Apocalypse Now was one of the first movies made in Hollywood about the Vietnam war. As the war is now seen as a defining moment in 20th century American history, it has spawned numerous other films. The Green Berets, the Communard, Full Metal Jacket, Hamburger Hill, and numerous other war films. Set on the Fourth of July, all these films constitute a distinctive sub-genre within the war film category.

Academy Award For Best Cinematography
Academy Award For Best Sound

Nominated
Academy Award For Best Picture
Academy Award For Best Supporting Actor (Robert Duvall)
Academy Award For Best Art Direction
Academy Award For Directing (Francis Ford Coppola)
Academy Award For Film Editing
Academy Award For Best Writing

Filming

This isn't just a film about Vietnam. Heart of Darkness, which certainly begins in Vietnam, ends up as a haunting meditation on the human condition. The film's opening sequence, shot at night in a jungle, is a vivid, visceral, and cruel depiction of war, complete with unrelenting violence and a lurid, hallucinatory atmosphere. The film's controversial use of Groundhog Day and actual war footage is never gratuitous, even when it's extremely effective.

Legacy

This isn't a film about Vietnam, but rather an exploration of the human condition through the lens of war and violence. The film is a powerful meditation on the nature of human nature, and the consequences of war and violence. It's a film that will stick with you long after you've left the theater.
Apocalypse Now was one of the first movies made in Hollywood about the Vietnam war. As the war is now seen as a defining moment in 20th century American history it has spawned numerous other films: The Green Berets, The Deerhunter, Full Metal Jacket, Platoon, Hamburger Hill, the Rambo movies, Born on the Fourth of July, Casualties of War. These films constitute a distinctive sub-genre within the 'war film' category.

Academy Award for Best Cinematography
Academy Award for Best Sound
Heart of Darkness

Although inspired by Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, the film deviates extensively from its source material.

Kurtz as god-like leader of a tribe of natives and Willard seeking him out parallel experiences in book.

Coppola replaced European colonialism with American interventionism.
Although inspired by Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, the film deviates extensively from its source material.

Kurtz as god-like leader of a tribe of natives and Willard seeking him out parallel experiences in book.

Coppola replaced European colonialism with American interventionism.
Filming
The original conception had been to make the movie on location in Vietnam, presumably with the war raging around actors and crew. But by the time shooting began in 1976 the Americans had withdrawn from Vietnam and an alternative location had to be found. Coppola selected the Philippines. He negotiated with Ferdinand Marcos, then the President of the Philippines, to hire Philippino Air Force helicopters and pilots, and construction began of the main set, Kurtz’s compound, deep in the jungle.

From the beginning the project was beset with problems:

Weather
Characters (Keitel, Sheen, and Brando)
Theft/Bodguards
Multiple Endings
Narration Rework (Michael Herr)
Sound (1st with Dolby surround)
OVERBUDGET!!!!!
Legacy
The movie is widely regarded by many as a masterpiece of the New Hollywood era, and is frequently cited as one of the greatest films of all time.

The May 1, 2010 cover of the Economist newspaper, illustrating the 2010 European sovereign debt crisis with imagery from the movie, attests to the film’s pervasive cultural impact.
Academy Award for Best Cinematography
Academy Award for Best Sound

Nominated:
Academy Award for Best Picture
Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor  (Robert Duvall)
Academy Award for Best Art Direction
Academy Award for Directing  (Francis Ford Coppola)
Academy Award for Film Editing
Academy Award for Best Writing
This hasn’t got much to do with Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, which certainly inspired its last sequences with a mumbling Brando, nor with the Vietnam War, painted as a kind of bloody, highly-coloured game. But the film remains an epic about war itself with many unforgettable sequences and a hallucinatory dramatic power that is almost palpable. The experience nearly killed Coppola, caused Martin Sheen to have a major heart attack and spawned a fascinating account, in both written and film form, of its intensely precarious making in the Philippines. Despite every disaster, the film proved successful, both commercially and artistically - an object lesson in stubborn persistence, imagination and technical brilliance. It says a lot about America and Americans too, though very little about the Vietnamese.

----Derek Malcolm (film critic and historian)