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Movies

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'Lions for Lambs' offers glimpse into future

DEBORAH NICOL - THE DESERT SUN - NOVEMBER 9, 2007

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In post-9/11 America, patriotism has been funneled into a love it or leave it niche. Questioning the decisions of Washington is viewed as anti-American, and discussion merely slows down the path to freedom.

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It's hard to wrap one's head around Bill O'Reilly's contention that Robert Redford's latest endeavor, "Lions for Lambs," helps to spur hatred toward the United States, but at least he's not claiming Americans will die as a result of its screening (as he did for "Redacted").

Is the director's return to the camera after a seven-year absence so controversial? Will Americans with colorfast flags be picketing the production of this vocal activist? Not if they bother to watch it. It's not surprising that the film's conclusion may lean to the left, but the journey to that point is paved with thoughtful dialogue from both sides of the table.

"Lions for Lambs" takes place in a not-so-distant reality. The Iraq War is a disaster and a better world is debated simultaneously in three locations representing the past, present and future of our nation.

Tom Cruise plays a senator vying for the brass ring and his ticket there is a new direction for the war. He unveils the not-so concrete facts to the reporter who helped set his career in motion, played by Meryl Streep. She's a seasoned but disillusioned writer who has unwillingly kowtowed to a warped media that prefers

style over substance.

Meanwhile, the senator's plan is already in action. Troops prepare for battle on the other side of the world, but ask questions before grabbing their guns. These soldiers are not mindless, gung-ho killing machines.

Their mission is risky and they attempt to go forth from an informed perspective. When they find themselves literally between a rock and a hard place, the metaphor is all too prescient.

As international relations are stretched, the future is viewed through the eyes of the next generation.

Redford directs himself as a poli-sci professor, attempting to awaken a student who is wasting his potential. He uses previous students as examples - ones who just happen to be implementing the senator's strategy as they speak. Though their military course is counterintuitive to his own, he respects their patriotic commitment towards affecting change.

The world comes full circle as the three viewpoints overlap, but the immediate future remains unclear. Each character must make a choice that will ultimately change the direction of the country: the media must be truthful without catering to pop culture and slick politicians; soldiers must be educated without being brainwashed and students must learn to debate with a purpose that extends beyond the classroom.

If such thinking is anti-American, then Redford succeeds in visualizing O'Reilly's doomed nation.

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Andell Entertainment

Tom Cruise and Meryl Streep in a scene from "Lions for Lambs."

'LIONS FOR LAMBS'

Review:

Rated: R for some war violence and language

Length: One hour, 28 minutes

Cast: Meryl Streep, Tom Cruise, Robert Redford, Derek Luke, Michael Pena

Playing at: Century at the River, Mary Pickford, Palm Springs 9, Rancho 16

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