about the Clemente Course in the Humanities, I recognized a compelling story but had no idea how affecting the in-person classes would be. Watching Clemente students bring their accumulated life experiences to bear in the classroom was humbling. And observing teaching at its best – inclusive, compelling, challenging – was captivating and moving. As the film took shape and we learned more about Kafi and Carl, my gratification in the project only grew. I'm awed and thankful that Kafi and Carl let us into their lives, and am pleased to be part of this project.

**Diana Fischer** has 30 years of production experience in television and film, including documentary and news (NewsHour), children's programming (Peep and the Big Wide World), and multimedia (GBH Interactive Projects). She has produced streaming interviews with artists including musician Mark Mothersbaugh and author Tom Perotta. For Lost Nation Pictures, she served as Story Editor of the Alfred I. du Pont Columbia Journalism Award-winning film *Class of 27*.



## CARL CHANDLER, PRODUCER

The incident that convinced me that James would be trustworthy, and would chronicle the Clemente experience accurately would occur in one of our initial classes. A reference would be made to Thomas Jefferson. Not being a big fan of Jefferson's I mentioned that there was



some contention as to whether Jefferson was the father of his slave Sally Hemings children. For many years the history establishment denied Jefferson's paternity.

DNA evidence proved his complicity. While some asserted Jefferson's innocence and defended his sterling reputation,



I stated 2 things had been neglected in the discussion.

Jefferson OWNED Sally Hemings.

If in fact, Jefferson was not the father of Hemings children, he made her available. I mentioned that meant there was a particular word for Jefferson's action.

**6 A RECKONING IN BOSTON - MEET THE MAKERS**

James called my statement "provocative" he delivered his reaction with a smile. His response was perfect to me. He understood my sarcasm and his smile indicated to me he did not disapprove. I realized James was trustworthy, as he really heard us.



**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. He made the calculation early in life that he did not want to be a full participant in the so-called "American dream" since he felt that his people were not respected or embraced by America. As a consequence, he feels his education was incomplete. His lifestyle choices did not include lots of money. Originally poor by choice, then by necessity, he sees himself as poor but not impoverished. Throughout his life he has been able to give lectures and presentations on Indigenous culture in southern New England, which he believes is a small contribution to young people's education. 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.

### **GREG MCCLEARY, SOUND DESIGN/MIX**

James and I have worked together on many of his films, A Reckoning in Boston being the latest. This powerful and complex film was shot over many years, making my first challenge one of transforming all the different sounding location audio recordings into something integrated and seamless. An audience should never be distracted by audio quality shifts from scene to scene. Additionally, a good mix must have good sound design (not unlike a good meal needing good ingredients). My goal was to support the narrative with sound that didn't call attention to it – but would be missed if removed. The spaces inhabited by the various protagonists in the film went from busy cities to farms to classrooms to lonely apartment spaces -- all benefiting from a solid flooring



of nuanced sound design. James and I worked closely on the score. Editing cues... hiring an additional composer for one crucial scene... and tapping a wonderful saxophone player to add depth to a number of cues. But all of this sonic work should never detract from the film's narrative. If I've done my job right, nobody should know I've done anything!

**Greg McCleary** has been a sound designer and re-recording mixer for over thirty years. Owner of Heart Punch Studio in Boston, McCleary has been fortunate to collaborate with filmmakers from all over. No film is the result of one person – it is always the coordinated effort and creativity of many.

### **KAFI DIXON, PRODUCER**

While filming an evening class, a white filmmaker was placed on an axis where he had to stand present as a maker and witness to the lives of a Black woman and Native American man pushing back on the systems in place for Black and Brown in the City of Boston: “Hierarchy,” as Carl states in art history class. As James followed our lives outside the doors of the community class, he became witness to not only the



experiences of lives but face to face experiences of our community. James and his camera journeyed with Carl and I, as he became a witness to the oppressive forces that our community experiences around race, class, and culture. As James reflects on his blind spots as a well-intentioned white man, he becomes a guide for others, who like him, need to better understand how these communities exist, and how we either help them or hurt them in our intentions. James explores a people and community whose experiences are often unseen and their voices are unheard, in the name of development.

**Kafi** has been employed as a gravedigger, fishmonger, retail merchant, Boston bus driver, community organizer and mother of three. She has been certified as an urban farmer by the City of Boston. Kafi, a former Clemente Course student, has been working closely with the film's director James Rutenbeck for the last six years. She is currently lead organizer for the Common Good Project, an urban farm and cooperative for poor and working-class women of color in Dorchester, Massachusetts. This is her first film.

## P.H. O'BRIEN - CINEMATOGRAPHER

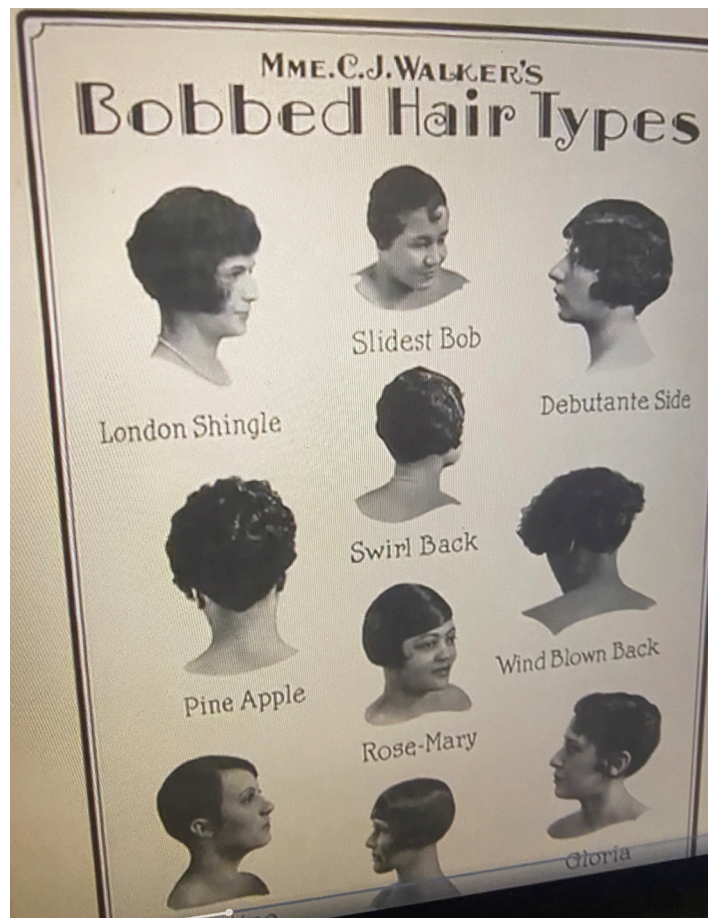
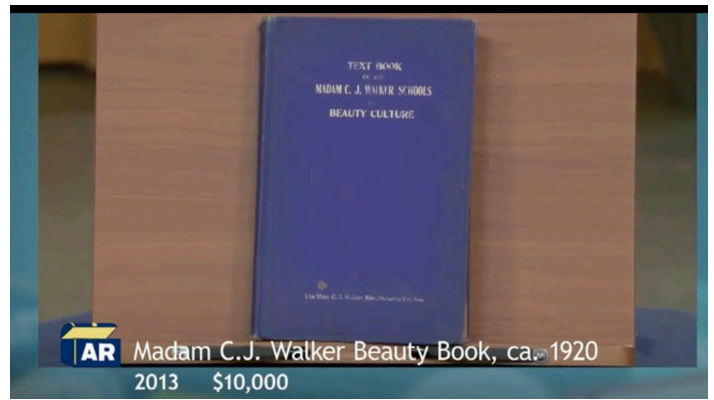
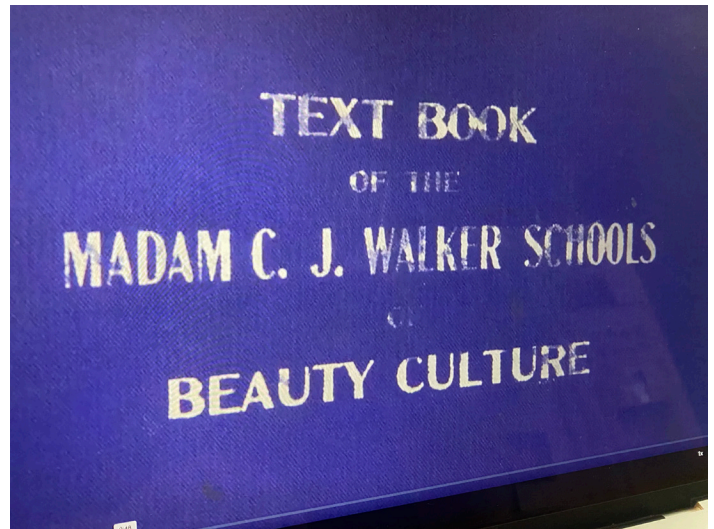


It's wonderful to work on a project where you can become close collaborators and friends when shooting a documentary. It is amazing how Carl, Kafi and Tolga could be so open, thoughtful and trusting about their lives on camera. There was one exception where

Kafi drew a line in the sand. When we were shooting in Mississippi, Kafi needed to stop to get some hair products. As you can see in the movie, she has some fabulous hair styles. We found an amazing hair-care-product super-store for women of color in the middle of nowhere. I was ready to stroll on in with her and check it out, but... no matter how much I begged she would not allow me to come into the store with her. There was no way she was going to let me in on ANY of her hair care secrets. So James and I, two white guys, just sat in the car while the ladies inside at the counter pointed at us and laughed. About a year later I was watching Antiques Roadshow and a 1920's text book on African American hairstyles and beauty culture was featured. This rare text was valued at \$10,000. I just nodded and said to myself, "Sounds about right..." So, someday when I hit it big, I'm going to buy the book for Kafi... but I'm going to sneak a peek first...

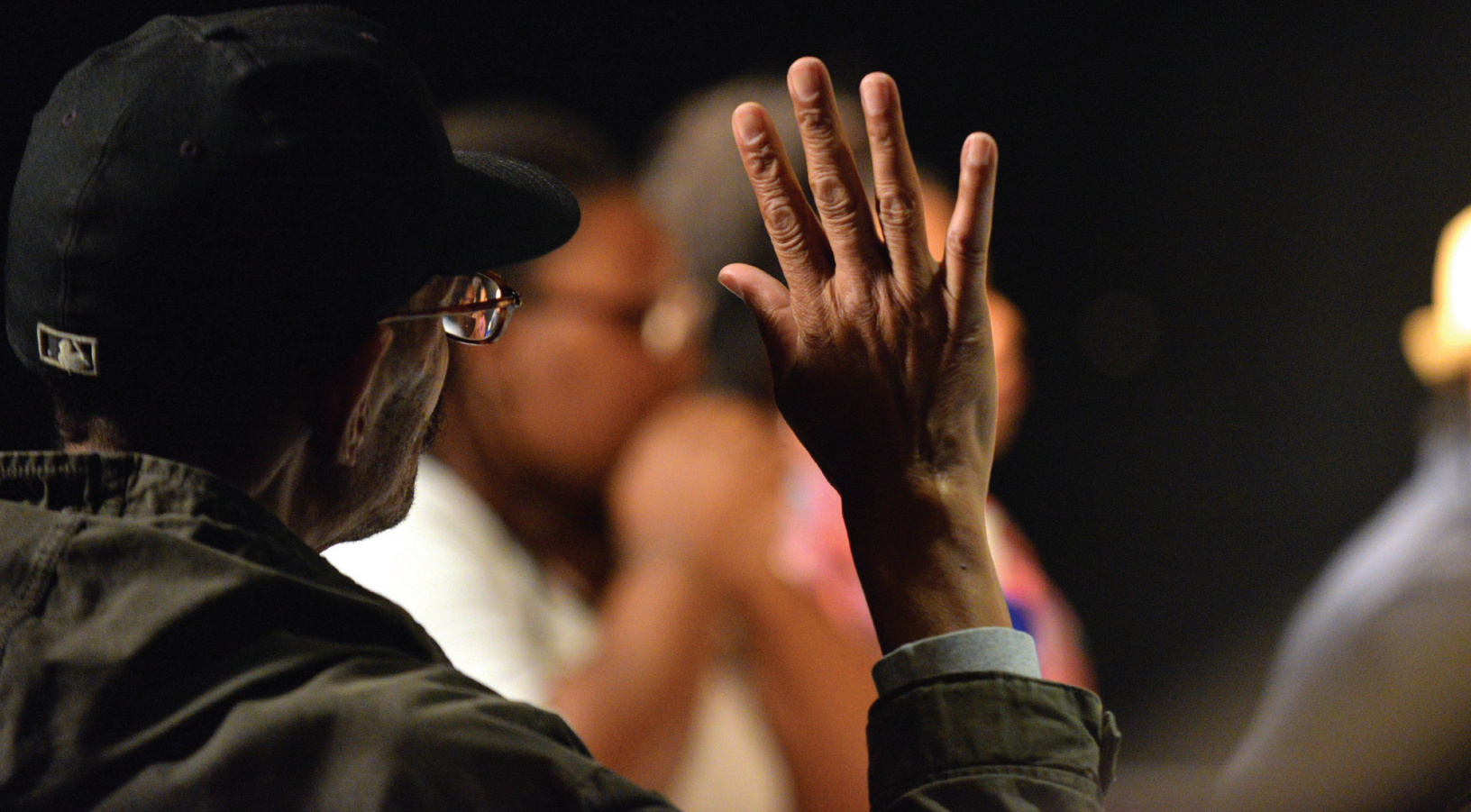
**P.H. O'Brien** has a long career of shooting and producing documentary films and TV shows. Among P.H.'s many director-of-photography/producer credits are collaborations with Steve (Hoop Dreams) James: Reel Paradise, Head Games and The War Tapes (best documentary, Tribeca 2006).

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.





# A RECKONING IN BOSTON



## MEET THE TEACHERS



### **JULIA LEGAS, PHILOSOPHY TEACHER**

Working with James and his crew on making “A Reckoning in Boston” was a great experience. It was a great opportunity for people to see just how engaged, dedicated, and vibrant our students are. We create a real community of scholars in our classrooms and James provided a window on that for the rest of the city.

**Julia Legas** is a lecturer in Philosophy at Suffolk University and Boston College. She has been with the Clemente Course, teaching moral philosophy for more than a decade, and values the opportunity to teach adult learners in their own communities.

## **JACK CHENG, ART HISTORY TEACHER**

Most students hate the possibility that something they say “wrong” will be recorded. But filming our Clemente class for A Reckoning in Boston went surprisingly well. I would attribute that to the professionalism of the film crew, but also to a population of adults who are so hungry for education that they could ignore the distractions.

As an art history professor, my favorite class is when we can skip the reproductions from books and slides and visit the @MFABoston to see the art in person. Turner’s Slave Ship, the Impressionists and the great Egyptian collection always leave a big impression.

Teaching adults is challenging and edifying. Feminism, colonialism, the Western canon, artistic irony, abstraction -- good or bad, all of these ideas have more resonance the longer you live. This is the value of a program like the #ClementeCourse.



## **FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM/LINKEDIN/ TWITTER**

After some friends saw A Reckoning in Boston, they asked me some questions about how the documentary was made. As a teacher in the #ClementeCourse, these were my answers:

<https://www.blog.clementecourse.org/post/a-reckoning-in-the-classroom>

### **Entries from my journal of 2014-15:**

Carl is great. He was telling me that he wants to figure out a way to get people in the community access to the MFA and other museums and cultural institutions, “the way we make Clemente accessible to people.”

**Jack Cheng** grew up in Toronto and attended Columbia College in New York where he got the kind of broad humanities education that the Clemente Course offers. He earned a PhD in art history at Harvard focusing on

**10 A RECKONING IN BOSTON - MEET THE MAKERS**

ancient art and has worked at archaeological digs in Turkey, Syria, and currently, at Jebel Barkal in Sudan. He has taught art history in the Boston Clemente Course since its beginnings in 2001, and served as Academic Director of the course for about a decade. In recent years he has been teaching versions of the Clemente curriculum to veterans. Jack works as a copywriter for Crackerjack Communications and lives with his family and a dog named Taco in Newton, MA.



## **TIMOTHY PATRICK MCCARTHY**

I knew of James Rutenbeck before I met him. A decade ago, our mutual friend Kristin O’Connell sent me a DVD of his brilliant film, “Scenes from a Parish,” which I loved. At the time, Kristin was the tireless champion of the Clemente Course, a free college humanities program for lower income adults that she worked to establish in multiple sites throughout Massachusetts. I was then the Academic Director of the Clemente Course in Dorchester, now celebrating its 20th year.

When James later approached us with the idea of doing a “film about Clemente,” my colleagues and I were admittedly skeptical. Our primary concern was how this would impact our students. After all, it’s not normal to have a documentary film crew roving around the classroom. We were also adamant that this not become another tired “savior story,” because that wasn’t our story. Together with our students and community partners, we weighed all the positives and negatives, decided to invite James and his crew in, and got consent from everyone who would be involved.

The journey since then has defied all expectations. The Boston Clemente Course is no longer the main focus of the film, but our uncommon classroom community is part of its backdrop and ensemble. The heart and soul of the film are Clemente graduates Kafi Dixon and Carl Chandler, both co-producers, whose inspiring personal stories help to break open the easy political story Boston likes to tell to and about itself. In the process, James himself emerged as a different kind of filmmaker—and it shows. I would like to think that all of us have been transformed by this artistic collaboration, and we hope that it will produce a similar kind of reckoning with audiences.

Personally, I have rarely been more proud to be part of something in my life.

**Timothy Patrick McCarthy** is an award-winning historian, educator, and activist who has taught on the faculty at Harvard University since 1998. He is the Academic Director Emeritus and Stanley Paterson Professor of American History in the Boston Clemente Course in the Humanities.

