

United States, 1952

Running Length: 1:25

MPAA Classification: Not Rated (Violence)

Theatrical Aspect Ratio: 1.33:1

Cast: Gary Cooper, Thomas Mitchell, Lloyd Bridges, Katy Jurado, Grace Kelly, Otto Kruger, Lon Chaney, Henry Morgan, Ian MacDonal, Lee Van Cleef, Robert J. Wilke, Sheb Wooley

Director: Fred Zinnemann

Producer: Stanley Kramer

Screenplay: Carl Foreman

Cinematography: Floyd Crosby

Music: Dimitri Tiomkin

U.S. Distributor: United Artists

By 1952, movie-goers knew exactly what to expect from a Western: a clean-cut, self-assured hero facing down a good-for-nothing villain in a climactic shoot-out, lots of action, gorgeous scenery, and not much in the way of thematic depth. This was a time when the Western was at the height of its popularity, and when stars of the genre, like John Wayne and Gary Cooper, were revered as heroes of the Old West. Then along came Stanley Kramer and Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*, and the Western was never quite the same.

Many fans of the genre regard *High Noon* as the best Western ever made. There are other contenders for the titles (including, but not limited to *The Searchers*; *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*; [The Wild Bunch](#); *Unforgiven*; and [Dances With Wolves](#)), but there's no debating that *High Noon* is amongst the elite - it is as much above the garden variety Western as something like *Die Hard* is above the generic shoot-'em-up action thriller.

High Noon contains many of the elements of the traditional Western: the gun-toting bad guys, the moral lawman, the pretty girl, and the climactic gunfight. But it's in the way these elements are blended together, with the slight spin put on them by Zinnemann and screenwriter Carl Foreman, that makes *High Noon* unlike any other Western. Audiences in the early '50s were drawn to the theater by the promise of a Gary Cooper film. Many viewers left confused, consternated, or vaguely dissatisfied, because things didn't play out in the expected way. It is rumored that John Wayne criticized *High Noon*'s ending as being "un-American."

Indeed, 1952 was the time of "un-American" things, with Senator Joseph McCarthy wielding the power of paranoia and fear in Washington as he presided over the 20th century Salem Witch Trials. This time, the targets weren't servants of the Devil, but Communists (although some at the time might have said there was no difference). Carl Foreman, the screenwriter of *High Noon*, was blacklisted soon after writing the script. Also on McCarthy's list were actor Lloyd Bridges and cinematographer Floyd Crosby. To hear McCarthy tell it, *High Noon* was a veritable hotbed of "un-American" activity. And the story can easily be seen as allegorical - a man is turned on by those he called friends and comrades, and comes to see that the most valued principle of the masses is self-preservation.

Foreman's script was loosely based on the story "The Tin Star", by John W. Cunningham. Although there were only bare-bones similarities, Kramer bought the rights to "The Tin Star" to avoid copyright issues. Foreman fleshed out the tale using a combination of his imagination and his real-life experiences with the McCarthy Commission. The more one considers the atmosphere in which Foreman wrote *High Noon*, the easier it is to understand the grim tone that underscores nearly every frame of the motion picture. The typical Western was a story of great heroism and derring-do. *High Noon* highlights much of humanity's base nature.

Cooper plays Marshal Will Kane, and, when *High Noon* opens, it's a little after 10 o'clock in the morning, and he is being married to Amy Fowler (Grace Kelly), a woman less than half his age. At the same time, trouble has arrived in Kane's sleepy Western town. Three outlaws, the henchmen of convicted murderer Frank Miller (Ian MacDonald), are waiting at the railroad station, where Miller, recently freed from prison, is expected on the noon train. He has one goal: revenge, and the target of his hatred is Kane, the man who brought him down. Kane's friends, including the town's mayor (Thomas Mitchell), the local judge (Otto Kruger), and the former Marshal, Martin Howe (Lon Chaney), urge him to flee, but he can't. Against the wishes of his Quaker wife and with no one in the town willing to stand beside him, Kane prepares to face Miller and his gang alone.

High Noon is about loyalty and betrayal. Loyalty on Kane's part - even when everyone deserts him, he stands his ground, though it seems inevitable that the action will cost him his life. And betrayal on the town's part. Many of the locals are agreed that they owe their prosperity to Kane, but they will not help him or defend him, because they believe his cause to be hopeless. There are even those who welcome Miller's return. In the end, Kane is forced into the showdown on his own, until, at a crucial moment, Amy proves herself to be a worthy wife.

The movie transpires virtually in real time, with a minute on screen equaling one in the theater. In one of many departures from the traditional Western, there is little action until the final ten minutes, when Kane shoots it out with Miller's gang. The lone exception is a fistfight between Kane and a former deputy, Harvey Pell (Lloyd Bridges). Other than that, the movie is comprised primarily of Kane's failed attempts to rally the townspeople to his cause. *High Noon*'s tension comes through Kane's desperation, aided in no small part by Elmo Williams' brilliant editing as the clock ticks down to twelve. For a motion picture with so little action, the suspense builds to almost unbearable levels.

Many have called *High Noon* more of a morality play than a Western, and, in some ways, that's an accurate description. Aside from the primary plot thread, there are other quandries to be considered. Amy must choose between her dearly-held peaceful beliefs (which she adopted after her brother and father were killed) and standing by her husband. It's easy to be non-violent when there's no price to pay. Harvey Pell must decide between ego and friendship. *High Noon* places many facets of human nature under the microscope, and therein lies the complexity in a seemingly simple idea. The deeper one looks, the more *High Noon* has to offer.

The climactic gunfight is not played out with two men staring down one another across an empty expanse of street, with a tumbleweed or two blowing around in the background. Instead, it's a quick and dirty business, with a hostage-taking and a man being shot in the back. When Kane wins the day, as he must (this is, after all, Gary Cooper), it has the feeling of a hollow victory. And the Marshal's final action - throwing his badge into the dirt before he and Amy ride out of town - gives us a taste of the bitterness that has settled in his mouth.

There are really only two men one could envision playing the part of Marshal Kane - James Stewart and Gary Cooper. Cooper, the older of the two men, is the better choice. He brings a world-weariness to the part. From the beginning, we sense that he's a reluctant hero, and this is confirmed as the story moves along. He admits to being afraid, and one senses that he wants nothing more than to get on the wagon with his wife and head out of town before Miller's arrival. But his overpowering sense of duty, coupled with the concern that Miller will eventually hunt him down, is strong enough to keep him where he is. Cooper imbues Kane with equal parts dignity and humanity. There's no doubt that he's a hero, but, unlike the usual Western good guy, he is filled with doubts and all-too-human weaknesses. These are the frailties each of us finds in ourselves; seeing them in Kane allows us to identify with him intimately. It makes the film more personal. In 1952, the movie was unsettling for some because they were unprepared to see a reflection of themselves on the screen. They expected an invulnerable hero; they got a man.

As important as it was to humanize *High Noon's* protagonist, so the villain remained largely faceless - an unseen menace riding in on the railroad tracks. Although his presence looms large over the proceedings, it isn't until the final fifteen minutes that Miller finally shows up, disembarking from the train, girded for battle. In a way, the arrival of actor Ian MacDonald is almost anti-climactic. By this point, Miller had been so thoroughly demonized that the appearance of a normal (albeit tough-looking) man is a little disappointing.

High Noon offered high-profile exposure to two actresses. Katy Jurado, a Mexican performer, received rave reviews for her tough-as-nails portrayal of Helen Ramirez, Kane's former lover. This movie represented Jurado's entrance into American cinema; after *High Noon*, she enjoyed a nice career in Westerns, appearing in such notable films as *Broken Lance* (for which she earned a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination) and *One Eyed Jacks*. *High Noon* also offered the first high-billed opportunity to Grace Kelly, who would go on to capture an Oscar, the eye of Alfred Hitchcock (she became his favorite female lead), and the hearts of millions (including the Prince of Monaco). For Kelly, this certainly isn't a great performance (she is a little wooden at times), but it was enough to get her noticed.

As is true of nearly every great film, all of the elements mix together in *High Noon*. The black-and-white cinematography is perfect for setting the dark mood. The music is relentless. And the editing (with the possible exception of the fight between Kane and Pell, which is choppy) is nearly flawless. But the real elements to applaud are the acting,

the script, and the direction, all of which are top-notch. Cooper appeared in more than 100 films during his long career; few aspired to the level of *High Noon*, much less attained it. And no credit on Zimmermann's resume is as impressive. The Western may be one of the few truly American art forms, and *High Noon* shows exactly how much potential it can embrace.

Awards for High Noon ([1952](#))

Academy Awards, USA			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient(s)
1953	Won	Oscar	Best Actor in a Leading Role Gary Cooper Gary Cooper was not present at the awards ceremony. John Wayne accepted on his behalf.
			Best Film Editing Elmo Williams Harry W. Gerstad
			Best Music, Original Song Dimitri Tiomkin (music) Ned Washington (lyrics) For the song "High Noon (Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darlin')"
			Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture Dimitri Tiomkin
	Nominated	Oscar	Best Director Fred Zinnemann
			Best Picture Stanley Kramer
Best Writing, Screenplay Carl Foreman			
Bodil Awards			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient(s)

1953	Won	Bodil	Best American Film (Bedste amerikanske film) Fred Zinnemann (director)
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[Cinema Writers Circle Awards, Spain](#)

Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient(s)
1954	Won	CEC Award	Best Foreign Film (Mejor Película Extranjera) USA.

[DVD Exclusive Awards](#)

Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient(s)
2003	Nominated	DVD Premiere Award	Best Audio Commentary, Library Release Maria Cooper Jonathan Foreman Tim Zinnemann John Ritter For the Collector's Edition.

[Directors Guild of America, USA](#)

Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient(s)
1953	Nominated	DGA Award	Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Motion Pictures Fred Zinnemann

[Golden Globes, USA](#)

Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient(s)
1953	Won	Golden Globe	Best Cinematography - Black and White Floyd Crosby
			Best Motion Picture Actor - Drama Gary Cooper
			Best Motion Picture Score Dimitri Tiomkin
			Best Supporting Actress

			Katy Jurado
			Best Motion Picture - Drama
	Nominated	Golden Globe	Best Screenplay Carl Foreman
			Most Promising Newcomer - Female Katy Jurado

Trivia

High Noon ([1952](#))

- Director [Fred Zinnemann](#) said that the black smoke billowing from the train is a sign that the brakes were failing. He and the cameraman didn't know it at the time, and barely got out of the way. The camera tripod snagged itself on the track and fell over, smashing the camera, but the film survived and is in the movie.

- This film was used as an allegory in Hollywood for those who stood up to the House Un-American Activities Committee during the McCarthy era by refusing to cooperate with their blacklisting efforts.
- [Lee Van Cleef](#) does not have a word of dialogue.
- The pained expression on Kane's ([Gary Cooper](#)'s) face throughout the film was not acting; Cooper had a bleeding ulcer at the time.
- This movie is rumored to be able to be viewed in real time. Several shots of clocks are interspersed throughout the film and they correspond with actual minutes ticking by.
- Producer [Stanley Kramer](#) first offered the leading role of Will Kane to [Gregory Peck](#), who turned it down because he felt it was too similar to [The Gunfighter](#) (1950).
- Hadleyville is the name of the town. It is never spoken but is clearly visible on the train station wall. Hadleyville was also the name of the town in [Gung Ho](#) (1986) but was placed in the northeast U.S. In the west, there is a real Hadleyville, in Oregon.
- In the fight scene involving [Gary Cooper](#) and [Lloyd Bridges](#), Lloyd's son [Beau Bridges](#), then a youngster, was in the hayloft watching the filming. When water was thrown on his father after the fight, Beau could not help laughing, requiring the scene to be shot a second time. Cooper was not well and in pain but was gracious and understanding, according to Lloyd.
- The wife of Sam, [Harry Morgan](#)'s character, was named Mildred. In "[M*A*S*H](#)" (1972), Morgan's character, Col. Sherman Potter, also had a wife named Mildred.
- [John Wayne](#) complained that this film was an unpatriotic portrayal of the Old West.
- Although [John Wayne](#) later complained that the film was "un-American", when he picked up [Gary Cooper](#)'s Oscar on his behalf he complained that he wasn't offered the part himself.
- This film has been screened more times at the White House than any other.
- [Fred Zinnemann](#) wanted a hot, stark look to the film. Cinematographer [Floyd Crosby](#) achieved this by not filtering the sky and having the prints made a few points lighter than normal.
- [Stanley Kramer](#) removed [Carl Foreman](#)'s credit as producer. They never spoke to each other again.

- They used little to no makeup on the face of [Gary Cooper](#), to show his lines and show how worried he was.
- Took 32 days to shoot the film.
- There were 10 days of rehearsal.
- Zinnemann's meticulous planning enabled him to make 400 shots in only 4 weeks.
- The film is set in Hadleyville, population 650, in the New Mexico Territory, on a hot summer Sunday in about 1880.
- The picture takes place between 10:35 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. slightly longer than the 84 minute running time.
- They only took between 1-3 takes per scene.
- Between takes [Gary Cooper](#) would chat with the crew or snooze underneath a tree.
- [Gary Cooper](#) didn't use a stunt double between the fight of himself and [Lloyd Bridges](#).
- The character played by [Gary Cooper](#) was originally named Will Doane. The name was changed to Will Kane because co-star [Katy Jurado](#) had difficulty pronouncing the name Will Doane.
- "Do Not Forsake Me, Oh, My Darlin'" was the first Oscar-winning song from a non-musical film.

Goofs for High Noon ([1952](#))

- **Continuity:** In the church scene a young girl is still in the church next to her mother after all the children have been "dismissed"; in the very next shot she is not there.
- **Continuity:** When Kane is in his office and puts his head down on his desk, he did not have a badge on when his head went down, but he has a badge when his head came up.
- **Continuity:** While walking around in the city looking for help, Will Kane's vest alternately opens and closes between cuts.
- **Continuity:** Amy's luggage has been loaded on to the train, which we see pull off without any unloading, but it reappears on the cart in the final scene.

- **Continuity:** Right after Amy shoots one of the bad guys in the back there is a shot of Will Kane looking out a window holding his gun in his left hand. There is an immediate cut to a shot of him holding the gun in his right hand. The left-handed shot appears to have been done to make the composition of the shot more dramatic.
- **Continuity:** When Will Kane goes to visit Martin Howe, the house door has a different arrangement of panels on the outside from the inside.
- **Anachronisms:** In the climatic crane shot when Kane is alone in the town square, modern day Los Angeles is clearly visible in the skyline.
- **Continuity:** Due to weather problems, the climatic crane shot at "high noon" was actually taken at 3pm, thus the shadows are all wrong.
- **Anachronisms:** In the climactic gunfight, after Marshal Kane has shot Ben Miller, we see Kane running between buildings into a back alley area off the main street of town. He stops by a tree and looks back to see if he is being pursued. As he sets off again, we see the back of a brick building with an air conditioning unit mounted on the outside of a second storey window.
- **Continuity:** When Kane enters Ramirez' hotel room, he drops his hat on a chair to his left. Next shot he holds his hat in both hands.
- **Continuity:** When Kane throws his badge on the ground at the end of the movie, a star from a previous take can be clearly seen immediately behind his left boot.