

Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
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Washington DC 20001

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Dear Brian,

Sometimes on week-ends we miss "ABOUT BOOKS".

So it was a truly Happy New Year's Day to watch C-SPAN and expand our knowledge about books.

I enjoyed your conversation with Carolyn Reidy about marketing by Simon & Schuster. Years ago common sense assured me that the only way publishers could stay in business was to publicize specific books and then, with a little bit of luck, have them sell way beyond the expectations of the promoters. So I was not surprised when Carolyn Reidy explained how that makes up for other worth-while books that simply (or maybe not so simply!) don't sell.

Sometimes I wonder why or how Michael Moore's **DOWNSIZE THIS!** became a best seller. I read the blurbs before buying several copies and sensed that the skills of the promoter were meant to be on a par with the book itself.

Possibly decision-makers in the corporate world, and especially those in the news business, have a need for comedy and satire in order for them to begin to understand the message that ordinary people experience without humor of any kind. And just maybe, many decision makers at the highest levels are very clever in modern methods of killing the messenger.

When I wrapped **DOWNSIZE THIS!** as gifts I tucked in a post-script from Michael Moore printed in "The Nation" on November 18 and December 2. I suggested this up-date be read before the book.

Thinking you and your staff may have missed those items, I enclose **WHAT YOU CAN'T GET AWAY WITH ON TV** and **BANNED BY BORDERS**. Those two pages told me a lot about marketing but even more about the corporate powers-that-be.

Thank you again for a good New Years Day. C-SPAN gives me much food for thought and the enclosures are my way of returning the favor.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Bayfield WI 54814

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

G. Books

MICHAEL MOORE

Banned by Borders

In November 9, as I write this, I was supposed to have been at the Borders bookstore in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, speaking and signing copies of my book *Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American*. It was to have been the final stop of my forty-seven-city tour. But on October 30 I was told that the book-signing had been canceled. The Fort Lauderdale Borders had received a memo from its corporate headquarters in Ann Arbor, Michigan, banning me from speaking or signing at any Borders store in the country.

When I was growing up in Michigan, the original Borders was a store that actively championed free expression. In fact, when I was publishing the *Michigan Voice*, Borders would carry my paper when other establishments would not. Now, Borders is a huge nationwide chain, and its "liberal" views have earned it the reputation as the "Ben & Jerry's of the book chains."

So why was I banned from Borders? My book was doing well. It has been on the New York Times best-seller list for a month and was the number two best-selling Random House book for the entire Borders chain. I've been banned, I found out, because I made the mistake of uttering a five-letter word, the dirtiest word in all of corporate America—"union."

Back in September, on the second day of my tour, when I arrived at the Borders store in downtown Philadelphia, I found nearly 100 people picketing the place because Borders had fired a woman named Miriam Fried. She had led a drive to organize workers at the store into a union. The effort failed, and, a few weeks later, Miriam was given the boot.

When I found this out I told the Borders people that I have never crossed a picket line and would not cross this one. I asked the demonstrators if they wanted to take the protest inside. They thought it was a good idea. I had no desire to cause a ruckus, so I asked Borders management if it was O.K. to allow the protesters in. They said yes. So we all came into the store, I gave my talk, I gave Miriam the microphone so she could talk, everyone behaved themselves and it was a good day all around—including for Borders, which ended up selling a lot of books, breaking the record for a noontime author at that location. (The record had been held by George Foreman, and I now like to tell people only Ali and I have beaten Foreman.) I also announced that I would donate all my royalties for the day to help Miriam out.

Although Anne Kubek, Borders' corporate V.P. in charge of labor relations, had approved my bringing the protesters inside, upper management decided that she had made a mistake—and they were going to take it out on me. On the following Tuesday I was scheduled to speak at the new Borders store in New York's World Trade Center. When I arrived, I was met by two Borders executives. They had flown in from Michigan just to stop me from speaking. The executives, flanked by two security guards, explained that I could come into the store and sign books, but I would not be allowed to talk to the people who had come to hear me. They said that the "commotion" I had caused in Philly



raised "security concerns." I couldn't believe I was being censored in a bookstore.

The Borders manager told the assembled crowd that I would not be speaking because "Port Authority police and fire marshals have banned all daytime gatherings at Borders." When I heard this, I stepped forward and told the people this was a lie, that I was forbidden to speak because of my support for the workers in Philly. Under protest, I signed the books of those who stayed—beneath a big banner celebrating "Banned Books Week."

On October 13, I spoke to a large crowd in a Des Moines auditorium. After the speech I went out front and started signing books. "What store are these from?" I innocently asked. "Oh, these are from the local Borders," I was told. Well, I thought, they don't mind if I make them some money—as long as it's not on their premises! Then someone slipped me an anonymous note. It read: "We are employees of the Des Moines Borders. We were told that we could not work the book table tonight, that only management was working the table, because they said they wanted to 'protect us' from you."

An hour later, I went out to the parking lot and saw some people standing there in the dark—the employees from the Des Moines Borders! They said they were hiding out there because they had spotted Borders' regional director with another man inside. "He flew in to spy on you, or us, or both," they told me. "He saw us so we may not have jobs on Monday." (Bookstore employees afraid they might be fired for attending a public speech at the Herbert Hoover High School auditorium!) The executive had not introduced himself to me—or his colleague, who employees believe is a unionbusting "consultant" hired by Borders.

I wished the workers well, and the next night they held their first union meeting. The previous week, the Borders store in the Lincoln Park section of Chicago had become the first Borders in the country to vote in a union (United Food and Commercial Workers). Recently, workers in Des Moines signed enough cards to hold a union election. It is a victory that should inspire not only Borders workers but underpaid employees everywhere. That's why I am not in Fort Lauderdale as I write this. Borders is "protecting" its workers from me.

Well, they're really going to need protection now. First, I am donating my royalties from the next 1,000 sales of *Downsize This!* to the organizing drive at Borders. Second, I am asking each of you to support the Borders workers in your city. Bring up the union when you're in the store and thank that kid with the nose ring and green hair for helping to revive the labor movement in America.

NOTE TO BORDERS EXECUTIVES: If, after this column is published, you retaliate by removing my book from your shelves, or hiding it in the "humor" section or underreporting its sales to *The New York Times* list, I will come at you with everything I've got. You sandbagged me in Philly, and the only decent way for you to resolve this is to give Miriam Fried her job back and let the workers form their union without intimidation or harassment. ■

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MICHAEL MOORE

What You Can't Get Away With on TV

During the summers of 1994 and 1995, I produced and hosted *TV Nation*, one of the few shows from our side of the political fence that have ever appeared on commercial network television. *TV Nation* was a political magazine show that used satire and humor to make a variety of points not dissimilar to those expressed in the pages of this magazine. We took our cameras everywhere. We invaded the whites-only beaches of Greenwich, Connecticut, with a big boatload of non-Caucasians. We drowned out a Klan rally in Georgia with a really loud mariachi band. We got a bill introduced in Congress by buying off a bunch of Congressmen with SaladShooters, Lady Remington shavers and tube socks.

How *did* such a show get on the air? One day while visiting L.A. I got a call from a vice president at NBC asking me if I had any ideas for TV. "Sure," I said. I didn't, of course, but that's not what you're supposed to say in Hollywood when you get a call like that. He asked me to come over to NBC later that day. On the half-hour drive to Burbank, in a fit of desperation, I came up with the idea of *TV Nation*. At the meeting, I gave the executives an example of a story I would do on the show: "I was raised Catholic and what I'd like to do on this program is confess the same exact sin in twenty different churches, make a list of who gives out the harshest penances, who hands out the easiest ones, and then run this as a 'Consumer Guide to the Confessional.'" Instead of responding with looks of horror, the execs keeled over in hysterics. One hour later I had the money to produce the pilot for *TV Nation*.

The first thing I did was to hire a half-dozen people from Flint, Michigan. None of us had any network television experience, so our chances for success were pretty good. That first summer the show ran on NBC; the second, it was on Fox. We had very little interference from either network, but there were a number of stories we produced that did not make it onto the air. Here are some of them:

1. "Let's Kill the Abortion Doctors." We spent a weekend with one of the leaders of the movement to assassinate the medics who perform abortions. It was a chilling piece and, at the end, the antiabortion terrorist says he approves of assassinating Clinton and the Supreme Court. Every single sponsor dropped out. NBC tried to convince others to sign on, but no one would touch it. The Christian right has the advertising community scared to death. Two days after NBC reluctantly pulled the story, a follower of right-to-life nuts like the one on my show went into two Brookline, Massachusetts, women's health clinics with a gun and killed two women. I've often wondered—would he have had the nerve to do what he did if he had heard that one of his mentors was picked up by the F.B.I. for making felonious threats against the President and Supreme Court?

2. "What Happened to Those S&L Crooks?" They cost the country a half-trillion dollars and many Americans lost their life savings. But as we found out, those responsible for this debacle



are not making license plates in prison—they're making millions of dollars again! They've even formed their own support group because they've been so "maligned" by the media and the public. We got our cameras into one of their country club "therapy sessions"; the results were hilarious and shocking. Fox never gave us a reason why this couldn't air other than that this scandal was no longer "current."

3. "Harassing Gays for Extra Credit." At Topeka West High School in Topeka, Kansas, the school administrators gave a student extra credit for picketing the funerals of people who had died of AIDS, holding up a sign that read GOD HATES FAGS. We investigated why this happened and talked to the young man and his family. But Fox told us that stories dealing with "gay issues" turn off the sponsors.

4. "Re-enacting the L.A. Uprising." We hired those guys who re-enact Civil War battles to do more recent ones like "The Battle of Hiroshima" and "The Fall of Saigon." But when the execs—who all live in the tinderbox known as Los Angeles—saw the re-enactment of "The Beating of Rodney King and the L.A. Uprising," they refused to run the piece. They were afraid it would incite future riots. As if *our* show was needed to do that.

5. "Do You Have Any Condoms?" Once condoms came in only one size—regular, one size fits all. But recently a new size has appeared on the pharmacy shelves—extra large. We sent our correspondent to drugstores to ask if they had any small condoms. The results were revealing, but the suits at NBC and Fox balked, saying if they ran the piece they would "lose affiliates in the South." I guess because our show appeared in the "family hour" we weren't allowed to talk about condoms. Seems to me that's the best time to be talking about them.

I have three observations to make about the election:

1. I predict that we will have the smallest turnout ever for a presidential election. When over 100 million American choose not to vote that is not apathy or ignorance—it is a political statement, a virtual act of civil disobedience. The public is mighty pissed off that the richest 1 percent now have two political parties to do their bidding for them, and the other 99 percent of us have...what?

2. Would you rather have the wolf or the wolf in sheep's clothing? Reagan and Bush never would have been able to get away with eliminating welfare or enacting NAFTA. They needed a Democrat to pull that off. What havoc will Clinton wreak over the next four years? Will the Democrats have the guts to stand up to him? I doubt it.

3. The things I said about Ralph Nader in *In These Times* were spoken to a friend who did not tell me he would publish our conversation. All of us who used to work in Ralph's office grumble about the indentured servitude of the place, but we would all go to the mat for the nutty guy because he kicks corporate ass like no one else. If you plan to vote for Ralph, God bless you. ■

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