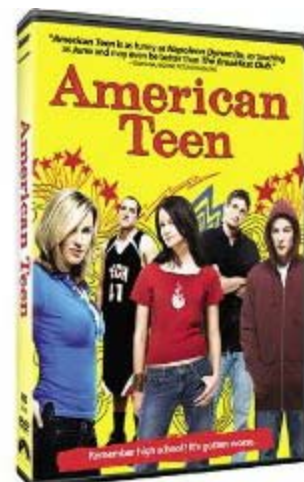


CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

Movie/DVD: *American Teen*

Background/summary: Released to a very limited theater run in July of 2008, this documentary on teenage life from director Nanette Burstein garnered an award at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. The film follows five students and their peers through the ups and downs of their senior year at Indiana's Warsaw Community High School. While the film had a limited theater run in just a handful of cities, it is slowly emerging from under the radar as a compelling peek into 21st century teen culture.



Discover: What is the message/worldview?

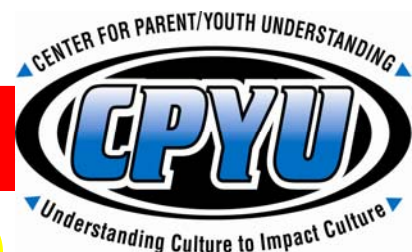
- Burstein's cameras zoom in on a quintet of teens from across the spectrum of teen-stereotypes as they spend their senior year at the top of the high school pecking order, dealing with the difficult developmental and cultural issues that have come to mark adolescence, and as they prepare to transition to the next phase of their post-high school lives.
- Megan Krizmanich is immediately labeled as the popular queen-bee and school princess who is obsessed with maintaining appearances and the accompanying social status. Initially, Krizmanich is depicted as the over-involved, jealous, and manipulative girl who will step on anyone who gets in the way of her mission to achieve her goals, including maintaining her status in high school and getting accepted at Notre Dame. However, the cameras catch her in the latter part of the film admitting her struggles and exposing her deep insecurities.
- The introverted, insecure, yet-endearing Jake Tusing spends his days surviving the high school social scene as an acne-covered band geek. Not surprisingly, he retreats into the world of video-gaming where he fantasizes about defeating the villain and riding off into the sunset with the girl. Large portions of the film focus on Jake's attempts to date, his dates, and his social struggles.
- Under great pressure to secure a basketball scholarship as a way to pay for college, Colin Clemens is a likable big man on campus whose father alternates between being compassionate and pushy.
- Also a basketball player and popular student, Mitch Reinhold is a good-looking and seemingly humble guy who surprises everyone when he develops an interest in the free-spirited Hannah, who he eventually drops via text message due to the social pressure from peers who are concerned by his desire to cross into a lesser social strata by dating Hannah.
- The film's main study is Hannah Bailey, a free-spirited and lovable young liberal from a broken-home who would have thrived in the hippie culture of the 60s. An artist, musician, and aspiring film-maker, Hannah implodes emotionally early in the year after her long-time boyfriend walks away from their relationship after convincing her to have sex.
- While far too many plotlines develop to cite in this limited space, some are worthy of mention. There are the athletic, academic, and appearance pressures faced by several of the students. There are the sexual pressures, including homosexual experimentation (girl-on-girl kissing), a flirtatious topless picture that spreads virally through the school population, bullying, cyber-bullying, drinking, and criminal behavior.

Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- Sin has polluted the entire world, leaving all people and all things crying and groaning for redemption (Romans 8). The high school campus provides a great case study in the extent and effects of sin. Adolescents groan in a variety of ways, many of them unique to their age and developmental stage. As with all other fallen members of humanity, teens pursue “the way that seems right to a man,” but that way often ultimately “leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12). The film pounds this truth home as it exposes adolescent insecurities and attempts at finding redemption.
- When he shared the Beatitudes, Jesus called his followers to mercy, peacemaking, meekness, and purity of heart (Matthew 5). *American Teen* clearly exposes how the Kingdom of the world, the flesh, and the Devil stand for the opposite. God’s order and design is to undo the evidence of the Fall in the high school social interactions, remaking young people in his image and calling them to follow his will and his way.
- The things of this world (achievements, college acceptance, scholarships, dating relationships) cannot and will not fill the God-shaped vacuum. While it is not wrong to pursue these things, they are not in and of themselves redemptive. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that all of this is vanity. Instead, “the whole duty of man” is to “fear God and keep his commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).
- Jesus Christ modeled a life of compassion for the poor, broken-hearted, and down-trodden. He calls his followers to do the same. While some of these people are obvious to us (Jake Tusing), there are others whose hard-hearted shell is simply a covering for their brokenness and vulnerability (Megan Krizmanich). We must look past the hardness to see the vulnerable and broken person living beneath. Then, we must love them as well.

Decide: What do I do with it?

- *American Teen* offers the best and most balanced big-screen peek into suburban middle-class teenage life of any film of the last ten years. For that reason, the film is must-viewing for anyone raising or ministering to teens today. The film should be viewed and discussed in a variety of settings including parent meetings and youth worker training.
- Since *American Teen* offers a mirror into the world of today’s youth culture, viewers should watch with pen in hand, making note of nuanced issues teens face. Then, prayerfully plan how to prophetically, preventively, and redemptively address the issues raised by the film.
- The film is perfectly suited for viewing by a high school-aged audience. Use the film as a springboard for discussion, asking kids where they see themselves and their peers in the film. But don’t stop there. Spring into a discussion of how a biblical world and life view speaks to each of those issues.
- Show the film to parents, asking them to discover where they might see themselves in the film. This is especially helpful in sparking an understanding of the parental pressures parents so easily and unknowingly place on their teens.
- The film reminds us of the need to listen, to be vulnerable and to be patient with young people struggling with brokenness. These should increasingly be marks of our relationships and ministries with kids.



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