

Bonnie and Clyde (1967)

Arthur Penn's 1967 masterpiece "Bonnie and Clyde" portrays the doomed outlaws to the tune of '60s radicalism

By today's standards, *Bonnie and Clyde* appears almost tame, but, upon its initial release, the level of violence was viewed as shocking. (The movie's initial theatrical rating was an "M" – the equivalent of today's "R.")

Bonnie and Clyde has a traditional three-act structure

The film catapulted Faye Dunaway from relative obscurity to stardom. 1967's *Bonnie and Clyde* is one of the exceedingly superb forefathers to sadistic comedy films, otherwise known as dark comedies and black humor.

``They're young ... they're in love ... and they kill people." From ``*Bonnie and Clyde*" descended ``*Badlands*," ``*Days of Heaven*," ``*Thelma & Louise*," ``*Drugstore Cowboy*," ``*Natural Born Killers*"

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Best Actress in a Supporting Role

[Estelle Parsons](#)

Best Cinematography

[Burnett Guffey](#)

``*Bonnie and Clyde*," made in 1967, was called ``the first modern American film" by critic Patrick Goldstein, in an essay on its 30th anniversary. Certainly it felt like that at the time. The movie opened like a slap in the face. American filmgoers had never seen anything like it. In tone and freedom it descended from the French new wave, particularly Francois Truffaut's own film about doomed lovers, ``*Jules and Jim*." Indeed, it was Truffaut who first embraced the original screenplay by David Newman and Robert Benton, and called it to the attention of Warren Beatty, who was determined to produce it.

The legend of the film's production has become almost as famous as its heroes. Stories are told about how Beatty knelt at the feet of studio boss Jack Warner, begging for the right to make the film. How Warner saw the original cut and hated it. How the movie premiered at the Montreal film festival, and was roasted by Bosley Crowther of the New York Times. How Warner Bros. determined to dump it in a chain of Texas drive-ins, and how Beatty implored the studio to give it a chance.

How it opened and quickly closed in the autumn of 1967, panned by the critics, receiving only one ecstatic opening-day newspaper review. (Modesty be damned: It was my own, calling it "a milestone in the history of American movies, a work of truth and brilliance" and predicting "years from now it is quite possible that 'Bonnie and Clyde' will be seen as the definitive film of the 1960s.")

The movie closed, but would not go away. The soundtrack, bluegrass by Flatt and Scruggs, went to the top of the charts. Theodora Van Runkle's berets and maxiskirts for Dunaway started a global fashion craze. Newsweek critic Joseph Morgenstern famously wrote that his original negative review had been mistaken. The movie reopened, went on to become one of Warner Bros.' biggest hits and won 10 nominations (with Oscars for supporting actress Estelle Parsons and cinematographer Burnett Guffey).

But that is only the success story. More important was the impact the film had on the American movie industry. Beatty's willingness to play a violent character with sexual dysfunction was unusual for a traditional 1960s leading man. In a famous Esquire profile by Rex Reed, which appeared as the movie was opening, he was dismissed as a has-been pretty boy. "Bonnie and Clyde" put him permanently on the Hollywood map.

Beatty and director Arthur Penn cast the movie mostly with unknown stage actors--so successfully that all the major players (Dunaway, Parsons, Gene Hackman, Michael J. Pollard, Gene Wilder) became stars on the basis of this film. Behind the camera, the movie launched the careers not only of Van Runkle, but also of editor Dede Allen (a New Yorker breaking into a closed shop) and production designer Dean Tavoularis, who went on to work on Francis Ford Coppola's "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now." And the cinematography of

Guffey launched a whole new wave of its own, of films shot and edited in the more impressionistic French style.

Arthur Penn came fresh to the project after a resounding failure ("Mickey One," a self-conscious but intriguing art film) also made with Beatty. His later credits included "Night Moves," "Alice's Restaurant" and "Little Big Man." Co-writer Robert Benton became an important director ("Kramer vs. Kramer," "Places in the Heart"). It's as if that one film sent all those careers cascading down to the present day.

ARTHUR PENN stage director from NEW YORK
USED GODDARDs BREATHLESS

ANTI AUTHORITARIAN
WHO DOES THE LAW PROTECT? Marxist?

Cotroversial for its depiction of violence/humor

MEDIA ORIENTATION

1. [Night Moves \(1975\)](#)
2. [Visions of Eight \(1973\)](#) (segment "The Highest")
... aka München 1972 - 8 berühmte Regisseure sehen die Spiele der XX. Olympiade (1973) (West Germany)
... aka Olympiade München 1972 (1973) (West Germany: TV title)
3. [Little Big Man \(1970\)](#)
4. [Alice's Restaurant \(1969\)](#)
5. [Flesh and Blood \(1968\) \(TV\)](#)
6. [Bonnie and Clyde \(1967\)](#)
... aka Bonnie and Clyde... Were Killers! (1967) (UK)
7. [Chase, The \(1966\)](#)
8. [Mickey One \(1965\)](#)
9. [Train, The \(1964\)](#) (uncredited; fired, replaced by John Frankenheimer)
... aka John Frankenheimer's The Train (1965) (USA: complete title)

- ... aka Train, Le (1964) (France)
... aka Treno, Il (1964) (Italy)
10. [Miracle Worker, The \(1962\)](#)
11. [Left Handed Gun, The \(1958\)](#)

Rebel Without a Cause (1955)

**Directed by
Nicholas Ray**

Graduate, The (1967)- Directed by

[Mike Nichols](#)

Faces (1968)- Cassevettes

EASY RIDER 1969 Directed by

[Dennis Hopper](#)

MEDIUM COOL

Zabriske Point

WOODSTOCK 1970

BLACKPLOTATION

- **Anachronisms:** As the gang leave a bank robbery in 1934, and 1940 Ford firetruck almost hits their getaway car.
- **Continuity:** The character of Ivan Moss is referred to as "Malcolm" by Bonnie in one of the final scenes. The character that Ivan is based on was named Malcolm Bass.
- **Errors in geography:** During the shootout where Buck Barrow is wounded, the Sheriff's door decals read "Platte City" which is (and was) in Missouri. Their license plates read "Iowa."
- **Continuity:** Blanche is eating a doughnut in the back seat during a motor scene. It goes from one bite missing to half-gone, then mysteriously back to one bite missing again.
- **Continuity:** While Clyde is consoling Bonnie in the field (after she tries to run away), his hand is alternately on/off her shoulder between shots.

Continuity: When CW offers Eugene back his hamburger, there is one bite taken out of it. When we cut to Eugene's reaction, there are two.