

Film Review: Documentary ‘Kids for Cash’ Shares Multiple Viewpoints

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 1, 2014 - 8:20am

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CHICAGO – The funny thing about documentaries is that any goal of truly replicating reality, or the truth, is impossible. Unless a documentary film were to convey an experience with 360 degrees and 24/7 coverage (AKA life), it will always be a subjective endeavor. Documentary storytellers are always creating a point of view, simply by choosing where to point a camera, and where to cut a sequence.



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

While “Kids for Cash” does not achieve such a breakthrough in that respect, it is a rare documentary that nudges viewers closer to having an impression of a situation’s both sides. With an elaborate story, (one that is literally charted out by one of its subjects), it does show a big picture, with two distinct halves. Keeping to the complications within its center story, “Kids for Cash” does give its villain, one with surprising complications, a distinct amount of screen time.

“Kids for Cash” is a documentary about Mark Ciavarella, a Pennsylvania judge who ruled juvenile court cases with zero tolerance. He sentenced children to jail for minor mishaps, challenging their development into adulthood. When people begin questioning his ruthlessness, a larger scandal is unveiled that questions whether Ciavarella was paid by jails to send them kids.

“Kids for Cash” begins with painting a disturbing picture of different fates handed down to children by a ruthless zero tolerance system by a local judge, Mark Ciavarella. We meet various kids who have been under his wrath, and hear the stories of their harmless illegal crimes. One kid is locked up for making a MySpace page for her professor. When she recollects the event, she says, “I’m now one of those people in themovies!” (she is credited as “MySpace Page Incident”). A local journalist tells her involvement with the story, which involves collecting a large group of similar grievances from parents, to understand the big picture.

“Kids for Cash” continues its limited release in Chicago on February 28th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Directed by Robert May. Rated “PG-13”



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Confrontation in the Documentary 'Kids for Cash'

Photo credit: SenArts Film



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