

Counterpunch

'Roger,' 'JFK' and Me: The Official Story

By MICHAEL MOORE

It was a slow day. Five or six hours had passed and I had not read a single attack on Oliver Stone! It seemed like everyone except Mother Teresa and Chuck Woolery had weighed in against "JFK," but then along came film critic Jack Mathews, who had placed "JFK" on his "10 best list" and found a fresh angle to use in going after "JFK"—compare it to my 1989 documentary "Roger & Me."

Mathews (Calendar, Jan. 5) wrote that "Roger & Me" was "an extraordinary film achievement," but like "JFK," "it breaks faith with viewers" because "filmmakers have a tacit responsibility not to lie or distort truth when truth is the very thing they claim to present."

This charge is as false today as it was two years ago. The facts in "Roger & Me" were true. Because I chose not to flash dates on the screen throughout the film, a few critics such as Mathews decided to create their own time line and chronology of events—and then declared mine wrong!

At no time did any reporter from The Times go to Flint, Mich., to verify what Mathews and his colleagues were writing about the film. When I asked a Times editor if these articles had been fact-checked, I was told that The Times didn't have the time or resources to fact-check every article.

In fact, only two dailies flew reporters to Flint to see whether "Roger & Me" was accurate—the Sacramento Bee and the St. Petersburg Times.

Both published long articles reporting that the film truthfully portrayed what had happened to my hometown of Flint, and the chronology was faithful to the cause and effects of the events that took place—specifically, that 30,000 jobs were in fact eliminated by General Motors, that Ronald Reagan *did* visit Flint *after* the layoffs began; that the tourism projects meant to save Flint opened *after* various factories had closed and that all the shots of poverty in the film were recorded in Flint and nowhere else.

Jack Mathews says that when "Roger & Me" was released, it was "heralded as a masterpiece" but when these charges (from General Motors) were revealed, it left people feeling "betrayed."

Who felt betrayed? In spite of the two-month GM smear campaign against the film, "Roger & Me" was released and voted best documentary by the L.A. Film Critics, the New York Film Critics, the National Society of Film Critics and the National Board of Review. After further attacks by GM, the film ended up on more than 80 critics' 10-best lists. Four months later it became the largest-grossing non-musical documentary of all time.

It seems the only ones who felt "betrayed" were the executives at General Motors and an aunt of mine who was sure we'd win the Oscar (an illusion I never shared, knowing that the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had consistently rejected the most popular and critically acclaimed documentaries, including "The Thin Blue Line," "Shoah," "28 Up" and "The Atomic Cafe").

So here we are, two years later, I'm getting ready to shoot my next film (relax, Jack, it's fiction this time) and the recession I addressed in "Roger & Me" has turned into a full-blown depression. This past Christmas, the chairman of GM, instead of reading from Dickens, announced he was sacking more than 70,000 employees.

Geez, I hope it was a distortion on GM's part (or that they'll at least fire all those workers in chronological order)!

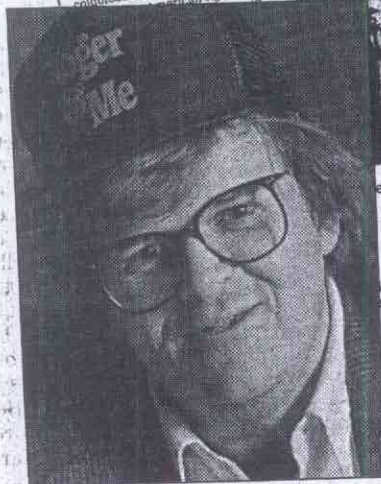
The furor that gets kicked up over films like "Roger & Me" and "JFK" has everything to do with the fact that these films challenge the "official story" and encourage their audiences to put down their Goobers and Twizzlers and do something.

In fact, the American people are pretty smart when it comes to issues like these, and they don't really need Michael Moore or Oliver Stone to know that the Reagan recovery was a lie or that Oswald did not

Who Issues Historical Licenses

By JACK MATHEWS

Broken down to its most elemental parts, the movie is driven by the coldblooded assassination of a American figure, a



evinson, in cap: An example of an artist interpreting history. clear-headed jurors to rule on a mountain of evidence he believes will convict a horde of 'conspirators for killing the President. Its style is part documentary, part cinema verité, part history warmed-over, part invention and 100% earnest speculation. Setting aside the relative importance of their subjects, the approaches to "Bugay" and "JFK" raise some interesting questions. When is the line between artistic license and social responsibility crossed? When does a movie cease being entertainment and become news? And should...

Oliver Stone: His "JFK" people felt betrayed. Pauline Kael of the New Yorker accused Moore of breaking faith with those viewers who might reasonably trust a documentary to do fact. Moore and his critic-defenders say that the substance of the film was true, that he had merely moved things around to help focus his portrait. "Roger & Me" was an extraordinary achievement, and "JFK" may be the most technically brilliant movie of the same time. Both films do be...

Moore

act alone.

Hopefully, next time, if Mathews doesn't want to deal with the truth, he could at least point out the true conspiracies of Moore and Stone: the remarkable similarity in both men's names (both have five letters!), the fact that both "JFK" and "R&M" were distributed by Warner Bros.

(which has regional headquarters in both Dallas and Detroit!) and that both men claim to have seen Jim Morrison at the hot dog stand on San Vicente last week sharing a chili dog with ex-GM chairman Roger Smith.

Moore directed "Roger & Me." His next film is a comedy about the new world order.