

## EDWARD ZWICK

When I first read about Sierra Leone, I was shocked. I'd read books about the colonial "scramble for Africa," about the exploitation of its ivory, rubber and gold, but to learn the history of diamonds was to learn the story of Africa all over again.

In certain ways the movie we've made is very conventional, an action drama about three people whose lives are forever changed by the discovery of a single rough stone. But because the story takes place in such a charged political context it is also an opportunity to evoke the kind of provocative images and complex issues seldom treated in Hollywood films. It's always been my belief that entertainment and ideas need not be mutually exclusive, and that political awareness can be raised as much by narrative as by rhetoric.

If a single piece of work was capable of bringing about immediate change, then so many well-intentioned films over the years would have long ago solved the world's problems. But raising consciousness is a distance event, not a sprint. It's important to remember that 150 years ago in this country it was entirely acceptable for a man to own another man. Twenty years ago people thought nothing of drinking and driving. Five years ago you could smoke in restaurants and on airplanes. These are remarkable paradigm shifts, but they only came about by a number of people willing to hold up a mirror, unflattering at times, in order to show the world to itself. As a filmmaker, all I can do is to add my voice to the chorus. Eventually the aggregate effect of movies, songs, documentaries, and editorials are compounded until it reaches a kind of tipping point. And change happens.

The United States purchases about nine billion dollars' worth of diamonds every year, more than two-thirds of the world's sales. If its consumers insist that each stone be accompanied by a verifiable warranty, it's going to have a very powerful effect. This is one of those rare situations in which an individual can become pro-active by virtue of nothing more than educating himself. We simply have to take responsibility for our consumerism.

I have nothing against diamonds (or rubies or emeralds or sapphires). Gems are beautiful and desirable. To buy or not to buy is an individual decision. But it has to be an informed decision. I do object when their acquisition is complicit in the debasement of children, or the destruction of a country. I find it unconscionable that the resources of the third world be exploited for the sake of our vanity, and above all that billions of dollars of corporate profit are built on the backs of workers paid a dollar a day. The story of Sierra Leone is not unique.

My hope is that in telling a story like this, it might help prevent it from happening again.

- Edward Zwick 2006

DISCUSSION  
QUESTIONS

1. What human rights issues were illustrated in the film? What international laws are in place to stop or prevent those abuses?
2. Do you think the violence depicted in the film is necessary to accurately portray the situation in Sierra Leone in 1999?
3. After the RUF burns Solomon's village, they chop off the hands of the villagers. What is the significance of this action? What does it symbolize?
4. The film began and ended in Antwerp, Belgium. How did events in Belgium relate to events in Sierra Leone?
5. Why did Danny Archer become involved in the conflict diamond trade?
6. In the beginning of the film, all Danny seems to care about is himself. At the end of the film, however, he is willing to die to protect Solomon. What prompted Danny's change of heart?
7. When Danny talks to Benjamin, the school teacher, Benjamin says that he wants to believe all people are basically good, but his experience tells him otherwise. Danny replies that people are just people. What do you think he means by this statement?
8. At the end of the film, Solomon comes face to face with Captain Poison, the RUF commander responsible for forcing Solomon into slavery and turning his son, Dia, into a child soldier. Captain Poison says that Solomon might think he's the devil, but it is only because he lives in hell. In what ways is Captain Poison a product of his environment and in what ways is he a product of his choices?
9. For each character in the film, diamonds represent a different idea or symbol. Captain Poison, for example, sees the pink diamond as his ticket to a better life. What do diamonds represent to each of the characters?
10. What tactics does the RUF use to turn children into soldiers?
11. All of the characters are changed by events they have witnessed. How does each character respond to the conflict around him or her?
12. Maddy, the journalists and other foreign players, such as aid workers, struggle with reporting what they see, doing their duty, and actually helping individuals in need. They often fall prey to an "us" vs. "them" attitude. How does the film deal with the idea of "the other"?
13. Though the film focuses on the devastation of war, it also deals with reconciliation, rehabilitation, and hope. What are some specific scenes that deal with these topics? How can the country begin to reconcile and recover from the effects of war?

\* Note to Educators: Please share with us any additional or alternate questions you or your students posed during the discussion. Use the feedback form found at the end of this curriculum guide or online at: [www.amnestyusa.org/education](http://www.amnestyusa.org/education)