

## More Bad News

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## Bad News

Authors: Glasgow University Media Group

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The first volume, Bad News, published in 1976, exploded the illusion that television news in Britain, on whatever channel, is more objective, more trustworthy, more neutral than press reporting. Undertaking an exhaustive monitoring of all TV news broadcasts over the six months from January to June 1975, the authors took as their subject industrial news broadcasts. Their analysis showed that TV news 'favours' certain individuals by giving them more time and status. But beyond merely denying the neutrality of the news, their findings gave a new insight into the picture of industrial society that TV news constructs.

More Bad News is the second volume and develops the analytic methods and findings of Bad News through a series of case studies of television news coverage. It argues that much of what passes as balanced and factual news reporting is produced from a highly partial viewpoint.

The authors focus on three main levels of activity, examining their material in terms of the story, the language and the visuals. The story concerns the bulletin presentations of the British economy in crisis, and its thematic linkage with the social contract during the first four months of 1975. In analysing the structure of news language, features such as the use of headlines, the organization of talk within the news item, and the use of reported speech are all examined, the vocabulary of industrial news talk being investigated in detail. The final part of the study deals with the visual organization of the news, looking at the flow of visual presentation, the rules for opening and ending sequences, and the visual rules governing interviewing.

The Group's analysis shows how special status and credibility is given to some sectional interests and opinions, particularly the economic views of the Treasury. As the book unpacks each level of routine news coverage, a picture emerges which the authors maintain has the surface appearance of neutrality and balance, but is in fact highly partial and restricted.

Both Bad News and More Bad News are available from HacMillan.

Taken from the flyleaf.

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## Peter Davis' Film View of South Africa: An American Review

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The White Laager (1977) 58 min. Prod. by P Davis and United Nations

Generations of Resistance (1980). 52 min. Produced by Peter Davis

The Nuclear File (1979) 54 min. Produced by Peter Davis

Please turn over

The White Laager, Generations of Resistance, and The Nuclear File by Peter Davis are a cinematic triptych on South Africa: the white superstructure, the black underbelly, and the international complicity that maintains each in its place. History has many voices and several versions, and the images and information in Davis' films build on each other. What we see in each film—white repression, black struggle, international response—impacts how we see the next. Each film traces the same territory, but on a different path, looking at South Africa's past, present, and into its future.

The White Laager could be subtitled "Apartheid According To Those Who Created It"—Opening with scenes of a white soccer game featuring unflattering shots of screaming fans, Davis immediately lets us know he finds Afrikaners (South Africa's "white tribe") unattractive. The White Laager traces the historical transformation of Afrikaners from oppressed minority under British colonialism to minority-as-oppressor in their own right. The White Laager is not only about the creation of apartheid, but the mind-set behind it, answering the question often asked by liberals outside South Africa—why are those people like that?

The central image in the film is the laager—a circle of covered wagons. The Afrikaners are inside the circle, and the hostile "others" (British, liberal whites and Blacks) are outside. The feeling is of isolation, being surrounded by enemies and having to fight them constantly. This paranoia is the Afrikaners' historical self-definition, and its imagery in the film constantly expands. The laager is not just a figment of the Afrikaner imagination. It functions inside South Africa through the structure of apartheid, and South Africa itself has become a laager, with Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe on its borders.

The White Laager is a collage of newsreel, government and tourist "information" films, a 1916 silent epic on the Afrikaners (De Voortrekkers/Winning a Continent), stills from the Black liberation documentary Last Grave at Dimbaza, and current interviews, to form a visual juxtaposition of who Afrikaners are and who they think they are. The film's tension is created by the two versions. The people interviewed in the film, all Afrikaners, romanticize their history and rationalize apartheid. The film's narrator plays a criticizing role, pointing out what they ignore or distort (for instance, the two versions of what the bantustans are—tribal homelands or economic wastelands? The picture tells the true story). Afrikaners describe themselves as a proud people who fiercely resisted British domination, and see their struggle as one of self-determination. Like the characters in De Voortrekkers/Winning a Continent, they still see themselves as pioneers who suffer and struggle. Davis shows the historical basis for that feeling in the Great Trek to escape British domination, and the Boer War in which 26 000 Afrikaner women and children died in British concentration camps. The film focusses on two other symbolic signposts of Afrikaner history: a memorial to their defeat by the British. "A fallen warrior, lies with a dagger in his heart. But from the heart springs a powerful 'spirit of steel' a glowing sword in his hand, representing the rise of a new, triumphant Afrikaners nation". Later, the triumph of Afrikaner independence, and the subsequent creation of the National Party, along with race separation enforced by law and arms, in 1949, visually culminates in a celebration at the Voortrekker Monument. The newsreel of this event strongly resembles the Nazi's Triumph Of The Will, with low angle views of huge banners, aerial shots of geometrically patterned dances, and crowds of jubilant white people singing an Afrikaners hymn. The White Laager chronicles the development of the South African economy and Blacks' role in it, and how the laws of apartheid have been liberalized or tightened as the needs of the white economy have changed (when increased production was needed. Blacks were

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allowed to enter jobs previously held only by whites). The film documents the white power version of South Africa. No Black person speaks in the film, and scenes of Blacks are seen as if from white eyes (rioting viewed from behind police barricades or from inside a car window with the windows securely rolled up, Blacks working silently with white over-seers nearby). The film ends with images of stagnation, shots of the new Afrikaanse Randse Universiteit which is designed in the shape of a concrete laager. The narrator points out that racism is learned, and young whites in South Africa will continue to absorb that lesson-isolated in their laagers.

"For 300 years whites have oppressed Blacks in South Africa, and for 300 years Blacks have resisted." With that opening salvo, Generations of Resistance reveals what the white laager tries to keep outside the ring of covered wagons. While the first film shows what Black resistance must fight, Generations Of Resistance documents the long history of that struggle, which has changed tactic and form, but has never stopped. Generations Of Resistance responds to The White Laager by paralleling it. The form of the film is the same (a collage of interviews, newsreels, and government films) and the sequence of historical events covered is the same. But now the narrator is a Black African, the music is a liberation song, and Black people are speaking for themselves.

Generations of Resistance recalls, through a series of black and white still photographs, all the slain leaders of Black resistance, from Chief Bambata, who refused to pay the British Colonial government in Natal a tax for the use of his own land, to Steve Biko. From early slave and tribal rebellions, the film moves on to the generations of the 1940's, 50's and 60's who believed there could be "peace in our time" and that power could be shared with the whites. Members of the Woman's Movement, the African National Congress, and the Pan Africanist Congress talks about their organizing efforts and how they were all forced to operate outside the country as every attempt at power was met with increased brutalization. Newsreels of Black union and urban demonstrations and interviews with those who participated in them show that Black people knew what was at stake and understood political organizing. As the film moves closer to the present, the black and white footage of the past gives way to color footage of the youth and student movements of the 1970's: Black students organizing on their campuses, playing native instruments (reclaiming tribal origins, which whites have used to divide and conquer), the children of Soweto.' The final shot is a freeze-frame (recalling the beginning stills) of Black children, with the caption "The Generation of \_\_\_\_\_?" as the narrator says "We are everywhere."

South Africa has two nuclear power plants which are completely cut off from public scrutiny. Their names are two Zulu words, Pelindaba (we don't talk about this anymore) and Velindaba (we don't talk about this at all). The Nuclear File takes place mostly outside South Africa, since it is only outside the country that its nuclear situation can be discussed. Over Jimmy Carter's televised news conference on South Africa exploding a nuclear weapon in 1977, and United Nations diplomats denouncing apartheid and passing resolutions to embargo arms to South Africa, the narrator says that while the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. may be able to prevent South Africa from conducting another nuclear test, they could not stop the death of Steve Biko. Since 1950, South Africa has risen rapidly to the role of a major international nuclear power producer and provider (based on the country's rich deposits of uranium). This could never have happened without outside help, which came particularly from the U.S.A. and West Germany. The Nuclear File chronicles this overt and covert aid and the conflicting international policies which leave many a loophole for nuclear weapons development inside South Africa. The Nuclear File is

often lengthy verbal information explaining the complex international deals that have made South Africa a force to be reckoned with in today's nuclear marketplace. The Nuclear File also pulls together racial and economic policies in South Africa, to emphasize that the problem is not just an internal, racial one. The survival of South Africa as white state depends on its increased militarization. Nuclear weaponry is South Africa's last stand in the face of world criticism. The hostile outside world may publically condemn South Africa on human rights issues, but everyone will continue to do business since--as one Afrikaner political leader ominously warns--in the future it may be too dangerous for them not to. The Nuclear File brings the 20th century end of the laager around to the head of the first covered wagon.

Davies' collage of forms (silent film, newsreel, still photographs, interviews, television, government public relations material, color, black and white) constructs not only a history but also a frame of mind. Switching from silent epic to present-day interview in The White Laager, he reflects the Afrikaners' own collapsing of history and myth, and their use of history as a mythology to support their own dominance. Generations Of Resistance, moving from still black and white photographs to newsreel to color film gives a sense of historical progression and movement forward, as well as a sense of continuity, sharing and passing along information and tactics from one generation to the next (while the Afrikaners' history is frozen in monuments). Davies' films are also about how visual information on South Africa is seen and used, especially by people outside South Africa who tend to get only the government version of events (Davies films are banned in South Africa). Given the South African government's large and sophisticated media propaganda machine, Davies' three films begin the important task of reconstructing Black liberation history (the riots in Soweto did not come out of nowhere) and bring out information on the current situation in South Africa which is generally ignored by most of the western media.

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## Questions of Cinema

Author: Stephen Heath  
Published by MacHillan,  
1981  
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Stephen Heath's approach to the study of film, drawing on developments in psychoanalysis, semiotics and Marxism, is massively influential not only among cinema specialists, but also for students of art, literature and the sociology of culture. His own writings continue to be the most approachable in a notoriously difficult field.

For "Communications and Culture" he has collected together a representative range of pieces, many of which are unpublished or not easily available to English readers, presenting film as a signifying practice and the cinema as a social institution of meanings. Topics treated include: the construction of space in film, narrative, the terms of the presence of people in film, relations of viewer to film, cinema and language, technology, political and avant-garde film practice ... Directors work considered runs from Orson Welles through Hitchcock to Oshima and a number of British and American 'independents'.

Stephen Heath was co-editor of The Cinematic Apparatus, also published by MacHillan  
From the flyleaf

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