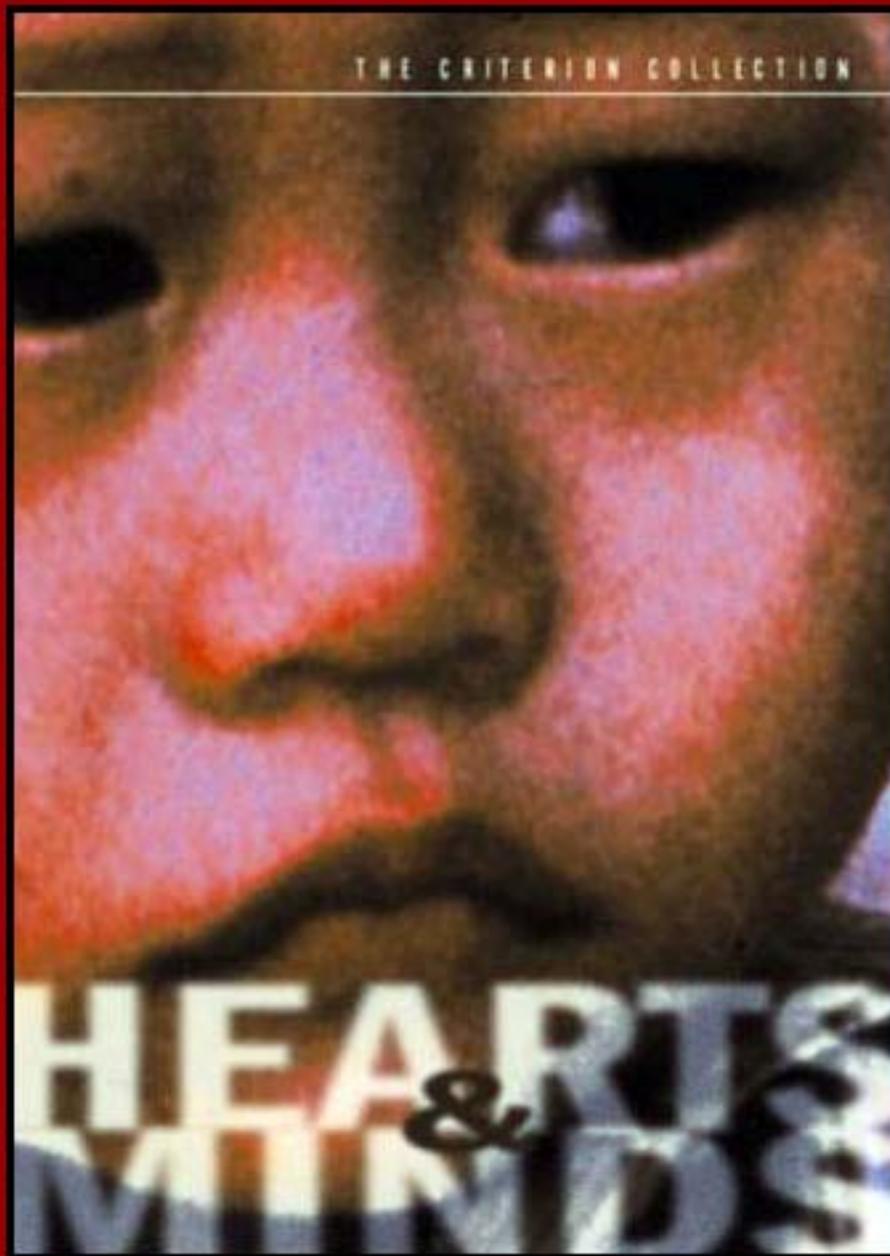




## **Viewing guide for *Hearts & Minds***

Rachel Etheridge (rachel.etheridge@trinity.edu)  
Trinity University, December 2006



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## ***Hearts & Minds- Pre-Viewing Guide***

**Rachel Etheridge, December 2006**  
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas



### **1. Overview/Introduction:**

The documentary *Hearts & Minds* (Davis, 1974) is a film based on the conflicting attitudes in America regarding the Vietnam War. In this documentary, Davis reveals the truth and disparity of America's involvement in the War, with no apologies for his lack of objectivity. The film uses a combination of metaphors, images, and interviews to reveal the perspective of the director and justify his point of view. Through quotes with disabled veterans, widowed Vietnamese women, and corrupt political officials, the audience member is left with a strong feeling of emptiness and guilt. There are multiple images throughout, with a scene of the fierce action of soldiers and quick cut to an American high school coach yelling at his football players. Powerful, moving, and somewhat disheartening, the film often leaves the viewer dismayed with the American involvement in Vietnam, along with the American mentality altogether. The emotional appeals are used to connect with the reader on such a controversial issue and event in America's history, while the information and verbal messages are conveyed to justify the argument. There are multiple close ups of the victims of the war, along with their emotional rhetoric, which ultimately give the film its strength and power.

Although the idea of subjective documentary is very common in today's society, this film was the first in its category. No other films on the Vietnam War prior to *Hearts & Minds* took this type of critical stance without any remorse. Peter Davis believed in his cause and presented his ideas subjectively, but without any false information or twisted angles. In reality, there is no other way to do this, because objectivity cannot exist within documentary, and specifically when the topic is based upon historical controversy. Therefore, this documentary presented a perspective on an extremely controversial issue in a way to move the viewer and realize the mistakes their country made during this time period.

This viewer's guide will work as a framework and guidelines to keep in mind while watching this documentary, as well as an attempt to facilitate the viewer afterwards. Although easy to initially understand and grasp the director's perspective, there are multiple complex and challenging issues and circumstances revealed. The film leaves the viewer with large, open-ended questions for the individual audience member to answer. This guide will encourage the reader to apply their own perspective and reasoning to the ideas delivered. Ultimately, the objectives of this viewer's guide is to

bolster the right of the viewer to gain his own perspective, despite the emotional appeals, while still maintaining the respect towards Davis's style and performance as a filmmaker.

## **2. Questions to Keep in Mind Before Watching:**

- As the film cuts between scenes in Vietnam and American individuals, think about the blatant emotional manipulation, racist rhetoric, and obvious comparisons. Is the goal of these emotional targets meant to demonize the American leaders involved, or simply to create a larger support for the humanization of Vietnam citizens?
- Think about the filmmaker's style and format in presenting this film. The film is composed of real footage, personal interviews, and devastating images. Davis orders the storyline to create the greatest impact on the viewer. Although you only hear Davis once throughout the entire film, could you consider this a silent narrative?
- Continually think about the name of the documentary "Hearts & Minds" while watching the film. In what different ways and areas does this title apply? What do you think the director's intent was in using this as the title of this controversial film?
- Who is the target audience for this documentary? Why? Do you think Davis was successful in reaching this audience with a message they could identify with?

## **3. Where to obtain copies of this film:**

- [The OCLC Worldwide Libraries](#)
- New and Used copies on [Amazon.com](#)
- New and used copies on [Ebay](#)
- New and used copies at [moviemail-online](#)
- Rental listings at [Netflix](#) and [Blockbuster](#)

## ***Hearts & Minds- Post-Viewing Guide***

**Rachel Etheridge, December 2006**  
Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas

### **1. Overview:**

Hearts & Minds is challenging for the viewer in terms of forcing an individual to determine their own set of beliefs regarding this issue as well as confront them with issues and opinions the viewer originally might not have been subjected to. Therefore, this guide will be specifically designed to help those particular viewers to understand and analyze this film by applying their own views in accordance with the subjectivity of the film. The target audience of this viewer's guide is centered toward young adults ranging from age 16-28, and more specifically aimed at individuals within this age range with a higher education and interest in film studies. However, this guide can be helpful for all viewers in multiple ways.

Initially, this film is good for the genre of documentary as a whole. It clearly demonstrates the reality of subjectivity in all documentary film. The majority of documentary films are based on historical events, largely because of their controversial and argumentative nature. Therefore, to fully present all sides of the story in a completely objective manner would be an insanely exhausting task. Regardless of an individual's efforts, there would still be suggestions of subjectivity, consciously or unconsciously.

Therefore, Hearts & Minds enforces the right of documentary filmmakers to make films representing their own subjective perspectives. However, there is a line between maintaining your right to present your point of view and presenting false and manipulative information. Therefore, the documentary filmmaker is responsible for deciding upon where that boundary lies.

In addition, this guide helps the viewer understand the circumstances that surrounded this event in history, as well as some of the alternate viewpoints that multiple individuals possessed. For individuals under 30 years old, this event in history is only something they learned about in history books; the reality of the Vietnam War is only presented to them through the media, film, books, and those who experienced it. Therefore, their perspective is easily molded and may not be aware of all that happened. The viewer is challenged to look at the perspective of the filmmaker and question his motives.

While surveying the filmmaker's motives, the viewer is also encouraged to question the emotional appeals created throughout. The parallels between the harsh government officials and the torment of the poor Vietnamese widows and children create a huge emotional response. Is this manipulative attempt reasonable? Although the stock footage of children crying violently over the loss of their father is legitimate, when juxtaposed with images of General Westmoreland quoting that "Vietnamese people don't value life", it makes the message that much more strong. The question then asks if Davis

was justified in creating these parallels and making the American government appear in such a negative light.

Therefore, when using this guide to think about the film *Hearts & Minds*, it is most important to apply your own set of ethics and morals to survey the content of the messages delivered and their ultimate rationale.

## **2. Useful Resources:**

### **a. Related Resources about the Vietnam War:**

- The Vietnam War: America's Longest War (<http://www.vietnamwar.com/>)

Based on the American.net website, this is an extensive website that has a multitude of ideas, perspectives, and summaries of the Vietnam War. There is a vast explanation of the events that led up to the Vietnam War, those that occurred throughout, and the physical and mental aftermath. There are also multiple accounts and outlooks given by veterans and soldiers, as well as citizens, both in concurrence and disagreement, with the Vietnam War.

- The Anti-War Movement in the United States (<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/vietnam/antiwar.html>)

This website goes through the steps of the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War. It summarizes the movements' goals, events, and circumstances that occurred throughout the climax of the movement. It also provides a timeline of the event and the relative success and importance of the Anti-War Movement at this time.

- The American Experience: Vietnam Online (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/>)

This website was produced by the US Public Broadcasting System in accompaniment with their television series: *Vietnam: A Television History*. There is a glossary of key terms and slogans used by the American government, as well as character analyses of the major figures involved, including six from North Vietnam. There is also a section called Reflections, which features personal essays from twelve different people from both Vietnam and the United States, focusing on their perspective and experiences during the war.

### **b. Related resources about the documentary film genre**

The Bright Lights Film Journal (<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/>)

With multiple scholarly articles regarding film studies, this website has a specific section dedicated to just documentaries. It also maintains in-depth definitions of complex film terms and genres, such as film noir.

War and Anti-War Films (<http://www.filmsite.org/warfilms.html>)

This website goes through the beginnings of films on war, both in support and protest. It provides a general analysis on war documentaries as a genre, as well as their repercussions upon American society. It also gives a long list of films from each war era, along with a brief summary of the intent of the film.

Radical Times: The Antiwar Movement of the 1960s  
(<http://library.thinkquest.org/27942/indexf.htm>)

This youthful, student-oriented website focuses partially on the war, but specifically on the cultural effects and impact upon modern day society. It contains photos, videos, discussion forums, and multiple references to explore and explain the circumstances surrounding the Vietnam War.

### **c. Glossaries of Useful film terms**

- Internet Movie Database Movie Terminology (<http://imdb.com/Glossary/>)

This extensive glossary of film terms is very helpful not only in its fundamental definitions, but also based upon its extensive knowledge of all films ever produced. It also has multiple links attached to other sites with reviews, comments, and summaries.

- Cinematic terms: A Film-Making Glossary  
(<http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms15.html>)

This glossary has an extensive collection of film terms, along with specific examples to explain the terminology. This helps to demonstrate the definition with images that the viewer can relate to.

- Glossary of Film terms by Joel Schlemowitz  
([http://homepage.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film\\_courses/glossary\\_of\\_film\\_terms/glossary.html](http://homepage.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film_courses/glossary_of_film_terms/glossary.html))

Created and maintained by an actual filmmaker, this website is immense and designed to be used as an accompaniment to a film course.

### **d. Film Reviews**

- Hearts & Minds by Rachel Gordon, Toxic Universe.  
<http://www.culturedose.net/review.php?rid=10003479>

This is an excellent film review by an individual that was born after the Vietnam War; therefore her perspective adds to the prime target audience for this viewer's guide. She distinctly analyzes the use of different viewpoint used in the film and the powerful message, although sometime painful, emotions harnessed throughout.

- Silent Majority Report by Michael Atkinson, the Village Voice.  
(<http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0442,atkinson,57660,20.html>)

Rather than centering upon character analysis, this film review tackles Davis's use of juxtaposition and cuts to impact, interrogate, and interact with it's a Audience. It also discusses the propagandist aspects of the film, but celebrates them as innovative for this conflicted time period.

- Hearts & Minds by Heather McIntosh, Reality Film.com  
(<http://realityfilm.com/blog/2006/06/02/hearts-and-minds/>)

With a focus on the deeper meanings and representations of the documentary, this review talks about the significance of the title on multiple levels. It also has a thorough analysis of the course of the film and a specific focus on the powerful rhetoric devices that give the film such a lasting impact.

#### **e. Scholarly treatments of the film**

- Rachel Etheridge, "Can Documentary Filmmakers Truly Be Objective: A Closer Look at Hearts and Minds", 2006.  
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/r.etheridge.2006.hearts.and.minds.pdf>)

This paper is a specific accessory to this viewer's guide. Written by the same author, this article focuses on the some of the same questions posed throughout this guide. It serves as an aid to the viewer by explaining some of the technical applications used in the film, as well as the director's style and intent.

- Michelle McCullough, "Vietnam in a Different Light," 2006  
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/m.mccullough.2006.hearts.and.minds.pdf>)

This article, although rather critical of Davis in general, specifically focuses on his use of images and rhetoric to emotionally persuade viewers. Although this author does not specifically agree with these tactics, and is therefore slightly more negative, it provides an excellent overview of the techniques and persuasive devices.

- Kaatie Cooper, "Contradiction and Irony in Hearts & Minds", 2006  
(<http://www.trinity.edu/adelwich/documentary/k.cooper.2006.hearts.and.minds.pdf>)

In addition to the previous two articles, this article focuses on the use of contradiction and irony in the documentary, as well as its legitimacy, due to the controversial nature of the time period. It further gives support for Davis's clear subjectivity and use of moving images and persuasive devices.

### **3. Video Clip Analysis**

#### **a. Explanation and set-up**

The video clip shown below is a small scene from the *Hearts and Minds* documentary. It shows two veterans of the war talking about the thrills and excitement of war, and specifically blowing things up. It cuts from their explanations to the actual destruction of the Vietnamese lands. An interesting factor regarding these interviews is how these grown men speak of bombs and total detonation as though they were children. They describe it as "exciting" and overall very satisfying, when in reality, those actions are destroying people and their homes.

#### **b. Link to the video clip**



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YO18E4w82CU>

#### **c. Analysis**

When looking at this clip, one is forced to focus upon the interviewees' childish and immature perspective on the action of war. They appear to view it as a game, in which they are having fun and only playing, when in reality they are destroying entire communities. They are comfortable, at home, or secure at some place in the United States while they speak of these events. Davis sends an extremely powerful message when he juxtaposes the scenes of explosion with the man making explosion signals with his hands. He does it in such a casual manner, while the actions bomb droppings reveal the actual damage that is being done.

This clip, on a connotative level, is speaking regarding the thrill and exhilaration of air warfare. However, on a denotative level, this clip is analyzing American culture. As early as young children, we are dehumanized to violence and destruction. On television, video games, cartoons, and a multitude of other media vehicles, we are constantly bombarded with violent images and actions. In addition to this, we are

trained to fight, and maintain the “us versus them” mentality. This mimics the clip of the high school football players being yelled at by their coach to “go get them and beat the enemy.” These individuals being interviewed clearly reveal this perspective. Rather than being upset and bothered by actions that are devastating to entire communities, they are focusing on the entertainment levels and the thrills received. By the appropriation of this mentality, they place themselves at the same level.

It also shows the separation between the United States civilians and the Vietnamese people. With no real way of understanding, the American people often were unable to view Vietnam as similar to them. Especially with the use of racist terms such as “gook,” the American population saw their actions in Vietnam as distant from them as the man describing the bombs and how stimulating it was.

#### **4. Discussion questions**

- When watching the clip, what was your initial reaction to the interviews? If it was acceptance, do you think your American cultural background was a factor in that understanding?
- Is the “us versus them” discourse a commonality simply within American culture? Or is this use of oppositional dialects a universal problem, and if so, in what aspect did it develop? Power, territory, religion?
- In times of war abroad, how can countries improve their citizens’ awareness and interest in the actions of their country’s military, while not distinctly viewing it? How does the media aid or debilitate this goal?
- Is this American competitive mentality gender-oriented or spread to all individuals, regardless of sex? The examples all show males (football players, male soldiers), but what about the increase in female soldiers? Will this impact the “us v. them” mentality?

#### **5. Closing thoughts**

This guide is meant to specifically ask the questions that Peter Davis asks in his documentary *Hearts & Minds*, but in a more constructive and straightforward manner. Davis relies heavily upon emotional persuasive appeals, and although this may have been necessary at the time, the American public is now ready to fully engage in discussion.

Therefore, when watching this film, it is important to think rationally and critically throughout. There are a multitude of manipulative juxtapositions, images, and comparisons presented to convince the viewer of Davis’s perspective. However, it is important for one to maintain respect for Davis as an excellent filmmaker and director. He makes no apologies for his style and format, which further assists him in his success. As a result, this guide asks the viewer to think critically, yet maintain a degree of respect for Davis as an extraordinary documentary filmmaker. Although

one may not agree with his methods of manner of presentation, but one cannot argue with the degree of excellence in which he performs it.

## **6. About the Author of this Guide**

### **a. Short biography**

I, Rachel Etheridge, am a Communications major/Communication Management minor at Trinity University in San Antonio, TX. Originally from Paris, Tennessee, I have a special interest in film studies. As a senior planning to graduate in May, 2007, I plan to attend graduate school with a specialization in Marketing.

### **b. Contact Information**

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

This viewer's guide is based completely on individual perspective and bias. Although it has been created to act as an assistance and accompaniment to the documentary, it does not speak for the filmmaker or documentary.