



CINEMA *Shepherd*

with the



Viewing Guide - Harlan County USA

(1976)

SYNOPSIS:

Barbara Kopple's Academy Award-winning *Harlan County USA* unflinchingly documents a grueling coal miners' strike in a small Kentucky town. With unprecedented access, Kopple and her crew captured the miners' sometimes violent struggles with strikebreakers, local police, and company thugs. Featuring a haunting soundtrack—with legendary country and bluegrass artists Hazel Dickens, Merle Travis, Sarah Gunning, and Florence Reece—the film is a heartbreaking record of the thirteen-month struggle between a community fighting to survive and a corporation dedicated to the bottom line.

CREW:

Director Barbara Kopple
Producer..... Barbara Kopple
Editing Nancy Baker
Associate Director Anne Lewis
Principal Cinematographer Hart Perry
Cinematography Kevin Keating
Sound Barbara Kopple

TRIVIA:

- When filming began, the film was intended to be about the 1972 campaign by Arnold Miller and Miners For Democracy to unseat UMWA president Tony Boyle, in the aftermath of Joseph Yablonski's murder; however, the Harlan County strike began and caused the filmmakers to change their principal subject, with the campaign and murder becoming secondary subjects.
- This film was selected into the National Film Registry in 1990 for being "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant."
- Debut of Barbara Kopple as a director.
- When the film was shown in Harlan County the week after it was finished, the Ku Klux Klan had hung a goat with KKK carved across its belly next to the place where the film was screened, so it was presented under armed guard.
- Winner of Academy Award for Best Documentary (1977)

"Hold fast to hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."
Heb. 6:18-19

QUOTES:

- **Hawley Wells Jr.:** [...] that was when I learned my first real political lesson, about what happens when you take a position against the coal operators, against the capitalists... I found out that the union officials were working with the coal companies. I also found that the Catholic hierarchy was working with the coal companies. Here was a combination of the whole thing, you see: you had to bump against the whole combination of them.
- **Barbara Kopple (Director):** “I found out later that they planned to kill us that day. They wanted to knock us out because they didn’t want a record of what was happening.”
- **Barbara Kopple (Director):** “‘Harlan County’ came out of the tradition of Albert Maysles and Leacock and Pennebaker, documentarians who went somewhere and stayed there and watched and listened and made a record of what happened. That is one approach. There are others, just as valid. All that matters is making a good film.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think about this film?
2. The Second Vatican Council continued the century-long teaching of the Church on the right for workers to unionize, saying: “Among the basic rights of the human person is to be numbered the right of freely founding unions for working people. These should be able truly to represent them and to contribute to the organizing of economic life in the right way. Included is the right of freely taking part in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal.” (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* on the Church in the Modern World, 68) Do the union and the company realize these noble ends?
3. What do you think about the portrayal of the union officials and executives of the mining company?
4. How does the death of miner Lawrence Jones change the course of the strike? In what ways could Jones be considered a secular “martyr”?
5. What unique role do the women have in the strike? Why might they have a particular authority?
6. What do you think about the figure of Lois Scott and her rhetorical and resistance strategies?
7. What kind of role, if any, does the Christian faith play in the course of the strike?
8. How does hope arise in the film?
9. What is the source of Christian hope?
10. Would you recommend this film to others? Why or why not?