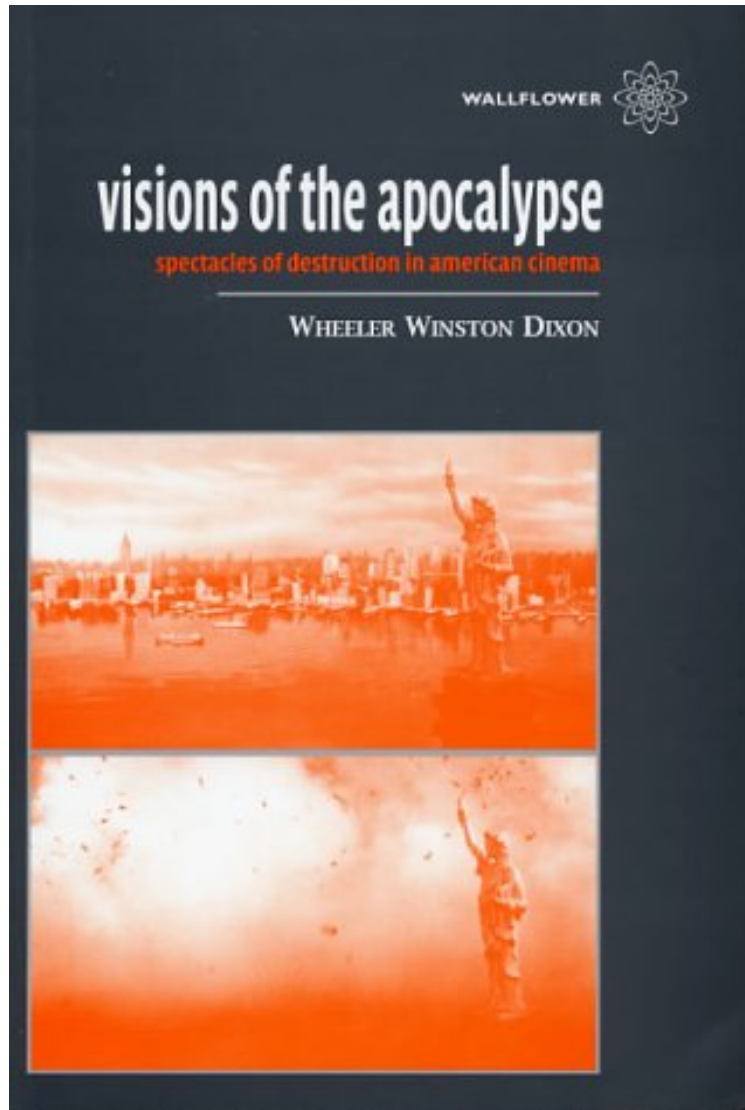


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Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema

Wheeler Winston Dixon

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Wheeler Winston Dixon : Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Visions of the Apocalypse: Spectacles of Destruction in American Cinema:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. How films shape our culture how culture shapes our films - 4 1/2 stars By Tim Lukeman Those readers looking for a book solely about apocalyptic films will only be partially satisfied

by this intelligent, incisive book. While it does delve into the ways apocalypse is presented in American films, covering quite a few of them, it's more an examination of American culture itself its fascination with destruction. Nor does the author restrict himself to images fantasies, which he demonstrates are both fed by a consumerist culture while helping to create maintain that same culture. He goes more deeply, examining the power of the almighty dollar in creating increasingly shallow but visually spectacular films that have immediate visceral appeal, much as a roller coaster does, while avoiding any food for thought afterwards. These films aren't designed to make the viewer think, but simply to feel -- as intensely vividly shallowly as possible. In their pursuit of pure sensation, they approach a kind of emotional pornography of immediate gratification: raw, exhilarating, and constantly lowering the lowest common denominator. This, the author suggests, is indicative of our consumerist culture as a whole. Further, he shows how this seething rush of garish, giddy trauma affects political social discourse -- or more precisely, how it short-circuits rational discourse in favor of an easily manipulated blaze of jittery emotion in need of a focus, a target, a scapegoat. And of course there are more than enough groups ready eager to provide that focus, in order to serve their own financial political purposes. One of the artistic prices of this approach, of course, is the death of film as potential art its replacement as nothing but commodity. He even delves into the physical replacement of film by digital technology, and how that adds to both the profit margin the fear margin. While this is fascinating material for any thoughtful reader, let me hasten to add that the author never succumbs to convoluted jargon. He has the knack of handling complexity in an accessible manner, never dumbing it down, always making it quite clear succinct. Considering the spate of jingoistic films we've been getting from Hollywood lately, this is vital reading for anyone concerned about the political military excesses of the post 9/11 world. Highly recommended! 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Certainly a great book by a top mind... with one single flaw. By Paulo Leite I always found it fascinating how American audiences (and film makers) love the cinematic spectacles of self destruction. From the great San Francisco to the discreet On the Beach all the way to the more recent Deep Impact (Special Collector's Edition), The Day After Tomorrow (Two-Disc All-Access Collector's Edition), Cloverfield [Theatrical Release] and I Am Legend (Widescreen Two-Disc Special Edition) (not forgetting the once-controversial The Day After, naturally). I, for example, freely admit that I love those films. And I love them perhaps because of my personal taste for (among many other things) the radically different premise they put in front of us: the vision of a world you dot see every day. And more important: it's not for real... no strings attached. And if we decide to focus our study just on that angle alone, I am sure we can identify many trends going on today. And they all represent big meals for those who care to dine. They would all make great subjects for serious study. That was exactly what I was expecting when I bought this great book. Mr. Dixon has a great knowledge of films, meaning that he is an experienced viewer... and he backs everything he says with the right data and the actual numbers. I will not try to summarize the book... but basically, what he offers is a long and valid (but somehow debatable - that's what I think) reflection on how the Hollywood film industry in particular (and all the other cultural industries in general) function today AND they way they drive (and shape) its audience towards certain... let's say "tastes". And Mr Dixon does that very well. The big major flaw, in my modest opinion, is that... from page one all the way to the end, Mr Dixon's very precise analysis left a bitter taste of prejudice and discrimination under my tongue against commercial Cinema. Maybe that's because I myself teach Film Production (and work in that area) and therefore (maybe), have a different view on the matter. What I feel is that Mr. Dixon violently criticizes an Industry (and a system of things) he clearly dislikes without taking some time and distance to see a bigger, broader picture. And that analysis make up for 90% of the book. It IS a great analysis... but it comes from someone who seems to have picked just one side. I agree with him on most everything. But I miss the other side. I believe the things Mr. Dixon criticizes have their own reason of existing. They do fill some void. He and I may not like them (it may not be our personal taste). But we have to understand why they are there. Sometimes, the great scholar becomes a (I wish I wouldn't have to use the word) snob critic when he starts throwing adjectives like "awful" to films that are much more than JUST that. At a certain point, several films and people get classified upon adjectives and terms that seems prejudicial. I'm not saying one cannot express his own feelings. But hardly that easily in the middle of such a great analysis. I was expecting a different book... specially because the analysis of today's big self destruction spectacles was not fully accomplished. BUT I still strongly recommend this book because (even after all I've pointed) Mr. Dixon DOES give us an astounding job. Really. It's a great book. His reflections on 9/11, its media coverage and the impact it had on American Cinema is top notch. His views on War Cinema are quite excellent. Again: a great book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not About Apocalyptic Films By Kirsten Lodge The title of this book is misleading. The author discusses the Cold War (including films of the Cold War period), the contemporary threat of terrorism, the decline of the film industry and U.S. society in general, contemporary politics, and dozens of films that have nothing to do with the apocalyptic genre. However, he barely discusses what he title proclaims, "visions of the apocalypse / spectacles of destruction in American cinema," and he discusses no recent apocalyptic films whatsoever. I wonder if the title was chosen just to make the book sell better.

Visions of the Apocalypse examines the cinema's fascination with the prospect of nuclear and/or natural annihilation, as seen in such films as Saving Private Ryan, Bowling for Columbine, We Were Soldiers, Invasion U.S.A., The Last

War, Tidal Wave, The Bed Sitting Room, The Last Days of Man on Earth and numerous others. It also considers the ways in which contemporary cinema has become increasingly hyper-conglomerated, leading to films with ever-higher budgets and fewer creative risks. Along the way, the author discusses such topics as the death of film itself, to be replaced by digital video; the political and social tensions that have made these visions of infinite destruction so appealing to the public; and the new wave of Hollywood war films, coupled with escapist comedies, in the post-9/11 era. Encompassing both questions of physical and filmic mortality *Visions of the Apocalypse* is a meditation on the questions of time, memory and the cinema's seemingly unending appetite for spectacles of destruction.

"Wheeler Winston Dixon's *Visions of the Apocalypse* explores American cinema and its fascination with spectacles of destruction, while simultaneously commenting on the ways in which Hollywood has created a culture of sameness where conformity rules. Lucid and eloquent and a relatively easy read for those unaccustomed to film academia, Dixon's knowledge and reasoned argument provide an intelligent and endlessly fascinating examination of some of the key issues that face us as we confront an increasingly insecure future." - Kirsty Fairclough, *Popmatters*

From the Author *Visions of the Apocalypse* examines the cinema's fascination with the prospect of nuclear and/or natural annihilation, as seen in such films as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Invasion U.S.A.*, *The Last War*, *Tidal Wave*, *The Bed Sitting Room*, *The Last Days of Man on Earth* and numerous others. It also considers the ways in which contemporary cinema has become increasingly hyper-conglomerated, leading to films with ever-higher budgets and fewer creative risks. Along the way, the author discusses such topics as the death of film itself, to be replaced by digital video; the political and social tensions that have made these visions of infinite destruction so appealing to the public; and the new wave of Hollywood war films, coupled with escapist comedies, in the post-9/11 era. Encompassing both questions of physical and filmic mortality *Visions of the Apocalypse* is a meditation on the questions of time, memory and the cinema's seemingly unending appetite for spectacles of destruction.

About the Author Wheeler Winston Dixon is the James Ryan Professor of Film Studies, Coordinator of the Film Studies Program, Professor of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and, with Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, editor of the new book series *Quick Takes: Movies and Popular Culture* for Rutgers University Press. His recent books include *Black White Cinema: A Short History* (2015); *Streaming: Movies, Media and Instant Access* (2013); *Death of the Moguls: The End of Classical Hollywood* (2012); *21st Century Hollywood: Movies in the Era of Transformation* (2011, co-authored with Gwendolyn Audrey Foster); *A History of Horror* (2010); and *Film Noir and the Cinema of Paranoia* (2009). Dixon's book *A Short History of Film* (2008, co-authored with Gwendolyn Audrey Foster) was reprinted six times through 2012. A second, revised edition was published in 2013; the book is a required text in universities throughout the world.