



PRESENTS  
**FRONTRUNNERS**



OPENS AT FILM FORUM IN NEW YORK – **OCTOBER 15, 2008**  
NATIONAL EXPANSION – **OCTOBER 24, 2008**

**Running Time:** 83 minutes

**Rating:** Not Rated by MPAA

**World Premiere:** SXSW Film Festival 2008

**Press Materials:** [www.frontrunnersthefilm.com](http://www.frontrunnersthefilm.com)

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## - SYNOPSIS

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FRONTRUNNERS is a smart and funny political documentary that follows the student council presidential campaign at one of the country's most prestigious public high schools: Stuyvesant High School in New York City.

An entertaining and symbolic campaign film, put forth in classic verité style, we follow four charming and idiosyncratic candidates as they navigate an electoral process that is said to be one of the most competitive at the high school level. These teenaged candidates face the same issues as candidates of any age, such as picking the 'right' running mate, shaking as many hands as possible, preparing for televised debates, impressing the pundits and journalistic community, addressing sensitive race-related issues, and mobilizing an apathetic voter base.

A microcosm of the U.S. Presidential elections, Caroline Suh's film shows politicking and pluralities through the lens of the adolescent experience.

***"It's the hardest race I ever fought."***

*-Dick Morris, Stuyvesant class of '64*

## - DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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Have you ever looked at people from your own generation and wondered, which one of these people will one day become President of the United States? It was this question that inspired the film FRONTRUNNERS, a documentary that follows a group of very smart, funny and sometimes shockingly mature teenagers as they vie for the presidency of Stuyvesant High School, one of the most competitive public schools in the country. Our film explores – among other issues -- the phenomenon of how from each generation, a few individuals commit themselves to politics and public service, driven to participate even though the cause and goals might seem fruitless to everyone else.

At heart, FRONTRUNNERS is of the genre of documentaries known as the "campaign film," but in this case, the candidates are not famous or professional – they are teenagers busy living, while also figuring out the world and their place in it. The challenge of the film was to capture both this campaign feel, referencing many of the same elements that occur on a macro-level, as well as the spirit of being teenagers in high school. We wanted the tone of the film to reflect the students' great mix of knowingness, cynicism, humor and intensity, on the level without too much sentimentality.

We tried to give the main characters the complexity and ambiguity of their lives at school, which meant focusing on issues that were relevant to their reality at Stuyvesant, where image, success, and work ethic meant more to their peers than how much money they had or what their parents did. In this way, Stuyvesant is really an idealized version of the world, where a student's behavior and accomplishments really speak louder than anything else.

A stylistically important aspect of the film for us was our desire to cut the film without voiceover or narration, and not to edit down their interview bytes. We wanted what they said to come out as they said it—without dialogue edits. This posed an interesting editing challenge to our editor Jane Rizzo, but luckily all of our characters tended to speak articulately, in paragraphs. Also, in order to have a teenage vibe, we wanted to use music that we felt in some way reflected the feeling of being at the school—music that was upbeat and a little bit irreverent. We're really thankful that the bands in the film – Elf Power, The Oranges Band, Of Montreal, among others—have allowed us to use their music.

In the end, we feel like the film is about people who put themselves out there to be judged, which is a brave and risky act, and also be about being invested and engaged in the world around you.

-Caroline Suh

## - DICK MORRIS: ON STUY

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### **The Most Competitive Environment Ever: Stuyvesant High School** by Dick Morris

After Columbia College, the cutthroat world of New York politics, the competitive nightmare of political consulting, backstabbing of the White House, and the duel for ratings on cable TV, I have to say that the toughest environment I have ever competed in was Stuyvesant High School. The kids were brilliant and the work difficult. But it was Stuyvesant politics that provided the carborundum stone on which I sharpened my skills.

I was, you see, captain of the debating team, a junior sister to the athletic teams that dominated the student government. Allotted a paltry \$90 a year, we couldn't afford to go to tournaments outside of New York City and, as a result, did little debating. So I set my sights on the football team budget of \$3,000 per year, determined to hack off a chunk for my debating team.

I was aided by a formidable stable of candidates, including now Congressman Jerry Nadler and New York State Assemblyman Richard Gottfried. Our team constituted a powerful political machine and swept all the student government offices, dominating the executive committee that divided up the budget. The football team may have had to play the year without helmets, but we got a nice fat \$500 budget.

It was at Stuyvesant that I learned how to be a politician and it was in their elections that I developed my abilities. Every election campaign calls on the sum of all of one's prior political experience. Its a bit like the painter Whistler who was asked how long it took him to paint a certain canvass. "My whole life," was his reply.

At a Stuyvesant High School reunion decades later (the fortieth) I met one of the candidates my slate had defeated for president of the student body. "After you became famous," he said, "I felt better about losing that election."

C'est la guerre!

## - CANDIDATE BIOS

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### **HANNAH FREIMAN**

Hannah Freiman was born in New York and grew up on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Before attending Stuyvesant, which she decided she wanted to attend after hearing it was "the hardest school to get into," she went to the private Fieldston School. Once at Stuy, Hannah became one of those rare creatures known as a "famous freshman," a high-profile darling of the seniors. She backed up her high profile with substance, quickly emerging as a school leader as head of the

cheerleading and dance squads (Hannah is known as the best hip hop dancer at Stuy), as well as the acting club. As an actress, she's tackled the stage (in difficult roles in school performances of "Burn This" and the "Children's Hour"), as well as the big screen, appearing in Todd Solondz' controversial "Palindromes." While busy with all of her extracurriculars – you can easily spot her at Stuy with her red ponytail swishing down the halls -- she's still managed to maintain her A average.

Hannah's platform stresses her outsider status, as she promises to change the stagnation of the Student Union's insider administrations. She's also stressing the female aspects of her campaign, by running with BFF "Lauren Gonzalez" under a "Choose the Chicks" slogan.



### **ALEX LEONARD**

Alex Leonard is the unforeseen wild card of the campaign, a dark horse who has thrown his hat into the ring for unknown reasons. Alex is widely known for being "tall," a fact that distinguishes him from the other candidates. He leverages his height as a basketball player, and perhaps as a hockey player, too.



### **MIKE ZAYTSEV**

Michael Zaytsev, or Mike as he's known around school, has a reputation that precedes him. A resident of Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, Mike is the frontrunner in the race, known for being cool and collected, hanging out with a tight groups of Russian friends, and being popular with the ladies. He's also been very involved in the SU, as Sophomore Class President, and an active volunteer in school events. Most recently, he has also been given the serious responsibility of being in charge

of the budget as the school's CFO.

Mike is running on a somewhat anti-administration reformist platform of the "3 F's: Food, Fun and Freedom." He and his running mate Marta Bralic have also used their initials (testing the waters of copyright infringement) in their "M & M" (Mike and Marta) campaign slogan.



## **GEORGE ZISIADIS**

George Zisiadis is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Greek-American, born and raised in Astoria, Queens. He started his Stuy political career early, serving as Freshman Class President, where he squeaked by the primaries by only one vote. (He attributes his subsequent political involvement to that lone voter.) Somewhat of a mystery to his fellow students, George's Stuy career has seen him following his own self-prescribed path, where he has worked hard to excel at a variety of different

activities. He's the 2<sup>nd</sup> ranked bowler in Manhattan, Founder and President of the juggling club, as well as a student of the age-old art of Greek Dance. At Stuy, he's probably most famous though for "The Lounge," which can only be described through its slogan, "it's not described, only experienced."

Currently serving as Chief of Staff (a presidential appointment), George is running with Vanessa Charbhumi under the populist and broad "Go Vote" slogan. Having an Asian VP running mate might have been a shrewd choice on his part, although he believes she's the best person for the job. His platform emphasizes his experience in the SU, as well as his desire to push the budget over the \$100,000 mark.



## - PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS

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### **CAROLINE SUH**

#### *DIRECTOR*

Caroline Suh has produced numerous documentaries for PBS, Trio (FINAL CUT: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF HEAVEN'S GATE), The History Channel (10 DAYS: ANTIETAM), A & E, and the Sundance Channel (ICONOCLASTS), among others. FRONTRUNNERS is the first feature documentary she has directed. She currently has two feature documentaries in development.

### **ERIKA FRANKEL**

#### *PRODUCER*

Erika Frankel has produced documentaries for PBS, A&E, and The History Channel on subjects ranging from the Trojan War to Joni Mitchell. She is currently co-producing a six-part series on the history of American comedy for PBS and developing a documentary about a clash between anthropologists in the Amazon that nearly destroyed the field of anthropology.

### **JANE RIZZO**

#### *EDITOR*

Jane Rizzo is an editor of both fiction and documentary features. Recently, she edited "The Great World of Sound," a feature film (director Craig Zobel) that was released fall 2007 by Magnolia Pictures. It screened at numerous festivals, including Sundance, South by Southwest, and New Directors. Jane's documentary credits include the award-winning "How to Eat Your Watermelon in White Company and Enjoy It," a biography about Melvin Van Peebles that screened at the Film Forum, numerous festivals, including Full Frame and Tribeca, and aired on IFC. Her many credits include additional editing on "Tanner on Tanner" and PBS documentaries.

### **GREGORY MITNICK**

#### *DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY*

Gregory Mitnick is a director and cinematographer, who has worked as the director of photography on numerous films. A graduate of NYU's Graduate Film Program, Greg's recent film "Lawrence," was a pick at the Tribeca Film Festival 2007, Slamdance Film Festival 2007, 30th Asian American International Film Festival 2007, the Festival du Cinema de Paris 2007, New Filmmakers at the Anthology Film Archives 2007, and the First Run Film Festival 2007.

### **JENNY HEATH**

#### *ASSOCIATE PRODUCER*

Jenny Heath teaches high school English at Rye Country Day in New York and coordinates the school's student leadership program. She has taught English and History at Concord Academy and Dana Hall, both in Massachusetts, and the Bryanston School, in Dorset, England. She also served as the Co-Director of City Bridge, a non-profit educational enrichment program from 1999-2001.

## **- THE MUSIC**

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**FRONTRUNNERS** features music from:

**THE M'S**

[www.myspace.com/thems](http://www.myspace.com/thems)

[www.the-ms.com](http://www.the-ms.com)

**OF MONTREAL**

[www.ofmontreal.net](http://www.ofmontreal.net)

**THE HEADLIGHTS**

[www.theheadlightsmusic.com](http://www.theheadlightsmusic.com)

**ELF POWER**

[www.myspace.com/elfpowerband](http://www.myspace.com/elfpowerband)

[www.elfpower.com](http://www.elfpower.com)

**THE ORANGES BAND**

[www.myspace.com/theorangesband](http://www.myspace.com/theorangesband)

[www.lookoutrecords.com](http://www.lookoutrecords.com)

**ALBUM LEAF**

[www.thealbumleaf.com](http://www.thealbumleaf.com)

**MOGWAI**

[www.mogwai.co.uk](http://www.mogwai.co.uk)

[www.matadorrecords.com](http://www.matadorrecords.com)