

Michael Moore snubbed by his hometown!

By Marc Haefele, Los Angeles Daily News
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Just suppose they'd held a writers festival in Oxford, Miss., 50 years ago and didn't invite Nobelist and native son William Faulkner.

That couldn't have raised more eyebrows than did the decision of organizers of a film festival in Flint, Mich., to blow off onetime local prodigy and Cannes Palme d'Or winner Michael Moore.

Seven hundred people showed up to the Flint Film Festival on Saturday and Sunday, including more than 100 contestants. But none of them was Flint's own far-famed creator of "Roger and Me," "Bowling for Columbine" and now the controversial "Fahrenheit 9/11."

Not everyone was happy about this omission. Flint Journal columnist Ed Bradley called it a typical Rivet City self-defeating SNAFU.

"This is Flint [so] there was no invitation," Bradley said.

Tom Hall of the local alternative paper, Uncommon Sense, said, "Like any community that inspires a great artist, Flint should celebrate [Moore's] incredible honor right along with him."

The festival contestants' consensus was that even a turndown from Moore might have garnered them a huge hunk of free publicity.

Flint Arts Council head Greg Fiedler, the event's organizer, gave three reasons Moore was not invited:

First, "He'd make the festival into his own event." Second, it was reported Moore had recently declined to help Flint arts programs, asserting "I don't even live there any more." Third, Fiedler said, local noncontestant filmmaker participants asked that Moore not be invited.

That Moore abandoned Flint 15 years ago is a local sore point, along with the fact his breakout first film bared his hometown to the world as a permanent, pathetic basket case. If Moore didn't want to help Flint, Flint didn't want to help him, Fiedler said. So the world's most famous filmmaker of the moment had to do without the hometown boost, and Flint was on its own.

How well did it do? The 125,000-population city's infant festival is one of roughly 900 nationwide, but it drew international entries plus more from closer to home. There were gobs of get-down enthusiasm for the event in a hard-luck town best known for partying tonight and forgetting about tomorrow.

Most of the best entries seemed like works in progress, particularly the feature first-prize winner, "Bucharest Express," a docudrama about the sexual traffic of Eastern European women that also ran at a Paris human-rights film festival earlier this year.

But one 29-minute documentary called "Jim Crow's Museum" might have stopped the show at any film festival in the world. David Pilgrim and Clayton Rye's grisly, low-key masterpiece is a guided tour of a museum of almost 200 years of anti-black racist objects and images -- 4,000 of them -- from minstrel-show posters to pickaninny postcards to the electric Rastus clocks and Ghettopoly games now freely available on the Internet. The film is like a fatal traffic accident: a horror you can't stop looking even as you hate yourself for your fascination.

Pilgrim, an African-American professor who created the museum, makes a strong, sad, understated case that racism, while always discernible, may never be eradicable. The Flint festival's jury gave "Jim Crow's Museum" first in category.

Maybe Flint really doesn't need Moore.

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