

# Free the house i live in essay sample

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



## **Film Studies**

The House I Live In is a compelling account of the manner in which America's War on Drugs has devastated families and individuals especially those belonging to the minority community. It has targeted the poor and the jobless. The film portrays touching anecdotes of those directly impacted by drugs – be it the grieving mother to the drug dealer, the senator to the narcotics officer, the federal judge to the prison inmate. The film highlights this as a serious human rights issue and urges people to speak against the injustice taking place in this country.

The film in fact portrays that drug abuse is a matter of treatment and prevention and individuals suffering from this problem should not be taken to books. The issue of drug abuse is a public health concern and not a concern of law enforcement. It has further portrayed the plight of the children in America who have been greatly impacted by the War on Drugs. Startling statistics have been shown which has raised pertinent questions about the racially fostered policy formulation in the United States of America.

## **Introduction**

The House I Live In is a masterpiece which helps in portraying abuse of drugs as a severe public health concern and goes on to detect limitations and tragic misgivings that have emerged due to certain fallacies in the enforcement of law in America. The film further captures the financial and political corruption has stimulated the drug war despite continuous evidence of practical, economic and moral collapses. The film also highlights the United States of America to have the largest prison across the globe thereby

leading to the confinement of more than 2.3 million individuals. It further displays the plight of the diverse families and individuals who have gone untold damage due to the incarceration of their near and dear ones. Another striking statement that the film unfolds is the vengeance shows towards the minority class and untold racism. The film highlights one critical angle of concern that the drug policy in America is actually focussed on economics. The film captures how the American drug policy has been used to victimize the minority groups in America. Be it by means of criminalization of drugs in order to wash out the Chinese people residing in California or by vindicating the Mexicans and blacks on charges of hemp or cocaine abuse, the law enforcers are taking every step to ensure the destruction of the minority groups in this nation.

### **Background of the drug policy in America**

The Anti Drug Abuse Act came into existence in the year 1986 when Sir Ronald Regan was the president of the United States of America. This act came into existence without any consultation with experts as politicians wanted to act tough on criminals and bring them to justice. This act launched compulsory minimum sentences for every individual using and abusing drugs without any discretion. This translated to the fact that an individual found with 5 grams of crack cocaine and another having 500 grams of powdered cocaine were sentenced for the same compulsory period of five years. Statistics show that African Americans as well as the white people in America use crack cocaine. The black people in this nation constitute to 13 percent of the total population and yet the American prisons house around 90 percent of the Black Americans. Crack cocaine is supposed to be more dangerous as

compared with powder cocaine mainly because it is more efficient and inexpensive manner of taking in cocaine especially for those who are heavily addicted to this drug.

One of the main reasons for the drug policy in America to fail is the compulsory requirement posed by the Anti Drug Policy Act. Despite the crime being non-violent in nature, the judge is forced to award the same punishment. This has resulted in highly inflating America's prisons and has undermined the system of justice in this nation. The film goes on to show that an individual has been awarded life imprisonment without parole for having three ounces of methamphetamine.

The year 2010 witnessed a slight change in the Anti Drug Act which has been replaced by the Fair Sentencing Act. This act is less stringent than the original one but is still racially prejudiced. The Fair Sentencing Act has lifted the previous ratio of 100: 1 on the crack/powder drug discrepancy to 18: 1. Despite this, the new law does not support justice. This is because individuals previously serving prison sentences would not get early parole. Also the Fair Sentencing Act does not suppress the racial prejudice in drug sentencing or eliminate the previous act of mandatory minimum sentencing.

### **Core characters in the film**

The film by Eugene Jaricki opens with the story of his nanny, Nannie Jeter and explains the reason as to why the director went on to find out the real issues facing the war on drugs in America. The director touchingly reveals her struggles and the way her family crumbled due to the drug policy. One of the striking core characters in this film is that of David Simon who is a journalist and has spent around a decade trying to find out the implications

of the Anti Drug Law in the United States of America. Simon is best known for his HBO creation, *The Wire*, a television series which was aired from 2002 - 2008. He further goes on to state that the drug war in America is a form of propaganda and is hampering the lives of individuals rather than bettering it. While tracing the history of United States of America's drug policy, he maintains that they are racially linked and suppress the rights of the poor. Take the case of Maurice Haltiwanger, a prison inmate. Maurice was imprisoned at a ripe age of 18 and according to his defence attorney, Jim McGough the best sentence that would be awarded to him is a prison term of 20 years. Circumstances under which he started abusing and selling drugs will not be considered. Moreover, the judge will not be in a position to lessen his sentence, given the stringent Anti Drug Law. Another important character in this documentary is that of Michelle Alexander, the author of *The New Jim Crow*. According to her, the anti drug law has been abused for decades and incarcerated most African American population. The author further mentions that more individuals from the minority community are behind bars as compared with those enslaved in the 1850s. She further urges that America has continued to systematically discriminate minority communities and the anti drug law has further aided to support racism. While tracing the history of drug policy in U. S. A., the film reveals shocking details of the manner in which the drug policy has been fostered racism. The documentary has used individuals who are directly involved with the war on drugs. It has taken the opinion of experts like David Simon and Michelle Alexander and at the same time has also taken the pains to interview prison inmates, defence attorneys, judge and individuals employed in the law enforcement agency in the United

States of America. The film tries to portray one single issue – the adverse impact of the anti drug law on the minority community in America. It has delved into the lives of people to find out pertinent fallacies that the Anti Drug Law has created in incarcerating the Black Americans.

## **Core issues with reference to the drug policy in the United States of America**

Today majority Americans believe that the United States of America has miserably failed in its ‘ war against drugs’. This points to the fact that there is an immediate need to devise a new plan to cope up with the severe challenge of illegal drugs and at the same time the policy should reflect the support of the general population in this nation. The year 2010 witnessed some reform to the original anti drug law. Steps have been taken by the Obama government to create a policy which considers addiction and drug issue as a health concern rather than a criminal issue and thereby shift the focus to treatment and prevention rather than law enforcement (Hakim, 2011).

The film portrays a key concern that the American criminal judicial policies are racial in nature and the war on drugs is not only vindictive in nature, but especially targets the African Americans. This is the same statement which is made by Michelle Jackson. According to Provine (2007), the inflated prisons in America house more African Americans than white people. This is despite the fact that despite whites abusing crack – cocaine more than the minority community, the American prison has maximum inmates from minority groups. The author further narrates that the law enforcement officials and the members of the Congress think alike and have developed the federal policy in 1980s on racial presuppositions. She further lashed out on the

judicial system maintaining that the mandatory sentence in the anti drug law is a matter of gross injustice. The film has delved into all the above mentioned issues and has portrayed the war on drugs to be racial in nature. It has gone to the extent of interviewing several inmates as well as members of the minority families and has displayed that the so called drug war has devastated many families across the nation.

### **Shocking statistics**

The documentary, *The House I Live In*, has presented shocking statistics around the war on drugs. One of them is that around 2.5 million children have at least one parent behind bars. The conclusion that may be drawn from this is that children hailing from such families are more likely to be incarcerated. It has highlighted the 'prison boom' as mentioned by Provine (2007) by maintaining that the American prison houses at least 25 percent of its population.

The film mentions that the year 2011 alone has witnessed the death of around 6500 people in Mexico as a result of the war on drugs. Yet, it has not highlighted the fact that around 90 percent of cocaine is transited to the United States of America through Mexico. Moreover U. S. A. gets most of its supply of methamphetamine and marijuana from Mexico. Other than this, the film has informed that the demand for illegal drugs has augmented due to the fact that Americans spend around USD 10 - 16 billion annually for purchasing such illicit drugs. However, it has not given the information that the cartels in Mexico get around \$19 - 29 billion yearly from the sale of drugs in the United States of America. This may be the reason as to why most people in Mexico are unaware of the war on drugs (CNN Library, 2013).

The film further mentions that around 500000 people in the United States of America have been incarcerated. The film reveals that although there are a significantly higher percentage of whites abusing drugs, the prisons in America have around 90 percent of the black population. This is especially true for the African Americans constituting to 13 percent of the population in America. As of today, around 2.3 million people in America are behind bars and although Michelle Jackson maintains that maximum prison inmates are African Americans, the film does not provide any clear figure. Out of the total incarcerated population of 2.3 million, at least 1 million people belong to the African American community and this is a clear indication of the law being misused to racially discriminate people in America. The film does mention the costs of incarceration that the American government has to bear but in passing. As of today, American prisons spend around \$70 billion on the correction program annually (NAACP, 2013). The film has heavily portrayed corruption in the law enforcement department but has failed to provide any statistics on this.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of the film**

The core strength of the film is that it displays the fact that the war on drugs has led to incarceration of the minority community and has done little to stop illicit drug trafficking. Another highlight is that the director, Eugene Jarecki delves into the lives of some individuals impacted by the anti drug law. Starting with his nannie, Nannie Jeter, the film narrates the damage done to her and also finds out the shocking tales of many individuals whose lives have been devastated due to the war on drugs. The interview by prison inmates, wardens and security officers tell the plight of individuals who have



been incarcerated even for non violent crimes. It is truly touching and sensitively deals with the serious concern that the drug policy in America has resulted in devastating millions of families.

The film has provided shocking statistics of how individuals belonging to minority communities have been targeted by law enforcement officials and the manner in which the drug policy has fostered the growth of systematic racism in this nation. The history of the drug policy has been traced and linked with racism. Central characters like Michelle Jackson and David Simon and their views on the war on drugs in America have been vividly portrayed in this film. The stand maintained by Mark Bennett, U. S. district court judge for the northern district of Iowa of sentencing around 1500 individuals in a career spanning one and a half decade has revealed the ‘ prison boom’ in America.

However, the film is not free from its limitations. It has often maintained certain stance without providing statistical data. Many American states have revised their drug policies. California, for one, has permitted the sale and prescription of marijuana for medical aid. This has actually helped the state to cut down criminal penalties owing to possession and use of the drug. Furthermore special courts are being established in many American states to cope with drug offenders in a targeted manner. More focus is being provided to choices related to treatment and parole (Hakim, 2011).

### **The intended audience**

Eugene Jaricki deftly presents the documentary in order to create awareness among the general public in the United States of America. The war on drugs has been steadily destroying homes and family for the past four decades.

The film shows the vivid history of America's drug policy and traces it to racism. It maintains that the nation did not want Chinese immigrants to stay and hence they devised the drug policy and put them in jail for abusing drugs. Moreover, the film has maintained that poverty and joblessness has forced scores of individuals to take up the dangerous profession of drug trafficking. It has revealed vivid and shocking details of the manner in which families were forced to take up this highly profitable and at the same time degrading profession. The economic recession has further worsened situations wherein people are poor and jobless. Selling and using drugs is a manner in which they can earn fast bucks and most of them have been forced to take this profession. Tracing the story of Nannie Jeter, the director maintains that when the family moved to Connecticut, she accompanied them mainly because her salary was doubled. At the same time, her son missed his mother and took to drugs. Countless stories of the unfair sentencing policy have been revealed in this film. Moreover, the film concludes that only handful individuals will not be able to do away the harm done to the society in the past forty years. Tracing the history of the drug policy and the stand taken by the congressman, the film further maintains that the drug policy has led to the prison boom which in turn has benefitted many corporations, medical units and entire communities. Also the prison inmates are provided limited or sometimes no rehabilitation and this leads them to display the same deviant behaviour once they are out of the prison. The drug war has been termed as slow holocaust in which poor people are targeted. It has led to the creation of a hopeless yet extremely corrosive culture in America. The intended audience for the film are the masses, policy

makers, experts, social reformers, congressman and all those involved in the drug policy.

## **Film conclusions**

The film concludes that the ordinary people are concerned with a peaceful and a contented life and the anti drug policy is robbing them of this life of contentment. The policy which had started targeting the minority communities have switched over to target the bottom 15 percent of the population. This translates to the fact that even the poor white population are bearing the brunt of U. S. anti drug policy. The country is reeling under economic downturn and this has led to joblessness and forced people to turn to drug trafficking so as to earn money.

The film shows that the law enforcement department gets incentive by making arrests. It clearly displays the reinforcement that the officers get in arresting individuals for drug charges and also hints on their chances for promotion. It also narrates that whereas arrests made for heinous crimes like murder, rape and robbery has declined, the arrests made for drug charges has doubled. It states that the anti drug policy has robbed people of having a decent life after completion of prison term. It further hints that such individuals find it difficult to attain jobs; they cannot get particular grants if they want to complete their education, denial of certain healthcare aids and are not allowed to stay in certain neighbourhoods. Also if their families reside in public housing, such individuals are not allowed to stay there after completion of prison term. In a way, the drug law robs the individual of a decent life and leaves the person with no other viable option than to begin selling drugs again. Hence, the conclusion in this case that the government

is slowly killing the poor and jobless has been well portrayed in this film. The film has been extremely touchy and has displayed the protests made by several judges against the sentencing act and the Obama government has made some changes to the existing drug policy. In other words, the film has showcased the miserable failure of the American government's war on drugs.

### **Impact on Public Policy**

The film, *The House I Live In*, provides a reasonable conclusion. It suggests that the masses should protest against the racially favourable anti drug policy. The policy has caused harm to the country for a long time as it is draconian in nature. The entire policy has been propaganda and has raised pertinent questions about the efficacy and intent of the war on drugs. The country should distinguish myth from realism and develop laws and social policies which are practical and reasonable. The film compels the viewer to retrospect on severe consequences of the drug policy in America. It demonstrates that people are jailed for longer time periods, they may not look for treatment for fear of being ostracised in the society, they find it difficult to find out once out of jail and other consequences which make them a social outcast (Tonti, 2012 - 13). The current change in the drug policy by the Obama government has been the first of its kind. This has come after immense efforts and vehement protests by experts, social reformers and individuals impacted by the drug policy.

The film has effortlessly captured the history of America's drug policy and has revealed that it fostered racism. The film has all through displayed the manner in which the War on Drugs impacted people from minority

communities. The early history targeted the Chinese and put them behind bars for abusing drugs. Experts maintain that the society should strive to foster public health, help the poor to get jobs and receive a proper education instead of robbing them a decent life (Howard, 2013). The film portrayed that the society should look at options which may help in treatment and prevention of drug use. Instead the drug policy is devastating the lives of families and individuals. This has resulted in boosting the debate for drug legalization in the United States of America (Anthony, 2013).

### **In retrospect**

The film has compelled its viewers to retrospect on a particular issue that has been prevalent in the United States of America from decades. It is the issue of racial discrimination. This issue has raised serious questions on America's War on Drugs and the manner in which it has devastated several individuals and families. The film could have even portrayed the current laws against racial discrimination and the reason behind their failures. The drug policy is a part of a greater vice. One of the central characters, Nannie Jeter has mentioned this in passing. She remarks that if a black woman is raped then no charges can be pressed against the rapist. This suggests that the social policy of the nation ostracizes blacks and the entire public policy has been infested with racially discriminative outlook. The failure of the War on Drug is due to the fact that it is draconian in nature. As mentioned by David Simon, it is slow holocaust. The film has urged the people to stand up against the drug policy prevalent in America. However, it is also necessary for the people to fight against vice like racial discrimination which is still thriving in this nation. The film would have a more enduring impact if it had

urged the masses and the policy makers to change their mindset and embrace people of colour instead of ostracizing them.

## **Conclusion**

The film, *The House I Live In*, is the first of its kind and recognizes the fact that abusing drugs is a severe public health concern and cannot be solved by the law enforcement body. It has provided a shocking and detailed history of drug abuse by associating it with racial discrimination and a vote bank for the politicians. The film has vividly portrayed the manner in which the policy has fuelled financial and political corruption. This may be one of the reasons for the unfair sentencing act to remain unchanged for such a long time. It has helped in serving the interests of political bodies at the cost of destructing innocent lives and families. The drug policy in America highlights consistent evidence of practical, economic and moral failures. The film has helped in making the American public aware about the serious after-effects of the drug policy and at the same time has paved the way for encouraging innovative manners to reform the current drug policy.

## **References**

- Anthony, A. (2013, March 31). Eugene Jarecki and the campaign to end America's war on drugs. Retrieved November 08, 2013 from <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/30/eugene-jarecki-war-on-drugs>
- CNN Library (2013, September 02). Mexico drug war fast facts. Retrieved November 07, 2013 from <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/02/world/americas/mexico-drug-war-fast-facts/>
- Hakim, S. (2011). Rethinking US drug policy. *Inter-American Dialogue*.

Retrieved November 07, 2013 from <http://www.thedialogue.org/PublicationFiles/Rethinking%20US%20Drug%20Policy.pdf>

Howard, B. C. (2013, January 22). The War on Drugs is a “ Miserable Failure”.

Retrieved November 08, 2013 from <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/01/22/the-war-on-drugs-is-a-miserable-failure/>

NAACP (2013). Criminal Justice Fact Sheet. Retrieved November 07, 2013 from <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>

Provine, D. M. (2007). Unequal under law: race in the war on drugs. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tonti, A. (2012 - 13). The truth teller: Carl Hart researches drug effects in humans to separate myth from reality. Retrieved November 08, 2013 from <http://www.college.columbia.edu/cct/winter12/features6>