

Subversive Visions: America on Film, 1949-1957

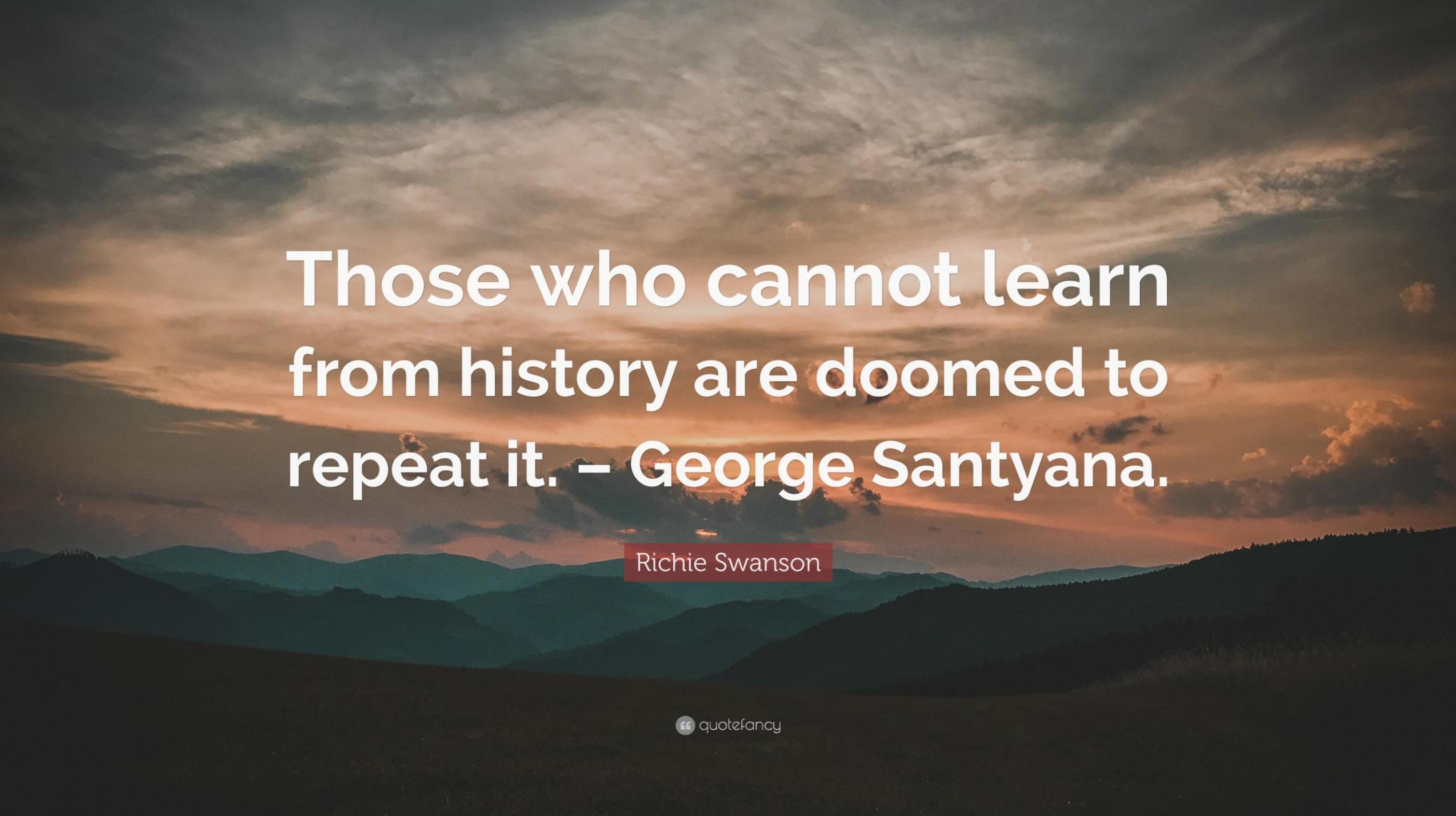
- **Three films that expose the hidden tensions of America's past and present.**





**The more things
change, the more
they are the same.**

Alphonse Karr



Those who cannot learn
from history are doomed to
repeat it. – George Santyana.

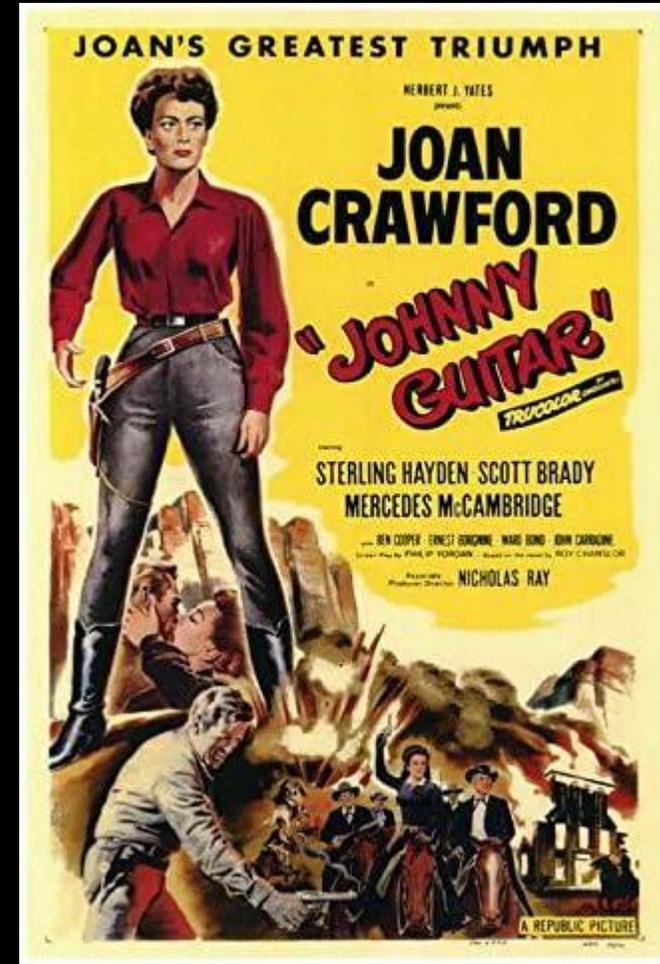
Richie Swanson



“I never met a woman who was more a man.”

Roger Ebert: “One of the most blatant **psychosexual melodramas** ever to disguise itself” as a western...also **one of the boldest and most stylized films of its time, quirky, political, twisted.** “

“an allegory squarely aimed at the House Un-American Activities Committee,”





**• All of the sexual energy is between the two women ,
no matter what they say about the men.**

- That casting (Joan Crawford and Mercedes McCambridge) led to more Crawford bitch legends...

- The chemistry of loathing is palpable, as it was between Crawford and Bette Davis in “**Whatever Happened to Baby Jane.**” Both women wear fetishistic black leather, silk and denim costumes that would have been familiar enough to students of 1954 pornography: The **tightly corseted waists, the high boots, the long shirts, the tight bodices, the lash of lipstick**; give us Meg Myles in “**Satan in High Heels.**”



- **“Johnny Guitar”** is about the hatred between Vienna and Emma, and Sterling Hayden (Johnny Guitar) seems to know it.

- **“Francois Truffaut** (the great French critic) said it reminded him of ‘**The Beauty and the Beast,**’ with Sterling Hayden being the beauty.”



- The dynamic of their investigation (of a robbery) and their attempts to force townsfolk to testify against one another form an allegory squarely aimed at the House Un-American Activities Committee, which in 1954 was trying to force alleged communists to “name names” of other alleged communists; the screenplay was ghosted by the blacklisted Ben Maddow. A significant moment comes when Johnny Guitar acknowledges his own name.



- **BEFORE**
- **THE**
- **MOVIE**



From *I REVIEW WESTERNS*

- a brilliant Revisionist Western – flipping traditional Western roles to depict not just one but TWO strong women commanding a town full of men. At the same time, it uses the Western setting to comment on themes like feminism, blacklisting, sexuality, persecution, and mob mentality – it's HUGE.
- From *The New Yorker*:
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- “One of the greatest Westerns.”

From *The Guardian*

- **Johnny Guitar review – unforgettably strange, brilliant western**
- **Nicholas Ray's 1954 gem, starring Joan Crawford and Sterling Hayden, is an extraordinary psychological drama**



Crawford as saloon-keeper Vienna, with a wonderful range of outfits, stark black eyes and a rectangular red slash of a mouth.

Maria Callas herself couldn't have played Vienna with more poise, more defiance, more passionate abandon.

- Crawford appears like the disturbing figure in a nightmare – and everything looks as if it is happening in a vivid dream, aided by the fanatically intense but mannered dialogue, weird interiors and back projections...

- Unforgettably strange and brilliant.



Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times*

singled out Crawford's physical appearance, stating

"no more femininity comes from her than from the

rugged Heflin in *Shane*. For the lady, as usual, is as

sexless as the lions on the public library steps and as

sharp and romantically forbidding as a package of

unwrapped razor blades."

Dialogue: watch Vienna and Johnny use words as love weapons.

- **Johnny:** *How many men have you forgotten?*
- **Vienna:** *As many women as you've remembered.*
- **Johnny:** *Don't go away.*
- **Vienna:** *I haven't moved.*
- **Johnny:** *Tell me something nice.*
- **Vienna:** *Sure. What do you want to hear?*
- **Johnny:** *Lie to me. Tell me all these years you've waited ...*
- **Vienna:** *All these years I've waited.*

Johnny: *Tell me you'd have died if I hadn't come back.*

Vienna: *I would have died if you hadn't come back.*

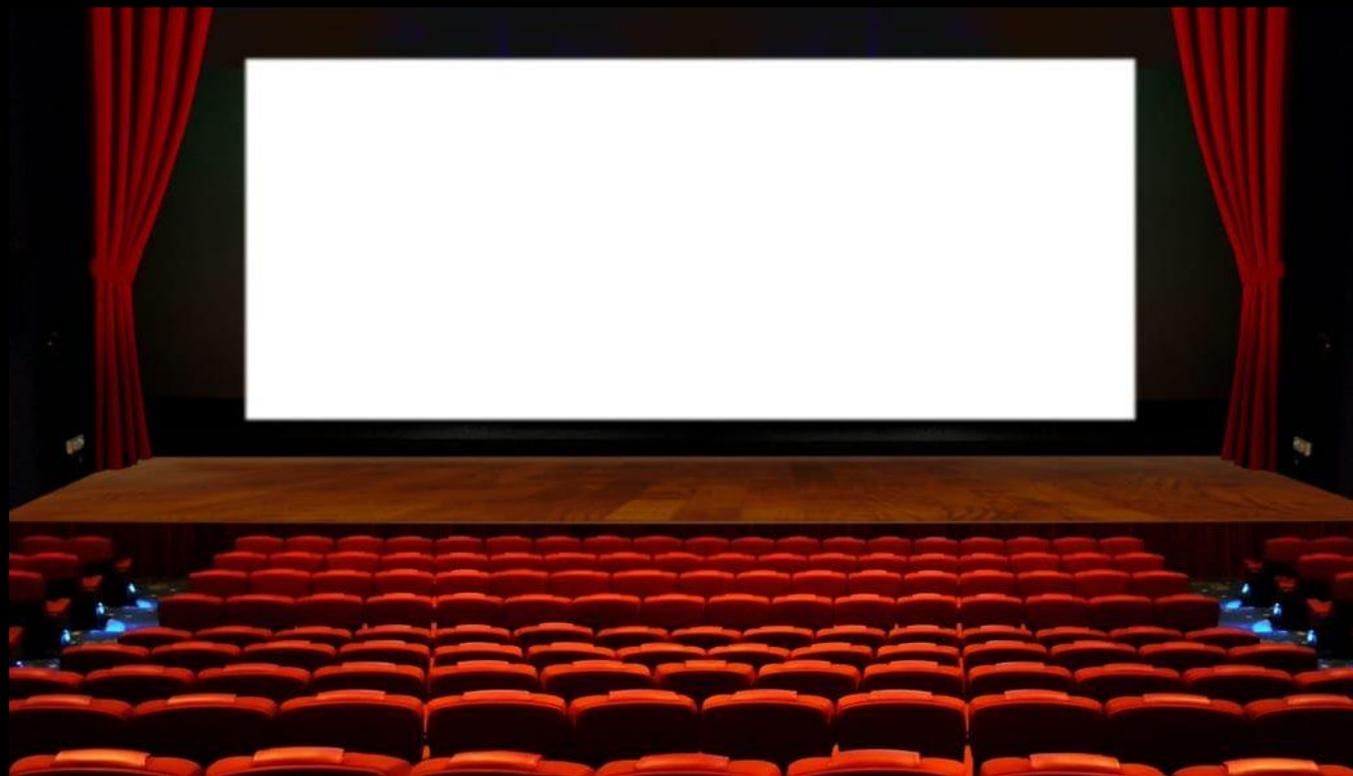
Johnny: *Tell me you still love me like I love you.*

Vienna: *I still love you like you love me.*

Johnny: *Thanks. Thanks a lot.*

That's not Western dialogue, it's cynicism made audible.

After the Movie





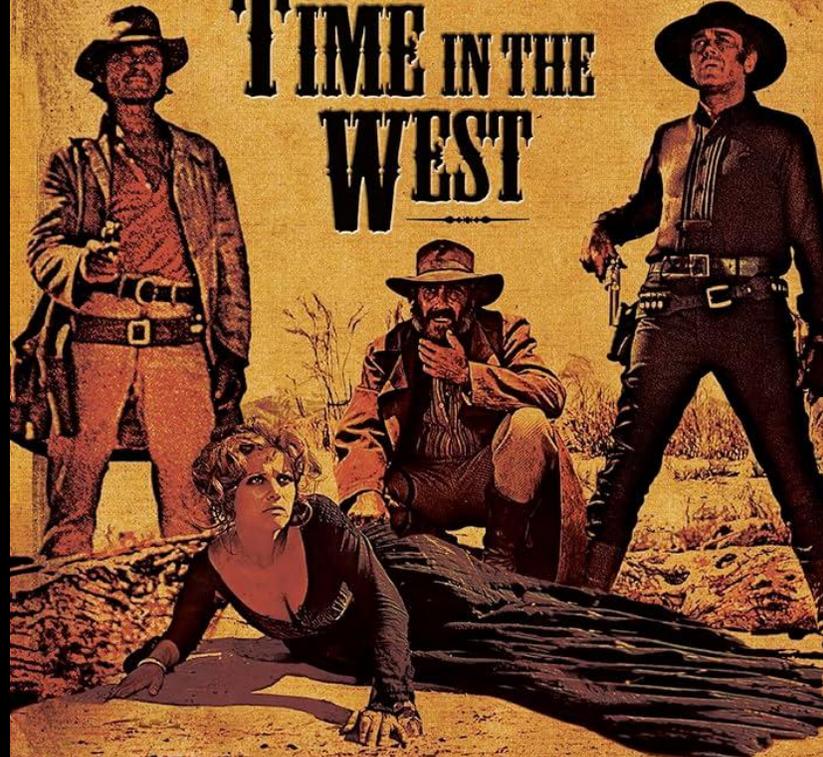
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- **"I don't think you have the foggiest notion of the contempt I have had for myself since the day I did that thing."**



CLAUDIA CARDINALE
HENRY FONDA JASON ROBARDS
CHARLES BRONSON

A SERGIO LEONE FILM

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST



- **And Next Week**

