

## Stagecoach

John Ford's *Stagecoach* follows a group of individuals as they ride in a stagecoach across Apache territory in order to end up at their various places. Although these individuals vary, from an alcoholic to an esteemed Southern Belle, there is a very clear divide between this group of strangers, separating them into two groups. Both Dallas and Ringo are pushed on the edges of each scene, leaving them to be the outcasts of the group while the others enjoy a meal at a stop along their journey. Because of their pasts, Dallas and Ringo are looked down upon by the group and constantly separated, from the beginning of the sequence during the voting through the end, where the group is dining. Through character placement and the subtleties in dialogue, the separation of the travelers key the audience in to who is considered "bad" by the standards of society of the time and who is considered "good."

From the moment Curly walks into the room, Mrs. Mallory heads to the head of the table, "rightfully" at her place in command, while Dallas only looks on and hesitates, before taking her "rightful" spot on a bench, away from the other travelers. This sets up dynamic, with the two women constantly on the other side of the room from one another, opposing each other. There is a similar set up for Ringo and Hatfield, who end up next to Dallas and Mrs. Mallory, respectively. In each group, the characters both come from similar backgrounds – Dallas and Ringo are both outcasts from society, although for very different reasons, and Hatfield and Mrs. Mallory come from the Southern esteemed society. These two groups are placed opposite each other in each scene, much like their literal oppositions, setting up a bad

vs. good dynamic. The other characters, although involved in this scene, aren't featured, as most of the close-ups are of characters of these two groups. As the characters move toward the table to eat, the same separation can be seen, especially when Mrs. Mallory makes it a point to move to the other side of the table when Dallas sits near her. Mrs. Mallory and Hatfield regard their opposites with disgust, and carry an air of self-importance, shown by their refusal to sit next to the lowlifes of Dallas and Ringo. By emphasizing these differences, we are shown that Dallas is being punished for her previous mistakes and is being driven out, both in the storyline and literally. Ringo, on the other hand, is a law breaker, but of a much different kind, but still "bad" nonetheless. These characters are deserted, not because of who they are, but because of their actions in the past and how they reflect on the character in the present.

This idea of separation and punishing those for their pasts is also apparent in the subtleties of the dialogue. While taking a vote, Curly makes it a point to address Mrs. Mallory's concerns about whether she would like to continue on her voyage, stating that he "wouldn't put a lady in danger" without her voting for it, highlighting the fact of her status, but then proceeds to skip over Dallas during the vote. It was only until Ringo points out that he neglected to ask Dallas does Curly let her speak, indicating that he doesn't think of her as a lady, or even worth getting a vote about her future. Mrs. Mallory's disgust for Dallas is quite evident as well, especially when Dallas sits down next to Mrs. Mallory. Her body physically tenses up and is only relieved when Hatfield asks her if she would like to move seats, to the other head seat of the table, away from Dallas. Hatfield asks her in such a way that it is apparent he knows that Mrs. Mallory wants to remove herself from the presence of Dallas, even if it isn't quite stated. These subtleties in the dialogue, although never said, express the

idea of Dallas being associated with the lower class because she doesn't act like Mrs. Mallory and has a checkered pass, being ignored and talked around, making everyone's distaste for her very clear. These things aren't expressively spelled out, because that would be quite against the moral code for a Southern Belle, but the tone and actions accompanying the dialogue let us know exactly how those around Ringo and Dallas feel about their pasts.

Although all of these characters are in the same situation with the same amount of life-threatening danger, there is still ways that the audience is clued in to the social groups that these four main characters belong to. Mrs. Mallory and Hatfield are physically separated from Dallas and Ringo, sitting at the head of the table and commanding attention, putting space between them in order to clearly define each other's roles. Although there are similarities between the two groups, the past actions of each group member define where they lie on the spectrum of "good" – being associated with Mrs. Mallory and Hatfield or "bad" – being associated with Dallas and Ringo. The pairing of these individuals, especially Dallas and Ringo, is foreshadowing their future, as the two outcasts are pushed together by circumstance and get to know each other better. In a world completely dictated by social rule at the time, the separation between the social worlds is conveyed clearly by Ford.