



Viewing guide for *Hearts & Minds*

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Trinity University, December 2006

Hearts and Minds – Pre-viewing guide

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1. Overview and Introduction

The documentary, *Hearts and Minds* (Davis, 1974), is a film that provides controversial comment and criticism to one of the wars the United States participated in, the Vietnam War. The director of the film, Peter Davis, takes a unique approach to depicting the war. Davis touches on topics such as military behavior, political events, and behind-the-scenes analysis through interviews. Davis interviews key individuals during the war such as commander of United States forces from 1964 to 1968, William C. Westmoreland and Secretary of Defense for the last year of President Johnson's administration, Clark Clifford.



For those unfamiliar with the particular details of the Vietnam War, the war began in 1959 and lasted until 1975. The war arose from a conflict between the communist forces, Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Viet Cong), versus the anti-communist forces, the Republic of Vietnam and its allies. Allies of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Viet Cong included the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Consequently, allies of the Republic of Vietnam included the United States, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and The Philippines.

The documentary focuses mostly on the presence of the United States military and its affects in Vietnam. To serve as context, the United States supported the French in their military actions in Vietnam early on but ultimately took over primary role of training the Republic of Vietnam military in 1956. By 1965, United States military troops began deploying to South Vietnam.

Davis covers the majority of the Vietnam War, from beginning to near end in his documentary. At the time that he released the documentary in 1974, the United States had already committed to pull out of Vietnam and public opinion of the war became negative. Within the documentary though, footage is found throughout the development of the war; both political footage and military footage in Vietnam.

Pro-military United States citizens in the mid 1970s argued that *Hearts and Minds* was anti-American since Davis captured intense footage from the perspective of the Vietnamese citizens and questioned verbally and through film editing, the justification of the war. *Hearts and Minds* won the Academy Award in 1975 for "Best Documentary, Features" among nominated documentaries such as *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman*, *The Challenge... A Tribute to Modern Art*, *Makah Hashmonim V'Echad*, and *The Wild and the Brave*.

2. Questions to keep in mind before watching the movie

- What kind of economic conditions was the United States experiencing and what other major events did the United States encounter between 1900 and 1964?
- What were the events that occurred which built up the active United States intervention in Vietnam? Why was France in Vietnam in the first place?
- The documentary makes reference to the [Pentagon Papers](#) but does not go into detail; what are the Pentagon Papers?

3. Where to obtain copies of this film

- Available used and new on [Amazon.com](#)
Direct link to [Hearts and Minds – Criterion Collection](#)
- Available for rent on [Netflix.com](#) or [Blockbuster.com](#)
[Netflix Direct link](#) | [Blockbuster Direct Link](#)

Hearts and Minds – Post-viewing guide

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1. **Overview**

The documentary, *Hearts and Minds* (Davis, 1974), focuses on many issues of the Vietnam War and after viewing it, many questions may remain and new ideas with the intent to explore created. At the time the documentary was created in 1974, the intended audience was the general population in the United States who shared or had opposing thoughts about the United States intervention in Vietnam. Accordingly, the intended audience for this post-viewing guide is for those who have just watched the documentary and are looking for a deeper critical view of the global consequences from the ethical decisions of certain military personnel in Vietnam.

Throughout the documentary there are several scenes where Davis films military personnel partaking in questionable ethical acts in Vietnam; some of these acts involving prostitution. A couple of the analytical papers researched and written by Trinity University students enrolled in Communication: 3325: Documentary Film in fall of 2006 have pointed out the bias representation of the military in the documentary. An important element to keep in mind is that although it is recognized that the unethical acts that some of the military personnel are true, it is by no means a representation of the entire military. However, the global impact of such acts being committed and the affect on the ethical view on the military is something to consider. Accordingly, it is also important to consider the risk of a government propagating to its population an ideology that its military does not and is not partaking in unethical situations.

During the beginning of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War, the United States administration was releasing propaganda to build support for the war. Government efforts to keep public support of the war reached throughout the war. At times, the United States government lied or carefully worded certain statements as to not run the risk of losing public support. Davis, with his documentary and use of tactics such as depicting immoral military acts and illogical reasoning by some government officials, begins to inject counter points into the marketplace of ideas. Without a point and a counter point, the marketplace of ideas will be limited and having a wide marketplace of ideas is one of the important factors to discovering the truth or reality.

The reality, as depicted by the administration that was trying to gain and maintain public support for United States military activity in Vietnam, was that the military was liberating Vietnamese citizens and gaining their hearts and minds. Davis questions part of this philosophy through his documentary. How can a military be gaining the hearts and minds of Vietnamese when their women are exploited in prostitution and pleadings from their children are ignored? This is one of the questions that Davis poses and one to consider if such a question is truly unbiased and asked in a fair manner.

2. Useful resources

a. Related resources about the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War (<http://www.vietnampix.com>)

This online resource is maintained by Peter Leuhusen who lived in Sweden during the time of the Vietnam War. He studied in the United States and attended Boston and Tulane University. His fascination for the Vietnam War grew over time and resulted in this online resource. The website Leuhusen maintains has strong and appealing photography from the Vietnam War along with a back-story for each photo.

Vietnam: Yesterday and Today (<http://www.oakton.edu/user/~wittman/>)

This website is: “primarily for students and teachers working to understand the Vietnamese Conflict. Its goal is to suggest books, magazine articles, and websites that will be useful, to provide suggestions for effective research, and to provide information about the war and the country of Vietnam.” This resource has many useful links when it comes to finding discussions and further readings on the Vietnam War.

The Veterans Coalition (<http://www.theveteranscoalition.org/>)

This resource helps a reader understand the Vietnam War from a particular perspective; the perspective of a Vietnam Veteran. This website has many resources including a history and accounts of the Vietnam War and specific topics affecting veterans such as Agent Orange and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is a good resource to complement a balanced view of the Vietnam War compared to readings that might suggest anti-United States.

b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

Nichols, Bill. Introduction to Documentary. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001.

This book gives a concise breakdown of what a documentary is and opens the door to begin critically thinking about the documentary film and the motives that goes into it. The book also assists in determining different types of documentaries and their effect on the viewing audience.

Rollins, P. (1984). “The Vietnam War: Perceptions Through Literature, Film, and Television”. American Quarterly, 36:3, pp. 419-432.

This article is a deep insight into how the Vietnam War has been perceived through different forms of media. Although not exclusive to documentary films,

it helps in forming the base foundation of understanding how reality can be perceived and its changes with the presence of media.

Devine, Jeremy M. Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second: A Critical and Thematic Analysis of Over 400 Films About the Vietnam War. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1999.

This book contains brief summaries and analyzes of over four-hundred films dedicated to or in topic of the Vietnam War. Years that this book covers are from 1948 until 1989. Definitely a good resource to grasp the amount of documentary and film material that has been produced over the Vietnam War and how it has been depicted over time.

c. **Glossaries of useful film terms**

Ambiance (<http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms1.html>)

“The feeling or mood of a particular scene or setting”.

Juxtaposition (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/juxtaposition>)

“The act or an instance of placing two or more things side by side; also : the state of being so placed.” In *Hearts and Minds*, director Peter Davis uses juxtaposition in editing the footage in order to emphasize certain claims.

Sequence (<http://allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=20:2324>)

“Segments of a film narrative that are edited together and unified by a common setting, time, event, or story-line.”

d. **Film reviews**

Hearts and Minds

(<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/goesout/mov/h/heartsa.shtml>)

This review is written by Jack Garner, a writer for the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. The reviewer gives two-thumbs up to the efforts of Davis in his documentary, even going as far as stating that *Hearts and Minds* was the *Fahrenheit 9/11* of its time.

Hearts and Minds

(<http://www.austinchronicle.com/gbase/Calendar/Film?Film=oid%3a144065>)

The review is written by Marjorie Baumgarten for the Austin Chronicle and although a short review, comments on the re-screening of *Hearts and Minds* at this time in which the United States is militarily active in Iraq and the importance

of such a reminder as that given by the documentary.

Hearts and Minds

(<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19740101/REVIEWS/401010317/1023>)

Written by Roger Ebert, his review of *Hearts and Minds* is also a positive review but with some criticism. He points out how the audience might feel manipulated by Davis' use of juxtaposition to feed us connections that the audience could easily make. Ebert comments that the documentary is filled with strong messages already and the manipulation only takes away its effectiveness.

e. **Scholarly treatments of the film**

Jorge Luis Ramirez, "The depiction of military culture in *Hearts and Minds*," 2006.

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

Analytical research construction analyzing the military depiction in the documentary versus that of reality. The scholarly treatment focuses on Davis injection of opposing ideology into the marketplace of ideas in order for people to question, to further dialogue, and to influence self-scrutiny.

Michelle McCullough, "Vietnam in a Different Light," 2006.

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

This scholarly treatment of the documentary *Hearts and Minds* analyzes the manipulative tactics and techniques used by Davis to communicate a certain agenda to the viewer including an overall depiction of the military which might be considered one-sided and not the most truthful representation.

Wilder, Carol, "Separated at Birth: Argument by Irony in *Hearts and Minds* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*", *Atlantic Journal of Communication*. Vol. 13 No. 2 (2005): pg57-72.

This scholarly treatment does a very good job at analyzing the various components of *Hearts and Minds*. Additionally, it compares it to the more current *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

3. Video-clip analysis

a. Explanation and set up

The following clip is a two minute and fifty-two second scene from the documentary *Hearts and Minds* that serves as a brief introduction to the environment in Saigon.

As the scene opens, there's a focus on United States military presence among the local culture. It then advances to a small child asking for donations from a passing-by military personnel who in the mean time is searching for a prostitute and trying to negotiate prices. Throughout the clip, several military personnel are videotaped around Saigon and certain prostitution areas.

b. Links to the video clip



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b81TzOOMD-g>

c. Analysis

In the mid 20th century, the United States administration promoted propaganda to develop support for the activities in Vietnam. This clip and accompanying research analyzes the behavior of military personnel in Vietnam versus the dominant agenda set by the government that the military acts in the best moral judgment at all times. Critics have claimed Davis' documentary to be anti-American for certain depictions in the documentary such as in this clip involving prostitutes.

Although this claim could have substance, nonetheless the acts of these military personnel were displayed in the public and provided the opportunity for the World to see. Individuals are judged based on what the public sees and thus if military personnel encourage prostitution and questionable actions, this is what the military presence in Vietnam will be judged by.

There is another scene in *Hearts and Minds* involving prostitution but its graphic nature is more revealing. The other scene actually shows several military personnel involved in sexual activity with the prostitutes. Although the graphic nature might be inappropriate for young children, it is affective in showing the treatment of the prostitutes by these individuals. In the second prostitution scene, one of the military personnel can be heard saying that “you make them believe that they’re number one.” The individuals also take initiative when removing clothing from the women and leaving them hickeys in visible areas.

Overall, both clips further the claim that certain military personnel were acting in immoral ways and damaging the character of the military as a whole. Additionally, this serves as an example of Vietnamese women being disrespected and encouraging the flesh market in Vietnam.

4. Discussion questions

- Do you believe that the actions of a few military personnel should be depicted in a manner that could symbolize the entire military?
- Would questioning certain military actions automatically make that individual anti-patriotic?
- How do you believe other people in the World would see these actions?
- Should have the military personnel been directed to not solicit prostitutes and if they did and violated that provision, should have they been reprimanded?

5. Closing Thoughts

The documentary *Hearts and Minds*, although produced roughly thirty years ago, has a continuing growing influence. The documentary was as much about the Vietnam War as it was about military intervention in foreign countries. As the United States continues to intervene via military actions in foreign countries, relevance to *Hearts and Minds* remains strong.

Although some might see *Hearts and Minds* as one sided, it nonetheless provides the opportunity for opposing ideas to enter into the marketplace of ideas and encourage dialogue.

6. About the author of this guide

a. **Short biography**

Jorge fell in love with San Antonio and thus decided to attend [Trinity University](#) in San Antonio, Texas. He embarked with plans to double major in Business Administration and Communication. He became involved in many student organizations including the Association of Student Representatives, First Year Leadership Council, Latino Exchange, Trinity University Volunteer Action Committee, and the campus television station. He served in various management and leadership positions such as a committee head for Latino Exchange, Production Manager and later on Business Manager for the campus television station and as an Executive Producer for a department sponsored television show co-hosting the Dean of Students at [Trinity University](#).

As the final two years of college education approached, Jorge was accepted into the international professional business fraternity, [Alpha Kappa Psi – Nu Pi chapter](#), at [Trinity University](#). This achievement was followed by his decision to study abroad in Monterrey, Mexico for 6 months in hope to regain part of the Spanish that he had lost and hopefully create the necessary contacts to achieve his future goal of operating his own international company. Currently Jorge has registered a sole-proprietorship in Texas under the name [JLR Media Group](#) and has worked at several local nightclubs as a photographer, produced videos for San Antonio's Sports Hall of Fame and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, and has developed several websites, information management systems, along with marketing/advertising consulting and representation during negotiations.

As the final year of his college education begins, Jorge has a current GPA of 3.7 in the Business Department and a 3.6 in the Communication department. His achievements have made it possible for his inclusion in the University's Dean's List for three terms and acceptance into the Mortar Board chapter at [Trinity University](#).

b. **Contact information**

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c. **A note to teachers, students, and anyone who uses this material in a group setting**

If you find any of this information useful, please feel free to use it in your group setting. This research and viewing guide is provided to the community to further encourage discussion and scholarly assessment. Although not required, if you do use this material, please let me know of the use and any feedback that comes of it.