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## ‘White Boy Rick’ is a well-done portrayal of one teen’s role in the war on drugs

By Alec Calvillo  
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Richie Merritt (White Boy Rick, right) and Matthew McConaughey (Richard Wershe Sr.) star in Columbia Pictures' and Studio 8's WHITE BOY RICK.

It's galvanizing and hard to fathom that in the 1980s, 15-year-old Rick Wershe helped the FBI bust drug dealers, "dirty" cops and the mayor of Detroit. Although it sounds like a plot along the lines of "Breaking Bad" and "Better Call Saul," the film "White Boy Rick" is actually based on a true story.

The film depicts the life of Rick Wershe, also known as "White Boy Rick." It is set in Michigan where Rick Wershe Jr. (Richie Merritt,) Richard Wershe Sr. (Matthew McConaughey) and Dawn Wershe (Bel Powley) live in a rundown area of Detroit.

Viewers quickly learn that the Wershe family is a dysfunctional family struggling to keep themselves on their feet. Richard and Rick Wershe attend gun shows to hustle and buy guns at a low price and subsequently sell those assault rifles and handguns to drug dealers for huge profits.

Rick Wershe helps his father sell illegal guns to drug lord, Johnny Curry, who he befriends. Soon after becoming a part of the gang and gaining Curry's trust, the FBI takes notice and threatens Rick Wershe to reveal the inner workings of the gang's network.

The boy eventually gains the trust of the FBI, but doesn't desire to help them. He receives threats for withheld information and cash compensations for intel.

Although Rick Wershe plays an illegal drug and firearm dealer, he's still a character that viewers can sympathize and root for. Much of the illegal activity he commits is done to provide for his low-income family, so it's clear that he deeply cares about his family and is willing to go to serious lengths to make sure they survive.

The obvious star in this film is Matthew McConaughey. He delivers a phenomenal performance all while resembling "Ninja" from the South African group "Die Antwoord" with his mullet. His comfort level in this role may have been due to his time playing Ron Woodroof in the 2013 film "Dallas Buyers Club."

The biggest surprise, however, came in the form of Richie Merritt, who played Rick Wershe. Although Merritt has never acted in a film before, he leaves no sign of being a rookie. In an interview with IMDb, Merritt talked exactly the same way his character (Rick Wershe) did in the film.

"White Boy Rick" could have been executed better if they had clearly shown Merritt's role in Curry's gang. The movie could have also touched on Rick Wershe's long-time battle with obtaining parole.

Serving 29 years in prison before he was granted parole in 2017, Rick Wershe has the record for longest serving non-violent prison offender in Michigan history.

All in all, the film does a great job highlighting the bond between the Wershe family despite the fact that certain events do not always unfold in their favor. It's non-fiction roots also shed light on the extent of U.S. obsession with the war on drugs.

