

## Morton Marcus: The secret behind the 'Bourne' films

Sentinel Staff Report

Article Launched: 08/31/2007 3:00:00 AM PDT

I've got a problem, and I know on the scale of things there are big problems -- global warming, our involvement in Iraq -- and little problems, like whether you're going to buy that new sofa or not, and my problem may seem small to you, but to me it's serious. Well, a little bit serious.

You see, films are not just entertainments to me. Even the most trashy and obviously superficial ones have moments that reveal a culture's biases, prejudices, or ideals. Each film therefore is a social, if not a political statement, and usually I can ferret out what that statement is. Call me a celluloid cop. And that's where my problem comes in -- that's where "The Bourne Ultimatum" comes in. What, I kept wondering, is the film really saying: what is it revealing about our attitudes as a society and a nation? I know the film is a slam-bang entertainment and most viewers leave it at that, but my job as celluloid cop is to reveal the hidden props holding up the silver screen images.

For three films, Jason Bourne has been running for his life, looking for his identity in the most literal way. The trilogy records the longest chase in Hollywood history -- six hours of dashing through all the major cities of Europe with a bit of India thrown in, and in this third installment we sprint through the streets of the Big Apple. The films are "picturesque," "pulse-pounding," and certainly have something to do with how anonymous areas of our government can focus enormous powers to destroy one man. We can identify and sympathize with Bourne because each of us recognizes how helpless we're becoming in the hands of corporations and government -- in this case, thank heaven, Jason Bourne is a bit of a superman.

But there has to be more, I kept telling myself, because the director of the film, Paul Greengrass, who also directed "The Bourne Supremacy," is known for his social and political concerns. Greengrass is a Brit who for years roamed the planet's hot spots for the British TV documentary series "World In Action," and whose two films previous to "the Bourne Supremacy" were intense pseudo-documentary looks at recent historical events. The first, "Bloody Sunday," [2002] examined the British massacre of Irish demonstrators in Derry in 1972, and the second, "Flight 93" [2006] reconstructed what had probably gone on aboard the ill-fated airliner that crashed into a Pennsylvania field on 9/11.

I could not believe that such a socially and politically oriented director would consent to making two films that were merely entertainments, and I said so to my wife Donna as we left the theater after seeing "The Bourne Ultimatum."

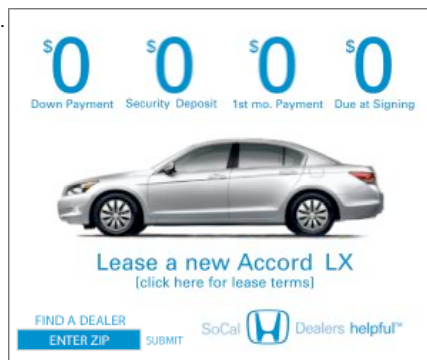
"What am I missing?" I said. "It's Greengrass. There must be more."

She smiled and replied, "There is: the women,"

I looked at her, perplexed.


"In all the Bourne films the government men are brutal and corrupt," she said. "They want to kill Bourne to hide their corruption, and they have the power to do it. But the women in the films are not corrupt. Yes, they feel sympathy for Bourne. But more, they realize they're being directed by corrupt superiors, and this leads them to help Bourne. The films are not about the corruption of our government but the corrupt people in its midst, the same targets in "Bloody Sunday" and before that in Greengrass's first film "Resurrection."

And with that, she kept walking toward the exit.



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I had stopped dead in my tracks while she delivered her exegesis, but now I lurched after her, calling, "Hey, wait for me."

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