

REDEMPTION SONG

Two men from different backgrounds try to reconcile their differences in the wake of the 2015 Baltimore riots.

A short film by
Warren Watson

Copyright 2016 Warren Watson 443-386-4776
Writers Guild Reg.# 1275898 warren@warrenwatson.net

FADE IN

We open with a montage of television news footage showing violence, rock throwing and looting during the Baltimore riots on April 27, 2015. Rioters break into then loot a store (pawn shop, convince, other store) as we hear voiceovers from anchors and reporters describing the scene during a live broadcast.

FADE TO BLACK

While in black: SFX of glass crunching.

FADE UP:

EXT - SMALL BUSINESS IN BALTIMORE - DAY

We fade up on shoes crunching on broken glass, debris and merchandise are scattered about the store's floor. A framed photo with the mayor and the store owner that used to hang on the wall now lays on the floor smashed. Other memorabilia from the last 22 years in business on the walls are smashed.

Store owner, RON WILLIAMS, 48, wearing dressy jeans, a fancy button down dress shirt with cufflinks and upscale oxford shoes walks through his damaged store. His employee EMMA, 21, older worn jeans, a long sleeve t-shirt, lightweight vest and hiking boots is there to help clean up.

RON

Look at what they've done. Twenty
Two years. Twenty Two years and
I've never had anything like this.
A few robberies. Some shoplifters,
sure. But nothing like this.

A dejected Ron leans up against a cooler, unsure of where to go from here.

RON (CONTINUED)

How am I going to rebuild? How can
I carry on? After this?

EMMA

I don't know but if you close up
I'm out of a job.

Emma grabs two brooms and hands one to Ron.

(CONTINUED)

EMMA

Help me sweep this glass up?

Ron takes the broom, shakes his head as he surveys the damage then starts sweeping.

GRAPHIC: 2 days later

A Baltimore City POLICE OFFICER, STEVEN THOMAS arrives in his patrol car just as Ron puts debris from the damaged store into a portable dumpster. Ron is now dressed in attire more appropriate to cleaning up the debris - old jeans, a t-shirt and tennis shoes. Officer Thomas, in his uniform steps out of the patrol car and moves towards Ron.

OFFICER THOMAS

Mr Williams, how's the clean up going?

RON

About as well as can be expected I guess.

OFFICER THOMAS

Gonna rebuild and stay?

RON

I don't know. Don't know if it's even worth it.

OFFICER THOMAS

Yeah, I can imagine how you feel. Well I came by to give you a little bit of good news. We caught the perp, a teenager. All of 15. Got him on the surveillance camera from across the street. Then he posted pictures of himself on Facebook. He thought he was slick.

RON

Well how about that. Thanks, that's the best news I've had yet. Now nail his little snot-nosed ass to the wall!

OFFICER THOMAS

Oh we will. Breaking and entering, malicious destruction, theft. He'll be going away for a while, til he's 21 at least. Here's the police report and the State's Attorney's info. She'll take it from here.

(CONTINUED)

RON

Thanks. Maybe he'll learn some respect while he's in there. Insurance company will be here in an hour. I'll be sure to let them know.

As the Police Officer exits Ron exhibits a slight smile and goes back inside to continue cleaning up.

EXT STORE - LATER

The INSURANCE ADJUSTER, DAVID ARNOLD arrives to survey the damage. David is wearing a suit and tie minus the jacket. David starts to enter at the front of the store but the door is locked. Ron is too busy cleaning up that he doesn't realize it's the insurance agent at the door.

RON

(in a curt manner) We're closed right now, sorry.

DAVID

Hello, Mr. Williams? I'm David Arnold, the adjuster with Free State Insurance.

Ron goes to the front door and unlocks it, letting David in.

RON

Oh sorry, come in. Thanks for coming. You can see what a number they did on the place. Let me show you where they did the most damage.

As Ron shows David the damage Emma takes a load of trash out to the dumpster.

EXT - STORE - DAY

Emma exits the back of the store then sets the trashcan next to the dumpster and prepares to hoist the heavy can over the edge. Just then her cell phone rings.

EMMA

Hello...oh hi Dana. At the store helping my boss clean up after the riot. I don't know, he's really depressed over it. He spent over 20 years building it up now this. It pretty much broke his spirit. I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EMMA (cont'd)
don't know if he'll keep the store
or not. (she realizes) I might be
out of a job soon.

INT STORE - DAY

David and Ron are wrapping up the damage assessment.

DAVID
Yeah like you said they really did
a number on your place. Don't worry
though, we'll get you back on your
feet soon enough. The good news is
you're covered for the damage they
caused and the merchandise they
stole, plus the lost revenue while
you're rebuilding. You'll be up and
running again before you know it.

RON
Thanks but I don't know if I want
to go through all of it again. I
don't know if I should relocate or
maybe get out all together and do
something else.

DAVID
Well, don't worry Mr. Williams.
You're covered either way.

RON
It's not that. It's the emotional
toll. My whole life is wrapped up
in this store.

DAVID
What will you do if you get out of
it?

RON
I don't know. I don't know.

DAVID
Well let me know what you want to
do.

RON
Yeah. Thanks David.

David and Ron shake hands and David exits as Ron goes back
to cleaning up.

INT STORE - DAY - LATER

Later that afternoon Ron is busy cleaning up the mess, emptying a dustpan of broken glass, potato chips and other mess into the large trash can inside the store.

EMMA

Ron you've been working so hard.
Take a break and have something to eat. I brought some sandwiches and sodas from home.

RON

Yeah, maybe you're right.

Ron sits down to rest and eat lunch with Emma. He turns on an old small television in the back room.

RON

I'm surprised those thugs didn't take the TV too.

EMMA

(chuckling) Probably because it's not high def.

As Ron and Emma eat their sandwiches the news is on and the reports provide updates on the aftermath of the riots. A REPORTER in the field is interviewing a neighborhood TEENAGER about the riots. The teenager, seen from the waist up is wearing an UnderArmor shirt, Ravens t-shirt or similar attire.

TEENAGER

The problem is there ain't no options for us. They took away our schools. They took away our rec centers. They cut the social programs. There ain't no jobs around here. There ain't no future for us. What are we supposed to do? What do you do when they back you against wall and you ain't got no options? You come out swingin'.

The teenager's comments causes Ron to see things in a new light, looking at the issue from the perspective of the neighborhood residents, especially the young people.

Ron gets up from his chair, pulls out his cell phone and calls the State's Attorney prosecuting the case.

(CONTINUED)

RON

Hello, Ms. Bradford? It's Ron Williams. I own one of the stores damaged in the riots. Do you have a minute? I'm wondering...can I drop the charges against the kid. Yes, drop the charges, but...only on one condition. Look, I have an idea...

FADE TO BLACK

FADE UP:

EXT - RON'S STORE - NEXT DAY

Officer Thomas arrives bringing the accused teenage assailant, JAMEL to the store. Jamel is wearing faded jeans with a couple of rips, t-shirt of some kind, a black hoodie and a gray beanie. Jamel is a bit nervous, not quite sure what to expect. Is he about to walk into the lion's den? Officer Thomas and Jamel walk into the store where Ron is waiting.

RON

So you're Jamel. You did all this. (pause, then extends his hand)...Nice to meet you.

Jamel is not sure if he should shake hands or not. He finally accepts Ron's offer and they shake.

RON (CONTINUED)

I'm Ron. So uh, you mind grabbing that tape measure for me?

A perplexed Jamel hesitates then picks up the tape measure but is a little confused, expecting to be chewed out any minute now.

RON (CONTINUED)

Do me a favor, measure that piece of plywood for me.

Jamel is motionless for a second, not sure what to expect.

JAMEL

Uh...okay.

Jamel, looking more confused than ever obliges and measures the plywood, both the length and width.

(CONTINUED)

RON

What do you have?

JAMEL

One foot three and a quarter inches
by one foot seven and a half
inches.

RON

Sounds perfect. You know how to use
a hammer?

JAMEL

Yeah.

RON

Good. Use that piece of plywood to
cover the hole in the floor.

Jamel is thoroughly confused. He looks at Officer Thomas.
Officer Thomas nods. Jamel places the plywood over the hole
and nails it into place.

JAMEL

Why you got me doing this?

RON

You need something constructive to
do and I need help rebuilding this
place.

JAMEL

So, uh...you ain't mad?

RON

I was. Truth is I wanted you to rot
in jail for all the trouble you
caused. Destroying my store,
stealing my merchandise. Leaving me
with this mess. But then I got to
listening and thinking. People
around your neighborhood say
there's nothing good to do. No job
opportunities, no way out. Hell,
I've been working so hard to make
my business a success that I didn't
even take the time to notice. So I
wanted to give you an opportunity.
Help me fix my store. Get it back
to where it used to be and I'll
drop the charges. I'll even pay
you, 12 bucks an hour.

(CONTINUED)

JAMEL

So you gonna drop the charges...and pay me?

Jamel looks to Officer Thomas, a perplexed look is written on his face.

JAMEL (CONTINUED)

This a joke, right?

RON

No I'm totally serious. But you have to work til it's done. No skipping out. No quitting before it's done and no cutting corners. The State's Attorney will be on top of that. I'll even teach you what I can along the way. If things work out maybe you can continue to work here after it's back up and running again. Deal?

Ron extends his hand to Jamel. Jamel is still skeptical but with his options limited Jamel accepts Ron's offer.

JAMEL

Um, o...okay yeah...yeah, deal.

Jamel shakes Ron's outstretched hand but he is unsure if he made the right decision. He knows he doesn't have much of a choice.

RON

Great. Now help take this trash can to the dumpster, it's rather heavy.

Ron and Jamel both pick up the heavy trash can and carry it outside to the dumpster.

EXT - RON'S STORE

RON

So I gotta ask, why here? why my store?

JAMEL

I dunno. Maybe it's 'cause we're tired of being treated like shit. Tired of the same bleak existence with no hope for something better. Tired of seeing our bothers, sisters and fathers killed all the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMEL (cont'd)
time. And after Freddie, that was
it. No more holdin' back. We were
gonna let the world know how we
felt.

RON
No respect.

JAMEL
Don't nobody care about us 'cause
we live in the hood and don't have
money to fight back. The rich guy
got his new stadium and what do we
get? Another greasy fried chicken
joint.

Ron contemplates Jamel's response, letting it soak in for a
second then changes the subject.

RON
So you play any sports?

JAMEL
I used to play basketball. Had
dreams of making it to the NBA til
I fell and broke my kneecap.

RON
Sorry to hear that.

JAMEL
Ain't no thing. Just means I have
to find something else to do with
my time. (pause) Let me ask you a
question.

RON
Yeah, what is it?

JAMEL
How come when black people riot
'cause of police brutality they
call us criminals, thugs and
animals but when white people riot
because their sports team lost OR
they won, people say they're
"venting their frustration" or
"just blowing off steam"?

(CONTINUED)

RON
Well because...

Jamel's question has Ron stumped.

RON
Becau...well...

A quizzical look crosses Ron's face.

RON
I don't know Jamel. (pause) I don't
know.

Ron goes back to work, getting the store cleaned up.

RON (CONTINUED)
Hand me that box of nails there.
(pause) It'll be lunch time soon.
You getting hungry?

JAMEL
You kidding? I'm starving. I'd kill
for a fish and cheese sub right
now.

Their conversation continues, the camera slowly widens out.

RON
How do you feel about a salad?
Maybe with some avocado. You know
something healthy.

JAMEL
Well, how 'bout we take it one
thing at a time, ok?

RON
(laughs) Yeah alright, sounds good.
fish and cheese sub it is then.

Their conversation continues as picture and sound fade...

SLOW FADE OUT