

Educational Film Review: *Double Vision*

About the video

Title:

Double Vision

Country:

UK

Duration (mins):

60 mins 20 secs

Is this a clip or segment of a film? Or part of a collection?:

Film, divided into 13 segments

Year:

1986

Description:

Mixes drama and documentary to look at boxing in Hartlepool and the different motives that take men into the ring. Places boxing within the context of Thatcherism and deindustrialisation.

Subject classification:

History

Educational level of intended audience:

Suitable for use in degree classes

Summary:

An evocative, powerful and political piece that explores the relationship between boxing and the impact of Thatcherism on industrial communities.

Audience and Use

This is a drama-documentary about boxing in 1980s Hartlepool, produced for general viewing. It raises questions about the impact of industrial decline on communities and individuals, as well as the motives behind boxing. It could be employed in undergraduate teaching, particularly on sport degrees, as a tool to trigger discussion on the relationship between sport and its social context. It could also act as a discussion piece for classes on the impact of Thatcherism on working-class communities, and it thus has relevance for history and social science degrees.

Content

At the programme's heart is a discussion of whether boxing is a tragic consequence of the 'human waste' of Thatcherism's private enterprise culture, or an inspirational product of that culture's emphasis on the supremacy of the individual. Different perspectives on this polarity are explored through the storyline of a television researcher getting to know the Hartlepool boxing community and travelling around the town. He is searching for a 'hook' and thus discusses with those he meets why they box and their wider experiences of life. Hartlepool's scarred industrial landscape provides a vivid visual backdrop. Although the two main characters are fictional, the programme features extensive footage of and interviews with real boxers. Contrasts between the past and present are drawn by interweaving footage from the 1960s into the programme.

Parallels are drawn between boxing and its industrial context. Like many industrial occupations, boxing is a skilled but physical art that demonstrates what men can achieve. There is initially a sympathetic portrayal of the hard but supportive and tightknit world of the local boxing gym. It is a world far removed from the glitz and glamour of world championship bouts that are displayed on television today. As the programme progresses, the researcher becomes disillusioned that men have to earn a living from fighting because of the wider industrial decline and decay. He sees boxing as an expression of people's wider hurt and pain. In contrast, his guide to the sport sees boxing as the individual's free and personal choice. For him boxing reflects a world where people rightly have to work and graft to survive. Those who succeed bring pride to the community; those who aren't strong enough fall by the wayside. Even the type of solidarity expressed in the 1984-5 miners' strike isn't enough in a world where only the fittest survive. This character could be interpreted as an expression of 1980s working-class Toryism. In the end, the researcher's proposal for a documentary is rejected for being too political.

Technical issues

The programme works best as a whole but it is divided into thirteen segments that can be downloaded individually. The length of the programme means that downloading it in its entirety is a little slow but still technically easy. It also fits easily onto a single CD Rom.

The quality of the footage is rather grey and grainy but that is part of its atmospheric appeal rather than a technical shortcoming.

The film's thirteen segments are approximately four or five minutes each and do not all have a single clear theme. This can make using individual segments in teaching more awkward but the catalogue entry provides a clear description of what each segment contains. Nonetheless, the programme does work far better when watched as a whole.

General comments

This video is a very much a product of its time and as such is an excellent tool to introduce students to its themes. It could be watched in a lecture slot with follow up discussion in a seminar, or individual segments could be used in class as a basis for discussion.