

Film Capsule: Personal Statement (Dressner, 2018): USA

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Viewed at the Annenberg Theatre inside the Newseum in Washington, D.C., as the Opening Night film of the 2018 American Film Instituteâ??s AFI DOCS Film Festival.

Personal Statement, directed and produced by Julianne Dressner, made its world premiere as the 2018 American Film Instituteâ??s AFI DOCS Opening Night Film. 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.



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

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 filmâ??s protagonist. An upbeat non-diagetic 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.



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)

This forms the crux of Dressnerâ??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 brotherâ??s college education, has reservations in supporting Christinaâ??s college choice. Christinaâ??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 will have its U.S. broadcast premiere on public televisionâ??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.

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1. AFI DOCS

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