

The Western - Genre Conventions

Key Points

- Telling stories set in the American West
- Often portray films in a **romanticized light** =
- Nostalgic, historical feel
- Genre has been popular throughout the history of the movies **WHY?**

- Has diminished in importance as the United States moves further away from the period depicted in these movies.

Setting and Time - the American West

- **Generally, 1860-1910 - What historical events were going on in America at this time?**

- Incorporates the Civil War into the film directly, or the background
- May extend further back to the colonial period, or forward to the mid 20th century
- May range geographically from Mexico to Canada
- Usually set against stunning American landscapes. **Examples:**

- In some movies the landscapes are more the stars than the actors
- Stress the harshness of the landscape, or juxtapose the beauty of it with the dirtiness of a town

Possible Locations:

- Forts
- Ranch Houses
- Homestead
- Saloon
- Jail
- **Others?**

The Hero - Often an outsider

- Semi – nomadic characters **MEANS** =
- Sole possessions consist of clothing, a gun and maybe a horse
- **Popular characters based on real individuals:** Wyatt Earp,
- Motivated by _____
- Adheres to a _____

Some general conventions

- Each movie is a morality tale = struggle between _____ and _____
- Some high technology of the era present, e.g. telegraph, printing press, railroad

Others:

Occasionally these referred to as a development just arriving, symbolizing the end of frontier lifestyle and the march of civilization

Iconography

- Stetsons =
- Spurs =
- Colt. 45's =
- Faithful Steed =
- Indians
- Characters: Sheriff, Prostitute, Indians
- OTHERS** =

Common Themes

The common binary theme _____ vs. _____

East vs. _____ Settlers vs. _____

Culture vs. _____ Train vs. _____

Community vs. _____

- Conquest of the wilderness and the subordination of nature, or the capture of territory from the natives.
- Depicts a society based on a code of honor rather than law.
- Social status is only achieved through acts of _____ or _____.
- The arrival of the law is often seen as _____