

# Of media and press freedom

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Fahrenheit 9/11, a documentary film which debuted in the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, was produced, written, and directed by the now controversial Michael Moore. It has – and continues to – create waves in American society for its liberal and litigious perspectives. Although the title includes the fateful numbers 9 and 11, the documentary was not really about September 11, but it did touch briefly on that doomful day for all Americans; especially since it was pivotal for the discussion of what was really the movie's main target.

The film provided not only the American people but also the world over a critical look on George W. Bush's presidency and his War on Terrorism.

Moore, admittedly a liberal, is not exactly fond of President George W. Bush. And this is apparent in his works, especially with the documentary film now in question. In fact, Fahrenheit 9/11 was mostly an attack on W. Bush and the way he handled the 9/11 attacks and the pressing threat of terrorism on America. Moore contends that W. Bush was not exactly an inept president; au contraire, he was a really smart one who knew just how influential his position is.

Released in America under the presidency of the very man it sought to destroy, Fahrenheit 9/11 was the perfect example of just how much democracy can be – and, sometimes, should be – very lenient on the media. With the media being branded as a 'watchdog', serving as the citizens' omnipotent eye on the goings-on of politics and everything else that concerns them, it is very necessary to let the media speak as freely as it should. Even with moves to censor and even discredit Moore and his claims in this documentary, the Bush administration had to let the movie be shown as completely hiding Fahrenheit 9/11 from the public will be a cause for

questioning the government's commitment to freedom of speech, which is clearly stated in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights.

Yet with the admirable way Fahrenheit 9/11 demonstrated our country's committal to press freedom, the Palme d'Or recipient also painted just how media can also go overboard and abuse its function as a watchdog. Even with the guise of being a look into how a president can abuse his powers, Fahrenheit 9/11 was made in a manner that can cause discord.

Made and exhibited at a time when Americans are still healing from the wounds of September 11 and the movie painfully refreshed the hurt that the events caused the American people. As the now popular Spiderman saying goes, "With great power comes great responsibility." This only means that people behind the media know just when propagandas and destructive materials should be kept to a minimum.

Assuming that Moore did get his facts right in the movie and his claims in his award-winning documentary have basis and are deserving of being exposed to the people, we can still see just how abusive media can be of its powers – this time, we'll see it in the stories that Moore weaved. Media's insolent nature is most apparent in the part where the movie's director/writer portrayed the news networks' contribution to the 'fear' propaganda.

Moore claims that the launching of a war in Iraq had no basis, just W. Bush's own 'fear' propaganda, which (as was also stated by Member of the Congress Jim McDermott) was spurred by the media's willing coverage of the Bush administration's feed of the 'constant' threat of terrorism even though

there were no specific details handed out. And so in a way, Moore also momentarily paints a tirade on American media's eagerness to become a voice of the Bush administration by presenting the terror threat and even the Iraqi war in a non-rational way, going with what the W. Bush administration wanted them to cover. For Moore, a lot of lies and cover-ups happened with the War on Terrorism coverage.

Indeed, Fahrenheit 9/11 may have torn the nation into two – some believing its theories wholeheartedly, and some reserving their trust to the Bush administration. But for any political science student, the movie is a perfect look as to how important a role and responsibility the media possesses in a democratic society. The movie also throws in the glaring fact that the media – with all its freedom and responsibility – should take extra care in handling its affairs.

## **References**

Fahrenheit 9/11. Dir. Michael Moore. 2004, June 25. DVD. Lion Gates Films, 2004.