

Propaganda Tactics and *Fahrenheit 9/11*

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I had my nose buried in books on the subject of propaganda analysis during June 2004, when Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* was released. So it's embarrassing to admit I didn't immediately recognize something big was happening in my field, and that it was as close as my local theater: "feature-length movie-house agitprop," as one commentator called it, which he correctly recognized as "a relatively rare and new thing."¹ With a few notable exceptions, such as Lenin's interest in cinema² and Leni Riefenstahl's work,³ propaganda has made a poor showing at the box office in modern times. Hollywood tried its hand at "message films" following World War II, but moviemakers soon discovered that people didn't go to theaters to have their consciences aggravated.⁴ Subsequent research has shown that individual movies rarely bring about major changes of opinion.⁵ Maybe that's why I was slow to see Moore's inferno. Still—you'd think that a professor and psychological consultant who considers his expertise to be influence and persuasion, would have gotten to the theater sooner. But I finally did, and for those (admittedly few) of us who marvel at the virtuoso application of influence techniques, I'll say that *Fahrenheit 9/11* was a fine education.

Here's my one-paragraph summary: *Fahrenheit 9/11* proposes conspiracy theories in support of a pacifist American foreign policy. Some of the film's major assertions are that a connection between George Bush and Osama Bin Laden can be made, that Bush has acted in favor of Saudis at the expense of Americans, and that the Saudis were behind the terrorist attacks of 9/11.⁶ The film implies that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are ineffective and unjust. It's also an attempt to reduce Bush's chances of re-election.

Fahrenheit's scorching of the president's character uses a "death by paper cuts" approach: scores of statistics and insinuations are marshaled to support a sprawling indictment of presidential ineptitude and fraud. As such, its validity as documentation rests largely on the accuracy of its many assertions—so the devil is in the details, as always. Some observers, such as Philip Shenon of the *New York Times*, believe that "it seems safe to say that central assertions of fact in 'Fahrenheit 9/11' are supported by the public record."⁷ Others see the manipulation of fact, rather than fact itself: "I was struck by the sheer cunningness of Moore's film... notice the film's meticulousness in saying only (or mostly) 'true' or defensible things in support of a completely misleading impression."⁸ Yet others see little truth value at all. NPR's Scott Simon wrote: "Mr. Moore ignores or misrepresents the truth, prefers innuendo to fact, edits with poetic license rather than accuracy, and strips existing news footage of its context to make events and real people say what he wants, even if they don't."⁹

There's an argument in the press and on the web whether or not *Fahrenheit 9/11* is propaganda.¹⁰ Commentators are fond of producing competing definitions of that notoriously slippery word. Most definitions reference mass-media manipulation of audience prejudices and emotions, and imply a willingness to deceive in order to gain power. Propaganda and education are similar in one respect: they both attempt to change what we believe is true. You can hear mundane persuasion in educational settings, but

propaganda makes much more extensive and systematic use of influence techniques. It's common for political communications to be castigated as "propaganda" when we don't agree with them, and lauded as "education" when we do, so our pre-existing biases influence how we apply the label. But there's a better way to analyze it—there are certain communication tactics that take advantage of "bugs" in the human cognitive hardware, and these tactics can help identify propaganda. So why try to make a determination based on semantics, or on subjective like or dislike of the communication? Why not determine whether *Fahrenheit 9/11* is propaganda, *based on its use of known propaganda tactics*? Moore's ability to use a range of tried-and-true tactics which can manage the 'pictures in our heads' will tell us whether we're dealing with documentary or propaganda. These tactics aren't exclusive; they're used by left and right, by capitalist and communist, by ideologs of all nationalities, creeds, and convictions. But they are *not* used with equivalent range, deception, or ability. The frequency, variety, and skill with which these tactics are employed can help us identify whether we are dealing with effective propaganda or not.

Working in academia and the military, I have friends on the left and the right. To generalize: my left-looking friends tell me they think Moore accesses strong arguments but sometimes makes those arguments poorly; my right-leaning friends don't see how *Fahrenheit* could be persuasive to anyone but the deep left. So one of my goals in this paper is to illustrate to the Right the mechanisms operating behind *Fahrenheit*—how the film functions psychologically, and what it does to persuade. To that end, I present eleven of the most favored psychological techniques from my study of propagandists the world over, and include portions of Moore's film that I believe illustrate those tactics. I see effective propaganda—but that's just my call. The reader's job (if he or she wishes to accept it) is to determine if, and how skillfully, Moore has employed the propagandist's tools, and to make the final call for documentary or for propaganda.¹¹

Omissions

One of the most commonly employed propaganda techniques is the omission of relevant or truthful information that works against the propagandist's thesis. Some scholars consider omissions to be a form of deception,¹² others argue that omissions are a normal part of human communication, which does not focus on background or contextual material for the sake of efficiency. Virtually everyone agrees that the intent of the communicator distinguishes deception from normal communication—an omission can be employed to intentionally give the wrong impression. Omissions ignore the contexts that may justify or undercut an action or idea; what gives them power is that they're often *not recognized as missing* by the audience. For example:

Imagine a lab that tests the ability of 20 brands of soap to kill bacteria. They find there's no significant difference among them; they're all equally effective. So one of the soap manufacturers, Smope, creates an ad that says: "No brand of soap can get you cleaner than Smope." Thanks to the simplification process of human memory, that statement will probably be erroneously encoded as "Smope is cleanest."¹³ Memory encoding is one of the many bugs in the human hardware. For this reason, influence

agents agonize over wording that remains in the vicinity of the truth while relying on the listener to generalize and simplify, and thus walk away with entirely incorrect beliefs. What the influencer says is secondary to what the target hears, believes, and remembers. The game is played in the mind of the audience, and you know the game's afoot when an advertiser, attorney, or propagandist picks and chooses words with the utmost care. Since movies entail untold hours of preparation, they're wonderful devices for precisely tuning the language and visuals for maximum effect.

Before we examine some key omissions, we need to explore that troubling "T" word: "Truth." How important are truthful or valid arguments in helping humans arrive at correct conclusions, anyway? Research has shown *the quality of an argument is largely irrelevant to humans*. Professor James Stiff, a leading judgment researcher, found a wimpy overall correlation between quality evidence and attitude change.¹⁴ He found that humans don't pay much attention to argument validity—rather, they pay attention to the argument's *claim* or *conclusion*, and how closely that claim or conclusion matches their prejudices. If a poorly argued message concludes with what a person already believes is true, he'll buy it. On the other hand, most powerfully reasoned arguments with ample supporting evidence will be rejected, if the conclusion doesn't match what the listener wants to hear. Don't accuse humans of being logical—they're not. They're psychological, which is something else entirely. That's why it's so common to see people giving faulty reasoning and invalid conclusions a pass: as long as the propagandist arrives at the "correct" conclusion, it really doesn't matter how he got there. Mere insinuation will serve about as well as solid evidence to prop up a prejudice.¹⁵

We can hear this "psycho-logic" in the comment of a 20-year-old *Fahrenheit* devotee quoted in a *Los Angeles Times* article: "I'm not a fan of the president," one of the *Times* poll respondents said in an interview Thursday. "If Michael Moore had done the film more truthfully, I would have been more impressed with it. But I agree with the main premise." The respondent gives Moore a pass on *truth*, because she agreed with his *claim* before setting foot in the theater. This is only human. And this helps explain why nearly a third of the respondents to the *Times* poll found *Fahrenheit* to be "completely accurate."¹⁶

Here are a few of the significant omissions in *Fahrenheit 9/11*:¹⁷

Moore uses a short clip of CNN analyst Jeffrey Toobin to dispute Bush's legitimacy as president. Toobin is quoted as saying that if the Florida ballots had been recounted, Gore would have won the election "under every scenario." Moore doesn't mention major studies conducted by the media that flatly disagree. *CNN*, *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Miami Herald* conducted studies which found that Bush would have won subsequent recounts in Florida, including recounts of the sort requested by Gore.^{18, 19, 20, 21}

Moore uses the words of retired FBI agent Cloonan to excoriate the departure of the Saudis after 9/11. Cloonan expresses outrage that departing Saudis were not interviewed.²² Not revealed is the fact that the Saudis *were* interviewed. The 9/11

commission reported that 30 of the passengers were interviewed,²³ that the FBI was able to interview all the departing Saudis that they wished to interview, and that the FBI has not subsequently wished to interview any of the un-interviewed Saudis that departed on that day.²⁴ The September 11 commission concurred that the Saudis were properly interviewed.²⁵

In what Moore describes as one of the film's funniest moments, Moore ambushes congressmen, asking them to help him send their children to fight in Iraq. Republican Congressman Mark Kennedy gives Moore one of his best clips: a quizzical look that's used to humorous effect. What's cut, however, is Kennedy's response: "I have a nephew on his way to Afghanistan." According to the *Star Tribune*, Kennedy actually has two nephews in the military, and a son considering a career in the Navy.²⁶ When Moore was charged with censorship for cutting Kennedy's response, he said that he deleted the clip because Kennedy didn't answer the question.²⁷ If we got the impression that Republican Representative Michael Castle, who is shown walking and talking on a cell phone, was particularly desperate to avoid Moore, we may find it interesting that he doesn't have any children.²⁸ And if we got the idea that it was primarily Republicans shirking their duties as patriotic parents, check the party affiliations of congressional parents who do have children in the military, listed elsewhere in this article.

Pre-war Iraq is shown as a peaceful haven, with Iraqi children playing on merry-go-rounds and flying kites, happy people eating in outdoor restaurants and smiling peacefully in sun-bathed plazas.²⁹ Given Moore's view, it's no surprise we don't see gassed Kurds, mass burial fields,³⁰ and dismembered Iraqi political prisoners. No dissenters hung from meat hooks, no torturing with blowtorches, vices, or drills. The sordid evidence from thirty years of Baathist war crimes, repression, and aggression are missing—they don't fit the thesis.³¹

After Moore shows us that the Iraqis were living in a state of bliss, the next footage we see is of American bombs falling in Iraq. Did we somehow get the impression they were falling primarily on those happy Iraqis we just saw? Moore's clips show bombs falling on military and police centers. This would only be noticeable to someone very familiar with Baghdad,^{32,33} but the nature of the targets are not mentioned in the film.

Afghanistan is pictured as a ruined country in political chaos under the thumb of the US. Afghanistan's new constitution—not mentioned. Afghanistan's upcoming democratic election—not mentioned. Afghanistan's emerging army—not mentioned. NATO's protection—not mentioned.³⁴ We're the victims of an information embargo.

The "coalition of the willing" is held up for a good mocking: Palau, Costa Rica, Iceland, Morocco, the Netherlands, and Afghanistan. Morocco offered to send two thousand monkeys! Yes, that was funny. Just the same, some seriously major players are omitted: Britain, Australia, Poland, Spain, Italy.

Moore portrays the Bush and Bin Laden families as close associates. Did you know that Osama can count 53 siblings in the family that disowned him in 1991? The rest of the large Bin Laden family has never been linked to terrorism,³⁵ and has enjoyed a good

relationship with the U.S. This, and other favorable relationships with the Bin Laden family are not examined, such as Jimmy Carter's successful solicitation of funds from several Bin Laden brothers for The Carter Center in 2000.³⁶ Actually, let's stay with Jimmy Carter for a moment—his brother Billy caused him some embarrassment, right? Did that make Carter any less of a president? No. *Should* it have? No. Consider Republican icon Ronald Reagan. His son Ron speaks out on behalf of the left. Does son Ron make father Ronald any less of a Republican? No. People in families are individuals. It's mentally lazy to generalize from a single family member to the entire family. Yet the propagandist can rely on the well-documented human propensity to jump from a single instance to a general indictment.

Moore shows us a disturbing scene where we are led to believe American soldiers are mocking a corpse with rigor mortis. According to reporter Liam Lacey, "He [Moore] revealed that a scene in which American soldiers appear to be desecrating a corpse beneath a blanket may be misleading. In fact, the soldiers had picked up an old man who had passed out drunk and they poked at his visible erection, covered by a blanket."³⁷

Aware that decreasing numbers of Americans believe that Saddam had an active hand in 9/11, Condoleezza Rice is shown saying: "Oh, indeed there is a tie between Iraq and what happened on 9/11." (Derisive laughter from the audience.) The rest of her immediately following quote, which makes sense of the first sentence, is omitted: "It's not that Saddam Hussein was somehow himself and his regime involved in 9/11, but, if you think about what caused 9/11, it is the rise of ideologies of hatred that lead people to drive airplanes into buildings in New York."³⁸

Moore capitalizes on a report (released by the White House during the Air National Guard "AWOL" flap) that expunged the name of a fellow Guard member by the name of James Bath. Bath is one of Moore's imputed conspirators, and a vital link between the Bush and Bin Laden families, as a money manager for one of the many Bin Laden brothers, Salem Bin Laden. Moore finds the crossed-out name to be a sinister attempt at deception, hiding evidence of the conspiracy implicating Bath, Bush, and the Bin Ladens. But Moore doesn't mention that 2003 federal law doesn't allow the National Guard to release medical information pertaining to other Guardsmen in a requested report, so they were bound by law to black out Bath's name in the version they released.^{39,40} Moore gloats about his investigative skill in obtaining an uncensored copy of the same report.⁴¹ It's merely a record released in 2000, before the privacy law of 2003 was in effect.⁴²

Past U.S. support for Saddam is highlighted and ridiculed. Not highlighted and ridiculed: that Saddam was a counterbalance to the U.S.'s greater enemy at the time, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran.

And, of course, there's not a word mentioned of the multiple UN resolutions that Saddam flouted.

For many, the most jarring omission was also the most obvious: the airplanes hitting the twin towers are not shown—only the dust and debris from the fallout, and the resulting human grief. The event inspiring the title of the movie—the definitive cause of

the war—the encapsulating image—is missing. Although the film doesn't retreat from gore in other depictions, omitted here are the images of hopeless Americans jumping to their deaths, rather than suffocating from the smoke of the burning towers. Regarding America's feelings on 9/11, Moore had two primary emotions to play on: anger and sorrow, and he needed to offer his audience something to feel at this point in the film. He cleverly chose brooding sorrow over motivating anger with his choice of visuals. To dwell on anger and the desire for justice would not forward Moore's thesis of Afghanistan and Iraq as immoral and unjustified wars.

It's no wonder that omissions are one of the propagandist's most favored tools. Why burden the audience with information that will *stop* them from jumping to conclusions? Influence researchers sometimes refer to omissions as *one-sided arguments*. And the data show that they're great for "preaching to the choir,"⁴³ the true believers, or to the unaware and uninformed. On the other hand, one-sided arguments fare poorly with informed, educated, or skeptical audiences, who are aware that opposing arguments exist, and want to hear both sides pitted against each other. The sheer number of important omissions from *Fahrenheit* clues us into Moore's intended audience—or to Moore's misunderstanding of how one-sided arguments work, whichever may be the case.

An insight into Moore's mastery of omissions was observable in his July 28, 2004 interview with Bill O'Reilly, who's known for his badgering style. Moore insisted on two ground rules before interviewing with O'Reilly, and both of them were "tells," giving us insights into Moore's technique. First, Moore insisted that he be allowed to ask every other question in the interview. Moore (and every journalist) knows the person asking the questions has much more control over the interview, than the person answering them. That's why we see Moore asking lots of questions of his "marks" in his movies—it allows him to feed them lines or set them up with traps, just as it does for O'Reilly and thousands of other journalists. But more interesting was Moore's second request: he insisted that there be absolutely no editing of the video that was shot of the interview, not even editing for time. Why would he ask this? Video edits are one of Moore's primary weapons against his opponents. He's a master of cutting and splicing film so his interviewees look duplicitous or foolish. Aware as he was of the effectiveness of his own techniques, it's likely he didn't want them used against himself.

Contextualization

Contextualization augments belief. Where omission takes away information, contextualization adds it. Contextualization is often used as a defensive tactic, but Moore uses it handily for playing offense, too. He's particularly fond of juxtaposition, the placing (or forcing) together of discordant images or ideas, or interrupting an emotion and allowing it to leak over into another scene. Previous scenes set an emotional context for subsequent ones, even if the scenes themselves are unrelated. Psychologists talk of "structure activation:" when our consciousness focuses on one thing, and then our train of thought is interrupted and refocuses on a new thing, the previous ways of thinking don't immediately dissipate—they linger to influence how we think about the new thing we're considering, coloring our judgment of it.

- We see and feel the grief of the witnesses to 9/11, as tears stain their faces. They are crushed by sorrow so profound that we can easily feel it ourselves. Then Moore interrupts our emotions of empathetic grief with a clip of Bush: happy, confident, and smiling—*or perhaps smirking*, since nobody could possibly smile in the context of this sort of grief. How could Bush possibly smile at a serious and sorrowful time like this? we wonder at a nonconscious level. Snatched from an unrelated context and plunged into the emotions of 9/11, the smiling Bush appears irreverent, insulated and calloused, because our previous emotions of grief are managing our judgments of this new thing we're offered for consideration: Bush's upbeat behavior.
- Rumsfeld tells us about the care taken in targeting Iraqi bomb targets. Cut to a clip of a crying Iraqi girl as she receives stitches. They look painful; we can feel the stitches pulling at our own skins. Then back to Rumsfeld and his assertions that the military is striving to make the targeting of its bombs as humane as possible. ("Just look at that poor child," we think. Moore scores again.)
- We learn how dangerous it is to fly in a post 9/11 world—it's frightening. Then we see a clip of Bush, encouraging Americans to fly! Then another clip, with a dour expert telling us that it's an exceedingly dangerous time to fly. ("Is Bush trying to kill all of us? Doesn't he care about our safety at all?")

- Bush says we'll "smoke out" the terrorists. He says it again in the next clip. And the next. Then we see a black-and-white image from a vintage western: "We'll smoke 'em out," a cowboy says in vaudevillian fashion. (We make the connection for Moore: "Bush is such an uncouth cowboy." Moore didn't say it; but we thought it for him.)

Journalists know it's easy to make anyone look foolish with out-of-context quotations.⁴⁴ It's just as easy to make people look duplicitous and fraudulent by showing them applying makeup and primping for a media appearance. But Moore does better than that. He allows the arrangement of his clips to visually answer the questions he raises:

- A bereaved father struggles with the death of his son, a soldier in Iraq. He asks, "What did my son die for?" In answer, Moore shows us a clip of the Halliburton building. This is the answer we're given to the father's question. Moore doesn't show liberated Iraqis or protected Americans in answer—he shows Halliburton.
- We see a bereaved mother wailing in grief for her son, a soldier killed in Iraq: "Why did you have to take him?" Who is she asking—God? The enemy who took his life? In the immediately following clip, Moore shows us a stammering George W. Bush. Has Moore just called Bush a murderer? No, he didn't say a thing. But we got the impression anyway.

One commentator said: "When Moore takes us to Iraq, on the eve of war, he shows placid scenes of an untroubled land on the brink of imperial annihilation. With all the leisurely strolling and kite-flying, it is unclear if Iraqis are living under a murderous dictatorship or in a Valtrex commercial... According to the footage that ensues, our pilots seem to have hit nothing but women and children."⁴⁵ That's the genius of contextualization: we might think it, but Moore never said it. There's a science to making people think and feel what the propagandist wants them to think and feel. As Moore promises, "any swing voters that see my movie will leave having swung."⁴⁶ Carefully setting up the context in which a person or event is considered has a powerful effect on what we actually think and how we feel. That's a bitter pill to swallow—we like to believe we're in control of our own thoughts and emotions. But people's beliefs and attitudes don't spring forth from within, like Athena fully armored from the mind of Zeus. Most beliefs and attitudes are caught from other people in a form of social contagion. Years of social science have documented how straightforward it is to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of others by modifying the physical or psychological context.

Ingroup/Outgroup Manipulations

Humans quickly, easily, and naturally distinguish group membership based on visible indicators such as gender, race, and age. But group preference is so easy to evoke, that it can be based on much less. In one example, social scientists brought subjects into a lab and had them estimate the number of dots on a large sheet of paper. Those who

overestimated the number of dots were told to join one group, and those who underestimated the number of dots were told to join the other. Then subjects were asked to evaluate the personal qualities that described these two groups. It was discovered that, on the aggregate, each group had rated itself significantly higher than the other group in terms of competence, intelligence, and creativity.⁴⁷ Subjects preferred the groups to which they belonged and found them superior—based on what? On whether they had over- or underestimated dots on a page! If people show ingroup preferences based on mere dot estimation, imagine how strong the effect is for weightier issues. Actually, we don't have to imagine it. We can lay the problems of racism, sexism, ageism, and an array of other -isms at the feet of this powerful and persistent “bug” in the human hardware: preference for one's own ingroups, and avoidance of outgroups.

Human persistence in viewing the social world in terms of groups and group rivalries (as opposed to individuals, or issues, or ideologies) is strong and ubiquitous. Using ingroup/outgroup manipulations, new groups may be formed, groups may be set against each other, intact groups may be split into warring factions, and (with much effort, skill, and luck) rival groups may be persuaded to cooperate and mend fences. The human's persistence in viewing the social world primarily in terms of groups is yet another of the many fascinating “bugs” in the human hardware. And this bug opens vast possibilities to the talented propagandist.

Moore unambiguously targets the Saudis as the out-group, the enemy, the evil-doers, the conspirators, the “real” terrorists in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Whether Moore truly believes this, or is merely positioning the Saudis as a sort of diversionary psychological lightning rod, is unknown. Elsewhere Moore has stated that “There is no terrorist threat in this country. This is a lie. This is the biggest lie we've been told.”⁴⁸ Taking the film at face value, though, it would be an unthinking oversimplification to group Prince Bandar and other members of the royal Saudi family as one and the same with Saudi fundamentalist Islamic terrorists. The distinction escapes Moore (perhaps they all look alike to him). It's interesting, that at a time many Americans are bemoaning a loss of pleasant international relationships, friendly relations between the Bush family and the Saudi royal family are *not* viewed as valuable international relationships in *Fahrenheit*. They are rather a traitorous fraternization with the enemy. To this end, numerous shots of the Bush family with Saudis are shown, bolstering stigma by association.⁴⁹ Moore receives a cultural windfall, and uses it to good effect: Men who are friends hold hands in Arab countries. Jarring as this is to most Western eyes, Bush Sr.'s understanding of the Arabic culture adds an element of smarminess for those who don't know its symbology in the Middle East. This is a standard out-grouping tactic: show the ingrouper (Bush) with the outgroup (Bandar), and the ingrouper may fall from grace, his true identity having been revealed as a treacherous outgroup. (Not shown or mentioned, by the way: Clinton's equivalently friendly demeanor with Prince Bandar⁵⁰ and Clinton's acceptance of an undisclosed sum from the Saudis for the Clinton Library.⁵¹)

The fact that the Bin Laden family disowned Osama in 1991 presented a problem for Moore—it made it difficult to paint the entire family with a broad brush.⁵² Weakening the connection even further is the fact that Osama is but one of 54 children of

Mohammed Bin Laden and his 22 wives.⁵³⁵⁴ These attenuated connections worked against the thesis of a George Bush-Osama Bin Laden connection. So Moore attempted to repair the breach by pointing to the Bin Laden family's attendance at a 2001 wedding of one of Osama's children, wondering how Osama could be considered a family pariah if his family showed up at his son's wedding. How could an outgroup be an outgroup if he was spotted with ingroupers? It's not the strongest indictment of uniform villainy among the Bin Laden family, but Moore used what he had. Yeslam Binladen, one of the Bin Laden brothers, disputed Moore's characterization of the wedding, calling it exaggerated: "Nobody from my family was at this wedding in Afghanistan except for the mother of Osama."⁵⁵

Cynicism

An attributional process that plays on human cognitive biases, cynicism is behind the supposition that the actions of other people are motivated primarily by selfish reasons (which stands in opposition to the *self-serving bias*, where people see their own motives as altruistic). Largely absent in children, cynicism makes its first appearance during the high school years, and is associated with maturity.⁵⁹

Cynicism is partially fueled by people's desire to be right in guessing the motivations of others, and negative motivations are always an option. For example, imagine we know a businessman who visits elderly shut-ins for several hours every Saturday. At first blush, this person seems unapproachably altruistic, but if we wanted to, how many negative motivations could we impute? Now imagine this colleague has recently made the news and his weekly visits with the elderly had become the topic of discussion on CNN's political program *Crossfire*:

- "He's just trying to impress people."
- "Why doesn't he spend *any* of his time with the homeless? I'm sure it's a lot more lucrative hanging out with the old folks. He might show up in a will."
- Or the opposite: "Those old folks don't need his time, they need money, but you don't see him giving them any."
- "He's fixated on death."
- "He's trying to atone for ignoring his own mother while she was still alive."
- "He's preparing to run for political office, and this is a resume enhancement."
- "He'd rather do that, than spend time with his own family."
- "He only visits the elderly a couple hours a week, then he's back to making money hand over fist. If he weren't so ruthless, a lot of those old folks wouldn't be shut-ins in the first place!"

Intelligence operatives call this "fudging." Spreading F.U.D. in this case is distributing Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt about a person's motives. The noted psychologist Ellen Langer writes: "It is easy to see that any single gesture, remark, or act between people can have *at least* two interpretations: spontaneous versus impulsive; consistent versus rigid; softhearted versus weak; intense versus overemotional; and so

on.”⁶⁰ The creative skill of being able to conjure and impute negative motivations is an important one for top propagandists. Watch any combative political program and you’ll marvel at the skill of pundits who have no psychological training, but who nevertheless are able to divine hidden psychological motivations deep in the twisted psyches of their opponents.

Particularly in ambiguous situations, assuming the worst in others has value as a protective default assumption. It also serves as a face-saving, self-enhancement device: “Those bastards aren’t fooling me. I know what they’re up to, they’re just serving their own interests at the expense of mine!” It’s a psychologically safe point of view that’s the polar opposite of trust, and it allows Moore to successfully “paste together conspiracy theories with the best of them, and deliver them in a fog of innuendo and accusation.”⁶¹ Since we’re talking about people’s hidden motivations, it’s impossible to be proved wrong. And it’s a powerful tool to use against a world leader that many people say they like for his trustworthiness and lack of pretense.

Moore’s mocking tone throughout the movie capitalizes on our desire to be part of the non-mocked ingroup, and simultaneously appeals to our sense of superiority. Think back to your high school years: the mockers always got to feel superior; those are the rules! Images of brutal American soldiers, and vignettes of Americans with Southern accents, make obliging appearances as cruel or ignorant outgroups for our mocking pleasure.

These cognitive biases are so basic and instinctual that they can be used to forward an argument in the absence of supporting evidence, and even the weakest evidence can be interpreted as documented proof. The primary cynicism fueling *Fahrenheit* is that Bush is acting in his own self-interest, instead of the interest of the nation. Supporting lines of cynicism are:

- Bush declared a pre-emptive war on Iraq not to eliminate Saddam as a potential terrorist threat, but so Bush could avenge (or please, depending on your brand of psychotherapy) his father. Moore alternately suggests it was so Bush could appease the American public, keep Americans in fear as a power maintenance scheme, and distract Americans from the real enemy, the Saudis. (Playing the part of the voice inside our heads, Moore wonders aloud whether Bush wakes up in the morning thinking about what’s best for the Saudis, or what’s best for Americans.)
- The US invaded Afghanistan not to eliminate the Taliban and insure American security from Al Qaida, but because the American oil company Unocal wanted to build an oil pipeline there. (Moore omits that Unocal abandoned the idea in 1998—see the discussion of Unocal under *Associations*, below).
- Bush is more interested in playing golf than in pursuing terror, because he returned to his golf game (“Now watch this drive!”) after commenting on the issue of a suicide bomber attack in Israel. The Israeli context is cut, so we assume the topic is the U.S. war on terror. (Speaking of which: Israel’s absence as a

player in *Fahrenheit* is odd, considering Moore's passionate opposition to Israel.)⁶² As a point of comparison for Bush's insensitive golfing, Kopel reminds us that after Clinton learned Israel's Prime Minister Rabin had been shot, he hit golf balls on the White House lawn while waiting to learn if Rabin would live or die.⁶³ Does that indicate Clinton was coldhearted and unconcerned? Not at all. Could a highly partisan film-maker make it look that way? You bet.

- Bush sat reading "My Pet Goat" (not the book's real name,⁶⁴ but it's a great title for mocking, so who cares) to children for seven minutes after being informed of the second attack on the twin towers. (The movie slows the frames of Bush's reaction, in case we didn't get the point.⁶⁵) None of us know what he was thinking, but this doesn't inhibit the unstoppable human desire to impute motives to others. A variety of negative attributions can be ascribed to these seven minutes:

- ⊙ Bush was confused;
- ⊙ Bush didn't care;
- ⊙ Bush couldn't think of anything to do;
- ⊙ Bush was waiting for someone else to tell him what to do;
- ⊙ Bush cognitively shut down under pressure;
- ⊙ Bush was wondering where he ought to shift the blame (Moore helpfully coaches Bush: "Shift the blame to Saddam!");
- ⊙ Bush was thinking about how he might salvage his middle-east connections, and so on.⁶⁶

What's great about the cynical attribution of motives, is that we can attribute negatively, no matter what the outgroup says or does. Christopher Hitchens asks us to think for a moment about all the opportunities that Bush would have afforded the propagandist, had he jumped into action immediately:

- ⊙ Rashness & overreaction;
- ⊙ Showing a panicky lack of leadership;
- ⊙ Fear, fright (or making others fearful);
- ⊙ Preknowledge of the attack;
- ⊙ Acting like a cowboy;
- ⊙ Being hustled out of the spotlight by his handlers;
- ⊙ Rushing off to ask Cheney what to do.

Having been protected by the Secret Service himself, Michael Reagan (President Reagan's son) has an insider's perspective on the constraints that were operating in that classroom:⁶⁷ "When you have Secret Service protection they pretty well go over with you; if certain things happen, they take control

of where you need to be, and how you need to get there. And so you don't move, you don't get up and run. We're taught you don't get up and go *anywhere*. The Secret Service tells you where to go, because their job is to protect you... I tell you, the agent was certainly in charge, so there was a good reason for him to be there five or seven minutes. Because the Secret Service was trying to get information in order to make the right decision.”⁶⁸

It's interesting that the vice chair of the September 11 commission, Lee Hamilton (a former Democrat congressman), went out of his way to defend the seven minutes by saying that: “Bush made the right decision in remaining calm, in not rushing out of the classroom.”⁶⁹ But Hamilton's defense is unlikely to change any minds or to counter the image of Bush as an idiot, a dolt, a fool—*because that image is just too delicious*. It really cuts a world leader down to size. (My size, that is—maybe even a little smaller!)

The point here is that it would be foolish for Moore's targets to follow his recommendations; it would be easy for Moore to then navigate to a new position and continue to fire on further “mistakes” that he himself had recommended. If the Miranda Rights could be rewritten for the targets of propaganda, they would read: “Anything you say or do (or don't say or do) will be used against you. Period.”

Traps

In my forthcoming book on propaganda, I call these E.W.Y.G.Y.S. traps: Either Way You Go You're Screwed. Traps are designed to embarrass a target regardless of what the target does or what positions they take.

Dan Greenburg wrote a humorous book, *How to Be a Jewish Mother*, which details the ways parents can control their children through shame and guilt. One of the tactics he recommends is that mothers give their children two shirts in a single gift box. The child opens the box, sees a green shirt and a blue shirt, and says, “Oh, Ma, what lovely shirts!” Mother says, “Try one of them on.” The child tries on the green shirt. Mother says: “What, you don't like the blue one?”

Think about it: *most* actions can be arranged along a continuum of many possible responses. Whatever response is taken, the propagandist can point to *some other* point along the continuum and claim in the absence of evidence, or in hindsight, that it would have been a better solution. Then the propagandist manufactures social consensus so the unchosen option is seen as superior.

For example, Bush's opponents have the option of springing a simple but effective trap on the administration regarding future terror in the U.S. If the U.S. *is* terrorized again, opponents can use the event to castigate the administration's lack of effectiveness in securing the country. If the U.S. *is not* terrorized, opponents can minimize the impact of terrorism, and focus instead on Bush's extreme overreaction to 9/11 and the costs incurred for defending the country against an imagined threat.

Since a response to terror is filled with risk and unknown variables, any position taken can be sharply criticized. Thus, any sort of response to terror provides fodder for criticism and opportunities for more propaganda. Don't get me wrong; criticisms of current policy may be absolutely correct. But the use of traps where the critic has the advantage in both directions is disingenuous. Here are some of the traps that Moore sets in *Fahrenheit 9/11*:

- Bush ignored too many warnings about the terror that occurred, allowing citizens to die—and, on the other hand—Bush is issuing too many warnings about terror that hasn't materialized, manipulating us with fear.
- Bush was too rash in starting a war; Moore states elsewhere that there should be no war in Afghanistan⁷¹—and, on the other hand—Bush waited too long before starting the war in Afghanistan, which allowed the terrorists to escape; Bush sat for 7 long minutes *doing nothing* after being told the second of the twin towers has been hit.
- Saddam was a big, dangerous problem that Bush missed— and, on the other hand—Saddam was not a problem because he was weak and ineffective.
- There's now too much security, intrusion, and encroachment on the personal liberties of U.S. citizens. Recall the three examples of harassed citizens in Moore's film: a group of cookie-munching peace activists, an elderly weightlifter, a mother and her baby hassled in the airport—and, on the other hand—there's need for *more* security in the airports (Moore wonders why cigarette lighters and matches aren't confiscated); Police in Oregon are underfunded,⁷² there's not enough security in the U.S.
- Too many U.S. soldiers are dying in Iraq and Afghanistan in an unjust war—and, on the other hand—we haven't sent enough U.S. troops into battle.
- Bush should pursue Osama with less vigor or not at all (elsewhere, Moore demanded there be no war in Afghanistan;⁷³ he opined that Osama should be considered innocent until proven guilty⁷⁴)—and, on the other hand—Bush should pursue Osama with more vigor (Bush has been distracted by Iraq; Bush didn't send enough troops to Afghanistan quickly enough).
- The Arabs need more freedom—and, on the other hand—the Arabs need more stability. (Don't we all?)
- Bush is a bumbling fool—and, on the other hand—Bush is a master manipulator.⁷⁵

Manipulating Cause and Effect

Cause and effect are problematic for the untrained human mind. (Heck, they're problematic for trained minds, too.) The assignment of cause becomes entangled with another bug in the human hardware: people tend to think that correlation implies causation. If we throw the virgins into the volcano and the volcano stops erupting (there's the correlation), then the death of the virgins caused the volcano to stop (there's the imputation of cause). If the economy is good (or bad), and a certain president is in the White House, then that president *caused* the economy to be good (or bad)—never mind that years of tracking have shown the economy to be cyclical in nature. If Bush is in the White House, and we're attacked by terrorists, then Bush *caused* the terrorist attack.

(“Jersey Girl” Kristen Breitweiser achieved fame for this argument: “3000 Americans were murdered on Bush’s watch!” Implication: Bush was responsible for—*caused*—these deaths, because they co-occurred with his presidency). Correlations may imply cause, and they may not—we can’t tell without a careful investigation of alternate possibilities. And you ought to be thankful I placed those other possibilities in this footnote, because they’re rather dull reading.⁷⁶

Another big problem that we humans have in understanding causation is the difficulty we have comprehending *multiple* causes of an effect. Humans like to simplify. In many ways, we’re simplification machines. We’re usually more comfortable in pointing to a *single* cause than to dozens of them—simple causes are more manageable, understandable, predictable, and useful. So human confusion about causation opens up great possibilities for the propagandist.

Moore’s movie starts with a review of the contested 2000 presidential election. Moore reminds us that the major networks had called the election for Gore—then, that Fox called the election for Bush (with Bush’s cousin responsible for that call). The narrator states that the other networks then reversed themselves and “followed Fox’s lead”—“All of a sudden the other networks said, ‘Hey, if Fox said it, it must be true.’” Moore arranges the video clips to follow this sequence. The implication is that Fox called the election for Bush (cause), which was responsible for the other networks doing likewise (effect). The imputed causal link is bankrupt—CNN, NBC, CBS, and other major news organizations based their calls for Bush on their own analysis of the voting data, not Fox’s. In fact, CNN and CBS were the first networks to retract Gore’s win, at around 10 pm.⁷⁷ Fox didn’t retract their call for Gore until after 2 am.⁷⁸

The implication that the networks elected Bush on election night is also misleading⁷⁹—in this case, perhaps completely reversed. Moore doesn’t tell us this, but Fox also called the election early for Gore. Most of the networks irresponsibly projected the winner while western Florida polls were still open in the conservative-leaning panhandle.⁸⁰ Political professionals know that early calls reduce turnout for the projected loser more than for the projected winner (because of a self-enhancing quirk in human psychology: many more people are willing to cast an irrelevant vote for the winner than the loser). Compounding the error, the media stated that Florida panhandle polls were closed, when they were not.⁸¹ John Lott of the American Enterprise Institute estimated Bush lost 7,500 votes in Florida because of the networks’ handling of the story.⁸² Democratic strategist Bob Beckel calculated that Bush lost up to 8,000 votes. The Republican polling firm of McLaughlin & Associates estimated that 10,000 votes for Bush were lost.⁸³ To the point of the movie, the insinuation that Bush’s cousin, or Fox News, “caused” Bush’s win, just isn’t true.

Moore says⁸⁴ that Saudi Arabian interests “gave” 1.4 billion to “the Bush family and its friends and associates.” (Never mind how the category distinctions are blurred here.) This is given as a reason for why Bush is overly accommodating to the Saudis. However, *Newsweek* reports that 90% of the amount in question (\$1.18 billion) comes from mid-1990s (Clinton era) contracts to US Defense Contractor BDM for training the country’s military.⁸⁵ The “connection” is that BDM was owned by the Carlyle Group, whose

Asian-affiliate advisory board included George Herbert Walker Bush. But G.H.W.B. joined the advisory board 5 months after Carlyle sold BDM.⁸⁶ Thus the manipulation of cause and effect: Moore places the ostensible *cause* (G.H.W.B. on the board) *after* the *effect* it was supposed to produce (BDM being asked to train the Saudi's military). Moore points to other, even looser associations between the Bush family and the Saudis, allowing cynicism to do the heavy lifting in the absence of evidence that Bush actively promotes the Carlyle group. In fact, there's even evidence to the contrary: the Bush administration has cancelled significant Carlyle contracts.⁸⁷

The Carlyle group is an established and successful beltway business with many connections to important and wealthy people, not just Friends of Bush. Associations to the Carlyle group that aren't mentioned include those to the Carter administration (via David Rubenstein) and the Clinton administration (via Thomas McLarty, Arthur Levitt, William Kennard, and Chris Ullman, who denies the GHWB connection as Carlyle's current spokesman).⁸⁸ Even prominent Bush opponent and billionaire George Soros is rumored to have invested millions into the Carlyle group.^{89,90} The point is, it's hardly surprising that some sort of connection between Bush and the Carlyle group could be made, even if the connection is tenuous. But a conspiracy theory is a hardy desert plant, and thrives on the dry rocky soil of tenuous connections—particularly if fertilized occasionally with a dose of cynicism.

Modeling the Convert Communicator

A factual analysis of *Fahrenheit* only goes so far. For many, the movie leaves them with a *feeling* of truth. Humans being humans, we're likely to bank on our feelings, even when they contradict the evidence. It's our nature to give our emotions primacy over our intellect. So to stoke the emotional component of the film, Moore combines two potent tactics to good effect: Modeling, and the Convert Communicator.

First, *Modeling*: Humans are much more likely to perform a behavior if they see someone else performing it successfully. Psychologists call this process "modeling the behavior." It helps explain why we look in the direction that others are looking, buy books on Amazon that we see others buying, and jaywalk across the street when we see others doing it.⁹¹ Albert Bandura, the famous clinical psychologist, created an entire therapy based on simple modeling. In one study, he was trying to resolve the phobias of children who were terrified of dogs. His therapy was nothing more than allowing these children to watch *other* children playing with a dog, either live or in film clips, for 20 minutes a day. After four days, over two-thirds of the formerly fearful children were willing to climb into a pen and remain confined with a dog, petting and playing with the animal. Remarkable, since none of these children were willing to do it four days earlier.⁹² Another researcher has demonstrated there's a reliable increase in suicides after a suicide story hits the front pages of newspapers. It's merely another demonstration of the modeling effect.⁹³ People are influenced by others regarding when to cross a street, when to be brave, whether to have an affair, and even when to die. So it comes as no surprise that the modeling effect can be harnessed for telling people how to vote.

The *Convert Communicator* is a special sort of model. Convert Communicators are often of low social status,⁹⁴ and would not be considered persuasive under normal circumstances. But there's something a low status communicator can do to become spectacularly persuasive. They can reverse their positions! Convert Communicators are persuasive because they have converted dramatically from one ideology or lifestyle to an opposite one, and with that change can come an equally dramatic enhancement of credibility—and from credibility, persuasiveness. Inside Alcoholics Anonymous, those who have spent the most years drinking, and have reformed, usually have the most status. A former felon, who has come clean and now uses his skills to combat robbery or computer fraud, is seen as extraordinarily knowledgeable and believable. Researchers have discovered that intravenous drug users found ex-drug users to be more credible than a physician, or the surgeon general of the United States!⁹⁵ Moore himself sometimes appears to play the convert communicator in his role of American apostate.

Social engineer Miguel Sabido is a Mexican professor who has harnessed the power of the Convert Communicator in his popular *Telenovelas*, which are serial melodramas akin to American soap operas, but with an important difference: the plot is used as a carrier device for the real purpose of changing people's values. People don't watch for the social engineering content, of course; they're tuning in to see sympathetic characters acting within a suspenseful plot—but the values reprogramming gets through nonetheless. In a number of third-world countries, Sabido has successfully promoted family planning, women's rights, pro-environmental stances, HIV education, and other points of view that are decidedly non-traditional for his audiences. He always binds these messages to an entertaining narrative carrier. While similar programming has been tried tentatively in the United States, it has been rejected as being overly manipulative.⁹⁶ The essence of Sabido's methodology is to present a sympathetic character, similar to the audience, who converts to a different set of values over time. As the beloved character converts to a new position, much of the audience experiences an emotional change of heart along with her. A sympathetic model who changes her stance throughout the course of a narrative yields powerful persuasion.

Enter Moore's Convert Communicators. We are introduced to Marine Corporal Abdul Henderson as he stands in front of the capitol building. Here, he declares he would rather face a dishonorable discharge and serve jail time, than serve another tour of duty in Iraq. Leaving aside the extreme rarity of soldiers with these attitudes,⁹⁷ Corporal Abdul Henderson provides us with an excellent example of the Convert Communicator. He's only a corporal, but his words have a powerful impact. As the research shows, it doesn't take much status to become a forceful persuader, if one publicly renounces one's values and converts to the opposite point of view. Psychologists think the tactic works because we tend to attribute a change of heart to the power of the message. Humans normally try to be, or be seen as, consistent. We are inclined to think that only a powerfully truthful insight could cause a person to reverse their values, risk inconsistency, and convert to the opposite point of view.

Lila Lipscomb is the grieving mother whose appearance was called "the emotional center of the film" by the *Los Angeles Times*. She's introduced to us as a happy and

confident woman, an ardent supporter of the U.S. military, and she says she used to detest Vietnam⁹⁸ war protestors. She's religious, proudly flies the U.S. flag in front of her house, and identifies herself as a conservative Democrat.⁹⁹ She's the model of a sympathetic heroine. Then we come to learn that she has lost a soldier son in Iraq: Michael Pedersen. As we experience her intense suffering, we apparently see her turning against the war and against Bush. (Moore shot all these clips after her son's death, but the editing makes it appear as if the event is unfolding and Lila's bitterness is mounting.) In a scene of building emotion, Moore's cameras document Lila's disenchantment as she reads her deceased son's letters.¹⁰⁰ Soon after, in perhaps the most touching scene in *Fahrenheit*, Moore's cameras record Lila's personal pilgrimage to Washington. A bystander, seeing the camera crew, scolds Lila for staging a conflict. Lila unloads on the bystander in a torrent of indignant emotion: "My son is not staged! My son is dead!" Our parting view of Lila shows her knees buckling in grief, her words choked with tears, as she finds a symbolic repository for all her pain and anger...the White House. For many, the scene is the most powerful in the movie. Then Moore segues in a voiceover: "I was tired of seeing people like Mrs. Lipscomb suffer." It's an odd comment coming from Moore, since *Fahrenheit* wouldn't have had the emotional punch it does, without capturing this heart-wrenching footage of Lila's grief.

One insightful commentator on this scene states correctly: "The power of Lipscomb's story lies in the sharpness of the U-turn she made."¹⁰¹ Moore's website posts the following quote regarding Lipscomb: "...she's a conservative, and that should be made note of. A conservative who believes the facts will reign."¹⁰² In the final scenes, it's clear that Lila's political position is fundamentally left and anti-war. But given Moore's proclivity for manufacturing persuasion, how certain are we that this represents a reversal for Lipscomb? Was this really a conversion, or was the evidence arranged to make it look that way? Might we merely be watching Lila become more extreme in her preexisting convictions? We don't know Lipscomb's pre-war sentiments, but we make the assumption they're pro-war because she's pro-military. We do know, however, that her son Michael did *not* support the war as early as December 2002.¹⁰³ In the film itself, Lila does not state that she supported the war in Iraq at any time. Walking out of the theater, I was under the impression that she *did* initially support the war on Iraq, but several readings of *Fahrenheit's* script verified that I had invented Lipscomb's initial pro-war sentiment. Such is the propensity of the human mind to "fill in the gaps." Moore didn't force me to jump to the conclusion that Lipscomb originally supported the war before opposing it; I did that of my own accord. Perhaps other viewers did, too.

The power of the Convert Communicator comes from making a *complete* U-turn, not from becoming more of what one is already. So I'm not asking the same question that others have: "did Moore exploit or manipulate Lipscomb?" That speaks to interpersonal influence, not propaganda. My question is, did Moore exploit or manipulate us, the audience? Did he fake the U-turn? Was there really any turn at all, or are we actually viewing an *Unconverted* Communicator? A bit of research turns up some of Lila's political positions:

- She voted for Bill Clinton.
- She voted for Al Gore.¹⁰⁴

- She declares: “Bush stole the presidency.”¹⁰⁵
- Environmentally speaking, she says: “We’ve already destroyed the planet.”¹⁰⁶
- She states she’s impressed with Moore’s other films.
- Regarding the mendacity of Moore’s films, Lipscomb states: “Not one person has been able to stand up and say there has been one lie in this movie.”¹⁰⁷
- Of Moore himself, she says, “Michael is a true visionary. I thank God that there are people like Michael Moore in the world.”¹⁰⁸

Are these the words and positions of a conservative, a conservative Democrat, or a centrist? Or did Moore merely arrange for us to think we saw the necessary first leg of the U-turn, to utilize the tactic’s persuasive power?

Subsequent to the film, I’ve learned that Lila Lipscomb has gone further in the direction we see her headed in *Fahrenheit*. She’s now an anti-war activist of note, and credits Moore as an influence in her transformation. She tells reporters that she’s convinced her house has been bugged by the Bush administration. She gives a verbal play-by-play as she dresses in the morning, in case Bush’s spies don’t have video with their audio. Her public speeches encourage listeners to vote “the fool” out of office, but also touch on unrelated topics, such as eschatology.¹⁰⁹

Readers who empathetically shared Lipscomb’s grief may object to any examination of her positions. That objection is understandable: her status of bereaved mother, and Moore’s ability to transmit her emotions to us, makes her an inviolate witness to war. Her feelings are beyond question or reproach. As the *New York Times* says, Lipscomb gives the film “an eloquence that its most determined critics will find hard to dismiss.” This statement encapsulates the value of models providing highly emotional arguments: because they are felt, they can’t be reasoned away. And this is why propagandists seek and cherish emotional arguments—in bypassing logic, they’re as close to ironclad as an argument can get.

Pacing & Distraction

The human mind is a serial processor; it does one thing at a time. If we were able to look inside the mind of the circus performer who’s balancing on a high wire while she’s juggling, we’d discover that her mind is actually jumping from activity to activity in an old-technology serial fashion, rather than actually performing parallel multitasking. We’ll also notice that what appears to be multitasking (but isn’t) can only be performed with overlearned behaviors, which take little cognitive oversight. It would be impossible to fake multitasking on a logic test while doing our taxes, and do a decent job on either.¹¹⁰

Distraction degrades the ability of our minds to process information. Take a freeway. Add music, makeup, a sandwich, and a cell phone, and we have a driver who’s all over the road—or worse yet, from my point of view, driving slow in the fast lane.

Distraction has a rather cozy relationship with persuasion. The pioneer researchers in distraction and persuasion stumbled over the effect when they had two equivalent groups of frat boys watch and listen to an anti-fraternity film. For one group, the visuals matched

the persuasive arguments they heard. Not surprisingly, the frat boys didn't find the attack on their fraternities to be persuasive—they were able to marshal their defenses and handily defend themselves with counterarguments. However, the second group of frat boys heard the same arguments, but saw cartoons instead! This group found the anti-frat arguments significantly more persuasive, because they were unable to mentally defend themselves during the persuasive onslaught. Instead, they were distracted by the zany cartoons they were watching.¹¹¹

In a nutshell, that's how distraction works—it keeps us from thinking. Which can either help or hurt the persuader, depending on the type of arguments used. Subsequent researchers went on to discover a vital distinction: distraction can do completely opposite things, depending on the *quality* of the persuasive arguments being used.¹¹² If the arguments are weak, distraction will make them seem *stronger* and more persuasive. That's because we're not really processing the quality of the argument, we're just aware there *are* arguments. "They've got a number of arguments, there," our overtaxed brains tell us. "They must be right." On the other hand, if we're distracted while hearing strong arguments, they don't seem nearly as strong. Why? Because we can't concentrate on them, and recognize how good they really are. So distraction in a film—such as music, animation, humor, fast cuts, or screen graphics—is a boon to the propagandist who's using weak arguments to prop up his case. And smart propagandists will drop all those distracting elements when they get to their strongest arguments. In my opinion, Lila Lipscomb provided Moore with his strongest (albeit emotional) arguments, and we could've heard a pin drop during her scenes. But what about the rest of the film?

There's plenty of distraction in *Fahrenheit*. The *New York Times* comments on how the statistics in *Fahrenheit* "fly by."¹¹³ Associate producer Doroshov says that portions of the film are "somewhat confusing, admittedly."¹¹⁴ There's dopey music that cues us in to how we should feel about Bush. There's the funny Bonanza scene, where the primary players of the Bush administration are lampooned as characters in the popular vintage western. But an interesting technique is Moore's use of newspapers as visuals to support his assertions—as if the audience could read the screen quickly enough! For example, we are shown a large headline from the *Bloomington Pantagraph* reading, "Latest Florida recount shows Gore won Election." The story is actually a letter to the editor, not a news story. The page was made over for *Fahrenheit* to appear as if it were a news story, with an attention-grabbing headline.¹¹⁵ The *Pantagraph* is seeking an apology and damages from Moore.¹¹⁶ The audience must be forgiven if they got the wrong impression.

Moore impugns the White House for preferentially allowing the Saudis out of the country when all other flights were grounded. First, Saudis were *not* allowed to fly when others weren't. The 9/11 Commission found "no credible evidence that any chartered flights of Saudi Arabian nationals departed the United States before the reopening of national airspace."¹¹⁷ Second, it was in fact Richard Clarke (critic of George Bush and one of the movie's heroes) who arranged for the flights of the Bin Laden family, and who took full responsibility for it.¹¹⁸ The reason for the Saudi departure? Clarke was

concerned about possible vigilante action being taken against innocent members of the Bin Laden family: “The Saudis had reasonable fear that they might be the subject of vigilante attacks in the United States after 9/11. And there is no evidence even to this date that any of the people who left on those flights were people of interest to the FBI,” Clarke explained.¹¹⁹ Moore was criticized for the misstatement and for the important omission. For the misstatement about the timing of the flights, Moore’s defense was saying that his goal was to show how the White House was eager to bend the rules for Saudi friends.¹²⁰ (This reminds me of a student who received a “C” in my class. After the semester was over, she told me her goal was to get an “A” in my class. Should I have factored her goal into my grades?) Regarding Clarke’s central role, Moore claims full disclosure: “Actually I do, I put up *The New York Times* article and it’s blown up 40 foot on the screen, you can see Richard Clarke’s name right there saying that he approved the flights based on the information the FBI gave him. It’s right there, right up on the screen.”¹²¹ But the audience isn’t able to read the video image of a newspaper column that’s shown for a moment, no matter how large the screen. As an audience member, is it my fault that I erroneously concluded Bush was the person responsible for clearing the Saudis for flight? Or is Moore trying to get me to believe something that isn’t true?

Associations

Associations were extensively studied in the mid 20th century when the Behaviorist school of thought (think followers of Pavlov and Skinner) held the rudder of psychology. Although Behaviorism is dismissed by many modern psychologists, this “old school” of psychology unearthed powerful influence techniques, many of which still do the heavy lifting for modern advertising. Media advertising is like a perpetually burning flame in honor of the Behaviorists, although they wouldn’t want to be remembered that way. The most basic behaviorist principle is association: Present two objects together a sufficient number of times, and one will automatically recall the other. That’s the reason we see so many beer commercials with devastatingly beautiful women in them! The beer advertisers are trying to get people (young men, mostly) to associate bubbly beer with fertile women in the hopes that the men will develop a longing for their brand of beer. Association is also why the American Right afforded us pictures of Kerry in the same audience as Jane Fonda. They were hoping that some of Jane’s Fonda-ness would rub off on Kerry. What’s sneaky about association is that the repeated forced pairing of things that don’t naturally associate, will nonetheless recall each other. It functions as a crude but effective propaganda tactic, if the ideas or images can be paired a sufficient number of times.

Imagine you saw a bumper sticker that read: “Most Felons vote Democratic. So do most Californians.”¹²² (OK, imagine the sticker without the footnote.) Does this imply that most Californians are felons, or that voting Democrat is criminal? Yes, the implication is there because of the pairing. Is there any truth in it? No, of course not. Only the association and the close proximity of the two statements drive the argument (if we can call it that). So how does Moore employ association?

Earlier we studied Moore’s focus on a document expunging the name of Houston businessman James Bath. In order to buttress his theory of Bush-Bin Laden associations,

Moore points to associations between Bath and Bush (Bath invested \$50K of his own money into funds controlled by George Bush) and associations between Bath and the Bin Laden family (Bath was a Texas business representative for Salem Bin Laden,¹²³ one of Mohammed Bin Laden's many children). The implication is that Bush was soft on Bin Laden because of the connection through Bath, but the mechanism of connection is mere association.

Moore posits that Bush's aggressive policy toward the Taliban was influenced by Unocal's desire for access to Afghani oil. Unocal was indeed interested in an Afghani pipeline, but pursued it during the Clinton years. However, Unocal recommended the opposite of Bush's strategy: they urged conciliation with the Taliban. When the Taliban metastasized, U.S. oil companies pulled the plug on the pipeline idea in 1998.^{124,125} When Bush took office, it was a dead issue. The pipeline is undeserving of its leading role in Moore's theories, but the mere association drives the conspiracy forward.

The idea that Bush invaded Iraq in cahoots with the Saudis, or that Bush "wakes up in the morning thinking about what's best for the Saudis" is another element of association, which isn't supported by Saudi protests. Crown Prince Abdullah was none too pleased with the American invasion of Iraq: "We reject outright any infringement on Iraq's unity, independence, resources and internal security, as well as a military occupation, and we have informed the United States of America of our position."¹²⁶ Why should Prince Abdullah be pleased that Iraq's oil would soon be competing on the world market with Saudi oil, after Saddam was removed?

Moore shows members of the Taliban visiting Texas. The implication is that they were invited by Bush. They weren't—they were invited to Houston by Unocal, before the Afghani pipeline idea was scrapped.¹²⁷ Neither does Moore mention that the visit was made with the permission of the Clinton administration, which twice met with Taliban representatives. It serves as another association. Get enough associations out there, and people will start to see a correlation.

Association is a crude weapon. It's like repeatedly clouting someone with a tree branch until they go down. Likewise, it takes lots of associative "hits" for associations to do their work (unless the audience *wants* to believe the associations). As Peter Ross Range writes of Moore, "By posting the opposite of what all the evidence suggests, he seeks to discredit the evidence. His writing sometimes comes close to the method known as the Big Lie."¹²⁸ Associations are an important mechanism to that end. They work much more effectively when the audience *wants* to see a connection. This is what the propaganda observer Jacques Ellul means when he refers to "...the complicity of the propagandee. If he is a propagandee, it is because he wants to be, for he is ready to buy a paper, go to the movies, pay for a radio or TV set..."¹²⁹ or, in this case, ready to see a connection.

Numeric Deceptions

Numeric deceptions are regularly employed by propagandists for several good reasons. First, quotations backed up by numbers sound like solid evidence. They conjure up images of scientists engaged in laudable scrutiny and the pursuit of unbiased truth. I am a sucker for numeric evidence myself. A friend quoting digits in defense of an argument will cause my heart to beat more rapidly—I can't help myself. Second, the checking of numeric data entails *effort, skill, and motivation* on the part of the target. The propagandist banks on a lack of all three, and it turns out to be a good bet. Most humans are content to “satisfice,”¹³⁰ to be content with good-ish, good sounding, or good enough, if not really *good* arguments, particularly if they support a person's pre-existing prejudices. Thirdly, numbers can be combined and parsed in infinite variety to support a favored theme. Thus they provide excellent fodder for the propagandist: they sound good, and most people are unable or unwilling (lacking time or energy) to refute them.

Moore was tinkering with numbers long before the release of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. According to former NYC mayor Ed Koch, Moore stated: “I don't know why we are making so much of an act of terror. It is three times more likely that you will be struck by lightning than die from an act of terror.”¹³¹ Put aside for a moment that this statement is at odds with the film's purported concern for the vigorous defense of our nation, and focus instead on the numeric argument. Could Reagan have made a similar case in the 1980s that the chance of contracting AIDS was so small that the epidemic could be ignored? No, and that's why he funded AIDS research to the tune of \$5.7 billion.¹³² Moore misunderstands (perhaps purposely) that the attack on the twin towers was not the *end* of Islamic fundamentalist terror, it was another data point in a growing *trend*. As Americans, we're concerned about the number 2749, the number of people that died in the World Trade Center.¹³³ And we're also very concerned about the potential of future, larger numbers.

Bush is chided for being “on vacation” 42% of the time during his first 229 days in office, by way of profiling Bush as a malingerer. This statistic originates from a *Washington Post* story¹³⁴ that adds the time Bush spent at three non-Washington locations: 38 days at Camp David, 54 days at the Crawford Ranch, and 4 days at Kennebunkport. The spin is in the different meanings that can be assigned to the word “vacation,” which most Americans interpret as “time not working.” Here's a case where the Bush administration tripped in a spin game of its own. The reason Bush and his team spent so many days away from Washington was because the president's handlers were making a purposeful attempt to portray Bush as “not a Washington insider,” an appellation Bush felt he needed to dodge as the son of a former president. Clearly, by the time 9/11 occurred, team Bush realized they had overdone the impression. Skewered, as the saying goes, on their own petard.

However, like all other US presidents, Bush spends the majority of his time working while “on vacation,” even when in a different location.¹³⁵ Time at Camp David consists of working weekends for Bush, as it did for previous U.S. presidents. In fact, British PM Tony Blair is visible in one of Moore's “Camp David vacation” clips. Neither can we

assume that Bush isn't working while at the Crawford ranch. Of his 2001 vacation, the *Washington Post* observed that: "His advisers have piled on so many activities for this month-long vacation that the president is likely to feel he is marooned at an overly ambitious summer camp." The Fox News Network calculated that, correcting for working weekends, the number dropped to 13%.¹³⁶ (For comparison, any of us working a 5-day week have 2÷7, or 29% "vacation time".) However calculated, Bush's "vacation time" is more accurately represented as *non-Washington* time rather than *non-working* time. Moore didn't dwell on that distinction, and was clever not to: the public has been primed to view Bush as an affable "frat-boy slacker," and distortions that reconfirm pre-existing biases generally go unexamined by audiences who expect to confirm their hunches.

At one point, Moore interviews Rep. Porter Goss, who defends the Patriot Act, and states that complaints regarding the Act can be reported to an 800 number. Moore runs a caption across the bottom of the screen: "He's lying." Then Moore offers the audience Goss' own office number as a substitute, with the likely result of overwhelming Goss' office with angry calls. However, there *is* a toll-free number for the exact purpose that Goss stated: it's 1-877-858-9040.¹³⁷ It works, I've called it myself to check—I found myself talking to a harried clerk who recoiled at the mention of *Fahrenheit*. The trick here is Moore's extreme literalness in parsing Goss' statement: Moore interprets an 800 number as: 8-0-0, not "within the 800 series." For his purposes, the toll-free prefix 8-7-7 doesn't count, and Goss is therefore "lying." OK, if Goss had said "a toll free" number instead of "an 800 number" it would have averted Moore's parsing. Calling Goss' statement "a lie" is misleading at best, but it does add a note of irony when Moore claims he'll sue anyone who calls *him* a liar.¹³⁸ But to the point, how likely is it that: an audience member would check this fact? that an audience member would be left with the impression that this representative, and perhaps others who support the Patriot Act, are deceptive?

Many of Moore's synopses are open to factual question; we can only visit a few of them here.^{139, 140} For example, in making the case that Bush's first eight months in office were lackluster, Moore says: "...For the next eight months it didn't get any better for George W. Bush. He couldn't get his judges appointed; had trouble getting his legislation passed, and he lost Republican control of the Senate. His approval ratings in the polls began to sink." Of these four assertions, only the third cleanly clears the hurdle:

- Six of Bush's judges were confirmed before 9/11.¹⁴¹
- During this time of ascribed legislative "trouble," Bush got the top item on his agenda passed: a \$1.35 trillion tax cut.
- Moore was correct about Senate control: the Democrats took control when Jim Jeffords left the Republican party. During the subsequent election cycle, however, the voters returned control to the Republicans.
- Regarding Bush's ratings, he started office with approximately 53% approval. Bush's ratings bounce around the 50-60 range until September of 2001, and a small decline of approximately two to three points could be seen over the course of the eight months—depending on how the running averages are calculated. Moore shows a graphic¹⁴² of Bush's ratings at a low of 45% on

September 5, 2001, which is an outlier—none of the 13 polls tracked by University of Minnesota history professor Steven Ruggles registered a number that low in 2001.¹⁴³ Regarding the implication that Bush’s popularity only waned since the election, there was a palpable uptick (hitting 60) at the time of the tax cut in April.¹⁴⁴ Moore nevertheless defends his characterization of the pre-September Bush presidency and its overall loss of 2 to 3 approval points as floundering and “definitely on the ropes.”¹⁴⁵ Again, Moore counts on his audience’s lack of motivation to investigate further. He’s probably right in doing so.

Moore claims that Bush “cut terrorism funding from the FBI” which impeded America’s ability to defend herself against 9/11. Since the DOJ’s budget is always established the previous year, the new Bush administration had nothing to do with the FBI’s funding in 2001. Neither did the Bush administration propose counter-terror cuts for the following year. In support of these supposed “cuts,” *Fahrenheit* briefly flashes documentation of a cut that Ashcroft *did* propose, but it was not part of the FBI’s budget. It was a cut for state grants to buy equipment, because the equipment fund contained two years worth of unspent funding at that time.¹⁴⁶

At one point, Moore asks congressmen to “send” their children to fight in Iraq. (Of course, that’s isn’t how soldiers are recruited for the US military—nobody can “send” anyone else to fight.¹⁴⁷) He also states that, of all the people in congress, “only one had an enlisted son in Iraq.” Does that leave us with the impression that parents in Congress are shirking their duty? The Associated Press and the Naples Daily News count at least *seven* children of Congressmen in the armed services:^{148,149} Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo.; Rep. Ed Schrock, R-Va.; Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C.; Rep. John Kline, R-Minn.; Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D.; Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif; Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo. Not included in the above list is Joseph Biden, D-De.¹⁵⁰ and Attorney General John Ashcroft.¹⁵¹ We can add Rep. Steve Buyer, R-Ind, who himself was called to active duty in the Gulf. (Moore also ignores that there are 137 veterans in Congress.)

But Moore is making a point: that Congress isn’t pulling its weight in sending their children into harm’s way, relative to the rest of the citizenry. Are average American families more likely to send a child into battle, than a Congressional family? David Kopel calculated the ratios of households to service personnel, and discovered that a Congressional household is about 23% more likely to have a child in Iraq, than the average American household.¹⁵²

Moore defends Saddam’s Iraq as a nation that “had never attacked the United States. A nation that had never threatened to attack the United States. A nation that had never murdered a single American citizen.” These lines are carefully worded, and it would take a brace of attorneys to determine whether the statement is numerically factual. But the impression they create of “no American blood on Saddam’s hands” doesn’t hold up:

- Abu Abbas (captured in Baghdad) murdered disabled American Leon Kinghoffer by throwing him off the Achilles Lauro to drown.¹⁵³

- Ramzi Yousef (ringleader for the WTC bombings) worked for the Iraqi intelligence service.¹⁵⁴
- Iraq was the home of terrorist Abu Nidal.
- The terrorist Yatsin helped bomb the WTC and then moved to Iraq.
- 148 Americans were killed in combat while repulsing Saddam's Kuwait invasion. Another 145 died in non-combat situations. 467 Americans were wounded during the Gulf War.¹⁵⁵
- Western hostages were taken during the invasion of Kuwait.
- Iraqi secret police were caught trying to murder Bush Sr. during his 1993 Kuwait visit.
- For 10 years, Iraqi forces fired on American aircraft patrolling the no fly zones in Iraq.¹⁵⁶
- Saddam was negotiating with Kim Jong-Il to buy a NK missile system.
- Saddam sponsored Palestinian suicide bombers in Israel, who in turn killed Americans in Israel.
- Regarding "threat," Saddam celebrated the terror attacks and described them as the beginning of a larger revenge movement against America.

Moore claims the Saudis own 6-7% of America. To buttress this assertion, he airs interviews with Craig Unger, who wrote a book on which Moore relies for making the Bush-Saudi connection. Unger gives the fantastic figure of \$860 billion dollars for Saudi investments in the US. The Institute for Research Middle Eastern Policy estimates *worldwide* Saudi investments at \$700 billion.¹⁵⁷ Regarding shares of foreign investment in America, the big players are Japan and the United Kingdom.¹⁵⁸ In fact, the US Census Bureau relegates Saudi investments in the U.S. to their catch-all "other" category. The data show that Saudis own between 4% and 7% of total *foreign investments* in the U.S., but asserting that the Saudis "own seven percent of America," or have the political clout to match, is a brazen distortion.¹⁵⁹

For his part, Moore stands by all of his statements. "Every single fact I state in 'Fahrenheit 9/11' is the absolute and irrefutable truth," says Moore. "Do not let anyone say this or that isn't true. If they say that, they are lying."¹⁶⁰

Shutting Down the Opposition

A good propagandist must not only tell his side of the story; he needs to shut down the opposition's ability to tell their side of it. Thus good propaganda is equal measures of offense and defense. Throughout the film, Moore has been playing offense. But after *Fahrenheit's* credits roll and the film is over, Moore continues to stoke the embers. The last blast from the *Fahrenheit* furnace is a strong defense cloaked as a counter-offense. Moore says he'll sue anyone who slanders his movie: "We want the word out. Any attempts to libel me will be met by force. The most important thing we have is the truth on our side. If they persist in telling lies, then I'll take them to court."

Moore has forewarned the public of a conservative counterattack (another good influence tactic), and has created a "war-room," fashioned after political quick-response

teams, to defend the film's credibility.¹⁶¹ He's consulted with lawyers who can bring defamation suits against anyone who maligns the film or damages his reputation.¹⁶² Moore has hired a team of fact-checkers to defend the movie, but these employees caveat that they are not striving for reporter-level accuracy. They have relaxed the standards and are characterizing the film as an op-ed piece instead of factual reporting.¹⁶³ Nonetheless, his lawyers defend its accuracy. "We have gone through every single word of this film—literally every word—and verified its accuracy," said his attorney, Joanne Doroshow.

The important thing here is that Moore remain on the attack. That's a good strategy. Social scientists Derek Rucker and Anthony Pratkanis have demonstrated how attacking others ("projection" is the term they use) reduces one's own appearance of guilt.¹⁶⁴ In their study, Rucker and Pratkanis allow an audience of subjects to watch three people (known creatively as A, B, and C) playing a competitive game. Pre-tests show that player B already looks suspicious to the audience. The researchers fuel these prejudices by telling their audience of subjects that player B will do anything to win. This allows the researchers to get off-the-charts levels of suspicion against player B, before the game begins. During the game, player B accuses the other two of cheating. In all of the replications of the experiment, player B's accusation effectively lowers his perceived culpability, and raises the appearance of guilt for players A and C! In some conditions, player B is able to get his levels of culpability *lower* than players A or C. Being the first to accuse others makes one look more innocent, according to the research. The results actually frustrated the researchers, because of the tactic's power: they couldn't find a way to *stop* the projection effect. Of course, this tactic has been used many times in human history. One salient example is when Adolf Hitler accused the Poles of encroachment before he attacked them, and it gave Hitler cover at the time.

For his defense—or continued offense—Moore has hired former Clinton strategist Chris Lehane, known for his expertise in "opposition research," the art of discrediting opponents. Lehane's job is to respond to critics publicly.¹⁶⁵ I've heard Lehane defending *Fahrenheit* on TV, and many of the tactics Lehane uses are pulled from the same pile as those enumerated above.

To end with the question we began with, is *Fahrenheit* documentary, or is it propaganda? Call it as you will. For my part, I see a consistent, effective, and clever use of a range of established propaganda tactics. If only a few of these tactics were used, or if the attempt to deceive weren't as apparent, I might equivocate. But Moore has located many of the fundamental "bugs" in the human hardware, and capitalizes on them with skill. Michael Moore once said of his fellow Americans that "They are possibly the dumbest people on the planet."¹⁶⁶ In *Fahrenheit*, it appears that he's counting on it. But the techniques Moore uses aren't exclusively effective on the American mind; *Fahrenheit* should be influential in other cultures as well. Humans are, after all, humans. They're running cultural software over the same basic human hardware. For my own determination of whether *Fahrenheit* is propaganda, I feel safe in applying the rule: if it flies, walks, swims, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck.

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- ¹ Jonathan Foreman. Moore's the Pity. June 3, 2004. New York Post. <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/23542.htm>
- ² Of revolutionary communist propaganda, Lenin said: "For us the most important of all arts is the cinema."
- ³ Leni Riefenstahl was a pioneer of film-based propaganda. Her work was central to Nazi marketing of the Third Reich.
- ⁴ Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell. 1999. Propaganda and Persuasion. Third Edition. Sage: Thousand Oaks. Page 127.
- ⁵ The LA Times reports: "Fahrenheit... appears to be wielding less influence among potential voters than the filmmaker and his supporters might have hoped." The Times reports that 9% of their sample saw the film as of July 23, 2004. Of those who identified their affiliation, 84% said they were Democrats. See "Public Keeping its Cool over Election Effect of Fahrenheit 9/11." John Horn. Los Angeles Times. Jul 23, 2004. pg. E.1
- ⁶ Since the film was made, the 9/11 Commission was so unkind as to repudiate Moore's hypothesis of the Saudis pulling the strings behind 9/11.
- ⁷ Philip Shenon, New York Times. Moore's assertions supported by record But '9/11' director may have to defend rapid-fire statistics. Reprinted in the San Francisco Chronicle, Thursday June 24, 2004. <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/06/24/MNGSC7B3L21.DTL>
- ⁸ These comments are from Professor Randy Barnett, recommending David Kopel's scholarly 40-page review of Fahrenheit 9/11. http://volokh.com/archives/archive_2004_07_00.shtml#1088978471
- ⁹ Scott Simon. 'Gonzo Demagoguery' Writ Large. Wall Street Journal. July 27, 2004.
- ¹⁰ For the propaganda argument, see: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=6780 <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102859/>, <http://www.capmag.com/article.asp?ID=3795>, <http://www.reporterinteractive.org/news/071404/Dickson1.htm>, and so on.
- ¹¹ The act of analyzing propaganda or influence inevitably draws the countercharge that the analyst is in fact the "real" propagandist or influencer. Years of teaching influence to college students have taught me that my students will become intensely suspicious of my every act and word around four weeks into the semester, when they begin to realize how vulnerable humans are to persuasion. Thankfully, that stage passes rather reliably around week seven, when students get past the meta-awareness stage and back into the study of the material at hand. The meta-awareness reaction is normal, attributable to "structure activation" discussed elsewhere in the article. That is, when one is thinking about how influence is performed, one becomes highly sensitive to it and begins to see it everywhere. Good educational technique is persuasive, and it's impossible for bright people not to perceive influence while studying about it. My hope is that my students apply what they've learned about influence not just to my class, but to the rest of their life experiences as well.
- ¹² See Metts (1989); Ekman (1985); Burgoon et al (1994) (see Gass 261)
- ¹³ The best analogy that comes to mind for how human memory works is a JPEG or an MP3, regarding how they compress data on save and reconstruct it with artifacts on recall.
- ¹⁴ Professor Stiff found the underwhelming correlation of $r=.18$. See James Stiff, Persuasive Communication, 1994, Guilford Press. See chapter six.
- ¹⁵ I'm using the term in it's narrow definition here: literally, a pre-judgment.
- ¹⁶ To be completely accurate, 31% found Fahrenheit to be "completely accurate." John Horn. "Public Keeping its Cool over Election Effect of Fahrenheit 9/11." John Horn. Los Angeles Times. Jul 23, 2004. pg. E.1
- ¹⁷ Michael Moore is ready for his close up. June 20, 2004. New York Times. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/20/movies/20SHEN.html?ex=1090641600&en=ce7e8595beb2f6c9&ei=5070&page_wanted=2
- ¹⁸ Different recount standards yielded different results, of course; but many of them favored Bush. According to USA Today, if Gore's standard had been used, Bush would have won Florida by three times the margin he did. <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2001-04-03-floridamain.htm>
- ¹⁹ Ford Fessenden and John M. Broder. Examining The Vote: The Overview; Study of Disputed Florida Ballots Finds Justices Did Not Cast the Deciding Vote. New York Times. November 12, 2001.
- ²⁰ Doyle Mcmanus, Bob Drogin And Richard O'Reilly. Bush Still Had Votes to Win in a Recount, Study Finds. Nov 12, 2001. Los Angeles Times. <http://www.latimes.com/la-111201recount.story>
- ²¹ John R. Lott Jr & Brian Blase. Moore's Myths. July 12, 2004. New York Post. <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/27166.htm>
- ²² To be fair, Moore makes reference to "little interviews" elsewhere in the film.
- ²³ "Many were asked detailed questions," states the 9/11 commission's interim report. MSNBC. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5304901/site/newsweek/#LETTERS>
- ²⁴ Edward I. Koch, Moore's Film Is Shocking Propaganda, Tuesday, June 29, 2004. <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2004/6/28/190852.shtml>
- ²⁵ Fox News. The Truth About 'Fahrenheit 9/11' Tuesday 29 June 2004. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,124079,00.html>

- ²⁶ Kevin Diaz. Minneapolis Star Tribune. June 25, 2004. I had some difficulty in tracking this citation since it was no longer available at: <http://www.startribune.com/stories/484/4845919.html> However, the article was cached at: <http://66.102.7.104/search?q=cache:1uTmVteDSvIJ:www.startribune.com/stories/484/4845919.html+kennedy+fahrenheit+moore+star+tribune&hl=en>
- ²⁷ Kevin Diaz. Rep. Mark Kennedy Won't Be Back For Moore. Star Tribune. July 11, 2004. <http://www.startribune.com/stories/1526/4865118.html>
- ²⁸ <http://www.house.gov/castle/bio.html>
- ²⁹ David Edelstein, Proper Propaganda, Thursday June 24, Slate Magazine. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102859>
- ³⁰ <http://www.massgraves.info/>
- ³¹ Jonathan Foreman. Moore's the Pity. June 3, 2004. New York Post. <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/23542.htm>
- ³² Jonathan Foreman. Moore's the Pity. June 3, 2004. New York Post. <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/23542.htm>
- ³³ Christopher Hitchens. *Unfahrenheit 9/11*. Slate magazine. June 21, 2004. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102723>. There's also the issue of errant Iraqi anti-aircraft fire hitting neighborhoods, Scott Simon reminds us.
- ³⁴ Christopher Hitchens. *Unfahrenheit 9/11*. Slate magazine. June 21, 2004. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102723>
- ³⁵ In an inverted mirror image of the 'proving a negative' argument regarding WMD in Iraq, Moore states: "You don't know that there's not evidence of links between Osama and his brothers." <http://www.dailyhome.com/entertainment/2004/as-movies-0624-0-4f23p3811.htm>. See also Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball. More Distortions From Michael Moore. Newsweek. June 30, 2004. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5335853/site/newsweek/>.
- ³⁶ Golden, Bandler, and Walker. Bin Laden Family Could Profit From a Jump In Defense Spending Due to Ties to U.S. Bank. Wall Street Journal Online. September 27, 2001. <http://www.geocities.com/vonchloride/wsarticle.html>
- ³⁷ Liam Lacey. Call it Gunning for Dubya. May 18 2004. Globe and Mail. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20040518/CANNES18/TPEntertainment/Film>
- ³⁸ Cyberalert. Monday December 1, 2003. Media Research Center. <http://www.mediaresearch.org/cyberalerts/2003/cyb20031201.asp#3>
- ³⁹ http://fahrenheit_fact.blogspot.com/
- ⁴⁰ The Privacy Act of 1974. <http://www.usdoj.gov/foia/privstat.htm>
- ⁴¹ Moore says: "In early 2004, in a speech during the New Hampshire primary, I called George W. Bush a deserter for his time in the Texas National Guard. In response, the White House released his military records in the hopes of disproving the charge. What Bush didn't know is that I already had a copy of his military records - uncensored - obtained in the year 2000."
- ⁴² Dave Kopel. Fifty-nine Deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm>
- ⁴³ "Is this a movie for the choir? I don't run away from that," says Moore. See USA Today. "Fahrenheit 9/11": Will It Change Any Voter's Mind? June 25, 2004. Infobeat. <http://www.infobeat.com/index.cfm?action=article&id=365275>
- ⁴⁴ David Edelstein, Proper Propaganda, Thursday June 24, Slate Magazine. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102859>
- ⁴⁵ Matt Labash. Un-Moored from Reality. 7/5/04. The Weekly Standard. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/278rxzvb.asp?pg=2>
- ⁴⁶ Kevin Ray. Fahrenheit 9/11 just leftist propaganda. The Battalion. Thursday, July 1, 2004. <http://www.thebatt.com/news/2004/07/01/Opinion/Fahrenheit.911.Just.Leftist.Propaganda-690957.shtml>
- ⁴⁷ Bettencourt, Brewer, Croak and Miller (1992). "Cooperation and the Reduction of Intergroup Bias: The Role of Reward Structure and Social Orientation." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 28(4), 310-319.
- ⁴⁸ Niamh Slevin. The Michigan Daily. Moore discusses book, blasts 'Bush of Arabia.' October 13, 2003. <http://www.michigandaily.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2003/10/13/3f8a2589eee03>
- ⁴⁹ Stigma by Association: In gradeschool, we called it "getting the cooties." You could get cooties by merely standing next to someone who had them. Cooties flew through the air and infected bystanders. The antedote was to "blow off" the cooties. If for example, you picked up your graded homework from a stack, and the homework below yours was from a person of known cootie contamination, you had to blow across your paper to rid it of the invisible cootie particles it got from lying on top of the cootie-infested paper beneath. See for example: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=12456519&dopt=Abstract
- ⁵⁰ Jonathan Foreman. Moore's the Pity. June 3, 2004. New York Post. <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/23542.htm>
- ⁵¹ Dave Kopel. Fifty-nine Deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm>
- ⁵² CNN, Osama Bin Laden Profile. <http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/people/shows/binladen/timeline.html>. Note that Osama was expelled from Saudi Arabia for anti-government activities that same year, and his citizenship revoked, further complicating Moore's thesis of a "Bush-Saudi-Osama" connection.

- ⁵³ Golden, Bandler, and Walker. Bin Laden Family Could Profit From a Jump In Defense Spending Due to Ties to U.S. Bank. Wall Street Journal Online. September 27, 2001. <http://www.geocities.com/vonchloride/wsarticle.html>
- ⁵⁴ The estimate of the actual number of children varies a bit, depending on the source. I've seen numbers ranging from 50 to 54. Bin Laden's brother disputes aspects of '9/11'. July 28, 2004. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5538722/>
- ⁵⁵ Yeslam spells his last name without the space and the capital 'L': Binladen. See Bin Laden's brother disputes aspects of '9/11'. July 28, 2004. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5538722/>
- ⁵⁶ Dr. Betty D. Maxfield, Chief, Office of Army Demographics. Army Demographics FY 03 Army Profile.
- ⁵⁷ Jesse McKinnon. The Black Population 2000: Census 2000 Brief. Issued August 2001.
- ⁵⁸ As of June 26, 2004, Black soldiers accounted for 88 of 712 deaths in Operation Iraqi Freedom. See: Operation Iraqi Freedom Military Deaths since May 1, 2003. OIF-Deaths-After.pdf. <http://web1.whs.osd.mil/mmid/casualty/castop.htm>
- ⁵⁹ Stuart Oskamp, Attitudes and Opinions. 1991. Prentice Hall. Page 162.
- ⁶⁰ Ellen Langer. *Mindfulness*. 1989. Cambridge: Perseus Books.
- ⁶¹ Peter Ross Range. Michael Moore's Truth Problem. March 23, 2004. New Democrats Online. http://www.ndol.org/ndol_ci.cfm?cp=1&kaid=127&subid=177&contentid=252483
- ⁶² The reference to Israel is clipped (without it, we assume it's a reference to America's war on terror). References to Israel are palpably absent throughout the rest of the film—even though Moore is strongly anti-Israel, calling it part of the Axis of Evil. Moore is doubtless concerned that audiences find his theories morally acceptable, so can't stray too far from the approved platforms. For Moore's views on Israel, see Israel, the Courts, and Michael Moore. The American Thinker. July 2 2004. http://www.americanthinker.com/articles.php?article_id=3645
- ⁶³ Dave Kopel. Fifty-nine Deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm>
- ⁶⁴ As Kopel points out, the invented name helps fuel Moore's ridicule. The name of the book was *Reading Mastery 2*, which contains an exercise, "The Pet Goat." Daniel Radosh. The Pet Goat Approach. The New Yorker. 2004-07-19. http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/?040726ta_talk_radosh
- ⁶⁵ Sumana Chatterjee and David Goldstein. A lowdown on the facts behind the allegations in 'Fahrenheit 9/11'. Knight Ridder Newspapers. Jul. 02, 2004. <http://www.realcities.com/mld/krwashington/9069433.htm>
- ⁶⁶ JP Devine, 'Fahrenheit': Entertaining, disturbing propaganda. Saturday June 26, 2004. Kennebec Journal. <http://kennebecjournal.mainetoday.com/news/local/775114.shtml>
- ⁶⁷ Readers with psychological training will recognize the Fundamental Attribution Error (a.k.a. the Correspondence Bias) resident in this situation. External viewers of the situation are prone to attribute Bush's actions at this time to his internal traits and personality. Bush likely viewed the situation in terms of its environmental constraints, such as the need to remain stationary until the Secret Service had assessed the threat and finalized a way to move him from the room.
- ⁶⁸ The Michael Reagan Show. August 27, 2004. Michael Reagan is responding to questions from caller Jeremy McAlpin.
- ⁶⁹ Fox News. The Truth About 'Fahrenheit 9/11' Tuesday 29 June 2004. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,124079,00.html>
- ⁷⁰ Christopher Hitchens. Unfahrenheit 9/11. Slate magazine. June 21, 2004. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102723>
- ⁷¹ Michael Moore. Declare War on Whom? AlterNet. September 4, 2001. <http://www.alternet.org/story/11507>
- ⁷² Many people don't understand the distinction between Federal and State funding. It's likely the lonely patrolman in Oregon would be seen as the fault of the federal government, rather than the Oregon state government.
- ⁷³ Michael Moore. Declare War on Whom? AlterNet. September 4, 2001. <http://www.alternet.org/story/11507>
- ⁷⁴ Christopher Hitchens. Unfahrenheit 9/11. Slate magazine. June 21, 2004. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102723>
- ⁷⁵ "He's both!" my friends on the left tell me. "Bush is a bumbling fool, but his advisors are master manipulators." So if you've ever wondered if you can have your cake and eat it too, here's how. The dichotomy cited in the text is from Sean Saulsbury. Fahrenheit 9/11: Propaganda for the Already Converted Fails as a Documentary. Capitalism Magazine, July 15, 2004. <http://www.capmag.com/article.asp?ID=3795>
- ⁷⁶ When X and Y reliably co-occur, there are several options: 1) X can cause Y (guns cause death); 2) Y can cause X (fear of dying causes people to arm themselves, which can be restated as "death causes guns"); 3) Z can cause both X and Y (intergroup hatred causes death and causes people to arm themselves); and 4) X and Y may not be related in any causal way at all (a man buys a gun and then dies when his parachute doesn't open). A correlation may mean any one of these possibilities, but most people will tend to believe their initial hypothesis that X caused Y, especially when X leads Y in time. See, I told you it was dull.
- ⁷⁷ Dave Kopel. Fifty-nine Deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm>
- ⁷⁸ John R. Lott, Jr. & Brian Blasé. Moore's Myths. New York Post. July 12, 2004 <http://www.nypost.com/postopinion/opedcolumnists/27166.htm>. Fox was the first to definitively call Florida for Bush after 2 a.m. Other networks made the same call within minutes, based on their voting data. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/media/election2000/election_night.html

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- ⁷⁹ Now, whether the networks elect the president *over time* is another topic altogether! Doubtless that over months of coverage, the media has considerable influence over who sits, and who gets evicted from, the White House.
- ⁸⁰ Only ABC waited until the Florida polls were closed, before calling Florida for Gore. Dave Kopel. Fifty-nine Deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. <http://www.davekopel.com/Terror/Fiftysix-Deceits-in-Fahrenheit-911.htm>
- ⁸¹ Joan Konner, James Risser, and Ben Wattenberg Television's Performance on Election Night 2000: A Report for CNN January 29, 2001
www.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/stories/02/02/cnn.report/cnn.pdf
- ⁸² John R. Lott, Jr. Documenting Unusual Declines in Republican Voting Rates in Florida's Western Panhandle Counties in 2000. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=276278
- ⁸³ John R. Lott Jr., Let the Sunshine In. *National Review*, December 10, 2003.
<http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/lott200312100915.asp>
- ⁸⁴ Scott Simon observes that Moore "depends so much on innuendo that a simple, declarative verb like 'says' is usually impossible."
- ⁸⁵ Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball. More Distortions From Michael Moore. *Newsweek*. June 30, 2004.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5335853/site/newsweek/>
- ⁸⁶ Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball. More Distortions From Michael Moore. *Newsweek*. June 30, 2004.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5335853/site/newsweek/>
- ⁸⁷ The Crusader contract for a self-propelled Howitzer was cancelled, to Carlyle's significant detriment. Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball. More Distortions From Michael Moore. *Newsweek*. June 30, 2004.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5335853/site/newsweek/>
- ⁸⁸ Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball. More Distortions From Michael Moore. *Newsweek*. June 30, 2004.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5335853/site/newsweek/>
- ⁸⁹ Oliver Burkeman and Julian Borger. The Ex-Presidents' Club. October 31, 2001. *The Guardian*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/wtccrash/story/0,1300,583869,00.html>
- ⁹⁰ A list of associates, and a feast for the Carlyle conspiracy theorist, can be found at the following page from Culture Change.org: <http://www.culturechange.org/CarlyleEmpire.html>. Numerous stories of a multi-million investment by Soros in the Carlyle group exist, but I wasn't able to find a solid source for the assertion.
- ⁹¹ Lefkowitz, M., Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S., 1955. Status factors in pedestrian violation of traffic signals. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51, 704-706.
- ⁹² Bandura, Grusec and Menlove, 1967. Vicarious extinction of avoidance behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 16-23.
- ⁹³ Phillips, 1974. The influence of suggestion on suicide: Substantive and theoretical implications of the Werther effect. *American Sociological Review*, 39, 340-354.
- ⁹⁴ Richard Clarke would be an example of a high-status convert communicator. His indictment of the Bush administration was powerfully persuasive.
- ⁹⁵ Perloff and Pettey, 1991. Designing an AIDS information campaign to reach intravenous drug users and sex partners. *Public Health Reports*, 106, 460-463.
- ⁹⁶ The interested reader should investigate the Office of National Drug Control Policy's ill-fated attempt to dabble in social engineering by having anti-drug messages grafted to the plot lines of popular American programs such as ER, Beverly Hills 90210, and the Drew Carey show.
- ⁹⁷ I call this tactic, "Outlier is the Mean." A statistically rare event (an outlier) is portrayed as typical, usual, common, normal, average (the statistical mean).
- ⁹⁸ In external sources, Lipscomb states she detested protesters during the Viet Nam war. Ben Schmitt. *Flint Woman Spotlighted in Moore's Latest Movie*. May 29, 2004. Free Press.
http://www.freep.com/entertainment/movies/moore29_20040529.htm
- ⁹⁹ If you'd guessed she was a Gore supporter in 2000, you were correct. So it's questionable whether the war actually caused Lila Lipscomb to change the direction of her feelings toward Bush, even if the intensity of those feelings increased. Bill Adair, *The Accidental Activist*. *St. Petersburg Times*.
http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/19/Worldandnation/The_accidental_activi.shtml
- ¹⁰⁰ The salient portion of the letter reads: "What in the world is wrong with George? Trying to be like his dad. Bush. He got us out here for nothing whatsoever. I am so furious right now, Mama. I really hope they do not re-elect that fool honestly."
- ¹⁰¹ Bill Adair, *The Accidental Activist*. *St. Petersburg Times*.
http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/19/Worldandnation/The_accidental_activi.shtml
- ¹⁰² <http://www.michaelmoore.com/words/latestnews/mikeinthenews/index.php?id=65>
- ¹⁰³ Is Pedersen a convert communicator? Apparently not in terms of his attitudes. Pedersen was against the war as early as December 2002. Lipscomb reports: "I walked out of my bedroom and we have a long hallway upstairs and he was standing there and he [Pedersen] said he would have to go to Kuwait and then to Baghdad. And he said he didn't support the war, that he didn't know why he had to go over there." *The Guardian*. *The Lie that Killed My Son*. July 8, 2004. <http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,6737,1256559,00.html>

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- ¹⁰⁴ Bill Adair, The Accidental Activist. St. Petersburg Times.
http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/19/Worldandnation/The_accidental_activi.shtml. Interestingly, in other sources, Lipscomb won't reveal her voting record; see http://www.freep.com/entertainment/movies/moore29_20040529.htm.
- ¹⁰⁵ <http://www.michaelmoore.com/words/latestnews/mikeinthenews/index.php?id=65>
- ¹⁰⁶ <http://www.filmfocus.co.uk/lookat.asp?FilmbaseID=68&FeatureID=7>
- ¹⁰⁷ Donn Fresard. Military mom in 'Fahrenheit 9/11' speaks. FS View. July 12, 2004.
<http://www.fsnews.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2004/07/12/40f190ecd19b4>
- ¹⁰⁸ <http://www.filmfocus.co.uk/lookat.asp?FilmbaseID=68&FeatureID=7>
- ¹⁰⁹ Bill Adair, The Accidental Activist. St. Petersburg Times.
http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/19/Worldandnation/The_accidental_activi.shtml
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- ¹¹² Osterhouse and Brock, 1970. Distraction increases yielding to propaganda by inhibiting counterarguing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 15, 344-358.
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<http://www.infobeat.com/index.cfm?action=article&id=365275>
- ¹¹⁵ The newspaper in question is the *Bloomington Pantagraph*. <http://tvh.rjwest.com/archives/005307.html>
- ¹¹⁶ The paper is seeking a whopping \$1 in damages for Moore's misrepresentation. Bill Flick. *Pantagraph to Moore: Headline use 'misleading'*. July 30, 2004. http://www.pantagraph.com/stories/073004/new_20040730034.shtml See also: <http://www.pantagraph.com/flick/flick0723.html>
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<http://www.hillnews.com/news/052604/clarke.aspx>. "I think Moore's making a mountain of a molehill," Clarke told Scott Simon of NPR.
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- ¹²⁰ Philip Shenon, *New York Times*. Moore's assertions supported by record But '9/11' director may have to defend rapid-fire statistics. Reprinted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Thursday June 24, 2004. <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/06/24/MNGSC7B3L21.DTL>
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- ¹²⁷ Fox News. The Truth About 'Fahrenheit 9/11' Tuesday 29 June 2004.
<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,124079,00.html>
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- ¹³⁸ Humorously, calling someone a liar is libel, of the sort that Moore promises to pursue if anyone calls him one. But one of the hallmarks of a propagandist is a staunch belief in free speech—for one's own ideology, not the other guy's. Jack Shafer. Libel Suit 9/11: Michael Moore's hysterical, empty threats. Monday, June 21, 2004. Slate Magazine. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2102725/>
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- ¹⁴⁰ Other Moore statements are challenged in even more exhausting detail here: http://fahrenheit_fact.blogspot.com/
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