

"Never Run a Bluff With a Six-Gun"

Nine Classic Western Films

History's first narrative film was a Western: Edwin Porter's "The Great Train Robbery," first screened in 1903. Ever since, westerns – "oaters" – have been among the most favorite films for viewers all over the world. Indeed, for people from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, John Wayne, James Stewart, Errol Flynn, Henry Fonda and Randolph Scott ARE America. Westerns come in all shapes and sizes: epics and dramas, musicals and comedies. AT one time, even John Wayne was a singing cowboy ("Singing Sandy").

In this course, we will screen classic Westerns ranging from Porter's "Great Train Robbery" to Robert Aldrich's 1979 comedy-drama "The Frisco Kid," starring a young Harrison Ford. Through these films we will see the way various writers and directors sought to portray America to the movie-going public; the history, scenery, ethos and values through which generations of film lovers first met America.

Each class will begin with an introduction for the evening's presentation. After viewing the film in its entirety, the class will engage in a (hopefully) spirited discussion. And remember, as the real (as opposed to the cinematic) Bat Masterson once said, "Never run a bluff with a six-gun . . ."

1. **"The Great Train Robbery" (1903) and "Tumbleweeds" (1925):** At a brief 11 minutes, Porter's "The Great Train Robbery" was the first Western, starring the man who would become history's first cowboy star: "Broncho Billy" (Max Aronson). "Tumbleweeds," starring the legendary William S. Hart, is an epic silent Western dealing with the historic Oklahoma land rush.
2. **"Annie Oakley (1935):** Barbara Stanwyck stars in a romanticized biography of the great Western sharpshooter. Directed by George Stevens and costarring Preston Foster, and Melvin Douglas.
3. **"Dodge City" (1939):** Errol Flynn stars as a cattle agent who, disgusted by the brutal lawlessness of Dodge City, takes over as sheriff. With Olivia de Havilland; directed by Michael Curtiz.
4. **"The Westerner" (1940):** Walter Brennan stars as the self-appointed "hanging judge" Roy Bean. Gary Cooper is the saddle tramp who opposes the "judge's" policy toward homesteaders. Directed by William Wyler and costarring Forrest Tucker, Fred Stone and Dana Andrews.
5. **"Buck Benny Rides Again" (1940):** Believe it or not, even Jack Benny made a Western . . . sort of. This is a rare comedic spoof of Western clichés, starring the

entire Benny radio "family" (Dennis Day, Rochester, Phil Harris, *et al*). Jack, playing himself, tries to make good on his fictitious boasts about roughing it in Nevada.

6. **"The Ox-Bow Incident" (1943):** William Wellman directs Henry Fonda, Anthony Quinn, Harry Morgan and Dana Andrews in Walter Van Tilburg Clark's classic tale of a posse that captures three men suspected of murdering a farmer. A taut, intimate classic.
7. **"The Searchers" (1956):** John Ford directs John Wayne, Ward Bond, Vera Miles and a young Natalie Wood in a story about a Civil War Veteran who embarks on a long journey to rescue his niece from an Indian tribe. Perhaps the greatest of all Ford/Wayne collaborations.
8. **"The Frisco Kid" (1978):** Robert Aldrich directs Gene Wilder and Harrison Ford in a unique heartfelt Western comedy/drama in which a Polish rabbi (Wilder) wanders through the Old West on his way to lead a synagogue in 1869's San Francisco.