

Michael Moore

Filmmaker

Film and Foreign Policy

This whole issue of how the world sees us now is something that's very important to me, I think it's important to all of us. It's because, I think, the people in this world actually love Americans. They love America, they love the idea of America, they love what we stand for, they love our Constitution, our government and all those great documents. They love all of it, and they've met many of us and they like us as people. In spite of all that's said today about how they feel about the Bush administration and the decisions that have been made, I think that generally we still have a few years of goodwill left amongst the people on this planet who feel very good about us. They've met us, as I've said, there's something they appreciate about our simpleness, you know, how we just kind of wear it out there on our sleeve—"hey, how you doing? Yeah, I'm from St. Louis,"—they like that about us.

They're very polite, too. They know we don't know a lot about the world. I just taped a Barbara Walters Special that will air this week, but I'm not going to tell you if I cried or not, you'll have to watch to find that out. It was a great interview and I really like Barbara Walters. She says, "Now, you wrote here in your book that Americans are among the dumbest people on the planet. Why would you say such a thing?" And I said to her, "Well, Barbara, who's the prime minister of Canada?" And there was dead silence and the look that she gave me. I felt so bad for her immediately, and I said, "It's okay. Don't worry. No one in this room knows. You're in good company." But if you go to any other country on the planet Earth and you ask one of its citizens in France "Who's the president of Germany?" or if you go to Poland, "Who's the president of Russia?" Or, go anywhere—go to Honduras and ask them who runs El Salvador—they know. We don't have to know.

Whenever I go speak at college campuses I have this little game I play on the stage called "Stump the Canadian." There's always a Canadian in the audience—I'm sure there's one or two in here today, right? They're so polite. But I got this idea because I spoke at the American Librarian Association in New York a number of years ago. They held the meeting at the Canadian Consulate there in Rockefeller Center. So there's 800 American librarians in there and a couple of Canadians who were there because it was their place and I asked the same question: is there anyone in here who knows who the prime minister of Canada is? And the place was just silent and then one little librarian in the back goes "But we can look it up."

we have a media that simply won't do it's job, won't ask the hard questions, won't demand the evidence

That's why Bush wears his "C" student thing on his sleeve--because he knows that goes over well. We actually aspire to the mediocre. We don't really celebrate intelligence, intellectualism, a discovery for knowledge. Actually, we kind of pooh-poo that, and we celebrate you if you don't know something. We have a system of enforced ignorance in this country. It begins with a lousy public education system and continues on when we're adults with a media that simply refuses to do its job and give us the information about what's really going on.

The National Geographic did a survey two years ago and they wanted to find out what young adults in America knew about geography, so they polled 18-25 year old Americans. This is what they found: 85 percent of them could not find Iraq on the map, 60 percent could not find Great Britain on the map—and here's the worst one of all—11 percent of them couldn't find the United States on the globe—11 percent!! This should be an embarrassment to all of us.

I think that the reason the world is a little nervous about us right now is that we seem to be going off half-cocked without really knowing what we're doing or what the rest of the world is really all about. The reason for that, I think, in part, is because we have a media that simply won't do it's job, won't ask the hard questions, won't demand the evidence. I have such faith in our fellow Americans—when they do have the information they do the right thing. But when they were told that

there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and [that] Britain was 45 minutes away from being attacked, and Saddam had something to do with 9/11—all that stuff—when they're given that, well, then they responded with 70 percent that supported the war at the beginning. But once they had the information, what did the American people do? They turned. Fifty-four percent now are opposed to the war. That's because they had the information. Where was the media before the war? They were too busy wanting to be embedded, to

According to a Johns Hopkins survey, 100,000 Iraqi civilians have died in this war. These are human beings with souls who have every right to live, the same right as you or I. The fact is that they are now dead as a result of what we've done. The Pentagon's own admission that they were zero for 50 in the first 50 air strikes when the war started—zero for 50 on the intended targets—who do you think we killed?

In my movie—the old woman who comes out of the rubble of her home and cries out to God, “Where are you

God? Why have you abandoned us? Why have you let the Americans do this to us?” and then she calls upon God to put a curse on us. She asks God that someday we will know what it feels like to have the bombs rain down on our homes and see our loved ones killed. It's a chilling moment. Every time I have seen it it pierces me because I believe in some sense we are cursed. It's something that we really haven't wanted to address for a very long time because we like to think of ourselves as—and we are—good and decent people. We

hold nothing against

the Iraqi people or the Iranian people—and yet here we go again, Bush is already talking about Iran.

There's the mother from Flint in *Fahrenheit 9/11* who read the letter from her son, his last letter home, in which he made what was his last

request that we, the American people, remove Bush from the White House. I hadn't seen the film in a long time and they just showed it at the Directors' Guild here this week, and so I went over and sat in the last row to see the people's reactions and my own reaction, I guess, and it was amazing. The film was actually twice as sad as it was the first time that we saw it. The laughter was twice as loud because everyone is in need of a good laugh right now, just as a release. The sense, I think, for a lot of us who voted for Kerry—I know some people here who didn't—the sense of despair that we felt in the last month, and I guess what I want to say to those of you who have been feeling that despair is that something incredible happened with this election. First of all, 57 million people voted for Kerry. Bush does not have a mandate. I love listening to him talk like he has a mandate because the Republicans are so cocky and arrogant about the election and the results and they've misread it entirely. They're going to overreach so far that they'll do themselves in. Trust me, if you remember that night when Nixon trounced McGovern—and you were 18, like I was, and you thought it was the end of the world—in 22 months Nixon was gone. That's why I believe that Bush is circling the wagons, appointing Cabinet members who are a choir of yes-men and -women. That's the worst way for him to go and it's going to be bad for the country and bad for the world for a short period of time, but I believe that good eventually does prevail. I believe this.

I know that a lot of the reason that we lost, that our side loses a lot, is because we show up to a gunfight with a butter knife. The other side, the Republicans, that's what you have to admire about conservatives, they have the courage of their convictions—they go right for it. They didn't go after Kerry's weaknesses, they went after his



Michael Moore
Filmmaker

be in bed with the Bush administration, to ask the questions. They failed to do their job, and I hold them as responsible as the Bush administration for the deaths of our 1,300 soldiers in Iraq.

strengths. They went right at him—war hero. Conservatives in the room, we secretly admire you. We don't know how you do it. We're like the Cal football team: "Well, we shouldn't run

America loves to vote for Hollywood, and that's why the Republicans run Hollywood whenever they can

up the score. We've already won the game." And the next day we don't get to go to the Rose Bowl. "Why can't we go to the Rose Bowl? We thought we did a nice thing by not running up the game." This has got to stop.

Conservatives are organized, dedicated, committed. They get up in the morning and they never stop. They are up at the crack of dawn trying to figure out what core group of people have to suffer more today. You have to admire them. Our side, we never see the crack of dawn unless we've been up all night partying. That's the only time we see the sun come up. "Oh, the sun's coming up. Maybe we'd better go to bed." Not them, though—not them. It's time to stop this, it's time to stop it.

You've had to listen for the last month to all these conservative pundits—the O'Reillys and the Hannitys and the Limbaughs. What has been their mantra for this month? Democrats have to divorce themselves from Hollywood. Hollywood cost the Democrats the election. Hollywood, right? Now let me ask you. Do you think Hannity and O'Reilly are in the business of wanting to offer helpful

advice to the Democrats? Do you think they're saying this because they want you to do better next time? No. They're hoping the Democrats don't figure out their secret—something they already know. They know that America loves Hollywood. Americans love Hollywood. They love the people in the movies, they love the people on TV—that's why they watch TV, that's why they go to the movies. The Republicans already know this and they also know America loves to vote for Hollywood, and that's why the Republicans run Hollywood whenever they can. Right? And they win—Reagan, Arnold, Gopher from the *Love Boat*, he was in Congress, right? Sonny Bono. It doesn't matter how obscure the celebrity is—Fred Thompson—they know Americans love actors. They love Hollywood, they love celebrities. It doesn't matter how many nude photos you have of them at drug parties, groping women—it doesn't matter, they're in the movies, they're on TV. And the Republicans are hoping against hope that the Democrats don't figure this out.

I've been out here a few days and I've actually heard people here say, "Well, maybe we shouldn't have been so involved." And a famous actor said to me, "I went to Ohio and knocked on doors and maybe I shouldn't have done that." Now, he's one of the top actors in America, one of the top celebrities. I said, "Are you kidding? You were in Stuebenville. Can you imagine if you grew up in Stuebenville and somebody knocks on your door who's like one of the top actors in Hollywood? You'll dine on that for ten years. That's not a bad thing."

When are we going to start running our stars? I'm telling you, the Democrats should not be running from Hollywood, they need to embrace Hollywood, not just because there are people here who should be running for

office. Who wouldn't vote for Tom Hanks? Who in America wouldn't vote for Tom Hanks? Give me the list of Americans that wouldn't vote for Tom Hanks, or Paul Newman or Oprah? Everyone loves Oprah. Who wouldn't vote for Oprah? I want their names. She's got good politics, she's got a good heart, she'll have us all up exercising at six in the morning. That can't be bad for America. She'll have all of us reading a book. I would let her keep her show every afternoon at four o'clock from the Oval Office. And if any of the Democrats in Congress mouth off to her, bring Dr. Phil in to slap them. Who's our Arnold? I'm not being facetious when I say that—who's our Arnold and when are we going to start running him? Why are we running the wonk? They run actors, professional actors or amateur actors like Bush. Bush, the sort of fumbling, bumbling Gilligan, Barney Fife. The people who vote for him know that he's reading someone else's lines. Since when did the Republicans get the better scriptwriters? Since when did they get the better art directors and set designers? Crawford Ranch is a Hollywood set designed by Karl Rove a year and a half before Bush first ran for president. Rove said, "We've got to create this thing. We've got to get you down there as often as possible, send you to wardrobe, put the hat and the boots on and the media will transmit images of this for free."

Listen, this is the honest truth and we know it—the Republicans had a story to tell. They had a compelling story to tell the American people. It doesn't matter if the story was fiction. It was a good story and the people want a good story. And this was Bush's story: Out of the ashes of September 11 rose one man who stood upon the rubble of Lower Manhattan with bullhorn in hand and said, "I hear you and I will protect you and you will never be attacked again," and the

people were never attacked again and lived happily ever after. That was a good story. Quick: Somebody tell me Kerry's story. What was the story? I'm not Bush? I'm not Bush-- that's a tag line, that's not a story. But you know what? Here's what is so incredible, we got 57 million votes with a tag line. That's how desperate people were to remove Bush and to get someone else in there. Fifty-seven million on a tag line. What would happen next time if we actually had a story to tell and a candidate who could tell it?

The Democrats need to spend months here in Hollywood because this is where the people are, the talent that exists here who can write the story, who could help do this. Do not run from Hollywood. Do not run another wonk. The star doesn't have to be Tom Hanks. There are political stars. I was at a Thanksgiving Dinner last week in Michigan and there was a relative at the other end of the table, a man who works in a factory, a man whom I've never heard use the words "African-American," if you get my drift, and he said to me, "You know, I like that Obama guy." I said, "Really? Why?" "I like his story." I like his story, he told a good story, didn't he? One that resonated, one that was compelling, one that was moving, one that connected with the hopes and dreams of every American. It didn't matter what his skin color was, and the great thing about his story was it was a story of nonfiction, and that's what we need. We need to find the Obamas and we

need to present them to the American people.

I have a lot of faith in my fellow Americans that they will do the right thing. Fifty-nine percent in a Gallup poll two days ago said that they would oppose Bush appointing a single Justice of the Supreme Court who would reverse *Roe v. Wade*—59 percent! That's the country you live in. Do not sit here in California and say, "Oh, what's going on out there? This is such a Blue State. What's going on with all those other states?" First of all, you have a lot of work to do here

because you're a Blue State with a Republican governor. But, of course, I love the fact that the only way a Republican can get elected in California now is you have to be pro-choice, right? Remember, Arnold had to make that very clear—I am pro-choice. I am pro-environment. I am pro-women. I am pro-gay. Right? Arnold—pro-gay! Said he would support the people of California if they wanted gay marriage he would support it. In fact, what's so cool about this is the only way a Republican can get elected here now is if you're married to a Kennedy. That's another requirement. So, that's the good news. The American people haven't shifted to the right. Karl Rove did what he said he was going to do. He got out his four million evangelicals that didn't vote last time. He told us he was going to do it and he did it. But there are 70 million people who didn't vote—70 million, and in that 70 million

are enough people to make it happen next time. I truly, truly believe that.

I've veered way off the subject matter here of film and its impact on the world, but I'm here in Los Angeles and, coming from the Midwest, I just want you to know that America loves this town. This town provides to the country its popular entertainment, and it's the one thing the Republicans can't figure out how to do. It drives them crazy. They don't know how to make movies. They don't know how to make a three-minute song. Bob Dylan, with a three-minute song, changed the world and moved a generation. We know how to do this, those of us on our side. If we do it, we'll succeed. The other side, they know this and that's why they're coming after Hollywood because it's the last place we can't figure out and they know that the people connect to the popular culture.

Last week, the Republicans took out a full-page ad in *USA Today*, essentially warning the Academy that they'd better not nominate Michael Moore and let him on the stage this year. Did anyone see this ad? They put a version of it in *Variety*—last week

**I'm not Bush—
that's a tag line,
that's not a story.
But you know
what? We got 57
million votes with
a tag line. That's
how desperate
people were to
remove Bush
and to get some-
one else in there**

**Bob Dylan, with a
three-minute song,
changed the world
and moved
a generation**

and I hear from *Variety* that they're going to continue to take out more ads. It says the election may be over but the war on ideas continues. Kerry may be defeated, but this one guy must be stopped—meaning me. But it's not really me. What they mean is *this*. *This* is those of us who work in this

business, those of us who do this. They know that there is a connection between us and the American people, and that is a frightening thought to them. If we actually did our work, if we start telling the stories here in Hollywood, if we start putting them up on the screen, if we start making television shows that tell the compelling story—I don't mean documentaries or nonfiction, I mean you go back to Roosevelt's time [when the] Steinbecks and the Preston Sturgeises and those who told stories to the American people that moved the nation in a compelling way, that provided the popular support that Roosevelt needed for the policies that he wanted to enact, that's when it worked. And when we've run stars before—Bill Clinton, a rock star, John Kennedy—a movie star, when we run people that people want to have in their living rooms, that's when we win and that's what we need to do and that's what this town needs to do.

Before I take questions, I want to add one more thing. The last time I was here in the Beverly Hilton was a couple of years ago when *Bowling for Columbine* was given the Writers' Guild Award for best original screenplay. It was the first time a documentary had been given this award because usually it's for fiction films and we were up against fiction films. Twelve thousand members of the Writers' Guild—11,500 who make their living writing fiction—gave the award to a nonfiction film, our film. My wife and I and our friends sat here in this room and we were so stunned that night because when you live out there in a way that Hollywood is portrayed

by the media, it's all about me, me, me in Hollywood. Me, me, me, me. And that night we sat among these writers who make their living writing fiction and they gave us an award that was not in their self-interest. The television writers can tell you that nonfiction reality has decimated their ranks, and

When we've run stars before—Bill Clinton, a rock star, John Kennedy—a movie star, that's when we win and that's what we need to do

yet they gave it to us anyway. The more time my wife and I spend out here the more selfless acts we see that take place in this town, whether it was our own personal experience, whether it was those who worked for Kerry when clearly it's not going to benefit their pocketbooks—if you earn a lot of money in this town, you're working against your own self-interests trying to elect a Democrat, but you put yourself aside for the greater good. And I'll say that even about Arnold—the selfless act of giving up a film career and sitting in Sacramento. Now, seriously, you have to give him that, right?

I see this constantly in this town and this is my humble call to people in Los Angeles, the people who work in my industry, your industry, to rise to the occasion here. So let the Steinbecks and the Preston Sturgeises

of our time rise up and let's let them tell their stories, let's make sure these stories get told.

It isn't easy, as Ms. Van de Kamp knows. As a former Disney board member she's the first to say it, we were talking here over lunch about our whole experience. Just getting *Fahrenheit 9/11* into the theatres, even though I'd had the success of *Bowling for Columbine*, you almost didn't get to see this film because Disney wouldn't release it. The struggle that Bob and Harvey Weinstein put up and fought to make sure that the American people got to see it is really something that, again, is one more example of people taking a stand when they don't have to, when it's easier to take the easier path.

So, I'm eternally grateful for that and I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you here today and I hope I've lifted some of your spirits a bit. Now is not the time to be down on the floor. Now is the time for us to participate. We all love this country dearly and we love the world that we live in dearly and we want to make sure that we are good citizens of this country and of this world. That will only happen when we treat this great democracy not as a spectator sport but as a participatory event. Someone out there earlier today said to me, "Do you consider yourself an activist or a film maker?" I said, "I'm a film maker. Activist should already be implied because I'm a citizen of a democracy. If you're a citizen of a democracy, you are automatically an activist because if we aren't all active it ceases to be a democracy."

Speeches to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council are edited for readability, not content. The Council is a non-partisan organization. The views expressed herein are solely those of the individual authors. The Council is a non-profit organization that pays neither honoraria nor expenses to its speakers.