
Waiting for Superman. Sociological Review of Davis Guggenheim's Documentary

"No matter who we are or what neighborhood we live in, each morning, wanting to believe in our schools, we take a leap of faith" is a quote from the filmmaker Davis Guggenheim who filmed the documentary "Waiting for Superman". This documentary is about the horrible educational system in the United States and the alternative which is creating Charter schools. This documentary follows the lives of five children struggling in the public educational system. Four of these children are part of racial minority group which makes their lives in the public educational system even harder. This paper is on the historical construction of race and ethnicity in the United States and an analysis on the documentary "Waiting for Superman",

The United States concept of race has its origins in Western Europe (Healey, 2010). Race is biologically, an isolated, inbreeding population with a distinctive genetic heritage. Socially the term is used loosely and reflects patterns of inequality and power (Healey, 2010). Race was used to distinguish the superior and inferior people, white being the inferior. In colonial America black people from Africa were brought to be slaves. When slaves were brought to the Americas they were considered inferior people because who ever was conquered was inferior. "In the first census of 1790, required for purposes of apportionment by the U.S. Constitution adopted in 1787, the separation

between blacks and whites was already made"(Glazer p.573). This was the first historical record of race construction in the United States. The construction of Ethnicity in the United States was as early as the settlers who came mainly from England and Germany. They are now what is called the dominant group Ethnicity is different from race and many people confuse the two; ethnicity is the person's culture, where they came from and not the color of their skin. Ethnicity was not recorded in the first census only race was, later ethnicity was recorded when more immigrants started coming to the United States. In 1980 the question on birthplace of parents was dropped, to the distress of sociologists and students of ethnicity. A new question on "ancestry" was added, which, in theory, would permit us to connect people to ethnic groups in the third generation and beyond (Glazer).

"Waiting for Superman", is a documentary on the educational system in the United States. It films five families who go through struggles in the public education system. This documentary captures the family's emotional feelings and hope for a solution. "Waiting for Superman" suggests that this solution is a Charter school. A Charter school is a public school that receives public money but does not have to follow any of the rules the public schools do. These Charter schools don't have enough spaces for all children to attend so they hold special random selected lotteries that choose students. This film captures the emotional distress children and their families go through waiting for the lottery.

There are five children in this film but only four of the children in this documentary are minorities. These four children are classified into Black and Hispanic minorities. The public high schools in these children's neighborhood are relatively bad and most of them are in minority filled neighborhoods. These families have no other choice but to attend these schools due to low income and zoning program. These bad schools are where the children are zoned to go which

means due to where they live (bad

Neighborhoods) they must attend these public schools. The districts they're in is mainly made up of minorities. One of the ways these districts get formed is by the census. "Congress requires that ethnic and racial statistics be available within a year of the census for the purpose of redrawing the boundaries of the congressional districts, and the other electoral districts for the state legislative assemblies and for city and county elected officials" (Glazer, p.574) The minority neighborhoods live all together and are zoned to all go to the same school with not a lot of diversity and assimilation happening; the minority groups do not get to understand what it's like to get out of that culture of poverty. Education is very important and crucial for minorities to get out of the culture of poverty. "The dynamics shaping the lives of minorities in America are best understood in the context of access to employment and to education. When the people of the United

States have united in determination to provide opportunities to minority citizens, African Americans and Hispanics have prospered. Minorities denied these opportunities, or unable to take advantage of them, remain mired in poverty" (Blandin, 1990).

I believe that charter schools are not the solution to reshaping the culture of poverty; but they can help a great deal more than public schools. In the Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Class textbook, (Healey, 2010), states that, "culture of poverty is perpetuated by the particular characteristics of the poor." Some of these characteristics include: violence, authoritarianism, and high rates of alcoholism and family desertion by males (Lewis, 1959, 1965, 1966). The only way the culture of poverty will be reshaped is if the characteristics of the poor change. Charter school's can teach their students and instill great values in them; which can change their views and break away from the characteristics of the poor. Charter schools are relatively small so therefore the classrooms are small with fewer students in each class. A small size classroom can give each student individual time with the teacher. In comparison to public schools who have large classrooms with many students who can't get the same amount of attention granted to them. Students applying to charter schools are the students who want to learn unlike public school who have a lot of student who are just careless. The vast majority of students applying to charter school who want to learn are also affecting the success of most Charter Schools. Not all Charter schools report high test scores but in my opinion test scores aren't a key factor in reshaping the culture of poverty, but the drive in these students to succeed in life is. Even though Charter schools aren't the solution to reshaping the culture of poverty, they are more effective in reshaping the culture of poverty than public schools.

Race plays a great deal in the educational system. Many people in racial minorities come from families who haven't graduated high school and don't signify the importance of education to their children. Teachers have to be prepared and understand the make up of their class and that most minorities need more attention than others.

I think race should be part of the equation in determining a child's educational experience. If teachers are trained more than just to teach but understand the social make up of their school they can offer more help to their students. Ethnicity plays a role in the educational system because most ethnic minorities tend to stick together therefore all attending the same zoned school. The system should take into consideration that schools that are in bad neighborhoods need more attention and help not in just simple education but discipline and counseling.

The film ends with children being upset about not getting into the Charter schools, which leads me to think that the documentary finishes with no hope. This documentary showed that the only hope we have right now is Charter schools. This makes me think that not enough people are planning some sort of solution for this horrible public education system in the United States. The filmmaker is trying to get a message out if we built more charter schools, children will be happy because they have the chance to attend a charter school and not worry about space. I don't blame the teachers completely for the children's bad education I blame the parents and this video is making it seem like all parents are so involved in their children's education. These are only five families and the filmmaker picked these five families because they were involved in their children's education on purpose to get his appoint across the bad teachers. This documentary was a good but I believe it was only one sided and focused to much on only one solution.

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