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Moore's mission: - Regime change in Washington

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By DANIEL STURM

There is no doubt that Michael Moore is on a political mission. Those who've already read his new book, "Dude, Where's My Country," know that he considers this bestseller the kick-off of a nine-month long campaign for regime change, or simply call it an effort to get rid of George W. Bush (by whatever means possible).

On Jan. 30, Moore spoke to a fired-up crowd of 4,300 at the MSU Auditorium, the largest audience the building has held in 12 years. Twenty minutes before the presentation, the filmmaker held a small press conference back stage. He had gained weight since I'd seen him during his national tour, in October, and he looked pale. Clearly, the extreme momentum and national limelight was taking its toll on the political filmmaker. He's promoting his new book, he's producing a new documentary about the "oily" relationship of Bush and Bin Laden (scheduled for release in September), and he's campaigning for the Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark. After taking a few questions of local reporters, Moore managed to squeeze in a live satellite interview with Bill Maher before rushing to start the show.

In 2002, Moore won an Oscar for his "Bowling for Columbine" in the category of best documentary, but this evening it wasn't the grass-roots artistry he's so well-known for that was on the floor. His attention was focused upon BIG politics, leaving little room for questions other than about □who's going to be the next big man in Washington.' Thus, I didn't get a chance to ask him how he came up with the idea of walking into a private home in Toronto to prove his theory that Canadians are less frightened of strangers in "Bowling for Columbine," for instance. But how could I complain when the local TV reporters didn't get the quick sound bite, either? When asked what he thought about Mel Gibson's new Jesus film, Moore rattled something about "supporting all film makers." The pop-icon Michael Moore probably has to answer to a lot of questions that are out in left field.

Most reporters were more than happy to grill him about his endorsement of Wesley Clark, whom mainstream media considered a "weak" candidate from the beginning, because he did not rank first or second in the Democratic presidential primary elections in Iowa and New Hampshire.

While admitting that he hasn't picked a winner since voting for Bill Clinton in 1992, Moore criticized the perception that the Democratic presidential race is already over and that the discussion should be focused on the leading candidates, Dean, Kerry and Edwards. "Between Iowa and New Hampshire, only 1 percent of all the delegates has now been picked. So I guess you'd have to say it's over," he commented with sarcasm.

Moore said he's more optimistic about this presidential race than the one in 2000, when he threw himself behind Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, rather than choose Gore over Bush, which would have been like picking the "the evil of two lessers."

"We're in much better shape this year," said Moore. "This is why I will not support a Green candidate this year,

because every candidate, with the exception of Lieberman, is to the left of where Gore was in 2000. In fact, Gore is to the left of Gore in 2000." Moore said he's decided to back Clark because he supports his stance on everything from taxing the rich, to affirmative action, to ending the war.

The filmmaker dedicated his last book to the three Michigan nuns, Jackie Hudson, Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert, who were sentenced to a combined total of nine years in federal prison last summer for trespassing in order to symbolically "inspect" American weapons of mass destruction in Colorado. The nuns, who belong to the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) Congregation of the Sacred Hearts in Grand Rapids, have said they were compelled to act as war with Iraq moved closer and because the United States has never promised not to use its nuclear weapons.

After the press conference with Moore, East Lansing resident Anabel Dwyer, who had been a legal adviser in the case, handed the filmmaker a petition urging President George W. Bush to pardon and release the nuns from prison.

Having had the opportunity to interview the "Sacred Inspectors," I must wonder why Moore chose to endorse the former NATO general, who ordered bombings against civilian targets in Yugoslavia. Exactly how could his labeling of Clark as an "anti-war candidate" be considered accurate?

The non partisan media think tank, Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting, has reviewed public statements made by Clark before, during and after the invasion of Iraq and concluded that the general has taken an ambiguous range of positions, from expressing doubts about diplomatic and military strategies of invasion, to celebrating the U.S. "victory" in an April 10 column for The London Times and declaring that Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair "should be proud of their resolve in the face of so much doubt."

In another London Times column the following day, Clark summed up his opinion on the lessons of war: "The campaign in Iraq illustrates the continuing progress of military technology and tactics, but if there is a single overriding lesson it must be this: American military power, especially when buttressed by Britain's, is virtually unchallengeable today. Take us on? Don't try! And that's not hubris, it's just plain fact." Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting concludes that labeling a candidate who has made such statements as "anti-war" would be "to render the term meaningless."

Another non partisan group, the Center for Public Integrity, questions Clark's independence from lobbyists for the military-industrial complex. When Clark declared his candidacy on Sept. 17, 2003, he was still a registered lobbyist for Acxiom, a company that was actively seeking Homeland Security contracts, and according to the center's "The Buying of the President 2004" he was also a military commentator for CNN.

The more I read about Clark's military record, the less I understand Moore's decision to support him. During the summer of 2003, Moore said he was courted by four presidential candidates. It still remains a mystery to me then why anyone who so adamantly opposed to war would have chosen this one. Sometimes an artist needs to go back to the drawing board, I thought to myself, and this seems to be one of those cases.

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