

America's Poor Kids

Wed Mar 6, 9-10pm, BBC2

By Gabriel Tate

Wed Feb 27 2013

Time Out Ratings



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If ever we wished a format wasn't exportable, it's this. But Brian Woods and Jezza Neumann's concept of analysing the realities and effects of poverty through interviews with children proves just as punishingly effective in the States as it did in 2011's UK documentary.

Focusing on three lowan families laid low by the recession, it exposes the fallacy of right-wing claims that welfare is a hammock rather than a safety net. The parents are desperate to work and the kids desperate to learn, but unemployment benefit is pitiful, medical insurance scanty and waiting lists for subsidised housing on the rise. Theirs are itinerant lives of homeless shelters, motels and a constant, gnawing hunger.

As ever, the kids cut to the quick with the heartbreaking maturity of their observations: 'Grades is my only way out of here,' says 13-year-old Johnny; 'This is not the Great American Dream,' reckons 11-year-old Sarah. Yet there's no self-pity, which, perhaps oddly, makes this important film as inspiring as it does despairing.

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Iain Glen's titular gumshoe doesn't so much eschew genre cliché as elevate it to the level of

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In the opening sequence, as a grown man tearfully admits to be crying over a helicopter, alarm

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