



## **Information for Social Change**

## ation for Social Change

*"an activist organisation that examines issues of censorship, freedom and ethics amongst library and information workers..."*

**Bowling for Columbine, USA, 2002, 125 minutes.  
Directed by Michael Moore**

### **Film review by Julian Samuel**

The United States National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS) will photograph and fingerprint Canadian citizens when they try to enter the United States. This rule applies if the Canadian in question was born in Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, or Yemen. Is America re-emerging as an apartheid state in which there is one rule for whites, another rule non-whites? Given this current political climate in America, "Bowling for Columbine" is an important, progressive film. I highly recommend it. Moore, who recently authored a book called *Stupid White Men*, should get an Oscar. However, a few problems persist.

"Bowling for Columbine" shows that Americans, even critical ones like Moore, are profoundly obsessed with their own national problems and only minimally expose their government's dictator-loving foreign policy. Americans come first, even in Moore's world. Because of free access to guns, about 11000 Americans kill each other every year. The subject of guns in America should really include an extended discussion of how America exports weapons of death and misery. The film dwells on the guns-in-America side of this subject without documenting what America does outside America. Moore ought to broaden his horizons. It is possible. (I make a few suggestions on how he might do this).

Diplomatically, and for internationalist balance, Moore inserts very short sequences of how American elites have killed people the world over. However, he does not once mention America's support for the eight-hundred pound free-range gorilla, Ariel Sharon. Is the Israeli genocide of Palestinians less important than guns-are-us homicide in America? Oh, but his film is about guns at home, why should Moore talk about Palestine? This loosely organized film takes many thematic excursions; racism in American; interviews with the makers of South Park; welfare; educational and hilarious cartoon sections on American history et cetera -- so why not a quick trip to Uzi Heaven to interview right-of-return Zionist settlers from Brooklyn and Toronto? Why does Moore *\*include\** a ten second historical clip on the American installation of the Shah of Iran while *\*excluding\** anything whatsoever on America's current support of Israel? A sense of balance might have been charitable.

The dozy sociologist in Moore awakens: "fear" is media-fed to Americans leading them into a gun culture nested in unbridled greed for running shoes, soft drinks and meat between fibreless white buns. With ugly wall-to-wall muzak behind interviews coupled with very easy-to-get anti-Bush, anti-military laughs, he shows: that Americans have tons of guns; that America is violent; that American elites bomb Aspirin factories in the Third World, whenever they feel like. These are a limited series of conclusions after 125 minutes don't you think? But he is addressing the masses. He has to keep it simple, that way it will get on TV and everyone will vote for Ralph Nader; then we will have wind power. And one by one, the fingernail removing dictators will fall, as the self-repairing ozone saves us, bringing green fields and sunshine in every pot. Moore has to sugarcoat the message. Smug, inactive, intellectuals use such arguments to defend Moore's lack of depth and courage as a documentary film-maker.

Moore uses Canada as a model country. Moore knows Canada like George W. Bush knows the Lake District. He should cultivate a critical view of us, and not hide behind his "I'm-the-sincere-film-maker-next-door" image. Our state run CBC persistently interviews apologists for Israelis: Janice Stein and Norman Spector froth views that are indistinguishable from Golda Meir's. Canada has racist parties: The Canadian Alliance and the Parti Quebecois. Both parties have repeatedly attacked minorities. He should read French-Canadian Lionel Groulx on Jews. Moore wants to give the impression that our politicians are social democrats. Was the 2002 demolition of Tent City in Toronto social democratic politics at its best?

I could not help thinking that Moore, microphone in hand, should go to Ankara, Islamabad (capitals of Turkey and Pakistan, Mr Moore), Kabul and Riyadh to ask the regional lovers of human rights about possible American connections. Would these societies become more or less democratic with or without America's help? Moore's elegant and revelatory questioning methods could be aptly applied to General Prevez Musharraf as well as the America-friendly desert princes who authorize looping off hand and heads with a wink and a nod. He could videotape a Saudi Arabian public beheading and get Condoleesa Rice to make educated comments on it. Ask away, Mr Moore, you're an American. The world's your oyster.

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