The Searchers Encyclopedia Article

The Searchers

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The Searchers

Since its release in 1956, John Ford's *The Searchers* has become one of the most controversial films in Hollywood history. At the center of the controversy is Ethan Edwards, played by John Wayne in what many consider his finest performance. Throughout the film Edwards pursues a band of Indians who killed his brother's family and captured the daughters, one of whom, Debbie (Natalie Wood), is still alive. Film scholars, particularly during the late 1980s and early 1990s, have attacked Ford's shabby treatment of Indians, which is perhaps most vividly evidenced in the reactionary persona of Ethan Edwards. Despite its critics, *The Searchers* remains a hugely influential film. It is often cited as a seminal influence by filmmakers as diverse as those of the French New Wave and the American directors who came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s—most notably Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Brian DePalma. And in Ethan Edwards filmmakers found a model for the semi-psychopathic antihero so often present in films since the late 1960s.

Further Reading:

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Nolley, Ken. "John Ford and the Hollywood Indian." *Film & History.* Vol. 23, No. 1-4, 1993, 44-56.

Skerry, Philip J. "What Makes a Man to Wander? Ethan Edwards of John Ford's *The Searchers.* " *New Orleans Review.* Vol. 18, No. 4, 1991, 86-91.