



Antwone Fisher

US 2002

Directed by Denzel Washington

Produced by Todd Black, Randa Haines and Denzel

Washington for Mundy Lane Entertainment

Writing credits: Antwone Fisher

Cinematography by Philippe Rousselot

Original Music by Mychael Danna

Film Editing by Conrad Buff

Production Design by Nelson Coates

Art Direction by David S. Lazan

Supervising sound editor: Donald Sylvester

Distributed by: Fox Searchlight Pictures

Runtime: 120 min

Leading players

Derek Luke

Antwone 'Fish' Fisher

Denzel Washington

Dr. Jerome Davenport

Joy Bryan

Cheryl Smolley

Salli Richardson

Berta Davenport

Leonard Earl Howze

Pork Chop

Kenté Scott

Kansas City

Kevin Connolly

Slim

Rainoldo Gooding

Grayson

Novella Nelson

Mrs. Tate

Stephen Snedden

Berkley

Malcolm David Kelley

Antwone Fisher Age 7

Cory Hodges

Antwone Fisher Age 14

There are several reasons for selecting *Antwone Fisher* as a contrast to *Betty Fisher*. The similarity of names in the title was actually coincidental. First, it is an American film that might be seen as a 'personal project' for a major Hollywood star. Denzel Washington is an A list star who has appeared in many major box-office films over a long career stretching back to early TV fame on *St. Elsewhere* (1982) and perhaps peaking with *Philadelphia* (1993) and *Crimson Tide* (1995),

although he finally won an Oscar for *Training Day* in 2002. Washington has always been careful about the roles he has selected. There has been some tension about his 'star persona' and the way he wishes to be seen. To some extent he presents himself as a 'mainstream' actor, but he has often accepted roles which are clearly focused on African-American identity issues (*Glory*, *Malcolm X*, *The Hurricane* etc.). *Antwone Fisher* was his first directing job and it is very much an African-American film about identity and the crisis for the African-American family and the African-American male in particular (also an autobiographical script). Films about the 'ordinary lives' of African-Americans are not likely to get wide distribution (as distinct from films with African-American stars in action films or comedies, such as Will Smith in *I, Robot*).

Antwone Fisher was independently made, but distributed by Fox Searchlight, the 'independent' arm of 20th Century Fox. Washington co-stars and co-produces as well as directing the film. How much of 'Hollywood' can we see in the film? We can ask the following questions about *Antwone Fisher* based on our own viewing and the dossier that follows:

- How do reviewers and audiences respond to the film? What kinds of emotions do they express about the film?
- How much 'Hollywood' do you detect in the film? Do reviewers/audiences comment on this?
- Do you detect any different assumptions about the film from reviewers/audiences outside the US – or, if this is discernible, any differences between black audiences and white audiences?
- Is *Antwone Fisher* a similar kind of film to *Betty Fisher* (genre, aesthetics, budget etc.?). If it is different, in what way?

IMDB 'User Comments'

Makes me cry every time, 27 September 2004, 10/10

Author: Esmith28 from USA Atlanta

This is my favorite movie EVER. I have watched it at least 10 times and I cry every time. My family begs me not to watch it so I wont have a crying fit. I think I love that it is a true story written by Antwone himself just as much as I love the movie. The acting is top notch, and the actors were perfect for their role. Denzel Washington is one of my favorite actors. But this is my favorite movie he has done so far. I took care of a little boy who was also born in jail. He was the most precious little boy I had ever met. He has now been adopted by a wonderful family who fought for him for almost two years. I saw this movie while the fight was still going on and his future was unsure and I am so happy he is safe and loved. And I am so happy Antwone's happy and found his family.

I would love to know more about him and how it has been since meeting his family. I just cant say enough good things about it!!

Denzel strikes again, 7 March 2004 8/10

Author: clarence279 from Austin, TX

Antwone Fisher does what other films of its kind fails so often. To take the life of an individual and put it on screen has both horrendous consequences as well as terrible risk. Yet, this film has a common flow between both Washington and Fisher - a theme that is both clear throughout the movie as well as critical to its telling. While the story has few flaws - Washington's character lacks the development it seems to raise: in his wife's unhappiness, his difficulty in cracking Antwone, as well as his position as a counselor in the Navy), the notion that the film portrays supercedes all, and that cannot be overlooked. The timing of Antwone's current troubles, his past, his sessions with Washington, as well his what may occur in his future, could not have been handled better, as we see the seeds that had been planted in young Fisher's life enough to barely comprehend the horror without being overwhelmed. Luke's subdued and sympathetic performance is unforgettable. Moreover, Washington's avoidance of the spotlight in this film speaks volumes of his intentions - which certainly should not go unnoticed.

beautiful movie!!!!, 5 February 2004

Author: bishopcatman@yahoo.com from united states

i watched this movie with my eight year old granddaughter and i cried through the whole movie. my granddaughter asked me why was i crying. i couldn't explain to her that i was looking at my own life. thank-you mr. fisher for showing me that you can heal. i found myself going through the same emotions that antwone was feeling when he didn't want to talk about his life. anybody whose ever been abused or neglected should see this movie. it showed me that i am not alone and to seek help in order to heal. though it is very hard for me to watch this movie again, i still feel this movie should have been oscar nominated.

Boring, 24 May 2003 1/10

Author: guyb from Portland, Oregon

Am I the only one who fell asleep during this movie; not once, but twice? I've been a big fan on Denzel in the past, but I think he's busy phoning it in these days and is suffering from too much fame. This movie may have been a faithful reproduction of a true story, but there just wasn't much there. Just goes to show you how boring a normal life really is!

Antwone Fisher: 5/10, 15 July 2003

Author: movieguy1021 from Anywhere, USA

Antwone Fisher, starring Denzel Washington and based on the life of Antwone Fisher, is directed by Denzel Washington and written

by Antwone Fisher, which is its major problem. Fisher didn't write one bad thing about himself, like he actually would. Washington includes himself way too much for a one-dimensional character. Worst of all, Washington is too much of a novice at directing to realize that the characters not only need development, but also need to have two sides to them. Antwone, although I'm sure he's a fascinating guy, but the way that Fisher writes himself is with such pride, he can't write a bad word about himself. And Washington seems to think that he's now in the 'elite' of the actor-directors and wants to show us that he too can work like that. He wants to show Woody Allen or Kevin Smith or any other actor-director that he's now in control, so he's in as many scenes as he can be.

The story, which isn't really anything to make a movie about anyway, has Fisher (Derek Luke, in an overrated debut film) in the navy and a short temper, something that flares up only once or twice more in the film. He's sent to see a psychiatrist, Jerome Davenport (Washington), who digs into Fisher's abusive past, as he's sent to a foster home. During the present, he falls for Cheryl (Joy Bryant), and advances in a relationship with her.

The one most remarkable thing about this movie is that Cheryl is probably the most multi-dimensional one-dimensional supporting character in a recent movie. We learn a bit about her, such as where she works, which is more than I expected to know about her. However, like Carl Hanratty in *Catch Me If You Can*, Davenport was fine as a 'character' where we didn't really want to know much about him, but a crucial thing is learned at the end. Also, at the end, when Davenport is spilling his guts out to Fisher, it's clichéd and scripted, not something that could actually happen.

It's not to say that Antwone Fisher is boring, it's just not exciting. With its two parts, the first part being the more interesting of the two, it can't have a straight flow. Nothing really interested me throughout the film, but I never found the need to pay attention to something else. I wasn't touched at all, how was I to be touched? Nothing grabbing came out of it. How is this supposed to be touching? Because a man remembers his past? I don't think so! Basically, Antwone Fisher is an OK movie. It's not exciting but not boring, the acting is not great but not bad, and the movie itself is not great but not horrible.

This film really touched me - made me cry!, 5 March 2003

Author: bigraph from Four Roads, Barbados

I really enjoyed this film for two major reasons:

1. I literally burst into tears in one of the final scenes of the movie. I mean it took me completely by surprise. I've cried while watching movies before, but never like that. Found myself unable to control it initially. Maybe it's just me but I figure that the film had to be pretty powerful to affect me like that. The realisation that that kind of cruel upbringing (and worse) is a reality for many children worldwide was sobering. The realisation that some of those stories DO turn out positively was reassuring and moving.

2. It was SO refreshing to see a film centred around blacks (written by, directed by and starring) which was positive. Presented an intelligent, articulate and sensitive young black man who was able to appreciate and enjoy a beautiful relationship with the woman he loved. Seems so incredibly rare in films involving blacks. This side of black people needs to be shown FAR more. Usually the image given by Hollywood is of loud, stupid, people who have NO self-control whatsoever, especially when it comes to sex and anger.

I hope that as many people as possible get to see this film since I think it is not only moving but inspiring and enriching.

Don't Let the Ad Campaign Turn You Away from This

Movie! Author: jkeen from Brooklyn, NY, 31 January 2003

I have seen most of the highly regarded end-of-2002 movies and I recommend "Antwone Fisher" above almost all of them. I was

tremendously impressed by Denzel Washington's directorial debut, particularly the restraint he chose in cinematic elements such as editing and music scoring. The sparing, deliberate use of music on the sound track, for instance, contrasts favorably with the excessive use of music in both Martin Scorsese's "Gangs of New York" and Spike Lee's "25th Hour" (both directors whom I like, by the way). Washington elicits a strong and -- once again -- restrained performance from newcomer Derek Luke.

I would also like to commend the film for the best cinematic depiction of a psychotherapeutic relationship in many years -- and I say that as someone who works with many psychiatrically damaged young men with anger management problems.

Some have criticized "Antwone Fisher" as a "male weepie." I feel that this is a movie that could have been done with over-the-top sentimentality, but that the restraint which Washington shows in all aspects prevents that from happening. Did start to shed tears at the end of the movie? You bet I did -- but those tears were very well earned.

The distributors of "Antwone Fisher" have chosen to promote it with an ad campaign which stresses its inspirational value. In the New York Times yesterday, the movie was advertised with a blurb from Martin Luther King III. While I think this campaign is probably good at reaching what, in today's political context, one would think of as "Antwone Fisher's" 'natural' audience -- the churchgoing African-American middle class -- I fear that it may turn off many people who ought to go see this film. Many of my friends have shied away from it because they are afraid they will be preached to by this movie; they don't like to see a movie because the son of a secular saint tells them it's wholesome and good for them.

So I say to all of you who are *not* in the above demographic: Go and see Antwone Fisher because it is a great motion picture! It's better than Gangs of New York. It's better than 25th Hour. It's better than About Schmidt. It's better than Catch Me If You Can. It's better than Adaptation. It's better than Chicago. The only other movie in current release which I unconditionally recommend is Pedro Almodovar's Talk to Her. So go and see Antwone Fisher.

Fish flounders, lacks "sole", 21 January 2003

Author: Paul (Shakespeare-2) from Ottawa, Canada

Denzel Washington's directorial debut is a conventionally made film, and that's OK -- no fancy gimmickry, no technical razzle dazzle, no quick cuts or weird camera angles. He gets some powerful performances from both lead actors and supporting cast, especially the young Black actor who plays Antwone Fisher himself.

The problem is that Washington deals too much in one-dimensional stereotypes, both good and bad. The film is too neat, too pat, and above all too nice. I left feeling as if I had single-handedly eaten all the goodies on the groaning board at Thanksgiving dinner, and (frankly) as if I wanted to bring it all back up again.

Reviews

Bring Tissues

By Ross Anthony, *Hollywood Report Card*

I must admit a small bias: I bumped into Antwone at a screening earlier in the year. Maybe because of a certain pleasantness about him or perhaps just the somewhat unusual Antwone Fishername, I remembered him. At that time, I didn't know his story, just a few words of hello and a handshake. So, when I watched the film, I couldn't help but imagine him writing it, living it.

A sailor in the US Navy has trouble controlling his temper. His many fights force him into psychological counseling with Commander Davenport (Denzel Washington). The sessions take some time to mature, but the interaction between the two is

always warm, always endearing. Fisher's (Derek Luke) charm packs a meatier punch than his fists.

It's a film about overcoming anger, finding forgiveness for a torturous foster childhood. It's about turning around and living. "I was born in prison two months after my father was murdered."

By now the "tough kid meets psychiatrist" tale is becoming a genre on its own -- "Good Will hunting," "Finding Forrester," etc. Nevertheless, Antwone's story exudes a sweet allure, hosts very likable characters that you care greatly about, and is ultimately truly his. Oh and yes schmaltz. But at the end of a hard day's work -- don't we all deserve a little schmaltz?

Antwone's story caught the attention of Producer Todd Black while Fisher was working as a security guard at Sony Pictures Studios more than 10 years ago.

"I became determined to write my story simply because I was told that I couldn't... When I saw the film for the first time, I was overwhelmed by a mixture of feelings: fear, joy, pride, satisfaction -- all of which still linger, and I am certain they will for the rest of my life. I hope others, too, walk away with those same feelings and the courage to do something to better the lives of children in general." Antwone Fisher.

Antwone Fisher

Jeanne Aufmuth, 'Palo-Alto on-line'

Call me a Scrooge, but I like my feel-good films to make me feel good. Antwone Fisher made me awfully sorry that Denzel Washington thought he could succeed on the other side of the camera.

Based on the true story of Navy sailor Antwone Fisher (Derek Luke), whose volatile temper lands him in the naval psychiatrist's chair (Washington as Jerome Davenport), Fisher bills itself as an inspirational story about connecting with the inner child to find hidden reserves of strength. But the psychological spelunking stops far short of the core, lacking real conviction and mired in the syrupy melodrama of bad-boy-gone good.

Sure, Davenport lends his support and becomes the father figure Fisher never had. Naturally, his girl stands by her man through thick and thin. And yes, I can be touched as easily as the next softie, but not by a bland portrayal of triumph or unimaginative direction.

Luke offers up an average performance that isn't compelling enough to carry the film. Washington is at his chin-jutting worst, phoning in his performance with a practiced one-two step.

Kudos to the real-life Fisher for taking pen to paper and letting it all hang out. Searching for your roots can be a harsh and disappointing experience. But I'm a veteran of enough survival stories to know there has to be more. Kudos to me for not choking on the saccharine rush generated by the cloying climax.

Big Fat 0 for opportunities wasted -- for Luke to prove himself as an actor with depth, for Fisher to illustrate that his abusive-heavy screenplay can translate into absorbing viewing and for Washington to demonstrate he can direct without Oscar-suppliant condescension. Trivial where it should be profound and hyper-cliched where it should be sincere, Fisher doesn't get the job done.

Xan Brooks

Friday May 16, 2003 *The Guardian* (UK)

Remove the implicit political dimension of an all-black cast, and Denzel Washington's directing debut is just Prince of Tides or Good Will Hunting done over.

Newcomer Derek Luke plays the troubled sailor who revisits his abused childhood under the eye of Washington's navy shrink; their sessions a springboard for all manner of cathartic flashbacks.

The whole thing is soothingly predictable and peppered with cliches. Annoying to admit, therefore, that Antwone Fisher's gratuitous tear-jerking finale slipped in under my guard. I left the cinema moist-eyed and mad as a wasp.

Philip French

Sunday May 18, 2003, *The Observer* (UK)

Denzel Washington's directorial debut, *Antwone Fisher*, begins with a series of romantic shots of a little black boy up to his neck in corn. This is intended to be an idyllic dream, but it turns out to be an unintentional metaphor for every sentimentalised, cliché-ridden situation the eponymous hero gets into throughout the movie. Written by Antwone Fisher himself and 'inspired' by his autobiography, the film tells the story of how, in a matter of weeks, he was turned from an aggressive, deeply disturbed young sailor on the point of discharge into a well-adjusted mature man, through a few sessions with a sympathetic naval psychiatrist.

He was born in prison to a neglectful mother, his father was murdered by an ex-girlfriend when Antwone was a baby and he was reared by a cruel stepmother and sexually abused as a child by her daughter. Pushed out of an orphanage as a teenager, he saw his best friend killed while robbing a convenience store and joined the US navy. The saintly shrink (Washington) becomes a surrogate father to the surly Antwone (Derek Luke). He gives him self-esteem and directs him towards a search for his lost family. The movie is glib and as slow-moving as bank holiday traffic. Fisher cannot resist that favourite Hollywood exchange: 'I love you son' - 'I love you too'. But it's surprising that Washington did not cut his final speech - 'Because of you Antwone, I'm a better man and a better doctor. I don't owe you anything. I salute you'.

Reviewed by Nev Pierce on bbc.co.uk, Updated 11 May 2003
Denzel Washington's directorial debut is a true-life tale that could bore for America. A mind-numbing, soul-deadeningly dull experience, it is a miracle of mediocrity, a small wonder: how can anything be quite this tedious?

To pre-empt whinges from anguished fans, that Washington has decided to direct is not a problem. Several actors - Woody Allen, Clint Eastwood, Sean Penn - have stepped behind the camera to become distinguished, or at least interesting, filmmakers.

However, puncturing Washington's otherwise impressive filmography, pictures such as "The Preacher's Wife" and "John Q" point to a weakness for sentimental, idiotic drivel. And it's his choice of just such a project, not his job-swapping, that is the problem here.

Antwone Fisher (Derek Luke) is a raw navy recruit who gets into trouble as often as others get out of bed. After his latest bout of fisticuffs, he's assigned to psychiatrist Jerome Davenport (Washington), who must discover if the kid's a troublemaker, or just troubled.

So, what's bugging Antwone? After a couple of silent sessions (hello, "Good Will Hunting"), we find out, as he flashes back to a nightmare childhood. Abandoned by his mother, dad dead, minders abusive - no wonder he fancies a fight. Perhaps if he finds his mom, he can also find peace?

You won't care. In fact, it's a testament to how poorly written the banal, Fisher-penned script is, that despite all his misfortune, you begin to hate him for making you sit through it.

Luke does what he can with a no-dimensional character and Washington at least avoids the first-time director trap of showing off with the camera. However, his point-and-shoot style further exposes the deficits of the near non-existent, TV-movie-of-the-week story.

There is not a single shocking, surprising, or even mildly diverting, moment, in this predictable, cliché-ridden, bland, self-consciously worthy waste of time. Like cinematic shock treatment, it'll leave you zombified.

... and in response to this review, the following 'Reader Comments':

Who is this person writing the reviews? Everything stated by the reviewer seems to be turned on its head when the ratings poll

is averaged out at just over a class 4! Sorry mate, but Antwone Fisher directed by Denzel is not only a great Debut directorial but is also top class film. Brilliant for a night in with the Mrs....
Si Brown

I feel sorry for Nev Pierce since his critique feels like the cold dead hand of a corpse. No compassion. No feelings? What's wrong Nev? Did the film get to you and you don't want to admit it? How was your childhood? You chill me with your coldness.
hal

Denzel Washington is an excellent actor, but please don't let him behind a camera again. An amazingly boring movie.
John Moore

from <http://www.3blackchicks.com>

Rose Cooper

I am intimately acquainted with someone who grew up in a foster home; his home was a damn sight more stable and loving than Antwone Fisher's was, a fact for which I am eternally grateful. But Antwone Fisher isn't about Fisher's battles with an evil foster mother; at least, not only about that. Nor is it only about his ability to find and nurture a loving relationship with a beautiful young woman, or the healing power of forgiveness. It is all these things and much more; in the end, Antwone Fisher is the embodiment of a "feel-good movie".

I found myself rooting for Fisher to succeed in conquering the demons that had tortured his soul for so long, and to find the peace within himself that would allow him to create healthy relationships with others. Rarely have I invested myself so emotionally in a film; Antwone Fisher drew me in so closely, I hated to see the end credits roll.

Newcomer Derek Luke plays Fisher to near-perfection; not due to any elite thespianic skills he possessed, but because he made Fisher and his story seem so incredibly real to me. There were times when director Denzel Washington flipped Fisher's switch too soon, and you could see the actor behind the character; but for the most part, Luke captured Fisher's vulnerability and anguish so incredibly well, I was often moved to tears. The love story between Fisher and Cheryl was especially heartwarming; tender, in a way that is rarely seen on screen between young Black people.

The supporting cast was equally good, even those whose characters made me grit my teeth. Washington, in his actor's hat, was a given; he's played characters like Davenport in the past, and wisely kept his role muted to allow Luke and others to shine more brightly (as well, no doubt, to concentrate more on his role as director). The beautiful model-turned-actress Joy Bryant meshed well with Luke; their characters' love story neither got in the way of the film, nor did it ever feel out-of-place - something that can't be said of a lot of dramas these days. Though I wanted to strangle her character for mistreating young "Twanny" (Malcolm David Kelley), Novella Nelson as Mrs. Tate, left a lasting impression that was hard to shake. Look for Viola Davis in a brief, but key, scene near the end.

Washington, in his director's hat, turns in a solid performance for his first outing. There were a few shots that brought me out of the moment (watch one particular jail scene closely, to see if you spot it too). But though the stiff competition for this year's crop of films probably precludes his being nominated for many awards, as they say in the vernacular, he done good.

As difficult as this movie was to watch at times due to its scenes of abuse and its unflinching depictions of The Evil Men (or more appropriately in this case, Women) Do, Antwone Fisher is the type of film I'd like to hold up to Hollywood filmmakers - especially those who keep trying to spoon-feed us Friday-type pablum - and say "See? This is what you should be trying to create!"