



AFI DOCS 2018 IS OPEN! Personal Statement sets the tone.

Description

Posted by [Larry Gleeson](#)

The 2018 edition of the American Film Institute's AFI DOCS is open. AFI President and Chief Executive Officer, Bob Gazzale kicked off the festival with eloquent opening remarks reminding a receptive audience of the action by former United States President Lyndon Johnson took 50 years ago to create the American Film Institute and its mission "to preserve the heritage of the motion picture, to honor the artists and their work and to educate the next generation of storytellers."



Enoch Jemmott, one of the lead subjects of the AFI DOCS 2018 Opening Night Film, *Personal Statement*

Personal Statement, the 2018 AFI DOCS Opening Night Film, directed and produced by Julianne Dressner, and co-directed by Edwin Martinez, was also making its world premiere. The cast and crew were out in full force on the red carpet before the film's screening.



Personal Statement Producer, Beth Levinson (far right), marshals *Personal Statement* actors at the premiere.

The film follows three Brooklyn, New York, high school seniors, Enoch, Christine, and Karoline, as they prepare themselves for college and try to inspire and encourage their classmates to make the jump with them.



Brooklyn, New York, high school senior, Christine, addresses her classmates on the importance of vocalizing their wants and needs followed up by taking positive actions as a way to get their needs met. (Photo courtesy of Reify Films)

The film opened with a nice out-of-focus frame of a night-time city-scape slowly coming into focus as a textual overlay informs the viewer of the setting. A transition reveals a young black male doing homework with his niece. Another transition reveals a young bi-racial female in dialogue with a young Hispanic female as she explains some of the challenges she is facing. A third transition reveals an Hispanic mother in the kitchen followed quickly by another transition revealing Christina, one of the film's protagonist. An upbeat non-diegetic score shows the three characters on their way to school meeting. The meeting turns out to be a training so the three protagonists can work as school guidance counselors.



Enoch Jemmott, right, a Brooklyn, New York, high school senior, prods his friend and classmate as t

This forms the crux of Dressner's film. Shot in a direct cinema style interspersed with fragments of cinema verite, *Personal Statement* uncovers societal issues as it reveals the struggles minority students are facing as they attempt to, not only go to college, but also navigate what will be their collegiate experience.



Karoline, who has undergone bullying for her dress and sexual orientation, shows her counselor a copy of her personal statement for her college application to Smith College, an all-female institution. (Photo courtesy of Reify Films)

Karoline, an LGBTQ student, wants a place where she can meet people who will accept her for who she is. Enoch, a standout high school football anxious to become his own person, lives with his sister. Christina lives at home with a strong-willed mother, who feels Christina needs to consider the financial undertaking in attending college. All three are passionate about going to college and they want their peers to undertake the collegiate journey as well. At the heart of the narrative is the personal statement that explains why each student wants to go their respective schools.

Karoline is a colorful character who had twenty-three absences in her first year of high school has progressed to where she has perfect attendance in her senior year. Enoch faces obstacles that include a mother who lives in a homeless shelter and a lower than desired grade-point-average from the college of his choice, Cortland. Christina, whose mother financed her older brother's college education, has reservations in supporting Christina's college choice. Christina's brother has been out of work for the last four years and her mother has had her work hours reduced.

While all three students wind up attending college, difficult choices are made along the way and challenging issues are revealed surrounding their pursuit of higher education.



Personal Statement Director and Producer, Julianne Messner (second from left) applauds as her team

A panel discussion immediately followed the film's screening with Dressner, Martinez and the film's three actors. To close out the evening a Private Gala celebrated the conscience-altering work.



The Opening Night Gala setting following the 2018 AFI DOCS Opening Night Film, *Personal Statement*

Personal Statement will have its U.S. broadcast premiere on public television's WORLD Channel and PBS on Tuesday, October 23, 2018 at 8:00 pm. This is a film that needs to be seen and the issues it raises need to be addressed sooner rather than later. Highly recommended.

*Featured photo: Bob Gazzale, President and CEO of the American Film Institute (Photo credit: Tom Kochel)



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