

'Activism is a form of love'

'We Have Our Ways,' Dawn Jones Redstone's film about reproductive justice, features women of color leading the resistance



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IF YOU GO

What: "We Have Our Ways" premiere at Portland International Film Festival

When: 12:30 p.m. Feb. 25

Where: Whitsell Auditorium, 1219 SW Park Ave., Portland

Information:
www.wehaveourways.com

BY SARAH HANSELL
STAFF WRITER

The year is 2023. Health care of any kind is highly inaccessible and in some cases outlawed.

Public utilities such as water are privatized and severely restricted.

Streets are filled with protesters clutching signs that say "Water is a human right" and chanting "Whose streets? Our streets."

This is the reality of "We Have Our Ways." The short film, directed by Dawn Jones Redstone, will premiere Feb. 25 at the Whitsell Auditorium as part of the Portland International Film Festival.

The film is set in a grim, looming future, but what it's really about is the resistance and activism of its main characters, all women of color.

"I've been shocked during this administration by how quickly things can be taken away, by how quickly human rights can be taken away," Jones Redstone said. "I guess I just want people to wake up. This is happening now; it is happening quickly. We need to do something."

The film's main character, Regina, portrayed by Portland writer and performance artist sidony o'neal, is a customer service representative at a health

care corporation, where she must turn down callers' desperate pleas for coverage. Still, she finds ways to resist, risking her "achievement score" to override the system and provide coverage, or covertly texting customers about where they can find underground services.

In a world with little health care access, it follows that reproductive health services are scarce, if they are there at all. Regina's cousin finds out she's pregnant, and the film follows Regina as she struggles, endures injustices and ultimately makes demands in order to get her cousin access to an abortion.

"It really resonated with me as a queer black femme," o'neal said. "There are so many conversations about reproductive justice that need to be enlarged by the presence of different bodies, of different genders, and just the visibility of who's having that conversation. I do have a lot of personal experiences and generational experiences with either lack of access to reproductive services and/or just in general, health care, and I think that those are extremely pressing issues and conversations to continue to keep at the surface of the creative work that we're all engaged in, and also in the political and the organizing that's happening."

Regina's evolution as an activist is a beautiful vision of how resistance can be born and what it can look like. Regina's resistance is activated by her love for her cousin, and her commitment to be there for her. It drives her to refuse to ignore the injustice around her, and even to risk her own safety.

"I think Regina, over the course of the film, is basically demonstrating how activism is a form of love," Jones Redstone said. "I think that's what the film is ultimately about for me."

This film cannot come at a more relevant time, with the Trump administration's overhaul of federal regulations that guaranteed contraceptive coverage, its reinstatement and expansion of the global gag rule, and repeated federal attempts to attack abortion access.

"I'm thinking about the meaning of the phrase 'reproductive justice,' and that phrase was coined by a group of women of color to connect the need for access to abortion, but so many other things," Jones Redstone said. "Reproductive justice is not just code for abortion. It's about what are the things that people, in particular often people of color, need in order to live a decent life. It's connected to water and health care and access to living-wage jobs, and there's many

more things that it could encompass."

The cast and crew of "We Have Our Ways" is 60 percent women of color, and it's not by accident. As a queer Latinx filmmaker, it's very important to Jones Redstone to "balance the media landscape," bringing in people of color, especially women of color, and "lifting those stories," she said. The film is about women of color taking their liberation into their own hands.

"I think it's tied to and deeply resonates with histories of disenfranchisement and the deep fungibility of bodies that were, for instance, once considered property," o'neal said. "Any work that portrays people of color exercising their right to autonomy of their bodies and reproductive health is extremely radical given the history of deep and systemic efforts, and very tacit efforts, to keep that from being the case."

Although "We Have Our Ways" depicts a dark future, there is also great hope in the film's resistance. Regina finds the power within herself to shift the narrative for her and her cousin, and to demand what they need when their government fails them.

"I think the people that are most marginalized will continue to rise up," Jones Redstone said. "And as things deteriorate, I think that we will ultimately take the lead, if we're not already."