

The Perfect Thing is useful for those interested in business, culture, and media studies. With 20/20 hindsight into the corporate thinking that instigates the development of new technology, Levy links the benefits of one device to the potential of another. He focuses on the business culture that dictates what gets scrapped in a company takeover in conjunction with the mindset of corporate leaders, such as Steve Jobs, that can create a culture shift to create a demand for a product that most consumers did not know they needed. *The Perfect Thing* explores the importance of media in our society along with the various forms it has taken in the past and the potential forms it will take in the future as it studies the cultural phenomenon of music in society. Above all, it raises thought provoking questions: Does a pervasive solitary listening experience limit the interaction of people? Or does it promote involvement and competition with debate over song lists and types of iPod players?

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Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination. Lee Clarke. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Lee Clarke is a sociologist at Rutgers University and the author of *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination*. Clarke may not be the lone apocalyptic whistle blower for the new millennium, but he distinguishes himself as one of the most creative. The author asks the reader to join him in pushing the envelope to imagine man-made and natural disasters that, although highly improbable, are not impossible. He warns us to prepare for a catastrophe of the future that will far exceed the limits of even Murphy's Law.

In his role as sociologist, Clarke defines catastrophe as a matter of perception, therefore making it relative to the times, surrounding events, and whatever information the victims currently possess concerning horrific events. Currently, we perceive ourselves to be in unprecedented danger and it is this perception that *could* save us. However, we do not behave as though we wish to survive. We continue to build our homes over fault lines, at the base of volcanoes, or

anywhere on stretches of America called Tornado Alley. His thesis is that it is hubris that motivates us to ignore evidence and refuse to acknowledge the creative brilliance of Mother Nature and the potential for malevolence in humankind.

In addition to using our creative imagination to conjure up the horrific possibilities in our future, Clarke admonishes us to use the history of disastrous events to construct a disaster *norm*. It is only by knowing and understanding the norm that we can think outside the box about that which is both impossible and improbable in the present moment. Our fate, he tells us, will be beyond our wildest dreams. Is it unlikely that a meteor will hit a nuclear plant? Of course it is. Is it impossible? As long as there are meteors and nuclear plants, it is not.

Clarke builds a strong case that the poorer the social class, the more vulnerable it is to disaster. One case in point would be evidence made available in 1966 that predicted the failure of the levees of New Orleans. The author of *Worst Cases* reminds the reader that *undisclosed* information is a clear and present danger. For example, as early as August 11, 2000, President Bush had intelligence that, if disseminated to the public, might well have discouraged a cautious personality from boarding a commercial plane. The “decider” decided to keep the information from the American people. The President did share the “intell” with John Ashcroft who had access to a \$2000-an-hour Gulfstream jet.

The chapter entitled, “Silver Lining,” is bizarre, ironic and timely. Clarke reminds us that catastrophe almost always results in a windfall for someone, even if that someone is the casket maker. Catastrophes provide heroes, “impetus for social change and they (catastrophes) provide a stimulus for stretching the imagination” (139).

Finally, Clarke advances a perspective on disaster management that he calls *Preemptive Resilience* which is the payoff concept. His theory is that because disaster really happens at a local level, “Bottom-up, citizen-based responses are often more effective” (171). He asks the reader to remember that a “spontaneous network of regular citizens successfully evacuated half a million people from lower Manhattan on 9/11” (171). This book encourages us to think productively and for ourselves about all that threatens us and then to follow its lead as we look for solutions that are both practical and empowering.

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