

A war designed to stir fear

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USA
Dawn
9.9.7.04

CAN a mere documentary decide the next US presidential election? Satirist film maker Michael Moore, so far as the jittery Bush administration is concerned, is one of the most dangerous men in America today. They rightly reckon that in a close race Moore is costing Bush vital votes in November. No documentary ever exerted the impact that Moore's 'Fahrenheit 9/11', a bitterly funny assault on Bush, has made at the box office.

Moore is not just 'preaching to the converted' but reaching the shopping mall cineplex masses, a majority of whom still believe the carefully cultivated lie that Saddam Hussein instigated the 9/11 attacks. If not, then what, they may well ask, was the point of the costly Iraq invasion anyway?

Films rarely matter in reality except as money-spinning reaffirmations of conventional wisdoms and shopworn fantasies. In wartime, films wave the flag and demonize the foe. At any time commercial releases are loath to challenge popular prejudices and illusions, and prefer instead to play along in order to please ticket-buying crowds. Yet Moore, creator of black-humoured political probes such as 'Roger & Me' and 'Bowling for Columbine,' slipped through the strict gatekeepers of the corporate entertainment industry to score a sizzling success and, incidentally, perform a great public service.

Moore's marvellous knack is his wry ability to express raw truths that audiences may suspect but are too uncertain or timid to express. In its opening weeks 'Fahrenheit 9/11' Americans flocked to see his heart-achingly funny expose of

dent from 1981 to 1992.

Bush was literally lifted into the ranks of multimillionaires through the auspices of influence-seeking big businessmen, with lavish Saudi backing as well. All these devoted pals appreciate that there is no higher and quicker return on investment than is gained through tax breaks, government contracts, and other special favours.

The idealized America that actor John Wayne valiantly fought for in all those old 1950s movies is long gone. Bush, the self-styled 'war president,' is actually the feckless, absent-without-leave National Guard pilot during Vietnam whose closest chum in that safe branch of the service became a Saudi representative. Moore cites an enormous cash flow from the Saudis to Bush's family and friends over three decades. Just two days after 9/11 well over a hundred members of Osama bin

from poor American neighbourhoods laid waste by official neglect, were carted off to serve the interests not of the nation but of Halliburton, Unocal and Bechtel.

An Iraqi family, raided at night by a snatch squad of GIs, weeps and trembles before their new masters. In wavering torch beams, children cower as another 'suspect' is swept up, mostly because he is a young man. Moore provides Abu Graib-like glimpses of routine racist mistreatment of Iraqis. As Moore sadly says, "Immoral actions lead to more immoral actions." These systematic abuses are what happen when cynical elites send ignorant and mostly poor youngsters off to fight for trumped-up reasons.

Backing Moore's case, a recent Senate intelligence committee's report found "no credible evidence that Iraq and Al Qaeda cooperated against the

United States." The troops righteously imagine they are exacting revenge for 9/11. A lie. But what then?

One of us has a relative, an American combat veteran who wandered by mistake long ago into the 'closed ward' of a US veterans hospital where the most gruesome cases are delicately tucked away. What he glimpsed inside left him shaken ever afterward.

You'd have to see his eyes as he told the tale. In 'Fahrenheit 9/11' Moore marshals forbidden images of the gaping wounds of maimed soldiers and civilians, the charred corpses of US mercenaries dangling on a bridge, and a long rows of flag-draped coffins.

Yet even these hideous costs might be made somewhat bearable if they really were necessary. They weren't. Moore's gripping interview with parents of a dead American soldier peels away the reflex-like obedience that passes for patriotism in many quarters in America.

The real war, Moore argues, is being waged on Americans by their own

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flocked to see his heart-achingly funny expose of Bush's trail of truculent twaddle, despite the fact that the original distributor, Disney, balked at releasing this controversial item.

'Fahrenheit 9/11' publicizes facts that were in plain sight all along. Behold footage of the 2001 inaugural where Bush's stretch limo is pelted with eggs by crowds outraged at his theft of the election because of Florida vote-rigging, a staged 'riot' of Republicans to stop a recount, and the decision by conservative Supreme Court appointees to crown him.

Moore shows the spineless acquiescence of Democratic Party leaders to this electoral travesty. Not one Senator of either party signed a demand by Black Congresspersons for a formal debate regarding the deliberate and illegitimate disenfranchisement of tens of thousands of black Florida voters, which helped hand the presidency to Bush — an outrage that has yet to be remedied. What is most shocking is that most Americans never were informed because such scenes were withheld or underplayed by national news networks, mostly owned by, shall we say, cautious conservatives.

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Laden family were spirited out of the US while police were tossing less well-connected foreigners into prisons and throwing away the key.

Moore reminds viewers that Osama bin Laden originally was nurtured by the US. In 1980s Afghanistan the US financed Osama and other feudal fundamentalists because a Soviet-backed modernizing regime obviously, in Bush's stock phrase, "hated the freedom" of those kindly Afghan war lords. Bush's backers always have had a soft spot for feudalism.

Moore's tenacious in-your-face bonhomie is irresistible to watch as he collars glib US politicians who squirm as he tries to enlist their children in the reckless Iraq war they so heartily approved.

The US Patriot Act, he shows, was a thick compilation of things that hidebound reactionaries dearly wanted to enact at the first pretext they came along. Moore circles the US legislature in an ice cream van, reading passages of the draconian legislation that US legislators signed without bothering to have read first.

George Bush, sitting clueless in a primary school classroom for ten minutes after being informed of the 9/11 attacks, is a priceless scene. There is the now profoundly embarrassing shot of George in a nifty flying suit smirking on an aircraft carrier deck with the woefully wrong 'Mission accomplished' banner unfurled like a tombstone epitaph behind him.

Bush's macho threat to the Iraqi resistance to "smoke 'em out" intersects with a scene from an ancient cowboy movie where he lifted this brave and silly B-movie phrase. Moore shows how US troops, largely trawled by sharp-eyed recruiters

argues, is being waged on Americans by their own leadership. This is an endless war, designed to stir fears and make citizens sufferers for the real agenda, which is the upholding of social hierarchy based on greed. Why else does the government plant spies in innocuous do-gooder groups while giving Osama bin Laden a two month head start to get away?

Why does this administration, which cut counterterrorism funds before 9/11, try so hard to slash money for military veterans to enable more tax breaks for the rich? Oil, of course, is far too obvious a motive for our most sophisticated minds to accept as the key reason for Iraq. Although, if there is a glaring omission in Moore's documentary, it is the intimate link of Bush administration neocons to the truculent Israeli right wing.

Moore cogently argues that the reasons Americans are told they are fighting are phony ones. Yet the gimmicks that the powerful rely upon are not working as well as usual anymore.

Today, a CBS News/*New York Times* poll finds a majority (51 per cent) believe the U.S. should have left Iraq alone. Almost two-thirds of Americans (62 per cent) say the war has not been worth the cost.

Apart from tens of thousands of dead and mutilated Iraqis, the war cost nearly 900 American lives, almost 5,000 wounded and 250 billion dollars. Word has leaked out that Bush people already are scrambling around to contrive a pretext to suspend the November elections. One suspects too there are plenty of people on their knees in the White House praying for another fundamentalist attack on the US — and that a meteor hits Michael Moore.