

## MOVIES &amp; TV

## Houston teen Marcel McClinton's ill-fated city council bid is now a movie

'Ready or Not' is the third film in a trilogy about Texas politics from documentarian David Modigliani.



Cary Darling | September 29, 2020 Updated: September 30, 2020, 11:43 am



Memorial Church shooting survivor Marcel McClinton addresses attendees at the March for Our Lives' Road to Change tour at city hall on Sunday, July 8, 2018 in Houston. (Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle)

Photo: Elizabeth Conley, Staff Photographer / Houston Chronicle

Just a couple of months ago, the documentary “Boys State” took viewers behind the doors of the annual Austin convention where high school teens form and run their own government for a few hectic days. ... Austin convention where high school teens form and run their own government for a few hectic days. For the thousand or so kids involved, it’s a teasing taste of electoral politics.

Now comes another documentary, “Ready or Not” (airing 8 p.m. Oct. 3 on Fuse and streaming starting at 9:30 p.m. Oct 3 at [ondemand.drafthouse.com](https://ondemand.drafthouse.com)) focusing on a Houston teenager who sidestepped the fantasy world of “Boys State” in favor of leaping feet first into the real thing. Last year, then 18-year-old Marcel McClinton made national headlines — including at least one viral CNN appearance — by running for an at-large Houston City Council position held by longtime Councilman Michael Kubosh.

Viewed as either the height of folly, naivete and tilting at Gulf Coast windmills or the astute act of a Pete Buttigieg-like political savant, his attempt to unseat Kubosh makes for a compelling story. For Austin director David Modigliani, who directed “Ready or Not” with Paloma Martinez, the film is the third entry in his trilogy of docs devoted to Texas politics. The first was “Crawford” in 2008 (about the impact President George W. Bush had on the small Texas town) and the second was last year’s “Running With Beto” (about Beto O’Rourke’s senate campaign).

He and Martinez manage to capture the campaign — a rickety contraption held together by the Krazy Glue of McClinton’s personality and perseverance — in all of its disorganized, cash-strapped glory.

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## “Ready or Not”

Unrated

Running time: 80 minutes

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As the film starts, McClinton is a senior at Stratford High School who’s in serious danger of not graduating because he has been devoting so much time to progressive political passions. Impacted by a mass shooting near his West Houston church in 2016, he threw himself into March for Our Lives gun-legislation activism. It was newsworthy enough to garner him something of a national profile and celebrity retweets.

He enters the council race as a way of expounding on those views but quickly runs up against the brick wall of Bayou City realpolitik: You talk a good game, but what does that have to do with traffic, potholes and the constant threat of biblical flooding? Not to mention he discovers long-standing neighborhood voting loyalties that are difficult for a fired-up teenager to comprehend, let alone duplicate.

Things get real really fast when the biracial McClinton, along with his sister and German-born mother, scan the nasty social-media comments after an appearance on a local news program. Later, the past rises up to haunt him as he is forced to delete many of his online photos and videos involving partying and adolescent high jinks — and even of him in a Trump T-shirt. The internet never, ever forgets.

He does manage to attract a coterie of seasoned, local progressive political advisers but, at heart, he’s still a teenager. So they have to go into stern-parent mode over such things as wasting money on an

Uber from Houston to Austin. And his father may be proud of him but he's not too proud to yank him off the political treadmill to teach him how to change the oil in his car — because that's something Dad thinks even a future pol needs to know.

It's not a spoiler, especially in Houston, to reveal that McClinton's quest proved fruitless — at least in terms of an election victory. But, no doubt, McClinton took some hard-learned lessons from his experience and for viewers, "Ready or Not" is a fascinating, ride-along look at how the election-year civic sausage gets made.

Now, who's up for a 165-mile Uber ride?

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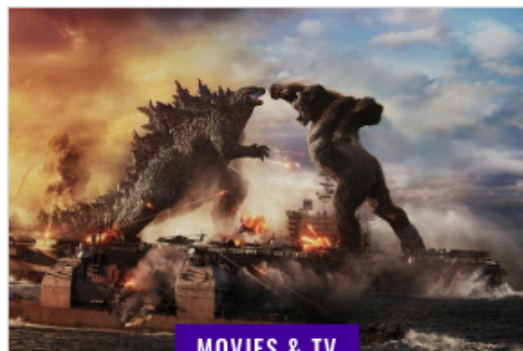


Cary Darling

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Cary Darling joined the Houston Chronicle in 2017 where he writes about arts, entertainment and pop culture, with an emphasis on film and media. Originally from Los Angeles and a graduate of Loyola Marymount University, he has been a features reporter or editor at the Orange County Register, Miami Herald, and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. In addition, he has freelanced for a number of publications including the Los Angeles Times and Dallas Morning News.

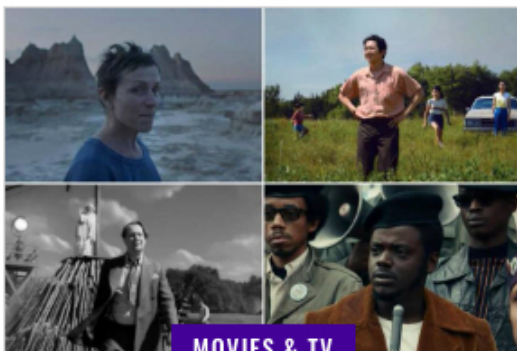
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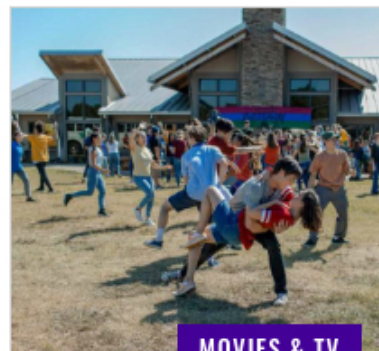
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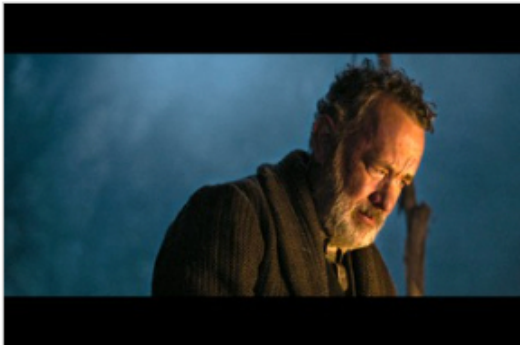
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