



Viewing guide for *Hearts & Minds*

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Hearts and Minds- Pre-viewing guide

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1. Overview/introduction

Hearts and Minds is a gripping 112 minute documentary created in 1974 and directed by Peter Davis. It is a controversial film because it highlights the sentiments of war through interviews, specific images from before and during the war, and uses editing techniques in a way that opposes American decisions regarding the war in Vietnam. It tells a story of the Vietnam War from the vantage point of people living during that time period. Despite mixed reviews of the documentary, *Hearts and Minds* managed to win an Oscar in 1974 for best documentary.



Graphic images of the devastations of war are presented and help frame the story. Davis shows aerial attacks, close-range shootings of Vietnamese, funerals, the burning of small huts, and civilians maltreated by the United States military. This is a film that not only critiques America's involvement in Vietnam, but also illuminates the fear of Communism that plagued the Cold War generation. The American paranoia that world domination could be in sight is presented in a striking way in *Hearts and Minds*. Peter Davis allows viewers a glimpse at the soldiers who were fighting for America and the ignorance and apathy that dwelled at home. This is done by using scenes of football games where people carry out their daily business, footage of ordinary people who are unaware of the purpose or for which side the United States is fighting, and fictional movies shown in the United States that depict the Vietnamese as savage and at the brink of Communism.

Authority figures of the 1960s and 1970s also appear in the documentary. Viewers hear a wide-range of opinions by men such as: Clark Clifford, who was the aid to President Truman and Secretary of Defense, Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister; Walt Rostow, the advisor to President Truman Kennedy and Johnson; General Westmoreland, the primary General in Vietnam; and Nguyen Khanh, who was the President of South Vietnam. These testimonies serve as a way for the viewer to see how people in many positions viewed the war. In addition, presidential speeches by the four administrations wrapped in the Vietnam War and real footage of the devastation abroad are used to argue Peter Davis' anti-Vietnam stance.

This documentary questions America's power-driven politics and mocks soldiers like Sgt. Coker who are fully committed to the United State's government. Veterans like Captain Randy Floyd tell their stories and eventually denounce America's personal participation in Vietnam. Others, like First Lieutenant Robert Muller see Vietnam as a job, yet regret the lasting impact it has had. Davis juxtaposes images between peaceful

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interviews and despair and destruction. He uses cuts to show veterans missing limbs and shows close shots of Vietnamese people to evoke strong emotion and sympathy.

Davis attempts to present the forgotten story of the Vietnamese, who in this documentary, are seen as the innocent victims of American aggression. The viewer is taken through the streets of Saigon to villages like Hung Dinh where interviews of Vietnamese people who have lost a family member, their land, or their house are shown. Peter Davis wants to give the Vietnamese people a voice and a face to the men and women who were affected by this unnecessary war.

2. Questions to keep in mind before watching the movie

- Davis uses many editing techniques in order to send a certain message to his viewers. These opinions are evident throughout the film with various techniques. Where does the filmmaker juxtapose two different images to send a message?
- Several images of American soldiers are shown in the film. Keep an eye out for the representation of the soldiers. How does Davis present the soldiers throughout the documentary?
- How honest are the images presented by Davis? Clearly, there is truth behind the images and interviews. However, be aware of the shots during the interviews of both Vietnamese and American people. They are done to evoke a certain amount of emotion.
- Because the Vietnam War is a historical event and does not directly impact today's generation it may be difficult to fully understand the emotions of the United States and Vietnamese who were directly affected by this long war. How does Davis represent the sentiments of Americans and Vietnamese?
- The interviews with governmental authorities, veterans, and current United States' soldiers are used to give the film credibility and to show the viewer a fuller understanding of the Vietnam War. Look for the way Davis uses the voices of the people being interviewed and how he transitions from scenes of peaceful Vietnamese to American culture. Is Davis overtly presenting a one-sided account of the Vietnam War?

3. Where to obtain copies of the film

- Criterionco.com has many movie selections including *Hearts and Minds* and through this website you can purchase through Amazon, Barnes & noble, coconuts.com, deep discount DVD, DVD planet, FYE.com, and Tower records.
- Can buy DVD and movie poster at hollywoodvideo.com
- Rent *Hearts and Minds* at cafedvd.com, netflix.com and blockbuster.com

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Hearts and Minds-Post-viewing guide

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1. Overview

Hearts and Minds is a complicated and insightful documentary. This viewing guide attempts to help people understand the complexity of Peter Davis' documentary. The intended audience is comprised of those who choose to watch this film for entertainment, its historical value and those who are viewing the documentary with a more critical and analytical eye regarding the editing and other manipulative techniques of Peter Davis. This viewing guide is designed to help with all of these reasons for watching *Hearts and Minds*.

It is imperative that the context of the Vietnam War be understood because as generations become more removed from the actual event, the history and many facts of the war may be forgotten. For this reason, this viewing guide has links to various Time Magazine articles and stories that relate directly to the Vietnam War and parallel, but are not part of the *Hearts and Minds* documentary. This too is important because it will help to see what and how "true" events and facts are presented throughout the film.

In addition, this viewing guide lists information about documentary films and the genre as a whole. This will assist a curious audience and will be crucial for viewers watching the film with a more critical eye. It is essential that the ideas and ethics behind the documentary film genre are acknowledged. There are three resources that address the history of documentary film and filmmakers, and ask questions at the heart of the documentary film genre that help people define the term. In concordance with this background information about documentary films, there are links to basic terminology regarding film and editing techniques that are useful in deciphering and analyzing *Hearts and Minds*.

This viewing guide is also a significant help with regard to Peter Davis' documentary because there are links to other writings about the film as well as scholarly reviews. These are included so the viewer can gain more insight into the documentary and will be useful either before or after viewing *Hearts and Minds*.

Finally, for entertainment and a glimpse into a possible analysis of the documentary, there is a video clip included in this guide. This is an example of the primary editing technique used by Peter Davis throughout *Hearts and Minds* in order to evoke the emotions of the audience and penetrate his anti-Vietnam War stance, which is fairly obvious throughout the film. The various links and video analysis is provided in order to

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assist the audience in becoming more familiar with whichever element or aspect they find most important for watching the film.

2. Useful resources

a. Related sources about the Vietnam War and war in general

The Vietnam War 1956-1975 (<http://www.questia.com>)

This is a book written in 2003 by Andrew West. It includes photographs from the Vietnam War and reviews the war through: the importance, background, warning signs, outbreak, the fighting, portrait of a soldier, the world around war, portrait of a civilian, and how the war ended. This is a useful resource for gaining a variety of information regarding the Vietnam War.

A Time for WAR: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975
(<http://www.questia.com>)

This book, written in 1997 by Robert D. Schulzinger, claims that the Vietnam War is always present. This offers a glimpse into the initially good-hearted intentions of the Americans and the quagmire that eventually developed. Schulzinger believes that the war was entered out of ignorance and unwavering belief in victory. This book is propelled by a critical viewpoint of America's entrance into the Vietnam War.

Strike Against the War (<http://www.time.com>)

This article featured in Time on Friday, October 17, 1969 explains the growing discontent with the United States' involvement in Vietnam. The article highlights the word moratorium in a new context. It was used to show the Nixon-Administration that the public is growing impatient with the war and wants out as soon as possible. The idea of M-Day united many Americans in their discontent. This article reflects some American sentiments when the war was far from over.

Transforming Hearts and Minds with the Literature of the Vietnam War
(<http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs.pdf>)

This is an essay written by Larry Johannessen, Assistant Professor of English at Saint Xavier University. This writing examines Vietnam from a different vantage point. The author tackles such questions as: Why is the Vietnam War Literature taught which literature is appropriate to teach, and how this literature should be addressed. To advance his argument regarding the impact of this literature, he has collected student responses to the Vietnam Literature. This resource is unique in that it analyzes the impact literature has on students.

b. Related resources about the documentary film genre

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Barnouw, Erik. *Documentary: a History of the Non-Fiction Film*. 2nd ed. Oxford UP, 1993. (<http://books.google.com/books>)

Erik Barnouw examines documentaries and filmmakers from 1895 to the present. He looks at new technology on documentary films and how a different social climate has impacted documentary films and filmmakers. Barnouw also includes rare photographs from his personal travels. This will help to get a sense of documentary films as they develop through the years.

Swann, Paul. *The British Documentary Film Movement 1926-1946*. Cambridge UP, 1989. (<http://books.google.com/books>)

It is important to see documentary films from many vantage points. This is a book tracing the British documentary film movement in the 1930s and 1940s. It includes analysis of governmental records and looks at John Grierson, who led the movement. The book shows the growth of cinema as it relates to documentary films and opposes the norms.

Renov, Michael. *Theorizing Documentary*. UK: Routledge, 1993. (<http://books.google.com/books?vid=ISBN0415903823>)

This book provides a collection of essays that help cover a wide range of different types of documentary films. Michael Renov asks seemingly simple questions like “What is documentary?” and “How fictional is non-fiction?”. This book includes examples from educational television to ethnographical documentaries in order to analyze the nature of the documentary form.

c. Glossary of useful film terms

Film editing glossary (<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/cinema/editing2.html>)

This provides a list of editing techniques that are evident in many documentary films. Davis utilizes many of these when filming *Hearts and Minds*. Thus, the viewer should be aware of these terms in order to, in part, see how Davis develops his documentary.

ITS center for technology: Multimedia Technology Glossary of terms (<http://its.unc.edu/tl/guides/irg-14.html>)

This website includes film editing techniques as well as a helpful glossary of terms that deal with the technology and production side of making film. The terms cover traditional image-production and new digital and computer terminology that are useful for any filmmaker to know.

Dartmouth writing program: Writing about film (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/humanities/film.shtml>)

This website, sponsored by Dartmouth University, features a long list of film terms and also provides guidance for students writing film papers. It addresses:

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the challenges of writing about film, kinds of papers, prewriting strategies, research tips, writing tips, glossary of film terms, and citing sources.

d. Film Reviews

Hearts and Minds review by David Ng

(<http://www.imagesjournal.com/2002/reviews/heartsminds/>)

David Ng observes that the film “gets around to blaming everyone”. David enjoys the film as a way of understanding the American involvement in Vietnam. He believes that Davis is successful in appealing to basic emotions and highest intellectual thoughts. This is blatantly a very opinionated film, yet it presents valid points.

Kanfer, Stefan. "War-Torn." *Time* 17 Mar. 1975.

(<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article>)

Written in 1975, Stefan Kanfer presents a critical view of Peter Davis' film. He condemns the film for its lack of accuracy when representing entire cultures. This is an excellent review if the weaknesses of *Hearts and Minds* are of interest.

Landesman, Cosmo. "Hearts and Minds." *The Sunday Times* 13 Nov. 2005.

Newspaper Sources. EBSCO. Trinity University Coates Library.

This is a review that appeared much later than the film was made. This appearance and opinion in today's society is important to note because it shows that the film still has an impact. Landesman calls the film unique and acknowledges that it is an anti-war film.

e. Scholarly treatment of the film

McCullough, Michelle. *Vietnam in a different light*, 2006.

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

This is a paper in which the editing techniques used by Peter Davis are examined. It seeks to prove that the choices made by the filmmaker created an anti-Vietnam War documentary that was one-sided and makes the viewer sympathize with the Vietnamese.

Landau, Saul. *Hearts and Minds: an American Film Trial*. Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media, 2004.

(<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC08folder/HeartsAndMinds.html>)

This essay analyzes the idea of shame and who the guilt should receive guilt. In essence, Landau says that the audience has a responsibility to pass the judgment. The author uses examples in the film based on the idea of shame. He suggests that certain figures, like General Westmoreland will never have the feeling of shame, regardless of the amount of Asian deaths brought about by the Vietnam War. This essay brings about the topic of shame, which is foreign to an American individualistic culture and a part of life in others.

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Tallent, Charles. *Hearts and Minds: Analysis of war propaganda and dehumanization*, 2006.

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

This paper examines the Vietnam War as it is portrayed in *Hearts and Minds*. It particularly focuses on the war propaganda and dehumanization that is evident throughout the documentary film. It is an applicable source to use because it will help draw parallels to other wartime propaganda and methods of dehumanization.

3. Video clip analysis

a. Explanation and set-up

This is a clip that shows the ability for Peter Davis to evoke emotion and present the American government as the “evil” aggressor. This particular scene shows the ignorance of what Davis wants to represent as, the face of America. Peter Davis juxtaposes a casual, peaceful interview with General Westmoreland with an intense display of grief, pain, and suffering by the Vietnamese people.

The viewer is unsuspecting of this transition and therefore, even more affected. Peter Davis sets up a regular, standard looking interview with a high ranking United States military officer. He chooses to cut to a burial scene of dead Vietnamese directly after General Westmoreland makes the comment that the “The Oriental doesn’t put the same high price on life as the Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient. And as the philosophy of the Orient expresses it, life is not important” (*Hearts and Minds* 1974). This calculated editing should be noted and examined further.

b. Link to video clip



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huFh760p-MA>

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c. Analysis

This video clip begins with the pain and suffering of the Vietnamese. It is interesting to note that the main figures in this scene who are meant to evoke the most emotion are women and children. The opening scene of this clip is centered on a woman who has just lost a loved one and is desperately trying to climb into the tomb. The overall scene is one of seclusion and Peter Davis gives this burial scene a sense of ultimate loneliness because it takes place in an open field where there are presumably no witnesses other than the mother, child, and military personnel. Davis strategically focuses on the little boy who longs for his father. Davis uses close shots to illuminate the pain and the tears of the young boy as they fall on his face and he crawls to kiss the photograph of his father.

Peter Davis continuously juxtaposes seemingly disassociated images together throughout the documentary in order to further his point. This scene is no exception and is debatably one of the most successful uses of editing in the film, for it evokes a high amount of emotion. General Westmoreland is the “spokesman” for the United States and against these images of a suffering woman and child, his cold and calm interview casts the American government and military in a negative light. There are many interviews in the documentary. However, Peter Davis chooses to select General Westmoreland because the image that surrounds his interview is also one of seclusion. This isolation is spiteful and in strict opposition to the previous scene and the ones that follow, of American soldiers standing in the streets while they destroy the oppressed Vietnamese soil. Westmoreland sits in a crisp suit near a lake and discusses the Vietnam War as though the Vietnamese people have no value of life or emotion. Peter Davis blatantly disagrees with these views and shows this by revealing this emotionally driven burial scene.

4. Discussion questions

- After watching this documentary, does Peter Davis’ anti-Vietnam War bias make some of the editing and image manipulations seem like propaganda?
- How could Peter Davis have shown a better representation of American soldiers in Vietnam?
- Which scenes and editing techniques evoked the most emotion? Were these emotions catered toward Americans or Vietnamese?
- Because Peter Davis chooses to use certain footage, interviews, and editing techniques, does this call into question the purpose of a documentary? *Hearts and Minds* is filled with real footage, yet it is altered to send a specific message. Does this decrease the credibility and validity of the documentary?
- Is *Hearts and Minds* a true documentary? Which type of documentary is this? Does it have elements of participatory, expository, and poetic?

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- Does this controversial documentary still impact today's generation? Are these emotions provoked simply because of the graphic images or as a result of editing techniques by Peter Davis?
- If one aspect of the film could be changed what would it be, which editing technique would best alter this change, and what would be the reasoning for it?
- Was this documentary a success? Why or why not?

5. Closing thoughts

Hearts and Minds is a film that covers everything from the politics behind the Vietnam War to the emotions of the victims, while the war taking place. The editing techniques performed by Peter Davis, which consisted of close shots, cuts, and the juxtaposition of unrelated images were cleverly intertwined to create a lasting message about the nature of war and its impact on both the oppressed and the oppressors. Therefore, it is important to examine how Peter Davis has put together his footage in order to prove a point and send a message to his audience.

In addition, it should be noted that this viewing guide is subjective and inevitably bias. Objective points regarding the film are addressed and the resources are generally well-represented. However, please keep in mind that this viewing guide does not reflect the intention of Peter Davis.

6. About the author of this guide

a. Short biography

I am a junior at Trinity University and have put together this pre and post-viewing guide for a Documentary Film class. I am a double minor in Media Studies and Spanish and I am majoring in History. It is my hope that this guide will assist people in becoming acquainted with the film as well as be critical of the editing techniques of Peter Davis as well as other documentary films.

b. Contact information

Email: michelle.mccullough@trinity.edu

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

Because I am posting this on the internet, if this viewer's guide is used for academics it is under fair use. Please email me if there are any questions regarding the analysis or the resources listed in the viewing guide.

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