

THE CHICAGOIST

Pieces and Parts

We like to consider ourselves educated about the situation in Iraq and up to date about what's going on. We scour the news each day for the latest developments, and we've even done a fair share of background reading to try and understand why things are the way they are. Then we saw [Iraq in Fragments](#), a new documentary which opens tomorrow. And suddenly we realized that we don't have a clue.



A film which ought to be required viewing for anyone attempting to have a conversation about Iraq, it's divided into three sections. The first follows an 11-year-old in Baghdad named Mohammed, apprenticed to an auto mechanic who routinely beats him. Through his eyes we see the growing tensions between the Shias and Sunnis, as well as the nightmarish conditions of city living. A man mentions casually that some of his neighbors were found murdered; these are people so numbed by daily violence that mere child abuse doesn't even warrant a comment. The second part moves to the south and concentrates on the Shiite movement spearheaded by [Moqtada al-Sadr](#). Scenes of mass rallies and bloodthirsty rants build feverishly; men suspected of selling alcohol at a marketplace are rounded up and blindfolded by a militia. One of them wails, "Before there was only one Saddam. Now there are a hundred Saddams." Part Three follows Iraqi Kurds in the far north, and their bid for independence. A family tries to live a peaceful existence by farming and making bricks, yet doubt and despair are constant even in the pastoral setting. They fly flags for [Kurdistan](#), a country which does not exist.

Filmmaker [James Longley](#) lived and filmed in Iraq for about two years, finally leaving in April of 2005 when it simply became too dangerous to stay. His

film captures much that is disquieting and frustrating, and wisely he has chosen not have a Western narrator attempt to smooth everything out. Instead he relies on the words of the Iraqis themselves. In fact, US soldiers are barely glimpsed. This is not a film about us. There are no American talking heads telling us what we should have done or what we should do now. As Langely notes, "Iraq, after all, is a country full of people who care nothing for our political arguments. They have their own lives, their own problems, their own way of seeing the world." And seeing Iraq now is to see Iraq in fragments.

Iraq in Fragments opens tomorrow at the [Landmark Century](#).