

When They Kick at Your Front Door, How You Gonna Come?

# The Guns of Littleton

by Erica Weitzman

In his superb film, *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore manages to expose the hypocrisy of the gun-ownership-rights lobby, the fear-mongering of the mass media, the not-so-latent racism in American history and culture, and the insidious power of the defense industry. He also gets it wrong. The virtue of Moore's film is that in seeking to answer its central question—why are there so many gun deaths in America?—it brings to light a host of disparate issues that some would prefer to keep in the dark. But as for the central question itself: Moore approaches insight, but at the last moment, his argument veers away. And as any bowler knows, a little too much spin can make all the difference between a strike and a gutter ball.

Moore's argument boils

down to this: America, a country founded on the twin brutalities of slavery and the Native American genocide, has lived in a state of fear from its very inception. With the abolition of slavery and the emergence of a civil rights movement, the fear of those in power—and by extension pretty much all white men—only increased. The mass media, under the direction of the powerful, continues to foster a sensationalistic and alarmist world view—Car Crashes! Cancer!! Young Black Males!! Saddam!!!—that encourages and sanctions this fear. So everyone has their finger on the trigger, as it were, just waiting for Osama bin Laden or Ice T to come knocking down the door.

As individual claims, these statements are pretty unobjectionable. But as an explanation for America's high rate of gun deaths, they miss the mark, so to speak. Such an explanation fails, for one, to explain why Canada (Moore's fetish in the movie) has so many guns and yet so few gun deaths; why, in other words, Canadians seem to have the magical power to own guns

