

Muzzling Michael

By Greg Palast

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When the fattened cats at Disney put the kibosh on Michael Moore's new film, "Fahrenheit 9-11," they did more than censor an artist. Gagging Moore is only the latest maneuver in suppressing some most uncomfortable facts: the Bush Administration's killing off investigations of Saudi Arabian funding of terror including evidence involving a few members of the bin Laden family in the USA.

I know, because, with my investigative team at BBC television and The Guardian of Britain, I wrote and filmed the original reports on which Moore's new documentary are based.

On November 11, 2001, just two months after the attack, BBC Television's Newsnight displayed documents indicating that FBI agents were held back from investigating two members of the bin Laden family who were fronting for a "suspected terrorist organization" out of Falls Church, Virginia – that is, until September 13, 2001. By that time, these birds had flown.

We further reported that upper level agents in the US government informed BBC that the Bush Administration had hobbled the investigation of Pakistan's Khan Laboratories, which ran a flea market in atomic bomb blueprints. Why were investigators stymied? Because the money trail led back to the Saudis.

The next day, our Guardian team reported that agents were constrained in following the money trail from an extraordinary meeting held in Paris in 1996. There, in the Hotel Monceau Royale, Saudi billionaires allegedly agreed to fund Al-Qaeda's "educational" endeavors.

Those stories ran at the top of the nightly news in Britain and worldwide but not in the USA. Why?

Our news teams picked up several awards including one I particularly hated getting: a Project Censored Award from California State University's school of journalism. It's the prize you get for a very important story that is simply locked out of the American press.

And that hurts. I'm an American, an L.A. kid sent into journalistic exile in England.

What's going on here?

Why the heck can't agents follow the money, even when it takes them to Arabia?

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Because, as we heard repeatedly from those muzzled inside the agencies, Saudi money trails lead back to George H.W. Bush and his very fortunate sons and retainers. We at BBC reported that too, at the top of the nightly news, everywhere but America.

Why are America's media barons afraid to tell this story in the USA? The BBC and Guardian stories were the ugly little dots connected by a single theme: oil contamination in American politics and money poisoning in the blood of our most powerful political family. And that is news that dare not speak its name.

This is not the first time that Michael Moore attempted to take our BBC investigative reports past the US media border patrol. In fact, our joke in the London newsroom is that if we can't get our story on to American airwaves, we can just slip it to the fat guy in the chicken suit. Moore could sneak it past the censors as 'entertainment.'

Here's an example of Moore's underground railroad operation to bring hard news to America: In the Guardian and on BBC TV, I reported that Florida's then Secretary of State, Katherine Harris, removed tens of thousands of black citizens from voter rolls just prior to the 2000 election. Her office used a list of supposed 'felons' – a roster her office knew was baloney, filled almost exclusively with innocents.

I printed the first installment of that story in the Guardian papers while Al Gore was still in the race. The Washington Post ran my story seven months later. By then, it could be read with a chuckle from the Bush White House. The black voter purge story would have never seen the light of day in the USA, despite its front-page play over the globe, were it not for Moore opening his book, "Stupid White Men," with it.

So go ahead, Mr. Mickey Mouse mogul, censor the guy in the baseball cap, let the movie screens go dark, spread the blindness that is killing us. Instead, show us fake fly-boys giving the "Mission Accomplished" thumbs up. It's so much easier, with the lights off, for the sheiks, who lend their credit cards to killers, to jack up the price of oil while our politicians prepare the heist of the next election, this time by computer.

Let's not kid ourselves. Tube news in the USA is now thoroughly Fox-ified and print, with few exceptions, still kow-tows to the prevaricating pronouncements of our commander in chief. Maybe I'm getting too worked up. After all, it's just a movie. But choking off distribution of Moore's film looks suspiciously like a hunt and destroy mission on unwanted news, even when that news is hidden in a comic documentary. Why should the media moguls stop there? How about an extra large orange suit for Michael for the new Hollywood wing in Guantanamo?

Penguin has recently launched the Expanded Election Edition of Palast's New York Times bestseller, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy.