

A few Comments on Michael Moore's, Bowling for Columbine

This movie is propaganda; it is not a documentary. That should be obvious to everyone. Moore is trying to manipulate the audience. Cinéma vérité is not reality.

Sandwiched between the lies, Moore got a few things right. First, there is very little relationship between media headlines and real life. Media coverage of crime has vastly increased in the past decades while the crime rate has declined. In both the US and Canada. Fear sells. People will pay money to be frightened.

Second, the fear of crime in the US is far out of proportion with reality. Statistics show that crime rates are falling in the US even faster than they are in Canada.

Third, there is way too much racism in society. People fear other people just because they look different, and they are afraid to associate with them. Their ignorance then breeds even more fear. This is true in Canada as well as in the US.

Let me tell you what I did not like about Bowling for Columbine:

First, this is a deeply dishonest movie. It is filled with bald lies and misleading claims. Lots of film ended up on the cutting room floor.

His claims about the movie trying to 'understand' guns is misleading. He is not even trying to be objective. Viewers should be cautious.

Many of the statistics that he cites in the film are false. But who in the audience knows enough about the facts to challenge him? I challenge you to go look up on the web the factual claims he makes. You'll be surprised.

A few examples where the heavy editing distorted reality. Remember when he got the rifle by making a bank deposit? He didn't show it, but to do so, he had to pass the American police check. It sometimes takes days to comply with both federal and state laws.

Remember when he bought ammunition in Canada? That must have been illegal. According to Canadian law, you need a firearms permit. Moore is not a Canadian resident so he doesn't qualify. The RCMP is investigating the incident.

Overheads of statistics

Second, this film does precisely what Moore criticizes the mass media for doing. He's scaring people. This movie demonizes guns. And gun owners. This movie is not morally superior to the media, nor is it realistic.

Instead of demonizing blacks, Moore demonizes gun owners. Why should we feel comfortable ridiculing rural, white men, when we don't feel comfortable ridiculing black people or Jewish people?

I thought stereotyping was bad? If so, why is it good when do it to rural, white men? Aren't we supposed to be tolerant of human differences?

Third, Guns aren't the problem; crime and violence are the problem. If guns were the problem, then North Dakota or Idaho would have the highest crime rate in the US. That's where the guns are; in the rural states. Why is the gun crime in the downtown core areas of the big cities?

In Canada, Toronto has a higher crime rate than Saskatoon. I doubt you are surprised. Guns in the hands of Saskatchewan hunters cause few problems. But guns in the hands of the criminals and punks in Toronto are dangerous. Why?

Certainly, firearms can be used for evil. But they are also used for good purposes. Like self protection.

I'm a gentle person; I believe hurting other people is wrong, but it is not an absolute wrong. There are limits.

There are limits to all values. Even lying. I think lying is wrong. But I think it is right to lie to someone to avoid an even worse crime, like murder. If someone came in here and said, 'who is Gary Mauser, I want to kill him.' I think it'd be moral to lie and say, 'who? I don't know him.' Even if you did.

Back to violence. I believe I have a right – even a duty -- to use violence to stop a vicious attack upon my wife or my children. Most Canadians would agree with me.

What would you do if someone physically attacked you or your family? Would you stand aside, and let them, or you, yourself, be raped or killed? Or would you resist?

Americans use firearms between 1 M and 2.5 M times every year to protect themselves from criminal violence. 80,000 Canadians also use firearms to protect themselves, their families, or their property every year.

Millions of Americans, and thousands of Canadians, use firearms in hunting. This is a healthy sport that teaches people how to handle firearms safely. As well, the government relies upon hunting to keep game populations in check.

Fourth, the film implies that there is no gun control in the US. This is false. The US already has strict gun laws. As does Canada. These did not stop the killers.

The film also claims that more gun laws would somehow reduce criminal violence with guns. Not so. There will always be bad people. It is just wishful

thinking to believe passing more laws will stop bad people from doing bad things.

The killers at Columbine broke many laws. The law did not stop them. They obtained their guns illegally. A girl friend bought guns for them. The movie lied here saying the guns were purchased legally.

They brought their guns to school illegally.

They killed people. It is, as you know, already illegal to kill people – even high school students.

It is naïve to think that if bad people couldn't get guns they wouldn't be able to kill people. People were murdered before there were guns.

Many criminologists basically agree that gun laws do not work.

Hollywood loves to demonize guns. Guns frighten people. But swords and knives are just as deadly. The stats show that people are more likely to be seriously hurt in a knife attack than in a gun attack.

You want blood? Try a knife. Doctors have much better success patching people up from a typical gun shot wound than from large knife cuts.

No, I will not show you gory pictures of knife wounds.

Had the killers at Columbine had swords or knives, they would have been able to kill just as many people. The reason? No one fought back. Do you remember the scenes from Columbine. No one resisted. They all ran. Why?

Students were just as cowardly in Montreal, when a crazy guy killed so many female students. He ordered the men to leave the room so he could kill the women. They complied, and he did. No one even tried to stop him. Why not?

There have been many mass killings that were terminated because people shot or tackled the attacker. Others were terminated before they got started by alert citizens. These, of course, get less media coverage so you probably haven't heard about them.

The important question is: how do we create a better society?

There are no quick fixes. We shouldn't demonize a race or a tool. We will always have evil people. In fact, all of us in this room have the capacity to do evil, should we wish to. I'll bet that everyone one of you has a weapon on them right now that could be used to kill someone.

It is impossible to ban all 'weapons.' The only way we can create a better society is to attempt to create better citizens. We need to work on improving our mutual commitment to citizenship.

This film exploits public ignorance. Why is the public ignorant? Our schools have failed us. Neither Americans nor Canadians know their history. History is not a required subject. The movie implies that militias are weird and dangerous. Not so. Historically, the militia consists of all adult citizens.

Both Canada and the US are 'militia countries.' Both countries were founded upon the 'civic virtue' of the citizens.

North America has successfully integrated millions of immigrants. That is our strength and our idealism. But current schools have failed us. They do not teach citizenship.

Both Canada and the US are grounded on English Common Law tradition. In the English Common Law all citizens have a duty to protect their community. Historically, this meant we were legally required to arm ourselves.

What can we do about violence? I believe we should focus on teaching citizenship. We need greater civic responsibility.

The problem with this movie is that it frightens us about our fellow citizens. And this undermines the trust we must have in each other, if we are to keep a healthy society. The only solution that is suggested, besides ridiculing gun owners, is more laws. That's unworkable.

Both Canada and the US are democracies. That means that, once we are adults, we are citizens and therefore, we are supposed to be responsible for governing ourselves.

As citizens we are free to make choices. I think that's important. For example:

We can decide by ourselves who to have sex with, and who to marry.
We can decide by ourselves whether or not to drink alcohol.
We can decide by ourselves whether or not to drive a car, and how fast to drive.
We can decide by ourselves what religious faith to follow. Or not.
We can decide by ourselves which political party to vote for. Or not.

All of these decisions entail serious risks. But our society trusts you to be able to make the best decision. If you decide stupidly, you'll pay.

We are not just subjects to be ordered about. We are not children to be protected. Or are we?

But freedom demands responsibility. If we are irresponsible, then we invite government intervention. Government control. More laws.

And government has the morality of cancer. Growth is its only goal.

Guns serve an important role in society. As do cars.
But we have to be responsible.

The arguments against public access to guns.

First, guns are too dangerous to encourage target shooting as a sport.

False. Target shooting is less dangerous than skiing or mountain climbing or hockey.

Insurance companies, who know how to make money, know that gun ownership poses no risk.

Second, guns pose too much danger to other people.

False. Gun owners – in both Canada and the US – must get police permission to purchase guns. Consequently, they are trustworthy. Gun owners have, on average, a cleaner criminal record than people who do not own guns. They are not a threat to their family or their neighbors.

Even if they did pose a threat. We don't punish people for their potential to commit crimes, but only when they actually do commit crimes.

The final point I'd like to raise is that the film is tasteless. It exploits people's naivete or eagerness and then it uses their cooperating to embarrass them. I found this very uncomfortable.

I guess there is a market for such 'reality' television, but it shouldn't be confused with a serious, thoughtful analysis of a social problem. This is no more a documentary than is the TV shows 'Survivor.' Like Survivor it is very heavily edited.

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Blackstone's Three Absolute Rights:

- 1. The right to personal liberty, including freedom of thought;**
- 2. The right to personal security, including an undiluted right to self-defence; and**
- 3. The right to own and enjoy property.**

To “protect and maintain” these absolute rights,

English law recognized Five Auxiliary Rights:

- 1. A parliament,**
- 2. Limitations on the King's prerogative,**
- 3. Due process of law,**
- 4. The right of petition to Parliament or the King, and**
- 5. The right to bear arms.**

"Those that give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Benjamin Franklin, 1759,

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

HL Mencken