

# Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* takes People's Choice Award

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Taking media commentators by surprise, Michael Moore's documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a scathing look at the Bush administration and its response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, won the People's Choice Award January 9 as favorite film. The People's Choice, held in the Pasadena (California) Civic Auditorium and broadcast live on CBS, is the first major awards ceremony of 2005 and the only one voted on by the public.

For the first time this year the prize winners were selected by Internet voting, with some 21 million people participating. The nominees in each of the 38 categories were selected by 6,000 readers of *Entertainment Weekly* magazine chosen by the editors.

That Moore's film, which argues that the administration of George W. Bush consists of thieves and liars, should win such a contest on the eve of Bush's second inauguration, is a refutation of the media's claims as to the president's popularity and "mandate." In its own, backhanded way, Moore's victory points to the key to the Republican victory: the unwillingness and incapacity of the Democrats to oppose Bush administration policy, on the illegal war in Iraq or any other critical matter.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is at the center of controversy in the present awards season. As a documentary Moore's film was not eligible for a Golden Globe Award. The filmmaker did not submit his film in the Academy Awards' Best Documentary category. Instead Moore and distributor Lion's Gate are campaigning to obtain a Best Picture nomination. The Oscar nominations will be announced January 25.

Moore published a letter on his Web site in December noting the People's Choice nomination, explaining that he had not thought at first to mention it: "But then a group of top Republicans took out a full page ad in *USA Today* (and placed a similar one in the Hollywood trade magazine, *Variety*) proclaiming that 'An election is over, but a war of ideas continues.' The point of the ad was to

say that while they, as right wing conservatives, were proud of getting rid of [Democratic presidential candidate John] Kerry, there was still one more nuisance running around loose they had to deal with—me! They also issued a not-so-subtle threat to the Academy Awards voters that, in essence, said don't even THINK about nominating *Fahrenheit 9/11* for Best Picture."

Right-wing Fox News host Bill O'Reilly chimed in, claiming "If Hollywood nominates this propaganda tract [*Fahrenheit 9/11*] as Best Picture, you will see a backlash against the movie industry that you have never seen."

Moore urged readers of his Web site to vote online for *Fahrenheit 9/11* for the People's Choice award, prompting the ultra-right *New York Post*, in its sour grapes response to his victory, to refer to "allegations of ballot stuffing via the Internet." The allegations are entirely self-generated. The *Post* notes that Moore had the temerity to use "his popular Web site to tell the film's fans that a vote for *Fahrenheit 9/11* was a vote against President Bush." The Murdoch tabloid fails to mention that right-wing Web sites were campaigning with equal fervor for the defeat of Moore's film.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is the highest-grossing documentary ever, at nearly \$120 million, and sold \$4.7 million in DVDs in the first week of its release.

Moore notes in his Web site letter that "The People's Choice Awards are considered, among all the awards shows, to be the one which most accurately reflects the 'mainstream' public opinion in the United States." The awards honor films, film and music personalities and television series, as well as "favorite smile," "favorite hair" and "favorite look." Julia Roberts and Johnny Depp gained most votes among female and male movie stars, respectively; Renee Zellweger and Brad Pitt won as favorite leading lady and leading man.

Greeted with cheers and a smattering of boos, Moore, who had promised on his Web site, if he were to win, to

give “a nice and polite speech,” kept his word. He told the Pasadena audience: “We live in a great country and we all love our country very much and I am so amazed that you did this—the people of America—that you voted for this film. I can’t thank you enough. I’m honored and gratified and I know that there are many people tonight—mothers and fathers across this country—with sons and daughters in Iraq. Our prayers are with them and I dedicate this award to them tonight. I want to thank, most of all, the people out there who voted for this. I don’t want you to give up. This country is still all of ours. Not just right or left, Democrat or Republican, it’s all of our country. I love making movies and I’ll take this as an invitation to make more ‘Fahrenheit 9/11s.’”

It may very well be that this year’s awards provided a glimpse into the contradictory and confused state of public opinion in the US. While *Fahrenheit 9/11* won as favorite film, Mel Gibson’s repugnant *The Passion of the Christ* took home the prize as favorite drama. In a further manifestation of an ideologically confused state of affairs, Gibson and Moore indulged in a bit of mutual admiration following the ceremony. Gibson declared that he had seen *Fahrenheit 9/11*, adding, “I liked it.” Moore noted that he had seen *The Passion of the Christ* twice, observing, “I thought it was a powerful piece of filmmaking. ... I’m a practicing Catholic, and you know I think Mel and I may be from different wings of the Catholic Church. My film might have been called ‘The Compassion of the Christ.’”

In the wake of an election in which the Republicans fomented every ounce of cultural backwardness, including hostility toward homosexuals, it is perhaps noteworthy that Ellen DeGeneres, perhaps the most famously gay celebrity in America, took home two prizes, as funniest “female star” and favorite daytime talk show host. *Will & Grace*, two of whose leading characters are gay, won as favorite television comedy series.



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