

Introduction

MATTHEW H. BERNSTEIN

With the premiere of his popular debut film *Roger & Me* in late 1989, Michael Moore proved himself an astonishingly successful nonfiction filmmaker. Thirteen years later, *Bowling for Columbine*'s extraordinary box office performance and its Academy Award for Best Documentary confirmed Moore's standing as a cultural commentator to be reckoned with. In the intervening years, Moore diversified his output: he became a best-selling book author, TV show producer, and media personality. When *Fahrenheit 9/11* premiered in June 2004, following its winning the Palme D'Or at Cannes, Moore certified his status as a filmmaker, newsmaker, icon, and political celebrity larger than any one of the films, books or TV shows he produced or the website established and maintained in his name.

For 20 years and counting, Moore has served as a comic, unofficial, harried, and harrying spokesperson for the disenfranchised working class and liberal and leftist Americans—a single-handed critic of corporate America and an answer to the rise of Fox News. He had also become a lightning rod for conservative criticism and personal attacks long before he attempted to influence the outcome of the 2004 American presidential election with *Fahrenheit 9/11*. And while 2007's *Sicko* was not nearly so ambitious as the 2004 opus—and it's worth recalling that no other theatrical nonfiction film has ever tried to dethrone a sitting American president—Moore's 2007 movie inaugurated a more intensive phase in America's ongoing efforts at healthcare reform that the Obama administration and Congress have begun to address through legislation.

In his essay for this volume, Douglas Kellner explains concisely Moore's phenomenal success:

He is a populist artist who privileges his own voice and point of view, inserting himself as film narrator and often the subject of his film's action. Moore plays the crusading defender of the poor and oppressed, who stands up to and confronts the powers that be. He uses humor and compelling dramatic and narrative sequences to engage his audiences. He deals with issues of fundamental importance, and convinces his audience that the problems he presents are highly significant and concern the health of U.S. democracy. Moreover, despite the severity of the problems he portrays, the films and filmmaker often imply that the problems are subject to intervention, and that progressive social transformation is possible and necessary.

It's worth noting how powerfully Moore has broken box office records for theatrical nonfictional films using his strategic and idiosyncratic combination of irreverent humor and personal provocations of corporate and political leaders. According to www.boxofficemojo.com, four of the six top grossing theatrical political documentaries are Moore's: *Roger & Me* (\$6.7 million domestic, \$7.7 million worldwide), *Bowling for Columbine* (\$21.6 million domestic, \$58 million worldwide), *Sicko* (\$24.5 million domestic, \$35.7 million worldwide), and, of course, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (\$119.2 million domestic, \$222.4 million worldwide). Among documentaries in general, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Sicko*, and *Blowing for Columbine* still rate in the top six highest grossing nonfiction theatrical films (political or otherwise) of all time.

Moore's box office record has been uneven, however. Moore's only effort at fictional filmmaking—the political satire *Canadian Bacon* (1995), starring John Candy and Alan Alda—was a flop (a limp \$163,971 domestic gross). *The Big One* (1997) performed modestly, but better than *Canadian Bacon* at the box office (\$720,074 domestic). This picaresque account of Moore's book tour (47 cities in 50 days) to promote his 1996 best seller *Downsize This!* featured bits of Moore's stand-up comic corporate critique interspersed with frequent detours in which Moore learned about and intervened in local unionizing efforts or corporate layoffs. Indeed, Moore did not hit his cinematic stride again until *Bowling for Columbine* in 2002. *Slacker Uprising* (made in 2007 but released in September 2008) is another minor effort: it most resembles *The Big One* as a rambling account of Moore's five-week tour of college campuses (joined by various celebrities and rock stars) during the fall 2004 presidential election. It went direct to

DVD and downloadable video on the Web. As I write this, Moore's latest film, *Capitalism: A Love Story*, has earned well over \$14 million in 11 weeks of domestic release, placing it eighth on the all-time list of documentary releases, and fifth among political documentaries. Given Moore's popularity in foreign markets, the film's \$3 million gross from its international distribution is disappointing. Still, it is hard to imagine another documentary filmmaker whose films will gross over \$330 million.

Box office aside, Moore's creativity and popularity cannot be denied. His first television series, *TV Nation* (1994–96) won an Emmy. His second, *The Awful Truth* (1999–2000), received an Emmy nomination.¹ Indeed, Paul Arthur suggests in this volume that it was the short-form journalism of his TV work that enabled Moore to regain his prominence and success as a filmmaker with *Bowling for Columbine*. In the meantime, Moore's books, many of them best-sellers, allowed him to stay near if not in the spotlight of America's political culture. In addition to Moore and Kathleen Glynn's *Adventures in a TV Nation* (HarperCollins, 1998), there were two more books published in succeeding years, *Stupid White Men* (Regan Books, 2002) and *Dude, Where's My Country* (2003, Warner Books), as well as *Mike's Election Guide* in 2008.

All of these texts draw upon Moore's experience in activist politics. In 1972, he became the youngest officeholder in Michigan history due to his teenage service on the Flint public school board. Moore's cultural output also grew from his work in left-wing muckraking journalism: he founded the *Flint Voice*, which became the *Michigan Voice*; he had a very brief stint as editor of *Mother Jones*; and he held an even shorter tenure as the editor of a media watchdog newsweekly for Ralph Nader.

Throughout his several careers, Moore recognized that putting himself in the middle of social issues would command more attention from a general audience. Beyond his own work, before the fall 2002 premiere of *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore made guest appearances in TV series such as *Mad About You* and *The Simpsons*, and visited the talk show circuit—including appearances on *The Late Show with David Letterman* and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, as well as at least one appearance on a TV show politically hostile to his views, *The O'Reilly Factor*. Moore even appeared as an expert talking head in the 2003 documentary *The Corporation*. He has also turned up on liberal-leaning comedy shows such as *The Daily Show* and *Real Time with Bill Maher* that, as Jeffrey P. Jones argues in his volume, Moore's brand of political humor helped to inspire. Often Moore appeared to promote his latest film or book; often he did not.

Several weeks in advance of the premiere of *Sicko*, the June 1, 2007, issue of

Entertainment Weekly featured a photo of Moore on the cover with the headline “Here Comes Trouble.” Before this, and well before Moore made the rounds of the talk shows to promote the film in late June, Bill Maher in May 2007 could boast that Moore had granted *Real Time with Bill Maher* his first TV interview in over two years. More recently, Moore appeared on *Larry King Live* from late spring 2008 through spring 2010 with no film to promote; he was simply there as a prominent celebrity. In fall 2008, he appeared as a commentator on the Republican National Convention, along with “Plumbers for Obama,” or on *Larry King Live* to discuss the financial and Detroit automakers’ bailouts. (Of course, he made the rounds of talk shows when *Capitalism: A Love Story* premiered in fall 2009, even singing “The Times They Are A-Changing” on the new *Jay Leno Show*.) Clearly, the American media have discovered that they can attract readers and viewers when Moore shows up. Even Moore’s occasional public utterances are reported in the press, as when he, in early 2004 as Democratic presidential primaries were under way, accused George W. Bush of being a deserter during his service in the National Guard in Alabama; the Bush administration took the accusation incredibly seriously, scrambling to refute this charge made well in advance of the June premiere of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Since the premiere of that film, Moore has inspired several books and feature documentaries devoted purely to attacking him.² The ferocity of the onslaught against Moore, even the dismissive use of his name and persona as a synonym for liberal extremism, only testify to his considerable presence on the American scene. Moore is, quite simply, an instantly recognizable national figure who commands national attention. Put another way, Moore is impossible to ignore.

Within the realm of American cinema, Moore’s impact is equally undeniable. *Roger & Me* alone represents a transformative milestone in the history of documentary filmmaking. Courtesy of a distribution deal (for \$3 million, less than half of the film’s eventual gross) with Warner Bros., *Roger & Me* brought its unique alchemy of Moore’s filmmaking tendencies—ironic self-presentation, humorous social commentary on the woes of the unemployed working class, and a laser-beam focus on corporate indifference to the communities where people work—into the mass media marketplace. There, it also received searing examination for certain alterations of chronology in delineating Flint’s troubles.

More recently, reports have surfaced that Moore deliberately left out of his film the undeniable fact that politically active groups were feverishly at work protesting General Motors’s layoffs; as a result, Moore appears to fight the good fight against GM’s inhumane policies alone. Even more devastating to the film’s



Michael Moore with cinematographers Shermer and John Prusak in a widely-seen publicity shot for *Roger & Me* that emphasizes his small crew and Moore's own inexperience as a first-time filmmaker. Copyright 1989 Warner Bros., Inc.

reputation is the recent revelation that Moore had actually landed an interview with GM CEO Roger Smith for the film but chose not to include it. Moore chose to omit both these facts so that *Roger & Me* would be more personal and more humorous. The film's extraordinary box office performance affirmed Moore's decision. Still, the revelation of Smith's availability to Moore undercut a crucial premise of the film and has further damaged its credibility.³ The controversies and debates that greet each of Moore's films, however, have not diminished his or their impact on American culture and politics. Indeed, as the stage-managed refusal of Disney to allow Miramax to distribute *Fahrenheit 9/11* demonstrates, they only enhance his films' impact and enable Moore to thrive.

Furthermore, Moore's films have played a major role in film history, specifically by helping to transform theatrical documentaries into viable commercial properties more frequently than they ever had been in the past—even when they take the form of an extended PowerPoint presentation, as did *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). Moore has also inspired a new generation of filmmakers who use his personalized, humorous, quickly cut combination of archival footage, found films, home movies, and newly shot scenes to explore problems in American society and politics. To take just one example, Morgan Spurlock's *Supersize Me* (2004) is clearly in the tradition of Moore's highly personal brand

of muckraking, here accomplished amiably and somewhat masochistically, but definitely framed as an incisive critique of a fast-food industry that can destroy Americans' health.

Moore's films can also be seen as anticipating the work of more recent cinematic exposés of corporate greed. Alex Gibney's *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005) detailed one company's jaw-dropping greed and malfeasance in the energy markets in such detail that it made the General Motors of *Roger & Me* almost seem compassionate by comparison. Several of the issues raised in *Fahrenheit 9/11* have been elaborated by a string of documentaries critical of the Iraq war and its catastrophically incompetent execution: Eugene Jarecki's *Why We Fight* (2005), Charles Ferguson's *No End in Sight* (2007), and on the subject of torture, Alex Gibney's *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007), as well as Errol Morris's *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). In retrospect, we can see that Moore's films, particularly *Fahrenheit 9/11*, provided a sketchy overview of various flaws in American politics and society that subsequent nonfiction films have explored with greater intensity and focus—and, quite appropriately, with considerably less humor.⁴

Given Moore's importance in American political culture, a broad assessment of Moore's work is overdue. True, countless reviews of his books, films, and TV shows are not hard to find. Recent years have seen the publication of three informative trade press biographies of Moore, as well as one scholarly book on the impact of, and firefights over, *Fahrenheit 9/11*.⁵

Still, this volume fills an important gap. It examines individual films but also Moore's filmmaking as a whole, which remains his most influential form of personal expression, and his most important contribution to cultural and political debates in this country. We offer analysis of his populist approach to American politics, in particular, and his eclectic method of critiquing America, its media, and most of all, its politicians. We look closely at the cinematic techniques Moore uses to convey his ideas, his views of gender and class among the latter.

We also consider Moore's ambivalent relationship with documentary filmmaking traditions. Moore has tried to distance himself and his films from documentaries. At the same time, the ways in which Moore has shaped his films have often been greeted with cries of propaganda. He is indeed commonly and casually described in talk shows and the news media as a left-wing propagandist, a view that reflects a highly limited understanding and the history of the documentary form and an extremely naive view of the documentary's relationship to reality. The authors in this volume recognize that the nonfiction film

represents the filmmaker's revelation of and response to events that occur in the world. The controversies that have arisen over Moore's films—their strong point of view or their misleading use of facts—do not compromise their status as nonfiction works, nor do they invalidate the documentary form as a whole.

Moreover, in this volume we look beyond the American movie theater, with considerations of Moore's status as a celebrity, his forays into TV production, the reception of his films and TV shows in the United Kingdom, and an analysis of Moore's development of a website relative to the lightning-fast development of American political activism on the Internet, a movement that grew after 2004 to become an essential tool of political organizing during the 2008 election cycle and into the present day.

We begin with two general overviews of Moore's filmmaking career. Sergio Rizzo examines Moore's celebrity persona. Few people think of Moore as an auteur, but Rizzo argues persuasively that Moore thrives in an era when the auteur functions as a marketing brand. Rizzo examines those elements of Moore's personal biography that his films emphasize to make him a distinctive figure. Key among them is Moore's close identification with Flint, Michigan, as a true locus of average American life and, as Rizzo puts it, "a symbol of his personal authenticity." There was also Moore's all too brief sojourn at *Mother Jones*, a humiliation Moore blamed on the intellectual liberal elite from which Moore stridently distinguished himself. Rizzo then examines the star persona created in Moore's "commercial performance" of himself as a muckraking reporter, appealing to a class-based identity politics that ignores the film business. In Rizzo's hands, the contradictions of Moore's persona multiply: Moore's prominence in the brand-name marketing for his films is at odds with the traditional stance of the documentary filmmaker as oppositional artist; like any working-class movie icon, Moore's status as "the left's biggest star" complicates Moore's everyman persona (a "schlump in a ball cap").

Gaylyn Studlar's essay also considers Moore's Flint-based, white, working-class image as part of her examination of the class, gender, and race politics of Moore's major films. Flint, she finds, is essential to Moore's on-screen "masquerade of working-class masculinity" (his persona as "an apparently unsophisticated, class-bound white man"). From this position, Moore develops what Studlar calls a "solidarity strategy": Moore appears to enjoy a genuine connection with the powerless victims whose plights he explores in his films, a rapport that disguises the cultural power he exercises as a filmmaker. Moreover, Studlar finds, with very few exceptions (such as Lila Lipscomb in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and the former health insurance executive Linda Peeno in *Sicko*), that

women rarely occupy an important role in Moore's analysis of the social, political, or economic problem at issue in his films. More typically, they are victims pure and simple, with whom Moore displays extraordinary, almost feminine empathy. At the same time, Moore neglects to provide in his films the kind of gender analysis that might show, for example, in *Bowling for Columbine*, that the American man's assertion of masculinity is responsible for so much of the gun violence he dissects in the film. Moore prefers instead to point at class inequalities, ruthless capitalism, and inhumane government programs ("Welfare to Work") as the primary causes of these school shooting tragedies. While the centrality of class to Moore's films has been apparent since *Roger & Me* and continues in *Capitalism: A Love Story*, Studlar's essay is the first to consider its function and meanings in Moore's films and its intersections with gender and race in a systematic way.

Of course, lower-class victims figure prominently throughout the history of social documentary. This is just one tradition of documentary filmmaking that Moore's film work takes up. Part 2 of this volume examines Moore's uneasy engagement with such legacies. Douglas Kellner focuses in particular on the workings of Moore's three major political documentaries (*Roger & Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and *Fahrenheit 9/11*) in contrast to the pioneering, highly influential work of another left-wing documentary filmmaker, Emile de Antonio. Kellner argues that Moore employs three crucial strategies: "personal witnessing" (apparent even in the title of *Roger & Me*), "exploratory and confrontational quest dramas" (apparent in all of Moore's films, but best exemplified by *Bowling for Columbine*), and "agit-prop political interventions" (typified by *Fahrenheit 9/11* and, we can now add, *Slacker Uprising*). The similarities Kellner finds between de Antonio and Moore are striking: both eschew claims of documentary objectivity, and both make their points by using a mix of found and shot footage, contrasting editing strategies and ironic humor. But their differences are fascinating as well: de Antonio left it to his viewers to interpret the meanings of his films, while Moore favors a more "viewer-friendly" method that relies heavily on voice-over narration. While critics—indeed, several contributors to this volume—continue to debate Moore's relationship to other films and filmmakers, Kellner's invocation of de Antonio proves highly illuminating. He reminds us that Moore's films carry on a tradition of partisan documentary filmmaking whose existence is denied or dismissed by so many of Moore's critics.

Like Douglas Kellner, Paul Arthur examines Moore's films relative to the nonfiction film tradition. As Arthur notes, the most commented-upon features

of Moore's film work are "the director's first-person presence and a structural propensity for segmentation, digression, and clashing rhetorical tones." But where previous commentators have disagreed as they sought to characterize Moore's work in terms of well-established documentary categories (and notably, Bill Nichols' categories of documentary modes⁶), Arthur proposes that Moore's films are best understood as progressively assuming the form of the documentary essay film, exemplified by films ranging from Alan Resnais's seminal *Night and Fog* of 1955 to Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* of 1986. Essay films emphasize in equal measure the subjectivity of the filmmaker (her memory and personal experience) with commentary on the world the filmmaker inhabits. Arthur argues that the essay framework allows us to account for so much of what makes Moore's films distinctive: their emphasis on Moore himself, but also his recourse to a rhetorical framework in which his faux naïf character raises his consciousness (and the viewer's) as he sets out to learn more about the topic of his investigations. The essay film framework also encompasses Moore's use of diverse kinds of footage (original, found, home movies, TV news clips, commercials, newsreels) and music, and the highly idiosyncratic, sometimes free-association logic that informs his approach to the subjects he explores—as well as the documentaries made attacking him. Unfortunately, Paul Arthur passed away before he could revise his essay to incorporate comments on *Sicko* and *Capitalism: A Love Story*. The implications of his insights on Moore's film work in general and for those films in particular, however, remain clear. Moreover, his essay is but one more example of his rich and enriching legacy of erudite, insightful writing on all aspects of film culture.

Part 3 of this volume offers an array of essays on Moore's four major theatrical films, *Roger & Me*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and *Sicko*. Miles Orvell's essay, published in 1994, compares *Roger & Me* with Barbara Kopple's Oscar-winning *American Dream* (1991), a sober account of the defeat of a workers' strike at Hormel meat plant in the 1980s. While both films chart the diminished power of labor unions to win concessions for their members in a postindustrial and global age—particularly after eight years of business-friendly policies enacted by the Reagan administration—Orvell notes how distinctly different these films are. As Kopple follows the efforts of union leaders and members to succeed and even survive during the strike, she takes a traditional approach to depicting the labor struggle, pairing (in Bill Nichols' terminology) expository and observational modes. Moore by contrast creates a "documentary satire," one that questions the tradition in which Kopple works by taking a free-wheeling, satiric approach to his account of Flint's devastation at

the hands of GM. Each film, Orvell concludes, “bears witness” to the struggles of laboring Americans in distinct ways: “Kopple’s camera reveals the nature of powerlessness and gives it a voice, but it conceals the awful silence of the powerful. And that silence, absurd in its pomposity, infuriating in its Kafkaesque reticence, is exactly what Moore shows us.”⁷

Christopher Sharrett and William Luhr’s review of *Bowling for Columbine* (originally published in *Cineaste* in 2003) offers a concise, insightful assessment of Moore’s most acclaimed work. Noting Moore’s unusual combination of comedy and social and political criticism, Sharrett and Luhr hail his ability to show his audience “the grotesque, almost incomprehensible features of American life” and note that Moore’s obvious revamping of found footage and handling of staged scenes provide a robust reply to the criticisms that he does not make every trick of his trade apparent to the viewer. At the same time, Sharrett and Luhr duly note that while Moore persuasively presents the Columbine killers as “logical products of American life,” Moore’s analysis of America’s love affair with the gun can appear “confused and confusing.” For example, the dramatic moment in which Kmart agrees to stop selling the ammunition with which the Columbine killers attacked the school is surprising, moving, and powerful—but it is ultimately ephemeral. Moreover, Moore’s final interview with Charlton Heston, whatever it reveals about the late National Rifle Association leader, likewise seems ultimately pointless. Earlier, when Moore engages in cross-cultural comparisons (gun violence in the United States versus Canada), Sharrett and Luhr assert, his argument appears to lose focus and coherence.

Fahrenheit 9/11 remains the milestone event in Moore’s career and cultural production; accordingly, this volume offers three essays on the film. Richard R. Ness examines its use of cinematic techniques by comparing the film’s protest against the Iraq war with Frank Capra’s pro–World War II indoctrination films, the *Why We Fight* series (1943–45). There are some striking similarities, some of which arise from the fact that both Capra and Moore offer viewers a populist view of America and its place in the world. Thus, like the narration in the Capra series, Moore’s narration strikes an intimate, informal tone relative to the audience. Moreover, both Capra and Moore recontextualize documentary or factual footage (Capra working with Leni Riefensthal’s *Triumph of the Will* [1934], Moore with television news feeds of the Bush administration). Both filmmakers also incorporate footage from studio films—used as reenactments of actual events in Capra’s work, and ironically so in Moore’s. Most broadly, Ness uses this comparison to challenge the notion that propaganda and documentary are absolutely opposed, or even that there is consensus on the definitions of docu-

mentary and of propaganda. These were central terms in the debate over *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s merits, value, and achievements. In fact, as Ness shows, Capra's work inspired precisely the same debates when it premiered 60 years earlier.

Charles Musser's essay considers *Fahrenheit 9/11* in terms of the notion of documentary "truth." He first compares Moore's film with the more "sober" documentary work of Robert Greenwald (exemplified by his 2003 *Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War*), which presents its case against the Bush administration as if at a courtroom trial. Musser then zeroes in on the competing assessments in different documentary films and press journalism of what actually transpired and for how long during Bush's seven-minute sojourn on September 11, 2001, in the Sarasota elementary school classroom after he was informed that a second plane had hit the second tower of the World Trade Center. Whereas Moore claims "nobody did anything" for those seven minutes, Alan Peterson's *FahrenHYPE 9/11: Unraveling the Truth About Fahrenheit 9/11 & Michael Moore* asserted that Moore was absolutely wrong. By meticulously showing that no filmmaker or newsmaker had access to an uninterrupted seven-minute clip of Bush's stay in the classroom, Musser is able to demonstrate that Peterson's claims are inconclusive and create a sideshow that distracts from the larger issue of the Bush administration's inattentiveness to the threat of Osama bin Laden. By situating Moore's film within an understanding of documentary film truth that is relational—in particular, seeing the film as an account of recent American history designed to counter the version put forward by the Bush administration and the major American news media—Musser argues for a new way of appreciating Moore's achievement in this film.

David Tetzlaff also argues for seeing *Fahrenheit 9/11* as an alternative account of American history since 2000. Yet Tetzlaff advances an unusual and compelling understanding of the film: that it is best appreciated not as a bona fide or distorted documentary, but as a dystopian vision, akin to *Brazil* (1985), *The Matrix* (1999), or George Orwell's novel *1984*. Moore's film, Tetzlaff argues, "is more about social control through the manipulation of imagery and information than it is about the Iraq war. It is more a cautionary tale about the construction of false consciousness in general than an attack on George W. Bush in particular." Tetzlaff proceeds to discuss the conventions of the dystopian narrative and shows how they inform Moore's strategies. Beyond *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s recasting of the 2000 presidential election as a dream and a nightmare, both Moore's personal narration and Lila Lipscomb's journey to political awakening are akin to that of the dystopian protagonist, such as Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, who lives unreflectively within this society gone wrong and slowly comes to

realize that something is amiss. As our guide to the new American political order in which the image is all powerful and used effectively for political ends, Moore offers a counternarrative about the Bush administration. He deploys images and events not reported by the mainstream media, which basically followed the Bush White House's version of events.⁸ Tetzlaff's essay offers a bold and original thesis about *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Other commentators have noted the film's quotations from Orwell; no one has previously taken the dystopian vision to be the keynote of the film.

We offer a reprint of Richard Porton's characteristically perceptive analysis of 2007's *Sicko*. Noting the remarkable praise the film earned across the political spectrum, Porton argues that Moore's response to the Americans denied health care is more empathetic than ever before; and that he "attempts to explain why Americans, perfectly content with government-run post offices and public libraries, have been brainwashed to believe that nationalized health care . . . is akin to a communist conspiracy." Porton refers to sober studies that agreed with, if they did not inspire, Moore's thesis in the film, and he points out its various blind spots (letting Bill Clinton off the hook for sharing Bush's faith in private industry's ability to provide adequate health care). Porton also takes due account of Moore's narcissism, which results in his continuing centrality to his films, and argues that the stronger part of the film is the first half, where Moore documents the dire straits into which insurance companies have placed hapless citizens, as opposed to the second half, where he visits other countries for terms of comparison (a strategy Moore first deployed in *Bowling for Columbine*). Porton reasonably characterizes the visit to Cuba as a "closing gambit and a dubious polemical ploy," concluding, "With Moore, alas, it is necessary to swallow some of films' reflexive gimmickry and admire his generally good political instincts and intentions." Porton's observation here, in fact, holds good for all of Moore's work.

Part 4 of this volume turns to that work beyond the American movie theater. Jeffrey P. Jones examines Moore's two TV series, *TV Nation* and *The Awful Truth*, as satires of the newsmagazine show typified by CBS's *60 Minutes*. Jones further situates them as early instances of the "politico-entertainment" that surrounds us now in fake news shows best typified by *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. While post-1960s American satirical fake news goes as far back as at least *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update," Moore's programs featured special reports in the field that continued his movies' populist anticorporation, anticonservative crusades. Jones's analysis also reveals Moore's mixing and matching stories and methods from television in his films: one of Moore's pro-

gun control reports, following a school shooting, features a kiddy sing-along with Pistol Pete; in *Bowling for Columbine*, Pistol Pete's place is taken by the talking bullet who narrates America's violent history. (These kinds of examples support Paul Arthur's claim that the TV show episodes facilitated Moore's return to theatrical documentary filmmaking in the 2002 film.) Most broadly, the hallmark of Moore's TV work, in Jones's terms, is his "unruly" approach to investigative journalism, combining traditional reporting methods with an "anything goes" muckraking spirit that Moore justifies as necessary to explore the systematic nature of the pervasive unfairness of American economics and politics—and a necessary alternative to traditional news organizations that do not give Americans the information and analysis they should. The result, as with *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, is a truly alternative, highly critical form of news reporting.

Richard Kilborn demonstrates that those key aspects of Moore's TV work, such as his refusal to respect or even recognize the properties of documentary filmmaking so revered in the United Kingdom, have generated his considerable popularity in Great Britain, where documentary is closely associated with TV. Moore's TV shows echoed earlier British TV comic political reviews, such as *That Was The Week That Was*, or the Monty Python shows. At the same time, Kilborn shows how influential Moore has been on British documentary culture, as measured by the growth of fake news shows there and the willingness of certain TV creators (Louis Theroux, Chris Morris, and Mark Thomas) and the documentarian Nick Bloomfield to put themselves on screen. Kilborn concludes by tracing Moore's impact on British media studies, which has debated whether Moore's films exemplify the dumbing down of documentary practice, a question perhaps answered in part by Douglas Kellner's comparison of Moore's films with those of de Antonio. Another possible answer is that Moore's films are revitalizing the form in ways we are still beginning to appreciate.

Kilborn's much-needed account of Moore's considerable impact outside the United States also notes the importance of his ability to use old and new technologies, including the Web. This is the very subject of Cary Elza's essay, which examines Moore's partnership with MoveOn.org in summer 2004 as "a turning point in the intersection of political action and Internet community-building." Moore's website, www.michaelmoore.com, has often consisted only of two blogs (one by Moore himself) and links to the websites of other sympathetic groups, and Moore is also able to use it as a supplement to his films, providing documentation for a number of their claims. Yet as Elza shows, Moore's and MoveOn.org's websites thrive because they redact (collate and select) the

most pertinent news stories for the political community they help to create. They thus create a public sphere where citizens can argue and strategize to change a nation's politics. Elza argues that Moore's films also perform redaction, selecting little-known or overlooked (by the mainstream media) bits of information (banks giving away guns, George Bush lingering in the Sarasota classroom) for our consideration as examples of an America gone awry. She also traces out the various initiatives MoveOn.org proposed to its members to promote *Fahrenheit 9/11*—to hand out flyers of the film's poster (Moore and George W. Bush holding hands on the White House lawn), and to attend "National Town Meeting" house parties before the film opened, at which Moore and MoveOn founder Eli Pariser spoke via a live web broadcast not just about the film but about voter registration—a key goal of the Moore-MoveOn alliance.

Elza is thus able not only to explain the mechanics of Moore's web presence, but the ideals and new political culture the Internet has generated since 2004. Much as Sergio Rizzo discusses Moore as a commercial auteur, a brand name, so Elza identifies Moore's web presence as a commercial brand, one that allows fans to feel they are part of a desirable community by appealing to their ideal, activist selves. Even if the desire to be politically active is an advertised commodified product, it still has political impact, in terms of how we define ourselves online, which constitutes a new "public sphere."

Elza thus situates Moore's and MoveOn.org's web presence from 2004 going forward as a crucial marker of the transformative role the Internet has played in national politics—a fitting observation, given that Moore began his career as a political activist before becoming a journalist or filmmaker. Indeed, the role of bloggers, Internet sites, redactors, and activist groups like MoveOn.org multiplied during the 2008 election cycle, providing almost instant alternative commentary to campaigns' claims and attacks, with MoveOn.org's website equaled if not eclipsed by the Huffington Post and politico.com. Still, MoveOn.org remains a premiere organizing entity on the Web, as was seen during the 2008 presidential election. Indeed, political campaigns will continue to study and copy the online campaign and fund-raising strategies the Obama campaign used so successfully.

Moore himself continues to send out e-mails to those registered at his site: announcing appearances on TV, celebrating Obama's victory and inauguration (November 5, 2008, and January 20, 2009), rejoicing when Obama compelled the head of General Motors to step down (April 1, 2009); asking supporters who work in the financial industry to step forward and reveal what they know about

the Wall Street meltdown and financial bailout for use in *Capitalism: A Love Story* (February 11, 2009); and to urge fans to attend his latest film during its opening weekend (October 2, 3, 4) and the following weekend (October 9). Moore's multimedia presence is just one more hallmark of his success in the marketplace and his impact on American popular culture.

SINCE FAHRENHEIT 9/11

Moore's career reached its peak of influence with *Fahrenheit 9/11*, but he remains a crucial figure in American political culture and film history. Certainly, Moore has inspired a great deal of thought, some of it angry, since he emerged on the scene. Perhaps the most striking development in this regard is the premiere of *Manufacturing Dissent*, a 2007 documentary by Canadians Rick Caine and Debbie Melnyk, filmmakers who—unlike Moore's previous cinematic critics—are sympathetic to Moore's politics and aims, but ultimately grew disillusioned as they learned more about his methods. The film reveals Moore's omission of his interview with Roger Smith for *Roger & Me*.⁹ Moore's critique of GM's devastation of Flint remains undiminished, however. Even if Smith met with Moore, GM did not reopen plants and rehire Flint residents.

Sicko, which premiered in late June 2007, resembles many of Moore's previous films. As Richard Porton notes, Moore is still the center of the film—he narrates it, and he is on camera a good bit. As in *Roger & Me*, he blames American industries—here those of health insurance and pharmaceuticals—for putting profits above human health and welfare. As he has always done, Moore uses ironic humor constantly, as when he faux naively asks a British couple in a London hospital how much they paid for the newborn they are carrying. He inserts brief satirical sequences, such as the *Star Wars* music and opening credits crawl to list the vast array of preexisting conditions that insurance companies use to justify denying coverage—much like the *Bonanza* sequence mocking the Bush administration in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. He continues to report in unruly fashion, using diverse materials (home video footage of a man suturing his own knee at the start of the film, for example). As he ponders why American health care is in such a sorry state, Moore also explores the universal health care systems in Canada, Great Britain, and France—a type of comparative reasoning he employed in *Bowling for Columbine*. The film certainly fits the parameters of the documentary film essay film Paul Arthur describes.

The segment of the film that provoked the greatest criticism is that in which Moore stages a visit to Guantánamo Bay and then Cuba in search of health

treatment for medical personnel who have suffered various serious ailments since their voluntary work at Ground Zero, and who have received no coverage for treatment or even a diagnosis in the United States. While Guantánamo Bay's authorities don't respond to his loudspeaker requests from a speedboat to enter, Cuban doctors provide for free the medical treatment the American health industry has denied them, and Cuban firefighters salute the American volunteer heroes. This is a stunt that would be perfectly at home on one of Moore's TV series episodes, as Jeffrey Jones describes. Here, it is as if Moore has taken the few seconds of footage of happy pre-war Iraq in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and fabricated an entire, penultimate sequence from it about Cuba as a paradise of compassion. Indeed, it is highly possible, and extremely likely, that the Cubans who participated in Moore's film saw this as an opportunity to put the country's best foot forward and so may have acted with unusual largesse. But as David Tetzlaff might remind us, Moore need not show us the devastating poverty in Cuba or the repressive cruelty of the Castro regime; we've heard all about it from the American news media and several presidential administrations. Moore's footage gives us a side of Cuba that exists, however marginally, and that we haven't seen before, and it is frankly quite moving to see Cuban firefighters salute the American lifesavers. We might even be tempted to frame *Sicko* as a dystopian narrative, much as David Tetzlaff argues for *Fahrenheit 9/11*—an outraged perspective on the American health system. This view is encapsulated when Moore—while contemplating the fate of a woman without health coverage who has been dumped by a South Los Angeles hospital, like so much garbage, at a shelter—asks of his American audience, “Who are we?” How could we allow such things to happen in our country?

Beyond the film itself, we could note that Moore has used the government's harassment of him—on the grounds of his illegal visit to Cuba—as a means of promoting the film before its premiere, although this did not get nearly the attention that greeted the alleged refusal by Disney/Miramax to distribute *Fahrenheit 9/11* after it won the top prize at Cannes. And, as Cary Elza observes, MoveOn.org did send e-mails to its members encouraging them to attend *Sicko* during its opening weekend to boost its box office.

But *Sicko* also shows Moore shifting gears in significant ways. In part because he solicited stories of health care run amuck, he builds the film on the accounts of Americans denied insurance and medical care, people who tell their own stories as he listens. If this replicates the time-honored documentary practice of focusing sympathetically on the victim that the John Grierson British documentary movement pioneered, Moore also includes among those inter-

viewed not only widows (such as the hospital worker) who indict the insurance companies who denied their family members coverage, but also Becky Malke, a whistle-blower who displays an aroused conscience the rest of the insurance industry has yet to demonstrate. It is Malke who explains that she was paid to keep people from getting treatment, and that in health insurance lingo, a “medical loss” refers to money spent on a patient to help her get well. (One widow raises the specter of racism in the denial of treatment to her African American husband.) There are fewer ambush interviews with corporate representatives than we expect in a Moore film, largely because the insurance and pharmaceutical companies were wary of speaking with Moore once they learned of the film’s creation.

Another departure resides in the fact that *Sicko*’s critique of health care in America is less partisan than Moore’s previous films. Though its first clip contains Bush’s celebrated campaign misspeak, “Too many ob-gyns aren’t able to practice their love with women all across this country,” this footage is more of a quick reference back to *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which ended with Bush’s struggle with the “Fool me once / fool me twice” adage. The opening with Bush is also the kind of satiric appetizer that opens *Bowling for Columbine* with a few seconds from an NRA campaign film (“The NRA has produced the following film. Let’s have a look at it”). True, a subsequent sequence astoundingly replays a recording of President Nixon conferring with Bob Erlichman about Robert Kaiser’s proposal to set up health care businesses (HMOs) that maximize profits for insurance companies; Moore then shows footage of Nixon announcing the new policy the following day. Moore also briefly shows the Bush administration’s indifference to the issue, and highlights former, “mother-loving” Congressman Billy Tauzin’s advocacy for the health insurance industry while in Congress, and then taking a job as its chief lobbyist when out of Congress. But another sequence shows how Hillary Clinton failed to create health care reform in the early 1990s and subsequently accepted contributions from the health care industry. In other words, Moore takes pains to point out that legislators of both parties have failed to reform the health industry. We might also note that there have been several commentaries from health industry experts who report, barely concealing their surprise, that Moore’s treatment of the issue was overwhelmingly accurate.¹⁰ The Cuba sequence aside, at first blush, *Sicko* seems to be Moore’s most mature film yet; it is certainly his least comical.

In publicizing *Sicko* prior to its June 2007 premiere, Moore commented at a press conference that he is now part of the mainstream, not because he has changed his positions on various social and political issues, but because Amer-

ica has caught up with him.¹¹ He listed each of his major films and their fierce critique of America's politics, economic system, and cultural values. Indeed, GM and the entire automotive industry still struggle for viability (now two decades after *Roger & Me's* premiere); Larry King invited Moore on his show in spring 2008 to discuss the automotive industry's bailout based on his expertise as a longtime Flint resident and the maker of *Roger & Me*. The April 2007 shootings at Virginia Tech and the all-too-many shootings since, only renew the sense of urgency about gun violence that inspired *Bowling for Columbine*. The Wall Street meltdown and bailouts of fall 2008 through spring 2009, including GM's declaration of bankruptcy, demonstrate the ongoing endless greed and conservative-inspired lax government regulation of America's banking and investment sectors that Moore mocked in his TV series.

As this list shows, the more liberal branch of the American mainstream has only further endorsed many—certainly by no means all—of the views Moore expressed in his films through June 2007. During the 2008 presidential primaries and the general election, candidates took health care reform seriously—even if few candidates advocated the kind of government-directed, universal coverage Moore advocated in *Sicko*.¹² (The fall 2009 story of Rocky Mountain Health Plan's denial of insurance to 17 pound, 4-month-old Alex Lange on the grounds that he was "too fat" is another example of the health insurance absurdities Moore examined in that film.) Most powerfully, of course, after 2005's Hurricane Katrina, a majority of Americans embraced the view of George W. Bush advanced in *Fahrenheit 9/11*—as an arrogant, incompetent, warmongering, out-of-touch president who had damaged the core principles of American democracy and the worldwide reputation of the United States. Major books such as Frank Rich's *The Greatest Story Ever Sold*, as well as countless journalistic exposes of the Iraq war, corroborate the 2004 film's accusations against the Bush administration.¹³ Moore is not *the* or even *a* primary reason for this shift in American attitudes—the changing demographics of eligible voters is a far more forceful factor—yet the prescience of Moore's views remains striking: i.e., his undeniable assertions that major problems abide and flourish in American society, as do the all-too-numerous ways in which the United States fails to live up to its ideals.¹⁴

In this light, *Capitalism: A Love Story* seems to be a step backwards for Moore. One might argue that economic and social conditions in the United States have not changed enough since Moore's debut in 1989 with *Roger & Me* for him to change tactics and move away from a reliance on what are by now very familiar strategies and rhetorical tropes in his films. In fact, Richard Por-

ton put it best when he wrote that the film “recapitulates (perhaps unwittingly) Moore’s Greatest Hits” and that it is “the most poorly structured of all of Moore’s features” (<http://www.cineaste.com/articles/toronto-international-film-festival-daily-update>).

Moore does raise many valuable points in *Capitalism: A Love Story*, which is best characterized as an essay film, along the lines Paul Arthur describes in this volume (highly digressive and with emphasis on Moore himself). The film reminds the viewer of the rampant cronyism that pervaded the federal government in the second half of the twentieth century and continues under President Obama: Donald Regan, President Reagan’s Secretary of the Treasury, was Chairman of Merrill Lynch before being tapped for government service and led the massive deregulation of the financial markets of the 1980s that led to the Savings and Loan scandals. Moore brings to light current, obscure examples of predatory business practices: the “dead peasant” life insurance policies taken out by major corporations on young employees that make the employer the sole beneficiary; the “condo vultures” who swoop down on devalued real estate and buy it for half or less of its original value; the juvenile court judge who accepted kickbacks from a private juvenile detention center for sentencing teens guilty of minor offenses to lengthy imprisonment. Moore dwells on the cut wages paid to major airline pilots (courtesy of Congressional testimony by national hero Captain “Sully” Sullenberger) and the low wages paid to regional airline pilots.

There are more familiar rhetorical moves from Moore’s previous films. Once again, Moore plays the faux naïve, wondering: “How are these companies able to get away with this?” Or, “I didn’t understand how any of this could be legal.” There is his use of found footage, in this case scenes from an old Encyclopedia Britannica film on “Life in Ancient Rome” that Moore uses to suggest that America is an empire in decline; or when Moore speculatively dubs business speak into the mouth of Jesus Christ in a campy educational film (“Go forth and make profits”; “I cannot heal your pre-existing condition”). The film also features Moore’s knowing use of film and TV musical references, for example, the theme from Nino Rota’s score for Federico Fellini’s *Il Bidone* (“The Swindle”) when Moore describes his own Flint, Michigan, childhood, and Bernard Herrmann’s credit music for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) when describing over an assortment of found 1950s footage how victimized Americans were “hypnotized” into believing that capitalism is right.

More seriously, it is striking when Moore visits the Flint AC Spark Plug plant with his dad, who recalls his delight in his co-workers, and when two

Catholic priests tell Moore that capitalism as currently practiced in America is a sin. It is inspiring to see Jonas Salk explain why he never sold the polio vaccine to a pharmaceutical company (“Would you patent the sun?” he asks Edward R. Murrow in an interview). It is heartening to see how Isthmus Engineering is owned by its employees or how Republic Windows and Doors employees recently struck inside their plant until the company’s boss agreed to pay them the back pay owed to them. It is powerful to hear FDR speak of a “second bill of rights” (a decent job, a livable wage, an adequate pension, a paid vacation, a good education) before his death. These few exceptions to the rule constitute the only countervailing visions of proper corporate conduct in the film.

Yet Moore provides no serious analysis of what exactly has happened on Wall Street, and his vague appeals to historical strikes or more recent assertions of employee rights prove as ephemeral as getting Kmart to stop selling a certain kind of bullet or as uncertain as his comparisons with health systems abroad. Moore’s ironic street theater antics now look tiresome. Anyone knowledgeable about Moore’s body of work (particularly his routines about corporate crime in his TV shows or in *Bowling for Columbine*) could predict that he would stage a visit to the New York Stock Exchange, or AIG and Citibank’s Manhattan headquarters and try to tape the sidewalk as a crime scene, or try to make a citizen’s arrest of the CEOs, or demand a refund of the Federal government’s bailout money from late 2008 and early 2009. Unlike *Roger & Me*, *Capitalism: A Love Story* tries to address capitalism as a system; but moments such as these show him reverting to the more personal targets (corporate heads, Charlton Heston) in previous films.

The “greatest hits” strategy in *Capitalism: A Love Story* really hits home when Moore references *Roger & Me* and he reuses his infamous interview in which GM spokesperson Tom Kay admitted that GM would cut thousands of jobs to stay competitive. Referring to GM’s June 2009 bankruptcy, Moore comments, “Maybe now they’d listen,” and Moore heads to GM headquarters where security officers won’t let him come through the main entrance. Corporate America knows who Moore is now, as was powerfully demonstrated when, in *Sicko*, Cigna insurance, threatened by Moore’s potential interest, agreed to provide previously denied coverage for two cochlear implants for a child.

Is Moore past his prime? Has he exhausted his ideas for comic documentary filmmaking? Only his future films will provide the answer. Of course, any study of a filmmaker in midcareer cannot pretend to be comprehensive, and this volume is not exhaustive. For example, it does not examine Moore’s books. No contributor considers *Canadian Bacon* or *The Big One* in a sustained way,

reflecting the critical consensus that these are minor works in the Moore filmography, though not without interest.¹⁵ Rather, in this volume, we pause to assess through a multifaceted lens the Michael Moore phenomenon. His importance to American filmic, political, and social culture simply cannot be denied; neither can the importance of understanding his work so far—and the work that is to come in an increasingly divided America.

Notes

1. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=politicaldoc.htm> (accessed April 20, 2010).

2. For some of the attacks on Moore, see David T. Hardy and Jason Clark, *Michael Moore Is a Big Fat Stupid White Man* (New York: ReganBooks, 2004); the trio of 2004 films: Alan Peterson's *Fahrenhype 9/11*, Kevin Knoblock's *Celsius 41.11: The Temperature at Which the Brain Begins to Die*, Bruce Wilson's *Michael Moore Hates America*; and Steven Greenstreet's *This Divided Nation* (2005). The year 2007 saw a cinematic liberal critique of Moore, Rick Caine and Debbie Melnyk's *Manufacturing Dissent*, discussed in the text.

3. These revelations have been reported in the news media but also appear in the film *Manufacturing Dissent* and in Roger Rappaport's *Citizen Moore* (Muskegon, MI: RDR Books, 2007). It is surprising that Roger Smith never revealed this fact before his death in 2008. For some discussion of Moore's impact on the marketplace for theatrical documentary, see Anonymous (roundtable discussion), "The Political Documentary in America Today," *Cinéaste* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 29–37.

4. Participant Productions creates both fictional and documentary films; their 2005 slate included *Murderball*, *Syriana*, *North Country*; in 2007, *Jimmy Carter: Man from Plains*, *Darfur Now*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Charlie Wilson's War*; in 2008, *Standard Operating Procedure*; and in 2009, *Food, Inc.*

5. For biographies of Moore, see Emily Schultz, *Michael Moore: A Biography* (New York: ECW, 2005), Jesse Lerner's *Forgive Us Our Spins: Michael Moore and the Future of the Left* (New York: Wiley, 2006), and Rappaport's *Citizen Moore*. See also Sergio Rizzo, "Why Less is Still Moore: Celebrity and the Reactive Politics of *Fahrenheit 9/11*," *Film Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (Winter 2005/2006): 32–39. Robert Brent Toplin's *Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11: How One Film Divided a Nation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006) is a well-reasoned examination of the controversies Moore's film stirred in 2004.

6. Bill Nichols has formulated and revised his notion of documentary modes of representation in several publications. See his "Voice of Documentary," *Film Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 17–30; his chapter "Documentary Modes of Representation" in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 32–75; the "Performing Documentary" chapter in *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 92–106; and his "What Types of Documentary Are There?" chapter in his *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 99–138.

7. For reasons of space, I have omitted my “Documentaphobia and Mixed Modes: Michael Moore’s *Roger and Me*.” This essay situates Moore’s first film in terms of Bill Nichols’s typology of documentary modes of representation, exploring how *Roger & Me* partakes of a variety of established documentary practices—at times appearing highly personal and interactive, at other times presenting a very straightforward analysis of GM’s policies and their impact on Flint. I also show why Moore’s filmmaking caused so many critics to feel misled by its handling of chronology and uncomfortable with its treatment of on-camera subjects. Interested readers can find the original essay in *The Journal of Film and Video* 46, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 1–17; it was reprinted and abridged in *Documenting the Documentary*, ed. Barry K. Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 397–415.

8. Tetzlaff’s reading of *Fahrenheit 9/11* is congruent with Moore’s own statements about the film at the time of its release. When asked, as he repeatedly was, whether the film was propaganda, Moore gave some variation on the following answer shown in *Slacker Uprising* (2008):

How much were we propagandized by the Bush administration? And by our mainstream national media? Over and over and over again. What if you had done your real job? What if you had asked the hard questions and demanded the evidence about this war? . . .

My movie exists to counter the managed, manufactured news which is essentially a propaganda arm of the Bush administration. My movies are the antipropaganda. The only thing sad about that is that people have to pay eight or nine dollars to come to a movie theater, get a babysitter, to learn things they should be getting for free sitting on the couch and eating Tostitos.

Moore made similar remarks in June 2004 on the CBS morning news talk show, much to the delight of Jon Stewart, who admiringly excerpted the clip on *The Daily Show* that month.

9. See film producer Jon Pierson’s open letter to Moore occasioned by both the release of *Sicko* and the availability of *Manufacturing Dissent*; see “Indiewire First Person: Jon Pierson, An Open Letter to Michael Moore,” June 29, 2007, http://www.indiewire.com/people/2007/06/rst_person_jo_1.html. Thanks to Paul Arthur for alerting me to its existence. Pierson’s criticism of Moore is notable especially because it was Pierson who secured Moore’s distribution deal with Warner Bros. for *Roger & Me*.

10. See, for example, Jonathan Cohn, “Schticko; It’s no fun to agree with Michael Moore,” *New Republic* 237, no. 4816 (July 2, 2007):18–19; and A. Chris Gajilan, “Analysis: ‘Sicko’ Numbers Mostly Accurate; More Context Needed,” Friday, June 29, 2007, <http://www.cnn.com/2007/HEALTH/06/28/sicko.fact.check/index.html>.

11. See S. James Snyder, “Michael Moore: ‘I’m Mainstream Now,’” Wednesday, June 20, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1635192,00.html>.

12. See for example, Robin Toner, “2008 Candidates Vote to Overhaul U.S. Health Care,” *New York Times*, July 6, 2007, sec. 1, A7.

13. *The Greatest Story Ever Sold: The Decline and Fall of Truth in Bush’s America* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

14. See Paul Krugman, “Disaster and Denial,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2009:

A29, on the failure of the federal government to pass effective regulations for the financial markets in 2009, one year after the many meltdowns of a year before.

It's worth briefly considering *Slacker Uprising*, a decidedly minor effort from Moore, in light of his claims that he is now part of the American mainstream. The film follows Moore on his five week old-style barnstorming tour of college campuses prior to election day 2004. As an early title explains: "Fearing four more years of George W. Bush, a cadre of rock musicians, hip-hop artists and citizen groups went out on the road with their own 'shadow campaigns.' To save John Kerry and the Democrats from themselves. This the story of one filmmaker's failed attempt to turn things around."

The film contains some very humorous moments. Michigan's Republican Party tried to sue Moore for bribery for handing out "a change of underwear" and ramen noodle packets at rallies to any "slackers" who promised to vote in the election. Moore created some mock campaign ads for the Republican Party (if Max Cleland was a true patriot, he would have sacrificed his one remaining limb while serving in Vietnam; if John Kerry were, he would have died in Vietnam). He offered pretend compassion for the Republicans who protest his campus appearances ("Here's the bonus, my Republican brothers and sisters . . . even though many of us in here see you as a deviant form of behavior, Republicanism, right-wingism, we'll still let you marry each other"). Moore's campus rallies are often enhanced by the presence of major rock stars and bands (R.E.M., Eddy Vedder, and even Joan Baez) who perform. Yet, the tone of *Slacker Uprising* is such that if a viewer did not know the outcome of the 2004 election, one would think George W. Bush was removed from office. This is perhaps one key reason why the film never gained a theatrical release. Another is that even before the 2008 election, the film was old news. A third would be that most of *Slacker Uprising* is simply very boring.

15. *Canadian Bacon's* satire of American politics and militarism combined elements of Stanley Kubrick's 1964 *Dr. Strangelove* (Rip Torn as a power mad general; absurd dialogue in the War Room; Alan Alda as an ineffectual, shallow, unpopular, and opportunistic president) with Moore's own signature themes and characters. Here, his *Roger & Me* persona is assumed by comedian John Candy in one of the latter's final films. *Canadian Bacon* also features Moore's ironic use of a mix of songs, such as Tex Ritter's "God Bless American Again," which plays over the opening credits, and Candy and friends singing the repetitive refrain (which is all they can remember) of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A" as they drive to rescue a friend in Canada. Also typical of Moore, the film begins by focusing on unemployment before moving on to dramatize the impact of the military-industrial complex on blue collar residents of Niagra Falls and the nation as a whole (anticipating the focus of *Bowling for Columbine*). Shot by master leftist cinematographer Haskell Wexler of *Medium Cool* (1968) fame and featuring countless jokes about Canada's pacifism and irrelevance, as well as cameos by comedians such as James Belushi and Dan Ackroyd, *Canadian Bacon* was a box office flop, with an over-the-top final sequence in which characters race to prevent a nuclear launch.

Yet *Canadian Bacon* does have its share of authentically funny scenes and lines of dialogue. It is also worth recalling that its scenario of a president using unprovoked war to raise his approval ratings anticipates that of Barry Levinson's *Wag the Dog* (1997). Here, an American president used a Hollywood producer and the media to create an Albanian war to distract Americans' attention from his recent sex scandal, revealed just days be-

fore an election. Levinson's film was itself released in January 1998 as Americans first learned of Bill Clinton's sexual encounters with Monica Lewinsky. Moreover, 1999's *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* would more successfully riff on American disdain for—and aggression against—its neighbor to the North. If Moore did not spoof these subjects with success, he certainly created scenarios that other cinematic satirists would develop more fully and profitably.

The 1997 release *The Big One* reiterates *Roger & Me's* pro-labor politics in the face of the very unemployment his book *Downsize This* protested. It also includes Moore's persistent confrontations with corporate press relations people who command his crew to turn off their cameras and leave the grounds and who refuse to give Moore access to CEOs (of the Leaf Corporation [makers of the Payday candy bar], Johnson Controls, Pillsbury, and Proctor and Gamble) as well as then Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson. Interspersed with his book talks are conversations with celebrities (Garrison Keillor, Cheap Trick's Rick Nielsen) and excerpts of his funny observations about Republican candidates ("Steve Forbes must be an alien since he never blinks"); corporate America ("We need to turn crack over to General Motors, 'cause they'll really screw it up. We'll eliminate crack in five years if we just turn it over to General Motors"); and giving America a makeover, renaming it "The Big One." As in *Roger & Me*, Moore is front and center in the film and often self-mocking (not least through his use of dramatic theme music such as the *Peter Gunn* theme song as he approaches a corporate headquarters or paranoid workers). The rapport Moore creates with working class Americans, as discussed by Gaylyn Studlar in her essay, is on full display here, as are the enthusiastic crowds who greet Moore in many cities. While the efficacy of Moore's actions can be questioned, the newly unemployed or struggling employed whom he encounters in the film clearly appreciate his sympathy and his public stance against corporate America. Moreover, unlike the hapless residents of Flint, Michigan, in *Roger & Me*, a film that emphasizes the obsolescence of the labor movement, employees of several Borders Books branches in *The Big One* celebrate their unionization in the course of the film.

The most discussed aspect of *The Big One*, however, was Moore's climatic and unanticipated meeting with Phil Knight, CEO of Nike Shoes. Moore insists that Knight shut down the Indonesian factories that employ and woefully underpay Indonesian teenage girls and open a factory in Flint, Michigan, instead. While Knight ultimately agrees to contribute \$10,000 to Flint's schools, he refuses to be Moore's "man of conscience," different from other CEOs, by opening a factory in Flint (Knight remains unconvinced that Americans, even unemployed Flint residents, will really take jobs making shoes). Here we see not only the reiteration of Moore's efforts, dating back to *Roger & Me* and continued in his TV shows, to meet with corporate leaders who usually shun him but also the prototype for Moore's confrontation with Charlton Heston in *Bowling for Columbine*. As in *Slacker Uprising*, the film is self-congratulatory at the same time that it aims to empower workers throughout America.