

Wishing upon a star

By Michael Moore

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Thank you for all the incredible letters of support as my film crew and I once again slog our way through the corporate media madhouse. Does it ever end? Are we ever going to get control of our “free press” again? Can you wish upon a star? The Disney spin machine has been working overtime dealing with this censorship debacle of theirs. I don’t think they thought they would ever be outed. After all, they know that all of us are supposed to adhere to the unwritten Hollywood Code: Never tell the public how business is done here, never let them have a peek at the man behind the curtain.

Disney has been hoping for nearly a year that they could keep this thing quiet. As I promised on Wednesday, here are the details behind my sordid adventure with the Magic Kingdom:

In April of 2003, I signed a deal with Miramax, a division of the Walt Disney Co., to finance and distribute my next movie, Fahrenheit 9/11. (The original financier had backed out; I will tell that story at a later date.) In my contract it is stated that Miramax will distribute my film in the U.S. through Disney’s distribution arm, Buena Vista Distribution. It also gives Miramax the rights to distribute and sell the movie around the world.

A month later, after shooting started, Michael Eisner insisted on meeting with my agent, Ari Emanuel. Eisner was furious that Miramax signed this deal with me. According to Mr. Emanuel, Eisner said he would never let my film be distributed through Disney even though Mr. Eisner had not seen any footage or even read the outline of the film. Eisner told my agent that he did not want to anger Jeb Bush, the governor of Florida. The movie, he believed, would complicate an already complicated situation with current and future Disney projects in Florida, and that many millions of dollars of tax breaks and incentives were at stake.

But Michael Eisner did not call Miramax and tell them to stop my film. Not only that, for the next year, SIX MILLION dollars of DISNEY money continued to flow into the production of making my movie. Miramax assured me that there were no distribution problems with my film.

But then, a few weeks ago when Fahrenheit 9/11 was selected to be in the Cannes Film Festival, Disney sent a low-level production executive to New York to watch the film (to this

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day, Michael Eisner has not seen the film). This exec was enthusiastic throughout the viewing. He laughed, he cried and at the end he thanked us. “This film is explosive,” he exclaimed, and we took that as a positive sign. But “explosive” for these guys is only a good word when it comes to blowing up things in movies. OUR kind of “explosive” is what they want to run from as fast as they can.

Miramax did their best to convince Disney to go ahead as planned with our film. Disney contractually can only stop Miramax from releasing a film if it has received an NC-17 rating (ours will be rated PG-13 or R).

According to yesterday’s New York Times, the issue of whether to release Fahrenheit 9/11 was discussed at Disney’s board meeting last week. It was decided that Disney should not distribute our movie.

Earlier this week we got the final, official call: Disney will not put out Fahrenheit 9/11. When the story broke in the New York Times, Disney, instead of telling the truth, turned into Pinocchio.

Here are my favorite nuggets that have come out of the mouths of their spinmeisters (roughly quoted):

“Michael Moore has known for a year that we will not distribute this movie, so this is not news.” Yes, that is what I thought, too, except Disney kept sending us all that money to make the movie. Miramax said there was no problem. I got the idea that everything was fine.

“It is not in the best interests of our company to distribute a partisan political film that may offend some of our customers.” Hmm. Disney doesn’t distribute work that has partisan politics? Disney distributes and syndicates the Sean Hannity radio show every day? I get to listen to Rush Limbaugh every day on Disney-owned WABC. I also seem to remember that Disney distributed a very partisan political movie during a Congressional election year, 1998 – a film called The Big One... by, um... ME!

“Fahrenheit 9/11 is not the Disney brand; we put out family oriented films.” So true. That’s why the #1 Disney film in theaters right now is a film called, KILL BILL, VOL. 2. This excellent Miramax film, along with other classics like Pulp Fiction, have all been distributed by Disney. That’s why Miramax exists – to provide an ALTERNATIVE to the usual Disney fare. And, unless they were NC-17, Disney has distributed them.

“Mr. Moore is doing this as a publicity stunt.” Michael Eisner reportedly said this the other day while he was at a publicity stunt cutting the ribbon for the new “Tower of Terror” ride (what a pleasant name considering what the country has gone through recently) at Disney’s California Adventure Park. Let me tell you something: NO filmmaker wants to go through this kind of controversy. It does NOT sell tickets (I can cite many examples of

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movies who have had to change distributors at the last minute and all have failed). I made this movie so people could see it as soon as possible. This is a huge and unwanted distraction. I want people discussing the issues raised in my film, not some inside Hollywood fracas surrounding who is going to ship the prints to the theaters. Plus, I think it is fairly safe to say that Fahrenheit 9/11 has a good chance of doing just fine, considering that my last movie set a box office record and the subject matter (Bush, the War on Terror, the War in Iraq) is at the forefront of most people's minds.

So what will happen to my movie? I still don't know. What I do know is that I will make sure all of you see it by hook or crook. We are Americans. There are a lot of screwed up things about us right now, but one thing that most of us have in common is that we don't like someone telling us we can't see something. We despise censors, and the worst censors are those who would dare to limit thoughts and ideas and silence dissent. THAT is un-American. If I have to travel across the country and show it in city parks (or, as one person offered yesterday, to show it on the side of his house for the neighborhood to see), that is what I will do.

Michael Moore is the producer of the upcoming movie, Fahrenheit 9/11. His last movie was the Oscar-winning Bowling For Columbine