

FILM REVIEWS

Including this weeks picks, Iraq in Fragments and The History Boys

BY L.A. WEEKLY FILM CRITICS

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PICK  **IRAQ IN FRAGMENTS** Seattle filmmaker James Longley's poetic essay on the plight of ordinary Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds trapped in a war simultaneously waged over their heads and in their faces stands head and shoulders above an overcrowded field of documentaries about the Iraq war. Longley, who spent two years getting to know his subjects before he began filming, has a genius for access, and for gaining the trust of vastly disparate players — if that's what you call people who have next to no control over their lives — in the country's current predicament. He spends time with an 11-year-old auto-repair apprentice whose father is missing and who's raised, after a fashion, by a volatile bully of a boss in a working-class quarter of Baghdad whose residents survive on a heartbreaking mix of disgust for their current foreign and domestic oppressors, coupled with desperate nostalgia for an idealized past. In Sadr City, Longley rides in a car with Islamic fundamentalists whose anger expresses itself as a twisted desire to police the private lives of their own people. And he listens to the dreams of independence of rural Kurds who were among the most numerous victims of Saddam Hussein's murderous regime. Longley's rage against the American occupation is quiet but palpable, yet he's far too smart to finger America alone as the culprit. In its intimate, small-scale way, the movie probes the religious, ethnic and political fissures that, exacerbated by the war, may permanently slice the country into three entities — if not more. This visually sumptuous movie richly deserves the cinematography, editing and directing prizes it carried off at Sundance last January. (Nuart) (Ella Taylor)