

LET THE LITTLE LIGHT SHINE

A FILM BY KEVIN SHAW

A high-achieving elementary school in **Chicago's fastest growing neighborhood** is a lifeline for Black children—until gentrification threatens its closure.



Broadcast: POV PBS

Run Time: 86 minutes

Language: English

<https://www.lightshinefilm.com/>

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/672573306>

Twitter - @LightShineDoc

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[Key Images](#) / [Poster](#)

Synopsis

When a thriving, top-ranked African American elementary school is threatened to be closed and replaced by a new high school that favors the community's wealthier residents, parents, students and educators fight for the elementary school's survival.

Directed and Produced by Kevin Shaw

Produced by Rachel Dickson

Executive Producers Steve James, Sally Jo Fifer, Erika Dilday, Chris White, Leslie Fields Cruz

More about the film

LET THE LITTLE LIGHT SHINE is about a high-performing, top-ranked African American elementary school, The National Teachers Academy (NTA) which is threatened to be closed and transformed into a high school favoring the needs of the community's wealthier residents. Parents, students, and educators mobilize to fight for the elementary school's survival.

The story follows everyday parents-turned-organizers alongside NTA students and staff as they advocate to keep their elementary school, which is a safe haven for children and a community bedrock in Chicago's fastest growing neighborhood - The South Loop.

The film also posits the point-of-view of residents in favor of changing NTA into a high school that is sorely needed for its neighborhood. The theme of gentrification is rarely viewed through this lens of education, where "well-intentions" are critically seen as privileged desires, creating a disconnect dividing and reshaping communities across the country.

Under-resourced schools across the United States have been closed due to underperformance, but LET THE LITTLE LIGHT SHINE tells a **unique story of a high performing school with a 100% graduation rate potentially being shuttered for the benefit of a higher social strata.**



Filmmaker Statements

I made this film to understand why there was a movement in a booming Chicago neighborhood to close a high-performing, top-ranked elementary school that serviced a majority Black student population and transform that institution into a high school, potentially causing more harm than good to neighborhood families. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," the adage goes. Race, obviously and unfortunately, figured into the equation, but there were other factors at play – class, which is intertwined with race, gentrification, power, privilege, and politics all had a hand in creating discord amongst a community that wanted the same thing -- the best possible education for their children. The ways to achieve that goal was different for each set of residents, reminding us of harsh inequities and bias existing in our country. This story is not unique to Chicago; it is

reflective of our American experience, one where Black and Brown communities still must fight for not only a seat at the table, but in this instance, an equitable place to learn.

- Kevin Shaw (Director/Producer)

When I first stepped in the halls of NTA, I knew it was a special place. I found a tightknit, cohesive community, students eager to learn, and supportive parents. As a Chicago Public School graduate, I knew this school was unique. We followed the story over the course of two years, and everyday in the school I felt extremely connected to the teachers and students and worried that this place would disappear. Being able to share this story is an honor and I hope people who see it are as impacted as I was when I met these incredible everyday heroes.

- Rachel Dickson (Producer)

PRESS

Selected Festivals/Screenings:

True/False Film Fest (world premiere)

SXSW EDU

Filmmakers

KEVIN SHAW - Director/Producer, Cinematographer, Editor

As a director, producer cinematographer and editor, Kevin Shaw has created Emmy award-winning content for national television networks. Shaw was a segment director and cinematographer on **America to Me**, and cinematographer on **City So Real**, from Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Steve James, where they both debuted at the Sundance Film Festival and aired on Starz and Hulu respectively. Shaw's debut documentary, **The Street Stops Here**, premiered on PBS and ESPN to rave reviews. He won an Edward R. Murrow Award for his short film about a quadriplegic trying to regain the ability to walk. Shaw is an alum of Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Stanley Nelson's Firelight Media Documentary Lab.

Twitter - @kevinshaw23

IG - @kevinshaw23

FB - <https://www.facebook.com/kevin.shaw.165/>

RACHEL DICKSON - Producer

Rachel Dickson is an independent filmmaker with a background in journalism and Spanish translation. She produced **'63 Boycott** with Kartemquin Films, which was named on the Academy Awards shortlist for Best Documentary Short Subject. Dickson was a field producer for **Hard Earned**, a Kartemquin Films production which won the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Award. She was a 2021 Sundance Institute Creative Producing Fellow.

Twitter - @rachelsuzaa

IG - @rachelsuza

FB - <https://www.facebook.com/rachel.dickson.39>

Steve James – Executive Producer

Steve James' previous work includes **Hoop Dreams**; Sundance award winner, **Stevie**; **The Interrupters**, which won an Emmy, Independent Spirit Award, and the DuPont Columbia Journalism Award; Emmy winner **Life Itself**, named best documentary by The National Board of Review, and The Producers Guild of America among many others; and **Abacus: Small Enough to Jail**, which earned James a second Academy Award nomination. His Starz docuseries, **America to Me**, premiered at Sundance and was one of the most acclaimed TV shows of 2018. His most recent docuseries, **City So Real** premiered to rave reviews at Sundance in 2020.

SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS

CREDITS

Directed and Produced by
Kevin Shaw

Produced by
Rachel Dickson

Cinematography and Editing by
Kevin Shaw

Sound by
Rachel Dickson

Original Score by
Kahil El'Zabar

Executive Producers
Steve James
Sally Jo Fifer

Executive Producers for American Documentary | POV
Erika Dilday
Chris White

Executive Producer for Black Public Media
Leslie Fields Cruz

Featuring
Elisabeth Greer and Family
Niketa Brar
Teneka Brooks
Isaac Castelaz
Chance the Rapper
Olive Cosey
Tina Feldstein

John Jacoby
Audrey Johnson and Family
John "J.P." Pointer
Amy Rome
Yaa Agyena
Marieyea Crawford
Taylor Wallace
And the families and educators at National Teachers Academy

Supervising Producer
Michael Kinomoto

Consulting Producer
Noland Walker

Field Producer
Fenell Doremus

Archival Producer
Emily Hart

Graphic Artists
Dizzy Giant – Dan Sharkey
Pablo Londero
John Castelli

Editing Consultant
David Simpson
Gordon Quinn

Assistant Editors
Rubin Daniels
Pedro Urgiles

Additional Cinematography
Adam Singer
Rachel Dickson
Aiko Kojima Hubino
Joshua Jackson
Jackson James
Michael Swanson
Hannah Welever

Drone Cinematographers
Andrew Weiler
Robert Gaona
David Parfitt

Additional Sound Recordists

Alan Chow
Hayden Jackson
Zak Piper
Rich Pooler

Musicians

Kahil El'Zabar - composer/multi-percussion/flute/voice
Miguel Delacerna - co arranger/piano
Corey Wilkes - trumpet
Alex Harding - baritone saxophone
Royce Harrington - trombone
Nicholas Tremulis - guitar
Ernie Adam - drums
Josh Ramos - bass
Kasan Blackburn - composer-producer mix tracks
Meagan Mcneal - vocals
James Sanders - violin/string ensemble director
Tamara Glassburg - violin
Nora Williams - viola
David Caplan - cello

Post Production Services

Nolo Digital, Inc.
Digital Colorist - Eliot Rudmann
Assistant Colorist - Kathleen Young
BAM Studios
Sound Mixer - Matt Sauro

Legal Counsel

Donaldson Callip Perez
Swanson, Martin & Bell, LLP

Bookkeeper

Suzanne Niemoth

Transcriptions

Rev.com
Lucia Agajanian

Archival Materials Provided by

ABC News
AP Images
CBS News
Chicago Public Schools
Crain's Chicago Business
Getty Images
Redux Pictures
Megan Cottrell
Chuck Fowler

Brian Schodorf

The filmmakers would like to thank

Maggie Bowman
Kristin Feeley
Brendan Healey
Alex Kotlowitz
Beth Levinson
Linda Lutton
Marilyn Ness
Diane Quon
Heidi Reinberg
Brenda Robinson

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International Documentary Association – Pare Lorentz Fund
Catapult Film Fund
Firelight Media
Kartemquin Films Diverse Voices in Documentary

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Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Black Public Media

For Olive (Taylor Wallace's grandmother who passed in 2021)

For Henrietta (Kevin Shaw's mother who passed in 2022)

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