

Grief and war: The horrible cost

From the Editors in the [July 27, 2004](#) issue

At times Michael Moore's anti-Bush movie *Fahrenheit 9/11* is simply sophomoric and manipulative—its style of satire and innuendo making it more a comedy than a documentary, more *Saturday Night Live* than *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Moore is not above ridiculing Bush by replaying clips of him nervously darting his eyes—an editing trick that could turn anyone into a buffoon.

The movie's case against the Bush presidency is also rather jumbled. Much of the first part of the movie is designed to reveal the Bush family's close connections to Saudi and American oil interests. The apparent implication is that Bush's responses to 9/11 have been governed by his personal stake in the oil business. The problem with this claim is that U.S. and Saudi rulers have been allies for years, long before George W. Bush took office, with both sides seeking to reap the benefits of oil production. Moreover, the Saudis tried to discourage Bush from going to war in Iraq, warning that it would lead to chaos in the region. So what do Bush's oil connections have to do with his policies? The Bushes' dealings with the Saudi royal family are certainly fascinating and may be well be significant—but how? Moore never even tries to connect the dots.

But the movie is still powerful and worth seeing, largely because of the attention Moore gives to Lila Lipscomb, whose son was killed in Iraq, and because of his footage of carnage in Iraq that doesn't make it on the evening news.

Moore has the good sense to let Lipscomb tell her own story. She is a flag-waving patriot who is in an interracial marriage. She is proud of family members serving in the military and she recommends military service to young people in economically depressed Flint, Michigan. The loss of her son leads her to question the military, the president, and the justice of the war.

Lila Lipscomb's raw expressions of grief and disorientation after the death of her son are the emotional center of the movie. Her questioning of the president fits into Moore's agenda, of course, but her articulation of loss transcends any arguments about a just or unjust war.

The lethal cost of the U.S. war in Iraq is being borne by relatively few families in this country. For most Americans, the suffering happens out of sight. Moore is right to want to show what that suffering is like in Iraq and how it is borne by at least one family at home.

Lila Lipscomb's story makes no obvious political statement. It speaks simply of the horrible cost of war and thereby reminds us of an old moral principle: if it is not absolutely necessary to go to war, then it is absolutely necessary not to go to war.