

Fork Films Presents



PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL

A Film by Abigail Disney and Gini Reticker

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Synopsis

Pray the Devil Back to Hell is the extraordinary story of a small band of Liberian women who – armed only with white T-shirts and the courage of their convictions - came together in the midst of a bloody civil war, took on the warlords, and brought peace to their shattered country.

As the rebel noose tightened upon Monrovia, and peace talks faced collapse, the women of Liberia – Christian and Muslims united - formed a thin but unshakable white line between the opposing forces, and successfully demanded an end to the fighting.

In one remarkable scene, the women barricaded the site of stalled peace talks in Ghana, and announced they would not move until a deal was done. Faced with eviction, they invoked the most powerful weapon in their arsenal – threatening to remove their clothes. It worked.

The women of Liberia are living proof that moral courage and non-violent resistance can succeed, even where the best efforts of traditional diplomacy have failed.

Their demonstrations culminated in the exile of Charles Taylor and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female head of state – and mark the vanguard of a new wave of women taking control of their political destiny around the world.

But ignored by the press, discounted by the politicians and obscured by the women's own modesty, this remarkable accomplishment was on its way to being lost to historical memory forever.

Pray the Devil Back to Hell reconstructs the moment through interviews, archival footage and striking images of contemporary Liberia. It is compelling testimony to the potential of women worldwide to alter the history of nations.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When Abby Disney first approached me to direct *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, I had some trepidation. All the stories coming out of Liberia had been so bleak, the violence against women appalling, the forced conscription of child soldiers heart-wrenching. I wondered if I could immerse myself in that material for the length of time it takes to make a documentary. And then, we met Leymah Gbowee, one of the main characters portrayed in the film. All of my trepidation turned instantly into unfettered enthusiasm. I couldn't believe how fortunate I was to be able to tell the extraordinary story of these women who had joined together to bring peace to their devastated country. Their remarkable accomplishment had been virtually ignored by the press and was on its way to being forgotten. Being part of ensuring that their story shines has been an absolute privilege.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Gini Reticker (Director) has received numerous awards for directing and producing documentaries. She produced the Academy Award nominated short *Asylum*, and the Emmy nominated *A Decade Under The Influence*. Directing for the PBS Series *Wide Angle*, Reticker took home an Emmy and the Society for Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Award for *Ladies First*, which focused on the role of women in rebuilding post-genocide Rwanda. In 2006, Reticker directed *The Class of 2006*, for *Wide Angle*, spotlighting the first fifty women in Morocco to graduate from an imam academy in Rabat.

Her first film, *The Heart of the Matter* received the Sundance Freedom of Expression Award; *Out of the Darkness: Women and Depression* garnered both an Emmy and a Gracie Award.

Before becoming a producer and director, Reticker worked as an editor on films including: *Roger & Me*; *The Awful Truth: The Romantic Comedy*, PBS American Cinema Series; and the Emmy-nominated *Fire From the Mountain*.

Abigail E. Disney (Producer) is a Founder and the President of the Daphne Foundation, a progressive, social change foundation that makes grants to grassroots, community-based organizations working with low-income communities in New York City. Abigail has provided capital support to The White House Project, the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Global Fund for Women, the Association to Benefit Children, among other groups. She has provided seed funding for a handful of grassroots initiatives, including Solutions for Economic Empowerment and Dignity (SEED), was instrumental in the creation of the Rattlestick Theatre, the Women's Venture Fund and the Bang on a Can Music Festival, and with a group of other passionate funders formed Liberty Media for Women to rescue Ms. Magazine from bankruptcy. Abigail recently retired as the Chair of The New York Women's Foundation, of which she had been a member for over 14 years, and serves on the boards of the White House Project, and the Global Fund for Women. Abigail is Vice Chair of the board of the investment company, Shamrock Holdings of California, and as a board member for the newly reinvigorated Harlem Globetrotters International. Abigail has also served on the boards of the September 11th Fund, The Brazelton Foundation, the Project for Psychiatric Outreach to the Homeless, the HIV Law Project and the advisory committees of the Association to Benefit Children and the Robert F Kennedy Memorial 2002 awardee, Haitian healthcare advocate Loune Viaud.

Kirsten Johnson's (Director of Photography) most recent film, "Deadline", (co-directed with Katy Chevigny), premiered at Sundance in 2004 and was one of the first independent documentaries to be acquired by a major network (NBC). Her previous documentary as a director, "Innocent Until Proven Guilty" premiered at

the Berlin Film Festival and was broadcast on HBO in 1999.

As a cinematographer, she has worked with directors such as Raoul Peck, Barbara Kopple, Michael Moore, and Kirby Dick. Her cinematography is featured in "Fahrenheit 9/11", Academy and Emmy Award-nominated "Asylum", Emmy-winning "Ladies First", and Sundance premiere documentaries, "This film is Not Rated Yet", "American Standoff", and "Derrida".

A solo show of her still photography, "Cabinet of Curiosity" was exhibited at The Miami Museum of Science, and a chapter is dedicated to her work in the recently-published book, "The Art of the Documentary". She has traveled and worked extensively in 13 countries throughout Africa and 38 countries around the world.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Leymah Gbowee was a 17 year old girl when the war first came to Monrovia. As she says, she turned, "from a child into an adult in a matter of hours." As the war dragged on Leymah had difficulty focusing on anything but her thwarted opportunities to go to college, and out of bitterness she dodged any political or social involvement. But as time wore on she came to see that it would be up to the citizens of Liberia, especially its women, to bring the country back from the insanity of civil war. She trained as a trauma counselor and worked with the ex-child soldiers of Taylor's army. The more she worked with them the more she came to see that they were too were victims.

Leymah joined the Woman in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and quickly rose to leadership thanks to her leadership and organizing skills. She brought all the women of the Christian Churches together into a group called the Christian Women's Initiative and began issuing a series of calls for peace. Soon she formed a coalition with the women in the Muslim organizations in Monrovia and eventually Liberian Mass Action for Peace came into being.

Under Leymah's leadership the group managed to force a meeting with Charles Taylor and extract a promise from him to attend peace talks in Ghana. She then led a delegation of Liberian women to Ghana to continue to apply pressure on the warring factions during the peace process. __Leymah has since been awarded the Blue Ribbon for Peace by Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and is building Women, Peace and Security Africa, a women's peace building organization in Ghana that will act to build relationships across the West African Sub region in support of women's capacity to prevent, avert and end conflicts.

Etweda "Sugars" Cooper, is one of the doyennes of the Liberian women's movement and is known for speaking out. In 1994, during one of the darkest hours of the civil war in Liberia, she and other women -- tired of being victimized and frustrated at the stalemate in the peace process -- founded the Liberia Women Initiative to advocate for disarmament and free and fair elections, and also to bring pressure to bear on stakeholders for the inclusion of women in negotiating a settlement of the Liberian conflict.

Throughout 14 years of civil war she used mass action including picketing, sit ins and marches involving grassroots and professional women and their groups to attract world attention to the plight of women and children and to urge the international community to take action to end the war. __As a strategist for the Liberian Women peace activities under the auspices of Women In Peace building Network, WIPNET, Sugars was unrelenting in lobbying factional leaders through visits, dialoguing and pleading with them to resolve the stalemate in the Accra Peace Talks in 2003, urging them to agree to a ceasefire and to constitute a transitional government.

Vaiba Flomo was working with the Lutheran church's trauma healing program when Leymah came to intern with the program and the two quickly became good friends. Vaiba, haunted by the constant reminders of war -- children dying from hunger or being abandoned because their parents couldn't feed them -- began to press Leymah to mobilize the women of Libeira, because as she says there's not a single woman in Liberia who will tell you that she doesn't have pain from the crisis.

Together with Leymah they worked to bring the Christian and Muslim women's groups together. Where there was some initial reluctance to engage with the other faith, Vaiba developed the message: "can the bullet pick and choose? Does the bullet know Christian from Muslim?" Reluctance faded into action, and the women began their campaign.

To this day, Vaiba works with victims of trauma. And she marvels at what the women managed to achieve: "sometimes when I really think on the work I'm like 'wow, just two little country African girls' dream has become so big'."

Asatu Bah Kenneth, has been a police officer for 25 years -- since before the war began. As the president of the Liberia Female Law Enforcement Association, Asatu was invited to the first meeting of WIPNET and then to the launch of the Christian Women's Initiative. She was so moved by what she heard that she stood up and pledged to mobilize the Muslim women of Liberia to help bring peace to Liberia. And she did, creating the Liberian Muslim Women's Organization. Liberian Mass Action for Peace came into being when the two organizations joined. It was the first time Christian and Muslim women had worked together in Liberia.

Asatu's position in the police service gave her access to intelligence about the war. On one occasion, as the war was closing in on Monrovia, Asatu called a meeting with Leymah, Sugars and Janet and other key members WIPNET. After that meeting the women issued the all-important position statement that they would eventually take to their meeting with Charles Taylor urging him to sit down at the peace table with the rebels.

Her nickname is the "stabilizer" because she doesn't take sides. Today she is Liberia's Deputy Chief of Police, (the Chief of Police is also a woman) and is focused on bringing more women into the security sector. She is proud that her profession allows her to be part of the international peace-building community.

Etty Weah, was one of the hundreds of ordinary women who became involved with WIPNET and the Liberian Mass Action for Peace. She was one of the many women who wore white and sat on the field day in and day out. Rain or shine. Bullets or no bullets.

Before the war, she used to sell food in front of her house in one of the suburbs

of Monrovia. As a regular church goer she responded to a call from the Christian Women's Initiative to become involved in Liberian Mass Action for Peace, and got to know Leymah. She was moved to attend the meeting because she deemed all Liberian women to be victims and thought there was strength in numbers if their voices were to ever be heard. As the war drew closer to Monrovia, and as the mother of two boys, she also feared for all the children who would be conscripted.

Janet Johnson Bryant was a journalist. Much of the time she worked for the Catholic radio station, Radio Veritas in Monrovia. Her beat was the Executive Mansion, occupied by Charles Taylor, who had a virtual stranglehold over the media. Journalists were often openly bribed during press conferences. She also hosted a radio show about women's issues.

Janet met the women of WIPNET when she reported on them for a story. She soon became part of their outreach and advocacy program. Like Asatu, she used her position to garner important, strategic information that benefited WIPNET.

In particular, Janet helped launch the Liberian Mass Action for Peace. Together with Leymah, Sugars and Asatu she helped draft the first press release calling for an immediate ceasefire and for all warring factions to sit down at the peace table. Janet then broadcast the message announcing the first meeting of the women in the field opposite Taylor's house – hundreds of women showed up and stayed.

She now lives in Lowell, MA.