

# Disney and the path to reelection?

**IN** what appears to be the end times for the Bush junta, nothing is sacred as Team Bush rallies all of its resources for a full court press to maintain control of Congress during the upcoming mid-term elections. Predictably, and right on schedule, the all 9/11 all the time presidency is shamelessly playing the only card it ever had in its deck.

For the fifth anniversary of the attacks that officially ushered in an age of security states and perpetual war, the Republicans launched a coordinated campaign of speeches, flag draped ads and a Disney/ABC propaganda film, "The Path to 9/11," whitewashing otherwise well documented Bush administration incompetence and criminal indifference leading up to the attacks while tarring Democrats as soft on terrorism.

The film was produced by Disney's ABC television subsidiary at a cost of \$40 million. They then pressured their affiliate stations to air it, all five hours, commercial-free starting on the eve of the fifth anniversary of the attacks. Marketed as a "docudrama," the film contradicts the 9/11 Commission's report, as well as countless well researched investigations, with falsehoods, lies and outright fabrications designed to puff the Bush police-state agenda while placing blame for the attacks on a blow-job obsessed Clinton administration.

The TV blockbuster was to be distributed to High School classrooms for rebroadcast by Disney-connected Scholastic Books, along with a teacher's guide admonishing instructors to revive discredited Bush administration lies by telling students that Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks, and that he was planning to unleash weapons of mass destruction upon the American homeland.

Though the film was praised by the dung beetle set, with Rush Limbaugh telling his

## **DISNEY AND THE PATH TO REELECTION / 2**

"Dittoheads" that it "really zeros in on the shortcomings of the Clinton administration," the path to *The Path to 9/11* had otherwise turned rocky well before the film was aired. MSNBC reports that an FBI agent who served as a consultant for the film quit halfway through the project because he claimed the film's writers were "making things up." ABC News' own consultant, former Clinton and Bush administration anti-terrorism advisor Richard Clarke, wrote that a key scene in the film, one where Clinton's Nation Security advisor tells the CIA to pass on an opportunity to capture Osama bin Laden, was "utterly invented."

Berger himself called the scenes where an actor depicted him giving the stand down order, as "complete fabrications," demanding that they be edited out of the final film. They weren't. Instead, the film casts a heroic Northern Alliance commander allied with the US as responding to the fictitious order by asking his CIA contact, "Are there any men left in Washington or are they all cowards?" Harvey Keitel, who plays the lead character in the film, went on record three days before the film's debut, complaining during a *Showbiz Tonight* appearance that, "it turned out not all the facts [in the script] were correct." No shit Harvey.

### **"Rebels with a Cause"**

Disney/ABC's chief screenwriter for the film, Cyrus Nowrasteh, told journalists that the film was "well supported and well documented," representing the film as being based on the 9/11 Commission's report. The film's promotional website promises an historical recreation that would "take viewers behind closed doors at the CIA, the FBI and the White House and into the world of Richard Clarke, Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, Dick Cheney, Sandy Berger and CIA Director Richard Tenet, among others."

Despite such pretentious claims to accuracy on the part of Disney/ABC, the film clearly wanders into the realm of fiction. Nowrasteh defends his deviations from reality under the guise of creative license, explaining that the film was still just a dramatization – though it appears that it's a dramatization of fictional and historic events fused together into a stream of misinformation and historical revisionism. Nowrasteh, it turns out, is a partisan Republican activist who is outspoken on the subject of using entertainment as propaganda. Last year he was part of a panel on the subject entitled, "Rebels With a Cause: How Conservatives Can Lead Hollywood's Next Paradigm Shift." Last week he admitted that the Berger scene was a fabrication.

The film's factufiction is unintentionally comic at times. For example, *The London Independent's* Robert Fisk, along with all the other journalists who interviewed bin Laden during the years leading up to 2001, are combined into one amalgam journalist who, and

here's where it becomes laughable, works for ABC. So we get one scene where the spineless wieners at the Clinton White House are watching ABC News, grumbling about how they can't find bin Laden while ABC News can. The CIA later goes to the ABC reporter for advice about how to deal with bin Laden. The ABC reporter appears again right before the bombing of the US embassy in Kenya – to warn a hapless Clinton CIA about the dangerous mastermind who goes on to execute the attack after the warning is ignored.

The line between fact and fiction was further blurred on the first night of the broadcast when the last 15 minutes of the three hour special were branded as an ABC News Nightline broadcast – as if the film ended for the night and a newscast began. The Nightline segment featured the show's new lineup of news anchors on the Nightline set reiterating the major points of the film, this time as news analysis – albeit old news.

### **Bush's Live Cameo**

On the second night of the screening we were treated to a TV first – a live presidential cameo in the middle of fiction TV – as the film was "interrupted" for a pre-scheduled live presidential broadcast. While the Bush speech fit seamlessly into the Disney/ABC movie, it must have appeared downright psychotic to the majority of people who viewed or heard the speech separate from the movie as Bush defiled our day of morning with "dead or alive" rhetoric promising more death and destruction in the form of an endless global war. He sang the al Qaeda mantra while boasting to the nation that the bad guy we'd been watching on TV was captured and in Guantanamo. Then he blessed us and allowed us to return to our film – for the time being.

Democrats, for their part, have been crying foul about The Path to 9/11 ever since they began seeing leaks about the content of the film. They had to rely on leaks, incidentally, since ABC refused to supply advance screening copies of the film to Democrats who were depicted in the film, while, the other hand, readily supplying screeners to allies such as Rush Limbaugh who were certain to rave about the film. Democratic leaders in Congress such as Western New York Representative Louise Slaughter, have vehemently attacked the film as blatant propaganda. Slaughter argues that the Disney/ABC effort "is obviously aimed at influencing the midterm elections," where most credible polls now predict Republicans, Diebold permitting, are poised to lose control of Congress.

The Path to 9/11 lays it on pretty thick. Northern Alliance commanders decry the girly men of the Clinton administration, pining for the Reagan days when a real president could get things done. The FBI warnings about suspicious students in flight schools is tabled after a black FBI agent denounces it as racial profiling. Other set backs are the result of

our inability to extract information by torture, like in Pakistan and the Philippines, or to conduct warrantless domestic spying. Clinton administration Secretary of State Madeline Albright whines on about diplomacy and following international law while CIA agents stand by powerless as spy drones photograph bin Laden.

The sudden Disney rush to pump partisan Republican propaganda into millions of homes is especially transparent coming just two years after their controversial decision to cancel distribution of Michael Moore's anti-Bush Fahrenheit 9/11 documentary, produced by Disney's semi-autonomous Miramax subsidiary. At that time, Disney cited the politically biased nature of Moore's historically accurate film as the reason to not distribute, or more accurately, to censor, the film. Lion's Gate Entertainment stepped in, distributing the wildly profitable film in Disney's place.

### **Disney, Jeb and the Saudis**

So the big questions is why? Why is Disney putting it all on the line to stump for the Republicans? The answer, it seems, lies in Florida where Jeb Bush's government has showered Disney with tax breaks for its theme parks and associated developments. With Bush's government firmly at the helm in Florida, Disney enjoys a spooky political autonomy on its 40,000 plus acre kingdom in central Florida as well as concessions allowing it to create the world's first branded city, Disney's own version of a Brave New World – Celebration, Florida.

The Disney/Bush web spins tighter. Jeb Bush serves as a trustee for Florida's state employee pension system, which is heavily vested in Disney, owning over 7.3 million shares of the mouse's stock. As governor, Bush holds sway over how those shares will vote in Disney shareholder meetings and whether or not the state would divest, a move that would send a shock wave through Disney's market valuation. In 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, George W. Bush went on national television and told the American people to fight terrorism by shopping and going "on down to Disney World in Florida." As New Yorkers were still choking on what we now know was toxic dust, Bush asked the rest of the nation to "take your families and enjoy life" in Disney World. Disney's CEO at the time, Michael Eisner, a Bush campaign contributor, sent out an email, according to The Village Voice, calling Bush, in the wake of the attacks, "our newest cheerleader."

Disney also owes a debt to the Republican controlled congress it's so ardently trying to preserve. In 1998 Congress passed the Disney-inspired Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, extending copyright protection on what would be public domain images for 95 years. Hence, the Mickey Mouse images we, our parents and grandparents grew up with, belong not to our popular culture, but to Disney. Screen printing your own

Mickey Mouse imagery can land you in jail for up to five years in states such as New York, that prosecute such "counterfeiting" of licensed imagery. Disney even claims the legal rights to photos that "guests" take while visiting Disney theme parks if they show copyrighted images such as structures or characters.

Disney has also been a major beneficiary from Republican-dominated bi-partisan trade bills that allow Disney to freely import tariff-free Disney-branded products from sweatshops in places such as Haiti, China and Vietnam. During the same year that Michael Eisner's salary, with bonuses and stock options, maxed out at \$575 million, workers producing Disney goods abroad earned less than \$300 per year toiling in hellish conditions. Then there are the bills that are before Congress right now, promising to end the last vestiges of media regulation. If passed, Disney and other media giants will rake in untold fortunes as the internet is privatized and the public airwaves are further deregulated and handed over to unbridled corporate control – with Disney's ABC Radio Network as a major beneficiary.

### **My pet mouse**

There are clear areas where the ABC/Disney film omits major 9/11 facts. For example, the FBI's "bin Laden set to strike in U.S." warning, given to the Bush administration in the weeks leading up to September 11th 2001 is reduced to a passing title on screen for three seconds. Nor did we see any reenactment of the 9/11 scenes of Bush reading "The Pet Goat" to a grade school class after being informed that the nation was under attack. Osama appears on screen in 1998, never having been aligned with or trained by the CIA. And we certainly didn't see any mention of Saudi links to the alleged hijackers or reenactments of Osama's cousins being rounded up and flown to freedom outside of the US on Bush administration orders, while all other commercial flights were grounded. In fact, while the film was certain to show titles listing the nationalities of the 1993 World Trade Center bombers, it omitted the nationalities of the mostly Saudi 9/11 hijackers.

These and other verifiable facts questioning Saudi and Saudi royal family links to the 9/11 terrorists were the meat of Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11 – facts that are whitewashed out of the historic record by the Disney/ABC film. Hence, the financial links between Disney and the Saudi royal family should come as no surprise. Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (F.A.I.R.) reports that Saudi royal Al-Walid bin Talal is a major partner in Disney's European theme park, EuroDisney.

Democrats and other opponents of the Bush administration are slamming Disney both for producing propaganda and for defiling the memory of the tragic events of 9/11. Senate Democratic leaders issued a statement last week, arguing "That Disney would

seek to broadcast an admittedly and proven false recounting of the events of 9/11 raises serious questions about the motivations of its creators and those who approved the deeply flawed program. . . . that Disney plans to air commercial-free a program that reportedly cost it \$40 million to produce serves to add fuel to these concerns.”

Public outrage runs even stronger. During the weekend leading up to the airing of *The Path to 9/11*, hundreds of thousands of Americans signed anti-Disney petitions calling for an FCC investigation of ABC’s misuse of the public airwaves. Subsequent petition drives are calling on congress to reenact corporate ownership restrictions on broadcast outlets in the wake of Disney’s abuse of power. In response to public outcry, Disney/ABC made a few symbolic pre-broadcast edits to the film while Scholastic Books pulled their revisionist teachers’ guide for the film.

### **Time to boycott everything Disney**

Disney’s edits, however, didn’t alter the propagandistic essence of Nowrasteh’s screenplay. In short, Disney has placed its bets. They’re fully vested and betting heavily on Republicans maintaining control of Congress. As Disney pays off its debt to its Republican and Saudi Royal supporters, they’re selling out their responsibilities as stewards of the public airwaves, as members of a democratic society and as Americans on the anniversary of a national tragedy. To have to sit through the emotionally devastating images of the 9/11 attacks once more is disturbing enough. To have to suffer through that day again as opportunists try to piggyback their political agenda on our scarred emotions is infuriating. Enough is enough. Let’s make sure Disney loses big at this roulette table. It’s time for a national boycott of everything Disney!

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