

Fahrenheit 9/11 sets US politics on fire

IT'S been a few weeks since the debut of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* and it's ascension into the record books. As of this writing, it's the #1 movie in the country and the highest grossing documentary in film history. In its first two days it reached a larger audience than Moore's previous film, *Bowling for Columbine*, did in nine months. It garnered more viewers for its opening weekend than *Return of the Jedi* and it broke *Rocky III*'s record for the highest gross for an opening of less than a thousand theatres. It also garnered second place in the contest for the all-time record for the highest per screen audience of any major American film release. Way to go Michael Moore!

Perhaps now would be a good time to utter an unspoken truth about the film: It's a mediocre piece of work. *Bowling for Columbine* was a far better made and more polished film. What captivated and wooed *Fahrenheit 9/11* audiences throughout the country wasn't Moore's cinematic artistry, but the film's shocking content. Ultimately the film owes its success to the American news media and its failure to report any hard-hitting, critical news for the last four years. For people who get their information from ABC, CBS, PBS, NBC, CNN, Fox, *The Buffalo News*, *The Washington Post*, *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, the information presented in this film, and hence, the film itself, was overwhelming.

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For people who were paying attention all along, Moore presented nothing new. Hence, the film wasn't a breakthrough watershed event in their lives. What they saw in front of them was a roughly-edited documentary with a somewhat disjointed and rather incomplete narrative – not up to the standards that Michael Moore has set for himself. What's exciting, and far larger than the flawed movie itself, is the phenomenon that has emerged around its opening.

Commodifying protest

However, what Moore has created is far greater than a film. He provided Middle Americans with a social space to express concern and disgust with the Bush junta. Newspapers throughout the American heartland ran photos of lines of people being turned away from packed movie houses – sometimes in places where a movie hasn't sold out in nearly a generation.

Show after show, day after day, and now week after week, people lined up. But they weren't there just to wait for a chance to see the movie. The huge lines wrapping around buildings and snaking through parking lots made it painfully clear that there was no room for them in these theatres, yet they lined up just the same. Their very presence on these lines was an act of defiance and expression. Their bodies made a statement both to their communities and to the media.

What we saw with the debut of Fahrenheit 9/11 were thousands upon thousands of spontaneous anti-war, anti-lie, anti-corruption demonstrations, every few hours, for days on end, in over a thousand communities. Private people who would never expose themselves to the ridicule and abuse possible at public protests had suddenly found a safe venue to vent their rage. By charging admission, Michael Moore had succeeded in commodifying the act of protest, thus making it comfortable for middle-class consumerist society. To their credit, these wanna-be ticket holders may very well have ignited a revolution. Through the spectacle of their masses, they forced themselves onto the American consciousness, ultimately igniting a quantum shift in politics, legitimating formerly marginalized anti-war voices and opening up the American political debate – just in time for election season.

Attacking Moore

The Bushista response to Fahrenheit 9/11 ranges from hysterical to pathetic. One Republican-connected anti-Michael Moore website, moorewatch.com, admonishes the faithful to download and pirate Fahrenheit 9/11 in order to undermine the profitability of the film. Hell-Oh? Fahrenheit 9/11 already grossed over one hundred million dollars.

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Michael Moore is already filthy rich. Supporters of the film want as many people as possible to see it. Moorewatch's boneheaded piracy campaign will put the film into the hands of potential viewers who would never dream of paying to see it. Yeah, that will piss us all off.

Move America Forward (MAF) is another GOP-connected front group formed to attack Moore and Fahrenheit 9/11. MAF is the creation of the public relations firm, Russo Marsh and Rogers – a company that often does political consulting for the Republican Party. MAF focused its efforts on censorship, pressuring theatre owners not to show Fahrenheit 9/11. They had limited success during the film's debut week, with Republican-leaning theatre owners banning the film. After Fahrenheit 9/11's record-breaking first weekend, however, this campaign fell apart. The whole idea of convincing Republican business-people to forgo great short-term profits in order to meet a long-term goal proved futile, with the number of theatres showing Moore's cash cow doubling by the second week of the film's release.

Republicans also responded to the film's opening with the subsequent release of a book, "Michael Moore is a Big Fat Stupid White Man" – the title parodying Moore's book, "Stupid White Men." A new film, Michael Moore Hates America, financed by Internet pornographer and Bush campaign financier, Brian Cartmell, is also in the works. This anti-Moore crusade, however, fails to respond to any of the charges made in Fahrenheit 9/11, which was about George W. Bush – not Michael Moore. Moore actually gave Bush a bigger role in the film than he gave himself – in essence making Bush the star of this summer's hottest blockbuster.

Yeah, Moore's a punk

These anti-Moore diatribes aren't going to tell us anything new. Yeah, we know Moore doesn't actually live in Flint, Michigan. He lives in Manhattan's tony Upper East Side. And he sends his kids to private school. He's been known to exploit his workers and his working class credentials are paper-thin. But he never ordered the invasion of any sovereign countries. He hasn't signed any death warrants or abrogated any international treaties. He never ordered his underlings to lie to Congress or present false reports about weapons of mass destruction. He never awarded no-bid fat-cat government contracts to his lying cheating cronies. He never allowed his buddies in the energy industry to rewrite this nation's energy policy. And he never sent young Americans into harm's way for no apparent reason. So really, what kind of dirt can the Bush people sling at Michael Moore?

They also can't attack the veracity of Fahrenheit 9/11. They tried. Dick Cheney derided the movie as nothing but lies before it even came out. But Moore did a preemptive vetting

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of his own film, hiring a team of fact-checkers to make sure all of his allegations were bullet-proof before the film was released. A few media outlets ran with Cheney's charges uncontested, but others followed up on the story, ostensibly to give examples of Moore's errors. But guess what? They got a different story than the one they went hunting for. Moore's allegations all bore out as true, with Cheney once more stricken with a bout of [cloven?]-hoof-in-mouth disease.

The biggest reality that the Republican evildoers have to face is that the damage is already done. It's too late. Moore's film has energized the nation, with tear-wrenching testimonies emerging out of the American heartland by the score. And the media is playing to its audience, with even the Republican party's otherwise faithful Fox News channel hedging its bets – their reviewer, Roger Friedman, called the film "a really brilliant piece of work, and a film that members of all political parties should see without fail."

Riveting the heartland

My favorite Fahrenheit 9/11 story ran in The Fayetteville [North Carolina] Observer under the heading, "Fahrenheit 9/11 Breaks Records in Military Town." The paper quotes a theatre owner in this southern conservative town dominated by a large military base, as reporting that Moore's film broke all of their previous records, presumably for attendance, gross revenue and consecutive sold-out shows. The theatre owner reported that approximately 75% of the audience were "soldiers or military families" who, show after show, gave the film a standing ovation. The Observer quotes Republican moviegoers praising Michael Moore and deriding the Bush administration in disgust. One explains how she went to see the movie because "it fills in a lot of blanks, a lot of questions we've had about the Bush administration." Another explained, "I'm not at all pleased about the way things are going [with the war]."

Last week I heard a story from a friend who was pulled over for speeding in ultra-conservative northern Michigan, where locals previously threatened her for sporting anti-Bush and anti-war bumper stickers. The State Trooper clocked her at over 85 mph. He commented on her stickers and told her he just watched Fahrenheit 9/11. He said the part about the trooper in Oregon really touched him. He let her go without a ticket or even a lecture. Something is definitely amiss in the heartland.

Then came the unthinkable which I reported last week – NASCAR Son-of-God Dale Earnhardt Jr. admonished a million NASCAR fans on Fox TV to go out and see Moore's film, describing it as "a good bonding experience, no matter what your political belief [is]." So much for Bush's base. NASCAR fans don't just like watching cars drive in circles; they

also enjoy watching things crash and burn. And that's what Bush's fascist movement seems to be doing under the weight of Moore's populist politics.

Spooky truths

Sure, Michael Moore skipped over a few major points in Fahrenheit 9/11. He never mentioned the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). This group, dominated by current Bush administration officials, laid out the plans for the Iraq War back in the mid 1990s, basically hoping to use it as a stepping stone for world domination. Moore wouldn't have been going out on a conspiracy theorist's limb. There's nothing anyone can say about PNAC that's any spookier than what they say about themselves. Check out their website at www.pnac.org. Still, reality is often stranger than fiction and Moore was probably judicious in skipping unbelievable truths. I also enjoyed watching Fahrenheit 9/11's 20-year-old clips of the Connecticut-born-and-raised George W. Bush speaking with a New England accent, having yet to develop his fake Texas drawl. Moore never pointed this dialectic discrepancy out, probably not wanting to distract from the film's more central themes.

Not only are the allegations that Moore presents in Fahrenheit 9/11 true – they're being buoyed by a barrage of new information. It seems the film breached the Bush administration's wall of impunity, with all sorts of filth now seeping out. Audiences were shocked to learn about the Bush family's cozy relationship with the Saudi royal family and the bin Laden family. This week we learned that the US released terror suspects from Guantanamo at the request of the Saudi royals. This comes as no shock to anyone who watched Moore's film. They also shouldn't be surprised to learn that the Saudis are major investors in the Disney Corporation, which refused to distribute Fahrenheit 9/11, or that the bin Laden family-connected Carlyle Group, George Bush Senior's employer, recently entered into a partnership to buy the Loews Theater chain, in effect cutting Moore's next film off at the pass in many communities dependent on Loews Theaters.

And ultimately, the Bush team is preparing some theater of their own, having recently told the Pakistani government that they want Osama bin Laden captured during the Democratic Convention later this month. Pakistan, currently the world's foremost violator of nuclear non-proliferation treaties, has a lot to fear if the US undergoes regime change. And they should. By allowing their scientists to sell nuclear wars on the black market they've done far more to damage American security than any other regime on earth. The question is, can the drama of an Osama capture mitigate the truths of Fahrenheit 9/11, or has Michael Moore truly woken the American people from a national stupor?