



The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976)

Director: Clint Eastwood

Certificate: 18

Run time: 135 minutes

If you liked this western, you might also like: *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood 1992), *The Good, the bad and the ugly* (Sergio Leone 1969), *True Grit* (Coen brothers 2010 or Henry Hathaway 1969).

Reviews:

Roger Ebert: "It's one of Clint's best, marking a touching emotional vulnerability that significantly steps away from his strict macho image" *Chicago Sun-Times*

Key Performances:

- **Clint Eastwood** as Josey Wales — an outlaw with a heart
- **Chief Dan George** as Lone Watie — a Cherokee Confederate
- **Sondra Locke** as Laura Lee — a Missouri settler.

Film Notes

The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976) is a Western directed by Clint Eastwood. The film is based on the novel *Gone to Texas* by Forrest Carter. It tells the story of Josey Wales, a Missouri farmer whose family is murdered during the American Civil War. After seeking revenge, Josey Wales becomes an outlaw pursued by Union forces. Along his journey, he forms an unlikely alliance with other characters who have also been displaced by conflict.

The film is rooted in the Western genre, but also challenges many of the traditional conventions associated with classic Hollywood Westerns. Traditional Westerns often present a clear distinction between heroes and villains, with the hero representing justice and civilisation. In contrast, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* is presented as a morally complex character. Josey Wales is not a perfect hero; he is driven by grief, revenge, and survival. This reflects the revisionist Western movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which questioned the myths of the American frontier and portrayed more realistic, flawed characters.

That said, many familiar Western conventions are present throughout the film. There are horseback chases, gunfights, frontier landscapes, isolated towns, and conflicts over law and order. The setting is dominated by wide-open natural environments, emphasising freedom as well as loneliness and danger. Costumes such as cowboy hats, revolvers, boots, and long coats reinforce the visual identity of the genre. The film also explores themes commonly associated with Westerns, including justice, independence, honour, revenge, and survival.

Clint Eastwood's direction plays a significant role in shaping the film's tone and style. Having established himself as an iconic Western actor through the "Man with No Name" trilogy directed by Sergio Leone, Eastwood brought many of those influences into his own directing. He uses slow pacing, long takes, and sweeping landscape shots to create atmosphere rather than relying on constant action. This allows us to focus on character development and emotional depth.

Eastwood also avoids presenting violence as glamorous. Gunfights are often sudden, brutal, and carry emotional consequences. Rather than celebrating violence, the film suggests it leaves lasting scars on everyone involved. Eastwood's direction supports the revisionist nature of the film by highlighting the human cost of conflict instead of portraying violence as heroic entertainment.

Another important feature is Eastwood's emphasis on community and redemption. Although eponymous protagonist begins the film isolated by loss and anger, he gradually builds relationships with a diverse group of characters. These include settlers, Native Americans, and other outsiders who have all experienced hardship. This shift from revenge to belonging gives the film emotional depth and distinguishes it from many traditional Westerns, where the lone hero often remains isolated.

Overall, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* is an excellent example of a revisionist Western. While it retains many of the classic conventions of the genre, Clint Eastwood's thoughtful direction introduces greater realism, moral ambiguity, and emotional complexity. The result is a film that not only entertains with action and adventure but also explores themes of loss, justice, forgiveness, and the possibility of rebuilding a life after tragedy.

Enjoy!

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWYTXylzxBg> (Classic Film Review)
2. *Westerns: Films Through History* edited by Janet Walker
3. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075029/> Internet Movie Database

Fun facts:

This is one of six movies made by real-life couple Clint Eastwood and Sondra Locke.

Controversially, Clint Eastwood replaced Philip Kaufman as director.

Due to his age (76), Chief Dan George found remembering his lines difficult. He was allowed to ad-lib his lines in his own storytelling voice.