

# Discredited director's comeback movie gets under skin



VENICE: American actor Nate Parker made a huge impact with his 2016 directorial debut, “The Birth of a Nation,” screened at the Sundance Film Festival.

He also acted in it – a period drama set in 1831 about a slave rebellion led by Nat Turner in Southampton County, Virginia.

The movie, bought for a record \$17.5 million (SR66 million), would have had excellent Oscar prospects, but a 1999 rape allegation against Parker, when he was a student at the Penn State University, resurfaced and ruined him. Though he was found not guilty, the suicide of the accuser did not sit well with public opinion.

So, when his latest work, “American Skin,” was picked by the Venice Film Festival, the event’s director, Alberto Barbera, came under heavy fire. But he refused to be cowed, stating in no uncertain terms that he was there not to judge the man, but his work.

Backed by the legendary US film director Spike Lee, “American Skin” has been touted as Parker’s comeback movie. It may or may not be so, but it needs to be seen.



“American Skin” is Nate Parker's latest moive. (Supplied)

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A power-packed, gripping piece based on a true incident, “American Skin” traces the unbearable pain of a mother and father who lost their 14-year-old son in a police shooting.

The film certainly provokes debate. Are African Americans in the US still shabbily treated, especially by the police? Does justice elude them more often than not?

Created with meticulous details, “American Skin” recreates the fateful night in Los Angeles where Lincoln Jefferson (Parker) is driving his son home. Cops stop him for speeding and when they find the car insurance has expired, Jefferson is asked to step out. He knows the drill well, having served as an American Marine in Iraq. Sensing trouble, the boy takes out his mobile phone but in a split-second confusion, he is shot dead.

A year later, Mike Randall (Beau Knapp), the white policeman who pulled the trigger, walks free and is reinstated. A livid Jefferson decides to take the law in his own hands, and the movie flies toward a pulse-pounding finish.

Great performances are seen throughout: Parker conveys distress and disappointment with admirable dignity, while Knapp displays arrogance backed by a uniform, but later relents to show remorse and regret.

“American Skin” must be judged by what it offers on the screen, and not by the biases some may hold against its director.

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