

part2 pictures

Presents

THE REDEMPTION OF GENERAL BUTT NAKED

A Film By
Eric Strauss & Daniele Anastasion



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SHORT SYNOPSIS

THE REDEMPTION OF GENERAL BUTT NAKED follows Joshua Milton Blahyi – aka General Butt Naked – a brutal African warlord who has renounced his violent past and reinvented himself as a Christian evangelist. Today, Blahyi travels the nation of Liberia as a preacher, seeking out those he once victimized in search of an uncertain forgiveness. Filmmakers Eric Strauss and Daniele Anastasion track his often troubling path up-close, finding both the genuine and disconcerting in Blahyi's efforts, raising questions about the limits of faith and forgiveness in the absence of justice.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Joshua Milton Blahyi – aka General Butt Naked – was a ruthless and feared warlord during Liberia's 14-year civil war. Today, he has renounced his violent past and reinvented himself as a Christian evangelist on a journey of self-proclaimed transformation. Blahyi travels the nation of Liberia as a preacher, seeking out those he once victimized in search of an uncertain forgiveness. But in the end, are some crimes beyond the pale of forgiveness?

Dubbed "General Butt Naked" for fighting with nothing more than an AK-47 and a pair of leather shoes, Blahyi believed he possessed supernatural powers that made him impervious to bullets. The General and his army of child soldiers are said to have killed thousands during Liberia's horrific civil war.

Following a dramatic conversion to Christianity, the General abruptly laid down his weapons in 1996, leaving behind his soldiers, his country and a war that would rage for another seven years.

Today, Blahyi is on a quest for redemption: facing those he once terrorized, preaching where he once murdered, and trying to rebuild the shattered lives of those he commanded during the war. For five years, filmmakers Eric Strauss and Daniele Anastasion tracked his often troubling path up-close, finding both the genuine and disconcerting in Blahyi's efforts. The film forces us to question the very nature of what true, meaningful reconciliation looks like in a country where justice has not been available.

At every turn, THE REDEMPTION OF GENERAL BUTT NAKED challenges viewers to confront hard questions about both the power and limits of forgiveness in a nation searching for healing and justice. Whatever you make of him – liar or madman, charlatan or genuine repentant – you will never meet another character as challenging as Joshua Milton Blahyi, General Butt Naked

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

What are the limits of forgiveness? For five years we wrestled with this question as we documented the life of a former African warlord responsible for the deaths of thousands. After 14 years of civil war, this is also perhaps the most important and troubling question facing the people of Liberia. While justice remains absent for the thousands who

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committed atrocities during Liberia's civil war, victims and perpetrators continue to live side by side in a fragile state of peace.

By following an individual whose story raises uncomfortable questions about evil, justice, faith and forgiveness, we hoped to show the complexity of the situation that continues to confront Liberians. How does a nation move forward? What is the necessary balance between forgiveness and justice? As Liberians struggle to rebuild a nation, this is the question they – and we – must answer.

-Eric Strauss and Daniele Anastasion

LIBERIA IN CONTEXT

Originally founded as a colony for freed American slaves, Liberia has been ravaged by Civil War constantly since the overthrow of its government in 1980. In that year, Samuel Doe, an ethnic Krahn, assassinated Liberia's President, William Tolbert, and installed himself in Tolbert's stead. Elections were not held until 1985 when Doe emerged victorious, though the result was disputed.

In the months and years that followed, Doe's government faced several takeover attempts until full-scale war broke out in December 1989. At its height, the conflict featured no less than seven different warring factions.

General Butt Naked, as he was known then, fought for the ULIMO-J faction under Roosevelt Johnson, on the side of former President Doe, his fellow ethnic Krahn. The General and his army of child soldiers became infamous during a battle in April 1996, when they prevented rebel leader Charles Taylor's forces from entering Monrovia. It was during this period that he committed most of the atrocities for which he has become known. Yet, in 1996, The General claims to have experienced a religious epiphany and put down his weapons, leaving Liberia.

Charles Taylor, an opposing warlord and leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, was elected president in 1997 and continued the tradition of an oppressive and bloody regime. Fighting soon resumed and continued until 2003, when Charles Taylor acceded to international pressure, stepped down from power, and Liberia's civil war officially ended.

Since the General's return from his self-imposed ten-year exile, conditions have improved in Liberia. Peaceful elections were finally held in 2005. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President and became the first female head of state in Africa.

Though the government has stabilized, the people of Liberia are still dealing with the aftermath of war. To date, no Liberian has been tried or prosecuted for any crimes that occurred during the country's long and bloody conflict. Former President Charles Taylor is currently being tried at The Hague for crimes that he committed in neighboring Sierra Leone. Former warlords and fighters continue to serve in Liberia's government with impunity.

Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up in 2006 to investigate the crimes and atrocities that took place during the war. Blahyi was the first warlord to voluntarily go before the Commission. The final TRC report, released in 2009, calls for several leading politicians to be banned from public office, including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and 2011 presidential candidate Senator Prince Johnson. The TRC's recommendations remain highly controversial in Liberia.

Suggested Resources:

Susman, Tina. "Liberia's Fierce Butt Naked General Now Preaches Peace," August 4, 1997. Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Ellis, Stephen. *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimensions of an African Civil War*, New York University Press, New York, 1996.

Berkeley, Bill. *The Graves are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa*,

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Basic Books, New York, 2001.

BIOS

Eric Strauss – Director/Producer

Eric Strauss has been creating documentary films for more than a decade, shooting, writing and producing for broadcasters such as National Geographic, The History Channel, The Discovery Channel, and A&E. For National Geographic Explorer, Eric directed, shot and produced *Heroin Crisis*, about the global trail of Afghan heroin, as well as *Iraq's Guns for Hire*, a profile of the private security industry in Iraq. Eric is currently directing and producing for *Hard Time*, an Emmy-nominated prison series that premiered on the National Geographic Channel in March 2009. *The Redemption of General Butt Naked* is his first feature film.

Daniele Anastasion – Director/Producer

Daniele Anastasion has worked regularly on documentaries for National Geographic, including the Emmy-nominated *Inside the Body Trade*, an investigation of the international black market in human organs. She produced *KKK: Inside American Terror* for The National Geographic Channel and has also produced and shot for Frontline/WORLD. She is currently producing for *Hard Time*, an Emmy-nominated prison series for National Geographic that provides a gripping yearlong view into the world of incarceration. *The Redemption of General Butt Naked* is her first feature film.

Combined filmmaker bios

Eric Strauss has been creating documentary films for more than a decade for broadcasters such as National Geographic, The History Channel and The Discovery Channel. Daniele Anastasion has worked regularly as a producer for National Geographic. They are both currently producing and directing for *Hard Time*, an Emmy-nominated prison series for National Geographic. *The Redemption of General Butt Naked* is their first feature film.

Gregory Henry – Executive Producer

Greg has spent more than 15 years making documentary films on subjects ranging from history to social issues across the US and the world. He began as an editor with the renowned documentarian Charles Guggenheim in Washington, DC, collaborating on more than seven films including the Academy Award Nominated *A Place in the Land*. In 1996, he moved to New York to work with Bill Moyers, producing long form PBS documentaries and then joining the weekly show *NOW with Bill Moyers*. As a co-founder and Executive Producer at part2 pictures, Greg has helmed the hit series *Hard Time* and many of the highest-rated programs and series from part2 pictures.

David Shadrack Smith – Executive Producer

David has been writing, producing, directing and filming documentaries around the world since 1993, experience which he brings to his role as co-founder and executive producer at part2 pictures. His work has earned 8 Emmy nominations and been seen on major broadcasters like National Geographic, Discovery, PBS, the up-coming OWN network, History, Showtime, and ZDF. After graduating from Wesleyan University with a degree in

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History, David spent 7 years living in Beijing, China documenting the incredible transformation there while exploring the craft of cinematography. Behind the lens or as a guiding force at part2 pictures, his emphasis on craft and authentic story-telling has helped contribute to stories that move people and inspire a dialogue about world culture in our times. David now lives and works in his native New York.

Jeremy Siefer – Editor

Jeremy Siefer is an Emmy Award-winning documentary editor based in New York City. His credits include National Geographic's *Afghan Warrior*, for which he received an Emmy for Outstanding Achievement in Editing in 2010 and several Emmy-nominated episodes of National Geographic Explorer. He has also edited programs for PBS, the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, HBO, Showtime, and Palm Pictures. He wrote and directed the 2005 documentary *Kiddush with Cachaça: Jewish Roots and Revival in the Backlands of Brazil*, and has filmed music documentaries around the world — from Paris to Singapore.

Ryan Hill – Co-Producer/Cinematographer

Ryan Hill is a Director of Photography who brings a distinctive visual style and strong sense of story to each project. His clients include HBO, PBS, National Geographic Channel and The Discovery Channel. He has worked with Aborigines in Australia, Eskimos in Alaska, drug dealers in Oakland and was embedded with the Green Berets in Afghanistan. He recently traveled to Pakistan, Morocco and Israel with Secretary Clinton for National Geographic's *Inside the State Department*.

Ryan Lobo – Co-Producer/Photographer

Ryan Lobo is a freelance filmmaker, photographer and writer based in Bangalore, India. His photographic prints have been exhibited all over India and Europe and he has written and shot numerous stories for various international publications. He has worked as a producer, cameraman and sound recordist on more than 60 film projects for National Geographic, Discovery Channel and other networks, including shooting undercover for the Emmy-nominated film *Child Slaves of India*.

Peter Hutchens – Cinematographer

In his ten-year career as a documentary filmmaker, Peter has shot and produced numerous programs for the National Geographic Channel, the Discovery Channel, and PBS. His assignments have spanned the globe and covered topics as diverse as Thailand's deadly cobras, Ireland's "accidental" mummies, America's embattled prison system, and China's emerging punk rock scene.

CREDITS

Directors	ERIC STRAUSS DANIELE ANASTASION
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Co-Producers	RYAN HILL RYAN LOBO
Cinematographers	ERIC STRAUSS PETER HUTCHENS RYAN HILL
Editor	JEREMY SIEFER
Composer	JUSTIN MELLAND
Still Photography	RYAN LOBO
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Production Coordinator Liberia	MARK MITCHELL
Production Coordinator Ghana	KEBBEH FREEMAN
Field Production Assistants	HABAKKUK W. SACKOR VARNEY K. SAMBOLA JR.
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DI Colorist	WILL COX
DI Producer	CAITLIN TARTARO
Post Production Facility	FINAL FRAME POST
Re-Recording Mixer	JACQUES BOULANGER CREATIVE AUDIO POST
Legal	REAVIS PARENT LEHRER LLP

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