



THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

CATHY YOUNG

The Boston Globe

Moore's anti-US populism

By Cathy Young, Globe Columnist | July 19, 2004

WITH "Fahrenheit 9/11" still riding high at the box office and a new book titled "Michael Moore Is a Big Fat Stupid White Man" soaring to the best-seller lists, Michael Moore continues to be at the center of public debate. (So much the worse for public debate.) While many agree that Moore traffics in one-sided, nasty agitprop and factually shaky innuendo, quite a few people are willing to recognize him as a scrappy David battling the Goliath of the Bush propaganda machine, a hero who may bend or stretch a few facts but is right about the larger truths. New York Times film critic A.O. Scott even called him "a credit to the Republic."

So who, exactly, is this populist hero?

Moore isn't just antiwar and anti-Bush; he is also virulently anti-American. That's a label some right-wing pundits tend to slap on anyone critical of the war and of President Bush. In Moore's case, however, the label fits.

Moore, the 50-year-old filmmaker and author of several books, has made a career of traveling round the world talking about how stupid, brainwashed, selfish, greedy, and otherwise rotten Americans are. He regales British audiences with tales of a National Geographic survey which found that many young Americans cannot find Iraq or England on the map -- neglecting to mention that the survey results for British youth were quite woeful as well. Inviting an audience at Cambridge University to share some packs of Doritos, he comments, according to an account in *The New Yorker*, "It's still your way, right, to share? You don't want to turn into us -- a society where the ethic is me me me me me me me, [expletive] you."

If Moore believes that Scandinavian-style social democracy is preferable to American capitalism, that's his right. But in his world view, the United States is judged by a blatant double standard compared to other nations. In a July 4 piece for the *Los Angeles Times*, Moore asks the pro-Bush Americans he regards as mindless flag-wavers, "Are you proud that nearly 3 billion people on this planet do not have access to clean drinking water when we have the resources and technology to remedy this immediately?" Note that the other wealthy countries of the world are not told that they must either remedy the problems of the developing world this very minute or be ashamed of themselves.

In "Fahrenheit 9/11," Moore weeps crocodile tears for the American soldiers killed in Iraq and for their loved ones. Yet in an April 14 message on his website, commenting on proposals that the administration of Iraq be turned over to the United Nations, Moore had this to say:

"I oppose the UN or anyone else risking the lives of their citizens to extract us from our debacle. I'm sorry, but the majority of Americans supported this war once it began and, sadly, that majority must now sacrifice their children until enough blood has been let that maybe -- just maybe -- God and the Iraqi people will forgive us in the end."

In his 2003 book "Dude, Where's My Country," Moore expresses sympathy with the Palestinians who danced in the streets to celebrate the fall of the World Trade Center: after all, America supports Israel, which kills innocent Palestinian children. Then, he makes a statement so mind-boggling that when I saw it on an anti-Moore website, I thought it might be distorted. It was not:

"Of course many Israeli children have died too, at the hands of the Palestinians. You would think that would make every Israeli want to wipe out the Arab world, but the average Israeli does not have that response. Why? Because in their hearts, they know they are wrong, and they know they would be doing just what the Palestinians are doing if the sandal were on the other foot."

Moore's dishonesty in stringing together his narratives has been amply documented (see, for instance, the website www.spinsanity.org, which is dedicated to exposing both left-wing and right-wing spin and not known for pro-Bush sympathies). But Moore's problem is not just with facts, it's with basic decency.

In one of his "satirical" routines in England in 2002, Moore derided the passengers on the planes hijacked on Sept. 11 as white middle-class wimps. According to Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a writer for the London Independent, "If the passengers had included black men, he claimed, those killers . . . would have been crushed by the dudes, who as we all know take no disrespect from anybody."

This isn't polemical boldness or satirical hyperbole; this is obscenity. After this, is there really anything else we need to know about Michael Moore?

Cathy Young is a contributing editor at Reason magazine. Her column appears regularly in the Globe. ■

© [Copyright](#) 2004 The New York Times Company