

The Hanoi Hilton

The *Hanoi Hilton* is a belated valentine to the POWs of Vietnam. A valentine still largely undelivered. The American Legion, along with some other Vets groups, maintains that this Cannon production has been backdoored out of national distribution because of pressure from the Hollywood establishment. These groups allege that it is only because of "incorrect politics" that this film has not been made available to a wider viewing audience. I'm going to tell you up front--I think they may be correct.

Vietnamese captors ease off on the prisoners, the scenes degenerate into a series of vignettes reminiscent of *Stalag 17*.)

The most powerful scenes in the film are not those of physical torture by the Vietnamese though, but those relatively quiet scenes turning on the idea of betrayal. When the first American who is tortured breaks, he is devastated, not by the torture, but in finding out that he is the first to break. When the weak character portrayed by Paul La Mat gives the Vietnamese information, we

THE JADE EYE: MOVIE AND TELEVISION REVIEWS

By C. W. Heiser

Because this film is so bound up in politics, and in the politics of the Vietnam war, which for us here and now is still politics in the true emotional sense, I will go straight to the source and review *The Hanoi Hilton* using Matthew Arnold's three criteria for criticism. That is, and I paraphrase: 1. What is the artist trying to do? 2. How well does the artist succeed in doing it? 3. Does the work exhibit "high seriousness"? (Does it touch the human condition?) Embracing the politics, does the movie still work?

The Hanoi Hilton was produced, written and directed by Lionel Chetwynd. In this film, Chetwynd's obvious purpose is to show us the horror and degradation of American prisoners of war of the North Vietnamese. In Chetwynd's presentation, a major component of that degradation is the betrayal of the POWs by fellow countrymen.

One of the ways Chetwynd succeeds in showing us the horror of the POW experience is through the use of what I would call open-ended cinematography and editing. As we follow Michael Moriarty as a downed Navy pilot through years of imprisonment, we are never manipulated by an expected sense of ugliness. There are no dank corners--clean light exposes dirt. In the set-piece torture scene, the camera stays in one place, at mid-range, building up detail on horrible detail. There are no tricks to distract us from the pain we see. By using this clean middle distance throughout the film, Chetwynd gives us the intellectual latitude to put ourselves in the picture, while still feeling the pain. (This smooth editing technique breaks down in the last portion of the film. As the war winds down, and the

are aware that what he tells them is useless from a military standpoint. What is damning is that he gave the information of his own, relative, free will, without physical torture.

Unlike *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon*, or any number of Vietnam era movies, in *The Hanoi Hilton* the war is not used as a vehicle to argue larger, symbolic questions of good and evil. In *The Hanoi Hilton* evil is particularized. This is especially clear in the scenes based, not very loosely, on Jane Fonda's visit to the POWs in North Vietnam. These scenes, like most in the film, are underplayed, and thus gain power. (And this not pretty portrayal of Hank's daughter may be what it is that's keeping this movie out of distribution. This is my opinion. *Rambo* is a heck of a lot more jingoistic than this flick, by a long shot, and Sly, the draft-dodging hunk, hero to millions, has blank check in Hollywood.) This major Hollywood actress touring Vietnam is shown as a dupe, while the POWs are more interested in the fresh fruit placed by the North Vietnamese to indicate better conditions than there were.

Does the film work? Yes, although it does betray itself in the end. The final scene shows us the prisoners cheering and crying at the arrival of a U.S. military plane to transport them home. A more honest ending would have alluded to the neglect these prisoners received at their return.

In the next few months, *The Hanoi Hilton* will be available on home video. While not a great film, I do recommend it as decent adult entertainment. Because of the volatile nature of the theme, I urge you to see *The Hanoi Hilton* and form your own opinion.

This review of the Hanoi Hilton by Charlie Heiser won second place in the Fall 1987 Capital Times Excellence in Student Journalism Awards. His column will continue through this semester.

Would I Be Tolerant of Another with AIDS?

By Michele Hart

A few weeks ago I was watching *NBC Nightly News* when a story came on about three boys from Arcadia, Florida who had been infected with the AIDS virus. I couldn't believe my eyes as the pictures rolled showing the burnt-out home the boys had lived in with their mother and father; a home that had been destroyed by arsonists. It was inconceivable to me that people could be intolerant and ignorant enough to destroy a family's home and all of their belongings because of AIDS.

As the piece continued I was encouraged by the fact that another community had allowed the boys to enroll in school and try to gain some semblance of order and security to their lives. But, once again I was upset because of the comments of a young mother whose son was going to be a classmate of one of the three boys. She said she'd keep her boy at home and teach him herself if she had to because she didn't want her son exposed to the virus. The reporter asked her what kind of risk she thought was involved if she let her son stay in school. She replied that one of the infected boys could bite her son or vomit on him, thereby exposing him to the deadly virus.

From what I understand, and I'm not claiming to know more than the average person, the only way you can get AIDS is from sexual contact with a carrier, or sharing a needle with a carrier. The virus can be in saliva, but not enough to infect another person through casual contact, and it cannot be transmitted from person to person by touch, like the common cold. Now unless this lady's son is a drug user who shoots up at the age of seven or eight, or is sexually active already, I couldn't see any reason for her to pull him out of school. At least that was my first reaction.

That story struck me strongly enough to make me sit down and think about it. What if it were my child that was going to be in the same class as an AIDS carrier? Could I be tolerant, or would I react as that woman had? Just how would I react to AIDS on a personal level? How does anyone react for that matter?

AIDS is not something we can ignore or assume that it will never affect us. Doctors are saying that in the near future it could affect most of us in some way or another. That's a scary proposition, and I don't think society is ready to handle it; not when houses in Florida are being torched and politicians, clergy, and lay people are calling for massive roundups and isolation of those infected with the AIDS virus.

When society stops passing judgments on those who have the virus, calling it a punishment from God or the devil's disease, and gets off of its morality soap box, only then can we begin to think in terms of dealing with the disease. Too many people think that those "horrible queers and faggots" (as someone said to me the other morning), are the only ones who have to deal with AIDS. Surprise, they're not the only ones who should be concerned. But, the

word is concerned, not paranoid, not abusive, not judgmental, not violent, not intolerant, concerned. The same people who claim to be open minded and accepting of anyone no matter what their race, color, or creed, are sometimes the first ones brandishing the verbal and moral judgments.

If this problem is ever going to be solved society has to stop pointing fingers and start holding hands. We cannot allow a few scared people dictate the way an entire population is going to react to the biggest health problem since the Black Death. The only cure for AIDS right now is education and prevention. We should be worried, not about how we're going to keep AIDS away from our own families, but how we can keep it from all families. By learning as much as possible about the disease and its transmission we may be able to slow its progression. We cannot, however, stop the disease with violence and name calling, or by judging and dictating the lifestyles of others.

Michele Hart's commentary on a very controversial subject was given first place honors in the Fall 1987 Capital Times Excellence in Student Journalism competition. She is now the Editor-in-Chief of the Cap Times.

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