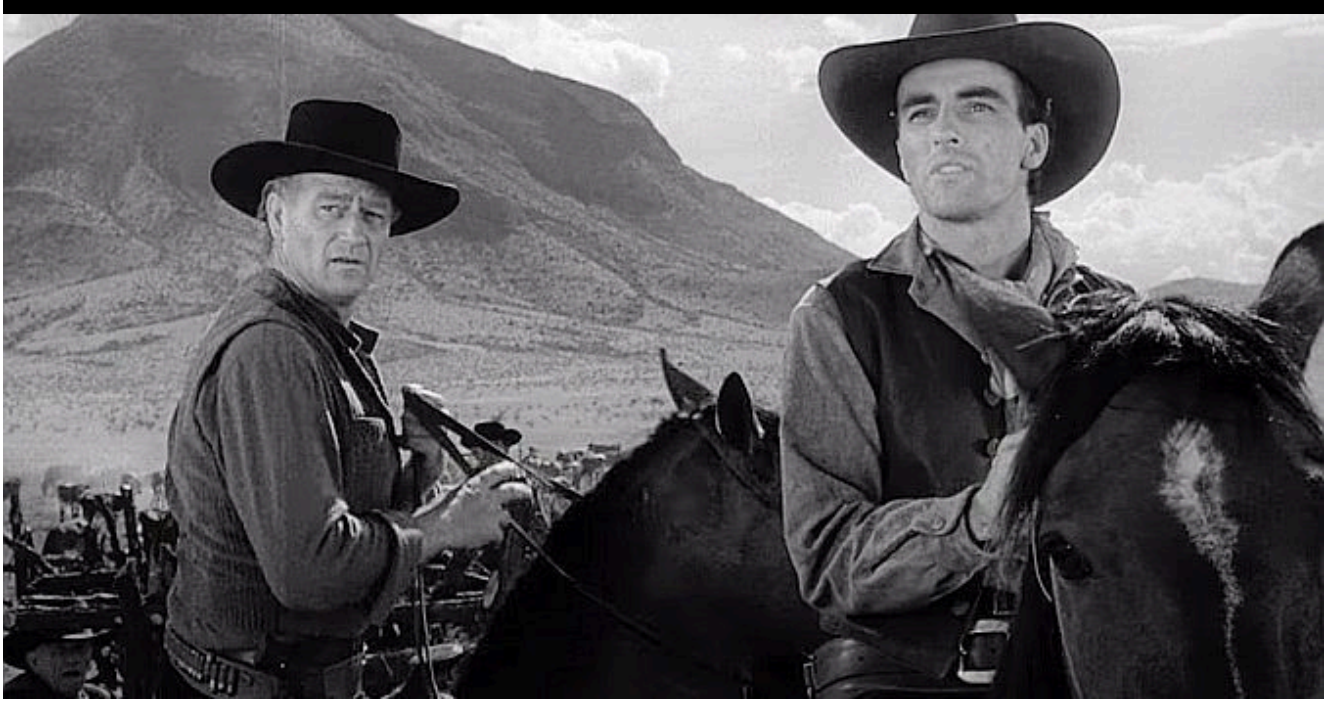
KINONIK

RED RIVER (1948)

Directed by Howard Hawks

WEDNESDAY July 22nd 7PM

SATURDAY July 25th 2PM / 7PM



In 1948 John Ford watched a rough cut of Howard Hawks' **Red River** and reportedly said of John Wayne, "I didn't know the big son of a bitch could act." Ford had been directing Wayne for nearly twenty years. What he was seeing was what happens when you put Wayne opposite Montgomery Clift and force him to compete.

Wayne had been the dominant model of American screen masculinity for a decade: big, declarative, physically commanding, performing authority through sheer volume and mass. He occupied the frame the way he occupied a room. Then Clift showed up and did something nobody in the American Western had done before: he listened. He stood still. He let interior life become visible without announcing it. Clift doesn't fight Wayne for the screen. He simply makes Wayne's entire mode of occupying it look antediluvian.

The confrontation simmered off-screen, too. While Red River was in post-production, Wayne was serving as president of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, actively working with the House Un-American Activities Committee to purge suspected subversives from the industry. He demanded that loyalty be performed loudly, publicly, without ambiguity — the same thing Dunson demands on the cattle drive. Clift was everything that apparatus existed to destroy: queer, interior, unreadable, a man whose very presence on screen suggested that masculinity might be something other than a loyalty oath.

Hawks doesn't theorize the masculine codes he's dramatizing; he sets them in motion and photographs what happens. He works through genre the way a boxer works through combinations: by instinct, by rhythm, by knowing where the opening is before the other guy does. Russell Harlan's camera treats the landscape as a moral arena, vast and indifferent, where the only things that matter are competence and nerve.

The text is pure cowboy logistics; ten thousand head of cattle driven over a thousand dangerous miles by men with competing ideas about how it should get done. But the subtext is a succession crisis and an early foreshadowing of the ascendance of the New Hollywood and a very different kind of movie star.

The film's logic demands a killing. Hawks can't bring himself to deliver it. The cattle get sold regardless.