



Viewing guide for *Obsession*

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Obsession – Pre-viewing guide

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1. Overview / Introduction

In today's world, the news is constantly filled with talk about the latest suicide bombing, or the most recent threat, but what force lies behind this explosion of terrorism. *Obsession: Radical Islam's War on the West* (Kopping 2005) attempts to explain the cause. *Obsession* is a recent documentary focused on exploring and presenting to the public a supposed threat from the radical sects of Islam. Wayne Kopping, along with Raphael Shore, created this film as an extension to their previous documentary on the Oslo Peace Accords, *Relentless: The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (Kopping 2003). Kopping, expanding on ideas from his first film, capitalizes off the global atmosphere post September 11 and the Iraq war, and creates a tour de force through experts, examples, and TV clippings expounding the emanate threat to all of western culture that organized Radical Islam represents.

The movie, structurally, is split into three main sets of arguments. The first is a group of interviews, focused on presenting expert opinions about Radical Islam. Secondly, the film displays examples of Islamic television, and attempts to analyze the meaning and the intent behind these shows. Finally, and probably with the most emphasis, the film draws a parallel between modern Radical Islam and Nazi Germany. Together, Kopping weaves these arguments into a representation of Islam as an impending terror that seems to be only seconds away from dooming the viewer.

From the film it is obvious that Kopping is quite passionate about this topic, but not nearly as passionate as some of the interviewees that are presented throughout the course of the film. These experts, ranging from anti-Semitism researchers, ex-Nazi Youths to even ex-PLO terrorist, voice their concerns about Radical Islam clearly and for the most part concisely. Each interview focused on a specific aspect of the "threat". These aspects included the anti-Semitic nature of Radical Islam, Radical Islam's plans to take down Israel, the propaganda nature of Radical Islam television, and the aggressive stance Radical Islam has shown towards the West. As a whole these experts represent Islam as a violent and aggressive radical force.

Next the film covers Islam's use of propaganda. Kopping uses very specific television clippings from what is to be assumed Islam television that show exaggerated stereotypes of Jewish people. These clips are accompanied by experts on propaganda speaking about how the television shows represent approaches that are common in standard manipulation techniques. They state that the use of fear is one of the most effective means of instilling hatred in large groups of people, and that Radical Islam has done exactly that against the concept of the 'West'. Kopping explains that the Muslim youth have been and still are trained to hate America and all that it stands for.

Finally, the film uses propaganda as a transition into the more shocking argument that in fact all Muslims share similar views to the Nazis. The film draws parallels between the Islam's and Nazi Germany's views on Jews as well as the techniques they have used to deal with them, including similar propaganda techniques. Kopping even delves into the history of Radical Islam and exposes the numerous, though tenuous, ties between Radical Islam's origin and Hitler, even claiming that there had been numerous meetings between the leaders of both groups. Even the ex-Nazi Youth claims that Radical Islam shares many of the same views as World War II Germany.

Both in the beginning and end Kopping reminds the viewer that there are many Muslims that are not a part of the Radical sects, though for the majority of the film he glosses over this fact. The film

generalizes many of the problems that it talks about to the entirety of Islam, falling into many of the same practices that it claims the Radicals use. While watching this film keep an eye out for the three main arguments Kopping uses and always remember what the director so quickly said and then forgot, the majority of the Muslim community do not share the views of their Radical counterpoints, and are not the ones supposedly being addressed by this film.

Enjoy.

2. Questions to keep in mind before watching the movie

- The film talks a lot about propaganda techniques, have you ever used these techniques? Do you see the film using these techniques?
- What is the main point of the film? Is the documentary's purpose just to expound on the threat of Radical Islam, or is there more? Does Kopping present the viewer with a way to solve the problem?
- Do you know anybody who is Muslim? What are their views on Radical Islam? Do they share the views of the film?

3. Where to obtain this film

At the writing of this viewing guide, *Obsession: Radical Islam's War on the West* is not available for purchase. It is assumed by the author that the film will be available from the following sources, in the future.

- The [OCLC World Catalog](#) – A collection of Libraries from around the world
- [Amazon](#) – Order new copies online
- The official [Obsession](#) website – pre-orders are now open
- Rental Listings at [NetFlix](#) or [Blockbuster](#)
- Presently available on [Google Video](#)

Obsession – Post-viewing guide

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1. Overview

To gain a better critical understanding of the film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War on the West*, this guide will delve into the many unstated aspects of the documentary. With any film there are many messages and themes underlying the superficial content, ideas that are only uncovered after more careful viewing. In the case of *Obsession*, the film is saturated with propagandist techniques, the very same techniques the film claims Radical Islam uses. This guide will examine these techniques, what they were used for, and who they are being used against.

The target audience for this film is complicated and is split into two different sets. The first is largely American. The film was shown on the Fox Television Network, a television network that reaches the majority of the United States. The film also has had limited release in theatres within the states. Logistically, the target market is America, but on a more conceptual level the film and its techniques are not aimed at a specific group of people, but are instead intended for all “Western” viewers. This film was created with the intent of spreading fear of Islam in the “West”. But, what is the west? There really is no answer to that question, and that plays right into the propaganda techniques used. In the case of the film the “West”, is every non Muslim in a democratic or capitalist country. The beauty of this is the film, using the fear of losing their culture and their way of life, can reach out and affect every one of these people.

The techniques used in the film, are perfect examples of classic propagandist methods¹. The film is focused on arousing as much fear as possible in the viewer, because as it is said in the film fear is the best way to control large groups of people. To create this fear, the film uses a few main techniques. The first is charged rhetoric. Even the title is charged, it makes the audience feel like the entire West and what it stands for is under attack. The film repeatedly reminds the viewer that Radical Islam is a threat to them, that they are in danger. There are repeated clips, of people chanting “Death to America”, and all of this is used to make the viewer scared, to make them feel like they must do something. The second technique implemented is the use of emotional imagery. When talking about Islam, Kopper bombards the viewer with, fearsome animalistic imagery like the squid, or even more direct, clips of innocent children dying. The end result is that the viewer associates this imagery with what is being said, the film creates a tie between Islam and death. Finally, not only does the film equate Radical Islam, to Nazis, it does something even more insidious. It generalizes the group, from the radical sect to the entirety of Islam, making the claim that the problem lies with all Muslims. In the end these techniques are only a few of the techniques used to cause fear, to make the audience feel like there is a global threat to their way of life and in turn make them feel like they should do something about it.²

Hopefully, this guide will be used to foster a better understanding of the film's goal, a goal to spread fear throughout the world. It is important to remember that this film is not unique, audiences should not only be wary of its message, but of all films' messages. Every film, in its own way uses propaganda techniques to sway the viewers' opinions. The one thing people can do is become a more critical viewer while watching these films. They should not accept things at face value instead examine and discover

¹ Institute for Propaganda Analysis. *The Fine Art of Propaganda*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939
² Delwiche, A. (2002 Sep.) *Propaganda Critic*. November 12, 2006, <http://www.propagandacritic.com>

each film's view and opinion and weigh it against their own. If this happens, we won't have to worry about films like *Obsession* spreading their whispers of fear around the world.

2. Useful resources

a. Related resources about Islam culture and relations

Islam and Islamic Studies Resources (<http://godlas.myweb.uga.edu/>)

Hosted and supported by the faculty at the University of Georgia, this site contains "short introductory essays on various aspects of Islam containing numerous annotated links and is regarded by scholars as the most comprehensive academic website on Islam."

Daniel Pipes (<http://www.danielpipes.org>)

Daniel Pipe, director of the Middle East Forum, presents his views on the Middle East and Islam. A strong supporter of fighting Radical Islam, his blog has garnered much attention and has been said to be "the single most accessed internet source of specialized information on the Middle East and Islam."

Ijtihad (<http://www.ijtihad.org/>)

Dr. Murqtedar Khan of the University of Delaware, maintains his site as a resource for articles and research on Islam US relations. The focus is on promoting a clearer and more religious tolerant view of the world from both sides. His column is updated frequently, and has insightful commentary on the world events.

b. Related resources about the documentary film and propaganda genre

Andrew Spicer, "Extending people's minds for a brief time every day: the wartime propaganda short" Journal of Media Practice, Vol 4 Issue 2, 2003

Andrew Spicer explores the propaganda documentary shorts of World War II, both their techniques as well as their significance. A good source to understand some of the less well known beginnings of propaganda as it relates to the documentary genre.

David Altheide, "Terrorism and the Politics of Fear.", Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologis, Vol 6. Issue 4, 2006.

David Altheide presents a detailed analysis of the use of techniques to manage and control terror. The article examines how news articles after major terrorist attacks play off the audience beliefs and assumptions to promote and spread fear. Many of the same techniques are applied in the documentary genre.

Bernardo Ruiz, "Why Make Activist Videos", Media Rights, August 2001 (http://www.mediarights.org/news/articles/why_make_activist_videos.php)

Six different filmmakers discuss the details about making a activist documentary film. They delve into what is needed to successfully achieve one, and what type of audience to present it to. These directors also discuss the social condition and analyze the need for activist films in today's culture.

c. Glossaries of useful terms

IMDB Film Term Glossary (<http://imdb.com/Glossary/>)

The Internet Movie Database has compiled and defined a very thorough list of film terms. An invaluable source for looking up and understand terms used in film analysis. The Glossary is alphabetically indexed

Propaganda Critic (<http://www.propagandacritic.com/>)

Dr. Aaron Delwiche of Trinity University, has compiled an exhaustive collection of propaganda analysis. Not only is it a useful site for finding explanations and definitions of propaganda terms, it is also a very helpful site for research into propaganda analysis.

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

Nichols, in his book, presents the reader with a very broad and encompassing overview of the documentary form. This includes defining the key terms of the genre, as well as explaining their significance in light of the whole. This is a very good book, if you are looking to gain a better understanding of the genre.

d. Film Reviews

Frank Gaffney Jr. "What we fight for." March 21, 2006. Washington Times.
(<http://www.washingtontimes.com/commentary/20060320-093053-5818r.htm>)

Frank Gaffney presents a positive review of the movie for the Washington Times, delving into the need for action and expanding on many points the film made. The article is placed under commentary, as it is more focused on expressing his opinion on the situation than a review of the film.

Colin Covert. "Movie Review: 'Obsession'". September 07, 2006. Start Tribune.
(<http://www.startribune.com/1553/story/662344.html>)

In the review, Colin Covert discusses how the film is a fairly balanced and well made documentary. He states that it "draws extensively from Arab TV broadcasts few Americans have seen." Over all he gives it 3 out 4 stars.

e. Scholarly treatments of the film

Phillip Coleman, "Obsession with Propaganda," 2006.
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/p.coleman.2006.obsession.pdf>)

In this research paper, Phillip Coleman explores the different propaganda techniques used throughout the movie, *Obsession*. Using the movie as an example, he shows how the documentary genre itself is inherently crafted towards propaganda. Phillip's paper is an interesting analysis of the implication of propaganda.

Dina Sayyed "Objective Obsession?" 2006.
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/d.sayyed.2006.obsession.pdf>)

Dina Sayyed explores how *Obsession*, while seeming moderate and responsible, is in fact propagandist in nature. The paper covers the use of rhetoric in the film as well as the dichotomy the film tries to create between us and the rest of Islam. Dina's paper is a thorough examination into the film's demonization of Muslims.

David Altheide & Jennifer Grimes "WAR PROGRAMMING: The Propaganda Project and the Iraq War," Sociological Quarterly, Vol. 46 Issue 4, 2005

The article addresses the revolution in propaganda techniques, specifically how they have formed around the idea of mass media distribution. The paper also covers the author's theories on the use of propaganda to initiate the Iraq war.

2. Video-clip analysis

a. Explanation and set-up

This clip, from near the beginning of the film *Obsession*, is used to introduce the threat of Radical Islam. The combination of news footage, interviews, and computer generated graphics, both catch the viewer up on the recent history of Radical Islam terrorism, as well as lay the seeds of fear in the viewer's mind that will later be cultivated by the rest of the film. Some things to note about this clip are its use of music, editing, and imagery.

b. Link to the video clip



Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hXMNR1YB-A>

c. Analysis

This clip presents examples of both rhetorical propaganda techniques as well as graphical. In this way it serves as a perfect example to analyze the general trends within *Obsession*. Before any broad statements can be made, the use of each of these techniques must be examined separately.

First, the clip is saturated with fear inducing rhetoric, the first statement being one of the most obvious. “The tentacles of terrorism are reaching out to every corner of the world.” The use of words such as “tentacles”, “war”, and “jihad” not only demonizes the Muslims, but ensures that the viewer begins to worry about their livelihood, and thus fear is cultivated.

Even more interesting is the clip’s use of audio and visuals. This clip focuses on associating the imagery of the death of innocent children with the introduction of Radical Islam. The effect of this is that the viewer forms an unconscious link between the two concepts. This is only reinforced further with the use of a computer graphic showing the spread of x’s over the world, which is both reminiscent of a war map as well as a plague. The film’s goal is to convince the viewer that in fact Radical Islam is the plague, and that it’s “tentacles” are spreading across the globe. The music on the other hand is intense and in a way frightening. It increases the viewer’s heart rate and leaves them in a state of tension which makes them even more open to the propaganda techniques being used.

These two techniques are continuously used throughout the film in an attempt to instill in the viewer a sense of fear, not from just any type of terrorism, but terrorism from Islam specifically. Both this clip, and the film as a whole, promote and emphasize this fear as a means to manipulate the viewer. As the film stated, this fear alone is one of the greatest tools that a propagandist has to use and Kopping uses it quite effectively.

3. Discussion questions

Do you think that the director’s goal was to create a propaganda film? If so, what could be his reasons for doing so? If not, then why are so many propaganda techniques present, can they be used for other reasons?

The film effectively uses imagery and graphics to both support its point and to alter the viewer’s perception of the film, do you think this approach was effective? What was the one image that stuck in your mind, and why do you think it did so? Do you think the director intended that image to be so powerful?

Have you seen similar propaganda techniques used in other media? Do you see these types of methods on television? If so, what are the implications for our society that these techniques are used so often?

Can propaganda be used for good? Are there ethical means of going about using such manipulative techniques, or should we always uphold the need for absolute truth and clarity in our films? Is propaganda any different than an editorial?

At the end of the film, the director talks about how we need to get involved and the problem must be dealt with, but he leaves it open ended. He never gives the viewer an exact thing that they could do. Was this intentional, or did Kopping not completely finish the film? What do you think his intention was for the “call to action”?

Throughout the film *Radical Islam* is compared to Nazis, is this type of argument overused in today's society? Is Radical Islam related to the Nazis, or is it possible that any argument or way of thought can be some how associated with Nazi Germany?

4. Closing thoughts

In the end, *Obsession* is a well made documentary, and an even more well made propaganda film, but we shouldn't out right shun it for being so. It can teach the audience a lot about propaganda in general as well as a bit about the documentary genre as a whole. The viewer can hopefully learn from the movie and this guide the significance of propaganda and how most films; in fact, do try to manipulate their audiences.

Hopefully, the reader has gained some insight into how propaganda techniques were used throughout the film, as well as become a more critical viewer of films in general. The best way to stop propaganda like this is to educate your fellow audience members. If we all know what to look for, we can see it for what it truly is, and then evaluate the film on the merits of its opinions and not the truth that it claims to be showing.

6. About the author of this guide

a. Short biography

Phillip Coleman is presently an undergraduate student attending Trinity University. He is planning on double majoring in Computer Science and Communications with an emphasis on film. He has done research into the effects of propaganda, and has plans to continue this research

His views on propaganda include a strong emphasis on understanding it, and spotting it within more common main stream media. He does not rule out the use of propaganda, but encourages the evaluation of the opinions that are behind it as well as the argumentation supporting those opinions.

b. Contact information

E-mail: phillip.coleman@trinity.edu

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

I encourage the use of this viewing guide as an educational tool. The more people who are able to use it to become more informed and critical viewers the more likely audiences will be able to spot propaganda in the future. If you intend to use it please make sure to cite me for the information being used, and I would appreciate if you would send me an e-mail with any feedback you have on this guide. Thank you very much.