

Since its premier at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, the debt documentary film, *I.O.U.S.A.* has received coverage from financial, general and entertainment media.

Roger Ebert, for example, gave the film 3 1/2 stars, *The Economist* and *The New York Times* recommended their readers see the film, and Variety.com refers to it as “an alternately amusing and alarming primer on America’s off-the-charts fiscal irresponsibility.”

Here’s a preview of some of the recent reviews of *I.O.U.S.A.*...



Roger Ebert: ★★★★★

I.O.U.S.A.

August 21, 2008 | By Roger Ebert

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080821/REVIEWS/329/1023>

A letter to our grandchildren, Raven, Emil and Taylor: I see you growing up into such beautiful people, and I wish all good things to you as you make the leap into adulthood. But I have just seen a documentary titled “I.O.U.S.A.” that snapped into sharp focus why your lives may not be as pleasant as ours have been. Chaz and I had the blessing of growing up in an optimistic, bountiful America. We never fully realized that we were paying for many of our comforts with your money.

Let me explain. There is something called the “national debt.” In the movie’s interviews with ordinary people, it has a hard time finding anyone who knows exactly what that is. Well, I’ve never exactly known, either. I thought I knew, but it never came up in conversation, and it became a meaningless abstraction, even though in 2009, the debt will pass \$9 trillion. You might think of those as dollars our nation has spent without having them.

What will this mean to you? It will mean you will live in a country no longer able to pay for many of the services and guarantees we take for granted. In 40 years, when you are still less than my age, it looks like the government will only be able to pay for three things: Interest on the national debt, “some” Social Security and “some” Medicare. It will not be able to afford any of the other functions it now performs.

How did we get into this situation? With a federal government that has been throwing bad money after good. Of all the presidents in the last century, the only one who was able to achieve a balanced budget and produce a surplus was Bill Clinton. He did that by bravely raising taxes and cutting spending. Our current president, George W. Bush, is now finishing up eight years of throwing around money like a drunken sailor. His fellow conservatives, like Rush Limbaugh, like to talk about “tax and spend Democrats.” But they seem to be “don’t tax and spend even more Republicans.”

Not that this film takes sides. It is non-partisan and includes many Republicans who agree with its argument that the country is headed for disaster within the lifetimes of many now living. It centers on David M. Walker, until recently the U.S. comptroller general, and Robert Bixby, the head of the nonpartisan Concord Coalition, who have been on a national “Fiscal Wake-Up” tour that will last until the November elections. They are trying to sound the alarm, but they speak to half-empty town halls and captive Rotarians and get pushed off the local news by a story of a man who swallowed a diamond.

I don’t really believe this review will inspire enormous numbers of people to go see the film. But if they do, they’ll find it accomplishes an amazing thing. It explains the national debt, the foreign trade deficit, the decrease in personal savings, how the prime interest rate works, and the weakness of our leaders. No, not only George W. Bush, but politicians of both parties, who know if they vote against tax cuts, they will be lambasted by their opponents and could lose their jobs. In the film, we see President Bush being asked about the debt and replying: “Ask the economists. I think I only got a B-minus in economics.” Then he gives that little chuckle. “But I got an A-plus in cutting taxes.”

Yes, he cut taxes while our national spending mushroomed. What we have to do is bite the bullet and pay higher taxes

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while spending less. The war in Iraq is a much sexier issue. But no matter what happens in Iraq, the real crisis we face is the debt. The movie includes testimony by former Fed chairman Paul Volker, former Treasury Department secretary Paul O'Neill, billionaire Warren Buffett, congressman Ron Paul and others on both sides of the fence who all agree: Don't buy what you can't pay for.

Here's an interesting statistic. I remember when "Made in China" meant cheap and shabby merchandise. No longer. In the ranking of the trade imbalance among all the world's nations, China is first with the highest surplus, and the United States is last with the largest deficit. The Chinese now hold a huge chunk of our debt. If they ever call in the loan, it would destroy our economy. In the presidential debate earlier in the year, Ron Paul was a lonely voice talking about the debt; the others on both sides paid lip service to the problem and moved on.

So here's the bottom line, kids. The United States is probably going to go broke during your lifetimes. Actually, it's already broke, but getting deeper into debt allows it to keep running on thin air, like the Road Runner. My advice? Learn Chinese. Start savings accounts. Don't buy what you can't afford. Any politician who tries to win votes by promising to cut taxes is digging our country's grave. ■

The New York Times

Tackling Our Unsexy National Debt

August 22, 2008 | By Jeannette Catsoulis

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/08/22/movies/22ious.html>

Yet another documentary that everyone should see but most will not, "I.O.U.S.A." tackles the unsexy topic of our soaring national debt and its likely consequences for present and future Americans — or at least those who survive the tsunamis, water shortages and Beijing-level air quality promised by Al Gore.

Brimful of disquieting facts on inflation, trade deficits and Wall Street's influence on national monetary policy, Patrick Creadon's resolutely nonpartisan movie tracks America's "fiscal cancer" through centuries of budgetary highs and lows. Packaging his inconvenient truths with as much humor as he can muster under the circumstances, Mr. Creadon balances his talking heads and pie charts with the folksy progress of the Fiscal Wake-Up Tour, a grass-roots effort spearheaded by David M. Walker, the former comptroller general of the United States, and Robert L. Bixby of the Concord Coalition.

Equal parts enlightening and alarming, "I.O.U.S.A." highlights our unwise preference for short-term reward over long-term planning, a weakness not shared by the film's exemplary Chinese household, which saves more than half of its \$10-a-day income. The movie's wrist-slapping tone, however, is softened by Mr. Walker's eloquence and Mr. Bixby's rueful, self-deprecating charm as they trudge tirelessly from one town hall to another, urging Americans to save rather than spend. Good luck, boys: Suze Orman has been working on that for years. ■

Economist.com

Another Inconvenient Truth: Fiscal Armageddon, Coming To A Cinema Near You

Aug 14th 2008 | *The Economist*

http://www.economist.com/finance/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11921663



AMERICA'S infamous debt clock, near New York's Times Square, was switched off in 2000 after the national burden started to fall thanks to several years of Clinton-era budget restraint. However, it was reactivated two years later as the politically motivated urge to splurge once again took over. The debt has since swollen to \$9.5 trillion, with

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the value of unfunded public promises (if you include entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare) nudging \$53 trillion — or \$175,000 for every American—and rising. On current trends, these will amount to some 240% of GDP by 2040, up from a just-about-manageable 65% today.

David Walker, who until recently ran the Government Accountability Office, has made it his mission to get the nation to acknowledge and treat this “fiscal cancer”. His efforts form the core of a new documentary, “I.O.U.S.A.”, out on August 21st. The message is simple enough: America’s financial condition is a lot worse than advertised, and dumping it on future generations would be not only economically reckless but also immoral.

The biggest deficit of all, the film contends, is in leadership: politicians continue to duck hard choices. It hints at dark consequences. As America has become more reliant on foreign lenders, it warns, so it has become more vulnerable to “financial warfare”, of the sort America itself threatened to wage on Britain, a big debtor, during the Suez crisis. Warren Buffett, America’s investor-in-chief, pops up to warn of potential political instability.

The film is part of a broader effort to popularise the issue. In 2005 Mr Walker set off on a “fiscal wake-up tour” of town halls; sparsely attended at first, it now attracts hundreds to each meeting (though some may be turned off by the giant pie chart strapped to the side of his tour van). The young are being drawn in too, even forming campaign groups; Concerned Youth of America’s activists “crusade against our leveraged future” wearing prison suits. Mr Walker is talking to MTV, a music broadcaster, about a tie-up. His profile has been lifted by a segment on CBS’s “60 Minutes” and an appearance on “The Colbert Report”, a satirical TV show, which dubbed him the “Taxes Ranger”.

Promisingly, the new film was well received at the Sundance Film Festival. Some even wonder if it might do for the economy what Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth” did for the environment — perhaps with this comparison in mind, Mr Walker and his supporters talk of a “red-ink tsunami” and bulging “fiscal levees”. But, unlike the former vice-president, he is no heavy-hitter. And, even jazzed up with fancy graphics, punchy one-liners and a splash of humour, courtesy of Steve Martin, tales of fiscal folly are an acquired taste. Still, “I.O.U.S.A.” is a bold attempt to highlight a potentially huge problem. “The Dark Knight” it may not be, but for those who care about economic reality as much as cinematic fantasy, it might just be the scariest release of the summer. ■



I.O.U.S.A.

Jan 23th 2008 | Justn Chang

<http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=festivals&jump=review&cid=2471&reviewid=VE1117935899&cs=1>

With the same eye for snazzy visual aids and casual human eccentricity that informed his delightful crossword-puzzle docu “Wordplay,” helmer Patrick Creadon tackles a markedly grimmer story in “I.O.U.S.A.,” an alternately amusing and alarming primer on America’s off-the-charts fiscal irresponsibility. Meant to raise awareness of the skyrocketing national debt and the disaster it spells for future generations, this highly informative docu reps a heady mix of charts, graphs and talking heads, but its superb packaging and timely subject matter should give it a shot at theatrical exposure before it cashes in on homevid and broadcast slots.

Creadon’s film could just as easily have been titled “An Inconvenient Truth,” and indeed has a number of things in common with Al Gore’s cautionary global-warming doc: It’s essentially a glorified PowerPoint presentation, and it calls for a nonpartisan response to an issue — in this case, our “fiscal cancer” — with significantly further-reaching implications for the average American than the war on terror.

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Trying to get the word out are U.S. Comptroller General David M. Walker and Concord Coalition exec director Robert Bixby, who both work to encourage government accountability. Together, they spearhead the Fiscal Wake-up Tour, traveling from city to city and urging locals to practice financial responsibility — especially in the wake of the federal debt, which is at \$8.7 trillion and counting.

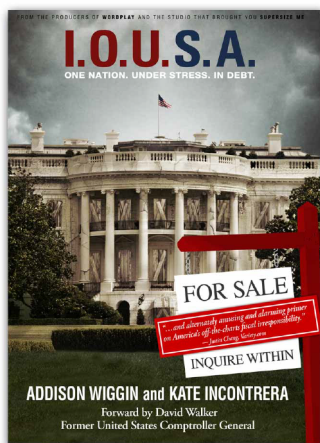
Explaining how we arrived at that staggering figure, “I.O.U.S.A.” zips over some 200 years of American history, making handy use of timelines, pie charts and other graphics (meticulously designed by Brian Oakes). The rise is attributed to a number of factors, including war spending, government programs, massive inflation, ill-advised tax cuts and the age-old tradition of US. presidents promising one thing and implementing another.

Inspired by the book *Empire of Debt* by William Bonner and Addison Wiggin (who exec produced and co-wrote the pic), Creadon breaks down America’s culture of spending rather than saving, a problem that occurs at both individual and national levels. Pic reserves much of its disdain for President Nixon and former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan (who declined an interview) for their roles in upping inflation, particularly Nixon’s decision to abandon the gold standard and its crippling effect on the dollar.

Creadon also frames the U.S. in a world context, showing how our habits of borrowing from other nations and importing more than we export have amassed further debt. Pic’s most urgent, disquieting segment examines the threat of China’s growing prominence on the economic stage, as its massive U.S. treasury holdings could give it political leverage.

A stat-studded geekfest for accountants and economics majors, “I.O.U.S.A.” is so dizzyingly (and for novices, sometimes confusingly) packed with figures and facts related to the federal budget, the stock market, the GDP, Social Security, et al., that its human voices become all the more welcome. Former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neill comes across as a principled critic of the current Bush administration, while Warren Buffett expounds on the virtues of thrift.

Good-humored, Tab-drinking Bixby provides unforced comic relief, while man-on-the-street interviews affectionately poke fun at how little Americans know about their money. Tech credits are polished. ■



***I.O.U.S.A.* the Book is available at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble and your local bookstore.**

Paperback: 288 pages
Publisher: Wiley (September 29, 2008)
Language: English
Retail Price: \$19.95

ADDITIONAL I.O.U.S.A. RESOURCES:

www.agorafinancial.com
www.agorafinancial.com/iouasa
www.iouasathemovie.com