

Easy Rider

Easy Rider – General Information

- Is a 1969 American road movie
- Written by Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, and Terry Southern
- Produced by Fonda and directed by Hopper
- Tells the story of two bikers (played by Fonda and Hopper) who travel through the American Southwest and South
- Success of *Easy Rider* helped spark the New Hollywood phase of filmmaking during the early 1970s
- Film was added to the Library of Congress National Registry in 1998
- A landmark counterculture film, and a "touchstone for a generation" that "captured the national imagination"
- *Easy Rider* explores the societal landscape, issues, and tensions in the United States during the 1960s, such as the rise and fall of the hippie movement, drug use, and communal lifestyle
- *Easy Rider* is famous for its use of real drugs in its portrayal of marijuana and other substances

Easy Rider - Plot

- Protagonists are two hippies in the USA of the 1970s:
- Wyatt (Fonda), nicknamed "Captain America" → dressed in American flag-adorned leather
- Billy (Hopper) → dressed in Native American-style buckskin pants and shirts and a bushman hat
- Character's names refer to Wyatt Earp and Billy the Kid
- The former is appreciative of help and of others, while the latter is often hostile and leery of outsiders.
- In the first scene Wyatt and Billy buy cocaine
- In the next scene Wyatt and Billy are in Los Angeles and sell their cocaine to a dealer called "Connection," a man (played by Phil Spector) in a Rolls-Royce and score a large sum of money
- They stuffed the money into a plastic tube hidden inside the fuel tank of Wyatt's chopper
- Billy and Wyatt want to ride eastward to New Orleans, Louisiana, for Mardi Gras
- On their way to New Orleans Wyatt and Billy meet and have a meal with a rancher, whom Wyatt admires for his simple farming lifestyle
- After that day they pick up a hitchhiker (Luke Askew) whom they take to his commune, where they stay for a day
- The hitch-hiker wants the two bikers to stay at the commune, saying, "the time is now", to which Wyatt replies "I'm hip about time...but I just gotta go."
- Before they leave the hippie commune, the hitch-hiker gives Wyatt some LSD for him to share with "the right people"
- The bikers come through a small town in which a parade is going on.
- They join the parade and get arrested by the local authorities for "parading without a permit"
- In jail, they become friends of the lawyer and local drunk George Hanson (Jack Nicholson)
- George takes them out of jail, and travels with Wyatt and Billy to New Orleans
- In a rural area around Louisiana the trio want to eat in a restaurant, but the waitress does not take their order and the police officers make racist remarks, Wyatt, Billy, and George leave without eating and make camp outside of town
- George observes that Americans talk a lot about the value of freedom, but are actually afraid of "anyone who truly exhibits it"
- In the middle of the night, they are attacked by local men and George is killed
- Billy and Wyatt continue to New Orleans and find a brothel George had talked about and take two prostitutes Karen (Karen Black) and Mary (Toni Basil) with them
- All four of them take the LSD and end up in a psychedelic trip
- Making camp afterward, Billy declares that their trek has been a success. Wyatt disagrees, declaring, "We blew it."
- The next morning, the two are continuing their trip eastward to Florida, when two rednecks in a pickup truck attacked them
- One of the men insults Billy and lazily aims the shotgun at him. As Billy answers the insult with his middle finger the hillbilly fires the shotgun at Billy
- Wyatt turns around and races back to put his jacket over his critically injured friend, before riding off for help

- But the pickup truck has turned around and waits for Wyatt
- As Wyatt wants to drive by, the guys in the pickup truck shoot at his gas tank, he also falls off his bike and is immediately dead

Easy Rider and the American Dream

- Billy and Wyatt represent the AD
- belief that financial security will enable them to live an easy life without a clear destination
- Costumes combine traditional patriotic symbols with emblems of loneliness, criminality and alienation:
 - American flag, cowboy decorations, long hair, drugs
- **Contrast** between the AD of the founders of America and the AD of the „normal“ people of the 60's:
 - Billy and Wyatt are hitting the road in search of a new lifestyle for them
 - Scene with a rancher: Lives in one place in his own house and has a very conservative lifestyle
- Billy and Wyatt's version of the AD is failing miserably at the end
 - „normal“ people accept only their view of the AD

Easy Rider and the Hippie Lifestyle

- Hippie culture: serious impact on American society in the 60's
- Billy and Wyatt represent the Hippie Lifestyle in Easy Rider
 - „**radical beliefs**“: becoming free, living free
 - **drugs**: huge part of Hippie culture, B and W deal with drugs and also use them
 - **outcasts**: Hippies aren't a part of society and neither are B and W
- Two sides of Hippie Lifestyle shown:
 - Commune at first a tranquil, beautiful place
 - Hippies as careless, friendly and happy people
 - But later:
 - desperate for food and crops
 - colourless brown commune in contrast to the vibrant and colourful valley
 - hope and individualism have been outstripped by reality
- George as a former „true“ American explains why Hippies aren't accepted:
 - Americans are afraid of the Hippie Lifestyle and the freedom it represents
- In the end B and W get shot because they look like Hippies
 - traditionalists would do everything to stop Hippie lifestyle

Easy Rider - Soundtrack

- One of the first movies without an own soundtrack
 - instead: popular rock songs
 - Peter Fonda's favourite songs
- Examples (extract):
 - The Pusher (Steppenwolf)
 - The Weight (Smith)
 - Wasn't born to follow (The Byrds)
 - If 6 was 9 (The Jimi Hendrix Experience)
 - Ballad of Easy Rider (Roger McGuinn)

Steppenwolf - Born to Be Wild

Get your motor runnin'
Head out on the highway
Looking for _____
In whatever comes our way

Yeah, darlin'
Gonna make it happen
Take the world in a love embrace
Fire all of your guns at once
And explode into space
Steppenwolf – Born to Be Wild
I like smoke and lightnin'
Heavy metal thunder
_____ in the wind
And the feeling that I'm under

Yeah, darlin'
Gonna make it happen
Take the world in a love embrace
Fire all of your guns _____
And explode into space

Like a true nature child
We were born
Born to be wild
We can _____
I never wanna die
Born to be wild
Born to be wild

Get your motor runnin'
_____ on the highway
Looking for adventure
In whatever comes our way

Yeah, darlin'
Gonna make it happen
Take the world in a love embrace
Fire all of your guns at once
And explode _____

Like a true nature child
We were born
Born to be wild
We can climbed so high
I never wanna die
Born to be wild
Born to be wild