

Michael Moore, Humbug

By Kay S. Hymowitz
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Recently a wealthy Chicago couple named Drobney announced their plan to bankroll a left-wing talk radio station. They needn't bother: the Left already has a multimedia star—and even without a radio station, he's bigger than Rush, has more fans than O'Reilly, and sells books faster than Coulter. Followers plead with this “folk hero for the American people” to run for president. Reviewers compare him to Twain, Voltaire, and Swift. Unlike Rush and company, the appeal of this blue-collar megastar extends far beyond the hoi polloi. Hollywood and Manhattan agents wave gazillion-dollar contracts in front of his face. He wins prestigious awards that will never grace the Limbaugh or O'Reilly dens—Oscars, Emmys, Writer's Guild Awards, and jury prizes at Cannes (where his latest movie received a record 13-minute standing ovation). People stop him on the streets of Berlin, Paris, and London—where, according to Andrew Collins of the *Guardian*, they consider him “the people's filmmaker.”

He is, of course, Michael Moore, author of the best-selling *Downsize This!* and *Stupid White Men* and the director of *Roger and Me* and *Bowling for Columbine*. Those unfamiliar with Moore probably learned about him during the Oscar ceremonies in March, when, several weeks into the war in Iraq, he won the award for best documentary and came to the stage to speak—or so he said—for his fellow documentary nominees. “We like nonfiction and we live in fictitious times,” he intoned. “We live in a time where we have fictitious election results that elect a fictitious president. We live in a time where we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons. Whether it is the fiction [*sic*] of duct tape or the fiction of orange alerts, we are against this war, Mr. Bush! Shame on you, Mr. Bush! Shame on you!”

Well, the speaker ought to know. As critics have pointed out repeatedly, Moore himself is a world-class expert on fiction; in fact, when it comes to truth telling, not to mention logic, you might say: less is Moore. But if the copious charges of lies and distortions don't make a dent, it's because Moore's fabrications are the very source of his appeal. Not only has he created an enormously clever fictional character whose name is Michael Moore—a contemporary Will Rogers, able to channel Noam Chomsky via Chevy Chase; a working-class, truth-telling schlub in a trucker's hat who shuffles out of his La-Z-Boy recliner to seek answers to folksy questions from the high and mighty—he has also conjured up a fictional America that seductively taps into long familiar populist resentments that have their most recent incarnation in the rage of the anti-globalization Left.

In May, I went to see Moore give a talk to graduating seniors at a liberal arts college outside New York City, and it was easy to see why the kids went nuts. Moore recalled the Left as I remembered it in the “you-can-change-the-world” sixties—funny, confident, passionate, idealistic, full of possibility. As you might expect, he poked fun at conservatives, but also at liberals, those long-suffering targets of political satirists. “You must have a conservative in your family—an uncle or someone,” he said confidently. “That person never loses his car keys. He has every key marked: this SUV, that SUV. Our [the liberal] side goes [*in a timid, whiny voice*], ‘Do you know where my car keys are? . . . Where do you want to go to dinner?’ ‘Gee, I don't know. Where do *you* want to go to dinner?’ Right-wingers go [*slamming the podium*] ‘GET IN THE CAR! WE'RE GOING TO SIZZLER!’ ”

Moore was humble. He giggled disarmingly at his own jokes. He blushed and looked at his feet during the standing ovation. He told how he was so inexperienced when he made his first movie that, during

an interview, Jesse Jackson had to show him how to use his sound equipment. He was also full of concern for the little guy. “Maybe I was raised the wrong way, but my parents taught me we’ll be judged by how we treat the least among us.” He promised truth in a world of corruption and lies. “When I got out of my seat, and they all rose in standing ovation [at the Oscars], I could just stand there and soak up all the love, blow them a kiss, and get the hell out of here. But there’s a little voice, ‘You have work to do.’ ” He was upbeat and inspirational. “Americans are far more progressive than you think. . . . Change this world. Make the playing fields level for everyone. One person can make a difference!”

It was a great act—the operative word here being “act.” It’s best to think of Moore as always a performer, one who is not only the star of his own show but also its subject matter. And therefore any attempt to understand Moore or his intense appeal to an alienated Left has to begin with the man himself.

Moore grew up in Flint, Michigan, where his father assembled AC spark plugs at General Motors. It was in many respects an ordinary midwestern working-class boyhood of the 1950s. The young Moore attended mass with his parents, joined the Eagle Scouts, and learned to shoot; he became a champion marksman, a fact he would mine decades later in *Bowling for Columbine*. But Moore also took to activism at a young age. At 16, he gave a speech in a local contest, condemning the Elks for barring blacks. His speech won the prize, and attracted much media acclaim, including a call from CBS. According to Moore, it even prompted the Elks to change their policy. In his teens, Moore briefly joined a seminary, he says—he was a great admirer of the radical priests, the Berrigan brothers—but he soon opted for a more secular pursuit of politics. By 18, he had won a seat on the local school board.

Soon after freshman year, he quit college and started an alternative newspaper called the *Flint Voice* (later the *Michigan Voice*), and in 1986 he went to work for the national left-wing magazine *Mother Jones*. There—not for the first and certainly not for the last time in his life—he managed to alienate his admirers; after four months, he got fired. Moore claimed political differences, but those at the magazine said he had been utterly unprofessional: arbitrary, suspicious, and impervious to deadlines. In any case, he sued *Mother Jones*, eventually settling for \$58,000, which he used as seed money for *Roger and Me*. Though he’d never made a film before, *Roger and Me* was screened at the Telluride film festival, resulting in a distribution deal that made it the highest-grossing non-concert documentary ever—until *Bowling for Columbine*.

Yet for all his fame and achievement, the most important fact about Michael Moore—and the foundation of a populist philosophy that verges on the reactionary—remains his birthplace. Moore is from Flint the way Odysseus was from Ithaca; his home haunts his every thought and feeling. “This was Flint as I remembered it, where every day was a great day,” he says in a voiceover in *Roger and Me*, a movie in which he sets out to track down Roger Smith, the General Motors CEO who ordered the factory closings that turned Flint into a rust-belt disaster in the 1980s. The movie is a paean to his beloved birthplace, an evocation of the populist’s lost golden age, an industrial counterpart to the agrarian Brigadoon, where life was whole, people were genuine, and everything felt secure. Moore has a wistful vision of Flint as the birthplace of the modern labor movement with the famous 1937 strike that culminated in the founding of the UAW, which he presents as a progressive union that integrated the assembly lines and secured its members health-care benefits and enough money to buy homes and cars of their own. He evokes a vanished time, when laborers and corporate elites joined in a mutual spirit of loyalty and honest exertion. “My dad didn’t live with this kind of fear,” he has said of

contemporary job instability. “The social contract then was, if you worked hard and the company did well, he did well.”

Moore’s image of Flint makes him the ideal poet of the Naderite Left. The city symbolizes the sadness and populist outrage over a world lost to the New Economy and its voracious global corporation. In *Roger and Me*, the camera lingers on block after block of boarded-up houses, and Moore interviews desperate people, some being evicted from their homes. The fallen landscape is for Moore a symbol of a lost world, in which people like the laboring men of Flint made real stuff—steel, cars, trucks—before being swept away by the flabby and artificial post-industrial economy.

Though not without its appeal, Moore’s vision oozes with more 1950s nostalgia than a Loretta Young fan club. There’s hardly a hint of the mechanical repetition endured by the men and women who bolted thingamajigs to widgets on the assembly line; one of the workers interviewed in *Roger and Me* says he is happy to escape “the prison” of the GM factory floor, even though he’s taken a cut in salary, but the director does not seem to notice. And while it is true that the UAW was integrated, Flint was hardly an Eden of racial harmony. As Jim Lawrence, a black labor activist at a GM plant in Dayton, Ohio, describes it, during the 1960s “the union gave foremen a blank check to mistreat blacks and keep them out of the high-rate machine jobs and the skilled trades.”

More misleading still is the director’s melodramatic narrative of corporate downsizing and Flint’s decline. During Moore’s golden childhood, when his father was assembling spark plugs, the United States was the world’s preeminent manufacturer. But by the 1980s, that world was passing—and not because of black-mustachioed CEO villains. For the first time, as other industrial nations recovered fully from World War II, American companies were battling genuine competition from abroad; by 1980, the U.S. commanded only 25 percent of manufacturing output, down from 42 percent in 1962. Especially hard hit were the heavy industries of the rust belt like the automotive companies. As cheap, well-made foreign cars flooded the market, industries introduced ad campaigns to “Buy American.” But people were not easily dissuaded from purchasing Honda Civics when their last Impala had dropped its transmission and its muffler.

Faced with these realities, companies had no choice but to cut costs and improve quality and productivity. They laid off workers, and organized those who were left into teams that had to take responsibility for the quality of their product. It wasn’t just blue-collar heads that rolled. Restructuring, aided by waves of computerization, meant wiping out entire layers of management, a process that was bloody and sometimes deeply unjust: Moore is right that CEOs often compensated themselves royally, while their downsized ex-employees worried about buying shoes for their kids. But the fact is that many industries emerged from the carnage more competitive and better equipped to avoid layoffs in future recessions. Back in 1988 Ross Perot, GM’s most prominent critic before Moore, quipped that dealers complained that “[w]hen you step on the accelerator, a Cadillac needs to move.” Today, as just one example of the success of the nation’s industrial restructuring, the Cadillac is moving again, America’s luxury competitor to the Lexus and BMW—and talk about Japan as Number One stopped years ago.

In *Downsize This!*, Moore attempted to elaborate on the theme of the downsized economy where *Roger and Me* left off, but the book’s description of a rust-belt dystopia of pink slips and unemployment checks was out of date way before it hit the bookstores. By 1996, the number of jobs and heft of paychecks in the Midwest had improved markedly. In 1998, the Department of Commerce was writing that “[m]ore flexible, market-oriented companies have generated hundreds of thousands

of jobs” in Michigan. A 2001 Michigan Economic Development Corporation report noted that, with the exception of still-depressed Flint, the state’s metropolitan areas saw an increase in personal income between 1989 and 1998, with income rising more than 20 percent in places like Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids.

Stuck in the Walter Reuther past, Moore can make no sense of this. A while back, he was appalled when *The Nation* asked him to be part of a lecture cruise, “to hold seminars during the day and then dock at Saint Kitts at night!” he hissed derisively, as if it were still the era when plutocrats in tuxedos and women in gowns and diamonds dined on caviar and champagne with the ship’s captain, while workingmen and women scrimped for a week’s vacation at a dank lake bungalow. He seems not to know that plumbers from Milwaukee and secretaries from Akron fill Caribbean cruise ships these days (though probably not those sponsored by *The Nation*), and that factory workers often sport two cars—and a boat on a trailer—in their driveways. Our economic system has “got to go,” he told Industry Central, before admitting, “Now don’t ask me what to replace it with because I don’t know.” How convenient: he can dwell in his mythical land of Flint and never face the manifest truth that the system that downsized and restructured with such turmoil ultimately improved living standards for millions, while at the same time absorbing hosts of poor immigrants.

Moore is hardly the first to engage in a little nostalgic mythmaking. What makes him unique is his willingness to construct his myths on a scaffolding of calculated untruths. It’s an irony worth savoring. Moore’s chief conceit is that he is the lonely truth teller, seeking out the story no one else is brave enough to touch. He repeatedly blasts the media for ignoring issues that only he, a lowly college dropout, has the courage to bring before a hoodwinked public. “In the beginning there was a free press—well not really, but it sounded good,” the announcer of his TV series, *The Awful Truth*, would say as the show opened. But the awful truth is that Moore himself is a virtuoso of lying—which is the only way he can give the appearance of truth to his untenable theories.

Let’s begin with his bold-faced lies. In an appearance on Comedy Central’s *Daily Show* in March 2002, Moore announced that during the period that planes were grounded for two days after the September 11 attacks, the Bush administration allowed a Saudi jet to whisk away bin Ladin family members over FBI objections. As Snopes.com, an Internet site devoted to tracking down urban legends, points out, the planes did pick up bin Ladin family members—on September 18 and 19, days after commercial flights had already begun flying again, and they did so only after the FBI had questioned the departing Saudis. At the college talk, I witnessed another stunner, when Moore announced—without so much as a blip on the polygraph line—that, even though the media report that children in intact families are better off, “every study shows that’s a big lie. Children of single mothers do better in life.”

Then there are lies of omission, a genre that reaches its apogee in the movie *Bowling for Columbine*. Prompted by the horrific murders by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999, *Bowling* is Moore’s putative attempt to explore why America endures so much more gun violence than other industrialized countries. It seems to make sense when he interviews the punk singer Marilyn Manson, whose violent lyrics the Columbine killers favored. Yet Moore’s point is not what you’d expect. Objecting that to “scapegoat” Manson for the murders makes as much sense as blaming bowling, since the killers supposedly bowled on the morning of the murders, Moore listens with reverence to Manson’s theory—which happens to be Moore’s own—that Americans are violent because we live in a “culture of fear.” Never mind that the investigators at Columbine have concluded that the killers did not go bowling that morning; the larger point is that

Marilyn Manson chose to name himself after Charles Manson, one of America's most infamous mass murderers. Moore says no word about any of this.

Then there are what we might call artistic lies. *Bowling for Columbine* opens in a branch of the North Country Bank, with Moore supposedly receiving a free gun in exchange for opening an account. At the end of the scene, he asks a bank employee, "Do you think it's a little dangerous handing out guns in a bank?" before he runs out with the gun in his hand to the beat of a punk rock tune. It is a dazzling opening, full of energy and *Dr. Strangelove* absurdity. The only problem: *it was staged*.

Commentators have been on Moore's case about this, some even campaigning to revoke his Oscar, awarded for a genre supposed to be nonfiction. Anthony Zoubeck, a self-described "former Moore fan" who writes for the Illinois State University paper, the *Daily Vidette*, contacted Helen Steinman, the customer-service representative seen greeting Moore in the bank. "You can't just come in here and get a gun," Steinman explained. Moore "was only supposed to be coming in and pretending to open up a CD. What the girl who opened up the account really told him was that there would be a background check and that he wouldn't get the gun for six weeks."

There are slanted, insinuating lies. In another example from *Bowling*, Moore places a Lockheed Martin executive from Littleton, Colorado, right in front of a mammoth, menacing-looking rocket and asks: "So you don't think our kids say to themselves, 'Gee, you know, Dad goes off to the factory every day and, you know, he builds missiles. These are weapons of mass destruction.'" He also observes darkly that the company moves its products through the community late at night, when "the children of Columbine are asleep." But Lockheed Martin does not make weapons in Littleton; it makes weather and communications satellites there. The missile in the film is a refurbished Titan 2 rocket used to launch one such satellite. Moreover, as Zoubeck learned from a Lockheed spokesman, the company moves the rockets at night because they are so large they need a convoy—not, as Moore insinuates, because anyone is trying to hide the awful truth about weather satellites.

And there are the lies of exaggeration—details that after marinating in Moore's brain swell into squishy conspiracy tales, like one of those dried sponges that swell prodigiously in water. Take what happened during a March 2002 book-tour appearance for *Stupid White Men*, his 2001 screed against the Bush administration, corrupt corporate power, and (as one chapter title puts it) this "idiot nation." At 11 PM, Moore was still signing books for a line of fans at a San Diego school, when event organizers announced that the janitors wanted to close up and go home, since the use permit was up. Moore paid little attention and went on signing books, until someone—apparently the janitors—called the police about half an hour later. At this point, according to Kynn Bartlett, a disappointed fan who wrote about the event on his website, two cops walked in with flashlights—Bartlett points out that it was dark in the parking lot outside—and calmly announced: "May I have your attention. The use permit for this event expired at eleven. You have to leave now." After some grumbling, everyone did.

End of story—until Moore breathlessly posted his version on his website the next day. POLICE RAID, SHUT DOWN MY BOOK SIGNING IN SAN DIEGO. "I am told that we are getting close to the time when we will have to leave the school," Moore's fiction begins. "That is not good. Hundreds are still in line." (Bartlett estimates there were 75.) Moore continues: "The San Diego police [all two of them, Bartlett says] are coming down the aisle, their large flashlights out (the auditorium lights are still on, so we all understand the implied 'other' use of the instruments)." People are "visibly frightened," "bolt[ing]" toward the doors. "I remark that it feels like we're in some sort of banana republic or East Berlin, secretly meeting so we can have our little book gathering. Sign quick, Mike, here come the police." There's not a word about janitors forced to work overtime to please celebrity

authors.

So does that mean that Moore's career as the pied piper of union workers is also a lie? The best that can be said is . . . not entirely. Moore appears to give a good deal of money to unions and charities. But on the road he often stays at the Ritz or Four Seasons, like other movie millionaires. (And he is always on the road: though he loves to describe himself as a slacker, he endured a 47-city book tour for *Downsize This*, a tour he made the subject of his disastrously narcissistic movie, *The Big One*, and he hit scores of cities for *Stupid White Men*.) Former employees have accused him of trying to stop them from joining the Writer's Guild and, according to interviews conducted by *The Weekly Standard's* Matt Labash, of creating working conditions that resemble a "sweatshop" and "indentured servitude."

In fact, there are plenty of indications that Michael Moore is not a compassionate, big-hearted man dedicated to social justice; he just plays one on TV. When asked by a reporter from the *Arcata Eye* in 2002 why he wasn't speaking at independent bookstores rather than at corporate chains, he exploded in a tirade that revealed his willingness to have his principles—in this case, his distrust of corporate power—take a backseat to his personal vengefulness. "You know in my town the small businesses that everyone wanted to protect? They were the people that supported all the right-wing groups," he ranted. "They were the Republicans in town, they were in Kiwanis, the Chamber of Commerce—people that kept the town all white. The small hardware salesman, the small clothing store sales persons, Jesse the Barber who signed his name three different times on three different petitions to recall me from the school board. Fuck all these small businesses—fuck 'em all. Bring in the chains."

Not that Moore isn't capable of spouting a few nasty racial stereotypes himself. "[T]he kind of people who fly in airplanes want someone else to clean up their mess; that's why they let hijackers take the plane," said this frequent (first-class) flier late last fall in a one-man show in London. "If the passengers had included black men, those killers, with their puny bodies and unimpressive small knives, would have been crushed by the dudes, who as we all know take no disrespect from *anybody*. . . . The passengers on the planes on 11 September were scaredy-cats, because they were mostly white."

Moore's defense when he is charged with lying or hypocrisy, as he frequently is, sounds more like Richard Nixon than Will Rogers. He keeps voicing suspicion that large, nefarious powers are set on destroying him. A bad review of *Roger and Me* in *Film Comment*? "*Film Comment* is a publication of the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Lincoln Center had received a \$5 million gift from GM just prior to publishing the piece trashing *Roger and Me*. Coincidence? Or just five big ones well spent?" The failure of his only fictional feature film, *Canadian Bacon*? The distributor, Polygram, buried it, because the company is "owned by Philips of the Netherlands, makers of weapons." Booming at the Oscars? In an interview with the *San Jose Mercury News*, Moore insisted, "Those boos were amplified . . . as I looked out at the audience no one was booing. You could see the camera desperately trying to find people who were disagreeing with me and they couldn't." Criticism in the online magazine *Salon*? Borders bookstores, one of *Salon's* advertisers, was angry that he had been supporting workers who wanted to unionize—oh, and *Salon's* editor has a "personal grudge" against him. Oh, and the writer, whom Moore wrongly assumes belongs to Manhattan's literary elite, is worried because "one of 'them' (i.e. me) has moved into the neighborhood. Ooh, scary. A guy who's supposed to be building Buicks in Flint is now prowling the streets. . . . Somebody circle the wagons! Protect the Starbucks!" As Moore told a Stanford student who asked him to respond to criticism of *Stupid White Men*, "It's always personal." For Moore, at least that much is true.

So how has an embittered, cynical man with a paranoid streak as wide as Montana and a dysfunctional relationship to the truth been able to present himself so successfully as a compassionate, salt-of-the-earth, truth-seeking hero? One answer is that he makes people laugh. Not only does humor make it harder for charges of lying to stick—as Moore asked Lou Dobbs, “How can there be inaccuracy in comedy?”—it also makes people open to what he has to say. “Humor is welcoming,” he told the college audience in May. “People want to listen to you at that point. . . . I don’t come off as Mr. Know-It-All.”

At his best Moore pokes fun at hypocrisy in time-honored fashion. In one of *TV Nation*’s yippie-style pranks, he threw a “Corp Aid” benefit concert on Wall Street to help “needy corporations.” In another episode, produced during the Gingrich years, he went to Cobb County, Georgia, and opened GOBAC, the Committee to Get Government Off the Backs of Cobb County, whose aim was to send the county’s \$4 billion in federal aid back to Washington.

Moore also successfully synthesizes a style that is simultaneously Heartland Joe’s Diner and MTV—or “*Leave It to Beaver* meets Metallica,” as he put it in a different context. *Roger and Me*, the film that transformed the documentary from a professorial lecture into hip entertainment, is filled with kitschy Americana—beauty queens, marching bands, Anita Bryant songs. Moore himself speaks slowly in a flat midwestern accent and looks like someone who buys his clothes at KMart, yet he still conveys a *Saturday Night Live* sensibility. Moore’s hip humor also flatters the snobbery of many of his vogueish fans, who ordinarily would have nothing but contempt for blubbery guys in saggy jeans and trucker’s hats.

The other key to Moore’s appeal is his simple Manichaeian moral system, the kind that populists traditionally invoke to stir up easy resentments, as with today’s alienated Left. Moore’s world comprises two groups: stupid but powerful white guys in suits, like Roger Smith; and decent but powerless ordinary folks, like Michael Moore. For Moore, this is not some kind of comic-book schema; it is as real as sin itself. Nike CEO Phil Knight is “the face of evil.” President Bush, today’s incarnation of the evil plutocrat in Moore’s mind, is “capable of anything.” “The other side [the rich]—what they believe in,” Moore said in an Internet interview, “is in their own kind of sick Darwinism that says only a few shall survive to have the American dream. And they spend their time trying to enact laws to guarantee that the majority won’t.” Downsizing and welfare reform, which Moore calls “inherently evil,” are both examples of “terrorism” committed by malevolent rich men.

In *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore dwells on the case of the six-year-old boy who shot and killed a classmate in, coincidentally, Flint, Michigan. The boy got into trouble, Moore informs us, because welfare reform forced his mother, Tamarla Owens, to work two jobs and left her unable to care for her son. Moore does not mention that the boy and his mother were living in a crack house filled with guns, or that social workers had previously cited Tamarla Owens for being “involved with drugs” as well as for child abuse, including an incident where, according to Newhouse News Service, she admitted holding down another of her children so that two male friends could beat him with a belt. Nor does he mention that poverty rates and well-being for black children have improved markedly since the “terrorists” passed welfare reform. But why would he? The test of his moral system is the degree of resentment it inspires, not facts and reason.

Much of Moore’s Manichaeism will be yawningly familiar to anyone accustomed to the weird myopia of the far Left these days. America—or “the corporation known as The United States of America,” as Moore puts it—is inhabited by a race of greedy, uncaring, racist freaks, equipped with what Moore

calls “the stupid gene.” Above all, Americans are violent. “Guns don’t kill people; Americans kill people,” Moore has said. Worldwide, people suffer for only one reason: not religious or political tyranny, but the malevolent policies of stupid white American men, descended from paranoid Puritans and covetous Italians.

More bizarre still are Moore’s theories about the attacks of September 11, an event that has plunged the filmmaker into an agony of cognitive dissonance, an ideal breeding ground for the paranoid conspiracy theories that come so naturally to him. In hundreds of letters, interviews, and articles, Moore shows no sign of having read the first thing about al-Qaida, militant Islam, or the Middle East. That hasn’t stopped him from concluding that bin Ladin is no danger. “Ooh . . . he’s everywhere,” he joked at Stanford University, waving his arms bogeyman-like. “Usama bin Ladin—he could be here tonight!” “What if there is no terrorist threat,” he has asked, and the Bush administration simply wanted an excuse to curtail civil liberties while it pursued its corporate interests?

Moore seems to forget his own stoking of fears of terrorism. “There is a rage building in this country, and if you’re like me, you’re scared shitless,” he wrote in *Downsize This!*. “I believe thousands of Americans are only a few figurative steps away from getting into that Ryder truck,” like the one packed with explosives by Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. Terrorism by downsized white Americans is one thing: *that’s* scary. But external threats by foreign terrorists? It just cannot be. “Many families have been devastated tonight. This is just not right,” Moore wrote on September 12, 2001, as the World Trade Center and the bodies of 3,000 lay in smoking ruins. “They did not deserve to die. If someone did this to get back at Bush, then they did so by killing thousands of people who DID NOT VOTE for him. Boston, New York, D.C., and the planes’ destination of California—these were the places that voted AGAINST Bush.” In Moore’s Manichaeian world, if Republicans alone had died on September 11, they would have had it coming.

Moore’s moral stupidity, so ratcheted up by September 11, is likely to drive his next film, a documentary about the “twin errant sons of different oilmen”—George W. Bush and Usama bin Ladin. The filmmaker is hoping to release the movie, called *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a few months before the presidential election, to “make sure that Bush isn’t returned.” All signs point to his usual techniques—facts stripped of context and detail, dark insinuations, and outright lies, all leavened by pop music and Strangelovian irony.

Tracing some of Moore’s recent comments, one can piece together the argument—or rather the hazy impressions, for Moore never constructs an argument—that will make up this so-called documentary. Moore will insinuate that the United States created Usama—“or USA-ma, which is more appropriate considering we trained him to be a terrorist.” He will tell us that in the late nineties the oil firm Unocal held a meeting with Taliban representatives in Houston, “when Bush was governor,” to talk about building a pipeline through Afghanistan. He will imply that this project was the reason the U.S. gave humanitarian aid to the Taliban, until “the deal went south,” and “suddenly the Taliban were evil.” And thus, Michael Moore will finally reveal the awful truth that only he is courageous enough to admit about why the United States really went to war with the Taliban.

And you can be sure that the trendy sophisticates in Cannes and Hollywood will once again rise to their feet to honor their mendacious auteur, European intellectuals will bow before his Manichaeian simplicities, and the international radical Left will cheer the moral obtuseness of the man who has made his fortune turning the documentary into fiction.