

PRESS KIT

FOURTEEN YEARS IN THE MAKING



AMERICAN PROMISE

Success is Our Only Option

THE RADA FILM GROUP produced in association with AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY | POV and THE INDEPENDENT TELEVISION SERVICE presents
A film by JOE BREWSTER and MICHÈLE STEPHENSON AMERICAN PROMISE OLUWASEUN SUMMERS IDRIS BREWSTER THE SUMMERS FAMILY THE BREWSTER FAMILY
Music Composed by MIRIAM CUTLER Edited by ERIN CASPER MARY MANHARDT ANDREW SIWOFF Cinematography by ERROL WEBBER ALFREDO ALCANTARA MARGARET BYRNE JON STUYVESANT
Co-Executive Producer DAN COGAN & IMPACT PARTNERS Executive Producer SIMON KILMURRY & CYNTHIA LOPEZ Produced by JOE BREWSTER & MICHÈLE STEPHENSON Directed by JOE BREWSTER & MICHÈLE STEPHENSON

AMERICAN PROMISE

A DOCUMENTARY DIRECTED BY JOE BREWSTER AND MICHÈLE STEPHENSON

World Premiere 2013 Sundance Film Festival US Documentary Competition Special Jury Prize

Official Selection 2013 Full Frame Film Festival Grand Jury Prize

Running time: 135 minutes

Media Contacts

National & New York:

Jmp Verdant Communications
Julia Pacetti
julia@jmpverdant.com
917.584.7846

Los Angeles:

David Magdael & Associates
David Magdael
dmagdael@tcdm-associates.com
213.624.7827

San Francisco Media Contact:

Larsen Associates
Karen Larsen
larsenassc@aol.com
415.957.1205

americanpromise.org

facebook.com/americanpromise

[@PromiseFilm](https://twitter.com/PromiseFilm)

Synopsis

American Promise spans 13 years as Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson, middle-class African-American parents in Brooklyn, N.Y., turn their cameras on their son, Idris, and his best friend, Seun, who make their way through one of the most prestigious private schools in the country. Chronicling the boys' divergent paths from kindergarten through high school graduation at Manhattan's Dalton School, this provocative, intimate documentary presents complicated truths about America's struggle to come of age on issues of race, class and opportunity. An Official Selection of the 2013 Sundance Film Festival. A co-production of Rada Film Group, ITVS and POV's Diverse Voices Project. Part of American Graduate: Let's Make It Happen, made possible by CPB.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

Prelude

American Promise was conceived during our search for a school for our son. Idris was about to enter kindergarten and we had begun the difficult task of finding a school in the public school system. So after beginning the search we noted that even in the public school system, schools that were highly esteemed were segregated. This segregation came in the form of gifted classes, zoning requirements and the ability and know-how to push for transfers into the most prized academic public schools in more affluent and predominantly white school districts. After several attempts to meet with public school officials in combination with a rising anxiety about the quality of a New York City public education, we decided to open the process to include private independent schools. So we entered the grueling right of passage into the New York City independent school application process. We had no knowledge of what schools were out there but we were confident that we would encounter some of the best schools in the country for our son.

Many interviews and tours later, we learned of the ambitious program at The Dalton School that, in addition to a top notch education, would give their child access to privilege and opportunity that is almost unheard of for the average American student of whatever ethnic or racial background. And they made us a promise that the public school system did not seem to be keeping; they would make the institution mirror the racial makeup of the city of New York. In exchange, we would agree to a daily 60 minute commute from our home in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn. This was a situation we could not turn down.

The Dalton Experiment – The Lower School Years

In 1996, our first narrative film, *The Keeper* received a warm reception both nationally and internationally. When our son started kindergarten, we were in the midst of developing projects, caught in the never-ending cycle of grant applications and rejections and were simultaneously searching for other film project jobs for hire as producers and/or directors. Unable to find a full time project where everything came together, wherein we could be passionate about the subject matter, creatively stimulated and financially compensated, we had some time on our hands to pick up a camera on our own. We were itching to sink our teeth into something. While dreaming about

the potential outcome of Idris's education and exposure, we realized about three months into his kindergarten year that documenting his experience would be incredible. We had seen and been moved by Michael Apter's 7-Up documentary and thought the documentation of our son's experience would be amazing. So we set out to follow our son's class for the next 13 years. By December 1999, we had extended our documentary experiment to include other families. Three other sets of parents of girls in the class agreed to participate in the telling of this story, where our children would be educated in a rigorous educational institution committed to a culturally diverse environment. This diversity experiment had begun to be documented.

American Promise — The Middle School Years

We cannot pinpoint exactly when we made the title switch from The Dalton Experiment to American Promise, yet we know it occurred some time during the early part of the middle school years, the most awkward and difficult period for children, including Idris and Seun. While the project continued to be embraced by the teachers, administrators, we began to experience some hesitancy on the part of some parents including the Summers family. Seun had begun to struggle in school and our access was being severely limited. We worried that they would become the fourth casualty and were preparing ourselves to go it alone, while simultaneously working with the Summers family to keep them on board. We shot at home with greater intimacy to compensate for resistance elsewhere. It was then that we began to realize that the project would have greater resonance, the more intimate and vulnerable we were in front of the camera. The artistic source for that inspiration came more from Steve James school of thought and the work at Kartemquin Films. We began to shoot sequential periods of two to three days without an event or goal in mind. We embraced a more observational filmmaking process and once we began to look at our footage, we realized that we had captured powerful moments of day-to-day family life and the pressures of education performance on both parents and boys.

Middle School was a painful time for our son and Seun. Their bodies changed, they struggled to fit in everywhere and this obviously impacted their academic achievement as well. Some of these experiences were universal to all middle school pre-adolescents. But Idris and Seun also experienced deep challenges specific to African American boys coming of age in American society. And we were intent on documenting that experience as much as we could. As our project began to have more focus on the African American male experience, we were able to make stronger more successful arguments in our fundraising endeavors. The importance of the issues and experiences we were documenting began to resonate with the funding world. For the first time in 2006, we began to receive support for our work. We received a grant from NYSCA and NBPC that allowed us

to occasionally hire cinematographers and develop our trailer. Our shooting style instantly benefited. We were no longer experiencing the pain of wearing three hats – shooter, director, and parent. We were partially liberated from that burden. The trailer, however, may have been one of the most significant and pivotal developments in the making of this film. Yes, the trailer allowed us to raise money but, more importantly, it seemed to touch a personal chord with regard to the national conversation on race, class and education for African American boys. African-American families from around the country began contacting us with concerns about their own son's performance in school, concerns that were uncanny in their resemblance to the problems we were facing with Idris. At this point, we began to realize that American Promise had an audience and maybe even a mission.

Promises Kept – The High School Years

In the high school years camera technology took a leap forward as well as our funding situation. As the boys hit 10th grade we began to experiment with HD cameras and digital shooting on cards. Tape began its road to obsolescence. Also, as was to be expected, the boys began to be more resistant to our shooting. They were on their way to becoming men, and with that came the drive to be independent of parental control and oversight, and in our case that meant away from the camera and our filmmaking demands. We strategized about how best to capture the honest moments with these boys as they began to see us as parents and as the enemy. We decided to hire younger male shooters closer to them in age and disposition. We think it worked. We would send the shooter off with them for long stretches and they all became comfortable with the camera and bonded. This was the key to keeping the boys in our story arc through the four years of high school.

The choice of shooter was just one element that highlighted the essential role that trust played when it came to our subjects. Not only did we have to commit to exposing our own vulnerabilities in front of the camera, but we had to convince our subjects to keep trusting us, especially if we wanted to capture life as it happened or be there for deeply personal and intimate moments that would serve to expose kernels of our common humanity that audiences would be able to immediately relate to – and that could transcend socially constructed identities. In our case we wanted to make sure our subjects understood that we were not so much looking for an objective truth, or interested in gotcha journalism, but rather we were invested in telling a story with deeply complex characters, family life and how race and class over the years played into how life choices are made.

Our relationships were tested on numerous occasions, throughout high school especially. We had become friends with the Summers — a bond that at times, in much the same way our parent hat came up, interfered with our filmmaker story-driven objectives. At times we had to trust our instinct to put the camera down when we knew we might regret it in the edit room, and wait for the best strategic moment to pick it up, that would not jeopardize our relationships. We could only do this by trusting in the integrity of our longitudinal approach — we had to believe that the sheer breadth of material we had already accumulated would work for us in the edit room and we did not and could not put our friendship in jeopardy for the sake of shooting one particular tragic scene. Our friendship had to take priority. These were very difficult calls for us. We agonized over whether to cover what could seem as going too far. But, ultimately, the bond and trust we had built over the years allowed us to access intimate moments with little resistance — that even surprised us.

The high school years were the most difficult with the school institutions, because the stakes were higher perhaps. Every start of the school year we persisted, presenting our wish list of what we wanted to shoot and negotiating access, as we relied on the notion that the schools would keep their promise to stay involved in the project until graduation.

Post-Production — The Pain Of Wearing Multiple Hats

Obviously when we as filmmakers have over 800 hours of footage, decisions made there could push the film in dramatically different directions. In 2009, we starting editing periodically with Geeta Gandbhir and Andrew Siwoff after we were honored with a production grant by the Ford Foundation. As directors this was an extremely painful process for us. We were for the first time combing through our family’s past looking at past mistakes and stumbles while trying to make decisions which impacted story structure, and character development. The scenes were strong but we had so much footage we would be editing until 2015, if we didn’t pick up the pace. We knew that we would need additional editors to help and because of the highly emotional nature of directors as parent and lead character we chose to select the strongest verite editors available to us. In January of 2012, we were lucky to bring on master verite editor Mary Mandhart (Racing Dreams) and Erin Casper (Our School). After six months of fighting, pain and tears, we assembled 33 hours of an exclusively verité driven cut of the film. By July 2012, we only needed to make a million more decisions and cut the film by 30 more hours. Tension in the edit room built up as we got closer to a final cut, as we all became deeply invested in our favorite scenes and moments. We probably left another 10 films on the cutting room floor that will find a life in this new world of transmedia storytelling, social media engagement and web presence. We are grateful to be able to have the opportunity repurpose footage that in an earlier period would never have seen the light of day.

SUBJECT BIOS

Idris Brewster

Idris Brewster is a featured subject in American Promise. He is currently a freshman at Occidental College in Los Angeles, and he attended the Dalton School in New York City. He is an avid skateboarder and enjoys a game of basketball every now and then. He was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York.



Oluwaseun (Seun) Summers

Seun Summers is a featured subject in American Promise. He is currently a freshman at the State University of New York, Fredonia, and he attended Benjamin Banneker Academic High School. He is a black belt in karate and enjoys drawing. He was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York.



Michèle Stephenson

Michèle Stephenson is the producer and director of American Promise. A graduate of McGill University and Columbia Law School, Stephenson uses her background in critical studies, race and human rights to inform her documentary work. An early pioneer in the Web 2.0 revolution, Stephenson began her film career working with the video advocacy group, Witness, where she used video and the Internet to structure human rights campaigns around the globe. Her work has appeared on PBS, Showtime, MTV and other outlets. Stephenson's honors include the Silverdocs Diversity Award and the Henry Hampton Award for Excellence in Film and Digital Media.



Joe Brewster

Joe Brewster is producer and director of American Promise. He and his partner, Michèle Stephenson, have produced and directed award-winning feature documentaries and narrative films. Brewster is a Harvard and Stanford-educated psychiatrist who moved to New York City to pursue media studies in the service of social change. In 1996, he wrote and directed his first screenplay, *The Keeper*, an



official selection competition section of the Sundance Film Festival and garnered numerous awards including an Independent Spirit Award nomination. Brewster and Stephenson have produced and directed two narrative films and three feature length documentaries, while raising their two sons in Brooklyn.

Anthony Summers

Anthony Summers is a graduate of Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is currently a Systems Engineer for CBS and the father of four. Prior to CBS, his work in computer engineering took him around the globe in the service of a variety of corporations. Anthony's eldest son, Oluwaseun, is one of the boys featured in American Promise. Anthony was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York.



Stacey O. Summers

Stacey Summers is a graduate of Binghamton University, State University of New York. She is currently a nurse care manager for Elder Care Health, a Managed Long Term Care Agency based in New York City. Stacey has dedicated most of her nursing career to providing support and care to the home-bound elderly living in New York City. She is a mother of four and her son, Oluwaseun is one of the boys featured in American Promise. Stacey was born in Trinidad and raised in Brooklyn, New York.



Summers family photo credit: Orrie King

PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS

Joe Brewster

Joe Brewster is the co-producer and co-director of American Promise. He and his partner, Michèle Stephenson, have produced and directed award-winning feature documentaries and narrative films. Brewster is a Harvard- and Stanford-educated psychiatrist who specializes in organizational analysis, the use of psychoanalytical principals to understand and improve organizations. He moved to New York City in 1985 to pursue media studies in the service of social change. In 1992, Brewster sold his first screenplay to the Jackson/McHenry group under the Warner Bros. imprint. In 1996, he wrote and directed *The Keeper*, which was an official selection in the dramatic narrative competition section of the Sundance Film Festival and garnered numerous national and international awards, including an Independent Spirit Award nomination.

Michèle Stephenson

Michèle Stephenson is the co-producer and co-director of American Promise. A graduate of McGill University and Columbia Law School, Stephenson uses her background in critical studies, race and human rights to inform her documentary work. Her Panamanian and Haitian heritage has also fueled her passion to tackle stories on communities of color and human rights. An early pioneer in the Web 2.0 revolution, Stephenson used video and the Internet to structure human rights campaigns and train people from around the globe in video Internet advocacy. Her work has appeared on PBS, Showtime, MTV and other outlets. Stephenson's honors include the Silverdocs Diversity Award and the Henry Hampton Award for Excellence in Film and Digital Media.

Mary Manhardt — Editor

Mary is an Emmy award-winning documentary film editor and consultant based in New York. The films she's cut have won awards at major festivals, including Sundance, Hot Docs, SXSW, SilverDocs, Vancouver, Tribeca and IDFA, and aired on HBO, PBS, MTV, ABC, A&E and AMC. Among the films she has edited or co-edited are: *The Farm*, *The Execution of Wanda Jean*, *girlhood*, *Farmingville*, *Street Fight*, *American Teen*, *Racing Dreams*, *Mystic Ball*, *Monica & David*, *Pelotero*, *Wham! Bam! Islam!*, *A Son's Sacrifice*, *Bronx Princess*, *Camp Victory*, *Afghanistan*, *The State of Arizona*, and *Valley of Saints*.

Andrew Siwoff — Editor

Andrew is a film editor whose recent credits include the documentary *American Promise*. In 2013 he collaborated with artist Janet Ruttenberg to create a video installation for an exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York. Andrew served as associate editor on the Academy Award-nominated documentary short, *God is the Bigger Elvis*, and assistant editor on Spike Lee's Emmy-nominated documentary, *If God is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*. He has edited short form content including web videos for Biography Channel; *Bye*, a documentary for PBS; and various commercials. Andrew graduated from NYU Tisch School of the Arts where he studied film editing.

Erin Casper — Editor

Erin's work has been shown and honored at major festivals around the world, including Sundance, New York Film Festival, Tribeca, Full Frame, Human Rights Watch, AFI Docs (formerly Silverdocs), LA Film Festival, and Visions du Réel. Her editing credits include the award-winning *American Promise* (POV 2014), *The New Black* (Independent Lens 2014), the 2012 Sundance Editing Award winner *Detropia* (as Associate Editor), and *Our School* (winner of the 2011 AFI

Docs 2011 Sterling Award for Best U.S. Feature). Erin was the inaugural recipient for the Karen Schmeer Film Editing Fellowship in 2011 and an editing fellow at the Sundance Institute Documentary Edit Lab in 2009.

Margaret Byrne — Editor & Cinematographer

Margaret worked as both cinematographer and editor on several projects for Rada Film Group over the past decade such as *Slaying Goliath* (2009). Margaret lived and worked in Lagos, Nigeria at which time she produced music documentary series and MTV Base 100th Live that launched MTV across Africa in 2005. Margaret was a Creative Director at Universal Music and directed live concerts and music videos. She is the founder of Beti Films and is currently directing *Raising Bertie*, a feature documentary offering a rare longitudinal look at the consequences of educational closure and lack of opportunity in rural America.

Errol Webber — Cinematographer

Errol Webber was 21 years old when he flew to Zimbabwe to begin shooting *Music by Prudence*, thus beginning his career as a documentary cinematographer. Despite his age, he had already worked as a commercial cinematographer and photographer for five years, shooting everything from concerts and promotional events to TV broadcasts and commissioned art videos for

museums. Errol specializes in documentary cinematography and is currently shooting five documentaries.

Jon Stuyvesant — Cinematographer

Jon is originally from Chicago, but currently lives and works in Brooklyn. He has worked in documentary film for over eight years and has done work for various networks on a wide range of TV shows. Jon was also the director of photography for *Slaying Goliath*, another documentary produced by the Rada Film Group. Jon is currently the co-producer and DP for *Raising Bertie*, a feature documentary being produced by Beti Films and Kartemquin Films (set for 2015 release).

When Jon is not behind the camera he can be found eating bagels and singing in the shower—of course never at the same time.

Alfredo Alcántara — Cinematographer

Alfredo, raised in Mexico City, is a documentary cinematographer based out of New York. He is the cinematographer for A&E Networks television series "The Unexplained" as well as the BIO Channel Mini-Series Special on Civil Rights. He also shoots all video content for Bon Appetit Magazines' BA-TV. He's currently working on the completion of a documentary commissioned by The Nature Conservancy on the preservation of North American bison.

Rada Film Group

The Rada Film Group began as a partnership between Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson with a mission to create compelling visual stories that provoke thought about our complex multicultural world. Their current documentary film, *American Promise*, was conceived in 1999 as a vehicle to celebrate the importance of diversity and acknowledge the work of British director Michael Apted. Through their work with *American Promise*, Brewster and Stephenson have been Sundance Documentary Fund fellows, Tribeca All Access fellows and BAVC Producers Institute fellows. They have received support from the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Open Society Foundations Campaign for Black Male Achievement, the Kellogg Foundation, the Fledgling Fund, the New York State Council on the Arts, the National Black Programming Consortium, ITVS and the POV Diverse Voices Project. Brewster and Stephenson are also recipients of a 2011 San Francisco Film Society Documentary Film Fund grant, a Jerome Foundation film grant, a Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund grant and a 2012 Tribeca Film Institute New Media Fund grant.

MILESTONES FOR IDRIS & SEUN

1999 Idris and Seun start kindergarten at The Dalton School.

2000 First grade — Republican challenger George W. Bush defeats Democratic Vice President Al Gore, but the final outcome is not known for over a month because of disputed votes in Florida. The cost of gasoline is \$1.24 per gallon.

2001 Second grade — World Trade Center bombing. Miles Brewster, Idris’s younger brother, is born.

2002 Michèle and Joe are married at Brooklyn Borough Hall. The boys graduate from the Lower School in June.

2002 September — Third grade

2003 Fourth grade - In September, the boys enter middle school at Dalton in a different, newer location. Idris visits his family in Haiti for Christmas. The Supreme Court (5–4) upholds the University of Michigan Law School's policy ruling that race can be one of many factors considered by colleges when selecting their students because it furthers “a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body.”

2004 Fifth grade - President George Bush beats Democratic challenger John Kerry to gain a second term of office. The cost of gasoline is \$2.10 per gallon.

2005 Sixth grade

2006 Seventh grade

2007 Eighth grade — Seun’s final year at The Dalton School.

2008 June — Idris and Sean graduate from Dalton Middle School

2008 September — Freshman year, high school. Seun starts at Benjamin Banneker Academy, a public school in Brooklyn. Idris starts at the Dalton High School and is invited to play basketball on the high school varsity team, where he is the only freshman on the team. United States Presidential Election 2008: Barack Obama (Democrat) defeats John McCain (Republican). The cost of gasoline

is \$3.39 per gallon. Stacey Summers, Seun’s mother, is diagnosed with colon cancer and begins chemotherapy that spring.

2009 Spring Break — Seun travels to Benin, West Africa with his high school Africa Tours Club.

2009 10th grade

2011 11th grade — A magnitude 7.0 earthquake hits Haiti and devastates the country. With the U.S. economy mired in a recession and unemployment remaining high, states have massive budget deficits, and as many as 300,000 teachers face layoffs.

2011 January — The Summers family faces a life-changing event.

2011 The boys begin their senior year of high school. They take the SAT examinations and begin the college application process. The cost of gasoline is \$3.52 per gallon.

2012 High school graduation. Idris and Seun find part-time employment in a tough economy. Seun works at the Laundromat Project, an art advocacy group in New York City. Idris works as an English tutor at the Write For The Future Program at New York University.

2012 Idris and Seun start their freshman year at college. President Obama defeats Mitt Romney to be re-elected president.

BLACK MALE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

We live in the land of opportunity, where children are told anything is possible. Parents in the United States share many of the same aspirations for their children, but there are invisible barriers that keep some children from progressing at the same rate as their peers. This is particularly true for African American boys, who are twice as likely as whites to be held back in elementary school, three times as likely to be suspended from school, and half as likely to graduate college.

This is known as the Black male achievement gap. Black males, even when given the same educational and economic resources as their peers of other races, are likely to fall short of their counterparts in virtually every measure of academic success. It is perhaps the single most pressing problem Black males face today. In an America that is increasingly realizing that it must revamp its education system to remain competitive in the global marketplace, the voice of the Black male is essential, yet a missing intellectual presence because of this gap in achievement.

Statistics: Blacks Males Are...

...more likely to attend schools that are under-resourced and performing poorly.

Currently, only 15 percent of Black students attend schools that are well-resourced and high performing, while 42 percent attend schools that are both under-resourced and performing poorly. In high poverty and minority schools, students are 70% more likely to have a non-certified teacher in a specific subject, with only 40% of schools offering Physics and 29% offering Calculus.

...less likely to obtain a college degree.

Only 16% of Black males hold a college degree, compared to 32% of White males.

...three times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their White peers, therefore missing valuable learning time in the classroom.

Black students, most often males, are punished with out-of-school suspension nearly three times more often than White students.

...2.5 times less likely to be enrolled in gifted and talented programs, even if their prior achievement reflects the ability to succeed.

Only 3 percent of Black male students are enrolled in gifted and talented programs.

...2.5 times more likely to be classified as mentally challenged by their schools.

Three percent of Black male students are classified in this manner, as compared to only 1.4 percent of White male students. Black male students make up 20 percent of all students in the United States classified as mentally retarded, although they are only 9 percent of the student population.

...more likely to have under-prepared and ineffective teachers.

Research of minority-dominant schools shows that 28 percent of core academic teachers lack appropriate certification.

...less likely to graduate from high school in 4 years than their White peers.

Only 52% of Black males who entered high school in 2006 graduated in four years, compared with 78% of White non-Latino males and 58% of Latino males.

..twice more likely to drop out of high school than their White peers.

In 2009, 4.8% of Blacks dropped out of grades 10-12, compared with 2.4% for Whites.

1. The Schott Foundation. “National Opportunity to Learn Campaign. Federal Recommendations.” schottfoundation.org/otl/otl-federal-recommendations-final.pdf

2. Toldson, Ivory and Chance Lewis. “Challenge the Status Quo”

3. Ibid.

4. TheNewYorkTimes. “Black Students face more Discipline, Data Suggests.” March 6, 2012 (data is from the Department of Education)

5. Black Alliance for Educational Options. <http://www.baeo.org/urgentneed.html>

6. The Future of Children at Princeton University. “Special Education for Students with Disabilities.” <https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=57&articleid=337§ionid=2249>

7. Black Alliance for Educational Options. <http://www.baeo.org/urgentneed.html>

8. The Huffington Post. “High School Graduation Rate for Black Males Trails White Students.” September, 2012. (data is from The Schott Foundation).

9. The Huffington Post. “High School Dropout Rates for Minority and Poor Students Disproportionately High.” October 20, 2011 (data from National Center for Education Statistics)

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING...

We have a responsibility to provide future generations of Americans with the education and the skills needed to thrive in communities, the job market and the global economy. Yet, too many Black and Latino young boys and men are being pushed out and locked out of the U.S. education system or find themselves unable to compete in a 21st Century economy upon graduating.

— John H. Jackson, President and CEO of the Schott Foundation for Public Education

We do not want our young Black and Latino men to have to beat the odds; we want to change the odds. We must focus on systemic change to provide all our children with the opportunity to learn.

— Michael Holzman, Senior Research Consultant to the Schott Foundation

The problem with black male achievement is institutionalized, and the solution will demand deliberate systematic strategies that involve full cooperation between concerned citizens, parents, activists, teachers, school leaders and policymakers.

— Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D. Howard University

A phenomenal, probing story of triumph and resiliency of the black family.

— Shawn Dove, Open Society Foundations

I'm definite that 2013 will be a story about black male achievement thanks to this film.

— Rashid Shabazz, Open Society Foundations

PRESS

We have a responsibility to provide future generations of Americans with the education and the skills needed to thrive in communities, the job market and the global economy. Yet, too many Black and Latino young boys and men are being pushed out and locked out of the U.S. education system or find themselves unable to compete in a 21st Century economy upon graduating.

— The Hollywood Reporter

Riveting... an intimate look at what it's like to be young, black and male in a largely white private school.

— Variety

Brewster and Stephenson's film is destined to be a classic of the genre – an engrossing exploration of race, education, and expectations featuring strong, personable characters who the viewer feels connected to immediately.

— Documentary Channel

An intimate American docu-epic unlike anything that's come before it.

— IONCINEMA

A grandiose illustration of the immense hope and crushing disappointment inherent in the American dream that promises with a good education, anything is possible.

— IONCINEMA

Stephenson and Brewster deliver a rare, intimate, and emotional portrait of black middle-class family life, humanizing the unique journey of African-American boys as they face the real-life hurdles society poses for young men of color, inside and outside the classroom.

— Sundance Institute

Substantive and emotionally epic, one of the most thoughtful and nourishing films I've seen for this year's Festival.

— HitFlix

An epic, engrossing, emotionally rapturous look at what it's like to live and learn as a young black male in America.

— OSTE

FULL CREDITS

Produced and Directed by

Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson

Editors

Erin Casper, Mary Manhardt, Andrew Siwoff

Directors of Photography

Errol Webber, Jr. Alfredo Alcantara Margaret Byrne Jon Stuyvesant

Original Score by

Miriam Cutler

Co-Executive Producer

Dan Cogan

Associate Producer

Nicole London

Additional Editors

Geeta Gandbhir, Margaret Byrne, Sandrine Isambert

Additional Photography

Andrew Michael Ellis Lloyd Handwerker Tony Hardmon Orlando Richards Frisly Soberanis Martina Radwan Miles Brewster Michèle Stephenson Joe Brewster Oluwaseun Summers Idris Brewster

Projects Manager

Lauren Pabst
Caroline de Fontaine-Stratton Gregory S. Jones

Assistant Producers

Sharika Bivens Jennifer Samuels Christalyn Wright

Researcher

Lauren Pabst

Assistant Editors

Randy Wilkins Camilo Chao Cem Kurtulus

Sound Editor & Mixer

Margaret Crimmins Greg Smith

Online Editor

Jon Fordham

Color Correction

Jon Fordham

Still Photography

Conrad Louis-Charles Orrie King
William Caballero Michèle Stephenson Andrew Bui

Graphics & Design

Rodrigo Ribeiro

Print Graphics

Michele Lott Design
Rodrigo Ribeiro

Color Correction Facilities

Frame: Runner, Inc.

Online Editing Facilities

Frame: Runner, Inc.

Sound Edit & Mix Facilities

Dog Bark Sound, Inc.

Score Recorded and Mixed at

Miriam Cutler Studios

Electric and Acoustic Guitars

Ira Ingber

Piano and Keyboards

Louis Durra

Mandolin, Mandola, Laud, Charango, Vox

Mando

John O'Kennedy

Bass

Carl Sealove

Cello

Max Baxter

Score Producer

Miriam Cutler

Mixing Engineer

Laurence Schwarz

Music Prep

Catherine Grealish

Interns

Arlonzo Brown Bernardo Sarmiento Rogelio

Thomas Michael Larnell Meena Lee

Xinyi Lin

Henry A. Murphy II Omar Leonard

Safia Siad

Asmara Break

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Ford Foundation

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Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program
and Fund

National Black Programming Consortium

Tribeca All Access and the Gucci Tribeca

Documentary Fund

Jerome Foundation

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New York State Legislature

San Francisco Film Society

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American Promise is a co-production of Rada
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(ITVS), American Documentary I POV and the

Diverse Voices Project with funding provided
by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting

(CPB).

Executive Producer for ITVS

Sally Jo Fifer

Executive Producer for American Documentary
I POV

Simon Kilmurry