

Morton Marcus: Are we demonizing the wrong people?

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"Who's the enemy?" That question popped into my mind after I watched two recent films, "Sicko" and "Live Free or Die Hard"

The question came up regarding "Sicko" after I read several articles poking and scratching at the film's aesthetics and factual content and then saw a short, angry letter to the editor in a local newspaper that proposed that "Sicko" would better serve as the title of Michael Moore's autobiography. All of the articles treated Moore as if he was the enemy — the enemy of these United States and all we hold dear.

That surprised me. Moore, a working-class guy whose dad was a Marine, has expressed nothing but love and reverence for this country and what it stands for. He's just examining those people and groups — corporations, such as car manufacturers and insurance companies — who are not only undermining but destroying everything for which this country stands and, yes, holds dear. It may be hard to believe but Moore is our gadfly, our Socrates, albeit a pop culture Socrates — his humor, irreverence and insights are geared to appeal to the widest possible audience. Through film he hopes to make the audience "see" what he's talking about.

"Sicko" may be his most all-encompassing expose. It concerns a topic that affects us all, whether we're liberal, conservative, Democrat or Republican, and that's health care. The film documents the vile practices U.S. insurance companies use to bend health care rules to their corporate profit advantage, and, by contrast, how other countries deal more humanely and successfully with their health care programs. And it's true that Canada, England, France and Cuba's health care practices make our system look pretty bad. But that doesn't mean Moore is our enemy.

At first "Live Free or Die Hard," seems just another Bruce Willis thriller with our action hero grown older but not less lethal. Fine, I'm one of those aging males who likes to think he's got the old testosterone still bubbling in his basket, and, besides, I think Bruce Willis' screen presence is the essence of the word charismatic: I'm a fan. But I was disturbed by the characterization of the film's bad guys. I'm not talking about Timothy Olyphant, the very Anglo-looking head villain, but his gang of enforcers. They were all French, and foreign bad guys in American films imprint the word "enemy" on our collective unconscious.

From the beginning of American film history in the 1890s, the parade of bad guys has reflected those who in real life we saw as our enemies: in historical order, they were gypsies, Germans, Japanese, Russians, and Arabs — the last as terrorists; see especially Schwarzenegger's "True Lies"

And now the French. And why are they the latest inclusion in Hollywood's rogue's gallery? Because they haven't agreed with the Bush administration's Iraq policy from the beginning. Remember four or five years ago when there was a proposal by act of Congress we rename french fries "freedom fries"?

Well, folks, France is a sovereign nation and can choose policies that do not necessarily agree with ours or anyone else's. But France our enemy? Never forget that if France hadn't given us millions of dollars and materiel, as well as naval backing, we would never have won the Revolution. OK, their aim may have been to cripple their nemesis England, but they were there for us when no one else was. In fact, the aid they gave us was the final cause of their own bankruptcy and ushered in the French Revolution.



So who is the enemy? Why do we always take such stands as those against Moore and the French? Are we afraid to examine — as citizens in a democracy must — those groups in government and the public sector that may be tampering or riding roughshod over those self-evident truths about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that we all hold dear?







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