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Prof. Levin – Cultural Diversity

Film Assignment

Waiting for Superman

Waiting for Superman was a film I analyzed for a previously taken Introduction to Sociology class. That class taught me more than I bargained for and so did the film. It is for this reason that I am discussing it again in regards to diversity and cultural awareness. Waiting for Superman discusses the failures and shortcomings of the American school system while giving the watcher a view of how it affects different areas of the nation, not just the minority groups. This is a film that touches on various points of education and where they fail the American children while also introducing viewers to how different aspects of race, class, and gender and how they all correlate when the topic of education comes up. It’s crucial to understand, that when watching this movie, that these issues will always be and continue to be a factor in our nation. Not because of discrimination but rather because of class status and which minority groups stand where in regards to class.

Throughout the documentary, different aspects of the American public education system are examined. Things such as the ease in which a public school teacher achieves tenure, the inability to fire a teacher who is tenured, and how the system attempts to reprimand poorly performing teachers are shown to have an impact on the educational environment. Teaching standards are called into question as there is often conflicting bureaucracy between teaching expectations at the school, state, or federal level. The film also examines teacher's unions. Michelle Rhee, the former chancellor of the Washington, D.C. public schools (the district with some of the worst performing students at the time), is shown attempting to take on the union agreements that teachers are bound to, but suffers a backlash from the unions and the teachers themselves.

Waiting for Superman introduces the watcher to various walks of life in various areas of the United States all-struggling with the same issues in regards to education. This is largely an inner city problem although the movie does discuss education in other areas. For example, one of the main characters in the movie, The Esparza Family, are inner city Latinos looking to get their bright young daughter, Daisy, into a better school. Daisy and her family live in east-Los Angeles, where 6 out of 10 students in her neighborhood do not graduate from high school. No one in Daisy's family has completed high school—her mother and father both dropped out to support their parents. Now, they do everything they can to support their daughter, but private school isn't an option.

Right down the street from Daisy's home is one of the best charter schools in Los Angeles: KIPP LA PREP. The school's students rank among the best in Los Angeles, and its demanding program will prepare Daisy for college in ways that her neighboring public school cannot. But with 135 students applying for just 10 spots, Daisy has a 14 percent chance of getting in. Throughout the movie, I felt mixed emotions about Daisy’s story and many of the other stories that were brought to light. I felt frustration that America the Beautiful is so unorganized and thought about the conflicts I see on the television everyday, issues that affect other countries that the United States is looking to aid, when in our own backyard, we have a myriad of issues that directly affect the sustainability and progression of the country. These little boys and girls are the future of the United States, yet education is not nearly in their grasp.

My frustration, as it relates to cultural diversity was even more enflamed when I realized that the children with the most issues were of a minority decent. This is mostly because these children are the ones growing up in inner-city areas. Children like Daisy, who was from east-LA, Anthony, a young African American boy from Washington, D.C., Francisco, a Latino boy from the Bronx, NY and Bianca from Harlem, NY. This movie subconsciously showed the caste system in the United States to be incredibly corrupt. With the example of the white little girl, who was decided which of the two good schools to attend, the movie showed how different the lives are of minorities and Caucasian Americans.

Daisy and Anthony had to be two characters of which I identified with and had a strong emotional pull towards. I respected their intelligence and their struggle but mostly, they reminded me of my struggles and my dreams. I dream big because I do not wish for my children to have to answer any of the questions these children had to answer. I find that Daisy and Anthony had to think about large things at a very young age. Daisy, who was thinking about where she wanted to go to college, is ambitious, of course, but never once mentioned what she likes to do for fun. I want my children to think about their future, but never at such as early age. As an African American woman, if I am not careful, this can be the life of my children and I find that that is why these two children got to me the most.

From watching this film, I learned that America is a very diverse country. Unfortunately, its diversity is spread through various outlets like class, gender, and even certain areas of the country. The diversity is no longer a melting pot but seems to be controlled carefully and that scares me. It scares me that as an African American woman, I may not make it in life. Not by any fault of my own, but because that is what American has pre-determined for me. That my children, with their black skin, may share my struggles no matter what I do to keep them from that pain. At 20 years old, that is a very painful thing for me to be thinking about.