Gary Cooper meets his tormenters in *High Noon*, directed by Fred Zinnemann. United Artists, 1952. Photofest, Inc., NY, NY.

INTRODUCTION

WESTERNS, U.S. HISTORY, AND THE COLD WAR

In this study of Hollywood Westerns released between 1946 and 1962, I consider closely some sixteen films and make mention of numerous others. Neither the dates nor my choice of films is arbitrary. Historically, this chronology takes us from the end of World War II and the beginnings of what historian Thomas McCormick has called America's half-century to the eve of the war in Vietnam.[1] The films are largely those that were popular with audiences and crit-

ics and highly influential in the genre. In U.S. film history, this period marks an era when A-picture Westerns—large-budget features—burgeoned as at no other time. When, for example, in the 1930s the gangster genre dominated, only seven A-picture Westerns were produced. From 1947 to 1950 Westerns made up about 30 percent of the total output of the major Hollywood studios. Douglas Pye tells us that "the last year in which over 50 Westerns [were] made was 1958 (with 54); from 1960 to 1976 the highest number in any year was 28 (1960) and numbers were generally from 15 to 25. In 1977 only seven Western features were made" (Cameron and Pye 1996, 10). Pye's numbers further confirm the tale that is evident in our recall of memorable Westerns. The year 1962 marks the end of the full flowering of the Western. After 1962 the reigning films in the genre tended toward irony and self-criticism, with Sergio Leone and Sam Peckinpah replacing John Ford and John Sturges as the leading directors. With some notable exceptions, there have been few Westerns produced and a paucity of notable films in the genre since the mid-1970s.

Proceeding chronologically, this book shows how Westerns and, more generally, popular culture are not only sensitive to the currents of historical change but also expressive of shifts in national mood and circumstance. It also shows the films' power to further an incipient trend and even to rearticulate some of its core features. Certainly the mass of Westerns produced in the period covered by this book had an impact on the terms and tenor of nationalist feeling in the United States in their constant dramatization of the relationships between a definable national entity and contiguous unsettled lands. These popular film narratives helped audiences assimilate major events and both predict and react to ideological orientations. For example, in films such as *The Alamo* (1960) and *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), a concern with conditions that, in their view, assert the morality of military intervention is a reaction to concerns and conditions of the fifties. In addition, however, they anticipate both the increasingly proactive policies of the Kennedy administration and the road to Vietnam.

My primary concern is how these films metaphorically narrate the relationship between the United States and the world; this is, I believe, the story that is focal to this genre and, arguably, central to this period of U.S. history. But U.S. international relations touch on all manner of domestic events, and domestic events impact international relations. I have necessarily paid considerable attention to the political and social history of the era; to matters of gender; and to discourses of family, religion, and race. For example, Chapter Two focuses on a group of Westerns that emphasize melodrama in a discussion of the ways U.S. policy makers increasingly tended to address questions of empire in gendered terms. Such presentations impacted the Cold War discourse of family and sexuality.

If the United States became a world power after World War I, it became *the* world power (or certainly one of two) after World War II. The stresses of the Cold War are in large part the result of the superpower status of the United States. To secure this role became an imperative of U.S. policy, but its maintenance caused untold strains domestically. Westerns, I believe, helped to mediate such shifts by grafting the historical onto the mythic to help audiences adjust to new concepts of national definition. As Westerns necessarily address U.S. nationalism, they also are deeply embedded in a vision of U.S. history.

My methodology allows me to articulate the terms of this immersion. On one level, Westerns are always referentially historical, as they seem to depict some moment of the U.S. past in the time prior to, or at the point of, the emergence of automobiles and motion pictures in the late nineteenth century. But there are relative distinctions to be made regarding their claim to represent the "actual" past. These films are most revealing in the way they represent the epoch of their production. That is, as all historical texts necessarily are marked by the time of their production, commercial films are more evidently and intentionally so because of their commercial intention and limited respect for the sanctity of historical "fact." Therefore, my primary concern is with the status of these films *in* history. As products of a particular time and cultural climate, these

Cold War films address and express those circumstances. For example, *Red River* (1948) reveals a fascination with the development of a business strategy that rewards centralized production and the seeking of far-flung markets. This emphasis in the film is concurrent with the implicit and explicit national discussion of the day, which rationalized a global system of exchange with the United States at its center. The film's implicit idea of open markets subject to penetration by the swashbuckling entrepreneur was a core belief of an important group of business and political leaders in the postwar era.

Indeed, to look briefly at *Red River*'s context, we see that as early as 1945 the Bretton Woods conference had fixed exchange rates among the world's leading economies, which helped the dollar become the defining currency of the postwar era. This put the United States in a position to dictate the terms of trade among that group of nations. As H. W. Brands explains, "The American government was working for the elimination of quotas and other restrictions on imports including tariffs, the better to allow penetration of foreign markets by American producers. Foreigners would gain reciprocal access to the American markets, but given the relative conditions of the economies of the major nations, Americans would get the better of the bargain for years to come" (1993, 11–12).

Red River focuses on the concerns of the era and addresses them with an ideological disposition that is recognizably connected to an influential portion of U.S. society during that time. Similarly, *The Magnificent Seven* comments extensively on not only the relationship between the United States and underdeveloped countries at a moment when such concerns were a matter of national discussion because of the rise of Castro in Cuba but also on the continued dissolution of the French and British empires in Africa and Asia.

And not only are these films *in* history; they also function, in an allegorical sense, *as* history. Although, as I note in my discussion of *Red River,* there are figures who can be connected to the first cattle drives from South Texas to Kansas, the film is clearly not interested in representing that historical event in a narrowly factual way.

However, some films that to varying degrees *are* situated by their production teams—for example, *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *The Alamo*—I treat *as* history. In the case of these films and, to some extent, *Broken Arrow* (1950) and *Shane* (1953), I am concerned not only with their role in history but also with their referentiality, their status as explicitly historical texts. Such films make a claim for their relative efficacy as fact and seek to show viewers that their historical narratives are part of the effective texture of the past. My discussion of such films does not judge their factuality; rather, it attempts to uncover the ways they interpret history, an analytical inquiry that can be enhanced by considering how they differ from conventional narratives within the discipline of history. My goal in comparing them to such narratives is to see their points of emphasis in the service of ideology.[2]

The benefit of such analysis lies in its power to show how popular productions convey social and cultural values, particularly at a time of change and duress. Westerns offer a particularly rich object of study for their power to graft discussions of imperialism onto assertions of the power and sanctity of the individual. Indeed, the genre is so culturally influential that it may be used to turn ideas that in another context might repulse many into palatable concepts. The repressed dimension of Westerns is their relationship to imperialism—and it is their indirect means of considering such activity that makes them *the* genre of the period after World War II. It is within this context that these works resonate. As postwar expressions, they allow us to understand, however speculatively, the powerful devices that promote particular constructions of national identity in a period marked by intense chauvinism and broad acceptance of a kind of economic and cultural hegemony.

Westerns, Myth, and History

It is a truism that all films on some level are historical. In popular film this truism becomes all the more telling because of the economic investment and commercial intention of the production. In

his insightful biography of Darryl Zanuck, George Custen discusses the role of the producer and Zanuck's own definition of and success in that role: "He managed to be a key opinion leader by gauging what the public would be interested in before they knew it themselves" (1997, 3). Although I am not interested in the prescience of a producer or filmmaker, Custen characterizes the intersections between a particular vision of a film, the film itself, and an audience that lie at the heart of this study. Some films pander to an audience by attempting to adapt material that is presold—whether it is a matter of news or a title from another medium. Others, however—and these Westerns more substantially fall into this category—take a more indirect approach, attempting to touch audiences beneath their explicit engagement with the world, offering narratives that resonate at some symbolic or allegorical level. Westerns are particularly effective as this type of narrative. At their best, they effectively conjoin history and myth to appeal powerfully to incipient nationalism in U.S. audiences. As Robert Burgoyne has pointed out, "In the twentieth century United States, the narrative forms that have molded national identity most profoundly are arguably the western and the war film" (1997, 8).

Burgoyne's assertion seems apt and echoes statements by other commentators.[3] The idea of the West has had a hold on the U.S. imagination since at least the end of the Civil War, as popular culture expanded, and any number of cultural concepts that are definitional at a given historical moment have found their expression in narratives of the West. The concept of the West as a distinctive place has a long history in U.S. culture related to the origins of English settlement on the East Coast of the continent: To go west was to enter the wilderness, the unknown. Yet settlers moving west were typically doing so as a matter of choice. By the early eighteenth century, tracts of land that bordered the Atlantic Ocean were largely deeded; for new immigrants or nonprimary heirs, to obtain land meant going west, if only to Lancaster, Massachusetts, as in the famous case of Mary Rowlandson in 1676, or to Salem Village (the site of the present-day town of Danvers, Massachusetts) in 1692

in the case of those famously fractious settlers with an eye for witchcraft. When we look at the places associated with our iconic frontier figures—Natty Bumppo (western New York), Daniel Boone (Kentucky), Davy Crockett (Tennessee and Texas), Buffalo Bill (the northern plains), or Barry Goldwater (Arizona)—we find an ever-moving line of European settlement across the continental United States, although it is important to note that such a line does not account for the persistence of Spanish settlement across the southwestern part of the country. Needless to say, the concept of the frontier is both Anglocentric and, of course, replete with related racist assumptions.

The lore of the West flourished in the period after the Civil War, at the point where the United States had taken domain over the lands from coast to coast as a result of imperial adventures justified by notions of manifest destiny in the 1830s and 1840s. Such adventures, buttressed and encouraged by jingoism, captured and helped shape the nationalist imagination, an aggregate that existed in relatively rudimentary form in the 1840s but that, as a result of technological changes in printing and transportation, was beginning to coalesce in the 1870s.

After the Civil War, with the growth of railroad-track mileage and the emphasis among commentators on the rebirth of a unified and increasingly great nation, the mythic West took shape in dime novels and political rhetoric. Not coincidentally, that region was closely connected both to imperial aspirations and to a fear among many of the nation's elite that the era of U.S. greatness might have passed. Indeed, the dialectic of cultural anxiety and chauvinism informs narratives of the mythic West throughout its existence.

Perhaps the most articulate voice of these dual currents was that of historian Frederick Jackson Turner; in 1893 at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, just prior to the Columbian Exposition, Turner presented his seminal thesis "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Turner explained that the West had been vitally involved in producing the first era of American greatness, defining "the forces dominating the American

character" ([1893] 1972, 4), intermittently reinvigorating democracy at the edge of civilization and then providing a basis for a more general renewal throughout the nation. Yet by looking at a map of the 1890 census, he found that the fault line that defined the point where population density fell below two people per square mile was no longer visible. Thus, he declared the closing of the frontier. He lamented this passing and wondered what the future had in store for a nation with this formative region having vanished. Turner's thesis provided a geographically determined vision of cultural decline. Paradoxically, he also reconfirmed that the "West" as an idealized locale might provide the basis of continued greatness.

It is not incidental that Turner presented his view on an occasion that was connected to the future role of the United States in world events and defined it in technological terms. Turner's lament represented the negative view of the events that the Chicago world's fair was designed to celebrate. As the fair ushered in the future, Turner found the terms to mourn the erosion of the past. Turner's view, while myopic, has proven to be remarkably culturally resonant, defining the core terms of U.S. exceptionalism for many decades. Arguably, he defined the frontier in a manner that allowed it to be transplanted conceptually to any number of locales, from the Caribbean to Europe to Asia.

Not coincidentally, at the same exposition, Thomas Edison took the opportunity to display one of his newest marvels, the kinetoscope. This device, which allowed viewers to look through a lens to see moving pictures, anticipated the large-screen film. Westerns of a type were among the first films displayed on that machine, and perhaps the first hit film of the new medium was *The Great Train Robbery,* released in 1903. The film depicted a western gang robbing a train and then being pursued and apprehended by a posse. Its popularity was so enormous that some film historians believe that it effectively ensured the commercial success of the new medium.

The concurrent emergence of the film Western and of film itself suggests the significance of this genre. It allows a reverential treatment of the past at the moment when technology becomes a central feature of everyday life, and in the United States this nostalgic vision involves a vision of the nineteenth-century West. In his masterful volumes *Regeneration through Violence* (1973), *The Fatal Environment* (1985), and *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), Richard Slotkin explores the meaning of the "frontier" in a number of geographic and chronological settings and shows us how this term could be adapted to a variety of cultural situations to promote national consensus. His introduction to the middle volume of the trilogy, which most thoroughly articulates his methodology, explains the means through which Westerns appeal to those in the United States: "Myth is acquired and preserved as part of our language. We observe its operation in the quality of historical (or pseudo-historical) resonance that attaches to terms like 'Frontier,' 'Cowboys and Indians,' or 'Last Stand.' They implicitly connect the events they emblematize to a system of values and beliefs, and they are usually used in a way that suggests an analogy between the historical past and the present situation" (1985, 23–24). Slotkin's assertions broadly describe the ways Westerns of the intensely nationalist period from 1946 to 1962 respond to variations in national posture and behavior that allow them to attract and maintain their audience.

As Slotkin defines this process, "Producers offer their fables and images, consumers buy or refuse to buy them; producers respond to consumer choices. . . . What emerges at the end is a body of genres and formulas whose appeal has been commercially validated; and this body of genres and formulas may be taken as the myth/ideology of the mass culture that consumes it, a kind of 'folklore of industrial society'" (1985, 28–29).

The films of this study, and Westerns in general of this period, are concurrently nostalgic and forward looking. They look back upon the glory days of western settlement as they look ahead to the expression of U.S. centrality in the postwar world. They "read"

the market for entertainment as they read the newspapers for headlines. It is no accident, for example, that the films that are most circumspect about the social role of violence—*Broken Arrow* and *The Gunfighter*—were produced prior to the Korean War or that the film that most complexly considers the role of a monomaniacal figure wedded to the culture of militarism—*The Searchers*—was produced after that war and the end of the career of Douglas MacArthur. This study attempts to locate how the historically resonant images found in Hollywood films provided a map for a great many Americans that helped them navigate the stresses and contradictions of Cold War life.

Imperialism is one key phenomenon that Cold War Westerns helped their audiences assimilate. It is instructive that the anti-imperialism of the Right, a strong tendency in the late thirties and a position that had a following immediately after the war, ceased to be a viable political position by the election of 1952. By that point the ideology of imperialism had eclipsed that of isolationism. Westerns played at least some role in this cultural shift, as they reflected it. All of these films articulate the necessity of engaged heroes who morally ensure the rule of right. National interest is defined not simply by the goal of occupying contiguous lands but also by the imperative of reordering them according to a distinctly U.S. vision of civil society.

This perspective owes much to a worldview that can be traced to a line of prominent nationalists and imperialists at least as far back as the moment in the late nineteenth century when discussions of U.S. expansion became both respectable and a matter of official policy—the age of Brooks Adams, John Hay, and Theodore Roosevelt. As we look at the prominence of a figure like Reinhold Niebuhr in the first phase of the Cold War, we are reminded that the United States was a very different country in 1950 than it is now, a nation similar in many ways to the nation governed by Theodore Roosevelt. Despite the presence of highly influential Jews in Hollywood, the nation was led by an Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite that retained nineteenth-century notions of its own preeminence both in

the nation and in the world. Certainly, part of Niebuhr's importance stems from both his role as a Protestant clergyman and his ability to articulate the tenets of Protestant religiosity in Cold War terms. Fittingly, he also had his counterpart right of center in Billy Graham. John Fousek explains:

> The ideology of American nationalist globalism originated in the thinking of native-born, white Protestants of upper- or middle-class backgrounds—a group heavily represented in the nation's foreign-policy elite, in the government generally, in international business, and in the media. . . . From this culturally privileged position within the imagined community of the American nation, the middle-aged, white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant men of the foreign-policy elite functioned as a hegemonic bloc in the formation of this ideology. . . . They were able to project their own values and beliefs into a dominant position in the nation's public life and largely to set the terms of public discussion concerning "America's world role." (2000, 10)

Fousek's comments are evocative in defining the emphasis of the postwar period and the relative coherence of a class of leaders. As suggested by its complicity and even its leading role in the industrial practice of blacklisting, Hollywood may have been outside the mainstream by virtue of religious orientation but certainly not in its political practices.

Indeed, as a result of both structural changes in the industry and the broader political climate within the United States, the late forties and fifties marked a period when Hollywood was at its least bold. The *Paramount* decision of 1948 ordered the dissolution of the vertically integrated system of production, distribution, and exhibition controlled by studios. This altered the structure of the industry and reduced the role of the studio, just at a moment when television was emerging as a competing form of entertainment. In addition, both these factors were compounded by the extreme interest of the federal legislature in the political affiliations of important figures in the industry. This climate made producers more conservative than ever, both in their politics and in their choice of film

content. The glut of Westerns in the Cold War, which were both inherently nationalist and part of a well-defined genre, serves as a testament to this conservatism. Explains Robert Sklar:

> Movies were always less courageous than some organs of information and entertainment, but they were always more iconoclastic than most, offering a version of American behavior and values more risqué, violent, comic and fantastic than the standard interpretation of traditional cultural elites. It was this trait that gave movies their popularity and mythmaking power.
>
> And it was this trait that the anti-Communist crusade destroyed. (1976, 267)[4]

Arguably, by employing the Western as a vehicle for potentially critical social ideas, writers and directors allowed their films to be readily recontained by dominant conservative ideologies. That is, since Westerns, as a matter of their generic markers, refer to a triumphal moment of continental conquest, films—such as *High Noon*—that employ the genre to offer a political critique from the Left run the risk of having audiences apprehend the film's political content in a way that contradicts the filmmakers' intention.

In my analysis I attempt to read these films as existing within a historical context, as products of a distinct time and place. In doing so, I also attend to their status as expressions that take place within a specific generic history. As audiences of the fifties viewed these films—and almost all of them were viewed by a significant number of people—they were both informed and entertained. These films defined an important element of the cultural fabric of the Cold War and in doing so contributed in significant ways to what their viewers felt about themselves, their country, and the world. I use these films to tell the story of the Cold War through a particular cultural medium. Although audience responses to these films were certainly not singular, and their meanings were far from apparent or capable of being reduced to a single possibility, my interpretations offer the benefit of attending to historical reference and to the particular cultural resonance of the genre itself.

My critical historical approach is enabled by the scholarship of revisionists working in the field of western history. These historians have, through their materialist analyses, recast the story of western expansion at the center of these films to negate triumphal assumptions of national history and destiny. For Patricia Limerick, for instance, the West is a site of "conquest and its consequences." As she explains, "Conquest was a literal territorial form of economic growth. Westward expansion was the most concrete, down-to-earth demonstration of the economic habit on which the entire nation became dependent" (1987, 29). With a nod to William Appleman Williams, who wrote of imperialism as being "intrinsically our American way of life" (1980, ix), Limerick places the annexation of lands across North America in a context that allows us to see the relationship of those annexations to subsequent imperial adventures.

These historians help us see that U.S. expansion was a matter not of destiny but of policy. Such insights afford a perspective that enables a critique of the assumptions of national identity embedded in these films. Without this critical view, these films remain cultural expressions that encourage audiences to view U.S. expansion as an ultimate good. This is not to say that they may not also engage alternative and resistant responses; however, as we view these films as broadly typical of the genre and in relation to a clear historical tendency of the period—toward nationalism and a kind of imperialism—they readily promote assent.

By discussing two "classic" Westerns by two revered directors—John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and Howard Hawks's *Red River* (1948)—Chapter One looks at the emergence of the genre as the focal genre of the period immediately following World War II. *My Darling Clementine* and *Red River* redefine the genre in terms that allegorize vital developments of the dynamic period following World War II, years that marked the beginnings of the Cold War and the emergence of the postwar system of U.S. eco-

nomic centrality. I use Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory (1979) to show how the textual emphases of these films elaborate the hegemonic role of the United States in the postwar world. Wallerstein's powerful explanatory theory allows us to see the continuities in world capitalism since its inception. These films effectively define the economic imperatives of the postwar era. They elaborate the core terms of U.S. dominance within a world system of trade at precisely the moment when that centrality is being articulated and institutionalized. As such, they serve as a point of reference for the subsequent films that I discuss and for the period in general. They operate affirmatively, with little doubt as to the legitimacy and inevitability of a postwar Pax Americana.

Chapter Two looks at *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *Pursued* (1947), and *Fort Apache* (1948) as films that shift the emphases of the genre by accentuating its melodramatic elements. These films all have women at or close to their centers, and in each one a love story—in the first two films a tragically doomed love story—drives the plot. These films not only show the plasticity of the genre and its range of uses in the Cold War context; they also define what Peter Brooks (1976, 4) calls the "moral occult" in the service of U.S. expansion. In emphasizing the melodramatic aspects of Westerns, these films complement the two films considered in Chapter One, building on important threads of these other productions while steering the genre to address a more "feminine" strategy of imperialism—a view that looks at the psychology of domination, valuing coercion over brute force. Peter Brooks's discussions of melodrama and its elements, and their further elaboration by Christine Gledhill (1987), help me to demonstrate how these films define unacceptable extremes of emotion. The portrayal of these extremes suggests the necessity of rational strategies of incorporation and alliance, whether personal or political.

Chapter Three discusses *The Gunfighter* and *Broken Arrow,* two films made in 1950, which enlist the genre to indict its disposition toward violence. My discussion considers these films in relation to

both the typical role of gunplay in the Western and the historicity of such activities. Elements of these films critique Cold War cultural narratives of U.S. militarism, as they recast typical aspects of Western films to emphasize their racism and immorality. Yet such critical elements are recontained by both the residual emphases of the genre and the emerging terms of Cold War liberalism, which to some degree anticipate the criticisms and rebut them in culturally compelling terms. I examine the ways figures such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Arthur Schlesinger define Cold War existence as an extraordinary condition that necessitates extreme vigilance and willingness to engage in appropriate violence.

Chapter Four looks at *High Noon* (1952), *Shane* (1953), and *The Searchers* (1956), films that define a pinnacle of the genre's popularity. These films stand among the highest-grossing Westerns of all time, and the two earlier productions of the three were nominated for six Academy Awards each. These films speak in various ways to the web of events—the rise of Joseph McCarthy, the cult following of Douglas MacArthur, the further development of the security state—surrounding the Korean War. In particular, though, using Bruce Cumings's voluminous work (1981–1990) on the Korean War and political theorist Franz Schurmann's discussions of containment as a worldview, I look at their dramatization of the concept of containment. I view these films as not only furthering the debate regarding legitimate and illegitimate violence that was so vital to the films of Chapter Three but also adapting it to further assert the efficacy, indeed necessity, of violence in certain situations—situations in which an avowed enemy threatens to encroach upon a defined safe area. My discussion of these films also culminates a phase of study that explores the ways films of the first decade or so of the postwar period address and dramatize key concepts of Cold War liberalism. The Korean War and the fruition of McCarthyism during the war marked the effective end of the need to justify repression. Although Cold War liberals had largely justified the erosion of civil liberties during the postwar period, their discussion

had at least kept such questions in public view. By the midfifties, despite the eventual demise of McCarthy, few questioned the excesses of the FBI and other domestic security mechanisms.

Chapter Five considers three films: *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), and *The Alamo* (1960). These films not only fetishize boundaries and lines of demarcation in ways that are similar to those of the films of the preceding chapter; they also define the moral right of those who have achieved a greater degree of "civilization" to intervene in the affairs of groups that are less developed. This chapter looks at the work of figures who articulated modernization theories in the fifties and early sixties, particularly W. W. Rostow, who served Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. These three films, particularly the two released in 1960, define the common ground between liberals and conservatives regarding the legitimacy of those connected with the United States to develop far-flung client states and suggest the transitions in Cold War posture that marked the 1960s. The films signal the shift in climate that allowed for Kennedy's election in 1960, as they dramatize a kind of magnanimous imperialism cast in U.S. terms.

Chapter Six analyzes *Lonely Are the Brave, Ride the High Country,* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* all released in the spring of 1962. These films share a distinctly elegiac tone, and all look back on the golden age of morally clear conflict, upon the moment when the West was incorporated into the domain of the United States. This chapter employs Renato Rosaldo's (1989) concept of "nostalgic imperialism" as a means of seeing the connection between this longing for an idealized past and the state of the imperialist present. This chapter takes the study to the eve of the Vietnam War and shows how those on the Right and those on the Left—Goldwaterites and the drafters of the Port Huron statement—draw upon the mythic West as their historical anchor in defining a national future that casts off the damages caused by modernization and its attendant ensconcing of a bureaucratic order, which excessively mediates all aspects of life. Such views, present in these films

of 1962, suggest how an excess of imperial ambition might breed social disenchantment.

A Note on John Ford

By no particular design, as I began sorting through the many Westerns of the period, I found myself focusing on a disproportionate number of films directed by John Ford (one-quarter of all the films that I discuss in detail). In retrospect, this is not surprising. Ford famously introduced himself at a 1950 Directors Guild meeting by saying, "My name's John Ford. I make Westerns." But until 1946, Ford had made relatively few Westerns and only one notable sound Western—*Stagecoach,* in 1939. After 1946 he directed thirteen. Although none of these films had box-office grosses as high as *Shane*'s, and none won Ford an Academy Award for either best picture or best director (he won his last Oscar in 1952 for *The Quiet Man* and was never nominated for a Western), Ford was clearly the most prolific and significant director of Westerns during the 1950s. His films, although U.S. critics often disparaged or quibbled with them—even the ultimately canonical *The Searchers*—attracted significant audiences and often great praise from (mostly French and British) critics.

Ford's motivations for working extensively in a genre that was so often minimized were seemingly complex. To some degree, they were a matter of routine; to some degree, they were a matter of his engagement with the mythological universe defined by the genre. Ford was apparently drawn to seize the opportunity that the genre afforded for social commentary that did not necessarily fall distinctly into categories of Left and Right. That is, Westerns allowed the politically complex director to explore ideas that more contemporary plots would have made politically controversial. Indeed, Ford's politics were an amalgam of populist socialism and conservatism: He belonged to the rightist Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals but also maintained his loyalty to egalitarian social democracy. He gave money to the Eisenhower

campaigns but, in a 1967 interview, declared himself to be a liberal Democrat (see McBride 2001, 471–473).

Although it is not my work here to make a case for Ford's preeminence, I mention it as an aside. In my many hours of watching Westerns, I found his films not just compositionally distinctive but qualitatively so. Ford's Westerns are visually compelling and thematically rich in ways that no other films in my study approach.