Bully Pulpit

By Bruce Cook

Michael Moore's film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, makes no excuses for its left-of-center POV. The unabashedly biased narrative with a venomous anti-Bush stance will have an impact on the November election. The percentage points of a minority of swing votes will decide the next leader of the free world. Moore's film cannot be underestimated, no matter how strongly its critics cry foul. Democratic Party leaders are acutely aware of Moore's influence. His face was camera front and center throughout the recent party convention in Boston.

Pundits have debated and dissected the theories put forth in the film, debunking some of the more powerful swipes Moore levels at President George W. Bush and his administration. One of the most damning visual images Moore presents is that of President Bush sitting in a child's school chair about to read to a class of elementary school students when the Secret Service rushes in to inform him that a plane has hit the World Trade Center. The camera holds steady. The President looks perplexed. Silence continues and more puzzlement fills his brow. The camera holds. Bush takes a beat, opens his book and reads to the class. The movie-going public in the theater in which I saw the film gasped. Moore's voice-over track, in his melodic tone offers, "Not knowing what to do, with no one to tell him what to do, Bush reads a book to the kids." What Moore fails to share with his audience is the fact that Bush chose not to alarm the children and finished his brief visit. The Secret Service notified him at 9:05 a.m., and by 9:30 a.m. the President was addressing the nation on television and radio.

There are other serious manipulations of fact used to suit political perspective. One in particular is the postulate that the Bush Administration, in conjunction with appropriate US governmental agencies, favorably authorized Saudi nationals—including members of the bin Laden family living in the US—to leave the country when all other flights had been grounded. In fact, these chartered flights, and other flights, including the resumption of limited commercial air travel, took place on 9/13, free from restriction and with US government sanction. Richard Clarke, the former Bush chief of counter-terrorism is interviewed in the Moore film, lending credence to Moore's theories of a Bush-Saudi conspiracy. Yet Clark testified before the 9/11 Commission that he alone had authorized the Saudis to leave the US, without any instruction from Bush. Conspiracy theory or simply a good old-fashioned mud slinging?

It doesn't matter. Truth, at least on a first pass, will not halt the delicious message of rumor and perception fed by emotion and fueled by fears of what people may want to believe to suit their own worldview. Yet, let us not forget the February 26, 1993, attack on the World Trade Center and the 1996 assault on the Khobar Towers, the loss of life and property at two bombed US embassies in East Africa in 1998, or the murderous hit on the USS Cole in 2000. All of this following the first Gulf War in which Iraq invaded Kuwait, threatening Saudi Arabia and the Western oil supply. All of these attacks were prior to September 11, 2001.

Can critics of Bush, including Moore, be so certain that there is no connection between Iraq and al Qaeda, and that the US had absolutely no call to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein and invade Iraq? Bush faces serious challenges for his re-election bid because many Americans are furious that the world did not support his plan for Iraq. Remember, the world is not known for coming to the aid of America, America is known for coming to the aid of the world.

The serious challenge now is the horrific instability in the region. Freeing the Iraqi people from the reign of a despot may lead to a safer world only if another despotic regime does not follow. America's role in the stabilization of Iraq and the Middle East at large is far more crucial than the elimination of Hussein. If we walk away, if we fail at helping to restore peace and order, Americans now and in subsequent generations will pay a price far greater. There is no such thing as peace at any price. Which brings us back to *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

One point made in the Moore film is essential to any political discourse, regardless of political allegiance. Moore ambushes Congressional members on the streets of Washington, D.C., questioning them as to whether they have sons or daughters fighting in Iraq. They do not. In fact, Moore points out that only one member of Congress has a child in the military serving in Iraq. The premise that people of privilege conduct war fought by the poor, the underclass and powerless youth is brought home via the tears of an American heartland mother who has lost her son in Iraq. "Why?" she cries in torment. "Why my son? For what?"

It is age-old anguish, tears of torment shed over war dead. There is never a "good" explanation for the death of a loved one in war, no matter how "justified" the conflict. Old men and women make war, young men and women fight and die. War may be based on principle. Killing is never the answer. Sadly, killing ends war. The ultimate oxymoron. The ultimate Catch-22. The ultimate paradox of humanity.

When Americans go to the polls on November 2, we must decide if we have the fortitude to stay the course led by President Bush. The divisiveness among the American people is unprecedented in a time of war. Experts agree that the election is too close at this time to predict the results.

Consider this before you vote: Next time you're at an airport, standing in a security line, or being frisked with an electronic wand, ask yourself if America is unjustified facing worldwide terror with force; in Iraq or anywhere else it exists. Would you be more comfortable getting on that plane if we simply removed ourselves from the Middle East all together and let the indigenous people solve their own problems?

Ask yourself if freedom, justice and peace are easily won, easily preserved and easily shared among all men. Then ask yourself who should lead America in 2004. **GT**