

THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE (continued)

We have done away with the old values and have liberated men and women, but what have we gained? Life is no more satisfying except when you are in love, and even that fades away, like everything else. Life is no easier, and we still have not found the key to happiness, or found any meaning in life.

In order to know the extent to which the American Empire is declining, if it really is declining, one would have to read Dominique's book. But this book does not exist. It has never been written, and never will be.

What does exist is this very good film that you will either love or hate when you see it. In either case, it will disorient you, make you laugh a little and make you think a lot ■

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WHY I LIKED "LE DÉCLIN"

I didn't think I would. Frankly, I saw no reason to pay \$5 to watch a group of men and women talk for two hours. Still less to watch them talking about sex! Surely we all have learned that on this subject there is nothing more to be learned from mere talk.

Perhaps not, but there is much to appreciate in Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin de l'Empire Américain*, now showing in Ottawa and Hull. It is easily the best Canadian film since *The Grey Fox* and in my view one of the best of its type that I have ever seen.

The story line of the film (for it can hardly be said to have a plot) is by now

well-known to moviegoers: a group of University of Montreal history professors and hangers-on gathers for a weekend at a palatial cottage in the Eastern Townships. The men arrive first. They prepare the meal and talk, as it is supposed that men do, about sex. The women pause at the university athletic centre for a workout, and they too talk, perhaps more surprisingly but



no less believably, about sex. Each group, and each of the eight individuals on whom the film centres, is wonderfully engaging and likable: a credibly attractive version of the kinds of people one has encountered in one's own life in Ottawa or Montreal.

Le Déclin is a pleasure to watch not only because of its Hollywood-quality production values (cinematography, editing and a first-rate script) but in large part because the characters themselves are somehow familiar. It is good

for Canadians to see themselves (or a larger-than-life cinematic version of themselves) on the screen.

But what I think makes *Le Déclin* a success is that it speaks to a much larger audience than simply Canadians, or Quebecker in particular, about themes that obviously transcend national or cultural boundaries: love, sex, friendship, failure, fulfillment. In its treatment of these subjects, the movie is, to my mind, recognizably Canadian without being in any respect provincial. Whether or not it is accurate in its portrayal of the values and problems of middle-class Montreal intellectuals does not really matter. Certainly I, as a non-Quebecker, cannot pretend to judge. Instead what I saw as the true value of the film was the way in which it showed a group of people from this half of the North American continent dealing with questions that other members of the American-led world culture could understand and appreciate. In short, it is a good movie, about Canadians, but you don't have to be Canadian to like it.

We have watched the Americans and the British and French on the screen for years. Lately, the Australians too have been making movies that speak to an international audience. Now, let them watch us. I don't think we show up badly at all ■

Jim Mitchell