

Excerpts from the feature article
HIGH NOON, A LOOK FORWARD
By Writer/Director John Mulholland

HIGH NOON was hailed upon its release in 1952 as an instant classic. It won several Academy Awards, including one for its legendary star, **Gary Cooper**. It was named the year's best picture by the New York Film Critics Society. And yet, even though it's high on the American Film Institute's 100 Best Films of the Century, HIGH NOON's respect has been hard won, indeed. Perhaps no other classic film has had such a rocky road as this "simple little western."

Decried by influential auteurist critics and academics, HIGH NOON has been attacked for being untrue to the western genre - read anti-populist; for being "middle-brow" (whatever that might mean); for being social drama hiding behind the western genre - and muddled social drama, at that; for being the most un-American film ever made (courtesy of **John Wayne**), etc.

However, over 60 years after its release, HIGH NOON still powerfully resonates with audiences around the world. When Solidarity needed a universal image to promote democracy and the right to vote in Poland in 1987, they chose Gary Cooper in HIGH NOON, a ballot in his hand rather than a gun. Conservatives and liberals both manage to cite HIGH NOON on the floor of Congress as a metaphor for their competing political ideals. Political cartoonists and headline writers inevitably use HIGH NOON as reference for countless crises. Three American Presidents - **Eisenhower**, **Clinton** and current **President Bush** - call HIGH NOON their favorite film.

On one hand, HIGH NOON has been attacked for being a conservative, damaging portrait of arrogant male paternalism. On the other hand, HIGH NOON is praised for challenging entrenched notions of gender, for exploring masculine anxiety, masculinity as a construct. Feminist critics and academics are offering intriguing and complex new readings to HIGH NOON.

Example: Amy Fowler (**Grace Kelly**) is having her new husband, Marshall Will Kane (Cooper), quit his career, leave his town, leave his friends, marry outside his church, and open a store of her choosing (wearing, perhaps, an apron?). Does Will Kane take on the villains at noon as a final gasp of masculine protest, as a declaration of independence from his wife's control?

Ernest Hemingway compared a story's meaning to an iceberg - like the iceberg, 7/8th of which lies hidden beneath the surface, 7/8th of a story's meaning lies beneath the surface.

Carl Foreman's bare-to-the-bones script and **Fred Zinnemann's** equally spare direction are a perfect film correlative to Hemingway's iceberg theory. This taut, seemingly straightforward little suspense western is complex, multi-layered, and perhaps even more relevant today than when it opened almost 60 years ago.