



Monday, March 12, 7:30 pm
at the Ogden 6 Theatre
1227 East Ogden Avenue | Naperville, IL

Reviewed by A. O. Scott / New York Times *Rated R* *115Mins.*

Moonee is six. She lives in the shadow of Disney World, in a stretch of central Florida dominated by cheap thrills and off-brand amusements. Home is a room in a motel called the Magic Castle, one of many garishly painted stucco-clad palaces whose names represent either false advertising, honest aspiration or brutal irony. This is an unmagical kingdom, a zone of tawdriness and transience, of strip clubs and strip malls, knockoff souvenir shops and soft-serve ice cream shacks.

But for Moonee (who is played by an uncannily poised and resourceful young actress named Brooklynn Prince), the Magic Castle and its surroundings are a land of endless enchantment and nonstop adventure. Mischievous and fearless — heroically bratty; devilishly cute — Moonee may remind you of Eloise, who tries the patience of the grown-ups at the Plaza Hotel in that immortal picture book. Their situations are different, of course. Moonee's mother, Halley (Bria Vinaite), is not jetting around Europe leaving her daughter in the care of a stressed-out nanny. She's very much a presence in Moonee's life, perhaps more big-sisterly than maternal, but doing whatever she can to keep them housed, clothed, fed and entertained.

What "Eloise" shares with "The Florida Project," Sean Baker's risky and revelatory new film, is the ability to tell its young heroine's story from two perspectives at once. Moonee's free-range existence looks like a lot of fun, and she and her friends — mostly a boy named Scooty (Christopher Rivera) and sometimes a girl named Jancey (Valeria Cotto) — run wild with an exuberance that adult viewers can only envy. Moonee and Scooty are like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer; the service road is their Mississippi River. They cook up pranks and follow their whims, heedless of the consequences.

But of course the viewer who experiences vicarious delight in their capers — ice cream tastes so much sweeter when you have conned some tourists into paying for it — is simultaneously conscious of an undertow of sorrow, anxiety and dread. We are well aware of the possible consequences, and also of the grim circumstances that grant Moonee her freedom. She is in every sense a child at risk. We watch her Little Rascal antics increasingly sure that something terrible is going to happen.

To balance joy and desperation as gracefully as Mr. Baker does — to interweave giddiness and heartbreak — is no easy feat. "The Florida Project" could easily have been cruel and exploitative, punishing its characters for their wildness and the audience for enjoying it. But the director, who wrote the script with Chris Bergoch, avoids the traps of condescension and prurience that ensnare too many well-meaning movies about poverty in America. Like Mr. Baker's earlier features "Starlet" and "Tangerine," this movie insists on meeting people on both sides of the screen where they are, on suspending judgment and extending compassion without abandoning its ethical grounding.

"Tangerine," an against-the-clock chronicle of a hectic day in the lives of two transgender hustlers in Los Angeles, won some of its fame for having been shot with an iPhone camera. "The Florida Project" has a more polished look, but the bright colors and rough, warm edges of Alexis Zabé's cinematography fit the mood and the setting. You see traces of the near-tropical natural glory that drew generations of hedonists, fortune-hunters and entrepreneurs to this part of the Sunshine State. You also find some beauty in the blight they brought with them.

Halley and the other parents and grandparents trying to raise children in the motels are part of that history, chasing dreams that seem at once fanciful and mundane: celebrity, wealth, a steady job, a stable home. All of these things seem equally out of reach and tantalizingly close at hand, and the same consumer economy that creates such precariousness also provides a steady stream of pleasure and diversion.

The steadiest adult presence in Moonee's world is Bobby (Willem Dafoe, never better), who runs (but does not own) the Magic Castle. You get the feeling that Bobby didn't exactly sign up to be the de facto mayor of a makeshift village, but he also clearly finds some satisfaction in managing the disorder that surrounds him. He's gentle with the children even when they drive him crazy and disrupt his work, and watches over them when nobody is looking. (In one of the film's most gripping and sharply constructed scenes, Bobby confronts a creepy, predatory interloper who has been hanging around the motel's playground.) His observant, unassuming decency makes him, to some degree, the filmmaker's surrogate.

"The Florida Project" is honest about the limits of benevolence, and about the wishful thinking that can cloud our understanding of the world. Its final scenes are devastating, and also marvelously ambiguous, full of wonder, fury and clear-eyed self-criticism. No magic exists that can make the pain of reality disappear, but we don't know how to believe in anything else. This movie accomplishes something almost miraculous — two things, actually. It casts a spell and tells the truth.





Monday, March 19, 7:30 pm
with Special Guest Speaker
Director Kelly Richmond Pope

Reviewed by Dick Carozza / Fraud Magazine Not Rated 70 Mins.

Kelly Richmond Pope, Ph.D., CPA is the director of All the Queen's Horses. Her first educational documentary, Crossing the Line: Ordinary People Committing Extraordinary Crimes, has won numerous national education innovation awards and is used in colleges, universities, and corporations throughout the country. All the Queen's Horses is her first feature-length film. Kelly participated in the inaugural Kartemquin's Diverse Voices in Docs fellowship program and participated in the Tribeca Film Institute's Tribeca Hacks in Chicago, IL.

Picture the small town of Dixon. The stereotypical white-picket fences and red, white and blue flags flying in front yards. It's the hometown of Ronald Reagan," says the narrator at the beginning of the documentary, "All the Queen's Horses," over scenes of horses grazing, children playing and townfolk grooming modest homes.

The bucolic images in this quintessential Midwestern town in Illinois belie the shock of its almost 16,000 citizens when they discovered in 2011 that their trusted city comptroller had embezzled at least \$53 million from city funds — the largest U.S. municipal fraud in history.

"If fraud is happening at this magnitude in Dixon, it can happen anywhere," says director and producer Kelly Richmond Pope, Ph.D., CFE, CPA, in the film. "Fraud is a local, national and international problem. Over the past five years, we've seen a steady rise in fraud schemes — specifically embezzlement schemes — committed by an employee within a finance position. ...

"The No. 1 question people ask me," says Pope in the documentary, "is how does one person in a small town steal \$53 million ... and get away with it for 20 years." Pope, an accounting professor turned documentary filmmaker, spends the rest of the full-length movie trying to answer that question.

She leads viewers through a visually vivid Fraud 101 class by examining the case's evidence, interviewing key players and fraud examiners (including ACFE Regent Emeritus Tom Golden, CFE, CPA), plus describing the city of Dixon's former lack of internal controls and eventual remedies.

During a recent Fraud Magazine interview, Pope says that from the start of her academic career she's tried to engage her students in visual ways. "I think visual storytelling — using films and TV — is a powerful way to teach," Pope says. "Students are able to connect with many accounting topics when they can see various scenarios depicted in film. Additionally, filmmaking is more scalable than research papers, so I enjoy incorporating my films into the teaching curriculum. ... Educators and trainers need to feel comfortable incorporating non-traditional methods to get into the minds of students and professionals."

In 2012, Pope was accepted into the prestigious documentary fellowship program Kartemquin Films, Diverse Voices in Docs (DVID), during which she produced "All the Queen's Horses". "In this program I had the opportunity to work with luminaries in the documentary film community like Gordon Quinn and Justine Nagan," she says.

Pope says she found the Crundwell story intriguing because of the large size of the theft, the small size of the town and the length of the crime. "As I watched the news coverage, I felt that the main focus was on the perpetrator and not enough on how the fraud happened and how this type of fraud could happen anywhere," she says. "So, I decided to do the documentary on the actual fraud and the courageous actions of the whistleblower Kathe Swanson." Swanson was the city clerk who discovered the bank account into which Crundwell stashed the city's funds.

Crundwell was Dixon's comptroller and treasurer from 1983 to 2012. In December 1990, Crundwell opened a local bank account in the name of the City of Dixon and "RSCDA." Until 2012, she repeatedly transferred city funds into this account.

Crundwell apparently used the stolen city money to buy hundreds of quarter horses and build a first-class, horse-farming business with an arena, an office and horse stalls. She also used the cash for business expenses, credit card payments, jewelry, home remodeling, real estate and vehicles, including a luxury RV bus. As she became one of the nation's top breeders of quarter horses, she used her company, RC Quarter Horses LLC, to initiate and authorize her business transactions.

In the fall of 2011, Crundwell took 12 weeks of unpaid leave. During that time, Swanson discovered in a city of Dixon bank statement three large deposits in the RSCDA account in care of Crundwell that had nothing to do with city business. Swanson had never seen this account before. She told Dixon's mayor who notified the FBI, which went to the district attorney's office to open a grand jury and subpoena bank records. FBI investigators discovered multiple illegal transactions totaling millions from city accounts into the RSCDA account. The FBI didn't find any evidence that anybody else was involved in the fraud scheme.

The city fired Crundwell in April 2012, and she was indicted on May 2 of that year. On Nov. 14, 2012, Crundwell pleaded guilty to a single count of wire fraud. She was sentenced to 19 years and seven months in prison on Feb. 14, 2013, at the Federal Medical Center Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas. She's scheduled for release on March 5, 2030. She'll be 82. The city of Dixon has recovered \$40 million from a civil lawsuit and the sale of Crundwell's assets.

"We now have put in multiple forms of fraud protection; multiple people have to sign checks," says Mike Venier, a member of the all-new Dixon city council, at the end of "All the Queen's Horses." Dixon also has a new mayor, has changed to a city manager system and has a full accounting system of checks and balances.

"We're trying to put the fraud behind us. You never believe it can happen to you. But obviously it can," Venier says in the documentary. "I think our hometown boy, our President Ronald Reagan, said it best: We trust, but verify."

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BOMBSHELL

THE HEDY LAMARR STORY

Monday, April 9, 7:30 pm

By Michael Phillips / Chicago Tribune Not Rated 89 Mins.

"Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story" rights a grievous wrong in the life, career, reputation and memory of a superstar. It fascinates both as film history and as a sobering reminder of how little credit a woman like Lamarr received, even at the peak of her popularity.



But we're already in trouble with that description. Hedwig Eva Maria Kiesler, born in Vienna to Jewish parents in 1914, wasn't like any other star. This "American Masters" documentary, airing on PBS in May but getting a deserved theatrical release from Zeitgeist Films and Kino Lorber, makes a compelling argument for her unique breadth of interests and accomplishments.

Writer-director Alexandra Dean achieves a lot in 89 minutes. For its first third, "Bombshell" stays busy laying out Lamarr's early years, noting her childhood obsession with the mechanics of her surroundings (she disassembled and reassembled a music box at age 5). The cultural ferment of 1920s Vienna encouraged her artistic and bohemian sides. And her forthright allure was destined for the film medium, although historian Jeanine Basinger puts it aptly in "Bombshell" when she says the young woman's scientific pursuits were, in effect, "derailed by her beauty."

Hired by MGM's Louis B. Mayer at \$500 a week in 1937, Lamarr ignited her fame with the release of "Algiers" (Charles Boyer, backlot Casbah, piercing looks) a year later. Her reputation preceded her. In the notorious 1933 Czech romance "Ecstasy," Lamarr took her clothes off for a skinny-dipping scene and, elsewhere, depicted what many consider the first female orgasm on screen.

Even without success in Hollywood, "Ecstasy" would've been enough to cement Lamarr's place in history. Her other life, though, or one of them, was that of a history-making inventor. In 1941, she and modernist composer George Antheil patented their idea for a radio-controlled torpedo using "frequency-hopping" transmission technology. The idea came from a Philco remoted-controlled radio newly on the market; if successfully implemented, the invention might have thwarted Nazi U-boats' efforts to jam the frequency of enemy ships.

It didn't come to pass during the war. Even though Lamarr raised a stunning \$25 million in war bonds, the U.S. government seized her patent as the suspect work of an "alien" (she wasn't yet a U.S. citizen). Her lives after WWII collided and, in many ways, conspired against her happiness: six marriages in all, none of them particularly love-filled or happy; addiction to uppers and downers first administered by MGM to keep its contract players going; a sad punchline phase (Lucille Ball spoofed her famous "I am ... Tondelayo!" line from "White Cargo"); and, finally, a measure of recognition of the technology she and Antheil developed. According to the end crawl of "Bombshell," Lamarr's notion can be thanked, in part, for the technology behind secure Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and GPS technologies as well as a range of military technologies.



Director Dean relies heavily, and rightly, on copious 1990 interview tapes rediscovered in 2016. They're the property of Forbes magazine writer Fleming Meeks, who walks us through his part of the story. The film's interview subjects range from Mel Brooks (who paid tribute to his own obsession with the glamour queen by naming a "Blazing Saddles" character "Hedley Lamarr") to the late Robert Osborne, in his final on-camera interview. "Bombshell" is packed with juicy details such as Lamarr's bizarre escape from her first marriage, involving a look-alike maid, a sleeping potion and a getaway on bicycle in the dead of night.

You wouldn't believe it if you saw it in a movie.

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"One of Willem Dafoe's most moving
performances."

AV Club

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at Ogden 6 Theatre
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"How could one woman steal \$53 million without
anyone noticing?"

Kartemquin Films

Monday, March 19 at 7:30 pm

"A thoroughly engaging eye-opening
showbiz doc!"

The Hollywood Reporter

Monday, April 9 at 7:30 pm

