

Review 3: Waiting for Superman – Film Review

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Director and co-writer, Davis Guggenheim, takes a similar approach to exposing the truth about American institutions in his film, “Waiting for Superman”, as Michael Moore does in his controversial documentaries “Fahrenheit 9/11” (2004) and “Sicko” (2007). The only difference is that Guggenheim focuses on the failing public education system, especially in urban areas. He addresses issues such as students’ plummeting math and reading scores in our public schools, the high dropout rate, unqualified and uninspired teachers, undeveloped and under-resourced schools and the unfair tenure situation to stress the urgent need for education reform.

Aside from countless interviews and statistics given in the film, Guggenheim gives real life examples by following five students in urban cities who have a strong desire to learn and who take their future education seriously. The urban communities highlighted in the film were located in Harlem, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., the Bronx and Redwood City, California. With the help of their dedicated parents and guardians, these students share their experiences as they struggle to find better schools and teachers and not become victims of corrupt educational institutions, referred to as “failure factories” in the film. Location and economic limitations provide these families with only one solution, entering the lottery system where their future rides on the chance their number will be called. Only the lucky are admitted into better schools with more resources and the promise of a higher chance of success.

Guggenheim also follows and interviews crucial leaders that are actively searching for solutions to the education epidemic. He features Geoffrey Canada, the director of the Harlem Children’s Zone; Michelle Rhee, the chancellor in Washington D.C.; and David and Mike Feinberg, the founders of Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). Another supporter of education reform is Facebook CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, who donated \$100 million to the public school system in Newark, New Jersey. These individuals recognize the need for education reform and have done everything from creating and maintaining sustainable social programs for students, closed inadequate schools, fired lousy teachers and made college mentoring possible to high school students. Hated by many and supported by few, these leaders have decided to change the course of education in their communities.

The film challenges and motivates Americans to advocate for education reform. Many reliable and well-known organizations and people have joined the movement. United Way of Metropolitan Chicago hosted the Chicago premiere of the film and also invited educators and Chicagoans to a series of forums to continue the conversation about education reform, including an online “virtual” town hall. They also have partnered with Exelon and created the *Stay in School Initiative* to bring new resources into communities that experienced some of the highest dropout rates in the city.

I would definitely recommend it to everyone. Though watching the film was often frustrating and, at some points, depressing, I thought the film was informative and compelling and inspires the hope and action necessary to create change. In fact, it has inspired me to get more involved and become more aware of the public education system and education reform on a local and national level. Whether we like it or not, the failure

of many urban schools to adequately educate children does affect us and will ultimately affect future generations. Without a strong foundation and future in education, we as a country will not prosper. The first step toward solutions is obtaining accurate information through multiple resources and mediums. It is important to form your own opinion on this major issue.

I truly believe it is our social responsibility to get involved and to increase community involvement in this movement. We have a lot of work to do!

For more information on the movement, check out

<http://www.waitingforsuperman.com/action/>

<http://www.uw-mc.org/>