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Liam Archacki

Wed, October 2, 2024 at 2:09 PM PDT · 5 min read

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Eugene Gologursky/WireImage via Getty

Ron Burkle is currently in headlines for [his failed bid to erect an outlandish townhouse](#) in the British countryside. But the billionaire investor—whose portfolio includes tech giants like Uber and Airbnb, the stylish hotel chain Soho House, and the NHL's Pittsburgh Penguins—is hardly a newcomer to controversy.

In fact, his personal history is riddled with ties to contentious and disgraced public figures ([Sean "Diddy" Combs](#), Bill Clinton, [Jeffrey Epstein](#), and [Michael](#)

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Born in 1952, Burkle, the son of a Stater Bros. grocer, first started working in a market at age 13 and worked his way to become vice president at Stater's parent company, Petrolane.

His first brush with controversy came in 1980, when he worked secretly to develop a bid to buy Stater from Petrolane with the help of Berkshire Hathaway's Charlie Munger. But internal valuations were 20 percent higher than the offer, so it was rejected and Burkle was fired.

"It was a rather dramatic change of events—and it turned out to be the best thing ever, because if I had stayed there I never would have thought about being entrepreneurial," he told *Forbes* in 2006.

He spent the next five years successfully investing in stocks before he founded the private equity firm Yucaipa Companies, named after the small California town in which he lived. The firm did incredibly well—its website says its mergers and acquisitions have totaled over \$40 billion in value since its founding.



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Then-President welcomes Ron Burkle and the Pittsburgh Penguins to the White House after their NHL championship in 2017. [...More](#)

Since getting his break at Yucaipa, Burkle has been a prodigious dealmaker.

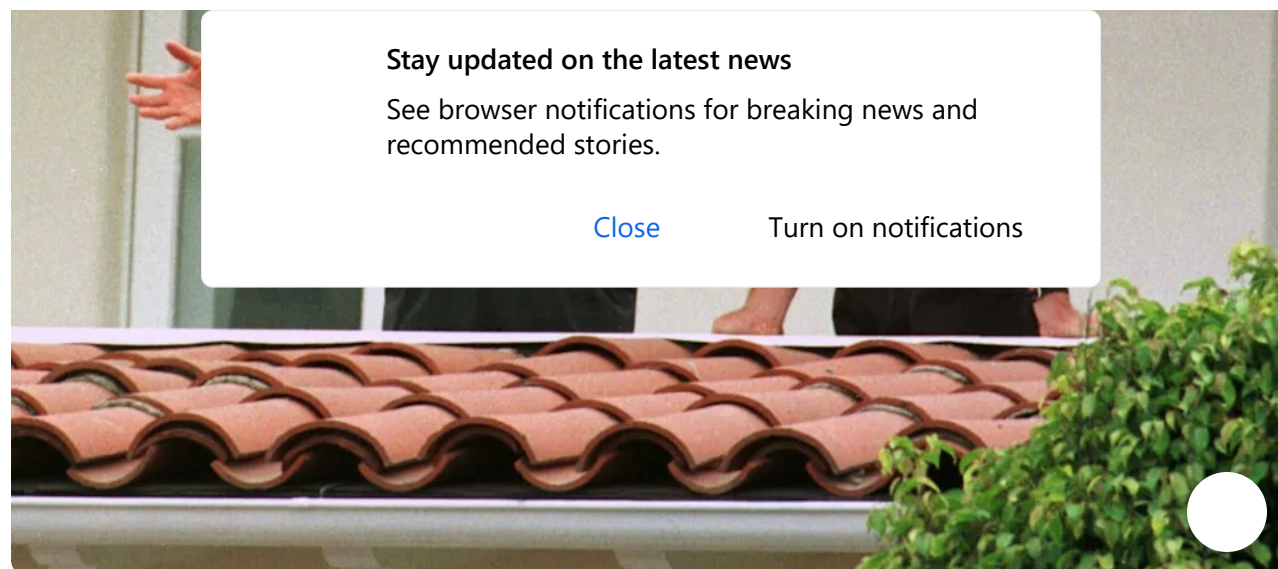
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He [joined Mario Lemiux](#) in 1999 for a bid to buy the Pittsburgh Penguins, saving them from bankruptcy and keeping them in the city. In 2010, he teamed up with Hollywood's Ashton Kutcher to [create](#) A-Grade Investments, a venture capital firm that has invested in tech start-ups like Uber and Airbnb. And Burkle [acquired a majority stake](#) in Soho House—the once-hip boutique hotel chain known for its exclusive atmosphere—in 2012.

With his business success came chances for Burkle to befriend big-name public figures, a shocking number of whom have since found themselves mired in controversy.

During the 1990s, Burkle—a prominent Democratic fundraiser—[became close](#) with President Bill Clinton (so close that Clinton reportedly had a bedroom in Burkle's mansion). The two soon struck up a successful business partnership that lasted through Clinton's sex scandal. The relationship cooled around 2009 over a dispute in which Clinton insisted that Burkle owed him \$20 million.





President Bill Clinton, once a friend and business partner of the financier, speaks with Ron Burkle on the balcony of Burkle's mansion. [...More](#)

Clinton and Burkle also notoriously jetted around the world together, [alongside a flock of young women](#), on the financier's Boeing 787 (which Burkle's young aides reportedly privately referred to as "Air F--- One").

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Some of their voyages together, however—reportedly humanitarian trips to Africa—[came on](#) disgraced child-sex-trafficker Jeffrey Epstein's private Boeing 727. Burkle [was named](#) in Epstein's court documents, but not in a criminal capacity.

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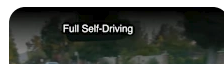
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Burkle [even purchased](#) Jackson's famous California *Neverland Ranch* for \$22 million in 2020. The sprawling estate had been vacant since Jackson abandoned it after he was acquitted on child sex-abuse charges.

But perhaps most topical is Burkle's connection to the music mogul Diddy, who was recently arrested on sex-trafficking charges. In 2003, Burkle [injected](#) \$100 million into Diddy's fashion brand Sean John. The two [teamed](#) with movie star Mark Wahlberg in 2015 to buy the since-failed water company AquaHydrate. Burkle [is also reportedly the godfather](#) of Diddy's children.



Ron Burkle injected a \$100 million investment into disgraced music mogul Diddy's clothing brand.
Johnny Nunez/WireImage via Getty

In addition to his investing prowess and famous friends, Burkle [is known for](#) the magnitude of his civil suits—as both plaintiff and defendant.

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misappropriating Burkle's investment, and one more alleging that he was defrauded during his attempt to buy the Weinstein Company's assets in the wake of the MeToo movement.

All this aside, maybe the most fascinating Burkle saga [was his extortion feud](#) with *New York Post* gossip writer Jared Paul Stern in 2006.

Burkle alleged that the *Page Six* freelancer tried to wrench \$220,000 from him in exchange for more favorable coverage in the publication's pages. Burkle reportedly got federal investigators to video a meeting between the two men in which Stern requested the money from Burkle.

Although Stern was never charged with a crime after an FBI investigation, he was fired by the *Post*.

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Stern [sued Burkle](#) for defamation, which ultimately failed.

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