



ENTERTAINMENT MOVIE REVIEWS

Iraq in Fragments

Documentary searing

By [KEVIN WILLIAMSON](#)

"If it's like this at the begin-ning, how will it be at the end?"

-- Baghdad auto mechanic

That's the question, and plight, raised early on in Iraq in Fragments, James Longley's evocative, heartbreaking documentary told from three disparate but equally compelling perspectives: the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

The answer, and the inevitable outcome of civil war, was evident -- but not as close as it is now -- four years ago when Longley began filming his Oscar-nominated epic.

What distinguishes Fragments from rival Iraq-themed documentaries is the level of intimacy he achieves with those he interviews. It didn't come easily. The filmmaker, who won awards at last year's Sundance Film Festival for directing, cinematography and editing, spent two years coaxing their candor.

What he found, in the months following the fall of Saddam Hussein, were everyday Iraqis who were at turns nostalgic, suspicious and enraged. Because of this, the film at times feels like an historical document. With the country spiraling daily into further chaos, the cynicism of Iraqis who merely doubt the motives of the American occupiers seems, by comparison to our present, almost cheerful.

Longley's own views about the invasion are not difficult to discern, but his piece avoids politics. In letting ordinary Iraqis speak, he grants them the one thing they didn't have under Hussein -- and don't have now -- namely, a voice.

For a while the title Iraq in Fragments may seem to pertain to the broken, botched, war-torn landscape, it also encapsulates the region's fractured reality.

The film opens in Baghdad, where an adolescent boy toils under an abusive boss. School and hope, it seems, are afterthoughts.

From there, Longley takes us to Shiite cities populated by fundamentalists whose vision of democracy includes severely curtailing anyone who veers from their brand of Islamic law.

And the film concludes in the rural north, where the continually oppressed Kurds wait for U.S.-prescribed freedom to bring them happiness. By segmenting his film into three narratives, Longley himself seems to doubt that Iraq, with all its irrevocable social divides, will ever be whole again.

Like we said, heartbreaking.

IRAQ IN FRAGMENTS

1 Hour, 34 Minutes

Director: James Longley

Sun Rating: 4 out of 5