

## Waiting for Education

“If we give up then what is the result?”(*Superman*). Throughout the documentary *Waiting for Superman* the idea that the very fabric of the United States its educational system has inevitably accepted a failing structure as its academic model is presented. The director Guggenheim heavily relies upon information in the form of facts and charts to support the main idea. These facts are generally centered on five exemplary students stuck in a deteriorating pedagogic system. The use of Emily, Francisco, Bianca, Anthony, and Daisy really adds a powerful element of emotion to strengthen the provided facts. Though facts and emotional stimulants are present the viewer cannot help but feel that everything presented is biased. I feel the director achieves his intent of convincing the audience that America is failing its students, while at the same time ignoring how it is uplifting its students.

One thing that is blatantly apparent throughout the film is the use of strategically placed facts. Most of the film is centered on low income families that are struggling to provide a quality education for their children. While discussing Anthony’s high aspirations for a more rewarding education. The director mentions that most of Anthony’s friends will drop out due to where they live and the schooling they are provided. This claim is to be proven with the statistic that “seven-thousand students drop out each day” in the United States.(Waiting) This helps to show how the academic system in the United States in some way works against its students. Those students that do drop out are “eight times more likely to go to prison”(Superman). Another part of the key information used is teacher tenure. You can receive tenure “Basically if you continue to breathe for two years, and whether or not you can help children is totally irrelevant” (Superman). This is used to cast the blame on teachers, and can cause one to assume all teachers with tenure are bad.

I feel these statistics though relevant are used to cast blame instead of help explain why the situation is the way it is.

One of the main points of the film are the five children that are the physical embodiment of what is wrong with the system. I disagree with how the director utilizes the children in his documentary. While they are important they are not what the documentary is about. It makes the audience wonder if it is not about the kids why are they included at all? The obvious effect of using children is the quick emotional attachments that makes one more easily swayed.

Guggenheim uses the kids as a way to show the hardship faced and how it affects kids and their lives in a negative way. I think this was an incorrect way to use the children. Instead of using their experiences in a negative way I would have shown how these particular kids are triumphing over the system. In the film they show how the system is letting the children down, where they could have shown how these kids are making a terrible system better. Instead of focusing on the academic achievements of the children based on their circumstances they focus on the hardships that are to be faced because of the system. Generally the viewers are offered a negative perspective throughout the film, where there could have been positivity.

The conjunction of specific facts and sided views leads the audience to feel almost as though the documentary was biased. This can be seen in a lack of opposing views found throughout. An example of this is the fact that seven-thousand students drop out every day but the film never mentions how many students graduate every day. One of the main discrepancies that can lead to seeing bias is that this film almost entirely looks at impoverished schools. The problem with the director's choice to focus on impoverished schools is that it doesn't show you the whole system. The reason this is a problem is because the entirety of the films claim is that the academic system as a whole is failing, not just schools found in impoverished areas.

Guggenheim also seems to have filmed “testimony” from those of like mind. The main contributors being Geoffrey Canada and Michelle Rhee who both happen to be education reformers in their own respects. A main example of the general like-minded negativity is when Canada states “... there was no one coming with enough power to save us”(Waiting). This film wasn’t seeking to show you the whole system just the parts it thought were flawed and how they thought it should be fixed.

*Waiting for Superman* shows massive flaws in the American education system, teacher’s work ethics, and lack of a general willingness to change. It offers convincing ideas, testimonies, and facts to help the viewer understand how public education is no longer held to the same standards and how it might return to the glory it once had. While the information it provides is true it ultimately seems to be a documentary with an agenda. Unfortunately the film seems to be extremely biased by only showing one side of the issue. Their charts only show the negatives of the facts they’re presenting. They state how bad the system is doing and how terrible it is in impoverished areas while never covering how well it works in other areas. The documentary also uses children to help support its biased claims. It uses them in such a way that the children almost force you to believe everything you’re told. I feel Guggenheim achieves his intent of convincing the audience that America is failing its students, while providing a convenient lack of opposing views.

#### Work Cited

Waiting for Superman. Dir. Davis Guggenheim. Paramount Vantage, 2010. Film.

