

Fahrenheit this!

By Bill Berkowitz

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He claims that the title of his film is more satire than publicity-seeking hyperbole. He says he's not out to get Michael Moore, he's just trying to reinvigorate the public discourse. He enlisted a number of ultra-right-wing commentators for his "journey across the nation" to help him "find out whether the American Dream is still alive." Bandwagon jumper or serious filmmaker? What is Michael Wilson, the director of the forthcoming Michael Moore Hates America up to?

"I think he [Michael Moore] demonstrates a distrust of America when he manipulates facts so that they skew his point. I think that's distrustful," Wilson told The Daily Show's Samantha Bee during a segment titled "Dislike Mike" in which Wilson goes to New York City to hunt down Moore. "I'd like to do to Michael Moore what he's done to others," Wilson added.

It's morning in America for conservatives who don't like Michael Moore or his politics. Moore's Oscar-winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine* got the ball rolling, and this year's Cannes Film Festival top prize-winning film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, sealed the deal. A number of web sites dedicated to debunking the lefty filmmaker and setting the record "straight" have been established including MooreWatch; mooreexposed.com; and *Bowling For Truth*.

There are also web sites, Wilson said in an e-mail exchange, "where people don't actually offer any sort of debunking of Moore, but rather call him names from the anonymity of cyberspace and offer him tickets to Iraq."

The astonishing success of Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* – which has grossed more than \$100 million domestically, and millions more internationally since its late-June debut – is no doubt helping drive the Moore-thumping.

A recently published book, *Michael Moore is a Big Fat Stupid White Man*, has taken Moore-bashing to bestseller lists across the country. Michael Wilson hopes his film will excite late-summer moviegoers looking for an antidote to Moore's extraordinarily popular documentary.

With hopes of getting his film into theaters by late Summer, filmmaker Michael Wilson is currently putting the finishing touches on *Michael Moore Hates America*. The movie is

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intended to celebrate America, rather than to bash Moore, Wilson claims. “Contrary to its title,” he writes at his web site, MichaelMooreHatesAmerica.com, the film “isn’t a hatchet job on the filmmaker. It’s a journey across the nation where we meet celebrities, scholars and average folks alike, and we find out whether the American Dream is still alive! In the process, we’ll look at Michael Moore’s claims about the country, its people, and our way of life.”

“My film is different” from the Moore-debunkers and Moore-bashers “in that I’m trying to be respectful of Michael Moore the person,” Wilson said. “I’m focusing on what he has said and done in his body of work, and holding it up against the light of experience – both mine and that of hundreds of other Americans I’ve met on this journey.” While Wilson respects Moore’s passion, he wonders “whether that passion clouds his honesty... and [that is] one of the themes I’m exploring in the flick.”

Why such a hyperbolic title? “The title isn’t a thesis,” Wilson pointed out. “It’s a satirical swipe at some of the shrillness that has engulfed this big American conversation. I think audiences (especially audience members who are expecting me to do nothing but lay into Moore) will be very surprised at how it plays out in the film. And I’m not giving that part away.”

Wilson has tried in vain to get Michael Moore to sit down for an interview. “The closest I got,” he told a reporter for the Pioneer Press, “was I did run into him at the (University of Minnesota) when he was on his book tour, and he started screaming at me.” According to Wilson, “the screaming began when [he] mentioned the title of his film in the middle of asking a question. ‘It was quite a sight... 7,000 Michael Moore fans, just booing me,’” Wilson said. (The Daily Show’s hysterical send-up of Wilson’s attempt to track down Moore in New York City is posted online.)

In the two and a half minute trailer for his film, Wilson chats with two prominent conservatives, former ultra-conservative Republican Congressman J.C. Watts of Oklahoma and Dinesh D’Souza, an “academic” who’s been feeding at the trough of right wing foundations for years. D’Souza, a former John M. Olin scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute is currently a Fellow at the Hoover Institution. D’Souza has authored a number of books including “The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society,” described by MediaTransparency.com as a book that “argues that low-income black people are basically ‘pathological’ and that white racism isn’t really racism at all, just a logical response to this ‘pathology.’”

Wilson was plugging away on the film but “struggling through lack of cash,” when he met financier Brian R. Cartmell, of the Center for Media and Democracy’s Disinfopedia reports. Cartmell is one heck of a colorful dude, who has cashed in on the American dream.

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In January 2000, Seattle Weekly writer Mark D. Fefer reported that Cartwell “was the president of Internet Entertainment Group [IEG], the Seattle-based online pornography giant founded by Seth Warshavsky back in 1995,” headquartered in Seattle, Washington. According to Disinfopeia, “Cartmell and his employer were named as defendants in an early cybersquatting case... [and] they were sued by the toy manufacturer Hasbro for using ‘Candy Land,’ one of Hasbro’s trademarks, in a domain name for a porn site.”

Brian Cartmell now runs SpamArrest, a company that offers a service blocking email spam. “Unfortunately, SpamArrest used the database of email addresses it built up through this system to send out emails advertising its service. People who emailed a SpamArrest customer were sent emails inviting them to subscribe to SpamArrest. The tactic caused outrage among many Internet users who accused SpamArrest of – ironically – resorting to spamming. It also led to SpamArrest being added to the block list of the respected anti-spam organization SpamHaus,” Disinfopeia reported.

Cartmell lays out his ten-point critique of Moore’s film at his web site.

Wilson bluntly criticized the Center for Media and Democracy (CMD) and its interactive Disinfopeia web site, claiming that when he tried “to correct the factual errors” on the site the organization “delete[d] our changes and post[ed] more propaganda.” Wilson charged that CMD “has no interest in being ‘fair’ or ‘respecting other contributors.’” He also accused CMD of “work[ing]... hard to silence dissenting opinions.”

As of July 18, Wilson was “still negotiating the deal” and couldn’t “talk about it yet.” He hopes to have the deal done “within the next two weeks” and have the movie in theaters in August or early September. He is optimistic that the film will draw a large audience: “There have been millions and millions of hits to the website, and I get a lot of very supportive email,” Wilson said. “And I hope that people who believe everything Michael Moore tells them will see my movie. It might change them. As for numbers, I don’t even want to guess.”

Michael Moore Hates America may also be shown at a new film festival called the American Film Renaissance which, according to the Hollywood Reporter, is a festival devoted to showing conservative films. Scheduled for Sept. 9-11 in Dallas, the festival was announced in late-June by co-founder Jim Hubbard who said it was being “bankrolled primarily by some ‘big-time conservative donors.’”

The ongoing buzz that Fahrenheit 9/11 continues to generate will help Wilson’s efforts. That the premiere date of Michael Moore Hates America might coincide with the release of DVD of Fahrenheit 9/11 will certainly not hurt the marketability of either film.

Bill Berkowitz is a freelance writer covering right-wing groups and movements.