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Moore's myriad mistakes

By [Bryan Keefer](#)
October 16, 2003

Michael Moore makes at least 17 factual errors or misrepresentations in his latest book, *Dude, Where's My Country?*, ranging from stating disputed information as fact to repeating a media myth to twisting his own sources. As a companion to our [article](#) about Moore's mistakes in *Dude* and his history of such distortions, here is a list of all the errors that we found in the book:

Page xiii: Moore claims that News Corp, the parent of HarperCollins, which published *Stupid White Men*, "dumped [the book] in some bookstores with no advertising, no reviews, and the offer of a three-city tour: Arlington! Denver! Somewhere in Jersey! In other words, the book was sent to the gallows for a quick and painless death." Yet in a February 5, 2002 [letter](#) on his web site, Moore stated that "HarperCollins is doing their best to get the book out there - but now, even they have run into resistance, with some bookstores telling them that they are not interested in having me come to their stores on the book tour" because of the controversial nature of the book. Later in the letter, he added that "I'll be hitting a couple dozen cities on the book tour, and I'll probably add a few more (if you'd like me to come to your town, let me or HarperCollins know!)." And directly contradicting his assertion in *Dude*, Moore wrote in a February 13 [letter](#) that his tour "initially included only three cities: New York, L.A., and Denver." Clearly, he is spinning the publicity campaign for his own book.

Page 9: Moore, writing about the connections between the Carlyle Group (a private investment firm with a politically powerful board of directors including George H. W. Bush Sr.) and the Bin Ladens, states that "After September 11, *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* both ran stories pointing out this strange coincidence. Your first response, [President] Bush, was to ignore it, hoping, I

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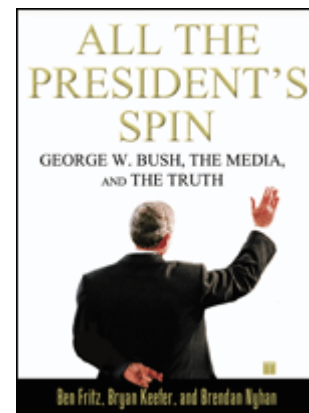
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-Sept. 28, 7 PM PST: Ben Fritz will appear on KXLU's

guess, that the story would go away. Your father and his buddies at Carlyle did not renounce the Bin Laden investment. Your army of pundits went into spin control... And then the video footage came out. It showed a number of the 'good' Bin Ladens - including Osama's mother, a sister and two brothers - with Osama at his son's wedding." Moore is distorting the timeline of when that information came out: He cites Al Jazeera (no date) and two articles published *before* September 11, 2001 (the articles date from Feb. 28, 2001 and March 1, 2001), not after.

Pages 15 and 16: Moore asserts that Osama Bin Laden requires dialysis for a kidney condition. Moore continues by asking "how could [Bin Laden] have really pulled this off while his skin was turning green?" In fact, as one of Moore's own sources (a January 19, 2002 New York Times article) notes, the nature and severity of Bin Laden's health problems is in dispute. The Times quotes an unnamed official who says that "While there have been a lot of rumors about the status of his health, we do not have evidence to support that he has had kidney failure or is on dialysis." Yet another of Moore's sources, an Associated Press article of March 25, 2000, notes that in spite of questions about his health, "it has been business as usual for Bin Laden," and cites an unnamed Western intelligence official stating that "He is still operating an enormous terrorist network around the world."

Pages 17 to 19: Moore offers the suggestion that the Saudi government was behind the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Ignoring the mountains of evidence connecting the hijackers to Al Qaeda, he asks, "What if September 11 was not a 'terrorist' attack, but, rather, a *military attack* against the United States?" (his italics) A few paragraphs later, he asks "did certain factions within the Saudi royal family execute the attack on September 11?" While [leaks](#) detailing classified sections of a congressional report suggest that the Saudi government provided some financial assistance to the hijackers (a charge denied by the Saudi government), there is no evidence that the Saudi government or Saudi officials helped plan the September 11 attacks.

Page 20: Moore quotes a New Yorker piece on page 4 of his book noting that "Once the FAA permitted overseas flights [after 9-11], the jet [with the Bin Ladens] flew to Europe." ([Other reports](#) have added credence to this version of events). But Moore writes on page 20 that "while thousands were stranded and could not fly, if you could prove you were a close relative of the biggest mass

"Centerstage".

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-Oct. 21: Bryan Keefer will give a book reading at Books Inc. in Mountain View, CA.

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-Bryan Keefer publishes [an article](#) on media coverage of campaign 2004 from a young person's perspective in the Washington Post Outlook section.

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-[All the President's Spin](#) reaches #14 on the New York Times bestseller list for paperback nonfiction!

-A Publisher's Weekly Online [review](#) calls [All the President's Spin](#) a "lucid critique" and a "passionate indictment" that is "[w]ell organized and heavily referenced."

murderer in U.S. history, you got a free trip to gay Paree!" In addition, a September 20, 2001 Boston Globe article notes that the Bin Ladens apparently chartered their own plane - they did not get a "free trip" as Moore suggests.

Page 23: Moore twists around the order of Attorney General John Ashcroft's claims in a Senate hearing in December 2001. Slamming Ashcroft for refusing to give the FBI permission to examine records of background checks for gun purchases by suspected terrorists, Moore writes "The Senate (and the public) only found out about Ashcroft's orders to stop the search for terrorists' gun files until December 2001, when Ashcroft not only proudly admitted to doing this in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee, but went on to attack anyone who would question his actions to protect the hijackers' gun rights. He told the panel that critics of his anti-terror practices were 'providing ammunition to America's enemies... To those who would scare peace-loving people with phantoms of 'lost liberty,' my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists." Ashcroft actually made the statement (which we [condemned](#) at the time) in his opening remarks, well *before* he addressed the issue of gun checks. Moore's framing makes it appear as though Ashcroft's controversial statement was made with direct reference to the issue of checking firearms records.

Page 43 (and all of chapter 2): Moore uses fake quotes as chapter headings, implying that Bush (or administration officials) said things they never said. The most problematic is "#3 Whopper with Bacon: 'Iraq has ties to Osama Bin Laden and al Qaeda!'" (page 53) He quotes Bush repeatedly stating that "We know [Saddam] has ties to Al Qaeda" - but provides no source suggesting the administration tied Saddam to Bin Laden personally.

Page 53: Moore repeats a well-debunked myth about Democratic presidential hopeful General Wesley Clark. he writes that "Clark has said that he received phone calls on September 11 and in the weeks after from people at 'think tanks' and from people within the White House telling him to use his position as a pundit for CNN to 'connect' September 11 to Saddam Hussein." Yet, as we have demonstrated, despite a somewhat ambiguous statement on "Meet the Press" last June, Clark has been consistent in his [claim](#) that it was a member of a think tank who contacted him, not the White House. A recent [report](#) in the Toronto Star identified the source of the call as a member of a Middle Eastern think tank based in Montreal. Moore

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also makes a second mistake in pluralizing the single call Clark has always referred to into "calls."

Page 58: Moore claims that the U.S. "oversaw the assassination of [Congo leader Patrice] Lumumba" in 1961. However, according to a July, 2000 US News & World Report [article](#), Lumumba was actually killed by Belgian operatives (though, as that article makes clear, the CIA apparently did have its own plot to assassinate him).

Page 67: Moore claims that, in building the famous Maginot Line, France "built the bunkers facing the wrong way and Germans were deep into France before you could say 'garçon, stinky cheese, please!'" In fact, the Maginot Line was built with many of the heavy weapons facing back and to the flanks of the line, to allow the bunkers to support each other, and the German invasion avoided it entirely, coming through the Ardennes north of the line.

Page 69: Moore misrepresents US contributions to the United Nations oil-for-food program in Iraq as "trade." He writes, "There were claims that the French were only opposing war to get economic benefits out of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In fact, it was the Americans who were making a killing. In 2001, the U.S. was Iraq's leading trading partner, consuming more than 40 percent of Iraq's oil exports. That's \$6 billion in trade with the Iraqi dictator." Most of the money, however, was used to purchase food and other UN-approved humanitarian aid; the rest went to pay war reparations and administrative fees for the program. (For details on the program, see [this report](#) to Congress.)

Pages 74 and 75: Moore writes on page 74 that "between these two bombing campaigns [in Afghanistan and Iraq], according to some estimates, 9,000 civilians were murdered." On the next page, he writes that "A British-American research group in London announced estimates of civilian deaths due to the war [in Iraq] at between 6,806 and 7,797." Those claims come from two controversial sources: Marc Herold's "Daily Casualty Count" for the Afghan campaign, and the Iraq Body Count [web site](#). As we have [noted elsewhere](#), Herold's [estimates](#) of up to 3,600 civilian deaths are considerably higher than estimates from other media organizations, which range from a few hundred to 1,200. Herold's [methodology](#), which relied upon on media reports (including reports using Taliban sources) and information from NGOs, has also come under fire. (Herold wrote a [letter](#) responding to our



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previous criticism). As Moore himself notes, the Iraq Body Count relies on a very similar [methodology](#), with the same sort of problems - media and NGO reports are not always accurate, and the sources cited in those reports have not been critically evaluated by the researchers. Rather than simply citing these figures as coming from a "British-American research group," Moore owes it to his readers to provide a more accurate representation of his source.

Page 82: Criticizing Secretary of State Colin Powell's [speech](#) to the United Nations last February, Moore mocks his claim that "What we are giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence." Moore writes, "Just days earlier, Powell apparently was not so sure. During a gathering of CIA officials reviewing the evidence against Saddam Hussein, Powell tossed the papers in the air and declared: 'I'm not reading this. This is bullshit.'" In context, he makes appear as though Powell had included the same suspect evidence he had called "bullshit" in the speech he eventually gave. However, the US News & World Report article that Moore cites details the process by which Powell winnowed out pieces of evidence he was uncomfortable presenting. The article concludes: "And plenty was cut [from Powell's speech]. Sometimes it was because information wasn't credible, sometimes because Powell didn't want his speech to get too long, sometimes because [CIA Director George] Tenet insisted on protecting sources and methods."

Page 110: During his criticism of the proposed Terrorism Information Awareness project, Moore claims that "There is usually very little in the way of an electronic or paper trail when it comes to terrorists. They lay low and pay cash. You and me, we leave trails everywhere - credit cards, cell phones, medical records, online; everything we do. Who is *really* being watched here?" Moore evidently forgot about the [credit cards](#) used by the Sept. 11 hijackers, which authorities used after the attacks to help retrace their steps.

Pages 111-112: Moore lists a number of examples of what he implies are abuses of the Patriot Act. He writes, "To date, there are at least thirty-four documented cases of FBI abuse under the Patriot Act - and at least another 966 individuals have filed formal complaints. Many of these people were just minding their own business, or seeking to partake in our free society. Consider these examples." The examples he cites, however, have nothing to do with Patriot Act or the FBI. He lists an anti-globalization activist who was

questioned by "immigration officials" and a "State department agent"; a New York judge who asked a defendant if she was a terrorist; French journalists detained at the Los Angeles Airport; a local police officer in Vermont entering a teacher's classroom to photograph an anti-Bush art display; a college student questioned by Secret Service agents about "anti-American" material; and a Green Party activist questioned on his way to Prague. None of the incidents he lists happened as a result of the Patriot Act, however, nor did any of them involve the FBI as Moore implies (the French journalists were detained for improper travel documents, and the Green Party activist was questioned by the Secret Service, as Moore's own sources note).

Page 160: Moore notes that the 2003 Bush tax cut will likely reduce revenue to the states. Attacking the cut, he implies that the cuts led to early school closings in Oregon: "Take the kids in Oregon, whose schools were shut down early this year because they ran out of tax money." Oregon, however, passed a law in May 2003 [decoupling](#) its state income tax system from the federal government's, insuring that the 2003 tax cut would have no impact on the state's budget. In addition, one of Moore's own sources (a June 8, 2003 article in the New York Times Magazine) notes that the situation is far more complicated than Moore makes it out to be: Oregon voters had rejected a referendum earlier in the year that would have raised taxes to pay for schools and other spending.

Page 180: Moore claims that "The overwhelming support for the war in Iraq came only *after* the war began. Before the war, the *majority* of Americans said that we should not be invading Iraq unless we have the backing of all of our allies *and* the United Nations" (he provides no source for the claim). In fact, a Washington Post/ABC News [poll](#) conducted on March 17, which asked "Would you support or oppose the United States going to war with Iraq?" showed 71 percent in favor (59 percent were in favor one week earlier). Another Washington Post/ABC News [poll](#) taken February 9 found 66 percent in favor of taking action against Iraq; when those who said they supported such action were asked if they would still support it without the backing of the United Nations, total support fell to 50 percent, with 47 percent opposed.

Update 12/15/03 4:15 PM EST: The description of the oil for food program under "Page 69" has been amended to more accurately describe what the funds were used for.

[Note to readers: Be sure to read our [review](#) of *Dude, Where's My Country?* to see how all these mistakes undermine some of Moore's arguments and fit a pattern of sloppiness and distortion that has characterized his career.]

Research assistance by Davis Bell and David Mishook.

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