

The movie is so bad it could help Bush

Thursday, July 1st, 2004

I brought a notebook with me when I went to see Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" and in the dark made notes before I gave up, defeated by the utter stupidity of the movie.

One of my notes says "John Ellis," who is a cousin of President Bush and the fellow who called the election for Fox News that dark and infamous night when the presidency - or so the myth goes - was stolen from Al Gore, delivering the nation to Halliburton, the Carlyle Group and Saudi Arabia and plunging it into war. A better synopsis of the movie, you're not likely to read.

Ellis appears early in the film, which is not only appropriate but inevitable. He is the personification of the Moore method, which combines guilt by association with the stunning revelation of a stunning fact that has already been revealed countless times before.

If, for instance, you did a Lexis-Nexis database search for "John Ellis" and "election," you would be told that "the search has been interrupted because it will return more than 1,000 documents."

The Ellis story is no secret.

I go on about Moore and Ellis because the stunning box office success of "Fahrenheit 9/11" is not, as proclaimed, a sure sign that Bush is on his way out, but instead a warning to the Democrats to keep the loony left at a safe distance.

Speaking just for myself, not only was I dismayed by how prosaic and boring the movie was - nothing new and utterly predictable - but I recoiled from Moore's methodology, if it can be called that.

The case against Bush is too hard and too serious to turn into some sort of joke, as Moore has done. The danger of that is twofold: It can send fence-sitters moving, either out of revulsion or sympathy, the other way, and it leads to an easy and facile dismissal of arguments critical of Bush.

During the Vietnam War, it seemed to me that some people supported Richard Nixon not because they thought he was right but because they loathed the war protesters. Beware history repeating itself.

Moore's depiction of why Bush went to war is so silly and so incomprehensible that it is easily dismissed. As far as I can tell, it is a farrago of conspiracy theories. But nothing is said about multiple UN resolutions violated by Iraq or the depredations of Saddam Hussein.

In fact, prewar Iraq is depicted as some sort of Arab folk festival - lots of happy, smiling, indigenous people. Was there no footage of a Kurdish village that had been gassed? This is obscenity by omission.

The case against Bush need not and should not rest on guilt by association or half-baked conspiracy theories, which collapse at the first double take but reinforce the fervor of those already convinced.

The success of Moore's movie, though, suggests this is happening - a dialogue in which anti-Bush forces talk to themselves and do so in a way that puts off others.

I found that happening to me in the runup to the war, when I spent more time and energy arguing with those who said the war was about oil (no!) or Israel (no!) or something just as silly than I did questioning the stated reasons for invading Iraq - weapons of mass destruction and Saddam's links to Osama Bin Laden. This was stupid of me, but human nature nonetheless.

Some of that old feeling returned while watching Moore's assault on the documentary form. It is so

juvenile in its approach, so awful in its journalism, such an inside joke for people who already hate Bush, that I found myself feeling a bit sorry for a President who is depicted mostly as a befuddled dope.

I fear how it will play to the undecided. For them, I recommend "Spider-Man 2."