

THE ONION

CINEMA

Iraq In Fragments



Director: James Longley
Documentary
Rated: Not Rated
94 minutes

Reviewed by [Noel Murray](#)
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James Longley's deeply embedded documentary *Iraq In Fragments* considers life in post-liberation Iraq through three stories, each showing a nation-in-progress with divided needs and divided goals. In the first, fatherless Sunni 11-year old Mohammed Haithem struggles to forge a familial relationship with his violent, opinionated boss, in a stunningly intimate, street-level sketch that mirrors the relationship between the Iraqi people and Saddam Hussein (or perhaps the U.S. occupiers). The second segment is just as revealing, examining how some Shiites are using Iraq's new democracy as a route toward restoring the religious fundamentalism long-absent under Hussein. And in the third story, Kurdish farmers try to find their place in a new Iraq, and question whether they should assert their culture at long last, or try even harder to assimilate.

The first third of *Iraq In Fragments* is so intense—a masterpiece in miniature, really—that audiences may not have much emotion left for the rest. Three consecutive emotionally wrenching short films are just too hard for any one person to process. But that's nothing to hold against Longley, who deserves credit for having the courage to document Iraq firsthand, without any kind of military protec-

tion, and also for doing it so artfully. *Iraq In Fragments* pieces together low-key audio interviews with extreme close-ups of people and their immediate environments, making it all look and sound jangled and disconnected. The movie also makes a fine fly-on-the-wall record of what the Iraqis say to each other while U.S. tanks roll through their streets. "Who cares about the oil?" one grumbles. "Why don't they take the oil and go home?"

None of this is overtly intended either as a critique of U.S. foreign policy or a defense of Islamic hardliners. Longley merely burrowed into the landscape for two years and filmed what he could, then cut it together into an impressionistic portrait of a country on the brink either of a glorious new dawn or an ignominious collapse. Mostly, he catches the Iraqis' nervous feelings of hope, as best expressed by Haithem, just after his boss yells and smacks him. "He loves me," the boy whispers. "He loves me like a son."

A.V. Club Rating: A-