

Rio Bravo (1959)



Theatrical release poster (Wikipedia)

TOMATOMETER

TOP CRITICS / ALL CRITICS

100%

Average Rating: 8.4/10

Reviews Counted: 38

Fresh: 38

Rotten: 0

Critics Consensus: No consensus yet.

AUDIENCE SCORE

91%

liked it

Average Rating: 4/5

User Ratings: 23,413

Set in Texas during the late 1860s, Rio Bravo is a story of men (and women) and a town under siege. Presidio County Sheriff John T. Chance (John Wayne) is holding Joe Burdette (Claude Akins), a worthless, drunken thug, for the murder of an unarmed man in a fight in a saloon -- the problem is that Joe is the brother of wealthy land baron Nathan Burdette (John Russell), who owns a big chunk of the county and can buy all the hired guns he doesn't

already have working for him. Burdette's men cut the town off to prevent Chance from getting Joe into more secure surroundings, and then the hired guns come in, waiting around for their chance to break him out of jail. Chance has to wait for the United States marshal to show up, in six days, his only help from Stumpy (Walter Brennan), a toothless, cantankerous old deputy with a bad leg who guards the jail, and Dude (Dean Martin), his former deputy, who's spent the last two years stumbling around in a drunken stupor over a woman that left him. Chance's friend, trail boss Pat Wheeler (Ward Bond), arrives at the outset of the siege and tries to help, offering the services of himself and his drovers as deputies, which Chance turns down, saying they're not professionals and would be too worried about their families to be good at anything except being targets for Burdette's men; but Chance does try to enlist the services of Wheeler's newest employee, a callow-looking young gunman named Colorado Ryan (Ricky Nelson), who politely turns him down, saying he prefers to mind his own business. In the midst of all of this tension, Feathers (Angie Dickinson), a dance hall entertainer, arrives in town and nearly gets locked up by Chance for cheating at cards, until he finds out that he was wrong and that she's not guilty - this starts a verbal duel between the two of them that grows more sexually intense as the movie progresses and she finds herself in the middle of Chance's fight. Wheeler is murdered by one of Burdette's hired guns who is, in turn, killed by Dude in an intense confrontation in a saloon. Colorado throws in with Chance after his boss is killed and picks up some of the slack left by Dude, who isn't quite over his need for a drink or the shakes that come with trying to stop. Chance and Burdette keep raising the ante on each other, Chance, Dude, and Colorado killing enough of the rancher's men that he's got to double what he's paying to make it worth the risk, and the undertaker (Joseph Shimada) gets plenty of business from Burdette before the two sides arrive at a stalemate -- Burdette is holding Dude and will release him in exchange for Joe. This leads to the final, bloody confrontation between Chance and Burdette, where the wagons brought to town by the murdered Wheeler play an unexpected and essential role in tipping the balance. ~ Bruce Eder, Rovi

Rating:

R

Genre:

Western,
Action & Adventure,
Classics

Directed By:

Howard Hawks

Written By:

Jules Furthman,
Leigh Brackett

In Theaters:

Apr 4, 1959 Wide

On DVD:

May 8, 2001

Runtime:

2 hr. 22 min.

Xenon

[www.rottentomatoes.com]

Rio Bravo

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Rio Bravo is a 1959 American Western film produced and directed by Howard Hawks and starring John Wayne, Dean Martin, Ricky Nelson, Angie Dickinson, Walter Brennan, and Ward Bond. Written by Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett, based on the short story "Rio Bravo" by B. H. McCampbell, the film is about the sheriff of the town of Rio Bravo, Texas who arrests the brother of a powerful local rancher in order to help his drunken deputy/friend. With the help of a cripple and a young gunfighter, they hold off the rancher's gang. *Rio Bravo* was filmed on location at Old Tucson Studios outside Tucson, Arizona in Technicolor.

In 2014, *Rio Bravo* was deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the Library of Congress and selected for preservation in the National Film Registry.

Plot

In the town of Rio Bravo, Texas, sheriff's deputy Dude (Dean Martin), who has acquired the contemptuous nickname *Borrachón* (pronounced: [bo.raˈtʃon], Spanish for "drunk"), enters a saloon but can't afford a drink. Joe Burdette (Claude Akins), brother of rancher Nathan Burdette, tosses a silver dollar into a spittoon. Presidio County, Texas Sheriff John T. Chance (John Wayne) appears and kicks the spittoon away, looking at Dude with disgust. Dude is shamed by his plight and takes out his anger on Chance, knocking him out with an ax handle. Joe begins punching Dude, then shoots and kills an unarmed bystander who tries to intervene.

Joe heads to his brother's saloon, where a bloody Chance comes to arrest him for the murder of the bystander. Another patron draws his gun on Chance, but Dude shoots the gun out of the man's hand. Joe is locked up in the local jail. Chance is willing to deputize Dude, provided he can stay sober. Both remember how good with a gun Dude used to be.

Chance's friend Pat Wheeler (Ward Bond) and his wagon train of supplies stop in town, with a young gunslinger, Colorado Ryan (Ricky Nelson), riding guard. Inside the jail, Stumpy

(Walter Brennan), Chance's game-legged deputy, keeps watch over the jail and Joe, who knows that Stumpy holds an old grudge against Joe's wealthy and powerful brother. Joe warns his jailers that Nathan Burdette won't like how his brother's being treated.

A mysterious woman nicknamed Feathers (Angie Dickinson) is in the saloon, playing poker. In the meantime, Dude and Chance patrol the town. Hotel owner Carlos (Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzalez) stops the sheriff, saying Wheeler has been talking too much about Chance needing help. In the saloon, Chance implores Wheeler to stop, as it will draw attention from the wrong people. Wheeler suggests that Colorado could be of assistance, but Colorado politely declines, saying he wants to "mind my own business." Colorado also promises not to start any trouble without telling the sheriff first.

Feathers leaves the poker game a winner. Chance follows her up to her room and confronts her as a card cheat, with his evidence three missing aces from the deck of cards being used in the game and a handbill indicating she is wanted for card cheating. Colorado intervenes, saying another participant in the game is the real cheat. They confront the card cheat and prove his guilt. Chance refuses to apologize to Feathers for doing his job, but is no longer in a hurry to make her leave town.

As Wheeler is walking back to the hotel, he is shot dead by a Burdette man hiding in the stable. Colorado offers to help but is angrily turned away by Chance, who says, "You had a chance to get in this and you didn't want it." Chance and Dude flush out the shooter, who escapes into Nathan's saloon after Dude wounds him. Dude believes the man has muddy boots, but everyone in the bar has clean boots. Two patrons suggest Dude needs a drink and one throws a silver dollar into a spittoon. The bartender puts a beer on the bar, but Dude notices blood dripping into the glass from above. He turns, fires and kills the shooter.

Chance goes back to the hotel to sleep. Without his knowledge, Feathers stands guard at the door to keep him safe, then returns to her room when he awakens. Chance discovers what she did and advises that she should leave on the next stagecoach.

Nathan Burdette (John Russell) arrives in town with his men, intent on seeing his brother Joe. Dude is standing guard and confiscating all

guns. One of Burdette's men ignores him until Dude cuts one of his horse's reins with a single shot. Nathan agrees to turn in their guns until they leave.

Carlos says Feathers will not get on the stagecoach. She tells the sheriff she does not want to leave, then gives him a kiss. He indicates if he were not in such a fix at the jail, things between them might be different.

Colorado visits the jail to tell Chance that the meaning of a song, Degüello, or The Cutthroat Song, that Nathan is paying men to play at his saloon. The song, reported to have been played by Antonio López de Santa Anna's men at the siege of Battle of the Alamo, indicates that "no quarter" will be given to one's enemy, no mercy. Dude is trying hard to stay sober. He is given back his guns (the ones he had before he left town, sold by Dude but bought back by Chance) as well as some clothes he left behind.

The next morning, while Dude is standing guard at the town entryway, four Burdette men attack him from behind and tie him up in a stable. Others get the drop on Chance, whose rifle is just out of reach. From inside the hotel, acting on Colorado's instructions, Feathers throws a flower pot through a window a moment after Colorado steps out on the porch, distracting the Burdette men. Colorado quickly throws Chance's rifle to him and the two men shoot the three Burdette hands.

Chance decides to have his men hole up in the jail, as it will take several more days for the United States Marshal to arrive to take Joe to the Presidio. Dude's nerves are shot, but as he's about to take a drink, the sound of The Cutthroat Song played by Burdette's musicians steels his resolve. He and Chance go to the hotel to round up additional supplies, but Carlos and Consuela are captured by Burdette's men, who trick Chance into charging and falling over a rope tied at the bottom of the stairs. Dude and Feathers are unable to help.

Chance is ordered to take the men to the jail to let Joe go. He is reluctant to do so, but Dude implores Chance to cooperate, saying that Stumpy is alone and has no food or water to hold out very long. The remaining Burdette men at the hotel take Dude hostage and Nathan Burdette offers to trade him later for Joe.

Stumpy opens fire at the jail, holding off Burdette's men. Chance and Colorado then take

Joe to make the trade for Dude at a warehouse, leaving Stumpy behind because of his bad leg. During the trade, walking in opposite directions, Dude tackles Joe and they scuffle while a gunfight erupts. Stumpy turns up and helps even the odds. Dude overpowers Joe. The lawmen throw dynamite sticks at the warehouse where Burdette and his men are based, shooting the sticks to explode them. After a few explosions rock the warehouse, the criminals surrender.

All is quiet in town as Chance gets reacquainted with Feathers, who models a skimpy new costume she will be wearing in her new job singing at the hotel. After it comes floating from the window to the street, a delighted Stumpy retrieves it, but Dude cautions him to mind his own business.

Cast



John Wayne and Angie Dickinson in *Rio Bravo*

- John Wayne as Sheriff John T. Chance
- Dean Martin as Dude (*Borrachón*)
- Ricky Nelson as Colorado Ryan
- Angie Dickinson as Feathers
- Walter Brennan as Stumpy
- Ward Bond as Pat Wheeler
- John Russell as Nathan Burdette
- Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzalez as Carlos Robante
- Estelita Rodriguez as Consuela Robante
- Claude Akins as Joe Burdette
- Malcolm Atterbury as Jake (stage driver)
- Harry Carey Jr. as Harold (scenes deleted)

Production



Ricky Nelson performing the song "Get Along Home, Cindy"

Exteriors for the film were shot at Old Tucson Studios, just outside Tucson, Arizona. Filming took place in the summer of 1958, and the movie's credits gave 1958 as the year of production, although the film was not released until 1959.

Rio Bravo is generally regarded as one of Hawks' best, and is notable for its scarcity of closeup shots. Only four appear in *Rio Bravo*. In the opening scene, when Joe shoots an unarmed man. Joe's revolver is shown in closeup, when he rolls a cigarette, also when Dude pours a shot of whiskey back into the bottle, and a closeup of a beer glass where a drop of blood falls in, alerting Dude to a gunman in the bar waiting above him in ambush. The long opening scene has no dialogue. The film received favorable reviews, and was successful, taking in over US\$5.5 million.

The musical score was composed by Dimitri Tiomkin. His score includes the hauntingly ominous "El Degüello" theme, which is heard several times. The Colorado character identifies the tune as "The Cutthroat Song". He relates that the song was played on the orders of General Antonio López de Santa Anna to the Texans holed up in the Alamo, to signify that no quarter would be given to them. The tune was used the following year, over the opening credits of Wayne's film, *The Alamo*. Composer Ennio Morricone recalled that director Sergio Leone asked him to write "Dimitri Tiomkin music" for *A Fistful of Dollars*. The trumpet theme is similar to Tiomkin's "Degüello" (the Italian title of *Rio Bravo* was *Un dollaro d'onore*, "A Dollar of Honor").

Because the film starred a crooner, Martin, and a teen idol, Nelson, Hawks included three songs in the soundtrack. Before the big showdown, in the jail house, Martin sings "My Rifle, My Pony, and Me" (which contained new lyrics to a

Tiomkin tune that appeared in *Red River*) accompanied by Nelson, after which Nelson sings a brief version of "Get Along Home, Cindy", accompanied by Martin and Brennan. Over the closing credits, Martin, backed by the Nelson Riddle Orchestra, sings a specially composed song, "Rio Bravo" (written by Tiomkin with lyrics by Paul Francis Webster. Nelson later paid homage to both the film and his character, Colorado, by including the song "Restless Kid" on his 1959 LP, *Ricky Sings Again*.

Members of the Western Writers of America chose "My Rifle, My Pony, and Me" as one of the Top 100 Western songs of all time.

A brief clip from *Rio Bravo* was among the archive footage later incorporated into the opening sequence of Wayne's last film, *The Shootist*, to illustrate the backstory of Wayne's character.

***High Noon* debate**

The film was made as a response to *High Noon*, which is sometimes thought to be an allegory for blacklisting in Hollywood, as well as a critique of McCarthyism. Wayne would later call *High Noon* "un-American" and say he did not regret helping run the writer, Carl Foreman, out of the country. Director Howard Hawks went on the record to criticize *High Noon* by saying, "I didn't think a good sheriff was going to go running around town like a chicken with his head off asking for help, and finally his Quaker wife had to save him." According to film historian Emanuel Levy, Wayne and Hawkes teamed up deliberately to rebut *High Noon* by telling a somewhat similar story their own way: portraying a hero who does not show fear or inner conflict and who never repudiates his commitment to public duty, while only allying himself with capable people, despite offers of help from many other characters. In *Rio Bravo*, Chance is surrounded by allies—a deputy who is brave and good with a gun, despite recovering from alcoholism (Dude), a young untried but self-assured gunfighter (Colorado), a limping "crippled" old man who is doggedly loyal (Stumpy), a Mexican innkeeper (Carlos), his wife (Consuela), and an attractive young woman (Feathers)—and repeatedly turns down aid from anyone he doesn't think is capable of helping him, though in the final shootout they come to help him anyway. "Who'll turn up next?" Wayne

asks amid the gunfire, to which Colorado replies: "Maybe the girl with another flower pot."

Critical reception

In August 1976, Leslie Halliwell gave the film two out of four stars, describing it as a "cheerfully overlong and slow-moving western" that was nevertheless "very watchable for those with time to spare". Despite this, it has a 100% Rotten Tomatoes rating and was rated the second greatest Western of all-time in Sight and Sound's 2012 critic poll.

Remakes and inspirations

Remakes

Howard Hawks went on to make two loose variations of *Rio Bravo*, on both occasions under a different title. Both of these remakes were directed by Hawks, both starred John Wayne and in each case, the script was written by Leigh Brackett. All involve lawmen working against an entrenched criminal element, partially by "holing up" in their jailhouse.

- The first remake, *El Dorado*, was filmed in 1966 but its release was held up by Paramount until the late summer of 1967. In this film, Robert Mitchum played the Dean Martin role, Arthur Hunnicutt the Walter Brennan character and James Caan the Ricky Nelson role. Hawks again named the Nelson/Caan character after a state (in this case, Mississippi) and in a wry, humorous twist on the original film, Hawks made him inept with firearms, but skilled with a knife.
- The second remake, *Rio Lobo*, was made in 1970 with a plot much further off the original mold, starting with the absence of a lawman-turned-drunkard character. This began with a Confederate train robbery of a Union gold shipment during the American Civil War, then moved to a post-war Texas county thoroughly controlled by a rich, arrogant rancher. The heroes, with the exception of an old man similar to Brennan's and Hunnicutt's characters in the previous pictures (Jack Elam here), were complete outsiders. Along with Wayne and Elam, this movie starred Mexican film star Jorge Rivero (as Frenchie), Christopher Mitchum (Robert Mitchum's son) and Jennifer O'Neill.

Inspirations

Feathers's dialogue was occasionally inspired by the character of "Slim" (Lauren Bacall) in the 1944 "To Have and Have Not", as when, after the first kiss, she says: "...it's better when two people do it," recalling the phrase "it's even better when you help;" and again later when she says, "I'm hard to get - you're going to have to say you want me," recalling Slim's "I'm hard to get, Steve - all you have to do is ask me."

- *L'homme à l'étoile d'argent* (*The Man with the Silver Star*), a 1969 album from the French comics series Lt. Blueberry was directly inspired by *Rio Bravo*. The plot is virtually the same. Blueberry plays the role of sheriff John T. Chance; McClure, a whiskey-adoring old man, combines the roles of Dude and Stumpy; Dusty plays the role of Colorado; Miss March, the teacher, plays the role of a less morally challenged Feathers; and instead of the Burdettes, here we have the Bass brothers.
- John Carpenter's 1976 film *Assault on Precinct 13*, though not a remake of *Rio Bravo*, was inspired by the film. Carpenter borrowed some elements from the earlier film's plot but set it in 1970s Los Angeles. He also paid homage to the original film by using the pseudonym "John T. Chance," the name of Wayne's character, for his editing credit. This film was also remade in 2005 by Jean-Francois Richet, starring Ethan Hawke, Laurence Fishburne, Gabriel Byrne, Maria Bello, Drea de Matteo, John Leguizamo, Brian Dennehy, and Ja Rule, moving the film's setting to Detroit.
- *Ghosts of Mars*, a 2001 film also by Carpenter, retains many of the elements that were developed in *Rio Bravo* and *Assault on Precinct 13* but takes place in a science fiction setting.
- *The Nest*, a 2002 film by Florent Emilio Siri, starred Samy Naceri, Benoît Magimel, Nadia Farès, Pascal Greggory, and Sami Bouajila.
- In the director's cut of *Natural Born Killers* (directed by Oliver Stone and written by Quentin Tarantino) actor Woody Harrelson says the line: "Let's make a little music, Colorado," before shooting Robert Downey Jr, quoting Chance in the final shootout scene in *Rio Bravo*.

