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[Pundits won't stop spinning Clark's phone call \(9/3\)](#)

By [Ben Fritz](#)

The story of who called retired general Wesley Clark on September 11, 2001 won't seem to die, with pundits left and right continually getting their facts wrong. Clark's story, while ambiguously phrased at first, has actually been quite consistent. ([Read the whole column.](#))

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Moore alters "Bowling" DVD in response to criticism (9/2)

By [Brendan Nyhan](#)

In the newly-released DVD version of his Academy Award-winning documentary "Bowling for Columbine," filmmaker Michael Moore has altered a caption that he inserted into a 1988 Bush-Quayle campaign commercial -- one of a number of misstatements and deceptive arguments [we criticized](#) when the film was released last year. Ironically, on the same day the DVD was released, Moore [issued](#) a libel threat against his critics on MSNBC's "Buchanan & Press," saying, "Every fact in the film is true. Absolutely every fact in the film is true. And anybody who says otherwise is committing an act of libel."

While we were among the first to call Moore on the inaccuracies in his film, most notably the alteration of the Bush-Quayle ad and his misleading presentation of US aid to Afghanistan in a timeline sequence, we were far from the only ones. Dan Lyons of Forbes Magazine [also revealed](#) several important lies or distortions, including the fact that the scene during which Moore receives a gun at a bank was staged. And David Hardy, an Arizona lawyer specializing in gun issues who has worked for the National Rifle

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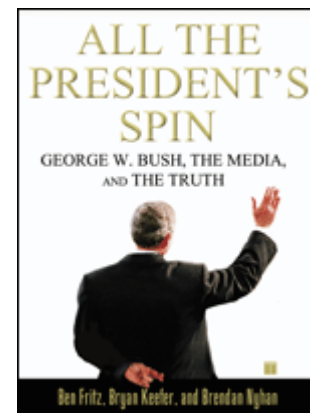
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 -Sept. 28, 7 PM PST: Ben Fritz will appear on KXLU's

Association, has [compiled](#) a voluminous list of allegations, including Moore's [heavy and misleading editing](#) of NRA President Charlton Heston's [speech](#) in Denver after the Columbine massacre.

Moore has generally refused to concede error in response to critics, in one case writing [an angry email](#) to Chicago Sun-Times film critic Roger Ebert denouncing several charges as "Internet crap" and "not true." In [subsequent correspondence](#) for Ebert's online column, Moore wrote, "if I state something as a fact, I need the viewers to trust that those facts are correct."

While promoting the DVD release, he was asked about the charges by guest co-host Jerry Nachman during a August 19 appearance on "Buchanan & Press." Moore then attacked Hardy while accusing critics of libel:

NACHMAN: Michael, I want to start with what your critics chiefly say. And that is, while you criticize President Bush for being a fictitious president, as you called him, winning in a fictitious election, a lot of your critics say that your documentary should have been more like an Oliver Stone movie because of the liberties you took with chronology and facts in both "Roger and Me" and "Bowling for Columbine." You've heard that criticism, I'm sure.

MOORE: Well, yes. No, the NRA and some gun nut Web sites have really come after...

NACHMAN: Well, it's not...

MOORE: ... the film.

NACHMAN: ... it's not just gun nuts. I mean it's people who have tried to lay out a chronology of what you said happened...

MOORE: Like who?

NACHMAN: ... when it happened...

MOORE: Like who has done this...

NACHMAN: Well...

MOORE: ... that is not a conservative right-winger that has a vested interest in

"Centerstage".

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wanting to attack me instead of debating me on the issues I'm raising?

NACHMAN: This guy...

MOORE: Every fact in the film is true. Absolutely every fact in the film is true. And anybody who says otherwise is committing an act of libel.

However, the release of Moore's DVD proves otherwise. As we first documented, when "Bowling for Columbine" was released in theaters, it featured a 1988 Bush-Quayle ad called "Revolving Doors" ([Real Player video](#)), which criticized a prison furlough program in operation when Michael Dukakis was governor of Massachusetts. Though Horton was furloughed under the program in question, the ad did not explicitly mention him, unlike the more famous ad aired by the National Security Political Action Committee, which had close ties to Bush media advisor Roger Ailes.

But because this part of "Bowling" attempted to show how portrayals of black men are used to promote fear in the public, Moore inserted the caption "Willie Horton released. Then kills again." into the ad, using a text style nearly identical to the ad's original captions. A casual viewer would assume that the text was part of the original ad. The caption is used to support Moore's statement, which runs over the sequence, that "whether you're a psychotic killer or running for president of the United States, the one thing you can always count on is white America's fear of the black man."

However, according to the archived video of the ad linked above, media reports and interviews with a high-level Dukakis official and political experts, the caption did not appear in the original ad. Moreover, it was incorrect -- Horton raped a woman while on furlough, but he did not commit murder.

In a tacit acknowledgment that the caption was both phony and factually incorrect, Moore has altered the text in the DVD version. The caption now reads "Willie Horton released. Then rapes a woman." Clearly, every "fact" in the film was *not* true, and critics who pointed out the alteration of the Horton ad (among other things) were not committing libel.

Moreover, Moore's correction doesn't make the insertion of

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text that wasn't in the original ad any more excusable. And he has conspicuously failed to correct the rest of the film's distortions and inaccuracies. While it is too late for the Oscar voters he deceived, Moore still owes it to the public to set the record straight.

Addendum:

The DVD also contains further proof of Moore's tendency to stretch and distort the facts. Hardy has criticized Moore for claiming that the plaque at the US Air Force Academy near a B-52 on display "proudly proclaims that the plane killed Vietnamese people on Christmas Eve of 1972. It was the largest bombing campaign of the Vietnam War." This phrasing insinuates that the plaque praises the bombing of civilians. It actually says the B-52 "shot down a MIG northeast of Hanoi" on that date. The plaque does celebrate "the men and women of the Strategic Air Command who flew and maintained the B-52D throughout its 26 year history in the command," including "Aircraft 55,003, with over 15,000 flying hours," which presumably included bombing runs over Vietnam such as the one on Christmas Eve, but it does not "proudly" proclaim that it was used to kill Vietnamese civilians. According to Ebert, Moore's response to this criticism was as follows: "I was making a point about the carpet bombing of Vietnam during the 1972 Christmas offensive. I did not say exactly what the plaque said but was paraphrasing."

The DVD captures Moore exaggerating this still further, saying during a speech at the University of Denver on February 26, 2003 that the B-52 participated in the massive Christmas Eve bombing campaign. "And they've got a plaque on there proudly proclaiming that this bomber, this B-52, killed thousands upon thousands of Vietnamese -- innocent civilians." In both cases, his representation of the plaque is dishonest.

Update 9/2 5:12 PM EST: A number of readers have written in to point out that Moore's statement is a tautology -- that is, it is correct by definition to say "Every fact in the film is true." However, in context, he implies that all of his factual *claims* are true -- asserting they are facts -- and attacks critics of those claims with a charge of libel. As such, we stand by the post as written.

Update 9/5 9:12 AM EST: In addition, as another reader points out, anyone who "says" something untrue would presumably be committing slander, not libel. [Note: This post was slightly edited for style and clarity.]



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