

Who Is My Neighbor

Films discussed: *Arlington Road* (1998)

Widowed when his FBI agent wife is killed by a right-wing group, college professor Michael Faraday (Jeff Bridges) becomes obsessed with the culture of these groups—especially when his new neighbors, the all-american Oliver and Cheryl Lang (Tim Robbins and Joan Cusack), start acting suspiciously.

That is what the blurb writer put on the back of the DVD case. In the movie inside it, however, the FBI agent wife is killed by the wife of a man who is starting up a gun business and whose children are murdered by a gang of FBI and military killers who have invaded the farm. And who is part of this gang of killers? The wife. And why have they invaded the farm? Because her black FBI boss is hot to get himself some of these rural white right-wingers, evidence or no evidence.

There in the blurb is the Hollywood mentality in a nutshell. So dominated are they by their paranoid leftist ideology that they can't even see the movie that they see, and some other film emerges in their minds when they write the publicity.

The film itself is much better than the blurb. Faraday teaches a college course on violence and terrorism in American politics. (The educational goal has shifted from the cultural heritage to political grooming.) The terrorist events that loom large for Faraday, however, are recent ones, two in particular. One is a bombing of an IRS building in St. Louis, and the other the above mentioned Federal attack on a farm in which his wife is killed.

Two actual events are in the background of the filmic events. One is the Oklahoma City federal building bombing in 1995, and the other is the case of Randy Weaver, whose fourteen-year-old son and wife were murdered (respectively shot in the back and targeted by a sniper while standing holding a baby) by FBI killers who had sneaked onto Weaver's land. The sniper's name is Lon Horiuchi, and he was decorated for his action and used again at Waco.

The movie's St. Louis Federal building job had been blamed on a loner who was thought to be seeking revenge over a 10,000 tax affair, for which he had been imprisoned. Faraday is not convinced and comes to think that it was done by conspirators, who managed to manipulate a likely suspect onto the scene. Quite a bit is made in the movie about the children's day care center that was in the building.

This of course was based on the famous Oklahoma City bombing where there was a special day-care center for the little fedlets, who could not be expected to mix with the common herd of children of citizens. The Oklahoma bombing is controversial because, instead of the small

number of conspirators blamed and convicted, some think there was a larger conspiracy. But the conspiracy in question was that of government agents under the control of the Clinton administration, looking to create a provocation to allow the Clinton justice department to crack down on their political enemies.

Be that as it may, part of the motivation for those known to be involved was to punish the Federal government for its massacre of a religious cult at Waco. There, in 1993, an assault force of FBI and BAFT using flammable CS gas, tanks, helicopter and machine guns attacked the cult's compound. Twenty-seven children were killed, and some of the adults in the cult's compound. Most burned to death or were asphyxiated by the gas, but some were shot. There followed a massive cover-up by the FBI and destruction of evidence.

A detailed study of both the Weaver and Waco cases can be found in David B. Kopel and Paul H. Blackman, *No More Wacos: What's Wrong with Federal Law Enforcement and How to Fix It*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997). There have also been documentary films about Waco. The FBI misdeeds in the incidents in *Arlington Road* are greatly reduced from the real world counterparts. On the other hand the threat of a highly effective "right-wing" anti-government organization is highly exaggerated in the movie. There really is very little of that sort of thing, and what there is of it is extensively infiltrated and even directed by government agents. In fact, the doubts about the government account of the Oklahoma City bombing have largely to do with the belief that the Federal government needed to cover up the extensive involvement of their own spies and agent provocateurs from multiple agencies working at cross purposes in the planning, set-up and perhaps even motivation of the bombing.

It is clear from the "making of" featurette and director's (Mike Pellington) commentary on the DVD that the director's sympathies lie with the forces of repression, and against those whom he calls, white, right-wing, and Christian. His jabs at Christians on the commentary track grew so frequent that Jeff Bridges asked him "You don't like Christians?" Pellington comes across as a leftist of the fat slob type like Michael Moore. His background is in video, MTV, and "art" (i.e. trendy crap). He has a showcase website, <https://www.markpellington.com/>. But Pellington realized that drama required toning things down and trying for some kind of ballance. On this level the film works very well.

The movie is the type of thriller that stays ahead of the viewer. It plays with conventions enough that the viewer feels he knows where the movie is headed and begins to root for the expected outcome, only to have a sharp plot reversal. There is a particular reason, and it is a interesting reason, why this works.

There is a type of movie—*The Game* with Michael Douglas is an instance—where the plot "setup" depends on the ability of some plotter to achieve precise psychological control of an unknowing victim through carefully planned and expertly executed manipulation. This can

produce a great results in the plot development of an action thriller. It is, however, completely implausible when one stops to think it through. Too little can be known about others and their reactions. Too few things can be controlled. Too many unexpected events and individuals can intervene. Manipulation of this sort only works against organizations where a rigid and specific methodologies exist asset procedures that allow an opponent to predict what the reaction must be to any given threat or provocation, and where ample resources exist to insure that the policies are followed. This can make good spy thriller movies *and* novels.

In the case of individuals this approach could never work, because everything is too unpredictable, leaving the individual's response severely under determined. That is why in the federal operations the number of people working for the state is much larger than the number that they hope to set up and arrest. Otherwise there would be no expectation of a certain result. But as the basis of a movie plot the method can appear to work, because the director can control the pace of the movie to keep the viewer from stopping to think through the implausibility of the premises of the action. It is not so much suspension of disbelief by the viewer as it is keeping the viewer involved in the action, and throwing him off balance from time to time. This is a case where what makes a good movie is opposite to what would work on a novel.

Arlington Road is this type of movie. This is fine as entertainment, of course, but Pellington is trying for more in two ways. First, he aspires to be something of a serious director. He is careful about image composition, uniformity of composition and tone, and similar filmic qualities. This does not conflict with the plot device, in fact it helps it by added another layer of film content to intrigue and carry along the viewer. But the director also aspires to say something significant about political violence and its social conditions. And here his plot device, being essentially false, because impossible, is at odds with his purpose.

The scary bomber is played by Tim Robbins who is an actor in the Donald Sutherland mold. He needs to portray both the comfortable, even somewhat charming suburban neighbor type yet also able to exude a sinister and even psychotic aura at other times. Jeff Bridges is the Mr. Everyman, like Jimmy Stewart in a Frank Capra movie. Pellington's skill with casting such pairings and extracting their dramatic potential is as much the key to the success of this movie as any other element. His hyperactive camera is distracting however: too many crane shots moving up and down pointlessly, too much film shot upwards from below the action for too long, a brief view from a helicopter used, apparently, because after half a day's futile filming from the air he didn't want to throw all the film away. There are car chase scenes that work, but fall short of what they could be because the film simply did not have the budget to do much.

The film was shot right on the edge of its budget, often with only time and money for a couple of takes of a scene in marginal conditions. In the case of this film these circumstances seemed to energize the cast and get a fast, nery feel for the movie, a case where less is more.

Granted that the movie is a success at that level, that still leaves us to wonder about the film that was not made. Given the murderous and oppressive intent of the people so often in control of Federal agencies, the amoral careerism of their personnel, and the indifference to justice of politicians and courts in these matters, why is it that the sort of terrorism portrayed in *Arlington Road* is still not justified? The film would have to grant the premise that the terrorist is a victim who cannot get justice, and not try to make apologies for the feds. It could then really and honestly take on the question of why, even so, terrorism remains harmful and evil. Such a movie could succeed at the moral level where *Arlington Road* doesn't even get started.

In the decades since the movie came out things have moved in a remarkably linear direction. We still have the state false flag operations, or the contrived events that allow the state organs to round people up and hold show trials, such as happened with the January 6 protest against election fraud. New have been the licensed insurrections, such as the Black Lives Matter (and it is forbidden to say that anyone else's life matters) and Antifa riots, where police and prosecutors are in support of the action, and when any patriot who does the right thing is persecuted. Also increasing black racism has been promoted and harnessed in the interest of the deep state. For example, in the January 6 case, the capitol police could be counted on to back illegal state action, and the prison system to engage in racist abuse of those arrested. Lawfare against any sort of patriotism or defense of Christian values is stepping up dramatically.

The press have always been whores. Hollywood has alternated between presenting this (*The Front Page, Ace in the Hole*) or portraying liberal hero reporters. The general trend has been from the former to the latter, that is decreasing honesty. The educational system has been harnessed in support of state repression and racism (in the name of anti-racism, of course) with all institutions, including religious ones lending support. The Evangelical seminaries, for example, are now backing the woke agenda, and supporting the racist interpretation of everything. The long term result, however, it not yet apparent. It may be that people at last recognize the illegitimacy of institutions, which do not server either the people or the ideological or religious values they were founded to promote.