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The docu-fantasy of Michael Moore

An extraordinary number of conspiratorial claims

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That Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* received the Cannes film festival's most coveted prize should have served as a warning that something about it was fishy. After all, a disturbing trend following the 2001 terrorist attacks was the absurdly generous attention the European media lavished on conspiracy crackpots, the moral equivalent of Holocaust deniers, who argued that 9/11 was actually an elaborate plot by the U.S., Israeli or British governments.

Leading the field, for example, was French junk author Thierry Meyssan's *The Horrifying Fraud*, which posits that the Sept. 11 attacks were carried out by murderous U.S. government officials looking for an excuse to launch a war on Afghanistan and Iraq. Meyssan's bestseller was the inspiration of German writer Mathias Brckers' imaginatively named *Conspiracies*, which suggests, among other inanities, that the attacks proved just as timely for George Bush as did the Reichstag fire for Adolf Hitler.

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No less morally frivolous was *The CIA and September 11* by Andreas von Blow, a former German government minister, who fingers the CIA and Mossad as the primary sponsors of 9/11. Blow's half-baked fantasies gained credence in such publications as *Der Spiegel*, while in Britain the *Guardian* gloated over its publication of former environment minister Michael Meacher's equally obscene claim that the U.S. knowingly and willfully let the 9/11 attacks occur because it fit into a grander and more sinister effort to procure future supplies of Middle East oil.

It's not a heist exactly, but Moore stakes out strikingly similar territory in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, likewise sticking to the golden conspiracy-theory formula of confusing correlation with causation, and supposition with evidence. And like its progenitors, the end result is a series of claims so far removed from fact they take on the air of fantasy.

Among them, for example, is the claim that Saudi Arabian oil interests secretly control U.S. foreign policy, and that President Bush invaded Afghanistan to build a gas pipeline and ousted Saddam Hussein for cheap oil. In recent television interviews, however, Moore is hard pressed to explain why, if Saudi influence was so complete, the Saudis themselves were against the invasion of Afghanistan, and so opposed to the invasion of Iraq that they kicked U.S. troops off their territory into Qatar. In trying to explain away such inconsistencies he bumbles on as unintelligibly as the president he so mercilessly lampoons.

The film also accuses the White House of allowing 140 Saudis, including members of Osama bin Laden's family, to fly out of the country in secret immediately after Sept. 11, as all other air traffic was only gradually returning to normal. Problem is, this isn't what happened. In fact, the flights were cleared by Richard Clarke, the head of counter-terrorism for the Bush administration. A ferocious critic of the Iraq war, Clarke has admitted on the record that he alone sanctioned the departures. Moreover, the Saudis left having been duly interviewed by the FBI, only after air traffic resumed.

But these are only a few of the distortions Moore has pathetically tried to spin as objective truth. Did we mention his suggestion that the U.S. is run by a cabal of business leaders who turn a blind eye to terrorism?

Not that this seems to bother many of the film's eager viewers, however, who are pushing ticket sales into territory usually reserved for star-laden blockbusters. And with a three-day weekend coming up, the movie is poised to post even more impressive attendance figures.

Fahrenheit 9/11 certainly does for the aggrieved political left what *The Clinton Chronicles* did for the livid right a decade ago. Seemingly well-researched, *Chronicles* told a disturbing tale of bribery, money-laundering, drug-running and even murder during Bill and Hillary Clinton's tenure in Arkansas. The difference, however, is that *Chronicles* was largely ignored by both mainstream film distributors and the reviewing media. Why? Because it was rightly perceived as vulgar propaganda intended to smear an incumbent president as he approached another election.

This re-election year is obviously different, but far from being a "dissenting" hero, Moore is but one more contestant in the race to the polemical bottom, coming at a time when truth is often the first victim of the supermarket media values now embraced by a depressing number of mainstream journalists. *Fahrenheit 9/11* places Moore squarely on the growing list of charlatans and hucksters engaged in a steady business pawning off their fabrications on an unfortunately credulous public.

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