

## Akira Kurosawa's Samurai Meet the American West

"In my view, a motion picture stands or falls on the effective combination of these two factors. Truly cinematic sound is neither merely accompanying sound (easy and explanatory) nor the natural sounds captured at the time of simultaneous recording. In other words cinematic sound is that which does not simply add to, but multiplies, two or three times, the effect of the image."—Kurosawa, Interview with *Cinema*, 1963

"On the contrary, I wanted to say that after everything the peasants were stronger, closely clinging to the earth. Rather, it is the samurai who were weak because they were being blown by the winds of time. They won the battle for the peasants but then they were dismissed and went away. The peasants remained till the earth."—Kurosawa, Interview with Joan Mellen, 1975

### Global Questions

- Fumio Hayasaka's score for *Seven Samurai* and Elmer Bernstein's for *The Magnificent Seven* are both considered classic movie scores. How do the different musics sculpt the way we respond to the films?
- How do the different cinematographies (e.g. widescreen and color versus standard screen, black and white or different speeds of cutting and camera movement) shape the films?
- In what ways are the visions of the individual and the community similar in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* and John Sturges' *The Magnificent Seven*? In what ways are they different?
- Is it too simple to suggest that Kurosawa's film represents a Japanese vision and Sturges' an American one? Why or why not?
- How much is the difference in the two films shaped simply by terrain and technological differences?
- Is the ideal of the cowboy gunslinger and the *ronin* samurai finally comparable? Why or why not?



### *Seven Samurai* (1954) [207 minutes]

1. What approaches does Kurosawa share with John Ford?
2. How does class shape the way the samurai and the farmers interact with each other?
3. How does each of the seven samurai manifest heroism?  
Kambei? Gorobei? Shichirōji? Heihachi? Kyūzō? Katsushirō? Kikuchiyo?
4. Why is the Warring States period important to the meaning of the film?

5. What role does sacrifice play in the film?
6. Why is the discovery of the samurai armor so offensive to most of the samurai?
7. What does it mean to be truly a magnificent person?
8. What does Kikuchiyo's speech about the nature of the farmers reveal about their social plight?
9. How do the samurai learn to care for the farmers, even respect them?
10. Why do they let the old woman kill the captured bandit?
11. How should we respond to the affair of Katsushirō and Shino?
12. What does Kurosawa's cinematography teach about the nature of war?
13. What is the significance of the last line?

**The Magnificent Seven (1960) [128 minutes]**

1. How does Chris compare as a leader to Kambei?
2. Why do you think they combined the characters of Katsushiro the young man and Kikuchiyo the wild one in the character of Chico?
3. Is the burial of the Old Joe as important of a scene as the saving of the kidnapped child by Kambei?
4. Why is the villain Calvera a developed character in the film?
5. Why is humiliation such a more pronounced theme in this film?
6. Why does Chico get the girl while Katsushiro doesn't?
7. How does each of the seven gunslingers reflect on the limits of their profession? Why do they admire the "courage" of the villagers?
8. Why is Calvera shocked that the seven came back?
9. How does the old man's speech compare at the end of this film to the last lines of *Seven Samurai*?

