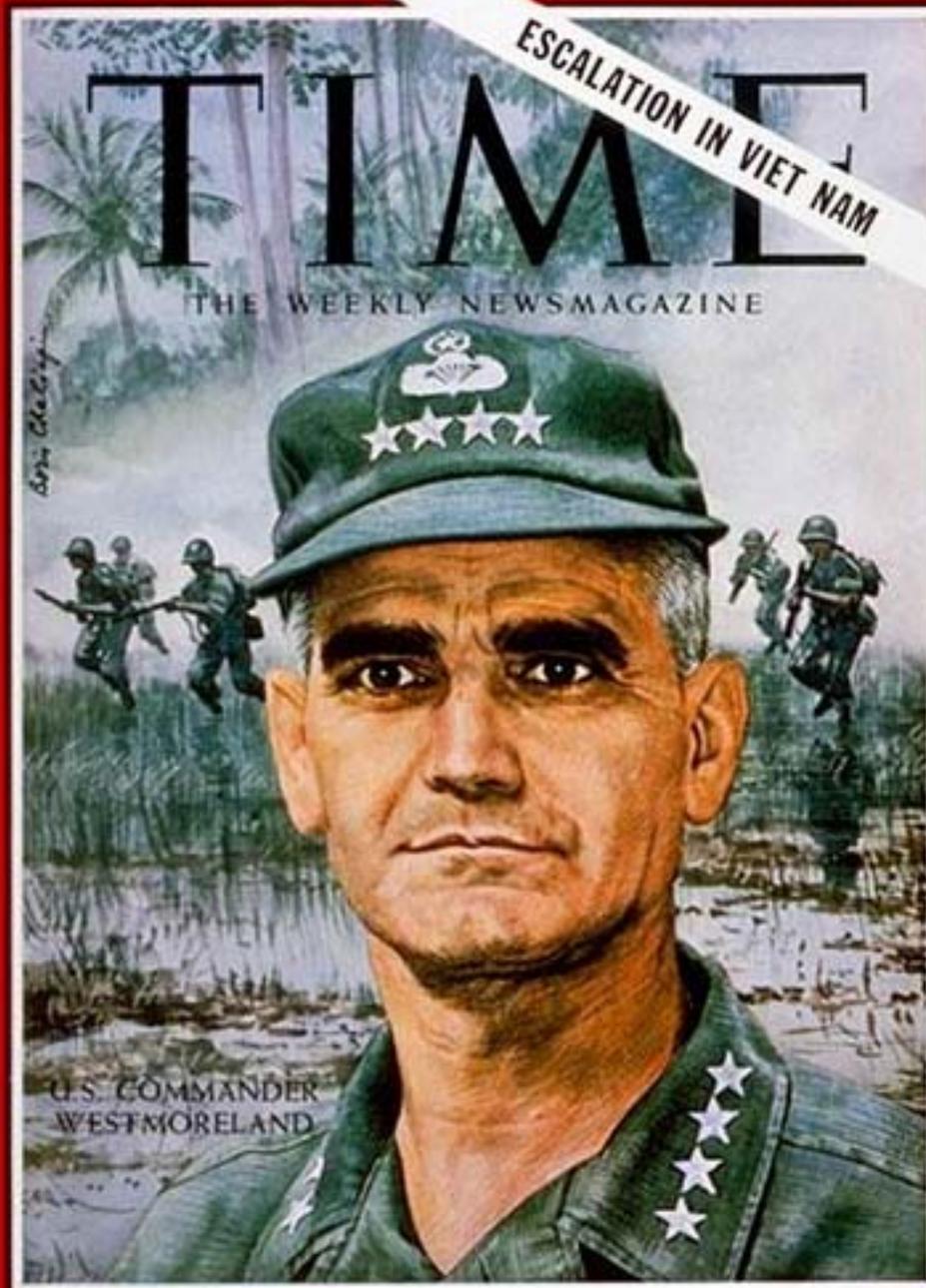


EMERSON'S LEGACY

NOVEMBER 19, 1969



Viewing guide for *Hearts & Minds*

Casey Hill (casey.hill@trinity.edu)
Trinity University, December 2006

Hearts and Minds-Pre-Viewing Guide.

Casey Tyler Hill, December 2006
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

A. Overview / Introduction

The Oscar winning documentary *Hearts and Minds* (Davis, 1974) is a critical look into the world of the Vietnam War. As a film, it stands on its own as a very deep and difficult account of the hardships experienced by the victims of the controversial war. Mr. Davis, rightfully, takes a very anti-war attitude in this film. His editing techniques, his interviews, and his use of cutaways create a feel to the film that draws you in and really helps you understand his points. He can, at some points, be a bit passionate in his depictions of certain “characters” in the film. These depictions hold political leanings and can separate his audiences as they are difficult to swallow. His passion should not be taken too literally; at times it seems as if he is being down right anti-American, yet at these times in the film you have to separate yourself from the film and consider the issue that he is discussing through these images. If you are able to do this you can come out of the film with a much better, more positive understanding of what he attempts to say in the film. Davis attempts to open your eyes to a new depiction of the Vietnam War.



Davis uses a series of interviews to vocalize his message. He never offers any of his own input. Rather, he takes the interviews of a few key speakers and uses them instead of speaking himself. The interviews range from a General in the U.S. Army (Gen. William Westmorland) to an ex air-force pilot (Randy Floyd). Each interview holds its own experience and gives the film a nudge in Davis's well planned direction.

The footage from Vietnam actually shows a bit less “battle footage” than you may think. Davis's aim in this footage is to show the way that the American army treated and devalued the Vietnamese people. There is an almost comical scene between a pair of American soldiers with Vietnamese prostitutes. The amount of ignorance and complete disregard for human-beings that Davis was able to capture makes the film very difficult to watch without becoming upset. In this respect, he was successful as a film-maker. Through this film, Davis was able to document an unforgettable mistake, as well as send a warning message to future leaders of governments. Blind power can cost lives and cultivate unthinkable regret.

B. Questions to keep in mind while you watch the film.

1. First, what makes this film so powerful? What elements of film making do you think Davis focuses on the most? If you could, how would you change the film (any aspect)?
2. Is there an underlying theme? If so, what is it?
3. Does the biased nature of the film hurt the overall experience? Or, does it help you understand parts of the Vietnam War that maybe you hadn't considered?
4. During the quick montages that Davis puts in the film (*the high-school football games, the stock footage, and the parade*) what do you think he is trying to say? Is there a message being sent?
5. Am I watching this with an open mind? Am I giving Peter Davis a chance to get his point through to me?
6. Is there a lesson to be learned from this film?

C. Here's where you can find the DVD or the VHS.

- New and used copies on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)
- New and used copies on [eBay](https://www.ebay.com)
- Rental Listings at [Hollywood Video](https://www.hollywoodvideo.com), [NetFlix](https://www.netflix.com), and [Blockbuster](https://www.blockbuster.com).
- Listings at [Barnes & Noble](https://www.barnesandnoble.com).

Hearts and Minds – Post Viewing Guide.

Casey Tyler Hill December 2006
Trinity University, San Antonio Texas

A. Overview / Afterview

This post-viewing guide is aimed to allow you to deepen your intellectual understandings of this film. The target audience is probably 18 + due to the time in which it was released as well as the implications it has for today's society.

It has always been difficult to give a completely objective view of something as powerful and biased as this film. However, the film can be an excellent supplement for a "developing-citizen", conservative or liberal. Davis takes the human aspect of war and thrusts it into your face. He's not exactly unbiased in doing it, but he makes points in the film that can strike a chord in your mind. This guide is designed to relieve some of that stress that Davis creates through his depictions of Americans and Vietnamese, as well as to allow the interpretation his message on an objective level. Hopefully, by doing this, you will find that you gain more from the film than you would have otherwise.



The Vietnam War in itself is a very important happening in the world's history to understand. This film gives a deeper look into what exactly this war meant for those who were directly affected by it as well as for those who can learn from it. The most important thing to consider when you think about what you have just seen is that it can be used as a reference. If you are able to open your mind to the message that Peter Davis is trying to send to his viewers, then you are able to understand that the government is not always right; that it is OK to question your own politics in order to gain a better appreciation for the freedoms afforded to you by your government.

If you have found this to be a difficult and emotional film to watch, you have taken the first step towards understanding Davis's message. It is now up to you to take this message, interpret it, and allow it to affect your understanding of humanity, diplomacy, war, and power.

B. Some helpful resources about the Vietnam War.

Vietnam History:

In this link you will find a number of different resources regarding the Vietnam War. There are quotes from former presidents, timelines, and lists of articles on the topic. It is very comprehensive and will give you a great understanding of the war and it's controversy.

- <http://www.vietnamwar.com/>

Vietnam Details:

Here you'll find a darker look at some of the aspects of the war. There is a detailed map of Vietnam showing exactly where it is as well as a fairly detailed description of the artillery used by the U.S. Army during the war.

- <http://www.vietnampix.com/index.html>

Veteran Stories:

This is a link to a site that holds a number of accounts from the war. Some of the stories may be different from what you may have heard in the film. Also, there are a number of links that delve into some of the main controversial issues that surrounded the war.

- <http://www.oakton.edu/user/~wittman/veterans.htm>

Peter Davis's own Words:

This will take you to an interview that Peter Davis took part in. He delves into a number of the aspects of the film. He gives insight and explanations into some of the directions that he decided to take the film.

- <http://www.heartsandmindsmovie.co.uk/interview.html>

C. Some resources for the Documentary Genre

Here is a link to a PDF file that contains an article written by Carl Plantinga. He attempts to give a solid definition to what documentary film is as a genre.

- <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.0021-8529.2005.00188.x?cookieSet=1>

This is yet another PDF file containing a dissertation written about the persuasive and societal effects that documentary films can have on communities. It also discusses the impact that documentaries can have on social movements.

- <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/etd/d/2005/aquayoa11349/aquayoa11349.pdf>

Here you will find a whole book containing explanations and discussions of the many different forms that documentary film can take on. Written by Bill Nichols, this book can be found in university documentary film classes.

- <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=E5bj1XDvRxUC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&sig=SrWN3QbuCzTQTXZx9wADlni5Cxs&dq=Documentary+Film+Genre&prev=http://scholar.google.com/scholar%3Fq%3DDocumentary%2BFilm%2BGenre%26start%3D10%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26sa%3DN#PPP1,M1>

D. Glossaries of film terms

IMDB (Internet Movie Database) is an online database containing hundreds and hundreds of movie titles. They also provide a glossary of film terms that can help you understand many of the technical aspects to making a film.

- <http://imdb.com/Glossary/>

Glossartist is another website that allows you to search through their extensive collection of film terminology definitions. These terms are very useful for aspiring film makers or just for those of you that would like to learn more about the industry.

- <http://www.glossarist.com/glossaries/arts-culture/film.asp>

Here is a site that you can go to and type an individual term into the search box and find the definition much quicker than scrolling through pages of definitions that you don't want.

- http://allmovie.com/cq/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=21:avg/info_pages/avg_glossary.html

E. Reviews of Hearts and Minds

This link is a quick review of the film. The author takes a stand on the history of the film as well as interview techniques that Davis chose to implement.

- <http://www.thespinningimage.co.uk/cultfilms/displaycultfilm.asp?reviewid=1492>

This review, written by a Vietnamese man, discusses the number of different aspects to Davis's film that worked well for him. He also criticizes Davis's ability to remain objective by saying that he blames "everyone".

- <http://www.imagesjournal.com/2002/reviews/heartsminds/text.htm>

In this review, the reviewer gives a brief overview of the film and then dives into a discussion of the film and the war. The author admits in his review that the film may be a bit difficult to follow for someone who has little understanding of the Vietnam War.

- <http://www.movie-vault.com/reviews/rjEIUvHqrmvisMfY>

F. Scholarly Treatments of the Film

In this treatment, I discuss Davis's techniques along with his attempts to embarrass the U.S. army and his biased interpretations of ideologies connected to the United States. While creating a powerful and impact-full piece of history, he crosses the line between anti-war and anti-American.

- <http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/c.hill.2006.hearts.and.minds.pdf>

In this next treatment, the film's depiction of United States military culture is discussed. The author discusses the techniques that Davis implemented in order to place the U.S. Military culture in the spot light.

- <http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/j.ramirez.2006.hearts.and.minds.pdf>

The next treatment goes into an overview of Davis's bias in the film. The manner in which he depicts both sides of the war is criticized through the analysis of his editing techniques and interview choices.

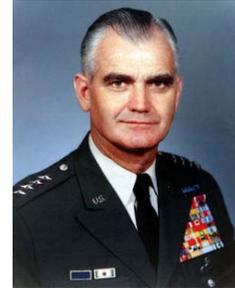
- <http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/m.mccullough.2006.hearts.and.minds.pdf>

G. Video-Clip

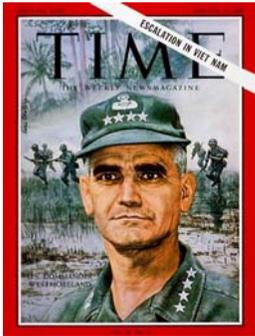
This clip is far and away the most difficult scene to watch in the film, and is most likely Peter Davis's most blunt and palpable juxtapositions between Vietnamese and American culture. The clip shows General William Westmoreland giving a testimonial about the "Oriental's" value on life. Notice the timing Davis's cutaways, who and what he decided to put into the clip, and then think about the power that this General probably had over American soldiers in the Vietnam War. This clip put the definition of American ignorance onto a new level, and was probably a driving force in the reason that Davis got his Oscar.



There isn't much that can be said about this clip that hasn't already been said by the clip itself. Davis's use of place, sound, and dialogue combine to create one of the most powerful collections of images and words that I, personally, have ever seen. First we see a woman almost inconsolably mourning the death of her son, and then we have General Westmoreland sitting comfortably on his park bench next to a duck pond wearing a well tailored suit. As soon as General Westmoreland begins to speak it is pretty evident that he is going to mess this one up pretty bad. "The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient." Davis takes this scene and simply ravages the scruples of war supporters.



The most important thing that this scene does for this film and for Davis's cause is that it paints a portrait of U.S. Military mentality (or a section of it). This is not an uneducated soldier in this scene; this is a graduate of West Point, a U.S. Army Chief of Staff, and a General in the U.S. Army. He is an educated man who was placed in a position to make moral and ethical decisions for hundreds of men. Davis is very obviously shedding light on the amount of apathy and ignorance that could be found in high ranking military and government positions during this war. This scene, combined with many of the others that Davis strategically places throughout the film wind up vocalizing Davis's message that America was ignorant, apathetic, and cruel during this war.



H. Discussion Questions

- What do you think the interview with General Westmoreland did for the film's integrity in terms of ethics in documentary film?
- After watching this entire film, what would you say, is the most important thing to come away from the film with?
- Do you think that Davis was ethical in his depictions of the men in the film? If not, then what could he have done differently?
- What elements of the documentary did you find to be most effective?
- Did you feel that the Vietnamese were fairly represented in the film? If not, why. If so, why?
- Peter Davis was quoted as saying that he did not set out to make an anti-war film. After watching the film do you believe this statement?
- After all of this, do you feel like you have gotten something out of this film?

I. In Closing...

The Vietnam War represents a world of controversy and pain. It will remain in American history as an unforgettable mistake. Peter Davis created a film that will be a constant reminder that governments can be wrong. Although Davis's techniques were not exactly unbiased throughout the film, he created a very important and relevant documentary film, *especially to the current issues in American diplomacy*, which will hopefully evolve from being an ominous reminder to a learning tool for future generations.

About the Author of this Guide

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