

Turning up the Heat on Political Debate

Reviewer: Helen Walsh

Fahrenheit 9/11, Michael Moore's film about September 11, 2001 and the Iraq war, has generated a tremendous amount of press, as well as impressive ticket sales, becoming the first documentary to surpass the magic \$100 million revenue threshold. The film has provoked very strong reactions from those critical of President Bush's administration and handling of the post September 11 period, as well as those who defend the President.

And then there's the criticism of the film for betraying the documentary art form - being strongly opinionated, one-sided and relying on cinematic tricks rather than letting the footage speak for itself. In short, being propaganda not art. But Mr. Moore has never made documentaries without a strong narrative opinion shaping them. For better or worse, it's his oeuvre and viewers of a Michael Moore film should know to expect this.

Arguably, the most interesting thing about the film has been its ability to touch a zeitgeist, tapping into a need for critical dialogue that has, until recently, been missing in the mainstream American press. I went to see the film on opening night, and was amazed at the huge lineups despite its playing on three screens in that one cinema alone. Over half of the audience were under 25; an age where people may be naturally political, as one reviewer suggested, but who have shown dwindling voter turnout levels across North America over the past decade.



Will this film mobilize more people to vote in the upcoming American November presidential elections and elsewhere? That remains to be seen. What it has already done, though, is forge a community of people talking about politics. Through its sizeable audiences, a multitude of articles in the worldwide press, chat rooms, and dinner party tables, it has raised the level of political discourse and discussion. Some argue that a film based on anything other than objective wholesale truth cannot prompt a more politically engaged citizen. I disagree. Fahrenheit 9/11 is opinionated, yes, but not propaganda. And the average filmgoer will see it, in both its strengths and weaknesses, with clear eyes.

Related Links:

- Michael Moore's website: http://www.michaelmoore.com/index_main.php
- To read critic and user reviews about Fahrenheit 9/11 visit: <http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?d=hv&cf=info&id=1808569540&intl=us>