



Presents

WEINER

A film by Josh Kriegman and Elyse Steinberg
(100 min., USA, 2015)
Language: English

Distribution



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SYNOPSIS

Anthony Weiner was a young congressman on the cusp of higher office when a sexting scandal forced a humiliating resignation. Just two years later, he ran for mayor of New York City, betting that his ideas would trump his indiscretions. He was wrong. With unprecedented access to Weiner, his family and his campaign team, **WEINER** is a thrilling look inside a political comeback-turned-meltdown. What begins as an unexpected surge to the top of the polls takes a sharp turn once Weiner is forced to admit to new sexting allegations. As the media descends and dissects his every move, Weiner desperately tries to forge ahead, but the increasing pressure and crippling 24-hour news coverage halt his political aspirations. With the city of New York as a loud and bustling backdrop, Weiner walks the line between political farce and personal tragedy as it plunges through an increasingly baffling political campaign with unflinching clarity, humor, and pathos.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSH KRIEGMAN AND ELYSE STEINBERG

Q: Your access to Weiner is so intimate. How did you get so close to Anthony Weiner?

Josh Kriegman: I worked for Anthony when he ran for mayor in 2005, and later as his New York Chief of Staff. After I left politics and went into film production, he and I stayed in touch and when I heard he was running for mayor in 2013, I was eager to capture that story. No one had any idea how it was going to unfold or what would happen, but I knew it was going to be a pretty extraordinary event. I started filming on the first day of the campaign and was there all the way through the end.

Elyse Steinberg: Josh and I have been a directing team for about four years on various film and TV projects. We're always looking for dynamic characters and knew we couldn't pass this up. At first we thought it might be an amazing comeback story, but then it took a fascinating turn. Unlike Josh, I didn't come into the project knowing Anthony, so I didn't know much about him other than what I'd seen in the news. I was pretty neutral until I had the chance to see the material and meet him, and I was really taken by how complex, charismatic and funny he was. He's the kind of character every documentarian dreams of following.

Q: How did you structure your collaboration with him? Were there things he said were off limits or was he just generally open?

JK: Anthony is a very open guy and is obviously very comfortable in front of the camera. There were a few moments when he asked me to turn off the camera and of course I respected that. But for the most part, we had unguarded access with very few barriers.

Q: So, there's an inherent humor in the idea of a New York mayoral candidate getting caught, for the second time, in a silly sexting scandal. Yet the film, while acknowledging this absurdity, never seems to pass judgment.

JK: We thought a lot about this. On some level the whole story is a bit bizarre, and of course the media had a field day making jokes and poking fun. But we were eager to do much more than just make an easy joke. Anthony has been so often reduced to a punch line or a caricature, and we were excited about the opportunity to capture and present him as more of a full person and nuanced human being.

Q: And in terms of the incidents themselves, you never let him off the hook, but you're not puritanical about it either.

ES: One of the things that is important to us is that the film doesn't take a point of view. It's a vérité film. The goal was to give viewers a chance to be in the room and

experience it all without passing judgment. A lot of people – including pundits and headline writers – judged Anthony in every possible way, and of course viewers will form their opinions, as well. But as filmmakers, we don't pass judgment.

Q: The film is very funny, but it could leave viewers with a bit of melancholy about Anthony's lost promise. You see in your footage all the people he was inspiring at the various campaign events and you can't help but wonder how it all might have been different.

JK: For all of his flaws, most people would acknowledge that Anthony is an enormously talented politician. He was successful for a good reason. He has talent, charisma and energy. He was able to present himself and his ideas in a way that resonated with New Yorkers. They responded to him and loved the energy and ideas that he brought to the conversation. Ultimately he was responsible for his own undoing, but he really had the potential to be the mayor of New York City and a lot of people believe he had a lot to offer. So there certainly is a tragic element to the story.

ES: Anthony is a very funny person. That was important for us to capture. In the face of intense scrutiny, many people would have just crumbled, but he stays at it and keeps his head high and somehow manages to have a sense of humor. We wanted to capture his spirit.

Q: At the beginning of the film, you set the stage with a montage of news media clips telling us a bit of Anthony's story leading up to his mayoral campaign. But immediately after, you're with him at home. He's there with Huma, wearing shorts and a T-shirt. It felt so surreal to come into that very personal space right after getting the media narrative.

JK: Part of what I think is exciting about the film is that these are larger-than-life personalities that we've seen in the public sphere, and all of a sudden you have a chance to see them differently. You get to see them behind closed doors, in an intimate and personal way. It forces you to remember that while there was this whole scandal circling around them, they were still a family. They were still just a husband and wife who would come home to their apartment, and make dinner, and put their son to sleep.

ES: It was important to us to show the media perspective, and then to show Anthony and Huma as regular people. Being with them through all of this, you learn something about what it looks like to live at the center of a meltdown or scandal.

JK: This brings up another point that we hope to get across with the film. While the film is an intimate vérité experience, at the same time it's not about just one man and one campaign. We hope it raises larger questions about our how our politics and our media function, and how much the public conversation is driven by spectacle and noise. In that environment, it really is striking to witness some of the quieter moments.

ES: So much of our political discourse today is driven by easy narratives, sensational headlines and outrageous statements. It's a lot of entertainment and theater. In this context our film gives us an unusual opportunity to go beyond the reductive flurry of sound bites and tweets, to look closely at the reality behind the headlines.

Q: There's a very pointed moment in the film where you see the news media heckling Anthony about the scandal, and, meanwhile, there are voters on the street nearby who actually wanted to hear him talk about his politics.

JK: That was certainly Anthony's experience – he wanted to talk with voters about issues and ideas, but he couldn't get past the phalanx of reporters who insisted on talking about his scandal. That said, Anthony does make a point in the film of not blaming the media. As he says, he did the thing, and the media was just playing its role.

ES: We wanted to show how the whole organism of politics and media function. Anthony did what he did, and reporters were responding to their own pressures and needs. It's a complicated system. We wanted to show the complexity of all the players.

Q: That's definitely true in the case of Huma, who really has a large role in the film.

JK: We see this as a film about Anthony. But Huma is a big part of the story. She's by his side early in the campaign, and was there at the press conference when the scandal broke a second time. We wanted to show the reality beyond the headlines, and of course Huma is a big part of that.

ES: In the same way Anthony was ridiculed and reduced to a caricature, so was she. She has been discussed and judged so much in the media, and now viewers will get to see a more human and personal side of her.

Q: How did the film turn out differently than you might have expected going in?

JK: Along with the rest of the world, we had no idea if Anthony could succeed when he launched his campaign. He was just two years out from an unprecedented scandal. Could New Yorkers really look past this and consider him as a viable candidate? It would have been one of the more remarkable political comeback stories we've ever seen - and for about six weeks, it seemed to be going in that direction! He was leading in the polls and a lot of people were marveling at how he seemed to have redeemed himself. But then, of course, things went in a different direction.

ES: We have been working on this for three years and Josh shot over 400 hours of footage. We had time to really think about how to tell the story in a way that showed complexity and nuance.

Q: Has Anthony seen the film?

ES: No he hasn't seen it yet. We invited him to see it awhile ago and it remains an open invitation.

Q: What's next for him?

JK: I don't know. That's a good question. I'm not sure where he's headed. I think even folks who are critical of him would agree that he's a man of extraordinary talents and has a lot to offer. I don't know what's next though.

ABOUT ANTHONY WEINER

Anthony Weiner was born in Brooklyn, New York on September 4, 1964. He was the middle child of lawyer Mort Weiner and his wife Frances, a high-school math teacher. He graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School in 1981 and went to college at SUNY Plattsburgh, graduating with a political science degree in 1985.

In 1991, at age twenty-seven, Weiner entered politics, running for a New York City Council seat representing southern Brooklyn. He won in the general election making him the youngest councilman in New York City History.

He first ran for Congress, and won, in 1998, in New York's 9th congressional district. The seat had been previously held by his mentor, Senator Chuck Schumer. In 2005, he ran unsuccessfully for mayor of New York City, but surprised many with a strong second place finish in the Democratic Primary.

In July 2010, Weiner married Huma Abedin, longtime aide to Hilary Clinton. Bill Clinton officiated their wedding. In December of 2011, their first child, Jordan Zain Weiner, was born.

On May 27, 2011, Weiner sent a sexually explicit photograph of himself to a female twitter follower via his public account. While he initially denied posting the image, he was eventually forced to admit that he had "exchanged messages and photos of an explicit nature with about six women over the last three years." On June 21, 2011, he formally resigned from Congress.

In May 2013, he launched a bid for New York City mayor, which is where the story of WEINER begins.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

JOSH KRIEGMAN (Director)

Josh Kriegman directed, shot, and produced *Weiner*, his first independent feature documentary. He has previously directed non-fiction film and television for PBS and MTV, among others. Prior to filmmaking, Kriegman worked as a political consultant and campaign advisor for local and national candidates—including for Congressman Weiner, years before the sexting scandal that led to his resignation.

ELYSE STEINBERG (Director)

Elyse Steinberg wrote, produced, and directed the acclaimed feature documentary *The Trial of Saddam Hussein* (PBS), an explosive exposé on what really happened at the former dictator's trial. Her other credits include directing and producing for MTV, A&E, and the PBS series *Need to Know*, about prison reform and juvenile justice. Steinberg's latest project is the documentary film *Weiner*.

ELI DESPRES (Editor)

Eli Despres co-wrote and edited the acclaimed documentaries *Blackfish* and *Red Army*. His other writing and editing credits include the investigative journalism series *EXPOSÉ* (PBS), feature doc *City Lax* (ESPN), short doc *At Risk* (ACAP) and the fiction feature *Wilderness Survival for Girls* (ContentFilm/Image Entertainment), which he also directed. Eli was nominated for the 2014 American Cinema Editors' Documentary award.

JULIE GOLDMAN (Executive Producer)

Julie Goldman founded *Motto Pictures* in 2009. She is an Emmy Award-winning producer and executive producer of documentary feature films.

Julie is producer of *Life, Animated* and executive producer of *Weiner*, both of which will premiere at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. She is executive producer of *3 ½ Minutes*, *Ten Bullets* and *Best of Enemies*, both of which premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and were shortlisted for the 2016 Academy Award. *Best of Enemies* was released by Magnolia Pictures to critical acclaim and *3 ½ Minutes*, *Ten Bullets* won a Special Jury Prize, was released by Participant Media and acquired by HBO for US broadcast. Julie produced *Indian Point*, which premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival and executive produced *The Music of Strangers: Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble*, which premiered at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival, both to be theatrically released this spring. She also executive produced *The Kill Team* and *Art and Craft*, both released by Oscilloscope and shortlisted for the 2015 Academy Award and *1971*, which was released in 2015.

Julie produced three films that premiered in the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival: *Gideon's Army*, *Manhunt* and the Oscar shortlisted *God Loves Uganda*. She produced *The Great Invisible*, which won the SXSW Grand Jury Prize and was released by RADiUS TWC; *We Are The Giant*, which premiered at

Sundance; A Place at the Table, which was released by Magnolia Pictures, and the Oscar shortlisted Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry. Julie produced Buck, winner of the Sundance Documentary Audience Award, shortlisted for an Academy Award and one of 2011's top five grossing documentaries. She consulted on the Academy Award-winning The Cove and produced the Oscar shortlisted Sergio. Some of Julie's earlier films include: Easy Riders Raging Bulls, Cat Dancers, In The Shadow Of The Moon, Better The World, What Remains, Once In A Lifetime and Sketches Of Frank Gehry.

CAROLYN HEPBURN (Executive Producer)

Carolyn Hepburn is executive producer of Weiner and co-producer of Life, Animated, both of which will premiere at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. Carolyn produced 3½ Minutes, Ten Bullets, directed by Marc Silver, which premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Special Jury Prize for Social Impact, was released by Participant Media, acquired by HBO for US broadcast and shortlisted for the 2016 Academy Award®. In 2015, she co-produced Indian Point, directed by Ivy Meeropol, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, and co-executive produced Alison Klayman's short film The 100 Years Show. Carolyn executive produced Art and Craft, which premiered at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival and was shortlisted for the 2015 Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature. In 2013, Carolyn was the line producer for two films that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival: God Loves Uganda, shortlisted for the 2014 Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature, and Gideon's Army, winner of the Sundance Film Festival's Best Editing Award. Carolyn is currently co-producing The Punch directed by Andre Hörmann, as well as line producing Matt Dillon's Fellove. Carolyn joined Motto Pictures in 2010, where she works as a producer and production executive. Prior to joining the Motto team, she produced a wide range of documentary projects for WNET, the United Nations and National Public Radio as well as innovative experiential media for Spark Productions.

CHRISTOPHER CLEMENTS (Executive Producer)

Christopher Clements is a partner at Motto Pictures. Christopher is executive producer of Weiner and Co-producer of Life, Animated, both of which will premiere at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. He was the creative consultant for the 2015 Sundance Film Festival hit Best of Enemies, which was released by Magnolia Pictures and shortlisted for the 2016 Academy Award, and co-produced Ivy Meeropol's documentary Indian Point, which premiered at the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival and will soon be released by First Run Features. Christopher is co-executive producer of The Yes Men Are Revolting directed by Laura Nix and The Yes Men, which premiered at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival and was released by The Orchard in 2015, and Alison Klayman's film The 100 Years Show, which debuted at Hot Docs. He executive produced Art and Craft, which premiered at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival and was shortlisted for the 2015 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Christopher is currently co-producing The Punch directed by Andre Hörmann, as well as executive producing the CNN Films feature Enlighten Me, directed by Jenny Carchman and Fellove, a documentary directed by Matt Dillon. Christopher's camera work was featured in Cindy

Meehl's Buck, which won the 2011 Sundance Film Festival's Audience award. He was production/editorial consultant for Gideon's Army, directed by Dawn Porter, which won the US Documentary Editing Award at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and 1971, directed by Johanna Hamilton, which had its world premiere at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival and screened on PBS Independent Lens. Christopher is a writer/director of award-winning animated short subject, documentary and narrative films.

Lily M. Fan (Executive Producer)

Lily M. Fan founded Scandobean Productions in 2010. She is a documentary feature producer and a Tony-nominated theatre producer. She is an executive producer of Weiner, which is premiering at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival as a part of the U.S. Documentary competition. Other film credit includes The Standbys. She is based in New York and is an avid political junkie.

CREDITS

Directed and Produced by **Josh Kriegman & Elyse Steinberg**

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Christopher Clements
Carolyn Hepburn

Executive Producer **Lily Fan**

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