

Bowling for Columbine

A Film Review – Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

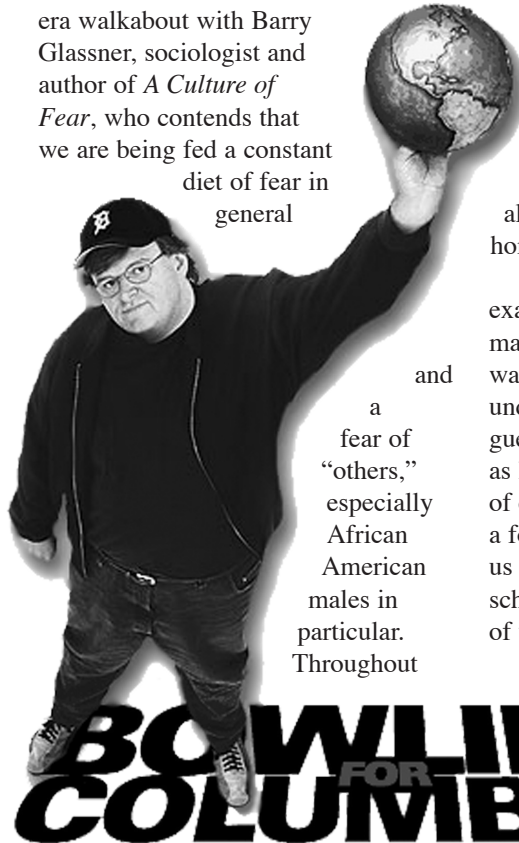
Did you know that while violent crime has declined steadily to the tune of 20% in recent years media coverage of these crimes has increased by 600%? I didn't, but I did know that I've been feeling less secure lately, what with all the child kidnappings and the sniper attacks. Yet it never really occurred to me that my fears were being manipulated to such a flagrant degree. In fact, I was even wondering if I was feeling more vulnerable because I was getting older...

But recently I went to the movies and I got a new lens on the whole fear issue... I was feeling a little anxious going in because I knew the film, *Bowling for Columbine*, might not be easy to watch, but I really wanted to see what Michael Moore had to say about gun violence in general and school violence in particular.

It turns out that the title of the film is based on the bowling class that Kleibold and Harris attended at Littleton High. The two young men actually attended their first period bowling class in the early hours that fatal morning when they took their high school hostage. The reminders of Columbine were hard to take, as were a number of other 911 calls by teachers and school personnel, but in the end it was Michael Moore's consistent questioning about our society's predilection for violence and the exposure of the media's saturation coverage of

crime that sent me reeling.

Moore takes an on-camera walkabout with Barry Glassner, sociologist and author of *A Culture of Fear*, who contends that we are being fed a constant diet of fear in general



and a fear of "others," especially African American males in particular. Throughout

of the Pilgrims, through the decimation of Native Americans and on down to the formation of the NRA and KKK during Reconstruction. He follows his thinking through history, up to, and including, white flight to the suburbs and a near hysterical frenzy of gun purchases all designed to keep "them" out of our homes and communities.

Moore's not so tongue-in-cheek examination of racial fear and its manipulation by the powers that-be was driven home in the movie and was underscored by his recent remarks as a guest on Oprah. He basically said that as long as we're consumed with fears of each other, we're sidetracked from a focus on the real problems that affect us all, problems like under-funded schools, unemployment and the threat of world war, to name just a few.

I'm encouraging all my colleagues, friends and family to see this film and I'm reading Glassner's *The Culture of Fear*. I

the film Michael Moore keeps returning to the question of why we're so afraid as white people and whether our fears have resulted in our essentially violent national culture. He even goes so far as to offer an original, animated portrayal of our nation's history as one based on fear, from the arrival

think the implications for our struggles to build community and social equity are clear and I'm hoping that the power of this film's message will open some hearts and minds that fear has paralyzed until now. ■

You can contact Debbie Bambino at dbambino@earthlink.net

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CONNECTIONS

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If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812/330.2702, kkelly@harmonyschool.org, dbambino@earthlink.net