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# Michael Moore

## EXPOSED!

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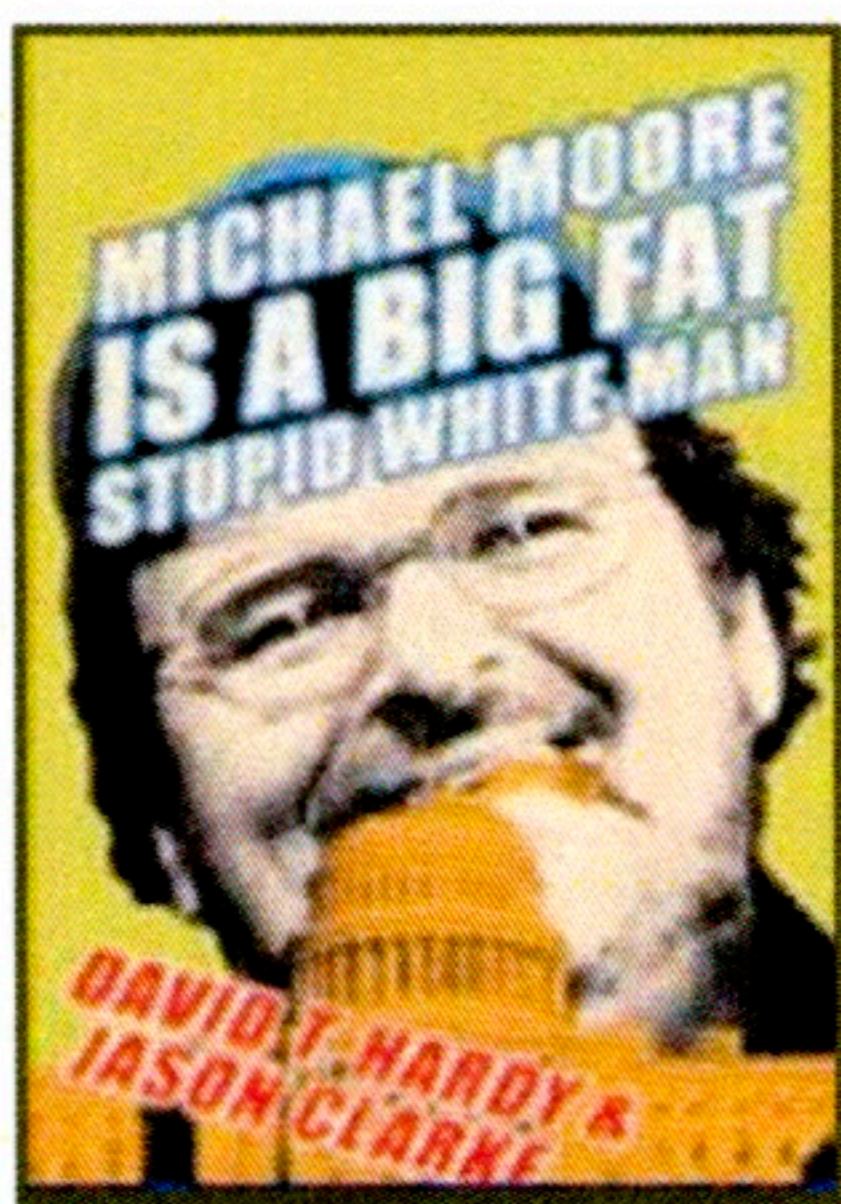
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Moore Is A Big Fat  
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by David Hardy  
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### **BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE** **Documentary or Fiction?**

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Michael Moore's "Bowling for Columbine" won the Oscar for best documentary. Unfortunately, it is not a documentary, by the Academy's own definition.

The injustice here is not so much to the viewer, as to the independent producers of real documentaries. These struggle in a field which receives but a fraction of the recognition and financing of the "entertainment industry." They are protected by Academy rules limiting the documentary competition to nonfiction.

Bowling is fiction. It makes its points by deceiving and by misleading the viewer. Statements are made which are false. Moore leads the reader to draw inferences which he must have known were wrong. Indeed, even speeches shown on screen are heavily edited, so that sentences are assembled in the speaker's voice, but which were not sentences he uttered. Bowling uses deception as its primary tool of persuasion and effect.

A film which does this may be a commercial success. It may be entertaining. But it is not a documentary. One need only consult Rule 12 of the rules for the Academy Award: a documentary is a non-fictional movie.

The point is not that Bowling is biased. No, the point is that Bowling is deliberately, seriously, and consistently deceptive.

**1. Willie Horton.** The first edition of the webpage had a section on falsification of the election ad regarding Willie Horton (the convict, not the baseball star). This was one of the earliest criticisms of Bowling--Ben Fritz caught it back in [November, 2002](#).

To illustrate politicians' (and especially Republican politicians') willingness to play the "race card," Bowling shows what purports to be a television ad run by George Bush, Sr., in his race against Governor Dukakis. For those who weren't around back then -- Massachusetts had a "prison furlough" program where prisoners could be given short releases from the clink. Unfortunately, some of them never came back. Dukakis vetoed legislation which would have forbidden furlough to



| Times Bestseller |  
| List) |

persons with "life without parole" sentences for murder, and authorities thereafter furloughed a number of murderers. Horton, in prison for a brutal stabbing murder, got a furlough, never returned, and then attacked a couple, assaulting both and raping the woman. His opponents in the presidential race took advantage of the veto.

The ad as shown by Moore begins with a "revolving door" of justice, progresses to a picture of Willie Horton (who is black), and ends with dramatic subtitle: "Willie Horton released. Then kills again."

**Fact:** Bowling splices together two different election ads, one run by the Bush campaign (featuring a revolving door, and not even mentioning Horton) and another run by an independent expenditure campaign (naming Horton, and showing footage from which it can be seen that he is black). At the end, the ad ala' Moore has the customary note that it was paid for by the Bush-Quayle campaign. Moore intones "whether you're a psychotic killer or running for president of the United States, the one thing you can always count on is white America's fear of the black man." There is nothing to reveal that most of the ad just seen (and all of it that was relevant to Moore's claim) was not the Bush-Quayle ad, which didn't even name Horton.

**Fact:** Apparently unsatisfied with splicing the ads, Bowling's editors added a subtitle "Willie Horton released. Then kills again."

**Fact:** Ben Fritz also noted that Bowling's editors didn't bother to research the events before doctoring the ads. Horton's second arrest was not for murder. (The second set of charges were aggravated assault and rape).

I originally deleted this from the main webpage, because in the VHS version of Bowling Moore had the decency to remove the misleading footage. But as Brendan Nyhan recently wrote in Spinsanity, he put it back in in the DVD version! He did make one minor change, switching his edited-in caption to "Willie Horton released. Then rapes a woman." Obviously Moore had been informed of the Spinsanity criticism. He responded by correcting his own typo, not by removing the edited in caption, nor by revealing that the ad being shown was not in fact a Bush-Quayle ad.

**2. NRA and the Reaction To Tragedy.** A major theme in Bowling is that NRA is callous toward slayings. In order to make this theme fit the facts, however, Bowling repeatedly distorts the evidence.

**A. Columbine Shooting/Denver NRA Meeting.** Bowling portrays this with the following sequence:

Weeping children outside Columbine;

Cut to Charlton Heston holding a musket and proclaiming "I have only five words for you: 'from my cold, dead, hands'";

Cut to billboard advertising the meeting, while Moore intones



"Just ten days after the Columbine killings, despite the pleas of a community in mourning, Charlton Heston came to Denver and held a large pro-gun rally for the National Rifle Association;"

Cut to Heston (supposedly) continuing speech... "I have a message from the Mayor, Mr. Wellington Webb, the Mayor of Denver. He sent me this; it says 'don't come here. We don't want you here.' I say to the Mayor this is our country, as Americans we're free to travel wherever we want in our broad land. Don't come here? We're already here!"

The portrayal is one of an arrogant protest in response to the deaths -- or, as one reviewer put it, "it seemed that Charlton Heston and others rushed to Littleton to hold rallies and demonstrations directly after the tragedy." The portrayal is in fact false.

**Fact:** The Denver event was not a demonstration relating to Columbine, but an annual meeting (see links below), whose place and date had been fixed years in advance.

**Fact:** At Denver, the NRA cancelled all events (normally several days of committee meetings, sporting events, dinners, and rallies) save the annual members' voting meeting -- that could not be cancelled because the state law governing nonprofits required that it be held. [Their attorney had advised there was way to change location, since under NY law you have to give 10 days' advance notice of that to the members, or hold the meeting anyway and vote on it, there were upwards of 4,000,000 members -- and Columbine happened 11 days before the scheduled meeting.] As a newspaper reported:

"In a letter to NRA members Wednesday, President Charlton Heston and the group's executive vice president, Wayne LaPierre, said all seminars, workshops, luncheons, exhibits by gun makers and other vendors, and festivities are canceled.

All that's left is a members' reception with Rep. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., and the annual meeting, set for 10 a.m. May 1 in the Colorado Convention Center.

Under its bylaws and New York state law, the NRA must hold an annual meeting.

The NRA convention April 30-May 2 was expected to draw 22,000 members and give the city a \$17.9 million economic boost.

"But the tragedy in Littleton last Tuesday calls upon us to take steps, along with dozens of other planned public events, to modify our schedule to show our profound sympathy and respect for the families and communities in the Denver area in their time of great loss," Heston and LaPierre wrote."



**Fact:** Heston's "cold dead hands" speech, which leads off Moore's depiction of the Denver meeting, was **not** given at Denver after Columbine. It was given a year later, 1300 miles away in Charlotte, North Carolina, and was his gesture of gratitude upon his being given a handmade musket, at that annual meeting. Even the "I only have five words for you" is edited -- it was five words for Al Gore, who was running for election on a gun control platform.

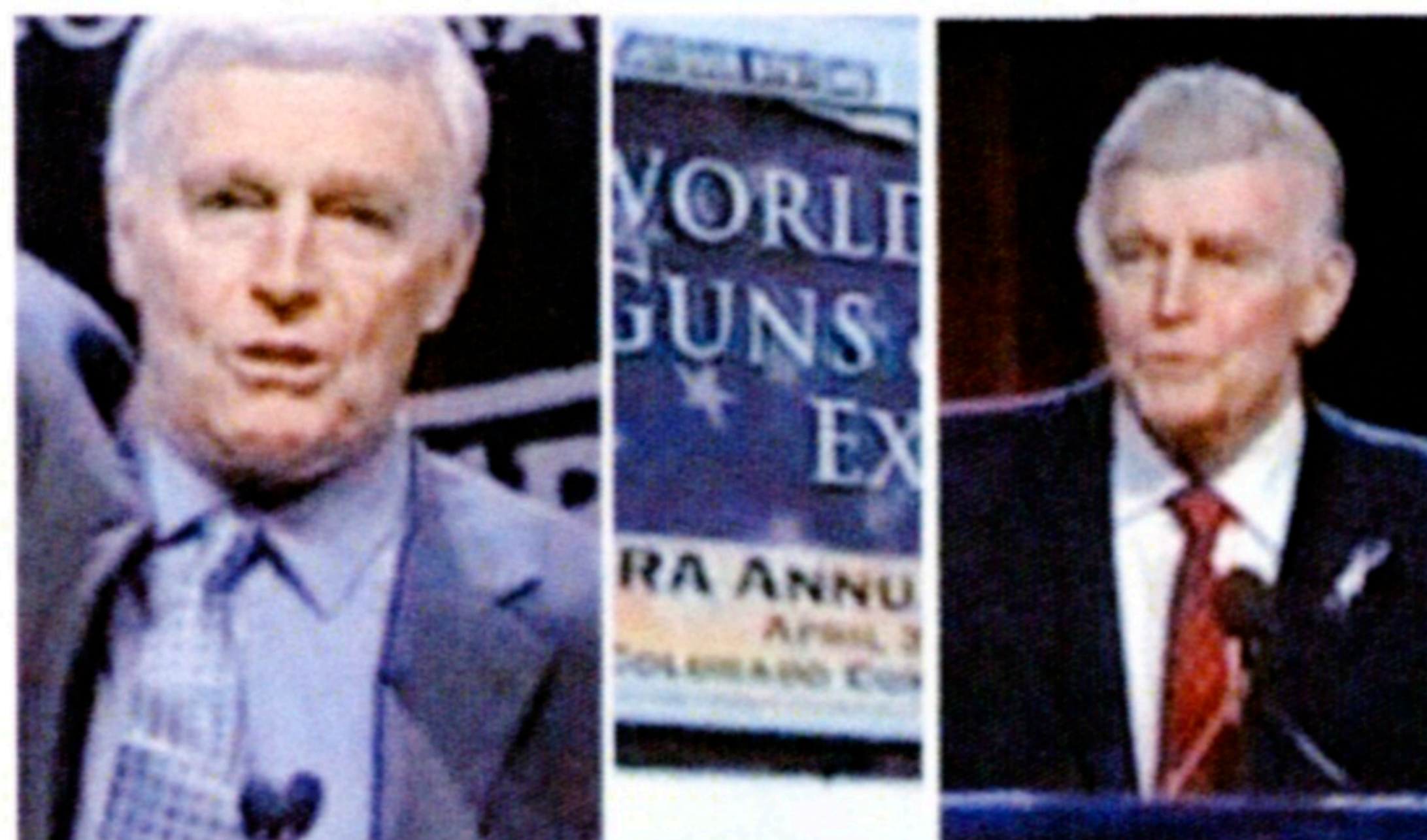
**Fact:** When Bowling continues on to the speech which Heston did give in Denver, it carefully edits it to change its theme.

Moore's fabrication here cannot be described by any polite term. It is a lie, a fraud, and a few other things. Carrying it out required a LOT of editing to mislead the viewer, as I will show below. I transcribed Heston's speech as Moore has it, and compared it to a news agency's transcript, color coding the passages. [CLICK HERE for the comparison](#), with links to the original transcript.

Moore has actually taken audio of seven sentences, from five different parts of the speech, and a section given in a different speech entirely, and spliced them together. Each edit is cleverly covered by inserting a still or video footage for a few seconds.

First, right after the weeping victims, Moore puts on Heston's "I have only five words for you . . . cold dead hands" statement, making it seem directed at them. As noted above, it's actually a thank-you speech given a year later in North Carolina.

Moore then has an interlude -- a visual of a billboard and his narration. This is vital. He can't go directly to Heston's real Denver speech. If he did that, you might ask why Heston in mid-speech changed from a purple tie and lavender shirt to a white shirt and red tie, and the background draperies went from maroon to blue. Moore has to separate the two segments.



**Moore's second edit (covered by splicing in a pan shot of the crowd) deletes Heston's announcement that NRA has in fact cancelled most of its meeting:**

**"As you know, we've cancelled the festivities, the fellowship we normally enjoy at our annual gatherings. This decision has perplexed a few and inconvenienced thousands. As your president, I apologize for that."**



Moore then cuts to Heston noting that Denver's mayor asked NRA not to come, and shows Heston replying "I said to the Mayor: As Americans, we're free to travel wherever we want in our broad land. Don't come here? We're already here!" as if in defiance.

Actually, *Moore put an edit right in the middle of the first sentence, and another at its end!* Heston really said (with reference his own WWII vet status) "I said to the mayor, well, my reply to the mayor is, I volunteered for the war they wanted me to attend when I was 18 years old. Since then, I've run small errands for my country, from Nigeria to Vietnam. I know many of you here in this room could say the same thing."

Moore cuts it after "I said to the Mayor" and attaches a sentence from the end of the next paragraph: "As Americans, we're free to travel wherever we want in our broad land." He hides the deletion by cutting to footage of protestors and a photo of the Mayor before going back and showing Heston.

Moore has Heston then triumphantly announce "Don't come here? We're already here!" Actually, that sentence is clipped from a segment five paragraphs farther on in the speech. Again, Moore uses an editing trick to cover the doctoring, switching to a pan shot of the audience as Heston's (edited) voice continues.

What Heston said there was:

"NRA members are in city hall, Fort Carson, NORAD, the Air Force Academy and the Olympic Training Center. And yes, NRA members are surely among the police and fire and SWAT team heroes who risked their lives to rescue the students at Columbine.

Don't come here? We're already here. This community is our home. Every community in America is our home. We are a 128-year-old fixture of mainstream America. The Second Amendment ethic of lawful, responsible firearm ownership spans the broadest cross section of American life imaginable.

So, we have the same right as all other citizens to be here. To help shoulder the grief and share our sorrow and to offer our respectful, reassured voice to the national discourse that has erupted around this tragedy."

"NRA members are, above all, Americans. That means that whatever our differences, we are respectful of one another and we stand united, especially in adversity."

I recently discovered that Moore has set up a new webpage to respond to a chosen few points of criticism, one of which is his, er, creative editing of Heston's speech. [Click here](#) for my response to his attempted defense of what he did, with link to his original page. Basically, Moore contends that he didn't mean for the viewer to get the impression that "cold dead hands" was spoken at Denver -- that just "appears as Heston is being introduced in narration."



B. Mt. Morris shooting/ Flint rally. Bowling continues by juxtaposing another Heston speech with a school shooting of Kayla Rolland at Mt. Morris, MI, just north of Flint. Moore makes the claim that "Just as he did after the Columbine shooting, Charlton Heston showed up in Flint, to have a big pro-gun rally."

Fact: Heston's speech was given at a "get out the vote" rally in Flint, which was held when elections rolled by some eight months after the shooting ( Feb. 29 vs Oct. 17, 2000).

Fact: Bush and Gore were then both in the Flint area, trying to gather votes. Moore himself had been hosting rallies for Green Party candidate Nader in Flint a few weeks before.

Here's the real setting, as reported in the Detroit Free Press one day after Heston's speech:

What do Al Gore, Charlton Heston, Jesse Jackson, Lee Iacocca, and George W., Laura and Barbara Bush all agree upon?

That Michigan is a really big deal right now. The candidates, their wives, mothers, and pals are here this week, as post-debate spin control ebbs and political ground control overtakes Michigan with 20 days left to Election Day.....Democratic nominee Gore is to campaign in Flint tonight; Texas Gov. Bush is to visit a Macomb County factory Thursday. . . . . For Republicans, other surrogates include former auto executive Lee Iacocca touting Bush at a luncheon today in Troy, and Tuesday's visit by National Rifle Association President and movie-Moses Charlton Heston.

For the Democrats, the Rev. Jesse Jackson is seeking to mobilize black voters for the Gore ticket Thursday at Detroit's King High School, and Energy Secretary Bill Richardson will do the same at an Arab-American Chamber of Commerce dinner Friday in Livonia.

How does Moore trick the viewer into believing that this speech, given in this context, was actually a defiant response to a shooting in a nearby town months before?

Moore creates the impression that one event was right after the other so smoothly that I didn't spot his technique. It was picked up by Richard Rockley, who sent me an email.

Moore works by depriving you of context and guiding your mind to fill the vacuum -- with completely false ideas. It is brilliantly, if unethically, done,. Let's deconstruct his method.

The entire sequence takes barely 40 seconds. Images are flying by so rapidly that you cannot really think about them, you just form impressions.



Shot of Moore comforting Kayla's school principal after she discusses Kayla's murder. As they turn away, we hear Heston's voice: "From my cold, dead hands." [Moore is again attributing it to a speech where it was not uttered.]

When Heston becomes visible, he's telling a group that freedom needs you now, more than ever, to come to its defense. *Your impression: Heston is responding to something urgent, presumably the controversy caused by her death. And he's speaking about it like a fool.*

Moore: "Just as he did after the Columbine shooting, Charlton Heston showed up in Flint, to have a big pro-gun rally." *You think: it must be very soon thereafter, and in response to it. There is a pattern here, that's the point. Heston rushes to tragedies to spout defiance.*

Moore continues on to say that before he came to Flint, Heston had been interviewed by the Georgetown Hoya about Kayla's death... *Why would this be important?*

Image of Hoya (a student paper) appears on screen, with highlighting on words of reporter mentioning Kayla Rolland's name, and highlighting on Heston's name (only his name, not his reply) as he answers. Image is on screen only a few seconds. Ah, you think you spot the relevance: he obviously was alerted to the case, and that's why he came.

And, Moore continues, the case was discussed on Heston's "own NRA" webpage... *Again, your mind seeks relevance....*

Image of a webpage for America's First Freedom (a website for NRA, not for Heston) with text "48 hours after Kayla Rolland was pronounced dead" highlighted and zoomed in on. *Your impression: Heston did something 48 hours after she died. Why else would "his" webpage note this event, whatever it is? What would Heston's action have been? It must have been to go to Flint and hold the rally.*

Scene cuts to protestors, including a woman with a Million Moms March t-shirt, who asks how Heston could come here, she's shocked and appalled, "it's like he's rubbing our face in it." (This speaker and the protest may be faked, but let's assume for the moment they're real.). *This caps your impression. She's shocked by Heston coming there, 48 hours after the death. He'd hardly be rubbing faces in it if he came there much later, on a purpose unrelated to the death.*

The viewer thinks he or she understands ....

One reviewer: Heston "held another NRA rally in Flint, Michigan, just 48 hours after a 6 year old shot and killed a classmate in that same town."

Another: "What was Heston thinking going to into Colorado and Michigan



immediately after the massacres of innocent children?"

Let's look at the facts behind the presentation:

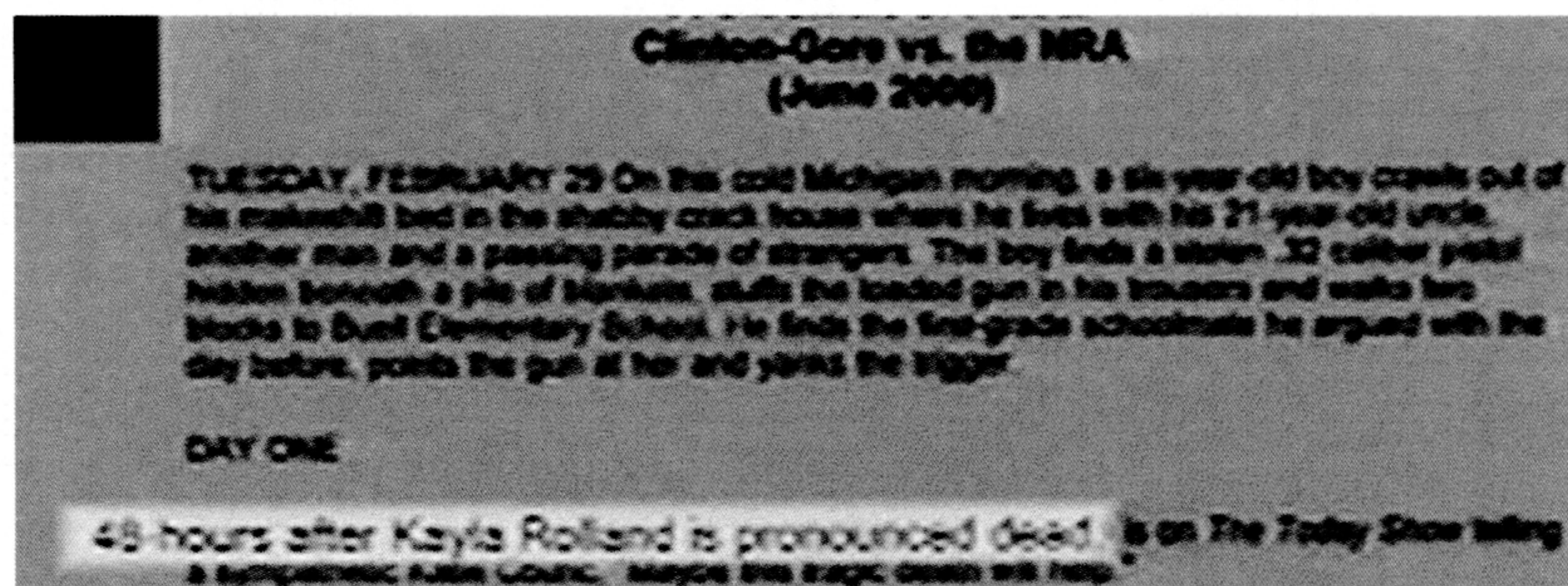
Heston's speech, with its sense of urgency, freedom needs you now more than ever before. As noted above, it's actually an *election rally, held weeks before the closest election in American history.*

Moore: "Just as at Columbine, Heston showed up in Flint to have a large pro-gun rally." As noted above, it was an election rally actually held eight months later.

Georgetown Hoya interview, with highlighting on reporter mentioning Kayla and on Heston's name where he responds.

What is not highlighted, and impossible to read except by repeating the scene, is that the reporter asks about Kayla and about the Columbine shooters, and Heston replies only as to the Columbine shooters. There is no indication that he recognized Kayla Rolland's case. It flashes past in the movie: [click here to see it frozen](#).

"His NRA webpage" with highlighted reference to "48 hours after Kayla Robinson is pronounced dead." Here's where it gets interesting. Moore zooms in on that phrase so quickly that it blots out the rest of the sentence, and then takes the image off screen before you can read anything else.



(It's clearer in the movie). The page is long gone, but I finally found an [archived version](#) and also a June 2000 [usenet posting](#) usenet posting. Guess what the page really said happened? Not a Heston trip to Flint, but: "48-hours after Kayla Rolland is pronounced dead, Bill Clinton is on The Today Show telling a sympathetic Katie Couric, "Maybe this tragic death will help."" (i.e., with gun legislation). Nothing to do with Heston. Incidentally, if you have the DVD version and the right player, you can freeze frame this sequence and see it yourself. Then go back and freeze frame the rally, and you'll make out various Bush election posters and tags.

Yep, Moore had a reason for zooming in on the 48 hours. The zooming starts instantly, and moves sideways to block out the rest of the sentence before even the quickest viewer could read it.

By the way, when interviewed by a reporter for the Times of London, Moore had to admit the point: "When I spoke to Moore last week, he



confirmed Hardy's point about the date of the speech, but angrily denied the allegation that he had misled viewers." Link to [Times webpage](#).

If this is artistic talent, it's not the type that merits an Oscar.

**C. Heston Interview.** Having created the desired impression, Moore follows with his Heston interview. Heston's memory of the Flint event is foggy (he says it was an early morning event, and that they then went on to the next rally; in fact the rally was at 6 - 7:30 PM. and the last event of the day). Heston's lack of recall is not surprising; it was one rally in a nine-stop tour of three States in three days. And, of course, he is an Alzheimer's victim. The ailment doesn't come on suddenly, but begins with a gradual loss of memory. Quizzing a man in that condition about what he did during a whirlwind tour months before is not the fairest or most decent tactic for moviemaking.

Moore, who had plenty of time to prepare, continues the impression he has created, asking Heston misleading questions such as: "After that happened you came to Flint to hold a big rally and, you know, I just, did you feel it was being at all insensitive to the fact that this community had just gone through this tragedy?" Moore continues, "you think you'd like to apologize to the people in Flint for coming and doing that at that time?"

Moore knows the real sequence, and knows that Heston does not. Moore takes full advantage.

As noted above, Moore's deception works on reviewers. In fact, when Heston says he did not know about Kayla's shooting when he went to Flint, viewers see Heston as an inept liar:

"Then, he [Heston] and his ilk held ANOTHER gun-rally shortly after another child/gun tragedy in Flint, MI where a 6-year old child shot and killed a 6-year old classmate (Heston claims in the final interview of the film that he didn't know this had just happened when he appeared)." [\[Click here for original\]](#)

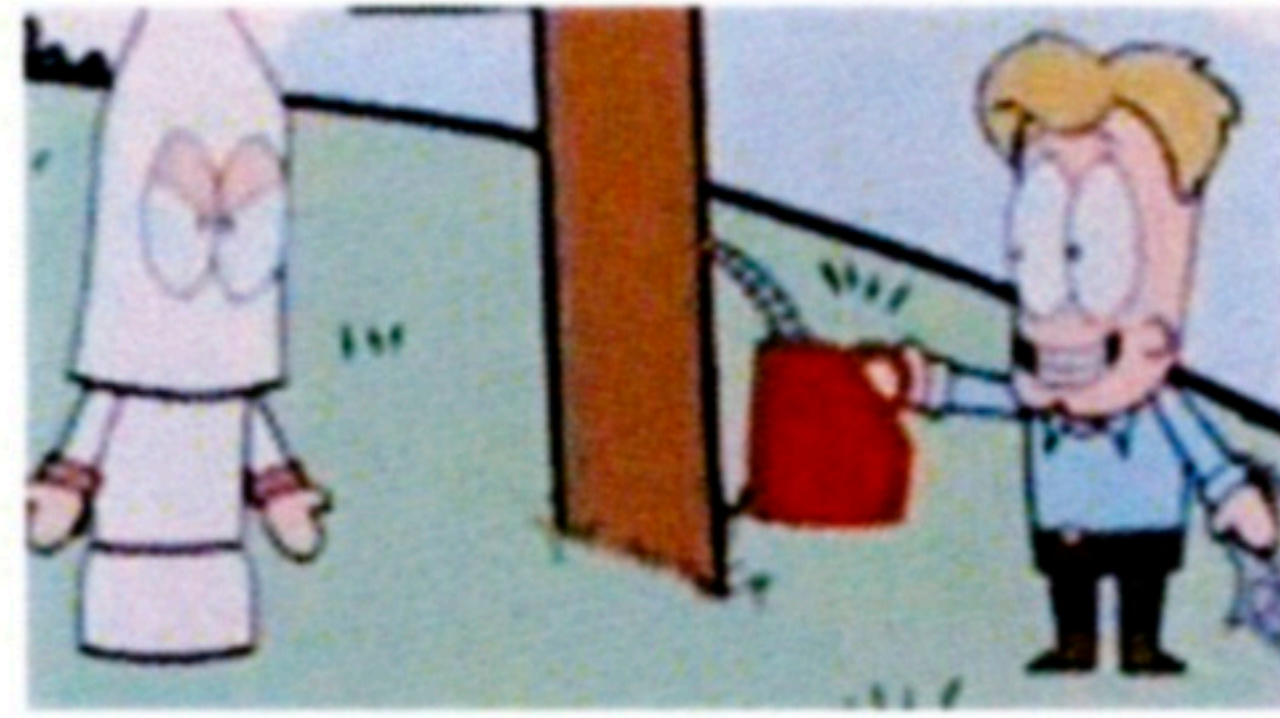
Bowling persuaded these viewers by deceiving them. Moore's creative skills are used to convince the viewer that things happened which did not and that a truthful man is a liar when he denies them.

A further question: is the end of the Heston interview faked? Moore stands on the stairs, asking Heston to stop and look at the picture of Kayla. Yet Moore is shown from front and back, with camera angle such that a cameraman behind would have been seen by the camera in front, and vice versa. Only one way to film that: film from behind as Heston walks away: *after Heston leaves*, have the cameraman come around in front to film the pleas about looking at the picture.

**3. Animated sequence equating NRA with KKK.** In an animated history send-up, with the narrator talking rapidly, Bowling equates the NRA with the Klan, suggesting NRA was founded in 1871, "the same year that the Klan became an illegal terrorist organization." Bowling goes on to depict Klansmen becoming the NRA and an NRA character helping to light a



burning cross.



This sequence is intended to create the impression either that NRA and the Klan were parallel groups or that when the Klan was outlawed its members formed the NRA.

Both impressions are not merely false, but directly opposed to the real facts.

**Fact:** The NRA was founded in 1871 -- by act of the *New York* Legislature, at request of former *Union* officers. Its first President was Gen. Ambrose Burnside, onetime commander of the Union Army. The Klan was founded in 1866, and quickly became a terrorist organization. One might claim that while it was an organization and a terrorist one, it technically became an "illegal" such with passage of the federal Ku Klux Klan Act and Enforcement Act in 1871. These criminalized interference with civil rights, and empowered the President to use troops to suppress the Klan. (Although we'd have to acknowledge that murder, terror and arson were illegal long before that time -- the Klan hadn't been operating legally until 1871, it was operating illegally with the connivance of local law enforcement.)

**Fact:** The Klan Act and Enforcement Act were signed into law by President Ulysess S. Grant. Grant used their provisions vigorously, suspending habeas corpus, putting entire states under martial law and deploying troops; under his leadership over 5,000 arrests were made and the Klan was dealt a serious (if all too short-lived) blow.

**Fact:** Grant's vigor in disrupting the Klan earned him unpopularity among many Northern whites, who were tired of the conflict, but Frederick Douglass praised him, and an associate of Douglass wrote that African-Americans "will ever cherish a grateful remembrance of his name, fame and great services."

**Fact:** After Grant left the White House, the NRA elected him as its eighth president.

**Fact:** After Grant's term, the NRA elected General Philip Sheridan, who had removed the governors of Texas and Louisiana for failure to suppress the KKK.

**Fact:** The affinity of NRA for enemies of the Klan is hardly surprising. The NRA was founded by former Union officers, and eight of its first ten presidents were Union veterans.

**Fact:** During the 1950s and 1960s, groups of blacks organized as NRA chapters in order to obtain surplus military rifles to fight off Klansmen.



**4. Shooting at Buell Elementary School in Michigan.** Bowling depicts the juvenile shooter who killed Kayla Rolland as a sympathetic youngster, from a struggling family, who just found a gun in his uncle's house and took it to school. "No one knew why the little boy wanted to shoot the little girl."

**Fact:** The little boy was the class thug, already suspended from school for stabbing another kid with a pencil, and had fought with Kayla the day before. Since the incident, he has stabbed another child with a knife.

**Fact:** The uncle's house was the family business -- the neighborhood crack-house. The gun was stolen and was purchased by the uncle in exchange for drugs. The shooter's father was already serving a prison term for theft and drug offenses. A few weeks later police busted the shooter's grandmother and aunt for narcotics sales. After police hauled the family away, the neighbors applauded the officers. This was not a nice but misunderstood family. Links: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#)

**5. The Taliban and American Aid.** In discussing military assistance to various countries, Bowling asserts that the U.S. gave \$245 million in aid to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in 2000 and 2001.

**Fact:** The aid in question was humanitarian assistance, given through UN and nongovernmental organizations, to relieve famine in Afghanistan. [Various numbers are given for the amount of the aid, and some say several million went for clearing landmines.]

**6. International Comparisons.** To pound home its point, Bowling flashes a dramatic count of gun homicides in various countries: Canada 165, Germany 381, Australia 65, Japan 39, US 11,127. Now that's raw numbers, not rates -- Here's why he doesn't talk rates.

Actually, international comparisons lead to some interesting points. Here's a webpage which gives worldwide homicide rates. The U.S. comes in at 24th place. It only made the list by edging out Armenia. Its former rival as a superpower, the states of the former Soviet Union, absolutely flatten it in this competition. Russia has *five times* the US rate. Ukraine and Estonia have twice its rate. Even Poland ranks higher. South Africa's showing is ten times the US rate! Hmm-- another point from a different section of that site. In rape rates per 1000 population, the US ranks ninth, at .32, just ahead of Iceland and Papua New Guinea. Canada is fifth, at .75, over double the US rate, and Australia is third with .80.

Now, these are figures for all homicides, not just gun homicides. The risk against which you want to protect is being killed, not being killed one way or another. But even for murder with firearms, the U.S. comes in at eighth place. We might also note that Canada has over twice the rape rate of the U.S, and about a quarter higher burglary rate, so if (as Moore contends) Canadians don't lock their doors -- they'd better start doing so.

Bias. I wanted to talk about fabrication, not about bias, but I've gotten



emails asking why I didn't mention that Switzerland requires almost all adult males to have guns, but has a lower homicide rate than Great Britain. (And, after posting this, got an email saying that Switzerland doesn't require all adult males to own guns -- not everyone is in the national militia. Here's an encyclopedia reference to their system. 36% of entire population is enrolled in the militia -- which must mean a very great part of the adult male population, " All of Swiss society celebrates shooting, and skill with the rifle. For example, each year Zurich shuts down a whole day for its "Boys' Shooting Festival."" Sounds like a plan to me.)

And, oh, yes, there is an extremely interesting paper (pdf download) by Canadian criminologist Gary Mauser, presented at a colloquium in, appropriately enough, the Tower of London, and addressing international comparisons of firearms laws and firearm crime rates. I highly recommend reading it, if you're interested in serious research rather than Moore's flashing numbers. Okay, they're mentioned, now back to our regularly scheduled program.

**7. Miscellaneous.** Even the Canadian government is jumping in. Bowling shows Moore casually buying ammunition at an Ontario Walmart. He asks us to "look at what I, a foreign citizen, was able to do at a local Canadian Wal-Mart." He buys several boxes of ammunition without a question being raised. "That's right. I could buy as much ammunition as I wanted, in Canada."

Canadian officials have pointed out (link broken--sorry) that the buy is faked or illegal: Canadian law has since, 1998, required ammunition buyers to present proper identification. Since Jan. 1, 2001, it has required non-Canadians to present a firearms borrowing or importation license, too. Source. (Bowling appears to have been filmed in mid and late 2001).

While we're at it: Bowling shows footage of a B-52 on display at the Air Force Academy, while Moore scornfully intones that the plaque under it "proudly proclaims that the plane killed Vietnamese people on Christmas Eve of 1972."

The plaque actually reads that "Flying out of Utapao Royal Thai Naval Airfield in southeast Thailand, the crew of 'Diamond Lil' shot down a MIG northeast of Hanoi during 'Linebacker II' action on Christmas eve 1972." This is pretty mild compared to the rest of Bowling, but the viewer can't even trust Moore to honestly read a monument.

(As Spinsanity notes, Moore goes even farther in his add-on DVD. There, he tells us, "And they've got a plaque on there proudly proclaiming that this bomber, this B-52, killed thousands upon thousands of Vietnamese -- innocent civilians.")

**8. Race.** Moore does not directly state that Heston is a racist--he is the master of creating the false impression --but reviewers come away saying "Heston looks like an idiot, and a racist one at that" Source. "BTW, one thing the Heston interview did clear up, that man is



shockingly racist." [Source](#).

The remarks stem from Heston's answer (after Moore keeps pressing for why the US has more violence than other countries) that it might be due to the US "having a more mixed ethnicity" than other nations, and "We had enough problems with civil rights in the beginning." A viewer who accepts Moore's theme that gun ownership is driven by racial fears might conclude that Heston is blaming blacks and the civil rights movement.

But if you look at some history missing from Bowling, you get exactly the opposite picture. Heston is talking, not about race, but about racism. In the early 1960s, the civil rights movement was fighting for acceptance. Civil rights workers were being murdered. The Kennedy Administration, trying to hold together a Democratic coalition that ranged from liberals to fire-eater segregationists such as George Wallace and Lester Maddox, found the issue too hot to touch, and offered little support.

Heston got involved. He picketed discriminating restaurants. He worked with Martin Luther King, and helped King break Hollywood's color barrier (yes, there was one.). He led the actors' component of [King's 1963 march](#) in Washington, which set the stage for the key civil rights legislation in 1964, and as president of the Screen Actors' Guild worked with King to open doors for minorities in Hollywood.

Here's the report on Heston's presentation with the [Martin Luther King Award](#) at the 2001 Congress on Racial Equality meeting. It does an excellent job of summarizing his role in the civil rights struggle.

Most of the viewers were born long after the events Heston is recalling. To them, the civil rights struggle consists of Martin Luther King speaking, people singing "We Shall Overcome," and everyone coming to their senses. Heston remembers what it was really like. More on [Heston's fight for civil rights](#).

If Heston fails to explain this in Bowling, we've got to note that Moore (despite his claim that he left the interview almost unedited) cut a lot of the interview out. Watch closely and you'll see a clock on the wall near Moore's head. When it's first seen, the time is about 5:47. When Heston finally walks out, it reads about 6:10. That's 23 minutes. I clocked the Heston interview in Bowling at 5 1/4 minutes. About three-quarters of what Heston did say was trimmed out. [Why the clock indicates six o'clock, when Moore is specific that he showed up for the interview at 8:30 AM, will have to await another investigation!]

**9. Fear.** Bowling probably has a good point when it suggests that the media feeds off fear in a search for the fast buck.

Bowling cites some examples: the razor blades in Halloween apples scare, the flesh-eating bacteria scare, etc. The examples are taken straight from Barry Glassner's excellent book on the subject, "The Culture of Fear," and Moore interviews Glassner on-camera for the point.

Then Moore does exactly what he condemns in the media.



Given the prominence of schoolyard killings as a theme in Bowling for Columbine, Moore must have asked Glassner about that subject. Whatever Glassner said is, however, left on the cutting-room floor. That's because Glassner lists schoolyard shootings as one of the mythical fears. He points out that "More than three times as many people are killed by lightning as by violence at schools." Moore didn't need Glassner to tell him that. In *Stupid White Men* he had written: "You're twice as likely to be killed by lightning as by a gunshot in school." (p. 108). So while condemning the media's "if it bleeds it leads" (as in lead story) Moore does exactly the same thing.

But media = fear = violence is as close as Moore comes to having a thesis, an explanation for homicide rate differences. But here he falls flat on his face. As one of his interviewees notes, over a period when homicide rates were falling, media coverage of murder increased by 600%. Okay, flip it around. When media coverage of homicides increased 600%, homicide rates fell. So much for Moore's explanation. In fact, so much for all of his attempted explanations. During the 1990s, homicide rates in the US went into their steepest decline in decades, with handgun homicides leading the way. That was the same period that saw the welfare reform laws, the bombing in Serbia, several million firearms sold each year -- everything, in short, that Moore condemns. (For one source, just go to the FBI statistics: between 1997 and 2001, firearm homicides fell from 10,729 to 8,719, and 1997 was after the biggest drop had occurred. How do we reconcile these drops with increased news coverage of crime?

I suppose we might go farther, and ask if Moore's film is not illustrative of what it condemns. Moore argues that the media (a) distorts reality, and (b) hypes fear of other Americans, because (c) fear is good for a fast buck. Moore distorts reality, hypes fear of other Americans ("are we nation of gun nuts, or just nuts?") and, well, made several million fast bucks.

**10. Guns (supposedly the point of the film).** A point worth making (although not strictly on theme here): Bowling's theme is, rather curiously, not opposed to firearms ownership.

After making out Canada to be a haven of nonviolence, Moore asks why. He proclaims that Canada has "a tremendous amount of gun ownership," somewhat under one gun per household. He visits Canadian shooting ranges, gun stores, and in the end proclaims "Canada is a gun loving, gun toting, gun crazy country!" Or as he put it elsewhere, "then I learned that Canada has 7 million guns but they don't kill each other like we do. I thought, gosh, that's uncomfortably close to the NRA position: Guns don't kill people, people kill people."

Bowling concludes that Canada isn't peaceful because it lacks guns and gun nuts -- it has lots of those -- but because the Canadian mass media isn't into constant hyping of fear and loathing, and the American media is. (One problem).

Which leaves us to wonder why the Brady Campaign/Million Moms issued



a press release congratulating Moore on his Oscar nomination.

Or does Bowling have a hidden punch line, and in the end the joke is on them?

One possible explanation: did Bowling begin as one movie, and end up as another?

Incidentally, Moore has issued a webpage responding to criticism. In so doing, he actually admits that much of the above criticism is accurate. He did splice the Willie Horton ad, and Heston's "cold dead hands" was never spoken at Denver, and his statistics do stem from those of the Center for Disease Control, which include self-defense and police shootings of perps. As far as the rest of the criticisms above -- strange, but Moore doesn't have an answer. Here's my response.

### **Conclusion**

The point is not that Bowling is unfair, or lacking in objectivity. The point is far more fundamental: Bowling for Columbine is dishonest. It is fraudulent. To trash Heston, it even uses the audio/video editor to assemble a Heston speech that Heston did not give, and sequences images and carefully highlighted text to spin the viewer's mind to a wrong conclusion. If there is art in this movie, it is a dishonest art. Moore does not inform his readers: he plays them like a violin.

A further thought, on a topic far broader (no pun intended) than Moore. Moore's film is unquestionably popular. He's attracted an almost-cult following. And judging from the emails I've received, plenty of his followers don't care a bit about whether they were misled. Can broader lessons be learned from this?

Suppose for a moment that Moore's behavior can be explained as a product of Narcissitic Personality Disorder, that he fits the clinical symptoms to a T, that indeed Bowling is a grand acting out of this character disorder. Does its popularity suggest something of far greater concern than one more narcissist in Hollywood? And does that in turn hold a key to mass slayings? Click here for some thoughts on that score.

dthardy at mindspring.com ["at" instead of "@" used to confuse those blasted spam robots]

P.S.: I don't have Moore's \$4 million budget (and wound up paying over a thousand in bandwidth overruns, before I found a new host), but if you could see the way to contribute ten or twenty dollars to this research, and to preparing a real documentary, please click below.

A few additions:

Some criticisms not given on this page.



Did Moore appropriate large portions from a webpage?

Equal time: emails critical of this page.

A brief reply to two responses I've received:

Objectivity: (sample email): "Your entire article is retarded. We're talking about making FILM. ALL film is subjective. Have you not even taken an entry level course in film before?"

Response: The point is not that Bowling is non-objective, or biased. The point is that it is intentionally deceptive.

Nothing is real: The camera changes everything, etc., so in video there can be no truth or falsity. Sample: "tv and movies, newspapers or even documentaries \*are\* constructions, not "the truth" ("truth" is subjective personal opinion/experience, which would be impossible to commit to videotape or celluloid)."

Response: This certainly has given me some insight into how some in the media view things! Can we agree upon one core premise: to deliberately deceive a viewer is wrong?

Talk basic ethics. Is that what you teach your kids? Truth and lies are ultimately the same, all that matters is whether you're good at it?

And don't give me the claim that filmmaking is somehow different, all filming departs from reality, so truth and lies exist for written media and not for film. All communication is symbolic; the use of verbal and written symbols to convey ideas. If anything, a documentary film purports to be less symbolic and more real: the viewer is shown things, and assumes he is himself seeing reality, rather than hearing a speaker's description, possibly unfair or deceptive, of it. If anything, this should imply a greater duty to avoid conscious deception than would apply to the written and spoken word.

Equally to the point: Moore himself repudiates these defenses, insisting that every iota of his film is objectively true. "I can guarantee to you, without equivocation, that every fact in my movie is true. Three teams of fact-checkers and two groups of lawyers went through it with a fine tooth comb to make sure that every statement of fact is indeed an indisputable fact.... [F]aced with a thoroughly truthful and honest film, those who object to the film's political points are left with the choice of debating us on the issues in the film or resorting to character assassination." Source.

Moore makes people think. This at least has some merit to it. But deception is not the way to inspire clear thinking. For that matter ... if the purpose is to inspire thought, how about giving some data? Homicide, firearm homicide, and gun use in self-defense have been extensively studied for forty years now. Kleck, Zimring, Bordua -- there is no shortage of experts here. And there is a lot of data on other matters, such as relationship of media coverage to crime. Yet the viewer hears none of this: in terms of substance, Bowling is thin as an oil slick.



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