

Vietnam – full metal jacket essay



Stanley Kubrick explores the behaviour of men in battle.

This movie focuses on the training of a battalion of men from the U. S. Marine Corp. , and shows their involvement in the army, from the moment they arrive at the training centre, on Parris Island, through their dehumanizing training programme, all the way to the turning point of the Vietnam War, which was when the climactic battle of the TET Offensive took place. It is the Vietnam War portrayed as World War Two, cocky and trigger-happy. The attitude of the director in this film is that of a mocking individual.

Stanley Kubrick seems to perceive the Vietnam War as a joke, especially in his movie. Firstly the main character is Private Joker, whose name is mockery enough, but he is seen sporting, throughout the movie, a badge with a peace symbol, and a helmet with “ born to kill” written across the front of it.

Apparently he is expressing the “ diversity of man”, but for a lot of people, it can be interpreted as a ridicule of the war in Vietnam. Private Joker is not a part of a combat squad in this movie, his job is as a military journalist, and so for him to be wearing a peace symbol, and a helmet with the slogan “ born to kill” on it, is rather irrelevant, and perhaps describes the way Stanley Kubrick felt about the War, that nobody was on top of anything, and that the troops did not know what to think of their situation, on whether it was right to kill or not.

Also there is a brief reference to the political situation in America at the time. One major thing that made it look like Kubrick was mocking the Vietnam War was the part in the movie when Private Joker, writing for “ Stars and Stripes” (a military newspaper) as a military journalist, writes in one of his articles, a

fake body count, solely for the purpose of building morale, within the American troops. Using that example, it would seem that Kubrick is taking a swing at the military's heavy ad-campaign to sell the war, during the TET Offensive. Stanley Kubrick felt that the Americans were using troops that may well have been too young, and some of who may have been not be able to handle it mentally, and so he felt the need to show us (the audience) the extensive, and extremely dehumanizing process of training of these youngsters who one day wished to become Marine Corps. Through this process we see that Sgt. Hartman, the drill sergeant, or training instructor for the new recruits, demoralizes his students.

He tears down their defences, their relationships, realigns their sex drives, he marries love and violence, and each soldier to their very own rifle. He shows how intense training can get, and how at one point, it can take its toll on you if you are not equipped to handle it. A certain soldier (Private Pyle) gets pushed over the edge during his training. Pyle is a fat, slow-witted man, whose ridiculous grin becomes a psycho's sadistic smile when something within him snaps. Private Pyle shows clear signs of emotional instability after being pushed to his absolute maximum by Sgt.

Hartman. Growing tired of taking the punishment for Private Pyle's mistakes, the other men give him a brutal payback beating, which seems to just tip him over the edge of sanity. After this incident he becomes withdrawn, and extremely non responsive, until he eventually breaks down in an explosion of violence that is extremely shocking, but deep down we can see that it was clearly imminent sooner or later. Stanley Kubrick may have also been trying to show comparison, by splitting the film up into two parts, firstly the training

camp, and then the TET Offensive, in Vietnam. He hangs the film by a thread and wants the audience to look deep into it. He picks it apart slowly, and piece by piece, until it becomes like an unsolved jigsaw puzzle, and he leaves it up to us to decide if it's a bad thing, or a good thing, this "training and fighting for your country" scenario.

If Stanley Kubrick were to take the war in Vietnam as a serious thing, he would for certain, have not focused on how brainwashed the Americans became within their training centre, which took almost half of the film. Kubrick spent a lot of time on this because it is clear that he wanted us to think about this process before Americans were thrown into the war, and how they have to be so intensively trained to kill, before they can do it as second nature. Almost like they haven't the strength or willpower to be thrown head first into a War, and give 100% for their country and what they believe in. He was showing us how by dehumanizing trainees, it makes them into animals, where thinking is a vice, and killing is a virtue.

He shows us how by uprooting a human beings moral fibres, and turning them on their head, you can create a perfect weapon, but maybe something that's too perfect, and after crossing a certain line in the process of training, there is no going back. If you have been in the War and you kill a hundred men, you can't go back to living an ordinary life again afterwards. Maybe Kubrick is trying to tell us that War is a life changing experience and that the brutal dehumanization of trainees at the camp on Parris Island, can alter people's lives, and might not necessarily help us win wars. Why don't we train a soldier to an extent, and then leave it up to him if he chooses to kill his opponent in War, or simply disarm and knock him out. We shouldn't take

away human's morale fibres. Nobody, not even God, if there is one, has the right to take away what defines you as an individual human being.

From my previous studies on this topic, I would have to say that I fully agree with Stanley Kubrick's interpretation of the Vietnam War, and his attitude portrayed throughout the film. I think that he is right to say that quite simply: America's attitude towards Vietnam in the War was a joke. I have nothing bad to say about this film, as it sums up the way I feel about the Vietnam War. The Americans over trained their youth to the point where they had nothing to define them as human beings, and Stanley Kubrick has showed this well throughout the first half of his movie, which was whole heartedly devoted to showing the audience the gruelling process of dehumanizing (they call it training) American Marine Corps.

In the film the enemies are portrayed as ruthless, as they attack the Americans on the eve of the TET Ceasefire, and this shows that the Americans had to fight back in "Self Defence". The attitude of the war, from the viewpoint of both the Americans and the Vietnamese, is brought across as extremely hostile, and merciless. As Private Joker quoted "A day without blood is like a day without sunshine." He is implying that the war is boring unless there is bloodshed, and more specifically, he would like to be the cause of that bloodshed, and kill people. Joker was the pivotal character in this film who seems to be the only one who survived the training without it taking any serious psychological impact on him. He was happy to be himself, a military journalist, but as we see throughout the film, his willpower becomes less and less, until eventually he kills for the first time, before quoting yet again "The dead know only one thing, it is better to be alive.

" Rather cynical I would say. He is being cocky, and obviously trying to make a joke out of the situation, but he doesn't realise that he has actually taken a human being off the face of the Earth. The reason he doesn't realize this: He has been demoralized throughout his time at training with his other trainees on Parris Island. During his time as a military journalist, I think that it is obvious how Joker has been demoralized, despite his willpower to stop himself from killing people. He says " I wanted to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture, and kill them. I wanted to be the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill.

" He is boasting about killing people, he would be happy and proud to kill someone, and this is what Kubrick tries to get across in the film, that the way that the American Government has trained the Marine Corps, is wrong, by spending so much time showing the intensity of it. And at the end of the day I feel the same way about this. And that is why I think Kubricks' interpretation of the film was completely true and correct.