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Bowling for Columbine

Violence is an epidemic that has swept America since the creation of this nation. Many Americans ponder why this is so. This question has been especially popular ever since an extremely inspiring man wrote and directed one of the most controversial movies of the time. “Bowling for Columbine” by Michael Moore moved and changed the outlook on Americas gun laws forever through the usage of interviews and story backups collected from the press to bring forth needed knowledge of our nation’s gun wielding culture, and how blood-thirsty we really are.

Michael Moore has a very distinct process in which he brutally questions the people he disagrees with, and in a very agreeing, polite fashion questions the citizens he is in correspondence with. He starts off the interviews with James Nicols, the brother of Terry Nicols – an Oklahoma City resident who blew up a Federal Building, instantly killing 168 people. They discuss how easily accessible guns are to the public, and where restrictions should be placed. Not much is produced from this interview, put in the movie more for an entertainment factor of a mentally unstable man talking about his guns.

Mr. Moore then transitions to an interview with two teenage boys from Oscoda, Michigan. Brent, who was known around the area for distributing guns to gangs in Detroit, and DJ, the second highest ranked person likely to blow up a building in Oscoda (due to his ownership of the “Anarchists Cookbook”). This is somewhat the framework of the movie, showing how easy it is for people of any age to get their hands on basically any type of weapon they desire, and distribute it to the public.

Michael then interviews a home security consultant who is based in Littleton, Colorado. This, as many people are well aware of, is the town where Columbine High School is located. The consultant takes him to a few homes in the area and show’s him some basic home security options, to which Mr. Moore jokes around with, stating “an axe would break this down” or, “what if I had a spear, it would fit right through this”. Obviously going for the humor of the moment, but still proving these so-called “secure” doors make a very insignificant difference when it comes to the safety of the family inside.

Mr. Moore then travels just a few blocks down the road (still in Littleton), to the headquarters of the largest weapons manufacturer in the world, Lockheed Martin, and has a chat with Evan McCollum, a public relations representative at the plant. Somewhat ironic that such a tragedy happened in the same town where such a large weapons manufacturing company is located. Evan and Michael discuss why kids of such a young age would resort to such a violent act of anger and frustration, and lash out on kids at their high school. Michael also hints at the thought of, “Gee, dad goes off to the factory at Lockheed every day and builds missiles; these are weapons of mass destruction. What’s the difference between that mass destruction and the mass destruction over at Columbine High School?” Evan McCollum doesn’t agree with this statement of course, due to his job of keeping his company under good terms with the public. Evan ends the interview with stating that we, as Americans need help in learning how to deal with annoyances in our lives in non-violent ways.

The next interview is with Matt Stone, as people may know, is one of the founders of the popular vulgar cartoon, South Park. Matt grew up in Littleton, and has fond memories of Columbine High School. He wishes people had simply taken the two boys aside who shot up Columbine and said, “This is not what life is really like. High School will be over soon and you can forget about all this crap you’ve been being told about life. Start fresh.”

After the brief talk with Matt, Mr. Moore moves onto the most important interview of the film, with Marilyn Manson. Marilyn has a very popular outlook on the whole situation of the Columbine shootings, and some very good points to be brought into the equation. For the record, Marilyn Manson was one of the young boy’s favorite music artists, and was being blamed heavily for the whole incident, which he thought was nonsense. As Marilyn states, “The two by-products of that whole tragedy were, violence in entertainment, and gun control. And how perfect that those were the two things we were going to talk about in the upcoming presidential election. Also, then we forgot about Monica Lewinsky, and about the President shooting bombs overseas. Yet, I’m a bad guy because I sing some rock’n’roll songs. Who’s a bigger influence, the President or Marilyn Manson? I’d like to think me, but I’m going to go with the President.” Michael Moore then throws in the fact that the same day that Columbine happened, the U.S. dropped more bombs on Kosovo than at any other time during that war. Marilyn thinks it’s extremely ironic that people were still putting 100% of the blame on him, and not the President. He states, “It’s because that’s not the way the media wants to spin it, and turn it into fear. Buy the Colgate, or else they won’t talk to you. If you got pimples, the girl’s not going to fuck you.” Basically, fear of rejection keeps consumption up.

The rest of the movie’s interviews are all based on the following popular concept: Why is Canada so much safer and less violent than America? And why is America so darn violent within itself? He starts answering these questions by going to the Chief of police of Sarnia, Canada. We find out that in all of Sarnia, there has been only one murder in the past three years. That’s a city of about 70,000 people. And if that’s not enough for you, Michael goes over to Windsor, almost 6 times larger than Sarnia, and gets the exact same statistic. Ironically enough, the one murder in Windsor was from a man from Detroit, with a stolen gun.

Mr. Moore then digs into the question of why America is so violent. Is it because we watch so many violent movies? Is it the poverty? Is it because we have such a diverse ethnic group within the states? Maybe it’s because we have such a large population of gun-owners. Well, it’s definitely not the movies. Young boys all over Canada are dying to see the next Hollywood action-driven movie. Let’s get into the poverty excuse. While Michigan was running at a steady 4% unemployment rate, Canada in its entirety was at 9%, yet they weren’t shooting each other. And as for the diversity, 13% of Canada’s population is non-white. That’s a pretty good chunk of Non-Caucasian’s. Finally, for the gun ownership, Canada blows us out of the water. Being raised with hunting and fishing as a national pastime, Canadians own roughly 7 million guns, next to only 10 million families.

Onto some of the important stories scattered throughout the movie. Obviously he covers the Columbine shootings in a great length, showing clips recorded from the school camera’s, and a couple important statistics like, 12 students and 1 teacher were killed that day, and dozens of others were wounded in the 900 rounds of K-Mart bullets fired. No one knows exactly why these boys were in such a terrible state of mind for so long, but many fingers were pointed in various directions. Marilyn Manson as we know, being one of them. In the end of the massacre, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold turned their guns on themselves. Just 10 days after the shooting, Charles Heston held a rally in Denver, Colorado, just a few miles down the road from Columbine High School, which brought national hatred to himself and the association he represented.

The screen then goes blank and all you can hear is screams and 911 calls from people inside the High School as the shootings are happening, and not help but get a shiver from the terrible experience these people must have went through. A critically emotional scene of the movie is where you hear a couple audio clips of fathers calling, asking if their son’s are okay. Reaching out to the mothers and fathers of America, these clips give them a sense of how it must feel to not know if your child is alive or not. After the noises and conversations are over, some comparisons pop up on screen, showing us gun deaths per year of assorted countries around the world. Starting with the lowest, Japan with only 39 murders, moving up to Australia and the U.K. with 65 and 68. Next are Canada, 165, France, 255, and Germany with the second highest in the world with 381. Can you guess how many gun deaths America has? 500…a thousand? A couple thousand? Not quite. America came into the polls with 11,127 gun related deaths the year of 2002. Definitely some number crunching to put some thought into.

Moving onto the next and most historically correct scene of the movie, it shows a brief history of the United States, and how good we are at being afraid of change. It is narrated by a cartoon bullet, and starts off with the pilgrims’ journey over to the “New World” in flee of the British. Once we get there, we get afraid of the natives (Indians), kill off a bunch of them, get afraid of each other, call each other witches and start killing each other. In 1775, we start killing the British so we can be free, but that still didn’t make us feel safe, so we passed the second amendment saying every White man could legally own guns. After that, we sail over to Africa and bring a bunch of natives back here to work for us and kill off a bunch of them because we’re afraid of doing our own work. After a couple hundred years of that, the blacks outnumbered the whites in the south in a lot of parts, and started rebelling, but it was too late because the North soon won the Civil War, and outlawed slavery (yet another reason why the U.S. is such an amazing nation, we’re great at starting fights with each other). The white people then got very afraid the ex-slaves were going to revolt, so they started the Ku Klux Klan. And in 1871, the same year the Klan became an illegal terrorist organization, the NRA was founded and made it illegal for a black man to own a gun. As the bullet states, “Of course, they were not related, and this was just a coincidence. One group legally promoted responsible gun ownership, while the other shot and lynched black people.” This went on until 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to move for the white folk on a city bus, and white people just couldn’t believe it. Black people all around the nation started demanding their rights, which freaked out the white people, so they found comfort in the suburbs where it was all white, safe and clean. The white people soon went out and bought a quarter of a billion guns, locked up their houses, alarmed every entrance, and gated their communities. Welcome to our current America.

As stated before, “Bowling for Columbine” by Michael Moore moved and changed the outlook on Americas gun laws forever through the usage of interviews and story backups collected from the press to bring forth needed knowledge of our nation’s gun wielding culture, and how blood-thirsty we really are. It was an extremely powerful movie, branching out extensively into all regions of the rhetorical analysis spectrum. Highly recommend by movie-goers and documentarians around the world, going out and purchasing or renting it in the near future may change your life. “Bowling for Columbine” shed light on issues many people didn’t even know existed.

Works Cited Page

Moore, Michael, Bowling For Columbine. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 2002.