



Moore Furious

He's back, broader than ever

CAPITALISM: A LOVE STORY: Written and directed by Michael Moore. Cinematography, Daniel Marracino and Jayme Roy. Music, Jeff Gibbs. Overture Films, 2009. R. 127 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

For several years, Michael Moore has resembled a neighborhood cop run amok, perambulating through the multiplex with a trick knee and hair-trigger temper. On film, his presence is both reassuring and upsetting: You're glad he's there, doing his part to keep you safe, but you sense he's overdoing things and it makes you retch a little. It's not as if you expect sophistication from Moore — he is, after all, a muckraker in the tradition of Ida Tarbell and Upton Sinclair — but you wonder if some crucial part hasn't come unhinged, some warning light gone ignored, in the process of making his overheated documentaries. Like *Sicko* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Capitalism: A Love Story* is both broad and wildly skittering, a loosely organized dystopian adventure resembling a chat with small children or the elderly. *Capitalism* also happens to be Moore's most personal film, a fact that partly compensates for his lazy technique and his tendency, more often than not, to connect more dots than a game of dominoes.

Having wrangled subjects like gun control and health insurance, Moore now confronts our entire economic system. The film's scope is like a runaway balloon that Moore can't bring under control, if even his timing, as usual, is uncanny. Many Americans were against the bank bailout — which Congress pushed through anyway — and those that aren't wary of the ongoing stimulus plan remain deeply suspicious of it. But while Moore's sense of injustice is finely wrought, his technique

is anything but. *Capitalism* is hobbled in the way all of Moore's films are hobbled, by a hop-scotch approach to complicated arguments and an overreliance on crying families in their kitchens. Call it Moore's First Law: There are the good folks, and then there are the folks who prey upon them. (It's simply not credible to claim that Alan Greenspan, the former Chairman of the Fed, endorsed home equity loans to get people "out of their houses.") In *Capitalism*, Moore skates from one complex subject to another — unions, starving pilots, home foreclosures, complex insurance schemes, derivatives, credit default swaps and finance — the thin ice cracking behind him with every step. His main argument, which is that capitalism is bad, never coheres, not even emotionally.

Moore's methods are so frustrating because I tend to agree with his conclusions. The recruitment of our finest young math minds to the banking industry was not only unwise, as one observer points out, but immensely destructive to American society. And the fact that the Treasury Department is basically an adjunct of Goldman Sachs is terrifyingly inappropriate. At his finest, Moore is a true innovator and crusader, like Sacha Baron Cohen in size 48. When Moore relies on genuine human encounters, like sailing to Havana in *Sicko* or visiting his father's old spark plug factory in *Capitalism*, he manages to stir up genuine unease, seeming less self-righteous than magnanimous. At his worst, his approach to truth is leisurely and accidental. Like forest fires and stinging wasps, Moore is a part of the natural order, a presence we can't live without. You just wish he wasn't so destructive in the process. **EW**

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