

## Citizen Moore

**Roger Rapoport**

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Love him or hate him, Michael Moore's in-your-face style of documentary filmmaking wins him as many foes as it does fans. Widely perceived as an unabashed liberal, Moore's public image has not always been grounded in fact. Enter Rapoport, a veteran journalist (*Wall Street Journal*, *Atlantic Monthly*) and respected author (*California Dreaming: The Political Odyssey of Pat and Jerry Brown*), who interviewed more than 250 individuals from all areas of Moore's professional and private lives—from Catholic school nuns who first recognized his creative talents to network executives and former employees who sometimes ran afoul of Moore's firebrand activism—to debunk the myths and defy the critics surrounding this self-effacing, self-promoting Everyman.

Famously confronting such iconic institutions as General Motors, the National Rifle Association, and, of course, the Bush White House, Moore has proven to be an equal-opportunity offender, someone who, according to Rapoport, is "willing to take on any union, political party, media icon, or religious group regardless of its political bent." For Moore, these juicy stories provide golden opportunities to expose hypocrisy at the highest echelons while inspiring outrage at the grassroots level.

Such fearless righteousness became a hallmark of Moore's journalistic style, one in which he never hesitated to put himself at the forefront of a story if it would result in a more dramatic showdown. Not only was Moore unafraid of being the on-camera messenger, he relished the idea that he might get shot, figuratively speaking, in the process. Yet according to one colleague, this move from behind-the-scenes to before-the-camera was more about Moore than it was about the issues, "He's got to be the underdog, the victim. It's always the world against Michael."

Brash, blunt, and brusquely irreverent, Moore cultivated this working-class hero persona with a guileless determination borne of his bona fide glory days as the idealistic muckraking force that took a fledgling alternative newspaper, the *Flint Voice*, from a fly-by-night rust belt broadside to a nationally recognized hallmark of counterculture journalism. A short-lived stint as the editor of the groundbreaking alternative magazine *Mother Jones* freed Moore to pursue his true métier, filmmaking, where he astounded critics by producing documentaries that became box-office hits.

With chapter titles such as "No Republicans Were Harmed in the Making of This Show" and "How Much is That Uzi in the Window?," Rapoport's breezy and glib style admirably captures the hip, antiestablishment demeanor of his subject, the kind of guy who delighted in being perhaps the only Academy Award nominee to "show up at the ceremony wearing a tux from Sears." Moore will continue to have his foes, but Rapoport's evenhanded portrait might just convert some into fans.

CAROL HAGGAS (April 10, 2007)

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