

## Michael Moore and Me

By Fred Barnes

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A FEW YEARS AGO Michael Moore, who's now promoting an anti-President Bush movie entitled *Fahrenheit 9/11*, announced he'd gotten the goods on me, indeed hung me out to dry on my own words. It was in his first bestselling book, *Stupid White Men*. Moore wrote he'd once been "forced" to listen to my comments on a TV chat show, *The McLaughlin Group*. I had whined "on and on about the sorry state of American education," Moore said, and wound up by bellowing: "These kids don't even know what *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are!"

Moore's interest was piqued, so the next day he said he called me. "Fred," he quoted himself as saying, "tell me what *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are." I started "hemming and hawing," Moore wrote. And then I said, according to Moore: "Well, they're . . . uh . . . you know . . . uh . . . okay, fine, you got me--I don't know what they're about. Happy now?" He'd smoked me out as a fraud, or maybe worse.

The only problem is none of this is true. It never happened. Moore is a liar. He made it up. It's a fabrication on two levels. One, I've never met Moore or even talked to him on the phone. And, two, I read both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* in my first year at the University of Virginia. Just for the record, I'd learned what they were about even before college. Like everyone else my age, I got my classical education from the big screen. I saw the Iliad movie called *Helen of Troy* and while I forget the name of the Odyssey film, I think it starred Kirk Douglas as Odysseus.

So why didn't I scream bloody murder when the book came out in 2001? I didn't learn about the phony anecdote until it was brought to my attention by Alan Wolfe, who was reviewing Moore's book for the *New Republic*. He asked, by email, if the story were true. I said no, not a word of it, and Wolfe quoted me as saying that. That was enough, I thought. After all, who would take a shrill, lying lefty like Moore seriously?

More people than I thought. Moore's new movie attacking Bush was given a 20-minute standing ovation at the Cannes Film Festival. Moore has described the movie as breaking new ground and revealing new facts, but the accounts by reviewers suggest it merely provides the standard left-wing, conspiratorial critique of the president. Reviewer Lou Lumenick of the *New York Post*, who gave Moore's previous movie *Bowling for Columbine* four stars, said the anti-Bush film would be news only "if you spent the last three years hiding in a cave in Afghanistan." Still, I suppose it's not surprising they loved it in France.

In publicizing the movie, Moore has been up to his old dishonest tricks. Just before the screening at Cannes, he charged that Disney had told him "officially" the day before that it would not distribute *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore said this was an attempt to kill the film. He indicated a newspaper article had the correct explanation of Disney's decision: "According to today's *New York Times*, it might 'endanger' millions of dollars of tax breaks Disney receives from the state of Florida because the film will 'anger' the governor of Florida, Jeb Bush."

Later, in a CNN interview, Moore admitted he'd learned nearly a year ago that Disney would not distribute the movie. By pretending he'd just gotten word of this, Moore was involved in a cheap publicity stunt. And it wasn't the *New York Times* that said, on its own, that Disney feared losing tax breaks. It was Moore's agent who was quoted as saying that in the *Times*. Disney denied its president

Michael Eisner had told the agent of any such fear. "We informed both the agency that represented the film and all of our companies that we just didn't want to be in the middle of a politically oriented film during an election year," Eisner told ABC News.

Where does this leave us? I think it's time for Moore to be held accountable. In *Stupid White Men*, he has 18 pages of "Notes and Sources," but he offers no evidence for the sham interview with me--no date, no transcript. How could he, since the interview never happened?

I have just the person to look into Moore's lies and distortions. Al Franken has taken special interest in public liars, writing a bestseller called *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*. Al, the Moore case is now in your court.

***Fred Barnes is executive editor of The Weekly Standard.***