

John Ford, the man who invented America

English version

Commentary

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00 00 40 00

Monument Valley, in the heart of the American West. The sacred land of the Navajo people.

To look out over the stunning beauty of this valley is to peer into the very heart of a legend: that of the conquest of the West – and of America itself.

A legend: for in reality Monument Valley has nothing to do with the conquest of the West.

No pioneer wagon train ever came here to this lost valley tucked away between Utah and Arizona.

00 01 17 00

If this landscape seems so evocative of the Far West, it's all due to one man who fell in love with it.

That man was a film director. One of the greatest.

His name was John Ford.

00 01 34 00

Stagecoach... My Darling Clementine... Fort Apache... The Searchers...

The titles alone evoke a whole stream of images from the days when both we and the cinema were young.

By inventing the Western with its heroes who were brought to life by huge stars like Henry Fonda, James Stewart and John Wayne, John Ford gave us his own version of the history of America.

00 02 10 00

His vision up there on the silver screen grabbed the imagination, and the legend Ford created seemed such a true image of America that you forget that it's fiction, and that there was in fact a man behind the camera.

00 02 37 00

Ford's is a cinema of promise: the promise of a land at last reconciled with itself; a land where each could find his or her place, no matter what their backstory.

Now that that land seems more divided than ever, let's head west and discover the cinema – and the America - of John Ford.

00 03 30 00

John Ford was already an established film maker when he first discovered Monument Valley in 1938. He'd already made a hundred films, most of them back in the silent days.

But in this landscape Ford found the inspiration that was to nourish the rest of his career, which started with the advent of the Talkies and peaked in his great masterpieces.

00 03 52 00

This period of extraordinary creativity was to win him no less than five Oscars – still a record to this day – and have definitively placed the Western at the very heart of America's identity.

And yet, to this day, the man who invented the legend remains an enigmatic, secretive figure, often unknown to the general public.

00 04 18 00

Joseph McBride

If you want to know Ford, you don't get it from interviewing Ford as I tried to do myself. Many people tried to interview him, he was almost impossible to interview. He wouldn't express his true feelings and thoughts very openly in interviews. He didn't want to be caught expressing, telling people exactly what he was doing because you could give people ammunition to snipe at you if you do that. So he kind of flew under the radar of Hollywood to some extent by making westerns.

00 04 47 00

He could deal with social issues more freely in westerns. Also nobody took western seriously in those days, so they didn't really care.

00 05 00 00

- Eleven, take one
- Take one? There won't be more than one take, will there? Shoot.
- Mister Ford, you made a picture called Three Bad Men, which is a large scale western. (...) You had a quite elaborate land rush in it. How did you shoot that?
- With a camera.
- Can I ask you what, what particular element about the western appealed to you from the beginning?
- I wouldn't know.
- Would you agree that the point of Fort Apache was that tradition, the tradition of the army was more important than one individual.
- Cut.

00 05 43 00

Joseph McBride

Ford created a personality, a persona for himself that he played like an actor. He played kind of a gruff cowboy kind of character. But he was actually a very well-read man, he was reading books all the time, he knew a lot about history and politics, and traveled the world, he was very sophisticated. But people didn't know this because he portrayed himself as a kind of a simple guy.

But, you know, if you see the films, that's his autobiography in a sense.

00 06 35 00

In Ford's films there lies a wealth of clues to his personality, like the pieces of a secret puzzle: the echo of that fractured America that Ford would spend his life trying to piece together.

In his first talking Western, Stagecoach, made in 1938, Ford gathers his characters together in a cramped stagecoach. As the dangerous journey unfolds, each reveals his or her true personality.

00 07 07 00

Which of them, then, is the one John Ford identifies with?

The shady banker who's just robbed his own bank? Possibly.

The outlaw? Could be.

The penniless gentleman gambler? The drunken doctor?

The hooker with the big heart?

No doubt he saw something of himself in all of them: after all, for their time, they were all subversive characters.

00 07 32 00

Cécile Gornet

These characters are founding figures of the Western genre who have become clichés in the hands of other filmmakers. Like the hooker with a heart of gold, or the righteous outlaw. Perhaps we sometimes forget that at the outset, when Ford created them, they were ambiguous, ambivalent characters, and far more complex than they might appear today. They may look like stereotypes now, but they were conceived differently.

00 08 09 00

Although the story takes place in the Wild West of the 19th Century, Stagecoach still remains a vitriolic attack on the social hypocrisy and self-righteousness of American society.

It was John Ford's head-on tilt at the corrupt elites as represented by the character of the banker, prototype of the white-collar criminal, whose time had come and whose ideas resonate to this day.

00 08 33 00

America for Americans!

The government must not interfere with business!

Reduce taxes! Our national debt is something shocking! Over \$1 billion a year!

What this country needs is a businessman for president!

-What this country needs is more fuddle.

- What?

- Fuddle!

00 08 56 00

Stagecoach was also the start of Ford's almost inseparable collaboration with a certain Marion Morrison, better known by his stage name of John Wayne, to whom Ford gave his first starring role.

He would make this big, strapping chap with his rolling gait a recurrent hero of his great American saga, the very incarnation of all the ambiguities of both Ford and his work.

00 09 24 00

Michel Cieutat

The John Wayne character in *Stagecoach* is very interesting: he'll turn out to be the hero, but not the simple hero you had back in the silent-film era. This hero has a little blood on his hands, and he's maddened, by his thirst of vengeance. He's a character who's neither one thing nor the other. He's a good guy, but a little bad: or vice versa. It's interesting that Ford created a type of character that challenges the innocence of winning the West as embodied by John Wayne. Up till then, Wayne had played pure good guys – a bit lamely. He wasn't a great actor at first. But Ford made him a national treasure.

00 10 20 00

Through film after film, Ford carved out this creation of his, constantly reshaping him to reflect his own inner journey and his view of America.

In 1962 – more than twenty years after *Stagecoach* – Ford once again directed his "national treasure" whose presence was to resonate across generations. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* is one of his most popular films, a real classic that is still shown all over the States – such as here at a former saloon in Llano, a small city deep in the heart of Texas.

In *Liberty Valance*, John Wayne has aged.

He now represents the "winner takes all" spirit of the West, against which is pitted James Stewart, another screen legend who features regularly in Ford's work. Stewart plays a young lawyer from the East-Coast who is determined to replace the law of the jungle with the law that is spelled out in his books.

00 11 31 00

- Look at the new waitress.
- That's my steak, Valance.
- You heard him, dude. Pick it up.
- No!
- Pilgrim, hold it. I said you, Valance. You pick it up.
- Three against one, Doniphon.
- My boy Pompey in the kitchen door.

00 12 27 00

John Wayne and James Stewart: two American legends; the two faces of America.

By setting them against each other, Ford captured the turning point in American history when the Wild West was declining just as Civilisation was struggling to take over.

These days, down in Llano the horses have been replaced by 4x4s, and folks no longer wear a Colt on their hip, yet the films of John Ford still don't seem that far away.

00 13 15 00

Jennifer Franklin

I had a great-great-great uncle from France who was a photographer. He came to Texas because he had a broken heart, and so he wanted to go to the West and he moved here on the ranch. And so from the 1870s on, we have pictures of Indians, and teepees, and the buck boards in the wagons. Oh I don't know I just love to see these old pictures and just... And you know, you think about the old westerns, I mean that's really what they lived. Look at these men...

00 13 46 00

So there was another part of the ranch that was not quite touching but close by, that in the '60s was sold to Jimmy Stewart, the actor, who was in a lot of westerns, and who apparently had a great love for the western life... And then my grandfather went to England, on just a trip, probably in the '70s I guess, and went to a play – I don't know where you go in London to a play but, and saw Jimmy Stewart in a play.

and they went backstage and talk to ranch, chated up about the ranch and the life. Totally like in a movie, yeah yeah.

00 14 22 00

I remember watching all of those movies as a young person. I mean everybody did, everybody watched all of that. And you know, I think people kind of discount westerns sometimes, as kind of children's movies, even back when I was a kid. It's like "for kids"... play cowboys and all that. But there's always a big message in them.

00 14 44 00

Fermin Ortiz

- If you had to choose, would you be rather John Wayne or James Stewart?

- For me, John Wayne. Because it was so simple. You could be a man, you could solve it as a man, and you could walk away as a man. When you get into the Jimmy Stewart role, and Jimmy Stewart way of solving things, he had to get into his head, and decide if it's right, if it's wrong, is he right, is he wrong... and all that. While John Wayne, it was black and white, simple: fix it. And I like that system.

- But, could you build a country on that, nowadays?

- The country was built on that. And the country is founded on that mentality. It's still that way.

00 15 22 00

Welcome to the John Wayne birthplace.

Now this is the place in Iowa where legends are made. And we have somebody that I wanna welcome personally here, in the birthplace of John Wayne. And that is Mr Donald Trump.

00 15 50 00

I want to apologise to the world for Donald Trump. He's not John Wayne, or any American that has preceded him. God willing, everyone would come after him. He has spent his whole life very sheltered, very protected by his money and by his name. And never had to deal with adversity. He wouldn't know how to deal with adversity.

00 16 13 00

That is so... Come on, get right next to me. John Wayne would be very very proud of you right now.

00 16 22 00

Nancy Schoenberger

Trump is a master storyteller, in a different way from Ford, who was a visual genius, and a genius filmmaker, but Trump, through his experience with reality TV, knows how to sell a narrative. Often in politics, it comes down to who has the best story to tell. Because we are a nation raised by, well, the movies, which is as I said visual storytelling. And we often will take those stories without questioning them. So I think we need, as we mature as a country, we need to be a little more discerning as to what stories we believe and why. And I think John Ford saw that.

00 17 05 00

Ford would often say his job was to tell stories, not to play at politics.

But those stories he told were always a part of the bigger story. It was his way of appealing to people's conscience.

After the success of Stagecoach, producer Darryl Zanuck asked him to adapt for the screen John Steinbeck's masterpiece The Grapes of Wrath. Ford decided to make a grand contemporary Western. It told the story of a farming family's journey across an America in the grip of the Great Depression.

A quarter of the U.S. population had lost their jobs; more than two million people found themselves in the street.

This was the socially and politically explosive source material Ford drew on. His film was an indictment of capitalist greed, and in particular of the unscrupulous banks who fed on the poor farmers' misery.

00 18 04 00

- Why, you're Joe Davis's boy!
 - I don't like for nobody to draw a bead on me.
 - Then what are you doin' a thing like this for, against your own people?
 - \$3.00 a day... that's what I'm doin' it for. I got two little kids at home, my wife, my wife's mother. Them folks got to eat. First and only, I think about my own folks.
 What happen to other people...their own lookout.
 - Yeah, but you don't understand, son. This is my land!
 - Used to be your land. It's the company's now.
 - Have it your own way, son...but just as sure as you touch my house with that Cat...I'm gonna blow you plumb to kingdom come!
 - You ain't gonna blow nobody nowhere. First place, they'd hang you, and you know it. For another, it wouldn't be two days 'fore they'd send another guy up here to take my place.
 Now, go on! Get out of the way!

00 19 08 00

John Ford was inspired by the photographic works of Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, who created a brilliant record of Depression-era America. He urged his two stars, Henry Fonda and Jane Darwell, to immerse themselves in these faces, these wasted bodies – and to bring them to the big screen.

They truly held up a mirror.

To such an extent that the film has become confused in the minds of the public with the actual archive material from that period.

00 19 40 00

In 1941, Ford received the Oscar for Best Director for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

He was now a man of considerable influence, at a time when the cinema had become the foremost of the mass media. And he would use this influence to speak for the dispossessed and voiceless of America.

On the film's release, it would earn him a reputation as a Leftist sympathiser.

00 20 10 00

And when, a few years later, the country was seized by anti-Communist hysteria, an FBI report was meticulously compiled on any of the director's statements that were judged to be suspicious.

Among them, his refusal to swear the oath of loyalty to the United States demanded by Cecil B. DeMille, then head of the Directors Guild of America.

00 20 32 00

Joseph McBride

One thing I discovered researching that famous Screen Directors' Guild meeting 1950 was that when Ford took his famous stand against Cecil B. DeMille, he carried a lot of weight, and so he managed to get DeMille vanquished at that meeting, but the next day, he contacted DeMille, and it's not clear whether he called him or wrote him.

But there is a document in DeMille's files that Ford called or wrote him to apologize, and he was disparaging the people who were against DeMille. Who knows? With Ford it's hard to know why he kind of tried to backtrack the day after the meeting. But it's typical of Ford's ambivalence too, maybe he felt two ways about the situation.

00 21 18 00

Look through his personal archives and you'll find a John Ford who's very hard to pin down. He refused to be labelled: either as left-wing or – as would later be suggested – a reactionary.

In a letter to his nephew Bob, who fought as a volunteer alongside the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, he declared himself a definite socialistic democrat who would forever remain on the Left...

00 21 52 00

In public, though, Ford always took care to cover his tracks when it came to his politics.

But his films spoke for him.

They bear witness to what he considered his inherited family values as the son of Irish immigrants: a loathing for injustice and a profound hope for a better future – the motor of the American Dream.

00 22 18 00

Dan Ford is John Ford's grandson and shares his bravura sense of humour. He's one of the last living Fords to have known the grand old man.

00 22 30 00

Dan Ford

You can piss in the yard if you want, but don't piss in the house. I'm teasing you.

John Ford celebrated America, because he was a son of immigrants. To somebody like that, people like that, the American dream was more than it is to somebody who's been here several generations. And early American movies were vital in bringing the country together, bringing the culture together.

00 23 06 00

... First of all the studios were very pro-American, and the heads of the studios were very pro-American, and they wanted to present an optimistic picture of America. Because it sold. And also, it made the Government happy. It kept the Government off their ass.

00 23 23 00

John Ford knew just where to get away from it all: on board his boat, a superb 32-metre ketch where between films he sought refuge from all the prying eyes – with the help of plenty of booze.

00 23 43 00

Dan Ford

It gave him the outlet that he needed to get away from people. Because he could control who saw him, and what he did, and what he drank, and how much he drank. And most of his real alcoholic benders probably most of them were on the Araner.

And he would do it with his friends, and he would do it alone. But it was his release, it was his escape.

00 24 29 00

In 1942, the U.S. was sucked brutally into the storm, with the surprise attack by the Japanese Air Force on Pearl Harbour.

Ford was a patriot to the core, and he didn't even wait for his country officially to declare war before enlisting in the U.S. Navy.

He was determined to convince the military authorities of the urgent need to train photographers and cameramen to document the worldwide conflict from an American point of view.

After intense negotiations, Ford got his way, and himself took charge of the training of these new recruits.

00 25 04 00

McBride

One of the ironies of American history is that minorities often join the military to prove their patriotism and their belonging in America, and that's I think why Ford was drawn to the military himself.

He wanted to be accepted in American society.

Part of him craved acceptance by the establishment which he ultimately got, and then part of him was an Irish rebel who was opposed to the establishment. So he was constantly torn between these two poles, which is one reason why he is such an interesting person, and artist.

00 25 41 00

The man who brought the conquest of the West to the screen now turned his lens on America at war.

Along with his camera crews, he roamed almost all the battlefields: in the desert sands of Africa; on board the barges at the Normandy Landings; side by side with the troops marching on Germany...

His baptism of fire came back in 1942, on the tiny Midway Atoll way out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

00 26 16 00

At Midway, Ford was to undergo a real initiation; it was if he'd suddenly found himself on the other side of the screen. This time, the death that prowled all around him was no longer a work of fiction. Perched atop an electricity power plant, he was under orders to signal the position of enemy aircraft.

00 26 42 00

He gave just one order to his young cameraman: "Photograph faces. We can always fake combat footage later."

But he got it anyway.

Ford was wounded in the arm by mortar shrapnel but kept on filming, managing to capture footage of a rare intensity.

His film *The Battle of Midway* would win the Oscar for Best Documentary in 1942.

00 27 12 01

- I expect you are going to hate this question but I do want to ask you about courage. Would you say that courage is something that one acquires or something that one was born with?
- How do you expect me to answer that?
- You do seem to be interested in courage.
- I don't know. I tried to figure it out. I am... I am really a coward. I know I am. So that's why I did foolish things. And I was decorated nine times. I tried to prove that I was not a coward but after it was all over I still knew... I still know that I was a coward. I've always found that a little quiet little man that nobody pays any attention to, usually has more guts. Do they use "guts" in BBC? Mmh?
- Sure.
- Has more guts than courage, that the big blow hard the big noisy outspoken fellow – it's the little man that does the courageous thing. Courage is a thing that does not belong to any nation, to any class of people.

00 28 37 00

Ford celebrated victory in his own way: aboard his yacht, the *Araner*, with his family and old friends. His clan.

Like millions of Americans home from the war, he did his best to return to civilian life; but his four years in uniform had changed him, and in quite a few unexpected little ways...

00 29 04 00

Dan Ford

He didn't tell direct war stories, but he lived the part. And he was very casual about his clothes, he wore good clothes, but he wore them very casually. He would wear Irish linens and quality jackets and sport coats. But they would be sloppy. There would be cigar ashes all over them and so on. But, when he put that uniform on, it was perfect. It was constantly tailored, to fit him perfectly. All the medals showing, that was the only time John Ford ever really got formal. And he got formal – he seemed to put it on at any excuse he could.

00 29 44 00

And later in life, whenever he went somewhere, like I went with him to Mark Armstead's daughter's wedding. And he wore the uniform! Everybody else has got his business suit on or a few people in tuxes, the bride and groom are dressed formally. He's got that fucking uniform on, you know!

00 30 05 00

The war's been over for a few years. I don't know if the war... the war stayed with him. It was, perhaps it was the highlight of his life. Perhaps it was, he was the most involved and happy in doing that, his time in the Navy, than any other time.

00 30 29 00

Joseph Mc Bride

I think Ford was an unhappy man in many ways.

His personal life was kind of a mess, and between films he would just get drunk a lot, he would crawl into a sleeping bag and read books and drink and listen to records. And they would have to take him to the hospital to dry him out...

That was Ford's way of coping, anesthetizing himself against ordinary life. So what he did was he created a better life for himself, a fantasy life on set.

00 31 06 00

Barely four months after getting back, Ford sought refuge once more in Monument Valley.

It had been seven years since he'd last been there filming Stagecoach with John Wayne.

In this lunar landscape, surrounded by his faithful few, he gradually got his bearings back, and embarked once again on his visionary chronicle of the United States – as if nothing had changed...

00 31 38 00

His first film after the war was a Western, My Darling Clementine.

It was his reconstruction of the famous gunfight at the OK Corral, where Sheriff Wyatt Earp – played by Henry Fonda – confronts the Clanton gang who had murdered his younger brother that helped to make the film so celebrated.

00 32 11 00

Joseph McBride

Ford mustered out of the war in 1945, and it changed him a lot. It helped mature him as a filmmaker even more, I mean he was a great filmmaker before the war, but he was even greater after the war, in my view. After World War II – most of his films were about war, in one way or the other.

00 32 34 00

My Darling Clementine is dark and gloomy, a bitter reflection on the violence of men which sweats out through every shot – and not just in the shoot-out sequences...

00 32 48 00

- Howdy.
- Good evening.
- I'm...
- Wyatt Earp. I know. I know all about you... and your reason for being here, but...
- Heard a lot about you too, Doc. You left your mark around in Deadwood, Denver and places. Fact a man can follow your trace from graveyard to graveyard.
- There's one here too, the biggest graveyard west of the Rockies. Marshalls and I usually get along much better when... we understand that right away.
- Get your meaning Doc.
- Good. Have a drink?
- Thanks, believe I will.
- Mac, a glass of champagne for the marshal.
- Make it whiskey.
- You're my guest marshal. Champagne.

00 33 54 00

Two men who mirror each other – and provide another piece in the great puzzle that is John Ford, revealing a theme that would now run through all his work: a face-off between two different images of masculinity.

One of them delicate, and shy around women; the other a hulking prototype of the Western male.

00 34 18 00

Nancy Schoenberger

John Ford was terrified of his own feminine side, and as a way to erase it and to embrace a more masculine image of himself, he created these masculine heroes with men like John Wayne, and earlier on Henry Fonda.

But there was that repressed, in my view, repressed side of his more artistic and feminine nature which he was not comfortable with and didn't know how to express, except through his films.

He really created the ideal of the American western hero, which he hoped to be an aspect of himself.

00 35 10 00

Ford was a man of many faces: the very image of his complex country.

In this eternal quest, the Native Americans had a very special place. He would shoot seven films in Monument Valley: for the beauty of the location, of course, but also to relieve somewhat the misery of the local population by hiring them on his shoots.

Above all, for John Ford, the Indians were an integral part of the story of America.

00 35 42 00

Gentlemen, this is Alchesay, head of the White Mountain Apaches...
...Satanta of the Mescaleros

00 35 48 00

Cécile Gornet

Ford restored Native Americans to their rightful place in the West. In a way, he restored their presence, their faces, their names. Their land, in Monument Valley. By filming there, he gave them work, but he also identified them with their sacred lands. For example, there's the shot in *Stagecoach* where they suddenly appear, as if they'd always been there, as if anchored in the landscape, for all eternity. As if Ford wanted to show the other side of the mythology that everyone repressed, in a denial of their presence.

00 36 45 00

So what remains today of John Ford's time with the Navajo, forty-five years after the death of the one they called "Natanyi Nez"- "The Big Chief"?

The Goulding Trading Post – the local base camp for Ford and his crew - is still there. It's grown over the years, thanks to the notoriety brought by Hollywood film shoots.

The Navajo are still there too. But the movie people hardly ever come to Monument Valley anymore, unless it's to film a commercial. Times have changed.

00 37 28 00

But it's still a thrill to see the old guys – the grandpas, the fathers and uncles – once immortalised by the camera of John Ford.

00 37 37 00

Look where they pitched the tents. On the airfield.

Paul Boone, Jefferson, Eddie Seaton. And that's Harvey's dad.

00 38 08 00

But for several months now, a new battle has been raging on this land so dear to the Navajo people and to John Ford...

...a battle that Ford would have surely loved to bring to the screen.

Former President Barak Obama accorded to these lands special protection that outlawed all mineral exploitation and indiscriminate building. But a few months ago, the new Administration decided drastically to reduce the extent of the land protected by law.

00 38 38 00

Angelo Baca

They want to take finite resources out of this land until it's basically slowly drained and killed. But for us, we've learned how to sustainably live on this land for generations. It's all just part of a plan to really disposes us, remove us and dislocate us from our land and our connection to it.

00 39 03 00

The same thing is happening.

The debate about land is still raging on. Whose land is it? Who gets to use it?

Is it public land, is it indigenous land? And the truth of it is it has always been Native land, and we're still here, and we'll always going to be here. It doesn't matter what people designate it as. If it's a monument or if it's not. We're always going to be here in this land. We're gonna be here far into the future.

00 39 30 00

America still hasn't shrugged off its old demons...

... the same ones that Ford confronted when, back in 1949, he made *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*.

In this film, he even inverted the whole code of the Western: the true victory was now to avoid spilling blood.

In front of Ford's camera, John Wayne was transformed. It was a true character role. He was only 42 at the time, and his extremely conservative politics were diametrically opposed to those of the man he was playing: an aging – and pacifist – officer.

00 40 05 00

- You will come with me. Hunt buffalo together. Smoke many pipes. We are too old for war.
- Yes, we are too old for war, but old men should stop wars.

00 40 28 00

In spite of their differences, John Wayne would be eternally grateful to John Ford for making a great actor of him.

In return, Ford used his leading man's enormous popularity to put across his message of pacifism.

And even though most of his audience preferred his big action sequences, Ford never gave up.

He was at the peak of his career... but still he wanted to take it further.

00 40 54 00

In *The Searchers*, made in 1956, he came up with the character of Ethan Edwards, a hero whose inherent racism comes to light when he decides to head off in search of his young niece, abducted by the Comanches.

Ethan's ambiguities, his violence and his prejudices are clearly those of American society as a whole.

The most disturbing thing, though, is the way in which, through John Wayne, Ford seems to reveal his own contradictions...

00 41 30 00

Joseph Mc Bride

He had different parts that were kind of at war with each other, but they all came together in his films as a kind of mixture of toughness and tenderness, he's sympathetic in some ways and deeply unsympathetic in others.

He had all these characters inside him, and he could relate to every angle of them.

00 41 53 00

The Searchers: the title alone makes quite clear the existential quest that Ford was embarking upon.

That quest was in fact on two levels: it was both that of a man searching for his true self and that of a country that was still in denial of its own past.

00 42 15 00

Nancy Schoenberg

The Searchers, you have to go out and see it, because it really tells a much more accurate, I think, view of American history. In that you see, through the vengeful character played by John Wayne Ethan Edwards, you see how so much of what motivated our western expansion was fear, resentment and hatred of native Americans. You see that in the character of John Wayne.

00 42 45 00

You see the remains of an Indian village destroyed by the American cavalry. John Ford writes that equation, saying: the Native Americans were not the savage ones, or not only. The US cavalry has a lot to answer for as well.

In *The Searchers*, we see that they're capable of genocide.

00 43 18 00

Something had broken in John Ford. He seemed no longer to believe in the America he had so glorified through all his films.

And still he was struggling with his own demons. Especially the bottle. His wounded arm from the Battle of Midway still caused him pain. And, following a botched cataract operation on his right eye, he now had to wear an eyepatch – thus joining the ranks of Hollywood's three famous one-eyed men along with Raoul Walsh and Fritz Lang.

00 43 52 00

John Ford had entered the last stretch of his career: the path of disillusionment.

From now on, he would strive to deconstruct his own legend; the legend he himself had forged throughout his work.

And if *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* occupies such an important place in that work, it's because it marks the turning point and a distillation of his intent.

00 44 14 00

Ford was denouncing the blindness of an America no longer capable of telling the reality from the myth.

Just like James Stewart facing the journalists, he was struggling to restore the historical truth.

But what if no one wanted to listen?

00 44 29 00

- You're not going to use the story Mr Scott ?
- No Sir. This is the west Sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.
- He's right Rans...

00 44 48 00

Joseph Mc Bride

It's a great film about how history is turned into mythology in America. It happens throughout the world too, but especially in America, because we're, as somebody said recently, we're a country that loves to lie to ourselves. We love to tell heroic stories that make our past seem better than what it was.

Liberty Valance kind of closes the book of American history and turns us back on American history as a sham.

Ford's later work is a rejection of America, basically.

00 45 28 00

This was the point where John Ford threw in his lot with the minorities and started in his way to fight for the civil rights of African-Americans. In 1960, with the whole country plunged into a wave of heavy racial tension, he directed a new Western called *Sergeant Rutledge*.

It's the story of a black U.S. Cavalry sergeant wrongly accused of the rape and murder of a young white girl. Convinced that he has no chance of getting a fair trial, Rutledge decides to flee. For its time it was an explosive subject; indeed it still would be today.

With *Sergeant Rutledge*, John Ford scored another bullseye by confronting white America with its own demons.

00 46 20 00

- 'cause I ain't going back to stand trial.
- Don't you be a fool, Brax. What if you did get away? Why, this thing would haunt you till you couldn't stand it.
- You forget, sir, we've been haunted a long time, too much to worry. Yeah, it was all right for Mr. Lincoln to say we were free, but that ain't so. Not yet. Maybe someday, but not yet.
- All right, Rutledge.

00 46 44 00

Chale Nafus

That was an absolute revelation to me. I do not remember seeing that. I was 17-18 when it came out, I don't think it was popular from what I've seen. But as I watched it now, I was overwhelmed with what Ford was doing, in 1960.

00 47 03 00

The first thing we know of Woody Strode's character is his hand over a white woman's face, and that's almost like a clichéd image. If it were on a poster, people would immediately say: "rape", etc.

He sets the audience – the white audience – up to think a certain way, and slowly begins to show the reality of what happened.

00 47 31 00

In 2018? I mean the police might as well be the white army cavalry – whatever. And so, the freedom, I mean I'm not sure that the freedom is there. 2,000,000 prisoners in American jails, more than anywhere else in the world? So I think that the difference is, it's not the grinding oppression of even the 1940s-1950s, and there's so much more education, and so many more spokespeople, and so I have great hopes. We're not going back to the way it was, even when I was growing up. I do, I still maintain hope for the long run.

00 48 15 00

In Sergeant Rutledge, the promise of a new America to which Ford had dedicated his entire career is the predominant theme.

As he worked on the picture, Ford could feel that his long and intense love affair with his country was drawing to a close.

Like a jilted lover, he roared out his pain.

And it was his lead actor, Woody Strode, who was the inspired mouthpiece for it.

00 48 41 00

The 9th Cavalry was my home. My real freedom. And my self respect. And the way I was deserting it, I wasn't nothing worse than a swamp-running nigger. And I ain't that. Do you hear me? I'm a man.

00 49 11 00

In 1964, John Ford was 70 years old. He went to say his farewell to Monument Valley – by filming there his last Western, Cheyenne Autumn.

Farewell to Monument Valley – and goodbye as well to the Indians, who'd played an increasingly important role in his films.

Ford said he wanted to tell history from the point of view of the Native Americans. "Let's face it, we've treated them very badly. We've cheated and robbed, killed, murdered, massacred and everything else, but they kill one white man and, God, outcome the troops," he said, concluding that "it's a real blot on our shield."

00 49 58 00

The film is loosely based on historical fact: that of the long march of the three hundred Cheyenne who chose to defy the U.S. Cavalry by leaving their reserve to return to their ancestral lands.

Cheyenne Autumn is a testimonial, one in which John Ford makes his final plea for the wrongs done to the Native Americans to be recognised.

00 50 24 00

Chale Nafus:

It does seem that a number of people, even of my generation, misinterpret him. I identify him too closely to John Wayne, so John Wayne became a big pro-Vietnam war apologist with the Green Berets. And so it was very unfair of me and of others to retroactively in a sense subjectively accuse Ford of having similar ideas.

And *Cheyenne Autumn* does not exemplify those attitudes. Because any, particularly the Native Americans within Ford's films, can stand in for any oppressed group of people, it's just he wanted to make westerns, so that's who it was. But, yeah, I'll be the first to admit that he – once again he requires and invites deeper study I think.

00 51 06 00

Has authority been sufficiently obeyed Sir?

00 52 08 00

- *Do you think the early settlers would have been proud of the America we have today?*
- *What does that got to do with films?*
- *Because a lot of people --- right or wrong regard you as one of the foremost if not the foremost chronicler of American history.*
- *Hence the question?*
- *Hence the question.*
- *Well right now I think they'd be bloody well ashamed of us... Things will get better.*

00 52 50 00

“ things will get better...”

These were the words of a man in the twilight of his years, who was soon to become a legend.

He has left us a body of work that continues to resonate to this day.

A magnificent antidote to all the darkness in the world.